HKS Accessibility Symposium & Awards – video transcript

Welcome screen

[Larry Kinitsky]:

Hello and welcome to the Helen Keller Services 2024 Virtual Accessibility Symposium and Awards. I'm Larry Kinitsky, chairman of the Board at Helen Keller Services, and it's my pleasure to open this groundbreaking event. Today, we gather virtually from across the country and the world, united in our commitment to shaping a more inclusive future. We're here to recognize the critical importance of accessibility in all its forms. From digital landscapes to physical spaces, from product design to corporate culture, this symposium will explore how prioritizing accessibility not only transforms the lives of individuals and strengthens our communities, but also drives innovation, enhances user experiences and unlocks vast market opportunities.

[Slide Insert 1 over speaker: The global disability market represents an annual disposable income of $7 Trillion. 1 in 5 people worldwide live with a disability, that’s 1 .6 Billion people]

[Larry]

The global disability market represents a staggering $7 trillion in annual disposable income. It is a vast and often underserved market that deserves and needs to be engaged. But beyond the compelling business case, accessibility is fundamentally about people, about creating a world where everyone can fully participate.

[Slide insert 2 over speaker: HKS Accessibility Symposium & Awards poster. Shows three speakers: Sumaira Latif, Company Accessibility Leader at Procter & Gamble; Beth Foor, Corporate Affairs at Kellanova; and Joe Strechay, Award Winning Film and TV Producer.]

[Larry]

Today, you'll hear from industry leaders who have embraced this philosophy. From Procter & Gamble's innovative approach to accessible product design, to Kellanova’s strategies for incorporating accessibility into their iconic brands. We’ll even get insights into how accessibility is shaping the entertainment industry. We are also honored to recognize companies setting new standards in accessibility, like United Airlines, LEGO and Meloway Makeup. These organizations are making real, tangible differences in people's lives through accessibility. This symposium is more than just a showcase of success stories. It's an opportunity for all of us to learn, connect, and reimagine how we make our own organizations more inclusive and accessible. As we progress through today's sessions, I encourage you to reflect on how these insights can apply to your own organizations and communities. Remember, every step we take towards greater accessibility is a step towards a more equitable and prosperous future for all. Thank you for being part of this important conversation. Now, I'm pleased to welcome our master of ceremonies, Doug Roland. Doug, take it away.

[Doug Roland]:

Thank you, Larry. And hello everyone. My name is Doug Roland, and I am honored to host this wonderful event. Building upon the award show that Helen Keller Services began a few years ago, this 2024 Virtual Accessibility Symposium and Awards offers an opportunity to not only honor some amazing companies leading the charge in accessibility, but also hear from some individuals helping to create a more accessible and equitable world. Which leads me to our keynote speaker, Sam Latif. Sam is the Company Accessibility Leader of Procter & Gamble, where she is responsible for driving forward innovation to make the company's 65 plus brands inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities. Sam's passion for her work stems from her personal experiences. As a woman who is blind, Sam is able to draw upon her lived experience of barriers to access in order to help foster inclusive design. Before we hear from Sam, we'll be watching two short videos. The first uses a novel approach to demonstrate the challenges that people who are blind or low vision face when shopping. And the second showcases an innovative solution for product accessibility.

\*P&G Whatsin Store video plays

[Shop clerk]:

Is there something that you're particularly looking for.

[Woman1]:

Uhm... An explanation.

[Woman2]:

What's all this unmarked stuff?

[Shop clerk]:

It's just regular food.

[Woman3]

What's the deal?

[Man1]:

How can you tell what's what?

[Child1]:

They don't even have signs.

[Woman4]:

Is this a different item to that?

[Shop clerk]:

Not necessarily. No.

[Woman5]:

This is crazy.

[Woman2]:

Are you sure this isn't some kind of massive joke?

[Woman6]:

So you don't know what it is?

[Shop clerk]:

No I don’t.

[Woman6]:

And, you know, obviously. But how do we know?

[Shop clerk]:

I don't know either.

[Woman7]:

There’s no nutrition value. There's no fat. There’s no salt. There’s no sugar written on the labels. How do you know what you’re getting.

[Woman8]:

What if you have a nut allergy.

[Shop clerk]:

Good question.

[Woman9]:

My mind is working overtime right now, trying to figure this stuff out.

[Shop clerk]:

So just imagine if this was your regular shopping experience, Like if you were to...

[Woman9]:

I’ll be getting rid of it.

[Shop clerk]:

This is the regular shopping experience for somebody who's partially sighted or blind.

[Woman9]:

Right, I see.

\*P&G Whatsin Store video ends

\*P&G NaviLens video plays

[Sam Latif]:

Imagine making every single product in every single store accessible. We cannot shop independently. We can't see what's on the shelf at all. I'm Sam Latif. I’m P&G’s Company Accessibility Leader and I happen to be blind. A key priority for P&G is to build disability confidence. There's 250 million people worldwide with moderate to severe sight loss. Imagine going into a store, and not being able to see what's on the shelf. Touching a lot of products on the shelf, knocking them down. It's very overwhelming. It's very difficult to make an informed decision.

[NaviLens App]:

Seeing four tags, 36 inches away. Pantene Pro V Miracles Intense Rescue Mask.

[Sam Latif]:

NaviLens is a modern, colorful QR code which instantly gets picked up by the smartphone at an angle, from far away. It's allowing us to find the product totally independently.

[Sam Latif]:

-Here.

-Here, I found it. This is the one!

[Sam Latif]:

For the first time ever, be able to literally see what's on the shelf. It's really instant.

[NaviLens App]:

Pantene Pro-V Miracles Intense Rescue Mask.

[Sam Latif]:

That's something that we've never, ever been able to do before.

[NaviLens App]:

Pantene Pro-V Miracles Grow Strong Shampoo with biotin and bamboo extract.

[Sam Latif]:

-Whoa!

[Sam Latif]:

The ingredients, how to use the product, the sell by date. The inclusion of NaviLens on our Pantene products is going to be really a game changer for people like me. I've never been able to go up to a shelf and without touching it, see what's on there is incredibly powerful. It's something that we've never experienced as blind people before. And this is another step in our journey to making our communications, our advertising, our physical products accessible for the 1.85 billion people in the world with a disability. It gives us back confidence, independence and dignity that we very much deserve.

\*P&G Sumaira Latif presentation plays

[Sam Latif]:

I'm from a Pakistani background and I grew up in Glasgow, Scotland, and now I live in the outskirts of London. I'm a mother of three beautiful children. And today I'm wearing a black Ted Baker dress with pink and white flowers and a pink headscarf. I love running, going to the gym, and more recently I took up Bollywood dancing. Now, on the subject of running, I view life as a race that we all have to run. We've got our own goals and we will face our own barriers along the way. There's hurdles for us to jump, but sometimes we can't jump those hurdles. We have to go under them around them, and sometimes we just kick them over entirely so that we can continue to move forward. So today I'm going to share the story of my race as I run towards that finish line and at that finish line, I envision a world, one that is more accessible and inclusive for everyone. It's something that I'm incredibly passionate about. I'll take a recent example. My near local cinema was not accessible with audio description. For those of you who don't know, audio description enables blind people to enjoy movies and TV. Because it's an audio track that describes the visual elements on the screen so that blind people can also follow along with the action. In the cinema we use a headset. It's very simple to do. Every Hollywood film, every Netflix movie or program comes with audio description. So I had asked the cinema for the headset when the cinema first opened, and each time they apologized, saying that they were still waiting for the headset, but don't worry, it's coming in two weeks. Time passed, a long time passed. And then one day for Mother's Day, my kids bought me tickets to the cinema and we were told when we arrived that there was no audio description. I was absolutely gutted. Normally I never watch a movie without audio description, but this one time I said I will watch the movie because my kids were so excited to take me to the cinema and I didn't want them to miss out. But instead my children turned to me and said, “No mummy, let's go home.” Suddenly I felt warm, tears rolled down my face. I just wanted to disappear. I started sobbing silently. But just before leaving the cinema, I asked the staff, put yourself in my position. How do you think I'm feeling? What they didn't realize, that by being inaccessible, they were not only taking away precious moments between a mother and her children. They were losing out on a huge pool of potential revenue. The next day the cinema called me. They told me they had gone and got the headsets that were needed and they invited my entire family to come and watch the movie for free. Now, that's just one example of how I regularly come across hurdles and sometimes I navigate them pretty quickly. Other times I try, fail, time and time again. What I find you know, particularly frustrating are unnecessary barriers put in my way.

