



Episode 3: Getting Active: A Casting Director's Perspective

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Audio commercial: Selena:

This is Selena event host of stories from planet Earth. Thanks for listening the following show on public housing media.

Upbeat intro music [Disarming Disability]

Nicole:

Hello and Welcome. Welcome welcome you have officially made it to Season 2 Episode 3 I can't I still can't believe we're in a Season 2. Totally blows my mind, but we are so happy to have you here in this space with us and we are so so excited to share with you the expert we have today. But before we jump into any interviews though.

We want to take just a moment to step back and we just want to take a moment to mention and thank and honor our logo designer Patrice. For those of you who follow us on social media you probably saw that Patrice actually passed away just before Christmas. He was much too young and this came as a total surprise. So it's just very very sad.

And as Sarah and I were talking about different ways to honor Patrice and what we could do, we really just wanted to continue to share his work. So we have been in communication with Patrice's family and we have gotten the go-ahead the blessing to continue to share his work and to continue to share his website.

Patrice was using his artwork and actually putting it on amazing merchandise, that was really awesome kind of disability Pride merchandise just Disarming Disability has no kind of stake in this this purely as us wanting Patrice's Legacy to continue and his work to continue.

So his family is still filling orders. We are going to continue to share his artwork, the artwork that exists because we think it is important that the work that he did throughout his life continue to be seen because he was making images of disability that were happy people with disabilities, active people with disabilities, empowered people with disabilities, and we just couldn't be more thankful for having the chance to work with him and do things with him.

So if you have a chance, please go check out a normalperson's.com and do yourself the favor of honoring Patrice maybe with a purchase there.

So now let's kind of hop into maybe something a little more lighthearted. We actually had something really cool happened Sarah. Will you will you share?

Sarah:

So the user "Sing all da time" all the time posted on our reviews for the podcast itself? Like the platform, They said "this was my favorite disability rights podcast. It completely transformed my relationship with my disabilities and sent me down a path a research and activism I so hope they make new season someday"

Tears! Right?? So many tears and just knowing that like yes, this is this is why Nikki and I have spent so much of our free time building this podcast, right? and like yes, we could have been doing all these other things but like we intentionally have been trying to connect people. We just trying to teach ourselves any of this information and just knowing that like somebody else felt that was like "we are doing our mission" and just like yes please be a part of this.

So please "sing all da time." I hope you're listening. I hope you hear this. I hope you feel honored and like just know that we see you and we appreciate you. We were trying to find ways to be able to write back on this particular platform, but was really sort of struggling with that. So we're just hoping that you're listening. We hope that this is a gift to you that like, yes, we made Season 2 and know that.

Please reach out to us on disarmingdisability.com. You can find us there. You can email us at disarmingdisability@gmail.com or look at our Instagram platforms or facebook. Please we'd love to have you be an advocate profile just to sort of share with us more about your story. We'd love to engage with you and anybody else who's been feeling these things. Please know that we read your comments. We integrate feedback as best we can with the things that we can change.

So please like we love hearing from you and we want to help empower you to be the most bomb ass Advocate you can be so if there's any way we can open that we totally want to and that's why we're doing everything that we're doing but also please reach out and we want to hear from you.

Nicole:

Yeah. Yes. Seriously just to Echo Sarah, you know people taking time out of their day to comment or share their feelings about disarming disability that that I cannot tell you how honored that makes us feel just because yeah, we do put a lot of work into this and the fact that there are ears that are listening just means the world to us. So thank you. Thank you so much. Yeah, let's let's hop, right now to today's expert guests. We are so

so excited to introduce you to Danielle. We will read you her her bio and just a second here, but I wanted to tell you that Danielle as a little bit of a teaser is just the coolest woman you'll ever meet that is really really actively and strategically making awesome changes within the media casting realm of the world.

Danielle is actually a leading member of the casting Society of America's inclusion and Diversity team. So she is working side-by-side by all of our amazing experts and advocates within the arts world. She has amazing kind of connections and work to all of these these people who are within the Disability world, but then she's also a beautiful bridge into the world that is specifically casting and she has so much insight to share with us. So I will stop talking and and yeah, let's hop right into Danielle's bio and our interview with her. Here we go.

