INTRO: Hi everyone, welcome to the ADCET Podcast – supporting you – supporting students. We would like to acknowledge the aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples who are the traditional custodians of the lands on which this recording is taking place and pay our respects to the elder’s past, present and emerging.

In this podcast, Karen McCall from Karlen Communications chats with David Swayn and Darlene McLennan about her passion and work in advocating for inclusive education over the last 20 years. Our conversation with Karen is the third in a series “ADCET crosses the ocean” where we bring global perspectives and ideas to our audience. You can find the other two parts to this series on our podcast channel. Make sure you check out our show notes for relevant links. Enjoy.

DARLENE:  Welcome to our podcast: ADCET—Supporting You—Supporting Students. This is Darlene McLennan from the Australian Disability Clearing House on Education and Training. Joining me today is my colleague David Swayn from the National Disability Coordination Officers Program based in North Queensland. Our guest today is Karen McCall, from Karlen Communications, from Canada. Karen is an author, advocate and specialist in accessibilities for Canada. Karen has worked in the field of accessible content design for more than 20 years and is the owner of Karlen Communications. Welcome and thanks for joining us, Karen.

KAREN:  Thank you for having me.

DARLENE:  We've had a little bit of a pre-chat and it's been fantastic to hear some of your stories and some of your passion, but can you tell our audience a little bit about yourself?

KAREN:  I do have a visual disability, so my interest in accessible education is part selfish and part humanitarian, I guess. I came into the field of accessible document design when I was getting my masters in the late 1990s. We were using Kermit and Dialup and online education was just becoming a thing, and I recognised immediately the barriers that those of us with disabilities would be facing if we did not look at the accessibility of online content. At the same time, the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0 were being released, so there was an interest in making websites accessible, which at that time were primarily the educational sort of source. Learning management systems were just being developed, so I kind of fell into it. As we were able to, in the early 2000s, make PDF documents accessible, I learned how to do that and made notes and I had enough notes to put a book together. So my book on accessible PDF was published in 2005 and then people said, 'Well, it's too hard to make things accessible and work in the text tree of a PDF document. Can we make a Word document accessible from the start? That would save us a lot of time. Can we make PowerPoint accessible? That would save us a lot of time when we tag something as a PDF document.' Then I took notes and wrote books on how to make PowerPoint and Word accessible and then did training and consulting as an instructional designer and taught people in colleges and universities here in Canada how to make accessible content. So I have been involved in this field from its inception.

DAVID:  Yes, it's quite a lengthy journey, I suppose, through all of that. I did a little bit of pre-reading about you, if you don't mind, and I notice that you've spent a lot of your professional career advocating for accessible documents in a very broad sense and also, in some cases, advising on legislation. I'm wondering if you could give us a bit of an overview of some of the wins and losses in the field at the moment; and, if there was something that needed to change right now, what would that be?

