

Out and About webinar transcript

Speaker 1 (Nerine Williams): Okay and welcome everybody, just got a few more people joining us, my name is Nerine I'm one of the assistive technology mentors here at AT Chat, I am a middle-aged woman with curly light brown hair, red glasses and a green shirt. Also, online today we have Glenn Wilson who is the other half of our dynamic AT Mentor duo.

Today our webinar is Out and About with assistive technology, and I would like to welcome all joining us here today so thank you for coming along.

I'll be introducing our presenters shortly but first of all I would like to give you some information about accessibility so if you would like to turn your captions on you will select your settings, go your language and select captions. We also have Auslan interpreters online with us today, they will be highlighted but you can also select their video and drag and maximize their portion of the screen, if you would like a larger version. If for any reason you need assistance today during the presentation, please add a comment in the chat window. In terms of housekeeping the webinar today will be recorded and if you have noticed that you do not have a video turned on or microphone turned on that is completely normal, if you would like to speak raise your hand in the top menu. Later on, when we have our Q&A, I've just been prompted to remind you that in fact we will be having a Q&A session at the end so there you go.

I just would like to take a moment before we get started to um do an Acknowledgement of Country and as we go through today, I will be providing image descriptions for each slide so for this slide it features a photo of a sunset on country with red dirt spinifex and a warm glow.

So today we wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land that we're all joining from today and for me I'm joining you from the stormy Turrbal and Jagera land, we've gone from a very steamy morning to a stormy afternoon. I acknowledge the strength of their continuing culture and offer my respects to Elders past and present. Sovereignty has never been ceded, it always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

We also acknowledge people with disability past and present those who are living full and complete lives and those who have needs that are not yet being met. We ask that you take a moment to reflect on this and work with us to bring about changes that will give all people, including people with disability an opportunity to live an ordinary life.

So, if you've not engaged with us before you might be wondering what AT Chat is, now before I forget there is an image on this page with three people, two women and a man who is sitting smiling in front of the AT Chat banner and they all using an item of assistive technology. AT Chat is an initiative of iLA and is an online peer-led community and service providing assistive technology information support and advice for people with disability and those who support them.

Now this is the bit that you really came here for, not to listen to me speaking but to hear from our two incredibly experienced and knowledgeable presenters. First of all I would like to introduce Greg Norton the owner of Stirling Estate Chalets in Capel which was built to accommodate people with disability. Greg as you introduce yourself today could I also ask you to describe yourself for everyone here.

Speaker 2 (Greg Norton): Okay so 58 male married with one son, so I suppose I got say I had brown hair but got gray hair now so about 58 years old and been farming most of my life or all of my life pretty much, have just changed in the last few years moving into I suppose ecotourism involved kind of on the farm. So I have five chalets that are suitable for sleeping 10 people each on the farm so we're all off grid and I suppose we do farm tours and have farm animals on the property as well also doing a little a project where we malt barley for breweries so we just supply all the local craft breweries which kind of in our area because we're in a tourism area. Generally, just about covers everything that I do.

Speaker 1: Thank you Greg, I'd also like to welcome and introduce Ben Aldridge, the managing director of 30-foot drop, disability advocate and speaker. Ben could you introduce yourself to everybody.

Speaker 3 (Ben Aldridge): Absolutely, absolutely, thank you Nerine, my name's Ben so yeah, I live just down the road from Greg actually here in Capel, living on Wardandi country and I'm 40 years old, so I'm a middle-aged man, wheelchair user, dark brown hair with a magnificent mustache if I do say so myself, but yeah I'm a systemic advocate so I work a lot with large organizations, peak bodies, you know different areas and government and that to actually help make their systems work better for us as a disability, you know as a disabled Community. But at the same time getting by and getting people to come along on the journey and to realize that hey you know this isn't just about charity you know this is actually something that is profitable, so try to make both sides work together.

Speaker 1: Brilliant, thank you, so today's webinar we're going to cover a range of topics and we're going to start out by providing perspectives on tourism and accessibility, talking about current systemic change, sharing some travel stories, giving you some information about starting the conversation and some tips from the field and then next steps, what to

do going forward. So to start with perhaps we could explore tourism and accessibility from a broader lens, so Ben, could I ask you to kick off here.

Speaker 3: Absolutely, so I've been involved in accessible tourism advocacy for I'd say seven years now at least, and even doing a little bit before that as well, accessible tourism is kind of working along the same lines as any of the disability rights movement where we do get a lot of movement and change followed by a lot of stagnation, so at the moment we've actually, and it can be a little bit hard to believe because things can go quite wrong sometimes when you're traveling but we're actually going through a bit of a period of positive change at the moment in the tourism industry, but it's a lot of chicken, the chicken in the egg sort of thing at the moment where the tourism industry is starting to get the idea that this is something that needs to happen, and starting to get more of an understanding of what's there but at the same time they're not quite seeing the market there for it as well, because I don't know about you Greg but I've been personally disappointed on more times than I can I care to remember and it kind of puts you off after a little while of wanting to actually travel.