But just like an actual race, I've learned to focus on the finish line. To be an athlete powered by purpose, to get over the barriers. You know, for me, my purpose is to break down barriers, that exclude people from accessing products and services. And trust me, as a disabled female from an ethnic minority background, I know exactly what coming across barriers feels like. So let's go back to the beginning. I'm one of five siblings, three of whom, including me, are blind. The three blind mice is what they used to call us. My first hurdle was accepting that I was going to go blind. I was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa at the age of four, but I didn't really understand that I would eventually lose my sight. I can tell you the lights are on. That's probably as much as I can see. As my eyesight deteriorated, I tried to face that early hurdle by developing compensatory behaviors just to fit in. My sister would record specific sections of books so I could pretend to everyone that I was reading along with everyone else in class. Instead of practicing spelling I would focus on inventing lines on paper so I could feel that the words I was writing neatly sat on the lines. So I'm still a bad speller today. I went to university and I didn't have the confidence to tell people I was blind. So I made friends with a group of people who literally got me from A to B. They went to lunch. I went to lunch. They went to a lecture, I went to a lecture. But when they didn't go to a lecture, you get the drift. But throughout all of these experiences, I was using up so much energy, trying to be something I'm not. And that might resonate with us all in this room. Thinking back to moments in our lives, in our careers, when you felt like the only person in the room. Honestly, it's exhausting. So I made the decision to accept my disability and to start using the cane. It gave me the freedom I crave badly so I could get around independently. Securing my first job after university was the second hurdle I cleared. It was pretty remarkable, you know, considering one in four people of working age who are blind are unemployed even today. It was a huge stroke of luck for me. I was at a careers fair and I, you know, and I accidentally got chatting to one of the attendees. We got to talking and he offered me a job. And I asked him, which company do you work for? And he said, Arnold Clark. Now, Arnold Clark is the largest car retailer in Scotland. So I asked him his name and he said, it's Arnold Clark. So Mr. Clark, not only gave me a job, but he asked me to define the work I wanted to do. So I started off in marketing, analyzing lost car sales of high end cars. Two years later, I was approached by an agency who convinced me to apply to Procter & Gamble. Now, I had no expectations to secure a job at such a big multinational company. And to my amazement, I was offered a job at P&G. So within just three months, I had moved from Glasgow to London, living just outside of London on my own. It was something I had never imagined I would do. A hurdle I never imagined would have been, you know, featured in my race. Not because I was blind. Maybe that had something to do with it. But it's not typical for a woman from a traditional Pakistani background to live unmarried on her own. At least 20 years ago.

But I was so lucky because one of the senior leaders at P&G went to Glasgow, met my parents and helped them to feel comfortable, to let them, to let me make the decision to come down and work at P&G. My first role in P&G was in IT. It's an industry in which women are still underrepresented today. And I was tasked to creating an e-marketing book for our fragrance business. My third hurdle was to find someone to marry. A year later, I met my husband, Joe. Joe is from a Scottish-Irish background and our lore story is, you know, very untraditional and one that I wish I had the time to share today, because it's really nice. I wouldn't have it any other way. I'm so lucky to share my life with someone who empowers and encourages me to have a rich and fulfilling, rewarding career. I realize I am biased, but he is a shining example of male allyship. So alongside Joe, I've experienced both my biggest wins and my biggest challenges. Hurdles I was determined to jump over triumphantly. So ten years later, after joining P&G, after several promotions and different roles in different brands across the company, I became a mom of three kids. So I had a son followed by twins, boy-girl twins, and I had three children under the age of three. So, you know, how does a blind mum go out on her own with her three kids to the park or to the shops? You know, I find my ways. I would pull a double buggy, you know, behind me as I use my cane in front of me to navigate forward. It was literally on the job training with precious cargo on board. I also had a bit of an epiphany. I'm sure every parent can relate to just how little time you have when your kids are born. And you no longer have the luxury of investing time to overcome, you know, hurdles that surrounded basic, everyday tasks. So having five minutes to jump in the shower while the kids are napping, but then not knowing whether the bottle I'm picking up is it shampoo, conditioner, hair removal? You know, needing to change my baby before I go out, but not knowing whether the nappies I picked up were you know, the right size or the right specification. And then I realized that whilst I was spending a lot of money as a consumer, the manufacturers of those products were not helping to make my life any easier. And I also knew that this was unintentional. They just didn't know enough about disabled consumers. So what could be done to change things for the better?

Suddenly it all became really clear. Me working at P&G meant that I had the power to change things for the better. I became that athlete powered by purpose. I decided that other people needed to run my race in my shoes. And I came up with this disability challenge. An opportunity to educate people, to bring my experiences to life for them. So I asked people to wear glasses that simulate sight loss. And then I told, you know, I said, can you tell me the difference what's in these bottles? I asked people to wear gloves that simulate dexterity in their hands. And then I asked them to open our box of laundry detergent. I asked them to watch our ads on mute. and then explain the storyline at the end. And then I got them to sit in a wheelchair and get to the bathroom in our office. And what happened? They struggled. The basic everyday tasks suddenly became a hurdle in their race and it got me asking questions. I kept asking who owns this process? Who owns this brand, this product? And I would approach the people directly, started to show them the opportunity. I would touch their hearts and show them just how difficult life can become when you're not included. I touched their heads by showing them the potential positive business impact if we opened up our brands to 1.8 billion more people. That's the number of disabled people in the world. As I continued my race, I became more and more passionate, running faster than I ever had before.

Feeling although I was clearing hurdle after hurdle and I'm, you know, having the opportunity to get people to think about the power of inclusion. I saw inside the company our internal mindset change, but also my personal mindset started to shift. I realized that whilst I loved my IT career, my real passion lay in innovation, driving our accessibility agenda forward. I got the opportunity to present what I was doing to the CEO at the time. And a week or so after I presented him the business opportunity and gotten to take the challenge as well. I, you know, I shared with him the business case and a week later I was offered the role of a P&G special consultant for inclusive design. They said, you can try this role for a few months to see if it works. Now, that role has now evolved into what I'm doing. Company Accessibility Leader for P&G. It's my dream job. It was an amazing opportunity, just like my first, you know, role in the car retailer. I was given a blank sheet of paper to make my job my own. There was so many things I wanted to do and I prioritized internal education and I delivered workshops across the business meeting people in different roles, functions, geographies. And these people were so united in greeting me with openness, empathy and a willing to join me in the race in bringing about positive change. Looking back, I'm just so proud of everything we've achieved from greater accessibility in our offices, in our media advertising, innovating in our products and our packaging to make our products easier to open for people with a wide range of disabilities.