KAREN:  Some of the wins are in my talking about inclusive education and the focus internationally, as of 2015, by the United Nations on inclusive education, so we are now talking about people with disabilities having a more equitable role in education, which is the win. The problem is that everybody defines 'inclusive education' as something different and, most of the time, it's defined as our being 'accommodated for' rather than being 'included in', so we have to change that paradigm. The win is that there are enough people interested in changing that paradigm and looking at a global inclusive education standard whereby, if we could find a way to all get together, I think we could make some serious progress in creating a baseline standard for what is 'inclusive' rather than 'accommodated for' education. Here in Ontario, our legislation doesn't really have any enforcement. Even though accessibility of documents, which is very vague in our legislation, is being phased in, I think the hope was that, because it's to be phased in from 2012 to 2025, with the change in government—we have elections every four years—the requirements for the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act would simply go away or attention wouldn't be paid to them. There is a lot of interest, in terms of community colleges and universities having programs and certificate and degree programs, in making things accessible. Two of our local community colleges, one in Toronto and one in Hamilton, now have graduate certificate programs in accessible media design. We do have the Ontario college of accessible design—so that is a plus—where you can get degrees in accessible design for a built environment, digital content and all aspects of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act: open spaces, information communication, customer service and all of those kinds of things. So we are making some progress. In terms of international standards, we do have the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, which are an international standard and are technology neutral. They don't quite fit the bill for documents, because documents are slightly different; they have page numbers and page headers and footers and stuff, so it's a little bit different. The PDF standards that are being developed are, I think, taking a serious step backwards. I'm not sure how they're going to progress in the future; they're not published yet. It's kind of a mixed bag. For a while there, it was very static and nothing seemed to be happening and then, within the last three years, there has been more of a renewed interest just in companies and organisations wanting to make their content accessible. On the other hand, there have been some big lawsuits, especially in the States, for people who don't find any value in those of us with disabilities accessing their products. So it's kind of a mixed bag. I see the COVID pandemic as a huge opportunity. Here in Ontario, we have been talking nonstop, those of us who are advocates. We will take any airtime that we can get—we seem to be getting a lot of it—to just bring home the point that digital access is important, that we have to pay attention to it and that we can't let it go by the wayside any more; that, if students are all going to be online, all of the teachers have to create all of their content to be accessible. So the huge win, I think, is the attention that the pandemic is putting on the amount of inaccessible content that is out there in the education environment.

DAVID:  I think that's a really great point to make actually: that it's rapidly accelerated that issue and brought it into the spotlight in a way that hasn't happened in some slow manner, where it can just tick along with other issues; it's rapidly accelerated it. I'm glad to hear that over there there's airtime for the conversation as well.

KAREN:  Well, it's interesting because it seemed to be a small crack that opened. Those of us who have any kind of a voice or any kind of stubbornness have really widened that crack so that we are being heard, even if nothing is being done now. What we're hearing is, 'Well, you know, everybody is already doing the distance education and all the students are in there already; it's too late to make things accessible.' My perspective is, 'It's not too late, now that you know about it. You have now three to four months'—when we started talking about it, it was four to five months—'before the pandemic comes back in the fall, so you have that time to start putting things in place: to start with your strategy on how you are going to make all of this content accessible; if students are not going back to the built-environment school in the fall, you have this lead time to start training teachers and start making sure that you have the strategies, the policies and the planning in place so that, come the fall, when students are still learning at a distance, more content is accessible and you are building on that.' So I don't see it as 'it's too late'. We're trying to dispel that mindset; 'Don't give up before you've started, because we're not going to accept that.'

DARLENE:  I think here in Australia we're having similar conversations. The challenge has been before the universities and TAFEs; they've been fighting for a long time for that accessible stuff and it has really come to the forefront now with COVID. We had a recent report done by Vision Australia called Online, but off-track, which really highlights the lived experience of many students who are blind and who have low vision in Australia. The report was quite damning of some of the experiences of those students. One of the recommendations from that report is that our peak body, Universities Australia, actually work with organisations such as Vision Australia to develop comprehensive training programs for all staff around the needs of and supports for students who are blind or who have low vision. Can you talk a bit—you covered it in the last bit a little bit—about why it is important to have all staff trained in accessibility and also that that begins right at the beginning of when content is being developed.

