**Virtual Masterclass\_ Equitable, Diverse and Inclusive Workplaces for all**

Wed, 07/12 11:00am · 58mins

Dónal McClean 00:03
We are going to show you some of the features that are available. We will also be sharing a screen with everyone. To show you some of the features, I have a question about how to highlight

Dónal McClean 00:20
and carry our sign language interpreter today, who is currently spotlighted at the moment with myself. My name is Donal McLean. I am a dark -haired male with glasses and a striped white shirt.

Dónal McClean 00:35
I am also the COO and co -founder of AccessEarth. Really quickly, I am going to share my screen and show how to access some of the accessible features for today. My screen should be now shared.

Dónal McClean 00:51
Anyone who wishes to have accessible features whilst watching this webinar, simply click on the More icon. Go to your Settings tab, click on Accessibility Features, and you will have the option to turn on the captions toggle

Dónal McClean 01:07
and the Sign Language toggle. Once the Sign Language toggle has been switched on, you will be able to then choose any of the speakers, specifically carry, and make a signer. That will then ensure that carry does not disappear whilst you are viewing the webinar. With that being said, that's enough from me. Thank you so much. I will now pass you over to Sandra and the rest of the panelists.

Sandra Healy 01:44
Thank you, Donal, and welcome everyone today.

Sandra Healy 01:48
My name is Sandra Healy. I am the CEO and founder of Inclusio. I would like to just take a minute to describe myself. I am a white woman. I have dark brown hair and wearing glasses and a headset today,

Sandra Healy 02:03
and I am looking forward to moderating what will be a very interesting panel as we kick off International Disability Pride Month. We are delighted to be partnering with Matt McCann

Sandra Healy 02:17
and Donal and the team at Access Earth. I am going to just take a few minutes just to set the scene around what we are going to talk about on the panel. I also want to take just a minute to introduce the work that we do

Sandra Healy 02:29
in Inclusio, the work that the team at Access Earth do, and why we have brought this series of master classes together today. Matt and I met, I think it was probably about eight or nine months ago,

Sandra Healy 02:42
we came together and said we have to do something, bringing our combined expertise together. I am delighted to say that here we are now bringing the master classes, where we are focusing on celebrating the disabled community,

Sandra Healy 02:56
but we also want to create awareness and reignite the conversations around some of the challenges facing disabled people and the experiences within the workplace. The team of the overarching, so we have three master classes,

Sandra Healy 03:10
hopefully you will get a chance to engage in the other two as well. They are every Wednesday from the same time next week and the following week. Really the team overall is focusing on rethinking the disability experience

Sandra Healy 03:22
in the workplace. For those of you who are not familiar with Inclusio, our platform brings a scientific evidence -based approach to understanding diversity, but also understanding culture

Sandra Healy 03:34
and the day -to -day experience of your employees across the organisation. When companies engage with Inclusio, they get to understand who their people are through self -identification

Sandra Healy 03:44
across a deep demographic profile. We also get to understand what the experience is like for disabled people in the workplace and also for neurodiverse individuals as well. We collect insights around that.

Sandra Healy 03:56
We also understand the challenges and the experiences around accommodations and we also understand how inclusive the culture is for everybody. I think we are going to be talking a bit about that today.

Sandra Healy 04:07
When companies work with AccessEarth, they enhance employees' knowledge around promoting inclusive practices. The team provides expertise and guidance around universal design, which is something that is very close to my heart.

Sandra Healy 04:21
They provide assessments around accessibility best practices for employers. Together, where we see an opportunity of our collaboration is that we can support organisations at every stage

Sandra Healy 04:32
to build equitable workplaces and to build workplaces where people want to work. As I said, today is the first in a three -part masterclass. In today's session, we're going to be discussing equitable access to the workplace for all. And why is it important? I think that's something that we all need to consider.

Sandra Healy 04:52
I spoke at an event a couple of weeks ago for Inclusion Ireland, and we had a very similar conversation there. And some of the things I shared was around the importance of work for us as humans.

Sandra Healy 05:03
You know, we know that employment is key to long -term personal empowerment and independence, and work plays a critical role for us in our human development. It provides us with a sense of purpose, identity, belonging,

Sandra Healy 05:16
and it provides opportunities for personal and social growth. And it helps us as humans develop and flourish in many ways. So we know all this, and even though we know all this, why do we still not have equitable access to the workplace for all?

Sandra Healy 05:31
It's just not a reality. And that's really what we're going to talk about on the panel today. And in fairness, across the three Masterclass series. Just to end my introduction, I got a couple of stats from European research.

Sandra Healy 05:48
I think this was published back in 2022, where it showed that the EU average rate of employment for people with disabilities is 51%. But the challenge we have is in Ireland, that figure is just over 32%.

Sandra Healy 06:02
So what that means for us in Ireland is that two out of every three disabled people cannot access employment, and we're one of the fourth lowest in the EU. And in a recent report this year, they identified some of the key challenges facing

Sandra Healy 06:18
people today trying to access the workplace. One is lack of access to inclusive and quality education. Two is bias in the recruitment process. And three is insufficient reasonable accommodations in the workplace.

Sandra Healy 06:31
And we're going to talk about that now today. And through our own research in Inclusio, our insights tell us that less than one in six people who require accommodations ask for them.

Sandra Healy 06:41
And from the people who did ask, 26% were not satisfied with the response that they requested. So that's a challenge for us, that one in four people really need to get more supports around access to accommodations when they ask for them.

Sandra Healy 06:58
And I know you're going to hear about that from the panel today. And this is why we need the session today, just to say that. So on the panel, we're going to hear from people who are using their expertise,

Sandra Healy 07:07
their voice, their position to keep equity of access to the workplace on the agenda. We're going to be discussing things around the UN Convention of Rights, on the rights of people with disabilities and the progress that's been made there.

Sandra Healy 07:20
You're going to hear from people around workplace accommodations, the importance of representation, visibility and voice. And finally, then we're going to talk about the future. What's next? And hopefully we'll get some really good insights.

Sandra Healy 07:33
And just to say, I think Donal had said, if you have questions for the panel or you'd like us to put questions to the panel, please pop them in the chat and we'll make sure that there's time at the end.