Of course, we don't have all the answers, but we're on that journey, we're running the race. And personally, I no longer want to be described as a pioneer or a game changer because that could be flattering, but it suggests that we're at the start of something. But when it comes to advancing diversity within our organizations, this work should just be normal. As I was reflecting on my experiences in preparation for today, it struck me just how much male allyship has played a pivotal role in helping me advance in my journey. From the person who gave me my first job after university to my dad, who allowed me to break tradition and come and work for P&G to the executive at P&G who flew to Glasgow to meet my parents to help me give me, you know, to encourage me to move to London, to my husband, who empowers and encourages me every day to reach my dreams to the CEO and the executives at P&G who trusted me in developing this role for accessibility. I'm really incredibly fortunate to be surrounded by men who have supported me in my race in creating a more equal and inclusive world for people like me. I truly believe that we all have a part to play to get to that finish line.

So my advice to you all is this. Consider your own race. What can you do to get over the hurdles laid out before you or help other fellow runners reach their potential? Some hurdles will be personal, some professional, and some will be things that you simply cannot change. I can't change the fact that I'm a mother, a woman, someone from an ethnic minority background, and someone who's blind. Nor would I want to. Those men with power, who I encountered along the way that have been supporting me in my race, they didn't have to, but they chose to because it was the right thing to do ethically and for the business. In the end we all have to run our own race. But if we find ways to support each other along the way, we'll make it more fulfilling for us all to reach our potential. Thank you very much.

[Doug Roland]:

Our next presenter is Beth Foor, Corporate Affairs at Kellanova and co-chair of KAPABLE, Kellanova’s Business Employee Resource Group for Employees with Disabilities and Supporters. As a passionate advocate for people with disabilities, Beth has been a key member of Kellanova is pioneering collaboration with Nabi Lens to improve accessibility. Some of the world's most iconic brands like Kellogg's and Pringles.

[Beth Foor]:

Hi, everyone. I'm so thankful to be here with you today to share with you about my passion for accessibility. Now, with most of you go to the grocery store, this is likely what you experience. But when I go to the grocery store, this is what I experience. You see, I was born without her syndrome, which is the leading cause of death blindness. I wasn't born blind. In fact, I had perfect vision when I was young. But I was born with a significant hearing loss. And I born hearing aids my entire life. And when I was young, I went to a school for children with hearing loss. Now, while I went to this specialized school, the reality was the rest of the world was not built for people like me. And back then, the only technology there was to help me with big, clunky hearing aids. That didn't work very well. It was at this time that I had gotten so far behind in my speech and language development that a doctor told my parents that I would likely never graduate from high school. Thankfully, I have amazing parents who refused to accept that, and they instilled in me a belief that I could achieve anything. We all need people in our lives like that, don't we? People who believe in us and who cheer us on when we feel like giving up. Having the right mindset is the difference between winning and losing.

As I got older, I was mainstreamed into the public schools and another doctor told me in junior high that I had a progressive eye disease and that I would start losing my vision and eventually go blind. I made an important decision at this point in my life. I realized I couldn't change my circumstances, my vision loss and my hearing loss. But I did have a choice in my attitude and in my determination to persevere. So, with a determination to not let my disability hold me back, I lived as normal of a life as I could. I played sports in high school and I got my driver's license when I turned 16. And you know what? I proved that first doctor wrong. Not only that I graduate from high school. I graduated with honors.

Now, around this time, as I was finishing up high school and getting ready to start college, I started to notice the early symptoms of my vision loss. I started to lose my peripheral vision and I started losing my neighbors. But despite these challenges, I went away to college and I graduated with a degree in business. Now, early in my career, I worked at a pharmaceutical company, but no one knew about my disability. My hair covered my hearing aids, and I lived close to work so I could drive home before dark. You see, I didn't want people to know that I wasn't normal. Because the reality is the world still is not built for people like me. It was around this time that I met my amazing husband, Matt, and like my parents, Matt has been a huge supporter in my life and has helped me find ways to do things that otherwise seemed impossible. Matt and I are blessed with two wonderful kids, and it was during my first pregnancy that my disease progressed to the point that I had to stop driving. Here I was a new mom, and while it was a joyful time, it was also one of the most difficult times in my life. And I started getting a lot of questions about why I was always being dropped off and picked up. You see, I was still trying to hide my disability. I didn't want people to know that I was different.

As my kids got older, I decided to pursue my MBA degree. Now, my graduate degree was a lot more challenging than my undergraduate degree due to the progression of my disease. But with the support of those around me, I still achieved my goal and excelled in all of my classes. Shortly after graduating with my MBA degree, I accepted a position with Kellogg Company, which is now Kellanova. But this was a much different experience and my first job out of college. You see, hiding my disability was no longer an option. By this point, my eye disease had progressed to the point that I had to use a cane to help me navigate, and I had to request accommodation to start my new corporate communications role. But you know what? I didn't have to be embarrassed at Kellogg. It was a very inclusive and welcoming environment and my colleagues were supportive and encouraging, and I was able to thrive in this type of environment.

Like a lot of companies, Kellanova has a variety of employee resource groups, but unlike a lot of companies, the business employee resource group at Kellanova have a seat at the table with leaders. We know that we're able to work with the leader to create positive change in our workplaces and with our brands. Shortly after starting at Kellanova, I became involved with KAPABLE, which is the Business Employee Resource Group for employees with disabilities and supporters, and I had the privilege of serving as co-chair for several years. One of the projects I'm most proud of is our Navilens project. Navilens uses an optical smart code and a mobile device app. When the inventors of first created their product, it was to help the blind community with public transportation. Originally, they never thought about using their technology on packaging. But when one of my colleagues learned about this technology, she asked, Why can't we put this on our brand to make our product more accessible in the grocery store? I'm so grateful to this colleague for asking this question. It takes this type of courage to ask the hard questions and to challenge the status quo. I'm even more grateful to Kellanova for saying yes and letting us explore this idea. And we did more than explore. We, we launched. We put this on our brands. I want to share this quick 30-second video with you so you can see how this technology works.

Navilens works by allowing smartphones to pick up and unpack code from up to three meters distance. When a blind or partially sighted shopper points their device in the direction of the cereal box. This then alerts the phone and the shopper can choose to have the ingredients, allergen and recycling information readily out to them, as well as reading it on their device, using the device's accessibility tools and whatever language the phone is set to. We're proud to be the first food company to put this technology on our packaging, and now a lot of other companies are seeing the value of Navilens and adding the technology to their products as well. When we first added an avalanche technology to our products, it was to help the blind community find our products. But we quickly learn that it made our brand more accessible to other people as well. For example, the mobile device app will read you the packaging information and whatever language the phone is set to. So now our products are more accessible to those where English is not their first language.

When you create a more accessible world for those with disabilities, you create a better world for everyone. Did you know that text messaging was originally created for the deaf community? I'm guessing that most of you enjoy the benefits of text messaging every day. So I want to wrap up by sharing three things that we can start doing together today to ignite change. Number one. Invest. Find someone with a disability or another challenge that you can invest in, that you can mentor, that you can cheer them on to do things that they didn't think were possible. Having mentors and people that believe in me has made all the difference in my life. And invest in your employee resource groups. Give them a seat at the table with leaders. Number two, include. Make a commitment today to prioritize recruiting and hiring people with disabilities. Use their experiences and their knowledge to help you improve your workplaces. The products that you sell and the services that you offer. And create an inclusive environment like Kellanova, where people with disabilities feel valued and welcome. And number three, innovate. What is the next great idea you could uncover? Challenge the status quo. Prioritizing accessible drives innovation, increases your market reach and enhances your brand reputation and image. I want to end with a quote from Helen Keller. Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much. Let envision a more inclusive, accessible world and work together to ignite change. Thank you, everyone.

