Spotlight Session & Special Olympics S2 Ep6\_3

**Novie Craven:** [00:00:00] Inclusion Revolution Radio is brought to you by Toyota North America, a proud supporter of Special Olympics and mobility for all.

**Josh Basile:** What's your story? What does accessibility mean to you?

Hello, you're listening to another special edition episode of Inclusion Revolution Radio in collaboration with accessiBe's Spotlight Sessions.

My name is Josh Basile. I'm your co host for today's show. I'm a C4 5 quadriplegic, paralyzed below my shoulders, and a power wheelchair user. I'm the Community Relations Manager here at accessiBe, and a passionate disability rights advocate and trial attorney focused on breaking down barriers to access and inclusion for people with disabilities.

**Novie Craven:** I'm Novie Craven, your other co host for today's show. I'm a proud [00:01:00] Sports Olympics athlete and employee. I play bocce, basketball, and about any other sport you can think of. I love Special Olympics and the work our organization does promote friendship, respect, and of course, inclusion.

**Josh Basile:** The movement towards a more inclusive world is powered by changemakers around the planet. Today we are thrilled to be joined with one of these extraordinary individuals, but before we introduce her, we'd like to recognize our sponsor for this episode, Toyota, a global partner of Special Olympics since 2017. Toyota supports Special Olympics Unified Sports activities in the United States and Japan.

Much like our guest, Toyota drives a shared vision of a more inclusive world. Encouraging collaboration and flexibility and respect in the workplace and at home. For their many miles ahead, we are thankful to have them behind the wheel.

**Novie Craven:** I'm calling Shotgun! Today we are thrilled to have the incredible [00:02:00] Amy Pohl. Amy is a former teacher, turned social media sensation, disability advocate, and storyteller. With 3.6 million TikTok followers, Amy has transformed her journey through chronic illness in a platform of environment and joy, showing the world that resilience, creativity, and laughter can rewrite the narrative around disability.

**Josh Basile:** From battling complex regional pain syndrome and Ehler Danlos syndrome, to becoming a beacon of hope for millions as a paralyzed full time wheelchair user, Amy's story is one of strength, advocacy, finding light even on the darkest days. In celebration of the United Nations, Human Rights Day, and International Day of Persons with Disabilities, let's dive [00:03:00] into her remarkable journey.

Welcome, Amy.

**Amy Pohl:** Hi, Novie and Josh. I'm so excited to talk with you guys today, like this movement is absolutely incredible. I didn't know about the Special Olympics until the summer, and I'm, ever since I've been reading up on it, and wow, you guys in the States are doing it right. We need to do more of it over here.

**Josh Basile:** You're awesome, Amy. So to begin, let's dive right into it. Can you share a bit about your journey from teaching to becoming a full time disability advocate and social media content creator?

**Amy Pohl:** Yeah. So you can never tell where your life is going to go. And never did I expect when I was training to become a teacher that one day I would be a full time wheelchair user, be paralyzed, like even getting out of bed in the morning was going to take two hours.

And I trained to be a teacher because I absolutely loved working with children. And then one day I got very sick, from those snotty nosed [00:04:00] children, and I ended up in the hospital and unfortunately a medical, like, error was made. And a few years down the line, this is me today. And social media has definitely impacted my life, for like, so massively. I'm so grateful for everyone that follows me, and I just hope that I can really help make a change to this world.

**Josh Basile:** Thank you for that.

**Novie Craven:** Wow, yes thank you.

**Josh Basile:** And then with your social media, when did it start becoming kind of that momentum?

**Amy Pohl:** So during lockdown in 2020, I'm sure like all of us, you'll all sympathize with me. We were very bored, had nothing to do, stuck inside. I was stuck inside our new hospital that I hadn't been to before, a rehabilitation unit. I couldn't have any visitors. And I'd heard of this app, TikTok, and I started [00:05:00] looking at it and I was like, oh, people making all these funny lip syncing, kind of cringe videos. And I was like, Oh, I'll make one too. So I made quite a lot in my bathroom, which, um, I have deleted a lot of them since because they were very embarrassing and I never expected even one person to see it because I thought my account was private, and as an ex-teacher, I really think that I would have been better at the privacy. But it's probably the best mistake I ever made because I, since then, built this massive community of over 4 million followers across like multiple platforms and I'm just so thankful for all of these people because not only are they followers, they have supported me through some of my hardest time of my life.

**Josh Basile:** That's awesome. Thank you for sharing that.

**Novie Craven:** I'm just sitting here in awe. Your story shows so much strength and change. Can [00:06:00] you share how humor has helped you through it all?

**Amy Pohl:** Laughter really is the best medicine for me. It's not for everyone, but for me, like, I have grown up in a household where I think we're all pretty much living as comedians inside our little house.

And my dad's favorite holiday, you would think it would be like Christmas or Easter, but it's actually April Fools. I don't, do you have April Fools? That's my dad and he will say to everyone that's his favorite holiday and he has got us every single year. And he still gets my mom now, like I live in a different house now, but he still gets my mom every year.