Speaker 2: Yeah I suppose my perspective, I've been in a chair for 30 years and been generally traveling for 30 years and when you go back and just look at those things I think probably 60% of the time has probably been extremely challenging so essentially traveling in a chair or from any disability point of view is probably not just in Australia but across the world at times in different countries, a lot of the holidays I go on tend to sometimes be a little bit extreme in the snow areas and stuff which makes it even harder so I suppose you just find that you have to do a hell of a lot of research, make a lot of phone calls to try and you know get the best outcome possible, you know lot of the times in the areas I've been to there's really just nothing accessible. Even in places where you would think should be way above and should be really good, but you know you just suppose I can deal with a little bit. I've got a little bit better ability to transfer myself into different things, that can cope with some different things, but a lot of people haven't got that, and I'm sure really does put people off wanting to travel when you just have to go through, so it's not a holiday when you're going through all those challenges.

Speaker 3: Yeah that's it, I've just come back from Lancelin just last weekend and you know going to the tavern there the only way in for a wheelchair was in the same way that they take the kegs in which was about 45° slope it was fine going up it when I was sober the other way was a bit more interesting.

Speaker 2: Yep.

Speaker 1: I'm going to cut in here because I know you both have very exciting stories to tell, a lot of useful information, I'm just redirecting, so from what you've both been saying obviously you know how accessible your experiences are really determines whether or not it's a great time or not so great time, and we're probably going to get into that a little bit more in a minute, but could we perhaps look at some case studies of what's been happening in the tourism and travel industry.

Speaker 3: Yeah absolutely, so I love this little graph I use it all the time for describing societal change because so often you're making progress and then something happens and it feels like you just go flying backwards.

Speaker 1: So, can I ask you then to describe the graph for those people who cannot see it?

Speaker 3: Sorry my bad, yeah so we have a graph on this on the slide here which is showing progress over time and it's a very squiggly line it has a general upwards trend but for every upwards part there is a downwards part that say things like oh no shite, hang on, oh crap not again, whereas the upwards ones are all weeee, here we go, yeah baby, woo and that is pretty much what trying to make societal change is like. I've always likened it to banging my head up against a brick wall until the wall cracks, until you start to see cracks and that is what it's been like, I spent about five years trying to get interest in putting together an accessible tourism accreditation that works and it's only just recently that it started to come about and that is sort of where we're at, at the moment. When I said we're in a period of big change it is that we have this current appetite from the tourism industry to make this happen. Are they always going to get it right, are we always going to get it right? No, but at least there is change happening. What are you seeing on your end there, Greg?

Speaker 2: Oh it's, yeah well, it's difficult I suppose, a lot of it could be about, I suppose when you're looking at all the places that should be providing it like hotels and everything where that they just have like one disabled room or something which nowadays because there are more people traveling which is where I've been caught out is it's just it's just not enough and so yeah they need to be supplying three or four rooms but a lot of the time I think with a lot of the tourism places you need to be pushing with them, look anyone can use the room it doesn't have to be put aside for disability people and even just for simple things for, you know old people and any traveler not just people who have got a disability, these things are a benefit to your business so you don't have six steps going into the restaurant or to any part of your business, which you know you just shouldn't that they should obviously be building rules around that shouldn't allow that but they still kind of do so. How are we going to get change? I'm not too sure, I think probably that the NDIS for a start has allowed a lot more people the ability to travel because with a bit of extra funding,

though they've just changed the rules there a little bit so I'm not too sure how that'll assist people, but I think once you probably have to get it out there in the public arena that there are more people with disabilities traveling and that will kind of help make people change, and you know I suppose doing the things that you've done Ben, where you set up, you know, a program that says these are the things you need to be accredited to suit these people, because generally as we've all found people with disability, people who haven't got a disability haven't got a clue, but you can't, that's really just an excuse on our part you need to explain to them to give them a clue, yeah you know we deal with it every day so we know but those other people don't, so they can't magically just know.

Speaker 3: That's it, and I find it's also often a very like it's a continual change process you know and that sounds very wanky of me that sort of wording for it, but it is where you have this, you come up with a hypothesis, you pilot it, you check the results, you tweak it, tweaking is also making part of the hypothesis again, you go again and for me the really encouraging thing is seeing the amount of research that's being done and being released around accessible tourism because that was my, that has been my biggest problem is trying to make these arguments around, let's make change, well what evidence do you have to back it up, it's like well I've only got stuff from overseas at the moment or you know a small pilot, that was done over East, but now we're actually starting to get some really good stuff which is amazing.

Speaker 1: There's been some really great data published just in May this year about accessible tourism with some interesting figures and we have got some links to that coming up in some resources to share but I think Greg you touched on something interesting there, talking about money and possibly some of, you know what will help drive these changes, is understanding that that yes there may be an initial cost in improving accessibility but there is also, you know better earning capacity and did you have more to add on that for us Ben?