Sandra Healy 07:42
So that's enough for me. I'm going to hand over now to our panel. And I'm going to ask each of the panelists just to introduce themselves and their work. Gavin Hennessey, I'm delighted to have you here. And I'm going to hand over to you first. Thanks, Gavin.

Gavin Hennessey 07:56
Glad to be here. And thanks for having me. My name is Gavin Hennessey. I'm a white male. I show up around here and beard. And I've got, I'm wearing glasses today with round rims and I'm wearing a blue sweater.

Gavin Hennessey 08:09
My day job is I lead diversity inclusion for AXA Ireland. And I think my connection to, I suppose, today is I firmly believe, as Sandra introduced, that while disability has been on the agenda for diversity inclusion,

Gavin Hennessey 08:22
it hasn't been at the top of the agenda. And I think we need to change that. So I'm delighted to be discussing how we can do that today and what we're doing at AXA.

Sandra Healy 08:35
Thank you, Gavin Hennessey. And I have Gavin Neat. Welcome.

Gavin Neate 08:46
Hello. Fantastic to be here. My name is Gavin Neat. I'm the CEO and founder of a company called Welcome. Many people will call it Welcome Me because of how the logo is, how the logo looks, but it's welcome or welcome me. So I'm middle aged. I'm going to say I'm prematurely graying with a, with a goatee beard. I'm wearing glasses and a black polo shirt. And yeah, I'm incredibly proud to have been invited along,

Gavin Neate 09:02
mainly because I'm based in Scotland, but also because my company, which improves customer service and first point of contact interactions for all disabled people, is now working and providing services in Ireland.

Gavin Neate 09:15
So, and I have some super contacts in Ireland and I've done some brilliant work with some amazing people like Caroline Casey in Ireland. So I'm incredibly proud to be here. Thank you.

Sandra Healy 09:25
Thank you, Gavin. And we're looking forward to hearing about more from you on the panel today. And Tom, Senator Tom Clonan, welcome. Delighted to have you here.

Senator Tom Clonan 09:55
Thanks Sandra and good morning to everybody and to Gavin and Gary. Thank you for having me here today. I'm a white male, I'm 58 years old, I have brown hair, I'm a bit sunburnt because I went to the National Day of Commemoration on Sunday and got roasted. I'm wearing a blue jacket and a blue shirt. And so as Sandra introduced me, I'm a senator in our upper house in our parliament. I was only elected this time last year, so I'm new to politics.

Senator Tom Clonan 10:09
Prior to that, I was an academic and a journalist. I did doctoral research when I was in the army on women's experiences of our armed forces and that revealed very high levels of sexual assault, sexual violence and rape.

Senator Tom Clonan 10:24
In fact, only this year, a further inquiry has confirmed that that is still the case 23 years later. I'm a parent to four adult and teenage kids and one of my sons own, he's 21, he's a neuromuscular disease, he's a wheelchair user, he's partially sighted.

Senator Tom Clonan 10:43
He's in college, he loves Lego, he's a Doctor Who fan and he's my campaign manager and he's the reason why I got elected. Thank you, Tom. Delighted to have you here and hopefully you don't mind me calling you Tom.

Senator Tom Clonan 10:55
We know each other many years. Of course, yeah, yeah. Senator Tom Clonin, I think is a bit too formal. So my first question actually, Tom, is to you if you don't mind. So I mentioned earlier about the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Senator Tom Clonan 11:10
And it's the first international instrument setting minimum standards on the rights of people with disabilities. And in us, which I think it's incredible that it even has to be stated, but unfortunately it does.

Senator Tom Clonan 11:22
You know, the persons with disabilities have the same rights as everybody else. And can you talk us through the journey of that? And I know it's personally close to your heart, but it's something now that you live and campaign around every day.

Senator Tom Clonan 11:36
So it'd be just great to hear from your perspective around the importance of that and your journey through it. Yeah, so the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international framework which sets out in law.

Senator Tom Clonan 11:52
It expresses positively the fundamental human rights of disabled citizens all around the world. And I mean, I think it's a very significant document in that it recognizes that disability as a kind of a lived experience

Senator Tom Clonan 12:10
is fundamentally about human rights. It's not a medical model of disability. It's a more radical view of how we should cater for, recognize the difference that is inherent in many disabilities

Senator Tom Clonan 12:27
and to scaffold that and support it. So it's about positively stating and vindicating the fundamental human rights of disabled citizens. And I suppose as a parent and a carer to some who's disabled, I'm struck in Ireland on a daily basis on the ways in which he's casually and cruelly discriminated against.

Senator Tom Clonan 12:52
So without kind of going into it in too much detail. For example, if my son wants to use public transport, for example, the local metro train system here in Dublin, he has to make a booking 24 hours in advance.

Senator Tom Clonan 13:09
He has to say what time he's going to get on the train at, what time he's going to return, what station, how long he's going to be there. It's a set out as itinerary. And very often when he does that, he'll get to the train station and the lift is broken.

Senator Tom Clonan 13:25
And so he effectively cannot use public transport. Similarly for college and for second level, he's in third level now, he's doing applied social sciences. Very often texts on the curriculum weren't available to him because they weren't available in the large print version or they weren't available to him by way of software.

Senator Tom Clonan 13:47
They call it a Daisy Reader system, which is what he uses. So just to pull back from that, if you were told that you would apply for permission to use public transport 24 hours in advance, or that you were denied access to the curriculum on the basis of your sexual orientation or your ethnicity or your religious formation or your agenda identity.

Senator Tom Clonan 14:10
It would bring the country to a halt, and quite rightly so. And everybody would be so exercised and up in arms about it. But because it's to do with disability, there's a sort of an acceptance that you're going to have a difficult life.

Senator Tom Clonan 14:29
So Article 40 of our constitution guarantees that each citizen can participate fully in the economic, cultural, artistic, social and sporting lives and for disabled citizens, that is definitely not the case.

Senator Tom Clonan 14:46
And that's been our lived experience. So the UN CRPD for me is an inspiring document in that it sets out and vindicates these rights. Now Ireland is an outlier in that we were the last member state in the European Union,

Senator Tom Clonan 14:59
I think, to adopt the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. And that's only in the last couple of years, but we didn't fully adopt it. So the optional protocol, which would fully bind Ireland in law to its provisions,

Senator Tom Clonan 15:14
has not been adopted by the government. And that's a major omission. And so the current government has promised that in the lifetime of the current government that they will actually adopt that final protocol.