Danielle Pretsfelder Demchick has been an active member of the New York casting Community since 2004 currently. She's a leading member of the casting Society of America's inclusion and diversity and training and education committee. She Prides herself on being an ally to artists and inspiring Talent of all abilities for more on her bio. Check out our website disarmingdisability.com.

Nicole:

So welcome Danielle. Thank you so so much for joining us today. How is your day going?

Danielle:

Well, it is an interesting time for everybody, yeah with coronavirus stuff. So we day is good. I've been working from home and doing some work for an online open call and then some Casting Society cares work trying to find virtual volunteer opportunities for members and I got trained in one where where you're like a listener not like a counselor or a therapist, but I'm not trained in that. So I was kind of interesting and when on my long walk, which is what I've been doing with all the lack of yeah was needing to be outside.

Nicole:

I love that. I mean, I'm sorry that you are stuck inside, but we're so happy to have you here. I'm wondering if you can start kind of by talking to us just about your professional Journey? What has that looked like what is it that you do? And how did you get to where you're at today?

Danielle:

Well, I'm the casting director. I've been working in casting for 13 no 15 about 15 years now. I was an actor as a kid I come from a family of not people that are in this business not an entertainment at all. My mom's a speech pathologist and one of her patients had a daughter who was a talent agent and I used to go and perform at the nursing home when I had days off from school and she was like you have to meet my daughter.

My mom was like “don't tell my daughter what your daughter does” and then I ended up signing with her and I acted as a kid for a bit, but I always wanted to be on the other side and I always loved the woman that was my agent. She still an agent today. Her name is Nancy Carson. She's also a really great advocate for kids in general of all kinds and I was just inspired by her.

I didn't know that I wanted to be a talent agent 'cause I knew what the people when I went in the room. I was always like what are they doing on the other side? I always wanted to be on that other side. So I loved that like a casting director got to read with actors and meet all these actors and I always loved that and then I interned in casting and they always had me in the room either reading with actors and then I worked for someone who wasn't big into working with kids.

So I would be the person working with kids he would always throw me in the room and he said “you remember all of their names and they like you” so that sort of became my thing there and then I worked in a lot of independent films.

One of the first Independent films that I worked on was called Adam with Hugh Dancy, which is about a guy with autism. And I had never really dealt with any sort of casting within like with the just within the Disability Community until that time I guess but then I always was like why did we cast?

and well, I guess that's not the most interesting story, but I wasn't I was always interested in putting real stories on screen and real people on screen and I've always had I've always been surrounded by people with disabilities. My mom being speech pathologist. I mean, it's not a “Disability” per se but she would run these laryngectomy picnics and events and I was like little and I'd be running around with laryngectomy. He's and people were like “weren't you scared of them?” and I was never scared or freaked out. I was always around people that had various disabilities.

My mom did a lot of work with the deaf. So I signed as a kid and I just might help my grandpa is a volunteer was a volunteer clown at the Shriners Hospital. So it was always around people that had you know various “deformities.” I guess was what like they were called when he did it and various different differently different abilities. So and I was never scared.

I just kind of accepted that as what was part of my life. I don't know and then my uncle works with with learning disabilities, and I guess that's also always been a part of my life. And I've just always thought it was important to see our world on screen. That's what I loved about casting. I've never really been as interested, Like I've always been more excited about the actor I meet, that I think is just like an incredible actor verse meeting a celebrity, like I don't even you know, there's so many people that bring so much heart to something that I'm like that is the person that moves me, like it'll usually

be someone from like some random independent film that I'll meet and I'm like, "oh my gosh, I can't believe I just met them."

You know, it's like seeing somebody who works so hard and just is so incredibly talented that usually you know, that really makes me excited like I'm working on something right now where we're hoping Marlee Matlin is appearing and I'm like, "oh my gosh, like I like I get to go?" like maybe this set and I'm like any other time. I'm like, I didn't even know who that Instagram celebrity was, but other people are freaking out, you know, it's all about these actors that have been working for so many years and bring this like incredible history that I love.