Speaker 3: Yes, so I mean when we're looking um New Zealand and Queensland at the moment so on the slide we have here, you know talking about Queensland New Zealand, so Queensland we have the Olympics coming up so the picture to represent that is some Paris Sports, from a, oh sorry I'm trying to think, chair, yeah, racing chair users and representing New Zealand we have a nice view out over some fjords, but so at the moment Queensland is absolutely kicking butt when it comes to accessible tourism and that is mostly due to the driver of the Olympics in 2032 during the buildup in the Olympics there is massive infrastructure and what they're looking for is legacy change and the people over in Queensland, the advocates have really taken the reins on this so well to be able to encourage the government to do this, so they've recently had the year of accessible

tourism, which I was really hoping WA would be the first to have one of them but Queensland beat us to it, hats off to them, but you only have to look at some of their resources and look up on the internet around accessible tourism in Queensland to see some of the amazing work that they're doing there, and that change has happened really rapidly. And it's the same in New Zealand, I recently came back from a trip to New Zealand where it had been six years since my last trip over there and when I went over six years ago they were behind Western Australia in as far as accessible tourism goes, six years later they've overtaken well and truly and that's because they've gone through that period of rapid change that we're just starting to go through now. So yeah it's really encouraging to see how fast it can happen, but we need to remember that any massive change within society we're talking in half decades to decades that's the sort of time scale we need to look at because in order to make it lasting decent change to be bedded down in community it can't be a flash in the pan, so yeah when I say it's exciting and it's rapid change, rapid in a societal change context.

Speaker 1: For those on the ground sometimes rapid change still feels very low in terms of impacting our own travel experiences.

Speaker 3: Oh, absolutely so...

Speaker 1: Oh, sorry go.

Speaker 2: Yeah it's probably something that you know we could actually probably use the NDIS to push it a little bit because now that I suppose there is a significant thing out there now that looks at people with disabilities and funding and that that just gives you I suppose something that you can attach on to and maybe start to push the for tourism you know people need that not so much what there's a funding issue or anything there but just makes people aware that there's a, something that's used to push it I think. That's because it really, before NDIS there was nothing, there were lots of little state bodies and this, that but there was nothing significant that could really be a driver for it.

Speaker 1: I think there's a place for caution there, in that you know that's tourism and NDIS have been rather contentious, and perhaps the focus is more about capacity with disability with assistance of technology for independence rather than providing holidays, I think.

Speaker 2: That's a place of that has changed probably not so much there but more respite I think but it's more just a thing that yeah it's hard to just find a body that can push something along and then said trying to as probably Ben's found and all the stuff that he's done you can try as much as you can but you just seem to be banging your head against the wall, and certainly the only reason you know NDIS comes up is because there's

a money thing but just in in the changes that they have pushed because I suppose I'm in that tourism sector and I see a lot of people who are coming they are per se paying for some of their holidays through some of the NDIS stuff which I think that's just been canned as part you know those rules are kind of pretty black and white now, and that the new n rules but as far as the respite goes that that there still is a big area for respite where I, we do, we do a lot of respite.

Speaker 1: All right so we've been speaking quite generally and really from a provider perspective but I'd like to just step back for a minute and go back to some of those personal travel stories that you both started to share earlier so stepping on the other side of the fence as travelers and as people with disability and assistive technology users can you share your own travel stories.

Speaker 3: You want to go or do you want me to...

Speaker 2: Just, kind of bring it up what I've got...

Speaker 1: So some of the things I want to hear about challenges when you're getting out and about and the reality of you know travel preparation, and this slide has an older woman with dark skin, in the water happy with a floppy hat and glasses and supporting a younger child, a young girl with dark skin and they look like they're very relaxed and happy on holidays.

Speaker 2: Alright, I'll fire off, so generally I suppose that's said I've been traveling for a while and yeah you certainly rock up into lot of places I've done probably a lot harder research in the past because you just never know what you're going to end up in, especially in different sorts of countries and generally as far as accommodation goes I've been able to get by but it's certainly been difficult. There's always one step into a hotel room, different things with showers screens but you many to pull your chair up to it and transfer into a chair but as most recently probably the last two times I've traveled where I probably thought traveling maybe it's just because I've got a really good accessible travel place myself but I haven't really looked and followed up with some of the places I booked and I've certainly rocked, last two times I've rocked up at hotels and they've, I booked a wheelchair accessible room, I turn up there and they've given it to someone else, so and with these last two places the other thing mostly that's okay, we'll get by with another room or something, but these last two places I booked at all the other rooms were split level so you're rocking there, one had six steps down to the main lounge and the kitchen and another one probably had at least one or two steps you know there was a bed and I think possibly the shower was on the only level so the rest of the family goes down one end and you'd have to stay up the other end so what I probably learned from that was that I certainly

need to the day before you go or even that week running up to it you need to be ringing that hotel and making sure that you've still secured that wheelchair accessible room. A lot of hotels now may only have one or two wheelchair accessible rooms and now that I run a booking system myself I know there's no notes or red flags in there that say that this room has been previously booked already for a wheelchair room so if that person you know if I ring up and say I need a wheelchair accessible room and that there's no notes in there about it they just say oh that they just take the person previously booked out of it ship them to another room and put you in so you rock up there and you haven't got a room so I suppose they unfortunately we've, well one hotel actually had to go to another hotel completely so you're on the Gold Coast trying to book another hotel at a moment's notice and another one in Sydney where you know I had it they' realized they'd made a mistake and they, I got that room the next day and after that the holiday was all fine but when you rock up at midnight and you haven't got a room just, make, pisses you off to the nth degree I Suppose. So like they're just booking things there's plenty of places where you go where you I nearly don't expect to be able to get anywhere if you go anywhere near a beach or a hill or a path or a track that you know you they're all going to have steps in them so I suppose you look at what you want to do on a holiday you where we go skiing we certainly do a lot of research on where we can go skiing and the fact that they're accessible, a lot of other things yeah but certainly go to plenty of things where you can't get to that beach or you can't walk up that mountain or get up that mountain because there's might be great paths for 90% of it but then they've just got six steps in there so you can't do shit, so research, research, research.