Senator Tom Clonan 15:29
But based on the likely term of the current government, they can go for maximum another year and a half. That would have to happen in the autumn or winter of this year. So I will be lobbying and pushing hard for that.

Senator Tom Clonan 15:44
In terms of what we've done in Ireland, Ireland is the only country in the European Union where the only jurisdiction in the European Union where disabled persons have no legal entitlement to treatment,

Senator Tom Clonan 16:00
therapies, supports, personal assistance, housing, we're outliers in that regard. So in the context of the wider European community, Ireland is an absolute outlier with regard to how we treat disabled citizens

Senator Tom Clonan 16:19
and their status enrolled in our society. Now, I should also say in relation to all of this, that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is very explicit in its assertion that disabled people,

Senator Tom Clonan 16:35
disabled citizens should lead these conversations. And they should be the primary voice and they should be the principal stakeholders in every consideration of matters to do with disability and disability rights.

Senator Tom Clonan 16:49
Now, the reason why I'm speaking about it is because under the UN Convention, there is also a provision which states and actually mandates that the parents and carers of disabled citizens

Senator Tom Clonan 17:01
who have lived experience of their life experience, that we're also mandated to speak, but the principal voices should be those of persons with disabilities. And that's something that is really important

Senator Tom Clonan 17:15
and it is not the case in the Republic of Ireland. And that's one of the things that the UN Convention advances. And look, finally, I just want to say, we had a remarkable day in our national parliament yesterday.

Senator Tom Clonan 17:32
And as I said, I've only been elected one year, but I actually drafted a piece of legislation called the Disability Bill of 2023, which for the first time will make it legally obligatory

Senator Tom Clonan 17:46
for the state to live up to its commitments to persons, to disabled citizens. And last night, the eyes of the nation were on Ryan Tiberty and our national broadcaster in the committee hearings.

Senator Tom Clonan 18:01
But in the Senate, I managed to defeat a government motion to amend my legislation to basically kill the legislation. And I think it's an almost unprecedented event. Last night, I managed, as a lone independent senator,

Senator Tom Clonan 18:21
to have this legislation passed. So it's now on the books and we just have to nurse it and push it through the remaining stages. But that was an incredible moral victory last night.

Senator Tom Clonan 18:33
As I said, unprecedented. The usher is the people who work in our parliament, who've been here for over two decades, came up to me afterwards and said that they had never seen this happen before.

Senator Tom Clonan 18:43
So that's a great moment for us all. And I'm delighted to say that my son, Owen, was there. He exerted moral pressure. He said that if they were going to vote against the bill that they'd have to look him in the eye as they walk past to press the button. So a great vindication for OWN as my campaign manager and I hope that we can use this as a lever

Senator Tom Clonan 19:07
to create the ethical and moral pressure for Ireland to basically pull up its socks and get in line with the minimum standards we have throughout the remainder of the European Union. Thank you.

Sandra Healy 19:17
 Thank you, Tom. A couple of things that I picked up from there. You talked about not the medical model, and I think the alternative to that is a strengths -based model. And thankfully, I'm starting to see a lot of focus on that through academic work.

Sandra Healy 19:32
And universal design, thankfully, is something that I've seen, particularly in higher education as well, over the last five years. A big focus on that. So I suppose the challenge for employers is how do you start to pull that out into the workplace?

Sandra Healy 19:44
And Tom, we will be coming back to you later. And you might consider how, like you have a lot of employers here on the call, you might consider how we can support your work, support the lobbying around that bill.

Sandra Healy 19:57
And if there's anything we can do, I'm sure all of us would support in any way we can. So Gavin Neate, I'm going to turn to you. And I have to say, I love your why. I was reading your bio where you said,

Sandra Healy 20:09
my why is driven by my passion for seeing everyone as equal, encouraging all others to do the same, and putting in the place the methods that make it possible. And I think to Tom's point around why are we here and disabled people representing themselves and being self -advocates,

Sandra Healy 20:26
I think at the same time, it is also important that you have people like us using our privilege and our position to be able to advocate and bring employers together like we have done today.

Sandra Healy 20:37
So delighted to have you here, Gavin Neat, and based on your many years of experience enabling disabled people to gain independence, and I know you've talked about some technologies

Sandra Healy 20:47
that you've introduced around that, what changes would you say you've seen over the time through your work in terms of attitudes and visibility and things like that around people with disabilities?

Gavin Neate 20:58
That's such a super question. And firstly, if I might just take a moment to... He took me, and I'm sure many people on an emotional journey there, I felt quite depressed right at the very start when he was listening all the things that Ireland wasn't doing.

Gavin Neate 21:16
But then I started getting goosebumps listening to what Ireland is doing and what he's doing and what his son is doing. So I started a little bit depressed and ended up incredibly optimistic.

Gavin Neate 21:27
And it's worth saying I'm based in Scotland where I've worked. I was in the military for a few years and then I joined Guide Dogs for the Blind in 1996 because I'd been a police dog handler and then I became a guide dog mobility instructor.

Gavin Neate 21:43
And I think I joined a charity at a time when the world was changing. The charities were starting to look... the very forward thinking ones were starting to look at their own makeup within the organisation.

Gavin Neate 21:59
We're representing disabled people but we aren't representing them within the organisation. And the other thing that was very noticeable to me, especially from I guess 1999 onwards,

Gavin Neate 22:11
was that technology was becoming increasingly accessible to disabled people. By 2004 -2005, I had people turning up to train with their guide dogs and they would whip out their Nokia N95,

Gavin Neate 22:24
which was the last decent Nokia slide phone. They would turn on voice operation within it and their phone was talking to them. And then by 2006, iPhone had bought out the 2S which had voiceover and the world changed.

Gavin Neate 22:37
And I started getting very excited about learning how my clients were using technology. And that was a massive step forward because they were teaching me. I was learning. I had to close my eyes to learn how to use voiceover.