And you would think she would know by now to set like a reminder of what the day is, but no. And just humor, like I live with a chronic pain condition that is just so, so intense, and I could just cry in bed all day, but instead I think getting [00:07:00] up and laughing and some of the things I say to myself, if a person said them to me in the street, I would not be laughing. I would be crying, but I don't know why it's just different when you say it to yourself. And it just, it gets me out the door every day.

**Josh Basile:** And with TikTok playing such a big role in your advocacy work, what inspired you to start creating content? How did it evolve into the empowering platform that it is today?

**Amy Pohl:** So, as I said, like it began with like literally these really cringe, awful, lip syncing, dancing, but I don't think you could call it dancing videos. And then as my follower base, continued to build and build and build, I began getting like comments from people saying, oh my gosh, like, I'm like you, or like what's happened to you or why are you like, asking me questions that I just wanted to answer and I wanted to build this community.

And I kind of felt like [00:08:00] empowered and like, I had to, I had to give back. I've been like truly gifted with this platform, with this enormous amount of ~~like,~~ massive voice that I can now have, and I just want to use it as much as I can to make a change.

**Josh Basile:** That's awesome. And you've used your platform to call it many accessibility issues. Why is it so important to highlight these barriers and what response have you received from companies and your audience?

**Amy Pohl:** Yeah, so like every single day I come across issues, you know, it's the 21st century and still we're not getting it right. I got an electric vehicle last year and we have over in the UK, we have something called Motability. So I was able to get the car through them. So you would think if you can get a car through them and it's adapted, you'd think I would be able to actually charge it in public. But no, most of the EV chargers that I go [00:09:00] to, I can't even get out of the car. I can't even reach the charging cables. I can't even see the screen because it's too high and I just felt like when this started happening more and more, I was like, I need to talk about this.

And then I had more and more people in my inbox saying, I'm experiencing the same. And I was like, this just isn't right. Like, it's the 21st century and we're still in afterthought. Why? So I made videos about this, and they blew up, and also about like transport, like going on a plane, going on a train. Every single day, I come across these challenges, and it just shouldn't be happening. I worked with, I did an amazing ad with this company called Sainsbury's, which is like your kind of version of Walmart. And they've started bringing in charging stations in their car parks. And they asked me to do an ad for it.

And I turned up and I started crying in the car park because they had made every single [00:10:00] charging bay accessible, not just one. Which a lot of places now are just making one. Like every single one is accessible. So why can't everywhere do this? If one place can do it, they all can.

**Josh Basile:** It's a very, very true statement.

**Novie Craven:** I know. It's like, I don't, sometimes when you don't know what accessibility is, people need to understand that people, that everybody's not going to know something, but if you speak up or something, and people are really going to try to understand, then I think it definitely says a lot because you have basically stood up for yourself, but also stood up for people with intellectual disabilities, people that are, that have other disabilities, so thank you so much for everything.

**Amy Pohl:** Thank you. We're ~~like~~ all human beings, you know? We deserve to be respected and included.

**Novie Craven:** In your videos, you share your challenges with honesty and humor. ~~How do you,~~ How do you decide what to share and how do you take care of your mental health ~~mental health~~ while [00:11:00] doing it?

**Amy Pohl:** Oh my gosh, so there's definitely a lot of videos I probably shouldn't have shared back in the early days. ~~Um,~~ And looking back on that now, like I've really changed what I do. Before I post a video I really think, do I want this out there? Like digital footprint is a massive thing. Once you post something, you can't really delete it. Like it's out there now, people have seen it. And like, on the other side of it, the comments I received are sometimes just truly awful. Like, you wouldn't go out and say this to me on the street, but I click on their profiles sometimes and they don't look even old enough to be on the app. And they're just children who just want attention. And it has in the past really affected my mental health and really affected, like, the way I think about myself. But I am a big advocate for everybody should have, like, a counselor or therapist. [00:12:00] And I pay like every two weeks for mine and you know what it's worth paying for. Like some weeks we just talk about what's on the television, but other weeks we go really, really deep and it's just great to talk to someone. Everyone needs to talk because if you just keep it inside, it's just going to get bigger and bigger and bigger and then explode.

**Novie Craven:** Your mantra, "Stop fighting yourself and start fighting for yourself" has inspired so many people, including me. Can you share how it has helped you on your journey?

**Amy Pohl:** Yeah, so back when I first became disabled, I was in that hospital bed, and I thought, that's it. I have no future now. Like, my life is over. I can't be a teacher. And all I had thought about was my future is as a teacher. I didn't think that I had any other future and there was no other possibilities. ~~And I sadly did try to attempt to take my life. And it got really, really dark. And luckily, I had a great support system around me. I was able to get through those dark times.~~ And a nurse sat down with me and just said, Look, you just need to [00:13:00] change ~~what you're,~~ how you're thinking about this and stop fighting yourself, stop blaming yourself for everything that's happened. Stop like thinking that that's it, it's all over and start fighting for yourself. Start trying to get out there and have fun and enjoy life again because you can enjoy life again.

Like ever since, like I, I thought I would never be able to ride a horse again. Last month I rode a horse. I hadn't even been jet, like, no, not jet skiing. I hadn't even been, I haven't done that, but I want to do that. I hadn't been, um, water skiing even before I was in a wheelchair. Cause I didn't think I could do it when I was standing, but I've done it since.