Nicole:

That's what I love that that's amazing. So get casting you're still casting today and and it sounds like kids are still really your flavor and we know that because you're here with us that disability is part of that flavor as well? Can you talk to us a little bit of about, Yeah, what was the journey kind of into the disability world?

How did how did that begin? I know you were sharing, you know kind of your growing up really was a foundational layer. But as far as like professionally and starting to really try to work with kids and advocate for them in the space. Where did that start?

Danielle:

So the president of CSA the Cast Society of America, Russell Boast is amazing and has a real focus on Diversity and Inclusion and when we started doing these Diversity and Inclusion open calls. New York was tasked with sort of being the home for performers with disabilities and LA was sort of the homework for the trans-initiative. And what we did was in order to kind of service both communities within one year New York took on PWDs for the year and they took on trans and then we swapped.

So I really was, like the ball rolling on all things grassroots outreach all of that for CSA for performers with disabilities. I kind of came on the committee just as like oh like, you know, we have like a night where everyone signs up for committees once a year for CSA. And this was the committee that one of the committee's I was excited about and there was a lot of opportunity and room to really take ownership and Leadership of it.

I loved that it was such a commitment of the president of the you know, I feel like a lot of times diversity and inclusion. It's like so there's like the, you know Technology Group and there's the this and there's the that and like there's no rules and regulations like who wants to take on Diversity and Inclusion? and it's like I guess I'll do it.

But with the president of CSA, he's this is a huge initiative of his it's something that's been important to him since before he was in casting he has an incredible history and he's done a lot of work throughout Africa and he really has seen that there's a lot of incredible "actors." like I would say in quotes that are not trained. Like there's a lot of

people that are just naturally incredible storytellers, but they haven't been given the tools and opportunities to tell their stories on screen.

And what we decided to do that within diversity inclusion, and he's been pulling resources into it because there is such a lack of training for people that aren't your "standard actor." Is that we've been doing this three prong approach with different communities. So we do first a town hall where we have members of the community calm as well as Talent agents, managers, we've had some press come and we have some people kind of do a round table.

There's we've done it a few different ways that will have like a round-table of no working actors that are within this community as well as maybe an agent or manager who represents a lot of actors with disabilities. And then we'll have a casting director who's maybe just you know, come off of casting a project that really Incorporated this community and we all just chat about it.

And then from there, we invite all those attendees and we also put you know more press out to come to a training event where actors get to do like an on-camera commercial class, theater film class. We've also done like theater and musical theater classes and The Business of The Business and they get to kind of ask questions. Like should my headshot show that I'm in a wheelchair? Should my headshot incorporate whatever my disability maybe? Should I have on the back of my resume, write, I on the back of my head shot should I have on my resume that you know, whatever it is that my disability is? Or should I wait until I get in the room? Should I be wearing a wig if I don't have hair?

Like, you know, we get into like really nitty-gritty things and that's I mean those are particulars with PWDs, but you know all communities that we've worked with have different issues that come with a picture and resume that you don't think about like, for example, we worked with trans actors.

Should they be putting roles that they played before they transitioned? you know, should you be saying that I played this female role- but now your male is that going to be confusing same thing when you're putting a role on PWD on your resume, could you say that it was for a theater for the deaf? or should you should you say that it was an all disabled cast? Does that matter?

Like what is it that should be on there in terms of training or should you include, or like noting that you use a communication device? If you do should you ask if you should bring that in the room? I mean we've had so many different questions- will I scare a casting director if I ask them if it's an accessible space and it should be an accessible space.

There's so many questions that you don't necessarily want to ask or your agent some agents or we've been told that people are like, oh, I don't want to ask them that they're not going to want to see you if I ask that but you have to advocate for yourself. How are you getting in that building? If you don't know if you can get in that building, I mean, I'm always surprised by that. I was with an actor friend in LA and we were at a very fancy restaurant and I said I said, you know, my friend wants to come in and I don't I don't see a ramp. And they're like, "oh you can come this way."