Gavin Neate 22:50
I'm quite proficient now in voiceover but I will never be as proficient as a visually impaired person using voiceover or talk back on Samsung or Android. But then ultimately I started thinking about ways that technology could enhance the lives of my disabled clients.

Gavin Neate 23:05
And in 2012, remarkably as a mobility instructor, I invented the world's first pedestrian crossing operated by smartphones. And I'm incredibly proud to say that Dublin has two of these crossings in.

Gavin Neate 23:19
So you can download a free app, you can walk up to a pedestrian crossing or roll up to a pedestrian crossing and your phone will press the button for you. South Dublin Council installed them last year or the year before.

Gavin Neate 23:29
So incredibly proud that Dublin was doing that and Ireland was doing that. And I increasingly became, I know Gary Kearney who invited me across to Ireland and I spoke with him and I got involved in a few projects that were being done in Ireland and took Welcome.

Gavin Neate 23:44
Welcome is my customer service solution which means that disabled people can communicate directly with customer service teams before they arrive. And Senator was talking about a 24 hour or it might be yourself, so I'm talking about 24 hours notice.

Gavin Neate 23:59
Well, I don't believe in 24 hours notice. I understand that there's a feeling that it should happen. But ultimately, does it need to happen? If you could tell somebody five minutes before you arrived what your needs were

Gavin Neate 24:11
and that would enhance your confidence that they would be able to deliver on your needs and it would empower you to dictate what your needs were. I'm not sure many people would say, hey, they should know stuff.

Gavin Neate 24:23
I'm not just going to rely on them knowing stuff. I'm going to enhance it by interacting with them. And we started that with Welcome and I'm very proud to say that Irish Rail are now using it at Cork.

Gavin Neate 24:33
So Senator Clonan, your son, if he's traveling from Cork, he would be able to use Welcome. But hopefully Irish Rail will be then spreading that out to other venues around Ireland. Also being used by Headway Island as well and NCBI who I'm very proud to work with. So Welcome customer service team solution that meant that disabled people were empowered to dictate their lives before they arrived somewhere.

Gavin Neate 24:59
And that's basically what we do. And I'm incredibly proud to be working in Ireland on that solution. Fantastic, Gavin. It sounds like you have the solution to what we need to start to change society and equitable access to public transport. It sounds like there's all venues. I just add to that. I have a solution but key to this solution.

Gavin Neate 25:22
When people use this solution, they can request where they want it. So if I had, by the end of today, 50 disabled people in Ireland saying that they wanted this particular solution at a venue,

Gavin Neate 25:35
I would contact that venue and I would say, hey, we've got 50 people that are prepared to spend their money in your venue. If you use this solution and the solution is going to cost you less money than you would make from one person walking through the door, let alone 50.

Gavin Neate 25:47
So it's empowering the disabled people to dictate the world they want to live in. We can go through our parliaments, but I recommend that if we go use the parliament as well because we need you guys on board. But disabled people dictating the world they want to live in, for me, that's cool.

Sandra Healy 26:03
Yeah, fantastic. And I think just hearing from you both, as I said, it sounds like that change is imminent.

Sandra Healy 26:11
So I think Gavin will make sure that we share your contact details around that just to be people listening here today. And again, employers, these are the kind of things that we can be bringing back into work.

Sandra Healy 26:22
Gavin Hennessey, delighted to have you here. And I've known you for many years and I know that you're a passionate advocate around diversity and equity. And no matter what sector you're in or no matter what company you're in, you make a huge impact on and we're delighted to have you here. What are your thoughts on representation and visibility of disabled people in the workplace in Ireland, you know, from your own experience?

Gavin Hennessey 26:45
Yeah, I think I'm kind of definitely more positive than I would have been more maybe a few years ago.

Gavin Hennessey 26:51
I've definitely seen a lot of changes in terms of views of people, particularly around views, people with disabilities. A number of years ago, I would have seen, you know, it being almost seen hiring people with disabilities as a charitable endeavor almost.

Gavin Hennessey 27:04
It was almost connected with CSR activities. And we've done a lot of work, I think, in the E &I space over the last couple of years to break that kind of that viewpoint. I think the other viewpoint I'm seeing as well as a deeper understanding of people with disabilities to that.

Gavin Hennessey 27:20
A lot of the first thing that people say to me in the workplace is we need to hire more people with disabilities. And the first thing I say is looking at the data. We have a huge amount of people with disabilities who are working for us already.

Gavin Hennessey 27:33
So I think that's a really deep kind of realization for people when you have the data and you can kind of really point it. I think the issue around visibility sometimes is that a lot of people with disabilities have invisible disabilities and that they don't disclose those.

Gavin Hennessey 27:48
So we've done a lot of work around data in the workplace to ensure that we have the data, similar to inclusion, understanding the different demographics in our organization and different experiences of people in our organization as well.

Gavin Hennessey 28:01
So I think that's a really kind of clear thing for me is don't assume that you don't have people with disabilities in your organization because they're not visible. I'm pretty sure you have a lot of people with disabilities who haven't disclosed.

Gavin Hennessey 28:14
I think the other thing that's really clear for me is that sometimes with the best intentions companies jumping to activities around people with disabilities without doing the work.

Gavin Hennessey 28:25
So I think one thing that was clear for me a couple of years ago is working with an organization who had made a lot of mistakes in this space is I actually created a model kind of that I use going forward now, which I call like the AAA model.

Gavin Hennessey 28:39
It's an awareness action and allies or community because if you don't do the work first before you engage with people, you can actually create more problems than creating solutions.

Gavin Hennessey 28:50
So from my experience, I think we it's really important to make sure that as an organization that you've done the work, you have the right policies and processes and systems in place to ensure that it's a really great experience then for all people.

Gavin Hennessey 29:03
So I think for me that kind of awareness action allies piece is really important. But I think, as I said, that really hardens to see that I think does a definitely shift in terms of perceptions in terms of visibility of people's in the workplace.

Gavin Hennessey 29:18
And I was really hard to see a couple of weeks ago. I reached out to one of my partner organizations that I do a lot of work with and they said that they can't work with me work with me for at least six months because they're so busy.

Gavin Hennessey 29:27
So which usually you'd be a little bit annoyed as someone who you work with, but it's actually a great kind of achievement in terms of it just shows the amount of people that are engaging with that organization and amount of work that they're doing.