Speaker 3: I suppose so for me I had a bit of a horror trip to Bali about 5 and a half years ago now, so it was just before covid and we booked this holiday and we did everything right, we did the research, we had the bookings, we did got all the stuff in properly, but it just like most trips something will go wrong, that is unfortunately part and parcel of having a disability and being in a place that you don't have control over, your surroundings. Things are going to go wrong, but to give you guys a little bit of context, I've traveled a lot both before I had my accident and after, I'm ex-military, before joining the military I worked on exploration oil rigs and I lived a couple years in Africa when I was you know 12 sort of time and that, so I've done a lot of traveling both pre and post so not a lot really phases me, but this particular trip, it's started off we rocked up at the airport, our flight had been cancelled, cool that's great, great, so we ended up quickly switching over to another provider which is something that I will never do again, off the top of off my, off the cuff because when we got to the other end the plane didn't have an airbridge no airbridge and they didn't have catering trucks which is normally the other way they get you in and out of an airplane if they don't have an airbridge, so I ended up 6'4, 110 kilos because I really like beer and good

food, being carried down these ridiculously steep aircraft stairs in an aisle chair built for somebody who's a lot skinnier and a lot shorter than me by four little Balinese guys carrying me down there and it starts raining, the steps are wet, I thought I was going to die, I'm like if you guys drop me I'm screwed. A few other things went wrong during the trip and then on the way back the night before, oh Bali-belly, cool, nice traveling with Bali-belly when you can't fully control your bowels, yeah. Look these, so I mean for me the things that I learned out of that particular trip were, if you're going to book a last-minute flight as a wheelchair user make sure that it's a reputable airline that you know and to be bloody careful what you eat over there.

Speaker 1: I think probably something else that you've highlighted is also being aware of safety and personal boundaries and knowing when to say no.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Speaker 1: That self- advocacy is a really big...

Speaker 3: Yeah, no it's a massive thing actually and what I've actually learned about airplanes now is you can say no, so when they say oh, we're going to get you off we're going to carry you downstairs, you can say no you can refuse to let them move you until they have something suitable there. Easier said than done I realize, because it takes a lot of self- confidence to be able to stand up for yourself in that way but even knowing that it's something you can do is a good start exactly because what are they going to do like fly you back? You know eventually a solution will be found because airplanes have schedules that they need to keep to so sometimes you can bend them over the barrel a little.

Speaker 1: Yeah, to have a safer outcome.

Speaker 3: Yes, to have a safer outcome not just to be an arse.

Speaker 1: And thinking then about that self- advocacy another way that we can self- advocate for ourselves is to have good conversations when we're doing our planning so next slide is actually all about starting the conversation, a conversation with your travel team whoever's in that team and think about the sorts of questions that you can prepare. And this is a really beautiful slide, there is a person holding a notebook in one hand with a pen, looking like they're about to write a list with a suitcase open with folded clothes, a camera, headphones, and a beautiful rainbow pair of socks. So, I mentioned that specifically because it made me feel very joyful with the burst of color. So, you know think about that conversation before you start your trip there's always some planning to be done. Ben, did you want to kick off with where you start?

Speaker 3: Yeah sure, I was going to make a jibe that I have not been able to pack that light since I had my accident. I take up a suitcase if not a suitcase and a half of just my crud whenever we travel, but the conversation is such an important place to start if you're planning on traveling at all to actually, with your travel team, with the people who are traveling with you, to sit down and have that conversation so one of the most useful things that my wife and I did was actually sit down and have this open and honest conversation of what are our non-negotiables around accessibility. What things on the holiday, of what yeah what can we do without, and what can't, we do without because that's, those are like your make or break things, so for us it's, you know I need we need to have a way for me to get in and out of bed, we need to have a place where we can charge my chair and need to have toileting facilities and then we also need to have a place where our son can exist safely. You know those are our non-negotiables. The highly desirable things are having that AT around like hoists, to be able to get in and out of bed safely but if that ends up not being available we can still operate without it. It's having that conversation of figuring out this is exactly, this is exactly what we need, and that way when you start booking you can immediately start just crossing bonds off the list going, no that isn't going to be suitable because it doesn't have this, and this, this isn't going to be suitable because of this and this and it may mean that there are certain cities or countries that you can't go to it all but at least you're going to be going to somewhere where you're going to be able to travel safely securely and actually have a nice time.