KAREN:  One of the problems that we've seen with everything going online is that students no longer have that connection, that direct connection, with the disability services. If we're talking about tertiary education, disability services act as the intermediary between the inaccessible content and the student. So the people who would take the books, break their bindings, scan them in, make them accessible and give them to the student are now working at home and don't have access to the multiplex photocopiers and their OCR, optical character recognition, or text recognition software; they're working at home and they don't have the tools that they would normally have access to in their office. So they're trying to make content accessible without the tools that they need and the students are needing the tools immediately. We, to some extent—to a great extent—are still accepting instructors not making their content accessible, partly because they don't know how to. Either they have not wanted to make their material accessible or they simply choose not to, despite some training. I mean, there's a wide range of reasons for why they don't. So we have students who can't access information and yet they are still expected to hand assignments in on time and to access material that they can't access. So, if an instructor, a faculty member or a teacher creates something to be accessible so that all students can access it, that takes some of the pressure off the disability services person, the person who acts as that intermediary—in primary and secondary school, it's an educational assistant—to then support the student rather than spending all of their time trying to find a way at home where they have the equipment. Also, if I can point to a project back in the early 2000s, at MIT they had a first-year physics class and I think, if I remember correctly, 75 per cent of the students failed the course or dropped out, and this was a prerequisite course to move on for a lot of their programs. So what they did—it was when the W3C was just starting and when the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines had just been published—was decide that they would make the content in the physics course accessible, and it was called the Pivot Project. They found that they turned around the rate and had something like 75 per cent of the students graduating. That was because the students—if they couldn't learn with the print, they had audio; if they couldn't learn with the audio, they had the video—had the content in several accessible formats, and they were accessible. It wasn't just that they provided different formats; they provided different accessible formats. So accessibility of digital content helps everyone. If a student can't learn a concept from print or they can't learn a concept from a video but they can learn it from print, they have that opportunity to choose the accessible format that is going to help them learn that concept. So accessible design helps everyone. It isn't just for those of us who are blind or visually disabled or have learning, cognitive or print disabilities. It's like kerb cuts, like elevators or like escalators; it helps everybody. I think we need to start framing it that way but also making sure that it's part of your job now as a teacher or a faculty member. If you want to keep your job, if you want to keep teaching, you are going to create accessible content; we will give you all the supports. In Ontario, we are really lucky because we do have the Ontario college for accessible design. One of the things that I've suggested is that we leverage that expertise to create the plan or the model for Ontario to use that can then be replicated and take that expertise in designing training programs and support for grants for teachers and faculty in Ontario to get them up to speed in the next three to four months on accessible content design and to provide ongoing training and support. I think it would be a great way to put us on the road towards 'inclusive' education rather than 'accommodated for' education. Right now, it's one-offs; it's on a per student basis that the accommodation is being made. It's not that we are being included; it's that, 'You have a problem accessing this content and we'll fix it for you.' But then, if somebody else comes along with a disability, it's like, 'Oh well, we'll fix it for you,' whereas, if it were accessible in the first place, not only would it save time but all of the other students would be able to leverage the accessibility as well.

DAVID:  You're very well spoken on that point, Karen. There's a lot of practicality to it as well insofar as, if you're a student who needs documents converted into a certain format, what happens if the person who does it isn't there that day? You don't have equal access to education in those instances. Having spent a long time advocating for it, have you got any thoughts on whether or not it's a lack of awareness or whether or not it's a lack of legislation?

KAREN:  We have the legislation; the legislation has no teeth. We can point to the legislation. Whether you're in Canada or whether you're in the United States, we have allowed faculty and we have allowed academic institutions to say, 'It's not important for us; it's not one of our priorities.' In terms of faculty and teachers, we have allowed people to say, 'I don't want to change the way that I teach. I don't want to learn how to do this; it's not my job.' What I would hear a lot of was, 'No student with a disability will be in my course,' which I thought was very sad. It's like, 'Your course is so boring that not even students with disabilities would want to take it.' That is not, of course, how they meant it, but I saw the look on their face after I said that. You can't tell whether you have students with disabilities in your class. With a lot of us, especially when we get to tertiary education, our disabilities are invisible or we have adapted to the point where we just use our adaptive technology and seamlessly integrate into the class, and I think it should be part of the academic institution's responsibility to do the same towards us and seamlessly include us in the digital content without us having to ask for it. Attitude plays a huge part, especially for faculty who are resistant to change, don't want to learn anything new or don't see that, at the very core, it's that those of us with disabilities still don't have any value in the academic ecosystem. That is because we are still accommodated for; we're seen as something that has to be accommodated rather than included. I keep going back to that kind of paradox in that, if we were included, it wouldn't be a question as to whether you would just seamlessly create accessible content. You would have all of your assignments constructed so that all of your students would seamlessly create accessible content and so, if you did have peer evaluations, if you did have collaborative work in the classroom, you wouldn't have to make special assignments or accommodations and exclude or isolate students with disabilities, who then are not part of the community of their own classmates but are off doing something different because either the tool, the digital tool, is not accessible or the content is not accessible: 'We'll give you something special to do; you're not included with the rest of us,' which further isolates us. Since everybody is learning at a distance now, the isolation is exacerbated because teachers are allowed to bring in digital tools that haven't been vetted for accessibility and they're not creating accessible content. It all comes back to the attitude: how are those of us with disabilities seen in an academic ecosystem? Are we seen as things outside the norm that need to be accommodated for, or are we seen as people who have value and are included in every aspect and level of learning?