Gavin Hennessey 29:39
So it was the nicest and happiest rejection I've gotten from a partner saying that they're too busy to work with me right now. So I'm definitely see a shift. Very good. And I think something you mentioned there, there's a couple of things I think even through our own work, Gavin, that we find is that you have to create the right culture and that psychologically safe culture and the psychologically safe and trusted experience at the team level for somebody to disclose, whether it's a hidden disability or visible disability.

Gavin Hennessey 30:11
I think you have to create that environment so that whether it's people coming into the organization or people already in the organization that they feel comfortable enough to ask for what they need.

Gavin Hennessey 30:23
And that, you know, the work that we do is making sure that the people managers are equipped with what they need to have, you know, those critical conversations and to create that, create that psychologically safe environment for individuals.

Gavin Hennessey 30:36
I know, you know, when I talk about diversity and inclusion and the work that we do, it's never done. And I think this is just another aspect of it and accommodations to your point, Gavin, that's something I'm seeing a big focus from employers now that probably wasn't there about five years ago, a big focus on accommodations around things like neurodiversity and visible and invisible disabilities.

Gavin Hennessey 30:59
So I do think we're heading in the right direction. And that's heartening, but we have a lot of catching up to do, I would say. Yeah, and part of why I kind of created that model too is so that we keep moving. It's kind of, I see it as a loop. So often organizations can get stuck on events and awareness and they don't actually do a lot of action or they don't create the space for people to feel comfortable.

Gavin Hennessey 31:21
So I think, like you said, you know, once you've done one iteration of it, continue, keep on packing the issue and keep making sure that we're working on it continuously.

Sandra Healy 31:43
Yeah, and I think discussions like this are really important that we get the opportunity to share, you know, some of the work where we have organizations and people leading from the front. So thanks for sharing that. Gavin Neat, because I have two Gavin's here today, I'll have to call you Gavin Neat. You talked about your work in Welcome, and you talk about where you work with multiple employers across the UK enabling disabled visitors to plan assistance in advance of arriving at a venue.

Sandra Healy 32:00
Could you give us some examples of accommodations that you've seen in the workplace? So I know you've talked about, you know, transport and things outside, but is there, do you have some examples of where you have deployed the technology in workplaces?

Gavin Neate 32:14
Yeah, and I think there's two parts to this. One is, you know, the technology that you've seen in the workplace. We're like a bridge to sometimes people becoming engaged. And I think a lot of businesses go, we can't possibly do it. It's too big. I can't possibly start the journey because it's just going to be too scary.

Gavin Neate 32:33
And if I start the journey and I'm not fulfilling it properly, we're going to put our head above the parapet and then people will take a swipe at us for not being as good as we should be.

Gavin Neate 32:41
So let's just keep our heads down. And I know it's a massive challenge, but one of the things that I absolutely love and it's not connected to what I do, it's loosely connected, but it is employee networks.

Gavin Neate 32:52
Employee networks are easily the best thing that you can do within an organization. The first initial step is to say, who wants to be involved? And that comes from the sea level management.

Gavin Neate 33:02
The C level management say, no, I want the people who are proud and disability pride month obviously is right now. The people who are proud, the people who are functioning highly,

Gavin Neate 33:12
the people that are proving what's possible. I want them to lead us. I want them to tell us how we can be better. I want them to show other people that they are very welcome in our organization.

Gavin Neate 33:22
And that comes from sea level and things like Caroline Casey's valuable 500. We see that we saw it at Davos at the World Economic Forum. It's like the CEOs and sea level management saying, let's make those changes.

Gavin Neate 33:33
And I would say that the next thing beyond that is the first point of contact. The first point of contact for anybody coming to your business is going to more than likely be digital or word of mouth.

Gavin Neate 33:44
So they're going to pop onto a website and they're going to see how they're going to learn very quickly what the attitude towards accessibility is. And I would always say, if you've got any information on accessibility on a website,

Gavin Neate 33:56
is top left hand corner have accessibility mentioned? If you go to your website and there's lots of people on the call now, go to your website, look at the top left hand corner if accessibility isn't there,

Gavin Neate 34:06
or if it's right down the very bottom and you have to scroll all the way down. Imagine doing that with a screen reader. You're going to have to go through a lot of information to find out accessibility.

Gavin Neate 34:15
Top left hand side every single time. But the thing I would say with my work and as a mobility instructor, I would walk into a shop or any environment like a hospital or an office block.

Gavin Neate 34:26
And I would observe the staff member interacting with the disabled person and vice versa. And of course, I was training the person to become more empowered and confident in interacting

Gavin Neate 34:36
because they were going to have to correct how the staff member interacted with them. Of course, using my technology, I was able to do that before I walked through the door. So I was empowering the staff member to interact with me,

Gavin Neate 34:48
with me as a disabled person right at the top of the tree. I'm the one that's telling you how best to interact with me. And I think empowerment of the staff member meant that the first point of contact

Gavin Neate 35:01
was the person who was probably going to be the best qualified within that organization. So really simple. The first thing you do when you meet somebody who's visually impaired, hello, my name is, and then your designation.

Gavin Neate 35:13
So hello, my name is Gavin. I'm the concierge here at the hotel. I'm the receptionist here at the business or whatever the person's visiting. And at that moment, that visually impaired person goes, oh yeah, I know who I'm talking to.

Gavin Neate 35:23
I know what they do. I know how to interact with them. I know how to praise them. I know how to call them if I need help. And that staff member goes, oh wow, I feel brilliant because I knew the right thing to do.

Gavin Neate 35:35
And the next time somebody walks through the door, I'm going to know the right thing to do. And I'm going to be reminded every single time somebody walks through the door using this service

Gavin Neate 35:42
so that I can help everybody, anybody. And then my God, I mean, best example was in a business in London. The head of HR was looking at or admin was looking at our system. They knew that five minutes from now, a guide dog owner was going to walk through the door.