Speaker 2: Yeah, well I suppose I probably do a similar thing or when we go, you kind of work out with your family what type of holiday you want to go on suppose we look at ski holidays so it's got to be accessible for me and then through that holiday then we might do something that, we're going somewhere so the kids have some fun but you I look at the point where I'm not going to be able to do some of those things, but I'll sacrifice that as long as they help me out when I go skiing. I think but a lot of things there is when you are looking to go on travel do that you just need to start to prepare a list about the sorts of questions you need to be asking the places you're going to go as you use it, so I suppose whether it's accommodation or whether it's ski places I suppose as far as the ski goes I always look for the, if I'm going to an area where I'm not familiar with I'll go to the, they'll be a disability ski place that so I become a member of that and then I can start an email conversation with them about what I can and can't do, so at least then you've got the basics of some help. When you get there, if you get there and you find there's plenty of things you can do on your own then you don't have to worry about them but when you going away on a holiday you want to be having a pretty good time at doing something, so you need to just be making sure you're asking the right questions and that getting prepared to kind of, to do what you want to do so I suppose that's all I can recommend.

Speaker 3: I don't I don't know about you Greg, but I found as well when you're having those conversations with the providers you pick up pretty fast on who knows what they're talking about and who may be a little bit full of it or just faking it.

Speaker 2: Yeah I suppose when you stick with the disability service type places that especially in the skiing always manage to stick with them, they do know what they're talking about and you can pick up on that pretty quick yeah, when you start talking to people who aren't in that and then and you're looking at like a tourism things like if you want to go hot air ballooning or something like that then you know they're generally not going to know anything. And generally if you want to go hot air ballooning the answers you get back are just no, yeah so I haven't been hot air ballooning yet.

Speaker 1: To be fair even when I was fully ambulant hot air ballooning is a tough gig to get in and out of that basket.

Speaker 2: Well, you don't see how we play sometimes but, but it can be, but yeah I've been up, I've jumped out of, I've jumped out of planes with a parachute so you know, hot air ballooning didn't sound that hard but they didn't want to know about me. But there you know there's different things if you want to hop in, can't remember I suppose like yeah go to the grounds and go on amusement rides or just trying to think of it I can't remember the, the tip up and down, crazy stuff –

Speaker 3: Oh, roller coasters!

Speaker 2: Roller coasters yeah, so look I've been I've been on one roller coaster but I'm sure you go to plenty of places and they probably wouldn't even let you near them.

Speaker 3: So yeah, I've got no core stability at all so no thanks.

Speaker 1: That was a really pertinent point there too when we're thinking about providers which is going to be our next step it's not just off - thank you Danika changing the slide for me, that was beautifully done - so providers aren't just, the first thing everybody thinks about is accommodation and then maybe the transport you know the flights, the trains, the buses, you know the taxis, however it is you're going to get there. So next I'd like to think about the provider perspective. This slide has an image of a silver bell on a countertop you know the kind that you tap the top and it dings and hopefully somebody comes out. So in terms of, from a provider perspective, what sort of questions could providers be asking so that they can be more inclusive and provide a more accessible service regardless of what type of um service they're providing. Greg, would you like to kick off?

Speaker 2: Yeah I suppose from a provider point of view it's you're really don't know what questions to ask really, I suppose you've really got to be told because, I suppose they don't

really know how to start the conversation aside from you know, in a wheelchair or what your disability is, because I suppose as far as disabilities goes that well they are one of the first questions I do ask I ask, what is your disability, you know are you in a wheelchair, are you framed, you have MSDS and, you know once you start to know. But I've got a pretty good idea of what a lot of those things are where a lot of your other providers aside from being in a wheelchair and being in a walking frame you wouldn't really know what some of the disabilities are so it actually makes it a bit difficult for them to give you an answer, so I think maybe it's more about the questions that you as a guest, whatever, should be asking really telling them or asking them what you want, so generally it's when you're rocking up at a hotel or when you're inquiring about hotels are they accessible you need to go the step further and say you know are they some people think just one step is fine but you know one step isn't fine. Can you get into the restaurant, can you get into the swimming pool, can you get into the lifts, even can you get into reception, there's more places than not that I've been to where you can book into a hotel but they got two steps getting into reception so how are you going to pay and get in there, it's just crazy.

Speaker 3: Or a counter that's up so high that they can't actually see you when you rock up.

Speaker 1: Great point, sorry.

Speaker 2: When you're getting back to your room, you know, is the room big enough for a wheelchair, can you get it, is there access to the bathroom and the toilets, plenty of things like that restaurant steps, then I suppose depending on the type of holiday I generally try and always hire cars, but you know if you're going somewhere in cities you know is their public transport nearby, and sometimes it's, maybe do a bit of research search or ask them if you can, you what is the terrain nearby, you know, if you step out the hotel is there a bloody great big hill that goes down or up which gets to the nearest public transport so said that there's times I've done that where I've booked in a great hotel and you rock up there and there's, and you're relying on public transport, but there's not much close by and there's a big hill down to the bus stop so you know you need assistance to get there and to get back, and you, it's quite a large hill where it's hard for your partner or whatever to push up so, maybe one of the things providers can think about is not just their initial service but how they connect in with other services and facilities in the area.

