

Disability Expo with Jade Godier

Speaker Key:

- CB** Chantal Boyle
- JG** Jade Godier
- FS** Female Speaker

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FS Welcome to the Sunflower Conversations, where we explore the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower, and its role in supporting people with hidden disabilities.

CB Welcome to the Sunflower Conversations with Chantal. Joining me today is Jade Godier who is the founder of IMATTER C.I.C., which seeks to be the UK leading central information service for the disability market. Jade is also the director of Made2Aid, the organisation behind Disability Expo. So, Jade, welcome to the Sunflower Conversations podcast.

JG Hiya, thank you for having me.

CB Let's hear more about Disability Expo. It takes place on the 6th and 7th of July at ExCeL in London. An inclusive event focussed on fun, fashion and entertainment. So, what can visitors expect to see?

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JG So, Disability Expo is the only event that is led by the disabled community for the disabled community. All of our staff, partners and ambassadors all have lived experience of disability or disability adjacents, or they've got disability industry background. So, they've worked within the sector, whether that be help or social care or something around that finer sides of things.

So, we wanted to create an event that wasn't corporate or just for the aim of selling disability related equipment, like a lot of the other events that are out there. We really wanted to have an event that people felt that they can come and be part of community and bring actionable change as well.

And also, to raise awareness. So, it is in celebration of Disability Pride Month. So it's the opening of Disability Pride Month. And we want the event to be a celebration of bringing community together. The event styling is done in zones. So, we try and make it as an interactive kind of experience as possible. So, we don't actually have keynote speakers at our event.

We feel that many voices are more powerful than one. So, one of the main

features of the event is our People's Panels. And what that will be is, there will be key topics and agendas that need to be discussed for actionable change for the disability community. And we are working with Senior [inaudible] and with our C.I.C, IMATTER, to create policy to take to parliament for actionable change as well.

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So, as a result of the different panels and the discussions, we want to try and take agendas and policies forward with regards to that. So, we want to be an event that actually makes an impact, and not having these same kind of conversations year on year about, we need better accessibility, we need better rights, and nothing really coming of it.

So, that's one of the key things that we are pushing at our event, and that's something that will be a year around. As we are a C.I.C. as well as an organisation, who wants to take actionable change, we want to create more employment opportunities. We want to improve accessibility.

And we also want to create more funding streams and revenues for disability related equipment and services that people need, that's not being funded through social care or health as well. Everyone should have a choice with regards to what they need to live independently. And to have their fulfilled, rather than being told that they have to have X, Y and Z, that might not meet their needs.

So, that's kind of a bit behind the C.I.C. That's quite prevalent in our event as well, with our Community Clinic. So, we have, rather than being an event that's got, we have exhibition stands and we have stands for people to purchase things, but you don't have to come to the event if you are not looking to purchase. It's about connecting people, networking, and also providing services that are not readily available at the moment.

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And try and obviously raise awareness for people. So, the community clinics will have occupational therapists available to give information and advice on funding routes. We've got a mobility and motif section, that's in partnership with Access Your Life and sponsored by Celtic Mobility, I think. So, what they'll be offering is people that have got scooters or power chairs, to be able to have them serviced at the event.

So, things like tyre checks, brakes, having a look and having a general assessment of their mobility product to check that it's still suitable. And then Access Your Life for a great service for signposting and giving information to non-suitable products. So, that's what they will be working with us with.

We've got information about diagnostics, especially around neuro divergency and stuff like that. So, we'll have psychiatrists available onsite as well to give information on that route. We've also got moving and handling advice, for people within the

community. So, for carers, young carers, family carers, to give that prior support network as well.

And then we've got a whole area of lots of different charities from different disabilities as well. There's loads, I could keep speaking about loads of stuff. But then one of the other key points is about, from what you said in the introduction, is about bringing fun and enjoyment as well.

So, our centre stage will be looking at fashion, adapted fashion in particular. So, we've got four designers that will be doing an inclusive catwalk. We've got comedy. Musical performances, so almost like a concert feel, that's what we want on centre stage. Then we've got a have a, have go zone, for sports and leisure.

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We've got an independent living home, with four rooms in it where you can look at different products and see the stylings of the home to be accessible, as well. And then we've got a sensory zone which is all around mindfulness, and relaxation, and particularly around neuro divergency kind of route. So, to do with education and the sensory to that as well.