Gavin Neate 35:56
They read the top tips and the overview and they read the person's messages to what they wanted to achieve. They were shaking like a leaf because they'd gone from unconscious incompetence

Gavin Neate 36:05
into conscious or conscious incompetence. And they were like, oh, and then I showed them some top tips. They then went down and met the person in reception on their own. They came back to me having given sighted guide with that person back to an office

Gavin Neate 36:17
and they were shaking like a leaf, but they were absolutely over the moon with how well they had done. I introduced myself. I didn't talk to the dog. I offered my arm. I walked at their pace.

Gavin Neate 36:27
I didn't say it's over there. I said, it's the reception's on our right hand side. I described it and they were just buzzing. So when staff do it well, they feel brilliant for doing it well and then they want to do it again.

Sandra Healy 36:40
Yeah, very good. And I think it's in a very important point, education. I don't think anybody wants to deliberately exclude. I don't think that's what happens. I think it's just people don't have the access to the information they need to create a good experience.

Sandra Healy 36:54
So delighted to hear that you're doing that as part of your work. And Gavin Hennessey, briefly, because I think we could be having this conversation for about three hours, but we don't have that amount of time.

Sandra Healy 37:04
Very briefly, just if there was something you wanted to add to that around accommodations, you know, some of the practical things that you've seen that work well.

Gavin Hennessey 37:17
Yeah, very similar to Gavin in the sense that I work with all of our internal teams to make sure that the process and the experiences the best it can be for people with disabilities. So like in the past year, we reviewed all of our recruitment and promotion processes to make sure

Gavin Hennessey 37:26
that there's notices for accommodations. We've worked with our recruitment teams to make sure that they're comfortable with that process and that they're comfortable with interviewing people with disabilities and the types of

Gavin Hennessey 37:39
accommodations that might be asked as well. We've done a lot of awareness around the organization too, around disability in terms of training. And I suppose we've ordered areas as well, I suppose that we're looking at that are maybe

Gavin Hennessey 37:51
intersectionality that actually also kind of are universal in a sense. So all of our branches have been age -friendly accredited recently. So that's really great because a lot of the accommodations that we've done there are universal

Gavin Hennessey 38:02
for people with disabilities as well. But I think to Gavin's point as well, some of the things that we're probably most proud of is the smaller kind of actions like our peer -to -peer support groups that have kind of organically

Gavin Hennessey 38:12
set up for people with neurodiversity. We've got a peer -to -peer network for that as well, which has been great. And I think just, I suppose, going forward as well, we've agreed a disability action plan.

Gavin Hennessey 38:25
So like I said, the work isn't done when you've done the basics, we're continuing the work and we want to kind of make ourselves kind of a leader in the space as well. So we, I suppose, watch the space in the sense of I'm looking forward to kind of some exciting projects coming up in the next couple of months.

Sandra Healy 38:41
Yeah, thanks Gavin. And just from listening to both of you, you're reminding me of a recent company and a CEO in Ireland, which I won't mention their name, but talked about how they're decommissioning the

Sandra Healy 38:53
employee resource groups and, you know, to hear something like that. Thankfully, it's an outlier, but like, you know, when you think about the impact that's going to have on culture and representation and voice, you know, like ERGs exist for a reason,

Sandra Healy 39:08
you know, and generally their grassroots employee led, you know, it's about passion and representation and very disappointed to hear that a CEO would roll back on something that's kind of proven over and over again. So, Tom, I might move to you. I know you've done incredible work through the Committee on Disability Matters. How long have you been advocating in this area and what inspires you?

Sandra Healy 39:33
I know Owen obviously is one of your key inspirations, but certainly what I've seen from the outside, Tom, is that you are relentless, I would say, and passion drives you for this. It'd be great to hear just more about that.

Senator Tom Clonan 39:48
Yeah, well, so I'm an accidental advocate. Because I had no experience of disability, no knowledge of it whatsoever until my son Owen was born, and he actually had a normal delivery, and everything was fine.

Senator Tom Clonan 40:07
He hit all of his developmental milestones. And then at 18 months, this disease, this rare neuromuscular disease just announced itself. And that's when the advocacy started, because unfortunately in Ireland, you know,

Senator Tom Clonan 40:23
for any kind of a service or support or any kind of an investigation, you have to fight for it. And you have to really fight for it. And so you end up, de facto, becoming an advocate as a parent and a carer.

Senator Tom Clonan 40:38
And it really struck me what Gavin and Gavin were saying. Every day you're fighting, it could be the revenue commissioners, it could be the Department of Health, it could be the Department of Social Protection,

Senator Tom Clonan 40:56
the Department of Education and Skills, you know, you're always fighting. And this has consequences for you as a citizen because you can find yourself being quite angry. And I think when you describe the relentlessness, I think some of that is channeling that anger

Senator Tom Clonan 41:15
and that fear and trying to try and convert that into something positive. And it really came to a head at one point. I bought a double oven from Harvey Norman and it broke. So I went into Harvey Norman and the guy said,

Senator Tom Clonan 41:31
well, we can't fix that. And immediately I went into fight mode and I said, oh, yes, you will, because it says it here. We have a fundamental right to, and he looked at me and he said, no, we're going to give you a new oven.

Senator Tom Clonan 41:44
And then he said to me, he said to me, do you know what? He said, are you having a bad day? And so they were trialling a coffee machine in Harvey Norman's. And this guy, you go to Harvey Norman's

Senator Tom Clonan 41:56
and Carrickmines, great store. He brought me into the furniture section and sat me down with a cup of coffee from their coffee machine. And he said, now you're very angry. And he said, you need to look after yourself

Senator Tom Clonan 42:07
and have a little moment like this of self -care. And I mean, there you go. So that speaks to the goodness of people in all sorts of organizations. And I was really heartened by what both Gavin,

Senator Tom Clonan 42:22
sorry to refer to you in the collective guys, but this good will, and on our journey, we found that individuals, people are so good and so positive, almost to an extent that people would embarrass you.

Senator Tom Clonan 42:36
Like the way that people respond to us as a family and to own, even now as a young adult, you know, if people want to give him things, they want to reach out to him. Sometimes they can be a bit shy for fear

Senator Tom Clonan 42:48
of saying the wrong thing. And Gavin, you were saying that about employees who are just afraid of not knowing how to approach somebody. And that part of our journey has been, Owen has an assistance dog called Leighie,

Senator Tom Clonan 43:05
a beautiful golden retriever. And so very often people will respond to the dog. And when they see the dog, the wheelchair disappears, the scanning speech becomes less of an issue and they'll chat to Owen about his dog.