We had to go through like literally the garbage. I mean how would an actor feel going through the garbage and then coming into a producer session? Like how do you feel ready for a job interview if that's the case and if that is the case, I'm not saying it's a good thing, but it'd be nice to know that before you come in. Maybe you'd come in a little bit early so that you feel like you can take a moment to regroup and do all of those things.

So we just we have these very candid conversations with actors and they can ask casting directors. And we also talked about picking a scene that's you know, good for you a scene that maybe incorporates who you are. Some people are afraid to do that. Picking something that also shows who you are without it being all about your disability. We talk about all different ways of choosing material that works for you. And then we do an open call we call it. It's a registered open call you sign up online for a slot.

Everybody's taped and added to a database that's seen by casting directors all over the world. And we've had incredible success from our database. One of the first stories that like I was like, "okay, this is really working" was I got an email from a casting director in New York and they said we need an actor was actually an actor with a limb difference. We're hoping for a girl like they were like, you know, we're going to be brought about it. We're really like if we could just pick the perfect person it would be someone in their like mid to late 20s explain all these things. I'm like, I have a link for you, but I know the perfect person and she ended up booking it and it was amazing and it was a top of show guest star. And she was amazing. I mean it she was on NCIS.

I mean, we've had a lot of success like that and you know, a lot of times it has been a role that is disability specific. But I also think you get in the room with that casting what I've seen is they reach out to me about a disability specific role but then you get on that person's radar and they're bringing you in for other things. I mean, they're not seeing you as only that and that's been a huge success.

Is that you know, you're getting in a room and you're getting on somebody's radar and you're having the opportunity to book something based off coming to an open call that took you 5 to 10 minutes. And also getting all this free training and at that training you get to meet all of these cast and directors in your city like you might not be meeting the

cast and in Chicago will watching your link. But you're getting the opportunity to work with the top casting directors on your material, which is really fun.

And I just love seeing how much the actors grow in both their skills and confidence from getting to be in the room like that. So that's one of the things that we're doing is a refresh of our PWD link. That's one of the big things that I've been really pushing for and I got the green light. We just don't know if it's going to happen when I was going to happen but the goal is for it to happen in July.

Sarah:

Yeah, and I think that's so powerful because like there are these microaggressions that exist like there is this stigma that exists like even though we live in a post like Ada world and it is 2020 and now I hope that because we're having these conversations and that helps establish the expectations going forward. So like, you know casting directors can know that this type of information is important so we can facilitate like how to do this better.

So it's not that every single person that is applying for these roles has to go through this whole conversation and and feel these anxieties that we could you know have this be like, okay these are the things that are included in spaces and we know that people like this exists and we know that people with these different types of disabilities are talented and worthy to be here and I'm not going to think of them less based on solely on their difference.

And that it really adds to their ability to you know, create real and authentic characters regardless if they're being, you know listed for role with the disability specific or more or just being a coffee barista that it's irrelevant if they have a disability or not. So I just I think that that's really important. And this is really helping to shape how we have these conversations moving forward. That was a comment.

Danielle:

a lot. Yeah, I think a lot of people also what I found it's not that they don't want to be hiring actors with disabilities or that they don't want to consider them. It's like they don't realize that you should be looking at everybody forever.

Thing or they don't know how to ask certain questions. Like I get asked a lot of questions and people like "I don't know how to pose this to someone" or "I don't know how to do this" and I'm like "just ask me like" or ask the person.

I very rarely seen an actor be like, "oh you shouldn't have asked me that" or like or an advocate say "don't ask me." like I'm happy to connect you with an advocate to ask about this or that.

I mean, I there was a show that I went to see some the my like co-chair New York It cast a project and it was this like traveling theater thing in the park. And she cast an actor with with a lower limb difference and he had to like hop around change costumes. Like things that I couldn't do myself with two legs while I couldn't go that fast and like change and like you basically had to balance on one leg and change behind a tree. Like it was crazy.