DAVID:  That's interesting because legislation and attitude are pretty well linked. A lot of legislation around the world is that you're required to fix it; it's not that you're required to build it right in the first instance. We spoke a little bit earlier in the pre-chat about access to technology and what's happening over there. But I'm wondering if we could go back to that and talk a little bit about what's happening in Canada at the moment in the further education space, in the COVID world and in online learning, and maybe we could chat about access to technology at its very core form.

KAREN:  One of the problems that has emerged—as I mentioned, I've seen it on some of the academic lists—is where people from disability services are now being confronted with academic institutions that are not providing the same adaptive technology for students, which was available to them when they were on site or in the built environment, now that they are at a distance. So, if you are a student and part of a family that can't afford the adaptive technology, you're being told that you, as someone who is not a techie, have to go out on the internet and find an adaptive technology that works in the same way as the one that you used at school, which you probably used seamlessly. You have probably come through school with the adaptive technology being provided for you—whether it's primary, secondary or tertiary education, there are the licences—and, all of a sudden, not only are you having to learn how to navigate a digital learning management system in inaccessible content but you're also being told that the adaptive technology that you have been using is no longer available to you and that you're going to have to go out and find suitable technology. Not only that; you're also going to have to install it on your computer, configure it and learn how to use it, all while keeping up with your studies. Some of the things that you will find on the internet are not going to have the same tools; they're not going to be as robust as the tools that you have been using at school, because the ones that you've been using at school are ones where you have site licences. So it's another area of disadvantage for students: having to figure out their own adaptive technology, if they don't have access to it at home. I work at a TechTable at my local coffee shop—or I did, before this—and, on the first Sunday of every month, people in my group would bring their technology in and I would update things and clean out their iPad, their browser histories and all of that so that their machines would run better. I can't even imagine how it is for students who are now at home and have absolutely no idea, just like my friends around the table, about what is going on with their computer. They just know how to use it; they don't know how to go out and look for adaptive technology that's going to work for them. They don't know how to install it. They don't know how to configure it. Where would they even find the learning modules to figure out how to learn to do footnotes: 'Is it going to allow me to put footnotes in my academic paper? Where do I do that? What are the keyboard commands? What are the voice commands?' It gives the students with disabilities a further digital barrier, in that they don't have the support of the adaptive technology that they may have been used to using, again, seamlessly when they have been on site at school.

DARLENE:  It's huge, isn't it, just the layers upon layers of barriers that could exist for students with disability at this time. I think you've given a really good insight there, Karen. Maybe moving on—I'm sorry; keep going.

KAREN:  I was going to say that the other thing is, because everybody is just moving online so quickly, the whole environment is in chaos. So all of these needs, all of these problems, get lost in the chaos: 'Let's just get everybody on line; let's get them past this year; just let's get it done so that we can move on to the next crisis and then the next and hopefully get back to school in the fall.' I honestly believe that we will have another pandemic or the same one, a continuation. Based on what happened 100 years ago, I just think that we're going to be faced with it and we're going to have this chaos if we don't sort it out.