Speaker 1: Ben did you have something to add there about you know were there any questions you could think of that a provider could be asking?

Speaker 3: So from, for me what I teach, so I do workshops with Tourism Council WA for tourism providers around the state and I always say to them that if you don't know then ask, so if somebody rings up and says, hey you know I have this disability is your place going to

be suitable if you don't understand anything or even if you do and you're still not 100% sure ask, say okay how can we make your visit work for you how can we make it as pleasant as possible and then have that conversation to try and figure out because we are the experts of our own experience. As members of the disability community we know, you know 99.95% of the time we know what it is that we need in order to make this work.

Speaker 1: So could it be as simple as well what actually makes it accessible for you, what are the things that are going to help you out. Are there specific things that you need help with around mobility, around sensory, around cognitive you know even to break it down to three main areas perhaps to just flag rather than getting into the nitty-gritty and then letting the customer fill in the blanks, is that what you're...?

Speaker 3: Yes, moving to, that's it yes, that's what I'm moving to, yeah to be just have that collaborative relationship with the tourism providers.

Speaker 1: Definitely so we all know the difference that assistive technology can make to our lives and in this section we're going to be seeking some tips from the field and we've got a beautiful image here of a power wheelchair user where it looks like a ram mounted camera wearing a hat and I can't quite, I think they're outside the Maritime Museum but I can't see which state because my vision is just not that good these days.

Speaker 3: West Australian.

Speaker 1: Thank you, it's been a while it's been about five years so I guess I'd like to start out with the sort of assistive technology that you use when you're traveling and getting out and about to create a great experience, and I know Ben you've already mentioned hoists, is there anything else you'd like to share with us.

Speaker 3: So for me my most important piece of AT is my wheelchair, when you're traveling it is exhausting you are doing a lot more than you normally do and so having things that make life easier so that you have enough stamina to be able to enjoy what it is you're there for is important so I have a pair of power assist wheels that I pair with a free wheel for the front there to actually make it easier for getting around the place and the other thing that I have that I never go anywhere without is called a cripper it's basically a tenodesis activated reacher grabber which is made by an American quadriplegic that he sells for cost, so if you like me rely on tenodesis for a lot I really recommend looking at cripers.

Speaker 1: Brilliant, thank you, Greg, is there any AT that really helps you?

Speaker 2: I suppose just when I'm traveling kind of get out and start making your lists and I suppose a few things I make sure them I've always got is a companion card so I suppose that's a national one that you can get through the NDS I think you can track it down through

the NDIS but yeah that companion card gives you wherever you go especially through most of the public things in cities. Your companion will get in free so you can certainly keep your cost down and it'll get you into to most places so that's always pretty good never go anywhere about the companion card. Probably just looking at what I've got, I make sure that I've got all my, I suppose toiletry and any medicines and stuff that I've got, I always will I suppose if you're a bit new to traveling, I'd be down to see your doctor make sure you got plenty of medication and plenty of scripts when you go so that you've always got backups because you might get um stuck somewhere. Especially like Ben seems to have found might get stuck in Bali for another week, so I always make sure I've got enough stuff because you know especially if you went to Bali there's probably some things you probably couldn't even get over there that I may need to use.

Speaker 1: And while it's not AT while you're mentioning medication it's probably worth checking that you are legally able to take the medication that you taking to the place that you are going and that's a shout out definitely for those in the audience that are on stimulant medications, because in some countries they're illegal and I'm sure there are many other things aside from that where you need to just check things out beforehand and I guess that comes down back to our planning. Now we are running short on time I've been given the hurry up a couple of times, but before we move on I do want to quickly put in a plug, so AT Chat regularly produces resources for the AT user community, there's a wonderful video with Jos Franciscus you know, AT & Me, some travel tips, there's also an article about accessing assisted technology in rural and remote areas and next week we will be launching four resources; a conversation guide for assisted technology users to help you plan those conversations to make your next travel experience whether it's in your local community or further afield as successful as possible; an editable planning tool for assisted technology users; an accessibility guide for service providers; and an editable information sheet that service providers can use to include you know important accessibility information, so it's at hand if they wish when people are calling and asking about their service, so that's something to look out for. But I guess what I'm really curious about is what's next for both of you, Greg what's on the horizon for you? And speaking of horizons there is a beautiful blue sailing boat there, so I don't know if that's been prompted because of what you're about to do next...

Speaker 2: At the moment I'm probably actually pulling a little bit more out of the farming and pushing a little bit more on the tourism side, I've actually had a caretaker manager running my chalets but actually I'm taking that over after Christmas so we'll probably be moving more to doing the tourism chalet type stuff and then continue with the malting so not really a lot of difference. Son's still a bit young yet to take over anything so just be sticking with what I'm doing at the mo and just trying to do it better.

Speaker 1: Great and for you Ben what's around the corner for you?

Speaker 3: Oh from a tourism point of view I'm, we're actually starting to move into off- grid camping so we were fortunate enough to find on the market a secondhand accessible caravan which has made a massive, massive difference for us, where you know being able to take your own accessible accommodation with you wherever you go in Western Australia is amazing, but we're looking at changing to the off-grid stuff which is really, really exciting. From a business point of view, I'm just continuing the slog of advocating and getting tourism providers to see the light.