CB It's a disability festival, isn't it?

JG Yes. It's just a community event.

CB The topics about policy, can you explain a bit more about that. You've already set what those topics are going to be. If you can just drop into those.

JG Yes. So, we've generalised the topics to what we feel is prevalent issues or things that need to be taken forward for discussion. So, to give an example of these, one of them we're talking about is aviation and flight. So, there's a lot around at the moment about trying to make aircrafts more accessible. And even like holidays, in general. So, we've got two travel panels.

We've got one panel on day one, which is with regards to travel for like community buses, trains, that kind of thing. So, with regards to that kind of travel. And then we've got, on day two, around travel and accommodation for overseas travel. So, is it aviation? Yes?

CB Aviation is air travel, yes.

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JG Air travel, yes. So, with regards to that we've got people on that panel that are already campaigns. We have up to six panellists, and a compare. And there will be a list of questions in relation to that topic. So, for example, if it is aviation, successful aviation is the topic. It will be like, there'll be points of questions that will be marked within that panel.

So, it will be like, why is it important to have wheelchair accessibility on aircraft? And then we will speak to the panellists, they will give their view, and then we'll take a question, answer from the audience, and the audience can be involved in it as well. And then we also have options for things like polling and voting and stuff from the panel, so that we can take these forward to the policy.

CB It's such a good idea to create this space, this community space, where everybody can contribute to hopefully, will be a positive outcome for the community.

JG There are a lot of different opinions as well. Everyone has their own agendas, and disability is so diverse, with different needs. But we all champion and campaign for the same thing at the end of the day. We want better access, and we want better inclusion. And no matter what disability you have, it always comes down to the same two points, then access needs, or then inclusion needs, may be different person by person.

Whereas the actual end goal is if we can get everyone to be a little bit more mindful of being more accessible and being inclusive.

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Can we talk a little bit more about the fashion and entertainment and fun side of it? It's on two days, so can visitors expect to have that experience of the entertainment on both days?

JG So, the panel topics will be different from day one to day two, but it will still be across the two days. The centre stage entertainment, some things we've got repeating on day one and day two, but some are a little bit different. That's just to do with availability of performers and stuff as well. But you can see the full timetable will be updated on the website.

CB Okay we will include the link to that in the show notes so people can see exactly what's going to be happening. I really like the inclusion of the fashion.

JG Yes. Should I tell you a bit about the designers and stuff?

CB Yes please, that would be great.

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JG

We've got Victoria from Unhidden. She's having her own line as well. We've got Craig Crawford, and Chamiah Dewey, as well, that's for small stature. And then we also have integrated into some of it, exhibitors' products that are at the

event.

So, mobility aids, fashion items etcetera. So, they will also be included. It should be a showcase, this is the reason I wanted to do it, is every event that I've been to, aside from the disability community, they always have this showcasing stage. But when I was pregnant with my son, I went to the baby show, and I loved the fact that they had mums, real life mums, modelling buggies and kids wear and stuff. And I was like, why shouldn't this be at our event as well?

CB And that's the road you're going down. And do you the fashion, is it just for women, or is it?

JG Oh no. It's fully diverse and inclusive. So, we've got Chamiah only does design for short stature, so that's her speciality and that's her niche.

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Craig does design for both male and female, so does Victoria. And we've got people with all different abilities, shapes and sizes, and the clothing will reflect the access means that that person has as well. So, things have been bespoke designed for this person to fit them, and to make them look and feel good.

CB Marvellous. And so, what prompted you to create this event?

JG So, the reason we started Disability Expo is that myself and my partner Alan, we've worked, I personally have worked in this industry for over ten years, I started off in product of consultancy. My background is kind of posture management related physio with regards to seating. That's my main background. I am an assistive technologies as well. I used to do a lot around them.

So, I became a product consultant, and then I would look for products overseas and research new innovations and things like that, as part of my role. And on going out and doing assessments it was a little bit frustrating that people, they categorise assessments. They will go out and do an assessment for somebody without asking questions on suitability.

So, I would drive hours to go and do an assessment for a product, and if somebody had just taken the time on the phone to do a short questionnaire with the person or ask their needs, you would know whether the product is going to be suitable or not. And also, you'd be letting the person that you're going to assess, potentially. Let them down, because they would think that it was going to work for them, and it wouldn't. That happened quite a lot.