[Doug Roland]:

Our next speaker has been instrumental in changing how blindness is portrayed in film and television. Please welcome Joe Strechay of film and TV producer and consultant who has worked on groundbreaking projects like Apple TV Plus C and Netflix's All the Light We Cannot See. Before we hear from Joe, here's a short video about the making of all the light we cannot See, which showcases the innovative casting process for this hit series, as well as the importance of authentic representation.

\*All The Light We Cannot See video plays

[Shawn Levy]:

How long a drive to the airport?

[Driver]

About 25 minutes.

[Shawn Levy]:

Single biggest decision for all the light we cannot see was Marie, who will be my Marie? She's the heroine of the book. She's blind and she has a persistent source of hope against a backdrop of darkness. I wanted to cast Marie with a blind young woman to have Marie played by someone who understands what it is like to walk that road. That's a valuable detail and nuance that impacts and informs every frame of this series. Thus began a global casting search. We got thousands of videos. One of them is a unicorn of a discovery. She's never auditioned. She's never thought about being an actress. She's an academic. She sent in an audition and I Zoomed with her. And increasingly my realization was, I think she could be great.

[Shawn Levy]:

So I called Aria. I am calling you to tell you that you got the part.

[Aria]:

You're kidding me.

[Shawn Levy]:

I'm not kidding you, Aria. Congratulations.

[Aria]:

Can I call my parents?

[Shawn Levy]:

Yes.

[Shawn Levy]:

Today is the day that she arrives here in Budapest to begin this journey with us.

[Shawn Levy]:

Hello, Aria

[Aria]:

I was very excited to first meet Shawn.

[Shawn Levy]:

Hey, are you hyperventilating right now?

[Aria]:

And so excited to see how caring he is to tell this story in the way it should be told. I want this character to be an authentic portrayal of a young girl growing up to become a young woman who's blind. So that's important for me to bring to the screen.

[Hugh Laurie]

Aria, of course, is absolutely astounding because when they were setting out to cast this, I think they may have found the only one who could do it.

[Shawn Levy]:

Aria has been a revelation.

[Mark Ruffalo]:

Interesting to see how easily she's integrated into it.

[Aria]

It's been really incredible to work with such an amazing cast. Everyone embraced me as not only as a newcomer, but as someone who wants to create something that's powerful and special and meaning through this.

[Louis Hoffman]

It's so amazing because she's never done anything. She's never been on a set, and she is such a quick study.

She is absolutely astounding, furiously bright. She's absolutely wonderful.

[Dialogue from the series]

Nazis hate anyone who’s different, and they hate anyone who speaks the truth. I’m different. I know. know you tried to protect me, but I'm different.

[Mark Ruffalo]:

I'm a little jealous because it took me 30 years to be able to do what she showed up and did in two weeks.

[Shawn Levy]

Aria brought so much intelligence and, frankly, humility to this.

[Louis Hoffman]

She does bring a special depth and truth to her character.

Blind people never really have an opportunity to do such things as blind characters are typically played by sighted people.

[Shawn Levy]:

Once Aria told me I've never seen my face and I've never seen people see my face.

[Shawn Levy]:

To realize how we all rely on self-perception and the perception of others. And how does one build a sense of self and a performance in the absence of those building blocks? You have to do it from the inside and that takes tremendous fortitude. And that's what Aria brings.

[Dialogue from the series]

After all the bombs, all the smoke. I will never give up hope.

[Shawn Levy]:

I am so grateful to Aria, and I'm so grateful that we found you. Thank you for doing hard work beautifully, Sometimes with grace, but also with devotion and determination to be excellent.

[Aria]:

I'm so grateful to be around a group of people that have shown me that I matter and that people like me matter, and that we deserve to not only have a say in telling our own story, but that we can be the hero of that story too. Because of all of you, I found myself, really for the first time.

\*All The Light We Cannot See video ends

[Joe Strechay]

Yes, I'm Joe Stretchy and a producer consultant TV and film and it is my pleasure to be speaking to you at this, Helen Keller National Center's Accessibility Symposium. You know, television and film is always meant something special to me. I've been obsessed with it since I was a child and probably watched way too much of it by, you know, by how you might have worked out. I am totally blind now, and I grew up with vision. I was losing my vision as a child and and legally blind by the time I was 19. And my mom was losing her vision, too. And I didn't know people who are blind or low vision. And I looked into television film to see myself. We all want to see ourselves in television and film and, you know, I looked at a film like At First Sight that starred Val Kilmer, where he was a massage therapist. And also we his sister would make his meals and put them in the fridge or freezer or farm. You know, I actually thought about getting a certification in massage therapy because of watching that film and seeing that character. This is serious and not to say there's anything wrong with massage therapy, just because I'm blind, I shouldn't think that's a profession that I need to go into, you know? But representation matters. And, you know, I've worked on a lot of projects over the years, you know, whether it's Marvel’s Daredevil for Netflix when they originally created that show. And then also, you know, the okay on Netflix and then moving on to my production experience, you know, as a producer for Apple TV Plus’, See for three seasons. But when All the Light We Cannot See for Netflix came to me I remember I got the phone call I was it was February of 2020 before the World shut down, you know, in March 2020. And they were telling me that they wanted me to work on this project. And it was based on a Pulitzer Prize winning book. And I read the book a bunch of times, and I was like, Yeah, I want to work on this.

And I was working on See and, and then I started thinking about the casting process. And once the world started opening up again, we started casting the child version of the character. But you before that, they started developing scripts and Stephen Knight, who's that was the creator of See, was writing the scripts for them and, you know, I'd worked with him on See and got to work with him again and they wanted to do it right and they wanted to make sure that blindness was respected and, you know, I don't work on projects where I don't feel blindness is represented well or respected. I want to make sure I build our community up and accessibility allows me to do my work, but also allows the actors who are blind or low vision or with other disabilities to do work. Whether I was working on See for Apple TV Plus creating accessibility for 35 actors who are blind or low vision over three seasons, or while I was working on All the Light We Cannot See where our lead character, Marie Laure, was played by two actresses who are blind or low vision. Nelle Sutton play the very young version of Marie-Laure. She was seven when we cast her. We found her during this international search, and when Shawn Levy saw her, he's like, that's the one. Her charisma. She melted your heart, the interactions with her and just her presence on camera. And she's just adorable. And when we found her, Shawn originally was thinking about, you know, most likely that older version would be a prominent actor who's not blind or low vision, someone sighted and when he saw her, he's like, I don't know. Well, let's do a let's do an international search. And we did. And we found this one in one of a kind actress who was meant to play this part, Aria Mia Loberti. And we had thousands of auditions from actors who are blind or low vision from over the world. And Aria just shined. She never auditioned before She was legally blind. She she was a PhD student at Penn State University here, and she grew up in Rhode Island. And she never thought acting was going to be an opportunity that she could do. Because when we don't know about actors who are blind or low vision out there in the world who are working and see them and see their work, we don't know it's possible.