Speaker 1: Brilliant, well for those of you in the audience that are keen to know more, we've got some Instagram handles and websites on the screen for both Ben and Greg so for Ben it's at 30-foot drop 30 foot drop, all one word or ww30 foot drop.com so 30 foot drop. And for Greg's at Stirling Estate Chalets, so www.Stirlingestate.com.au so if you would like to have further conversations with Ben or Greg you've got their details there. And probably the next thing to think about is what's next for all of you so as AT users you can access our resources, engage on the Chatterbox platform on Facebook with other AT users in that community, you can also connect with an assisted technology, or AT Mentor and check out the Show and Tell series where our community has shared the AT that helps them to get out and about, in terms of providers I mentioned earlier there's the accessibility guide and accessibility information sheet that was mentioned earlier, and also if you're really keen to think about the service that you're providing and how to make it more accessible and inclusive, there are other options like asking your customers about what they need and perhaps even looking at engaging disability access and inclusion consultants, people that are qualified to provide multiple perspectives around different accessibility needs, a range of different accessibility needs, so there are some options that are open for providers definitely to start asking more questions. So on that note we have reached the point to end, the question and answer segment. So, for anybody that has been patiently waiting please raise your hands virtually if you have a question for Ben and Greg.

Speaker 3: Whilst we're waiting for that I'll share a quick travel tip, so what I found is when you're traveling in planes especially but anywhere where you may become separated from the rest of your equipment always make sure that you take your essentials, so carry-on luggage wise I always make sure that I have a week worth of meds, a week worth of whatever it is I need in case my luggage goes walkabout.

Speaker 1: That is an excellent, excellent tip, having backup plans, contingency plans is essential. I've got a question here from Stuart, and Stuart has said something that I experience a lot when trying to find or book accessible accommodation, is the huge number of venues which don't have information about accessibility on their web websites

when they do actually have accessible rooms, Stuart I've encountered exactly this for an accessible conference in November on the Gold Coast. So his question is what's the most effective way to bring about change on this through tourism associations or industry groups?

Speaker 3: So best, okay, it, hmm, it's both, so we have pressure coming from the disability groups to say, hey guys if you want more of us coming in put the information on your website, but it's also through the industry and the industry education as well from both sides coming because as you said they often, places unless they have been told what they have or educated in what they have and what they don't they have no idea, no idea at all so this is, and it's an ongoing effort at the moment in all states, by Tourism Australia.

Speaker 1: Yeah and there are a lot of places out there that if you are able to access the telephone and you can get on because you try and use the chat bots they're not great but if you can actually speak with somebody often you find out that they are accessible, they just haven't provided the information which is frustrating. Our next question from Kit is a little bit more challenging, it's a really big picture one, I'm curious what developments are happening with disability accessibility awareness, happening with planning development building, construction aviation tourism, and other such industries where there's currently a lack of awareness about disability accessibility. I'm with you Kit, I think we are all wondering that and there are probably many, many different answers to that depending on the state that you're in and the specific industry that you're speaking about. Greg and Ben, did you have anything to add to this?

Speaker 2: I think things have generally got a bit better when you look at say Airlines for instance now you know where Jet Star was really shocking when they first started up, they're actually pretty good now so you know Qantas are always been pretty good so I think it's one of the problems in the disability area you probably have to stick with the main line or the some of the better well-known Airlines and that they'll be able to let you know that now they've got more question and answer and forms to fill out when you do your bookings online so that you can get kind of good service so I think that has improved. There's plenty of other areas where it probably hasn't improved I think, going back on the last question a lot a lot of the booking companies or the booking platforms do have areas in there where, you know, as a provider myself I've filled all those things out and there is a disability check there, you know maybe they just haven't ticked the boxes to fill them out, so that when you go on to booking.com it won't come up, it quite possibly does have some accessibility. So yeah, it comes up to any individual provider has to fill out the stuff correctly.

Speaker 1: Definitely. I can probably add to this from a Queensland perspective, Ben did you have anything to add from, you know, WA perspective or a national perspective?

Speaker 3: Yeah, I was going to add from a national perspective. So, all of these things they're linked but they're separate at the same time which is really annoying. So, each of these different areas they all sort of split them all up within the government, but what we need is. As advocates we need to continually have that pressure on because these issues, they build up to a critical mass and then change happens, build up to a critical mass then more change happens, but like I said you got to think of it on quite a long-term scale in order for it to really be effective.

Speaker 1: Definitely, I can probably add from a Queensland perspective because we have got the push for the games, you know 2032 legacy, there are many, many areas where there is much more co-design happening. So not waiting until the product is delivered and then, or ready for delivery, and then go hey, you know people with disability, what do you think and just give us the tick. Actually involving people from the get-go and so two really, you know, important examples I can see is the Brisbane Metro, which is the buses that are just actually launching this month, and they've had people with disability involved from the very beginning and there's other infrastructure programs as well where they really have a variety of people with lived experience providing remunerated input so, you know, valued financially not just, you know, freebies right from before tender process start. So that is happening more and more in Queensland.

