I'm Amy Low, a Service Delivery Director at AbilityNet.

For anyone who doesn't know AbilityNet,

we are a charity that uses technology to remove barriers

to participation for disabled people at home,

at work, and in education.

Our vision is a digital world accessible to all.

To help us achieve our vision,

we've got a digital accessibility practice

that provides a range of services and we've had

real pleasure in working with sector colleagues to

prepare for the public sector regulations in the last year or so.

Although I recognize the challenges that others have raised this morning,

looking at it possibly a bit more from the outside,

we've witnessed some really excellent progress certainly in focus

and activity relating to digital accessibility in the sector.

Looking at the chat,

this is especially apparent and impactful where

senior leaders are engaged and onboarding, making it happen.

But Rome wasn't built in a day so I can understand that

at the front line, some of this stuff is not filtering through.

But before I begin,

I want to give a huge shout-out to everyone at this conference

because whether your whole institution's onboard or not,

I know that you will have been fighting to make a difference in

your institution and you will have been getting results.

That's what we're building towards a better future.

Anyway, let's get started with my short talk about the power of storytelling.

I'll try and keep to time so I know we're a bit behind.

I'm going to tell you guys a story today.

Might even be a bit more of a secret,

so please don't tell anyone.

But when I started AbilityNet,

I could hardly even spell digital accessibility.

To be honest, I do still struggle a little bit,

particularly if I'm typing quickly.

I don't know if anyone else has that experience.

That was just over six years ago.

It was the start of probably the steepest learning curve of my professional life.

I didn't realize it then,

but I was joining an organization that was deceptively small,

but really complex in the services and activities that we provide.

The one thing that was abundantly clear to me from the very start was

the huge opportunity to make a positive impact that we had in our hands.

But looking back at Dan's presentation,

we needed to be able to simplify the messaging to make people understand and listen.

But it was complicated.

So I set about trying to work out what was what and have it all fitted together.

There was websites and applications.

I knew a bit about these.

There were assistive technologies,

a bit more mysterious.

There were disabled people and assistive technology users and

apparently neither of these were necessarily linked or mutually exclusive.

Again, my knowledge and understanding was pretty basic.

There were models of disability.

Some were bad, some were good,

and everyone seemed to know which and why.

There were barriers, many of which I was completely unaware of.

There were recommendations and solutions to overcome or remove barriers,

most of which I was completely unaware of.

Sometimes, there were new barriers caused by the recommendations to remove barriers,

which again came as a bit of a surprise.

There were accessible websites that had really poor usability,

which was very confusing,

and there were websites which appeared really usable,

but were not fully accessible,

which was even more confusing.

There was also great debate about what constituted

an accessibility issue over a usability issue and vice versa.

Which was equally confusing and seemed a little bit like a red herring, too.

I tried to categorize all this stuff and split it up to

make sense of it in terms of who worked on what and why.

But then it would all roll back into one.

Eventually, most of it had impacts on each other and it felt really complicated.

When we went digging to the next level of detail,

some of it looked like the image on my slide,

old text image of somewhat complicated code snippet.

There were also lots of acronyms: WCAG, TTS,

STT, loads of other things that I didn't know about that completely bamboozled me.

I'm going to tell you another secret now.

It wasn't really particularly accessible for me to make sense of.

I reached a point where part of me felt a huge surge of impostor syndrome.

As in, what am I doing here?

I shouldn't be here,

someone else should be doing this that can understand

what the heck it all means and take that message

forward to make the improvements that are undoubtedly needed on such a massive scale.

But the other part of me said,

"I know about people,

I know about technology,

I know how people want to use technology and

what a big difference it can make if everyone has equal access.

I can get my head around the rest of this.

I just need to approach it in a different way."

I then remembered I once had

this Italian-American boss and I wouldn't even attempt the accent,

but he used to say to me when he needed to understand something really quickly,

explain it to me like I'm three years old.

I thought this might just about help me get there so I went at it that way.

This was a really interesting approach as,

after an initial funny look,

this naturally led to people giving me stories to help me understand.

Some example stories I heard included, story 1.

Once upon a time,

there was a guest speaker at an event attended by at least one blind delegate.

The speaker put on a video that was about disability inclusion.

The surprise was that the video had no talk track and no audio description,

leaving non-sighted audience members at a complete loss as to what was going on.

From their perspective, there was some music playing and nothing else.

At the end of the music,

quite a lot of people clapped and murmured,

but no one expanded at all on what had been shown.

As a result, a proportion of the audience was completely excluded.

The end. Story 2.

Once in a land not far away,

there was a keyboard-only user who was trying to buy a ticket to a festival.

They were very excited as they managed to get into the booking screen quite quickly.

They entered their details as quickly as they could as there was

a timer during which they were able to make the purchase.

Then at the very last step,

there was a keyboard trap,

which meant that by the time they managed to get the damn thing to work,

the basket had timed out and the tickets had sold out.

As a consequence, they were completely excluded.

The end. These things always come in threes.

Let's go to Story 3.

Once, there was a beautiful kingdom where everyone not only thought

about legal considerations or

accessibility guidelines after they built something for everyone to use,

but they went further and they thought about them

before they designed and built any new service.

What's more, they made the link and appreciated the fact that

accessibility considerations when planned in from the very start,

make products better for everyone and no one is excluded.

They all lived happily ever after. The end.

Now, that last story might be more of the fantasy

or sci-fi genre of stories as things stand today.

But it certainly landed with me and it set the ambition.

Just to wrap up, these stories helped me to empathize, to contextualize,

and also, and rather excitingly,

to be able to make my own judgments on

completely new things as to what may or may not be accessible.

They also helped me to create that click in others by retelling the stories.

This was a special moment.

I felt like I was really winning then.

I kept asking questions,

and the ensuing stories helped me to understand some more things,

which enabled me to land those messages with customers and contacts.

I realized that understanding this stuff didn't necessarily

require for me personally to understand and explain the aria tree,

for instance, although I may have future ambitions in that aria.

See what I did there. Sorry, groan.

But what I did understand was that I needed to be curious,

to be humble, to listen,

to empathize, and keep asking questions.

I now find I can't unknow considering

accessibility and I'm collecting stories about it everywhere I go.

Of course, I'm still making mistakes,

being alive to what can go wrong,

not being complacent, and doing my best to improve and be better at it all.

As a result, I'm learning new things all the time.

This is why stories matter,

and this is why context matters, and empathy matters.

If you're a lone voice that's trying to get people engaged around digital accessibility,

don't just give them the stick.

Don't even really focus on the camera,

give them the stories.

People love stories, people listen to stories,

and people remember stories.

I'll stop there because I know we're short on time but thank you everyone.