And the more opportunities out there and I'm not saying every part is going to be filled by someone who's blind or low vision because not every actor is meant for every part. But the more we show people successful, the more likely people are going to seek out the training and go into in TV and film and commercials and get acting experience and do community theater and all these people who are blind or low vision help will know it is possible. And then more and more of these roles will be filled by people who are blind or low vision. We want to always fill the role with the best person for that part. And Aria Mia Loberti and Nell Sutton were those people. I had to create accessibility for them, but accessibility for actors who are blind or low vision, it's, you know, whether it's scripts or marks on set her the production or whatever the casting process, making sure that's accessible to them, making sure they can participate fully and just worry about what they do, their craft of acting, that's my role and one of my roles, and I work on the creative side too, helping to tell those stories about blindness, making choices in All The light We Cannot See, you know, which is historical fiction. So you'll see our character using two-point touch at certain points and the way they're using their white cane. It's not totally historically accurate because we had to make choices. It's a little longer than the cane they would use at that time too because they actually are legally blind and had to use their cane, but that was my decision. And Shawn Levy supported me in making these decisions as we moved on. And Aria got to have input on things as we as we filmed and it's just so important to be part of the process. And we all want an accessible workplace and a place where we can go. Accessibility brings inclusion. I want to see that again. Accessibility brings inclusion. We can't be included if it's not accessible and, you know, I want to be able to participate. And my work on See really led me to that project. See, you know, when we were bringing 35 actors in over three seasons and then the 20 actors and recurring roles, which means more than one episode, I had it from the start realizing I'm like, So we're going to be bringing on an actress. I'm like, Who's in charge of the accessibility? They're like, Is that something you can do? I'm like, Yes, it is. So I got to figure out and build what that looks like. And when I asked Dan Shotz and John Steinberg career the showrunners of season one of see on Apple TV plus I asked them I'm like, do we stop at blindness and low vision? What about other disabilities in there and Dan’s like yes, let's include everyone. And Dan and John said, Joe, you do your thing. And I did. And we were able to bring on people who are deaf or hard of hearing, shorter stature people, persons with cerebral palsy, persons who have prosthetics like a prosthetic leg or persons who may not have use of one arm, of all kinds of persons. But it was just, you know, part of the world. And I think we all just want to be part of the world. And one of the great things about working on that show is also you're painting people as heroes, villains. You’re creating people doing their everyday life.

Often, persons with disabilities and persons who are blind don't get to see that. Don't get to see ourselves in all those different roles. And “See” allowed us to do that and on All the Light We Cannot See, Marie-Laure, you see her being courageous. See her saving her own life, but also challenging the world and and pushing forward and helping the resistance. And I think we all want to be that hero. We all want to see ourselves in that realm. And it was real. You know, the work we did help paint this this authentic picture about this character. And it was such a great pleasure to work with Aria Mia Loberti and Nell Sutton showing and Diane Levine, Shawn Levy, the executive producer and director of all four episodes and having watched it on Netflix, it came out November 2023. Go and watch All The Light we Cannot See. You will not be disappointed. It is a great limited series and something you can watch easily for hours, hour and episode. You know, maybe actors you might not have heard of. Mark Ruffalo, Hugh Laurie and others. No… just joking, you know, we all know Mark the Hulk and so many other great roles. And Hugh Laurie, I think of House and so many fantastic roles. This this show was a dream to work on. And I look forward to many, many other projects in the future where I get to paint how blindness is portrayed, but also in the accessibility for actors who are blind or low vision and other disabilities.

I want to thank the Helen Keller National Center for putting on this event and including me, but also for creating accessibility for those who are DeafBlind and helping the change the world and impact it in such an important way. Yeah, again, if you haven't watched my shows, go and check them out. You know, I hear the pretty good. And so thank you again. I look forward to hearing from you all in the future. Enjoy the enjoy the event. Take care.

[Doug Roland]:

This concludes the symposium portion of the event. Thank you to our amazing presenters, Sam Latif, Beth Foor and Joe Strechay for your engaging and informative presentations. And now on to the awards, the 2024 AccessAbility Awards, to be precise. In its fourth year, the AccessAbility Awards are an opportunity to honor the exceptional achievements of organizations dedicated to advancing accessibility in the blind, DeafBlind and low vision communities. Our first awardee, United Airlines. United Airlines is committed to being the most accessible in the world. Through initiatives such as braille integration into their cabins, improved in-flight entertainment accessibility and new wheelchair accommodation initiatives, United Airlines’ diverse workforce, which includes employees with disabilities, works to set industry standards for accessibility as they understand that accessible travel benefits everyone. Here to accept the award is Adam Lang, Project Manager, Mobile App, and Peter Wolkowski, Director, Onboard Product Design. But first, a video from United Airlines.

\* United Airlines video plays

Our goal is to be the most accessible airline in the world. I think that so much of that starts on the inside of it with us. I live with a mild cerebral palsy. I haven't met a single coworker at United that isn't willing to work with me. United, they took a chance on me. I was born without my right hand. And now I fly airplanes. To give people a chance to thrive in the workplace and to excel in an area that we know that they can excel. It's just wonderful.

And I don't feel anything's going to hold me back by being hearing impaired. I just feel that the opportunities are open. Whatever I want to do.

I'm Daniel , and I’m Z, and we are Special Olympics Service Ambassadors.

Our main goal is to greet the customer and to get their boarding pass and get where they're going.

I consider myself as the invisible disability, 100% deaf in both ears. It's important to see employees with disabilities engaging because it makes a really big benefit to society as a whole.

At United, we needed an ally for everybody with disabilities, for customers and employees both. So we are the group of allies. Our goal is to just make this company the place where everyone says, we’re totally going to try travel because they do it right.

I help make sure that our website, our mobile app and other digital channels are accessible to and usable by our customers.

We have set the standard for how we can make it better.

With United taking more maybe innovative steps, beyond United the changes could Ripple. We owe it to this community to make them feel just as comfortable as every other passenger.

\* United Airlines video ends

[Peter Wolkowski]:

We're honored to accept this award on behalf of United Airlines for our advancements in cabin accessibility. Our mission is to ensure travel is accessible to all. And we've made great strides, particularly for passengers with visual disabilities, by being the first U.S. airline to introduce braille in our cabins and tactile placards for non Braille readers.

[Adam Lang]:

Our commitment extends to our in-flight entertainment and mobile app enhancements supporting a range of assistive technologies. We have also implemented new tools and policies to better serve our wheelchair users and customers, including a digital filter for aircraft accommodation and a fare refund policy for necessary flight changes. Internally, our business resource group Bridge champions and inclusive workplace, mirroring our dedication to customers with disabilities. This award reaffirms our belief that accessible travel benefits everyone. Thank you for recognizing United Airlines’ efforts to ensure that every journey is possible for every traveler.

[Doug Roland]:

Our next Accessibility Award winner is LEGO. LEGO has revolutionized the way children who are blind and low vision learn braille. Through their innovative LEGO Braille Bricks, this product transforms a beloved toy into an educational tool that promotes inclusivity and literacy. LEGO worked closely with blind organizations worldwide in creating Braille Bricks to ensure the product truly meets the needs of the blind and low vision community. LEGO believes children learn best through play and have created a fun and engaging way to learn braille. Here to accept the award is the Creative Lead for Braille Bricks, Rasmus Logstrup. But first, a video that showcases real families using LEGO Braille Bricks.

\*LEGO video plays

Lisa and Matt and their two young daughters are sat. They open a box of LEGO Braille Bricks. Lisa to camera.