So like you can do, I can still live life. I can still do things. I might not be a teacher, but now I feel like I'm a teacher on the internet, on social media, I'm kind of just doing life differently. And I love my life now. Yeah, that's okay.

**Novie Craven:** You're definitely a teacher on social media for me, definitely. Which is good, because you know, definitely [00:14:00] the way that you show your, your humor and your, you know, the way that you challenge yourself is definitely amazing because I think that definitely says, okay, I have a disability. I don't care if I have a disability. People, other people that I surround myself with don't care if I have a disability. I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing.

**Amy Pohl:** Exactly.

**Novie Craven:** When I was young, when I was a baby, the doctors used to say, you're not going to be able to talk, you're not going to do anything.

**Amy Pohl:** And now you're hosting a podcast.

**Novie Craven:** Yes!

**Amy Pohl:** Woo!

**Novie Craven:** Thank you so much, Amy. Thank you so much.

**Amy Pohl:** No, you're amazing.

**Josh Basile:** You're living with an adventurous spirit and adventurous wheels and everything you're doing, it might be a little different than it was before, but you're still doing it, having fun and making memories.

And you've built an amazing community of millions online. What have been some of the most meaningful interactions or stories from your followers?

**Amy Pohl:** [00:15:00] Oh, there's so, so many, but like, one of the things I can think of was my dad. He works in a school and he told me once that he bumped into like a paramedic and the paramedic said, Oh my gosh, you're like Amy Pohl's dad. Like I know who she is. I follow her like, Oh my gosh, a paramedic follows me, but then he said, we changed our training and like, how we do stuff in the field just because of what happened to Amy. We now share her story and talk about it so that it won't happen to anyone else. I also have had many messages from a lot of nurses saying that they've spoken about my case in a lecture.

And it's really like, made them think we shouldn't reuse needles even if there's because that's what happened to my hand Um, a needle was reused on me and the chances of something going wrong is very slim, but it can happen and I'm an example that it can happen.

**Josh Basile:** Wow [00:16:00] What Thanks for sharing that.

**Novie Craven:** What advice would you give to people facing challenges about finding joy and purpose, even when your life is unexpected?

**Amy Pohl:** That tomorrow can always be better than today I've had very, like, a lot of dark days and it's okay, to be going through something bad. It's okay to feel sad. It's okay to, like, regret things that aren't happening in your life, but if you're just going to sit in your room or sit in your bed and just think about that all day, it's not going to get better.

Whereas if you get out, have fun, find things to do, there's always ways of like changing something so that you can do it. Like in terms of, I went abseiling, which I think you call, um, oh, what do you call abseiling in the States? Um, when you go down like a cliff backwards.

**Josh Basile:** Rappelling.

**Amy Pohl:** Yeah, yeah, [00:17:00] so I went rappelling in a wheelchair.

And I never thought, like, rappelling would be possible, but just putting something in place, like going down in a wheelchair. Something's always possible, you could adapt things. You just have to find a way.

**Josh Basile:** That's what you do. So, Amy, what is next for you? Any upcoming projects or goals you're excited to share with us?

**Amy Pohl:** I'm so like, I am so excited for the next year. Like 2025 is going to be epic. Like 2024 was my comeback year where like I got my house. I started to live life again. 2025 is like my Adrenaline Junkie Year, because I have, oh, I've started this thing, the past, like, six months, where I've been trying to challenge myself to do new things or to do things that I thought would never be possible. Like going on a plane as a wheelchair user, like riding a horse, like abseiling, riding a [00:18:00] bike with my hands, driving, and now I've got a big list on my phone of even more things that I want to do. I want to jump off a cliff and go paragliding. I want to go surfing. I want to swim in the sea again, and I am gonna do these things. I just gotta find a way.

**Josh Basile:** I love that. Cheers to that.

**Novie Craven:** Our last question, ~~what does it mean,~~ what does inclusion mean to you?

**Amy Pohl:** It means, inclusion means so much to me. It means like feeling welcomed and valued as a person despite my disability, having equal access and opportunities without any barriers or discrimination, and just feeling respected and included, and we all deserve that.

**Novie Craven:** Thank you so much for joining us on the episode of Inclusion Revolution Radio. A huge thanks to Amy Pohl for sharing her incredible story, her humor, [00:19:00] and her insights into navigating the disability space with courage and creativity. Amy's journey reminds us all that even in the face of adversity, there's power in finding joy, building a community, and advocating for change.

**Josh Basile:** Thank you so much, Amy. No, thank you.

**Amy Pohl:** Honestly, you guys are amazing. This movement is amazing. We need more of this. And I hope so many people are listening to this because it's just needed.

**Josh Basile:** You're awesome, Amy. And you can learn more about accessiBe, the Inclusion Revolution Radio, and Special Olympics by subscribing on YouTube and following us on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Find us on our handles using @accessiBe\_Community and @SpecialOlympics. Thank you so much for staying to the end, and we're looking forward to the next episode. Bye, Amy. Bye, Novie. Bye, [00:20:00] everyone.