Speaker 3: I'm finding the same with that financially, so Tourism Council WA wouldn't give me the light of day when it came to their conferences four or five years ago, now they're approaching me with money already in hand, so you know that's big change.

Speaker 1: Definitely. Sam has also added something here, a statement rather than a question, but I think it's really important for everyone to hear. So my name is Sam, I have cerebral palsy, the hardest thing for me when I go traveling is I can't take my electric wheelchair on an airplane because they always break my wheelchair and it takes so long to fix and then there's no guarantee there's a wheelchair repair on the other end, and another thing is Airlines don't have bathrooms that I can use. That's a really common but really terrible experience to have Sam.

Speaker 3: Oh, that that is a horrible, I couldn't imagine anything worse personally than having a chair break on a holiday. Just recently when I was in New Zealand the air staff made a slip of the tongue, they said oh we've lost your chair, I'm what, pardon, no, no, no! Like, we are sorry, we're waiting for your chair. Oh God, don't do that to me!

Speaker 1: Language is important!

Speaker 3: Yes

Speaker 2: Qantas have bought two of my chairs.

Speaker 3: Well, there you go! No but it is it is horrible and it, and that's what I mean by you need to think ahead as well, think of worst case scenarios and you need to stand up for yourself. So, I insist that my chair goes into a luggage container on its own now, has to go in on its own because if it breaks I'm screwed.

Speaker 1: Definitely and perhaps if you are not feeling that you can speak up for yourself hopefully traveling with somebody who can help you to speak up for yourself or speak up on your behalf. Kit has a question and Danika's kindly just turned on Kit's video and audio. So, Kit would you like to go ahead with your question?

Speaker 4 (Kit): Yeah, can you hear me OK?

Speaker 1: Yes, hi there, I was curious, with the many different types of disabilities, like I know disability consultants are doing some work in some of these spaces but what is happening, like you know, when there's so many different types of disabilities but then getting, better representation. Like when different reference groups maybe have 10 people but 10 people also doesn't represent the whole disability community so what's happening in that space?

Speaker 3: Yeah so over here in WA I'm working more with shires to train people to be better advocates so you know to approach things if you're being asked to be on a panel like that to approach it instead of from a purely self-centered point of view to actually be able to look further out, cuz as an advocate it's not about you, it's about the community that you're representing, and I find that that is the best way. Because as nice as it would be to get everybody's viewpoint it's not practical at the same time.

Speaker 1: I think one of the things that organizations that are committed to doing better are doing certainly over here is that they are seeking a broad spread of input on their accessibility working groups. So, they are really looking to get a genuine mix so that they're considering neurological, psychosocial, physical, intellectual, cognitive, you know, and other neurodevelopmental and other disabilities, so they're getting a broad range of input. We did have a question earlier from Tanya who wanted the information on the cripper stick and Ben has popped that in the link in the chat, and it is quad tools.com and there is one last question. So, Tanya wants to know if people can travel with powered wheelchairs.

Speaker 3: Yes, you can, yes, but! So there is the International Air Traffic Authority Guidelines, which govern a lot of what is allowed on planes as far as batteries go, so it's the batteries that create the big problem, so you need to check that before flying. So having

your specifications and your tech specs from your wheelchair and being able to compare that with what is allowed.

Speaker 1: And I think some of that comes into too the beginning before you, when your wheelchair is being scripted or you're going through the process of selecting it making sure that the wheelchair is able to, obviously there is some unscripted chairs out there and there are scripted chairs but I know that there is differences in terms of the back rest being able to collapse. So that's definitely a consideration early on when you were thinking about you know the right wheelchair rather than after the fact.

Speaker 3: Yeah, I mean I've got a friend who, unfortunately he's passed away now, Rick he was a C4 quadriplegic so was unable, you know was on a ventilator and power chair and that, and he traveled to some amazing places, he honeymooned in Africa and you know through America and stuff, South America and stuff, so it is possible, it just, it takes a lot of research and planning.

Speaker 1: not just talking to myself, so I know that we've gone a little bit over time, I just really would like to thank everybody, thank you to Ben and Greg for sharing your experiences and your insights with us this afternoon, thank you to our Auslan interpreters for assisting us today and for keeping your fingers busy for us, thank you to all of you for attending, we really were pleased to see you here and are looking forward to you coming along next time, because we have some new and exciting content coming out shortly from AT Chat. There is a link being popped in the chat for a feedback form, we would be very grateful if you could gift us your time and cognitive energy to provide us with some feedback because we always like to improve every time we do these webinars. And of course, the recording will be available shortly. I did just want to sneak one last comment in I saw Tanya's reply saying she thinks she's after the fact and I guess I would say it's never too late, it's worth chatting to your OT and seeing if there is a solution that you can find, and that solution, depending on the nature of your wheelchair, could even look like a hire option so please don't be disheartened there is always a solution to be found. So, thank you to everyone we're really grateful that you joined us and we look forward to seeing you next time Out and About.

Speaker 3: Thank you very much everybody, it's been a pleasure.

Speaker 2: Thank you as well.