Senator Tom Clonan 43:17
So I know that there's huge good will. I think we're hardwired as human beings to reach out to each other and to embrace difference. The issue then is at an organizational level. So like that great guy in Harvey Norman

Senator Tom Clonan 43:31
who just was emotionally intelligent, by the way, I'm not getting any payment from Harvey Norman for saying this. You know, he just happened to be a person who is emotionally intelligent, psychologically literate,

Senator Tom Clonan 43:44
a wonderful human being. And but we've had so many mixed experiences. Like I remember traveling from Dover to Calais on a ferry, roll on, roll off ferry. And I took the opportunity while we were queuing

Senator Tom Clonan 43:58
to take the dog out and walk him around so he could cock his leg before he gets on the ferry. And somebody up on the bridge spotted us and the captain of the ship invited us up to the bridge

Senator Tom Clonan 44:09
and wanted to show Owen, gave him a chance to steer the ship. Don't know how the passengers feel about that. Owen's partially sighted. He was in the middle of the busy channel, allegedly steering the ship.

Senator Tom Clonan 44:20
So you have responses like that. And then on another ferry company, when we drove onto the ship and they saw the dog, they actually told us to turn around and get off the ship. Again, it's just a matter of training and informing people because they just misunderstood, didn't understand why we had brought a dog with us. It wasn't on the manifest, didn't understand that

Senator Tom Clonan 44:44
an assistance dog is actually a working dog, is fully accredited with assistance dogs international, not a pet as such. I'm greatly encouraged by what both Gavin and Gavin were saying about

Senator Tom Clonan 44:59
just that piece of bringing the awareness into the workplace and then the actions. Gavin, your solutions -based approach and your positivity, saying, let's find a solution to this,

Senator Tom Clonan 45:15
let's not see problems and obstacles. Because as a parent and as a care, I'm conscious that sometimes, and I think it's part and parcel of the experience that sometimes you can become quite fearful.

Senator Tom Clonan 45:26
And I'm mindful that, yes, at the outset, I did say a lot of very, very negative things. But absolutely, I think it was Martin Luther King, I think it said that the overarching arc of the universe is towards justice. I think the overarching tendency is towards greater

Senator Tom Clonan 45:44
acceptance and understanding of and support for people who are different by way of disability. And I take great encouragement from that. So I would say, unfortunately, some of the services

Senator Tom Clonan 45:56
and supports in Ireland, especially since our economic crash and the imposition of austerity, I'm being negative again now, but definitely in our lived experience, those kinds of things

Senator Tom Clonan 46:06
have deteriorated and disability services are in crisis at the moment. But the new chief executive of the Health Services Executive, Bernard Glasser, I know he's determined to reverse that. But I think

Senator Tom Clonan 46:19
overall in wider society, there's a much better appreciation around diversity and inclusion in all of its iterations. And it's a national conversation, it's a part of our discourse.

Senator Tom Clonan 46:32
I find as a politician that issues around identity, diversity and inclusion, they're the ones that really generate a lot of correspondence and interaction and engagement. And that's a great place to be in. And I'm optimistic and hopeful for the future.

Sandra Healy 46:48
 Thank you, Tom. And interestingly, that you mentioned public sector, because certainly my own personal view would be that that's where we start. And I know the public sector duty reporting,

Sandra Healy 47:01
for people who are not familiar with that, it is around where public sector organisations are mandated to report on the numbers of people with disabilities that they've employed. And I know public sector duty has increased recently up to 6%. So that's encouraging. I think

Sandra Healy 47:20
there's a lot of support organisations around public sector helping to drive that. We have a lot of clients as well that use Inclusio to collect the information to be able to report on the public

Sandra Healy 47:32
sector duty. But for me, I personally think that we start with public sector. If you get visibility, representation at the front line there, that's what starts with acceptance and it just becoming

Sandra Healy 47:45
the everyday of our life and our society. We have about nine minutes left. And I can't see if any questions have come in. So, Donal, I can keep going or if you have questions, I'll put them to the panel.

Dónal McClean 48:01
Absolutely, Sandra. We do indeed. We've got a couple of questions here. The first one comes from Erin Fox. As a self -advocate, I'm always happy to share my lived experience and ask

Dónal McClean 48:11
for accommodations I need, but self -advocacy can be exhausting too. And sometimes people can forget. What would your advice be for ensuring sustained awareness among colleagues in the workplace?

Sandra Healy 48:26
Yeah, I think that it can be exhausting. And I think, Gavin Hennessy, I might go to you on that because I know as a DNI practitioner myself, you're always very cautious that you don't create an overburden, a particular set of people to have to advocate all the time. So, Gavin, have you any thoughts or comments on that? Gavin Hennessy?

Gavin Hennessey 48:49
Yeah, I think for me, I'm always talking to hiring managers and our employee relations team as well in terms of ensuring that they're offering kind of accommodations and making sure that there's awareness around what's available to.

Gavin Hennessey 49:02
I think it's a challenge for employers too in terms of keeping up to awareness because I know for ourselves that we're going to be revisiting our reasonable accommodations policy and re kind of re communicating it across the business because I do feel like there's a lack of lack of awareness.

Gavin Hennessey 49:17
And that's just an iterative process that we kind of keep needing to do. But I do think as well that I'm excited about some of the technology solutions like AccessEarth that can kind of take out some of that kind of self advocacy or at least make it more easy and a better experience as well. So I think technology has a lot to play going forward as well of making the experience a lot better for everyone.

Sandra Healy 49:42
Yeah, and I think Gavin, like I spent five years in Dublin City University and I was part of seeing the change in around universal design as they started to embed that into learning and thankfully I think most of the universities in Ireland now universal design in the curriculum is just is standard.

Sandra Healy 50:02
And the work that AccessEarth do around, you know, building an environmental design and universal design there is absolutely phenomenal. And I would say Gavin, Neate, that's part of your work then as well, isn't it, around that environmental accommodations as well.

Gavin Neate 50:17
Well, my word, an even more so representation, which I've heard several times, and it's a little bit of an exclusive, but just recently we want a contract with the Scottish Parliament to install welcome into every single MSP constituency office.