Olivia lost their vision at such a young age. The whole way that she's learned about the whole world essentially is through sensory touch.

[Lisa]

Do you want to find your name in the bricks?

[Olivia]

I got an “A” already.

[Lisa]

She was first introduced to LEGO Braille Bricks in her class at school.

[Olivia]

I think I normally use braille in my books, and at school. I started it in reception and my braille teacher taught it to me.

 [Lisa]

The fact that we now have that at home has just changed everything.

[audio description]

The family's playing with the LEGO Braille Bricks and associated online play starters on a tablet.

[tablet reads aloud]

Rock, paper, scissors.

[Family dialogue]

Who's going to win? Olivia. Me!

You can see they're just both as engaged as each other. And that's the main thing. It brings a typical game into the household that's got something accessible for her without making it so different. Learning the language, which makes her feel just the same as every other child.

[audio description]

A box of LEGO Braille Bricks are on a counter. They open the box.

[family dialogue]

What we've got here. We got A1, B2, C3.

[father]

My kids only know me without sight, but to them I don't think they’ve realized that I can't see because I can hear so well.

[tablet audio]

Build a wall around the hand using Bricks with three or more studs.

How many dots do we need? Three or more. Three dots or more.

[father]

They don't see me differently to how I think their friends see their parents.

I lost my sight 11 years ago. Nobody really mentioned braille. They said, well, braille is very old fashioned. Technology's kind of replaced it. You've got audio books, you've got all your CDs, all these things. I don't want to put headphones in because I kind of need to listen out for things, but to have a stack of pages on my lap, running my fingers across that, it's life changing for me.

[audio description]

Both families sit around a picnic table in the garden. On a summer's day, a guide dog sits on the grass. The table is covered with red, green, white, blue and yellow LEGO Braille Bricks. The children build with them. Amanda sat watching her son and daughter play.

[daughter]

I love LEGO Braille Bricks because they just help you learn. I've taught my sisters some braille. Feels good because they didn't know it before I start teaching and I'm looking forward to learning with my mom, my nana, my dog.

[Amanda]

Reece got a genetic disorder called optic atrophy. Over time, as our eyes deteriorate, Reece’s deteriorate at a rapid rate.

[boy]

With braille, I know when I'm older, I'll still able to read and write and get my family involved and do secret messages with them.

[Amanda]

It's just amazing to see the potential that can come from these little dolls and how much it can change someone like Reece's life.

[audio description]

The children study the Braille Bricks on an element chart.

[Amanda]

Braille itself is quite a challenging thing to learn if it's just on a piece of paper. With the LEGO Braille Bricks, the children they can all learn in an amazing way.

[father]

As a visually impaired parent, I try and teach them braille because they obviously want to learn as well. Curiosity about young age is great and we kind of want to tap into that. The thing with LEGO Braille Bricks, they’re colorful, they look like LEGO Bricks. They work like LEGO Bricks. But yet through play, they kind of learn to pick up the little dots. We can lose hours of the day just sitting there with a bucket of LEGO Bricks, just making things. But if you learning at the same time, I think it's just a win-win!

[title]

LEGO Braille Bricks now available on LEGO.com/play-with-Braille-English

\*LEGO video ends

[Rasmus Løgstrup]:

Hello everyone. We are so proud to be recognized by an organization like Helen Keller and we are a great admirer of the work and service you provide. Thank you for the award and recognizing the potential of the LEGO Braille Bricks. It's a great honor to be here to represent both the LEGO foundation and the LEGO group. The development of this project has been such an amazing journey, allowing us to co-create this innovative and inclusive learning tool side by side with the blind and partially sighted experts and fans. We could not have done it without the help and the support of the many blind organizations and professionals working with children to teach them braille through play. A special thanks to Royal National Institute of Blind People, American Foundation for the Blind, and all the kids and families that have participated in endless testing and marketing. All children have the right to quality education and learning opportunities. We asked over 25,000 children and 88% told us play is the best way for them to learn and develop. It helps them develop essential skills to support them in their lifelong learning. Therefore, it's a privilege to support this important project that brings learning through play to even more children and adults around the world. Thank you again for recognizing the potential of this project. With each brick featuring studs on top that correspond to a letter , number or symbol of the braille code which also printed on the same brick. This is truly inclusive play experience where blind, visually impaired and sighted people can equally engage. The enormous response we have received from fans around the world is a big testament of this. We hope it will serve as a fun and engaging tool to support the development of braille skills and help build vital awareness and interest of braille and why it is still relevant in this digital day and age. Thank you.

[Doug Roland]:

Since 2015, Be My Eyes has transformed the landscape of assistive technology. Their app allows blind and low vision users to connect with volunteers to receive real time visual assistance for daily tasks. But now, the addition of AI supports to the app provides an always available option for users. This blend of human compassion and technological innovation exemplifies the spirit of the AccessAbility Awards and is the reason that BE My Eyes has been honored with this special distinction, The Access Excellence Award. Here to accept is Be My Eye’s founder, Hans Jorgen Wiberg. But first, a video from Be My Eyes.

\*Be My Eyes video plays

You might wonder how blind people deal with everyday challenges. Well, normally the answer is simple. They are not that different from you. We play music, we go to school, we go to work. You get the picture. But sometimes the simplest things can be difficult. And we need a pair of eyes. And that's where you come in. Through your Smartphone, Be My Eyes connects the blind with sighted people through a live video connection. Simply choose if you need help or want to help by the click of a button.

You can help just by installing the Be My Eyes app. And we'll notify you when someone needs your help. And if you're in the middle of something, don't worry someone else will step in. So would you care to be my eyes?

\*Be My Eyes video ends

[Hans Jørgen Wiberg]

Hello. My name is Hans Jørgen Wiberg. I'm the founder of Be My Eyes. And I am very proud to say that we have this year received the Helen Keller Services Award. This means a lot to Be My Eyes because we have gotten this recognition from our own community. Helen Keller is, of course focused on a deafblindness. I have hearing aids myself, so I feel I'm kind of part of it. And we in Be My Eyes, we are, our destination is to make the world more accessible. And we very much hope that we can do even more for the DeafBlind community in the future. And this award is a reminder for us to be aware of the whole community, and we are very proud to receive this honor. Thank you so much.

[Doug Roland]:

Meloway Makeup is built on the principle of creating make up products that are accessible and easy to use for everyone. Meloway’s standout innovation is their line of makeup products designed for one handed application, making makeup more accessible to individuals with limited mobility or dexterity while still appealing to a broad consumer base. We recognize their commitment to embedding accessibility into the very heart of their brand. Congratulations Meoway Makeup for your Accessibility Award for inclusive product design. Here to accept are brothers and Founders Ash and Aiden Kim. But first, a short video from Meloway Makeup.

\*Meloway Makeup video plays

[Narrator]:

Our mission is to build a brand that is for everyone, including people that the beauty industry has marginalized. We wanted to bring products that are easy to use because makeup should be fun, effortless and playful. At Meloway, we focus on making our products user friendly and ergonomic. The beauty industry must work harder to reflect the needs and voices of people with physical disabilities. We are starting by making our packaging easier to open, grip and apply. Our commitment extends beyond creating cutting edge products. We stand together with everyone who wants to celebrate their individuality through makeup and wants to explore the world of beauty on their own terms.