But I think she just asked him like do you think you know, "I really want to bring you in for this do you feel comfortable doing this?" and he's like, "let me see what I can do. Like, let me do a trial run in my apartment and see if I can you know, take my pants off with standing on one leg. And yeah if I can then I'm going to come in for the audition"

But it's the same thing as saying I can't. hit like a high G like, you know, I can't. Like it's not related. Some things are just out of your you know, tool belt and that's okay. But there's very few things that, especially someone who's been a functioning adult with a disability, can't figure out how to do is what I've found.

Sarah:

Or you'll be able to ask for appropriate supports in and you know accommodations or that type of thing too that it's like, okay. "Well if we did it this way, then I can totally do that" and being able to negotiate and sort of work through those different needs.

Danielle:

I mean you modify things in life for so many different reasons whether it's a recipe because you don't like the way something tastes.

Are you know something doesn't feel comfortable when you're doing a workout class, you know, you don't like planking on one side. It hurts your elbow. Like, you know, there's stupid things that nobody thinks- it's not a big deal. It's just like what you do. DSo why can't you modify something most of the times when you modify something? I that's the other thing is I really think you make it better.

Nicole:

I love that and I think what the position that you particularly hold Danielle. That's so special to a to us like the community. I'm going to go ahead and speak for the community as a whole is the fact that so many of these spaces, like we I feel like me as a person every day. I'm you know, I'm able to very easily talk about having one hand and I know what I can and can't do.

but I a lot of worlds that I need bridges into the other spaces of privilege that that unless I have a bridge or an on-ramp into it. I don't have a way in and I think that's what you have so passionately in eloquently than willing to take on is is you've been willing to engage with the community and you haven't been scared to ask the questions and you haven't been scared to say what do we need to do to get this ball rolling in to get people

into these spaces of privilege because because we exist and we we are here and we want to to enter into those spaces.

It's just a matter of figuring out again, what that on-ramp is, which I feel like yeah, that's that's the very special role that you play. So can you can you talk to us about about I guess maybe maybe the right word is what is the responsibility that you feel like you have kind of in being that ramp or how do you balance- you know, the fact that you are you are the the casting director kind of being the bridge to the community? Does that question make sense. I kind of asked it in a weird way.

Danielle:

Yeah, I think I know what you're asking. I mean the thing a lot of people, I'm not saying actors with disabilities or people disability, *people* don't understand is that casting directors. What we do is we provide like the we go shopping and bring home the best results and say like this is what looks best on you. But ultimately we're not paying the bill. So it's the producer who chooses what they want. So it's like I could go in the dressing room and say like all these things look great and like the thing that everyone agrees looks atrocious you could still buy if it's your wallet, you know.

So my job is to show the best, you know to give someone a plate of the best ideas. And give them a selection and give them all different types of options. You know, so everyone's rolling casting is different but the types of projects I typically work on it's not like they're saying we want someone who looks like this looks like that.

Were building putting together an entire puzzle and if it means making a modification- like somebody might not be a sibling we might decide there a cousin. Like that's happened before because someone just seems like such a perfect fit for the role and if it's just or that they're an adopted sibling or we figure out a workaround if it's someone that we think is a star.

But for smaller roles you don't do that. You know, we have to really you know, they say they want someone who does this they do that. But with what I do I am neat because I'm Network casting. It's a bigger picture that I'm usually putting together. Is that the larger rolls.

But I will always provide options of all kinds. I mean, I'm also were really big into our I'm really big into body positivity and like inclusive casting and that sense and a lot of times when I'll show somebody with a disability of some sort, they don't even necessarily know in the initial casting tape that they have a disability unless it's something that's you know, more obvious or that they had to we had to hire an interpreter for the project or like that that hits the bottom line.

But even so it's like \$75. I don't think anyone's really like, you know figuring out that that's until they watch the tape that that is who that person is. And we've just I've

always been kind of under the guise that you present the best actors and we're always looking for all kinds of actors.