Gavin Neate 50:34
So disabled people will be able to go to their monthly surgery with their MSP knowing that the staff member who will meet them at the door already understands how best to interact.

Gavin Neate 50:44
And also the MSP will know exactly how to interact and the intention there is to have more disabled people speaking to their Member of Parliament, more members of Parliament representing the needs and requirements of their disabled constituents.

Gavin Neate 50:59
And, okay, this is the big one, more disabled people putting themselves forward to be parliamentarians. And I think that is representation. And my word, take that even further, putting something like this, this proximity based awareness of disability in a voting station, so that returning officers know who is about to walk through the door, making it easier for disabled people to vote.

Gavin Neate 51:21
That is true representation. That's the future. Fantastic. I love when technology solves a problem, I have to say. I'm delighted to hear that. So, Dónal, we've five minutes. I think we can take one question and then I have one final question for the panel just around the future.

Dónal McClean 51:39
So I think if we can just take one question, get a brief response and then we'll close out the session. Absolutely. That's perfect. So we have another couple that have just come in here, but I'll just get this one here.

Dónal McClean 51:52
So we got one here, something from my experience with my son from a lived perspective, a barrier to active employment for him can sometimes be the built environment of the employer or challenges with obtaining an interview from what seems a fear of supports that need to be available. Employment can be challenging. So it's more just a statement rather than an actual question, but I think it would be good to just get thoughts on the panelists around that.

Sandra Healy 52:20
Yeah. And can I just, and I'd say most people on the call already know this, when we were in the university, we developed a, and it's, I know you'll find it online if you search for it.

Sandra Healy 52:31
It's called the hiring manager's guide to neurodiversity. And within that document, it's around universally designing the hiring process so that people don't have to disclose very personal things about themselves when they're just going for an interview.

Sandra Healy 52:45
So it's there. It's, you know, it's really good quality. We worked on it with Indeed. You know, they gave us some really good guidelines as well around setting up the interview process.

Sandra Healy 52:55
So if you, if you don't have that as an employer, please, if my team will help you find it, if you can't find it. So from my perspective, that's, you know, something I'd like to add that anyone from the panel briefly like to pick up on that.

Sandra Healy 53:11
No, okay. That's okay. Because we've three minutes. So I have one question for each of you and it's just, it's around the future. So if I was to ask Tom, I might ask you to think about the future from an Irish perspective and then Gavin Hennessy, maybe from an employer perspective and Gavin from a taking over the world perspective. So I'll start with yourself, Tom.

Senator Tom Clonan 53:35
Well, I think I would hope that in the lifetime of this government that our parliament will fully ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Senator Tom Clonan 53:47
And I hope to progress. The legislation that I've introduced and I have a much more comprehensive piece of legislation to come in the winter. And I think as a parliament we do our bit. I'm so encouraged to think that civil society, business, industry that we're all added among this,

Senator Tom Clonan 54:08
that we all recognise that disabled citizens are, you know, they're our most beautiful, precious, extraordinary citizens. You know, the challenges that they overcome in their everyday life to participate, like they will bring so much to the arts, to business, to our artistic and cultural lives.

Senator Tom Clonan 54:28
And I'm just, this has given me a big, but this is the equivalent of the cup of coffee in Arby Norris. I've taken great encouragement and hope from this session today. And thanks to everybody who attended and for the people who asked questions. Thank you for inviting me here.

Sandra Healy 54:47
And Tom, I will reach out separately and find out how we can support you because I think that that's a really important thing, right? That we see how we can support the bill that you're putting forward. So thank you. Gavin Hennessey, yourself.

Gavin Hennessey 54:59
Yeah, I think without trying to sound like corporate speak, one of our behaviours is kind of try to create experiences beyond expectations.

Gavin Hennessey 55:06
And I'm really taking that as a D&I practitioner as well and kind of exploring how we can look to the future in terms of creating those experiences. And one of the things I'm most excited about, which I spoke about already for the future, is how technology can enable that.

Sandra Healy 55:19
So things like inclusio, AccessEarth, I'm new to it, to Welcome, but I'm really excited about exploring those different things, pieces of technology to see how we can kind of create one better data and two better experiences.

Sandra Healy 55:31
Great, thank you Gavin. Gavin, please.

Gavin Neate 55:51
So just last week I attended Disability Expo in London, the Excel Arena, and Disability Expo was imagined by disabled people, organised by disabled people, attended by disabled people, and it was just the most amazing event you could possibly have gone to. The influencers that were there, the people that were there that were actually dictating the future. The big story is that disabled people, 20% of the world's population, but pretty much 80% of the people will be disabled at some point in their lives.

Gavin Neate 56:05
So it's the largest demographic, smallest demographic in the entire world. And I would also add to that the welcome is spreading across the UK and now Ireland, but my goal is to try and get it into the parliament.

Gavin Neate 56:17
We've got it in Scottish Parliament, so why not the Irish Parliament? It's a big one. Representation is the most important thing. Fantastic. Thank you. And we're going to close the session there right on the button.

Sandra Healy 56:29
I know we could have continued on. Thank you everybody. It's been a fantastic experience hosting the panel. And thank you to everybody for listening in. And I'd just like to say thank you to the teams.

Sandra Healy 56:39
My team in Inclusio and the team at Access Earth have done a phenomenal job bringing us all here today. And don't forget we've two other sessions now coming up next Wednesday and the following Wednesday.

Sandra Healy 56:50
So please tune in if you can. Thanks everybody. Please reach out to us if there's something you've heard today that you'd like more information on. More than happy to make sure that we bring that to you. And I'm going to hand back to Donal. Thank you.

Dónal McClean 57:04
 And Sandra, you're not getting away with that also. A big thank you to yourself for moderating a fantastic panel. Thank you again so much. And thank you so many people for attending.

Dónal McClean 57:14
The videos will be sent around either on social medias or through emails that you use to register. So stay tuned to that. And as Sandra said, keep an eye out for the next two sessions. The next one is next week. Same time. This is on intersectionality within disability. Thank you everyone.

Sandra Healy 57:33
Great. Thanks everybody. Have a great day. Thanks panelists. Bye -bye.