\*Meloway Makeup video ends

[Ash Kim]:

Thank you so much, Helen Keller Services. As a small business, we are honored and humbled by this recognition, especially among such giants across different industries. We started our company with a vision to broaden what it means to be inclusive in the beauty industry by designing products to be more accessible for people with unique challenges and physical difficulties.

[Aiden Kim]:

The beauty industry still has a long way to go to reflect needs and voices of people with physical disabilities. While conversations about disability have become a lot more prominent over the past few years, they are still lacking on an industry wide consensus and the urgency to make beauty products more accessible. What we are doing right now may be barely scratching the surface, but we hope these changes will eventually lead to truly accessible beauty. Our commitment extends beyond creating cutting edge products. We are here for everyone who wants to celebrate, celebrate their individuality through makeup, and wants to explore the world of beauty on their own terms.

[Ash Kim]:

Our journey is nowhere near done and we are more inspired than ever to continue our work. Thank you.

[Aiden Kim]:

Thank you so much, again.

[Doug Roland]:

Several years ago, I collaborated with Helen Keller Services to build an educational platform called Feeling Through Studio, where disabled presenters teach users about disability. Made in collaboration with the DeafBlind community, it was also essential for us to make this platform as accessible as possible. We turned to Brian Williams at the creative agency Rival to help us take on this unique endeavor. Brian was able to take the accessibility of the platform to a whole new level, namely by integrating accessibility features like ASL interpretation, closed captions, live transcript and audio description directly the video player. Thank you, Brian and Rival, for your commitment to pushing the boundaries of what's possible and accessible web design. And congratulations on your AccessAbility Award for inclusive educational platform design. Here's a video from Rival, followed by an acceptance speech from Brian Williams.

\*Rival video plays

[Narrator]:

After Doug Roland's film, Feeling Through had been nominated for an Academy Award. He and Sue Ruzenski of Helen Keller Services approached Rival to use the film's success as a springboard to create a digital platform that would serve to extend awareness and foster education around the DeafBlind community. As the many stories and educational courses were being crafted, we got to work designing a site with accessibility being the top priority. We chose Web Flow's new to market platform to build the site on as its built in accessibility features were exactly what we needed. Core to the site's content strategy, feeling through Studio’s stories are carefully organized into different categories. And within each category, video chapters have been set up for easy navigation. Each video chapter has its own page, description, supporting chapters, and education component. For video playback, we Integrated the Able Player to maximize the accessibility of the video within the player. We were able to create a workaround that allowed for multiple Vimeo videos stream in simultaneously. The site has been very well received and continues receiving accolades as it grows. It has been an honor for Rival to create this meaningful digital platform and we look forward to furthering accessibility in all of our designs.

\*Rival video ends

[Brian Williams]:

Hello, everyone. I'm Brian Williams, the Chief Creative Officer and Co-Founder of Rival LA. I'm a white male in my mid-forties. I have short, dark blond hair. I'm wearing thin rimmed glasses, a white button down shirt, and I have a white wall and some large houseplants and other decorations behind me. Well, I'd like to start with a huge thank you to Doug Roland and Sue ruzenski from Helen Keller Services. When I first watched Feeling Through, I found it so moving. It was so well directed and produced. And it being the first film starring a DeafBlind actor nominated in the Academy Awards, it was just such an amazing accomplishment. So when Rival L.A. was asked to design a platform that would extend the success of the film into an entire education platform for the DeafBlind community, I was just so honored. To work on this was really meaningful. This was a special moment to really dig in and create something beautiful that everyone could experience. And when we saw the news stories that Doug was filming, how captivating they were and how well they captured the community, I wanted to ensure the digital experience was the most accessible setting there could be for a web platform.

Designing Feeling Through Studio included creating interactions with clear, understandable navigation, needing color and contrast standards, and ensuring the typography is set up with proper sizing and hierarchy in CSS classes so screen readers can pick up on them and present them in the proper order. And given the nature of the site, the video player was of course the most important piece. We integrated a few different players to feed in videos from Vimeo streaming platform, but only the able player could meet all the features we wanted. And even with this robust open-source player, we hit a few roadblocks along the way for what was possible, but pushed hard and created workarounds that allowed us to do new things the player hadn't done before, like a customizable ASL and transcript box. You know, out of all the awards to receive for innovation and design, this has to be by far the most meaningful. It's not every day we are asked to create something for a community that can experience such challenges within the web. And we worked so hard to make sure that this was done well. Helen Keller Services we are so thankful for everything you do and the lives that you make so much better. You have inspired our company to spread accessibility and everything that we create. Thank you for this award. And thank you all for working with us on this amazing project.

[Doug Roland]:

The next award goes to one of the leading nonprofit organizations serving people with disabilities. The Viscardi Center is dedicated to educating, employing and empowering individuals with disabilities or similar needs, including children, adults and veterans. Their mission is to help these individuals discover the love of learning, experience the power of work, achieve the freedom of independent living and the self-confidence to fulfill their dreams. The Viscardi Center is receiving the AccessAbility Award for comprehensive disability services and advocacy, recognizing their outstanding commitment to supporting individuals with disabilities across all aspects of life and their efforts to create a more accessible and inclusive world. Here to accept is Chief Information Officer Mike Caprara. But first, a short video from the Viscardi Center.

\*The Viscardi Center video plays

We are The Viscardi Center and together we are building a more accessible and inclusive world, a world in which people with disabilities can discover the love of learning.

The power of work. The freedom of independent learning. And the self-confidence to reach their dreams.

The Viscardi Center is a leading nonprofit organization whose mission is to educate, employ and empower individuals with disabilities and their family throughout their life cycles. We're proud to serve kids with disabilities, teenagers with disabilities, and adults who are setting themselves for lives of independent employment. We encourage each student to learn and grow at their own rate, and that's something I think we're experts at, taking that individual student and looking at all of their different needs and making sure that we create an environment where they learn and grow at their own rate.

We're unique from other organizations in that we serve people a broad range of visible and non-visible disabilities. A well-rounded approach to employment focuses on all experience levels from entrepreneurs, veterans and professionals adapting to an evolving job market to youth transitioning from school to the world of work.

One of the most rewarding parts of my job is to watch that transformation happen with our students. Seeing them from elementary school to middle school to high school where they grow and mature into bright, confident young adults is truly amazing.

[mother]

Dylan started attending Henry Viscardi School in pre-K. He was three years old. He's been there for his whole educational career. We didn't want him to just be the kid in the wheelchair in the back of the room, so to speak. We wanted him to be around people who were more like him, who he could relate to. To see your child excel and play wheelchair basketball, and be in the National Honor Society and do all sorts great things, it’s beyond anything you could wish for.

[Chris]

All these years at Viscardi, they turned a shy, young kid into a wise young man who was not afraid to advocate for himself. They’ll teach you to be confident, and to want to go places and to have goals. That is what The Viscardi Center is all about.

[Dr. Rosa]

When people complete their education and training The Viscardi Center, they will feel the self-confidence knowing that they are prepared to make transitions either to college or to competitive employment as they take their rightful place among a diverse workforce. And above all, they will feel a prevailing sense of pride that they are members of the disability community and are playing a role in changing the face of contemporary culture.

Everyone can make meaningful contributions if given the opportunity. It's no different for people with disabilities. Look at job candidates for the skills they present on their resume and in interviews recognize the value and diversity of thought they could bring to your workplace. They might just be the next leader within your organization and beyond.

We want to look past the disability and know that they can do things and be very successful at a very high level. Coming here regularly for all these years, like I have, you learn to not see the disability. You see the person first. What we're trying to do as an organization is change those perceptions.