And if it fits the storyline will present that person. And that's kind of been what I've been taught unless it's something you know, again like a historical like there's a project. I worked out where they wanted exactly what they wanted that you know, they wanted if somebody was six foot there were some that was six foot seven and a lacrosse player and the director wanted someone who had some lacrosse experience and was between and it was at least six five.

Nicole:

Very specific

Danielle:

Unless you're looking to like recreate something like that. And that was an interesting project in itself because that if there had been an actor with a disability, if there had been someone with a disability in that story- then would have been very adamant about that too.

So I have to respect that. It was about the historical, you know re-creation and honoring that story. And it was a 9/11 related story- there's obviously a lot of emotion tied to that.

But in general what I've found is that when you present options that includes actors with disabilities, that's the best way to show people that this is what we want to see on like this is an option. And if that actors the best option they're looked at and sometimes I've had searches that they're like this person like is really interesting. I don't think they're perfect for this but can we keep them in mind for something else?

So I have like a folder that's PWD KIM, KIM is to "keep in mind" because I don't want them to fall off someone's radar because they were great and they just didn't they weren't perfect fit for the role which had nothing to do with disability or not. But I think the best way to keep momentum is just to keep - it also auditioning getting actors in the room that gets, and I've heard more even from PWDs.

I feel like that other actors that there they get more self tapes than in-person auditions and stuff tapes are great too. I mean any opportunity is great, you know any chance to show what you got. But I think the more opportunities you have to get in the room.

It's a craft. It's like you know, you're practicing more and more and that's why I'm like even if this role I don't think they're going to be open to a PWD. I'd rather bring that person in give them the best audition and it might either sway the producer they might write a role for that person the next project they work on they might be interested in them might just kind of give them perspective on the character. Because unless you

show everybody that's a good option. I don't think you're doing a service to the project as a casting director.

Nicole:

That's fun to hear. Yeah, that it that it really is. It's not a narrow field that you're thinking of even in terms of specifically disability, it is this like wide big picture that you're thinking about that's that is cool again just a comment. So sorry Sarah. I cut you off. What were you going to say?

Sarah:

So I do I do want to ask what what do we need to do as a disability community? To really sort of help change that like, how can we help really when we say that like we want to be included at the table what are things that our community needs to do in order to really sort of make that happen?

Danielle:

I think training like I think all actors need to train and taking advantage of training opportunities and I don't think it's being like "I'm going to a training opportunity for actors with disabilities." I think it's going to the best training program in your community. And not being afraid of maybe being the only actor with a disability that's there.

I mean if you're in certain cities that you know, you're probably not going to be the only person if you're in a Major Market, but or if there's no great acting class near you or if there's a class that's okay. Maybe then also working with a coach remotely. Like making yourself the best possible candidate for the job. I think with anything that's important and I think it's also in this is something that I work on as well as I'm on the training and education committee with the casting Society of America is that we need more disabled casting directors.

We need more people bringing their lens to our world. You know, it's really really important. There's not there's you know, there are a few but there's also not a lot of casting directors of color, like this is you know, something were not unaware of I mean the cool thing about casting is that at least I mean one minority standpoint women are the bulk of casting directors are women. So we bring something in that regard but it started out casting started as a field of kind of like a job that secretaries did.

So it's not so shocking that it was women that you know that there are more women in it, but I think encouraging people with disabilities to pursue casting and to look at it as an option and it actually really, is I think, an awesome job for somebody that maybe loves performing but is self-conscious in some way.

I mean, that's kind of part of what I love about it is I love performing. I love reading with actors on the other side. But like you guys see right now, I don't have my hair done and I

guess I haven't but I didn't know but like I don't like the idea of having to be "pretty every day" and like do myself up and like be judged for my appearance. I just know that wouldn't be healthy for me. But I love that I get to be on the other side of the table and you know one second I'm reading and I'm the reporter the next second I'm Grandma then I'm an annoying little brother like I love that and I love the creativity of casting.

So I think it's an awesome field for somebody that has an interest in performing but maybe doesn't want to be on stage or doesn't want to be on the other side of the camera. I think there's a lot of opportunities in casting and that's a huge Initiative for us right now is trying to broaden our lens.