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What I would end up doing is spending the hour I was contracted to sell something to this person, looking online and finding stuff that would work for them, help them. So, on the basis of that, my other half and business partner,

Alan, his background is in software and engineering and development. And he built a search engine so people could find products and make it suitable by presentation.

Because two people with the same disability present completely differently. And it had be a personalised approach. And that's something that we've always championed with our events and our approach even within health and social care is that personalisation is key. Not one size fits all. That doesn't happen.

So, from the basis of our search engine, we then started events. So, we've held the Rise 4 Disability event in Kent, Leeds and Peterborough. Kent has been held for over six years, and it's grown year on year. Last year our event saw 3000 people in one day, attend. And we've always had it in our agenda to have an event in London. And we decided to take the step and do an event in London, but also to make it for the disabled community only.

We health professionals to come to the event. But to learn from their clients, not to come to have to have CPD sessions on training. They will learn from their clients. We want people to come in support and in community. So, we will have a trades section as well, that will be on the evening of the first day. We don't believe that trade and direct sales work in the same space at the same time.

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So, we deliberately took a trade only evening so that people can have discussions about business network opportunities to have trade discussions, which you wouldn't be able to do if you had everyone around your stand. Although we have lived experience ourselves. We also have industry knowledge and experience. So, we do what we feel is right from a business perspective as well as to make things work best for our partners, businesses and exhibitors as well.

CB Did you have a long-term goal then? This is going to be the first one in July, so the long-term goal for Disability Expo?

JG We do. it's already outgrown the size and we might have to take extra space. And next year we want to extend more particularly around the employment. I didn't even mention about employable zone. So, we've got an employable zone that is in partnership with Even Break and sponsored by Amazon. And it's all about equal employment opportunities and about businesses being, especially from a DEI representation of stuff and how it can be more accessible as employers.

And we will extend on that because the interest has been massive. We also want to extend on holidays and travel. And we also want to extend around the home lifestyle sides of things. Almost like ideal home show, but for disability community. That's been quite an interesting one. We definitely are going to expand the event, that's for sure.

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And we want this to grow year on year, where it becomes a key pinnacle point of celebration, no different from Pride the month before. Where everyone comes together in support.

CB You said it's going to be at ExCeL, which has got good transport links for people who, nobody lives at ExCeL anyway, so whoever is going has to travel.

JG I think there's a misconception with ExCeL. A lot of people think because it's classed as London, it's in the city of London. So, getting to it, it's actually quite easy, we're in Essex, and it literally takes me 35 minutes to drive to ExCeL. We're working with ExCeL very closely on their accessibility. It has to work obviously. We also want them to champion the accessible part in general as a venue.

And to improve accessibility for other events. And we're working with them with regards to consulting them on this and actions that they can make and change to be more accessible as a venue. Which they have good accessibility anyway, but they will want to take that next step up. So, we are obviously talking to them with regards to Hidden Disabilities Sunflower training, and they're looking into do that.

We obviously having the training ourselves as a team, for our staff and members as well, so that there's an understanding, you're also our partner for our lanyards. Everyone wants to have representation of the lanyards as well. Which will be great. And there's also other things.

So, we're looking at putting extra toilet facilities in the venue, because we know that's an issue where the toilets are located and how many are needed from other events. So, we're actually putting in event toilet facilities for people.

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We have BSL Tours for the deaf community. And we're also using Smart Beacon technology for the blind community as well. So, for audio description and we've also looked at simplifying our show guides to make them more accessible and easier read as well. And all different types of accessibility points within our event. Looking at aisle width space, location, making it easy to get around the event.

We've also got our sensory zone, which is a quiet space for people that need that as well. And we are making sure the staff at ExCeL are knowledgeable and trained on how to take the approach. Parking has always been a previous issue that people have said as well about ExCeL. So, they have now confirmed that disabled parking is completely free for anyone who has a disabled badge.

CB Good. Is there a shuttle?

JG No, you actually drive into the venue. So, we are going to do a video and put it

on our site to show people the experience of coming in, so they can see. So, they can find out how to get there. You drive in kind of underneath. There are two level car parks. You've a lower level, so for your work vehicles that are over 1.9 meters, they can park within the car parking space, now they took the height restrictions away, which there was issues with that.