DARLENE:  Yes, indeed. On a bit of a global perspective now, do you have any thoughts about the Marrakesh treaty? Both Australia and Canada are signatories. How could we leverage this to get publishers to ensure that they develop courses and books to be accessible so that our institutions aren't always having to modify or adapt the content for students?

KAREN:  Again I come back to 'accommodate'. There are two parts to this. The first one is that we still do 'accommodation' and not 'inclusion'. Making something accessible is done on a one­-off basis; one student needs one book to be accessible, and that's how we view it. So that publisher only has to make that one book accessible that one time for that one student. Then another student comes along and it's 'accommodation' and not 'inclusion'. So there's no real mandate for the publishers to make something inclusive from the beginning. The other problem is that we have—and we have had for the last at least five years—this skirmish going on among the different file formats, especially when it comes to textbooks and education. We have the people who really believe that HTML is the best way for those of us with disabilities to access anything digital; we have the PDF people who believe that PDF is the best way; and we also have the ePub people who say that their format is the best way or the only way for those of us with disabilities to access educational material. The problem with that is that we have these three groups that are telling those of us with disabilities what is best for us, when most of the textbooks are created with desktop publishing software and they can be made accessible right from the putting together of that textbook. You would simply save it as a tag to PDF or save it as an ePub or whatever you're going to publish it in. Even though I have been, in the past, a strong advocate for the accessible PDF format, I have always said, 'I don't care what format you publish your works in; you make it accessible.' So, if a textbook is going to be available in ePub format, it is as accessible as ePub can be. If it's going to be published in HTML, it is as accessible as HTML can be for that content. It's the same with PDF. But don't tell us what is the best format for those of us with disabilities. When you go into a book store and you want to buy a book, the sales clerk doesn't say, 'Oh, hardcover isn't really good for you; you really can only read a paperback,' or, 'You can only read a coil ring.' People who don't have disabilities aren't told what is the best format. So publishers right now are confused because they have these three factions saying, 'This is the best'—'This is the best'—'This is the best'—and they are 'accommodating for' rather than 'including in'. So, even if they have a digital textbook, it's probably an inaccessible version of whatever format when it could very easily be an accessible version. What those of us with disabilities and those of us who are advocates have to start looking at again is 'inclusion' rather than 'accommodation' and saying, 'It doesn't matter what format you create this text book, this course pack or this course material in, it is going to have to be accessible. As the document author, as the publisher, can you choose what you're going to do—whether it's ePub, HTML or PDF—but, whatever format you decide on, it has to be accessible and that accessible version has to be available at the same time that a student purchases a print book if you also decide to publish the book in print.

DAVID:  I guess this sort of really leads us in very neatly to something that's extremely important—I know it's something that you've put some time into—which is a global inclusive education standard and your advocacy for this. Could you talk to us about what that looks like and then, maybe for our listeners, what they could do to support this cause?