[Chris, student]

I can do the same thing as any pother person, juts in a different way, that’s all it is, just in a different way.

[Dr. Rosa]

One of the most powerful aspects of the Viscardi experience is the realization that we're all part of the same loving community, the members of which want the same things, they share the same hopes, the same dreams, they have the same fears and have the same aspirations as all other members of our community. People with disabilities are redefining what it means to be a person with a disability in American life where educators.

We are employment experts, we're parents, we’re students, we are The Viscardi Center.

\*The Viscardi Center video ends

[Mike Caprara]:

We would like to thank Helen Keller Services’ Selection Committee, sponsors and AccessAbility Award recipients. You're all doing tremendous work. We appreciate this recognition as it raises awareness of the need to make digital assets accessible and the impact this work has on people with disabilities. According to the CDC, one out of every four US adults has a disability. Yet 98% of the US Web pages are not technically accessible and cannot be accessed by individuals with disabilities. Besides making a website inclusive being the right thing to do, the disability community is a largely underserved and growing market. And making adjustments to the web experience may serve as a competitive advantage for any organization. Studies have shown that companies without accessible websites are turning down a share of a 1.2. Trillion dollar market. In fact. 71% of people with disabilities will leave a website that is not accessible and not purchase your goods and services. With regards to diversity, equity and inclusion efforts and employing individuals with disabilities, your website is the front door to your organization. You need to think about whether your online application process is inviting and accessible to individuals with disabilities. If not, your organization could be missing out on some really talented, qualified candidates. I would like to recognize The Viscardi Center executive leadership and staff for all of their hard work and commitment each and every day to this social enterprise. Without you, this wouldn't be possible. Thank you.

[Doug Roland]:

It's hard to mention digital accessibility without thinking of Apple. For decades, Apple has taken significant strides to ensure that regardless of ability, can engage with their products and services. What sets Apple apart is not just their technology, but their philosophy. They believe that accessibility is not a feature, it's a fundamental right. This vision is inspired not only their innovations, but has also prompted other companies to follow suit fostering a culture of inclusivity across the tech industry. As we celebrate Apple's achievements, let us recognize that their work is paving the way for a more inclusive future where technology truly serves everyone. Thank you Apple, for leading the charge and for reminding us all that accessibility is essential for innovation and community.

\*Apple video plays

Some people are just born to race.

When you want to be great, nothing is going to stop you.

We have the same goals, the same mindset. Everyone is going out there for the same reason. To be the best.

We train the same way. We practice the same way. We sweat the same way.

[background voice]

Teams featuring adaptive and non-disabled athletes competing over four stages, starting with the 100 meter sprint off the track into a 500 meter cycle in the velodrome, a 50 meter freestyle swimming.

[various persons on screen]

As a kid, all I wanted was to run and race just like my friends.

I was never told, you can't do this. I can't do that. I was just doing sport like everyone else.

There's no difference between me and any other swimmer. When I get in the water I want to win.

When I am racing, I feel free. I feel powerful. The track makes everyone equal.

We lined up at the same line. We finish at the same line. It was just a matter of who got there first.

 \*Apple video ends

[Sarah Herrlinger]:

Hello, everyone, and thank you. On behalf of the Accessibility Team at Apple, we are incredibly honored to receive this award. Helen Keller Services has been instrumental in advocating for equality, accessibility and support of the deaf and blind communities. At Apple, we've been building accessibility in our products for almost 40 years now. We believe that accessible design is inherently good for all, so we ensure that accessibility features are available right out of the box across products because we feel that devices should meet people where they are and not the other way around. And with all that we do, we firmly believe in and are guided by the disability community mantra of nothing about us without us, that means deep collaboration with a wide range of disability communities inside and outside of Apple is critical to creating accessibility features that work for a diverse set of users. And that's why we collaborate with organizations such as Helen Keller Services to incorporate feedback on the impact our accessibility features are having in the lives of our users. Accessibility is just one in a core set of values that are deeply integrated into everything we do at Apple, guiding how we operate as a company, how we design and build our products, and how we show up in the world around us. We're always working to leave the world better than we found it and to empower others to do the same. Congratulations to all the other honorees and thank you again for this fantastic award.

[Doug Roland]:

Well, that does it for the awards portion of our event. Thank you again to our award winners for their dedication and achievements in helping create a more accessible and equitable world. United Airlines, LEGO, Be My Eyes, Meloway Makeup, Rival, The Viscardi Center and Apple. You’re truly companies to be admired and emulated. But before we conclude this event, let's hear from Helen Keller Services CEO, Dr. Susan Ruzenski.

[Sue]

Good afternoon, everyone. As we come to the close of our 2024 Virtual Accessibility Symposium and Awards, I'm filled with a sense of excitement and possibility. Today, we've witnessed the incredible power of innovation, collaboration, and commitment in creating a more accessible world for all. Before we reflect on today's events, I'd like to introduce you to my colleague Bryan, who will be joining me for these closing remarks. Bryan is a valued member of our team at Helen Keller Services and brings a unique perspective as someone who is DeafBlind.

[Bryan]

Hello, everyone. I'm honored to be here with Sue to close out this important symposium. As someone who lives and works with combined hearing and vision loss, I've experienced firsthand the impact of accessibility in both my personal and professional life.

[Sue]

Thank you, Bryan. Your experience and perspective highlights why the work we've discussed today is so vital. From Sumaira Latif's inspiring journey at Procter & Gamble to Beth Foor's groundbreaking work at Kellanova, we've seen how personal experiences can drive corporate change. Joe Strechay showed us the transformative impact of authentic representation in media, proving that accessibility extends far beyond physical spaces into the stories we tell and the characters we see on screen.

[Bryan]

Our Accessibility Award recipients have demonstrated that accessibility is not just a goal, but a driver of innovation and business success. They've shown us that when we design for accessibility, we often create solutions that benefit everyone.

[Sue]

But our work is far from over. The global disability market represents an immense, largely untapped potential – not just in economic terms, but in human capital, innovation, and societal progress. This vast community of individuals with diverse abilities is not a niche demographic; it's a significant portion of our global population that crosses all boundaries of age, culture, and geography.

This reality serves as a powerful call to action. It reminds us that accessibility isn't a specialized concern or a box to be checked – it's a fundamental principle that should underpin how we envision, design, and operate in our increasingly interconnected world.

When we prioritize accessibility, we're not just opening doors for some; we're creating a more versatile, user-friendly, and innovative environment for all. As we leave this symposium, Bryan and I want to challenge each of you to become ambassadors for accessibility in your own organizations and communities.

[Bryan]

Here's how you can partner with us to make change: The first is, Educate. After watching this amazing symposium, there is much thought and reflection. Talk, discuss and share those ideas with your colleagues. And the second thing is Collaborate with Helen Keller Services. Reach out to us, take the time for training, consultation and to explore partnership opportunities.

[Sue]

Innovate: Look at your products, services, and workplace practices through an accessibility lens. How can you make them more inclusive? Advocate: Push for accessibility to be a core part of your organization's strategy, not an afterthought. Hire Inclusively: Actively seek out and create opportunities for individuals with disabilities in your workforce. At Helen Keller Services, we're committed to being your partner on this journey. Whether you need resources, training, or simply a sounding board for your ideas, we're here to support you. Thank you all for being part of this important conversation. Let's leave here today not just inspired but determined to take action.

Together, we can build a more accessible, inclusive, and prosperous world for all. Thank you and have a wonderful day.

[end video transcript]