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So, they took that so they can drive straight in. And then we've got for other vehicles they've got a higher up platform. And you basically go up the ramp and to a lift that takes you straight up to the exhibition hall. So, they have got quite a few lifts available as well. And I think there's every ten seconds they run.

CB Oh really, that is great. That is good.

JG Yes. And we've also got the DLR that comes straight into ExCeL at the docklands area, so you go straight up and you're at the exhibition hall. I know they've got the Queen Elizabeth line, which is fully accessible. So, for the trains. Nice and easy to get there.

CB Yes, you mentioned about BSL Tours. Will the panel forums, will they be BSL translated?

JG Yes. Yes, so we've got BSL interpreters on both centre stage and the people's panels. We are also looking at facilitating Makaton within the sensory zone on certain sessions, especially if it's younger audiences as well. We also have BSL Tours. So, the tours the way that they work is, people can hook onto a session. They'll go around the exhibition hall as such.

So, they can go as a group around to different exhibition stands and then they'll have translation there.

CB What a great idea. That's a really great idea.

JG So, we've been working with Nettie, who is the person who is leading the BSL.

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She's great. She's a really good interpreter. And Amy is our ambassador as well. So, Nettie and Amy are both ambassadors for the deaf community and they've been working really closely with us making it more inclusive and accessible.

CB Who do you see coming, age, range?

JG Everyone and anyone. Literally we want everyone to come and be part of the community. Even people that are not associated with disability but want to learn more or want to support as well. So, we want anyone to attend. And there will be something for everybody as well.

CB I think that that's a good point to make. That this is for the, it's a community

space, but in order to create the equity in society, non-disabled people need to also attend to learn a bit more. Just the simple thing of having the BSL tours and having the panel forums being interpreted and stuff. It's crucial isn't it, because otherwise it's not inclusive to be a part of the conversation.

JG I think inclusivity, the main thing behind that is learning is key and awareness. And I think the more that we educate and inform everyone, for example what need there are, the more it will improve over time. And people will become more knowledgeable and understanding as well. So, that's what we want to take with that. Even to the point of, we've got a lot of people in businesses who representation of DEI also like health professionals, people from government for example.

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Health and social care sides of thing, parents or carers, anyone that wants to learn more really. And be involved. And we also want people to just come and meet people and like-minded people, and network and make friends.

CB Well, it sounds like an absolutely fantastic event. As you mentioned we are going to be there, Hidden Disabilities Sunflower will be there to talk to people. I think we're also going to be on one of your panels. And so, I guess finally the question is, how can people get tickets?

JG So, it's free to attend, as a delegate. So, you can register for your ticket. We also have a virtual ticket class as well, to mention. So, for people that feel that they physically can't get to the event, we still want to include everyone. So, we have a livestream, we have our panels on Zoom. And also, for our adaptive gaming zone, which I didn't mention as well.

There will be livestreaming of that for the twitchers and gamers that are there as well. So, different aspects of the event will be livestreamed and virtual for people that feel they can't physically attend.

So, to register you can click on the show notes. So, in the show notes there will be a link to register, you can click on that. Or you can visit our website, which is www.thedisabilityexpo.com.

CB Amazing. Well, we're looking very much forward to 6th and 7th of July. And there is so much, because even as we've gone through, there's been many times when you've said, oh I forgot to mention this bit, and I forgot to mention that bit.

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So, it sounds like you've got all angles covered.

JG Yes, hopefully. The thing is, it's a learning experience for everyone. We will learn from this event and add more for next year. And include next year as well.

CB Yes, we have got to start somewhere.

JG And this is a mammoth task, it really is.

CB Yes, as you've been running me through everything, I have been thinking this is massive. There is so many things to consider. Inclusion is obviously at the heart of what you're doing. So, it's a big task, and there will be learnings, because there always is whenever you do anything. Even if you've been doing it for 20 years, there's always something that you can change or improve on.

But the important thing is to just start, and this is going to be a Disability Expo festival. And I'm very much looking forward to it.

FS If you'd like to share your Sunflower story, or conversation, please email, conversations@hiddendisabilitystore.com. Find out more about us or listen to this recording again by checking out our insights page at hiddendisabilitiesstore.com. You can also find us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn. Please help, have patience and show kindness to others. And join us again soon. Making the invisible visible with the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower.

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