KAREN:  I really believe in a global inclusive education standard primarily because, when I hear people talk about inclusive education, it means anything, and it means different things to different people. Now that we have, as of 2009­10, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities from the United Nations—154 countries, I think, have signed and ratified it—we have a really good base of different cultures and different countries to draw on, in terms of creating a baseline for defining 'inclusive education'. Then, in 2015, the United Nations developed the Sustainable Development Goals; goal 4.5 for 2030, which we're not going to meet, is 'inclusive education'. But, again, it's not defined. Everyone talks about inclusive education—it seems to be a very hot topic—but you can talk to five people and have 10 different opinions on what 'inclusive education' really is. My focus is on disability and inclusive education. But, for me, 'inclusive education' also means educating girls and minorities and creating that baseline for equal education for everyone. My focus just happens to be on the disability/accessibility component of this. So then internationally, when we have our conferences on inclusive education, we're all talking about the same thing and we're not talking about 'accommodation'. In some places there is confusion between 'accommodating for' and 'inclusion' or 'integration'. Mainstreaming, for those of us who lived through mainstreaming, leaves a really bad taste in our mouths because we lived through it and it didn't work. So it's about allowing us as part of the discussion, those of us with disabilities, to be at the table and have a voice on where we have found the barriers in education to be and how we can start creating that baseline of accessibility so that countries who can or want to build on that baseline and advance the standard can. But at least, when we talk about inclusive education and set up schools where those of us with disabilities are going to access learning, then we're all on the same page and the expectations are all the same; it doesn't matter which country you're in. That's my vision for a global inclusive education standard: that we are all on the same page; that we are talking about 'inclusion in' rather than 'accommodation for'; and that 'accommodation' becomes that rare instance instead of the go-to or the norm for those of us with disabilities. In terms of how people can advance it, I think we need to talk about it. I think we also need someone who is a little higher up the food chain than I am to set up meetings that include those of us with disabilities and that include those of us who are advocates and in the field of education. Rather than the theory of education, it should include those of us who are actually in the trenches of education and have that experience and understand the difference between 'accommodation' and 'inclusion' and then begin talking about what that global inclusive education standard is going to look like, even if we just tackle accessibility at this point and then build the other components for girls and women and other minorities on to that or if that work goes on simultaneously so that we can create an inclusive standard in order to know what we are talking about internationally. We have a global economy and right now, because we are failing to graduate students who know anything about accessibility or accessible design, we are graduating people who are unemployable. In Ontario, we have legislation and companies are asking for people to prove that they know how to create accessible buildings, how to create accessible websites and how to create accessible multimedia, and we haven't taught the students. Take that to the next level, to the global economy, and we have countries like Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the United States where there is legislation on accessibility of digital content and environments, and we are graduating people who have absolutely no idea of what that means. So we're just perpetuating the barriers, because we're not developing an inclusive education standard. We need to keep talking about it. I will talk about it to anybody who wants to listen and I'll get ideas. But I think we need some buy-in from someone who can actually bring us all together. Maybe now, because we're all online, it's going to be a lot easier because we won't have to travel to meetings. But I think we need someone with a bigger name than mine to actually say, 'This is a really good idea; let's seriously talk about it and put some framework together.'

DAVID:  Having listened to the way that you just put that—I'm sure our listeners would agree—I'm not quite sure if we need someone bigger than yourself to talk about it; it was so wonderfully put. Something that's probably going to stick in my head is about that 2030 goal and how you would do that without a set of standards; how you would create something that you don't have a set of standards for so that you can understand it in the global context. That's a very, very good point. Thank you so much for bringing it forward in that way; it was wonderful.

KAREN:  Thank you. Like I said, I will take any opportunity to talk about this because I really do believe that it is important for those of us with disabilities, but I think it's important for the global community as well to have this understanding about what we mean when we talk about education and disability.

DARLENE:  Karen, you've talked a little bit about the challenges and barriers that have existed at this time. I suppose, just in concluding, have you seen any, what we'd call, silver linings that are currently happening or that you see maybe coming out of this time?

KAREN:  Just the fact that people are interested and are letting us talk; as advocates, they're letting us talk freely without dismissing us when we talk about the accessibility of education or the lack thereof. It has given us a great platform for talking about how we need to improve the accessibility of education and what that means for those of us with disabilities. So the huge silver lining is our ability to talk about it without being dismissed or marginalised. But it's also the fact that, based on past history, we do have this window of opportunity where we can start putting things into practice and we can start building the framework for more digital accessibility. We have this time to train teachers and faculty how to make things accessible and: 'If you don't want to make something accessible, you simply don't work here. This is the way that we're doing it from now on and this is going to be part of teacher education. It's going to be part of a teacher's job that, when they create their curriculum, their content, it's going to be accessible or you're simply not going to be a teacher.' We can't accept the excuses any more. I think one of the silver linings is that we are now able to express that, whereas we have been told, 'Talk about unintentional barriers. It's not really their fault that they're not creating accessible content. Coax them along; they'll come along.' I don't think we can do that any more. I think the silver lining is that it has given us the strength and the courage as advocates to say, 'Enough is enough.' For 20 years, we have coddled people and accepted the fact that maybe some day they'll want to learn how to create accessible content, and for 20 years that hasn't worked. Now we have a pandemic and everyone is learning online and we're seeing the folly of coddling people in trying to coax them along and coaching things and, you know, 'You're creating unintentional barriers.' No: 'You were creating barriers and you knew that you were creating barriers.' The time has come to stop it and just start creating accessible content. For me, the silver lining is that I hear more advocates talking more strongly about the need for accessible document design and the fact that, if we are to come anywhere near the goal of 2030, we have to start now; otherwise, it's going to be 2080 and we're still going to be saying, 'You're creating unintentional barriers. There are people with disabilities who could really use accessible content.' That's where we're going to be in 100 years from now: right where we are now.

DAVID:  That's a very terrifying thought, isn't it: if something doesn't change in the way that things are advocated for, then of course the world continues to revolve. Just as a final conversation point, and I'm not sure if we went through this earlier, with Universities Australia and legislation, one thing could change quite rapidly—I don't know how this compares to Canada's context—and that's procurement standards. There's one standard which is sitting there for the use in procurement of online learning and other systems and software that needs to be legislated and, if it is, it changes the way that we buy things and how they're used. There are those small changes which I suppose I naively perceive as someone just needing to sign something and a whole bunch of things will get fixed. I wonder how many of those things could be identified during this process and then pulled forward.

KAREN:  The problem with procurement is that a lot of the procurement documents simply say, 'It has to be accessible.' You have companies that come back—we saw it here in Ontario with websites for companies and organisations—and put in their requests for proposals, their procurement documents, that it has to be accessible for people with disabilities. Of course, companies would say, 'I can do it.' Then they would get the contract and, all of a sudden, there were no accessible websites because they didn't know how to do it. So building it into procurement is only part of it. One of the companies here in Ontario a couple of years ago—one of our telecommunications companies, Telus—decided that web developers were going to have to prove, before they got to the interview, that they could create an accessible website. So, with procurement, the people who are managing the procurement process are going to have to know: what is an accessible LMS and what are the components of it; how do we determine that; how are the bidders going to prove to us that they have an accessible learning management system and that they have templates for the teachers and faculty that will create accessible content; and that, if they try to put inaccessible content up, they're going to get a little flag that says, 'Excuse me, but what you're trying to do is going to create something that is inaccessible; here's a better way of doing it.' All of that has to be built into the procurement process so that the people who are doing the procurement can't simply say, 'Your LMS or your textbooks have to be accessible.' You have to actually know what that is and you have to have specific guidelines and standards that any bidder for those projects has to adhere to and prove that they can comply with. So procurement is a nice way of doing it, but you have to know what you're procuring.

DARLENE:  Yes. It's a good reminder, I think. We've had a very similar experience in one of my workplaces where the vendor said, 'Yes, yes, it's accessible,' and of course it wasn't. It's very frustrating. Karen, we're just reaching our end of time now. Thank you so much for your wisdom and for sharing your knowledge and your passion with us today. David and I have been furiously taking notes and thinking of how we can not only improve our practice but also inform the sector in a positive way just through your experiences through this podcast. So thank you for your time today.

KAREN:  Thank you for talking with me.

DARLENE:  I wish you all the best in this terrible time and please keep safe.

KAREN:  Thank you.

DARLENE:  We look forward to hopefully seeing you at one of the online conferences that are happening this year.

KAREN:  Yes. I have put proposals in for at least four online conferences all around the world, so this is another silver lining: I can attend a lot of conferences that are happening at the same time because I don't have to travel.

DARLENE:  That's wonderful. So all the best—

KAREN:  Thank you.

DARLENE:  and thank you for spending some time with us today.

KAREN:  Thank you very much.

OUTRO:

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