Nicole:

I love hearing that I love hearing again. It's this like I said before I feel like you were thinking much more widely. Than I was and of course, I wasn't even thinking well, duh put people with disabilities in a casting position that makes but of course that makes so much sense and the idea of it being being a possibility. I mean, I'm sure that I kind of shared my story with both of you but in a nutshell, I remember very clearly the first time I saw someone with one hand on the TV. The first time right because for me that was a shocking and exhilarating experience.

And I was a 10th birthday party and it happened to be believed or not Miss Iowa from that year when I was 10 years old, that happened to have one hand. So all of us ten-year-olds came into the living room from this birthday party. And I watched this girl who I of course, I'm from Iowa. Yeah who looked like me on TV and that that stuck with me so deeply that even you know, when I went away to college my undergraduate degree is directing and theater management.

Why is it that? because I never saw an actor on stage that looks like me but then when it came time to later in my life when I did do a pageant, I didn't even question it. I knew that it was a space that I was welcome because so many years ago 10 years ago. I had had that experience where that was the first person so vividly I watched on stage. So I think I think that just the more that we are creating whether, we realize it or not, these moments for people to be seen and to be heard it's opening up kind of a deep-seated space for the Next Generation to to fill the shoes that we aren't able to kind of even dream of filling right now.

I don't I don't know if that makes sense. But that's that's kind of that feeling that it gives me which leads me to wonder -How have you seen how have you seen disability representation change from the time almost 15 years ago when you started to now?

Danielle:

I really didn't see actors with disabilities coming in for auditions. It was like the sort of like pseudo-celebrity roles were the only people that I would see being cast in projects that I worked on maybe like there is one there's one project that I worked and I

remember there was an actor with the disability that was cast for a non-disabled role and it was like a really big deal.

It was someone that the director who's the big celebrity met and wanted us to cast and I think again it was always like celebrities related and it was shocking to me. I was really excited but it was shocking and if you go back 15 years ago any role that was pretty much in a major movie that showed disability in any way was played by an able-bodied person.

So I was an assistant. So I just you know was there to observe and you know type up lists and bring the actors in and out and you know do the deal memos and do all of those things. Like I was very active in the casting project. Am I my bosses who I worked for were always, you know, incredible and we're very collaborative, but they weren't being given, you know, the initiative to go out and look for actors with disabilities for those roles because we were trying to we were working at independent film.

We were trying to get you know, what we were doing was partnering with the producers to get the movies green lit we weren't saying. Oh, I wonder if there is actually an actor with you know name anything. That would be great in this role. It was like, oh the person's attached. It's going to actually get made.

And I mean I've seen a lot of backlash from that recently which you know, I don't want to slap anyone's hands and say they shouldn't have made this movie or that movie or that an actor can't act and you know portray something else. But at least try to find somebody.

I mean in my experience, there's so many great actors with disabilities. Like at least try and why don't you put the celebrity in the other role. There's usually at least two big roles like, you know, there's just but I do see the world starting to change with that. and I mean, like I said about Peanutbutter Falcon, I'm like obsessed. I mean it was amazing.

And Zach actually grew up right around the corner from me. He went to my school. But he wasn't in mainstream classes and I didn't really know him. He was younger than me. So he's not like the reason that I'm interested in this or do this or anything like that. But but I you know, I always went to schools that were very inclusive. I guess like my mom and told me like I should I didn't even really like remember this but that there was you know, a boy with CP that was in my preschool and like it was never you know anything

But you know, Zach didn't have the acting opportunities that I had in high school like he wasn't invited to audition for the main stage shows from what I remember and look at him now, and I mean he was incredible in that movie and that movie was incredible and seeing him in like the perfect example. I mean Shia LaBeouf can totally have a movie

GreenLit and he is has been such an amazing advocate for this community. I love seeing what he has to say.

And I mean, he's a character he was in the movie that I cast. I was an assistant on many years ago. And I know, I cut my finger on a headshot. Like he'll never remember this, but I cut my finger and he was like, "oh you're bleeding" and I was like, "oh my god. Oh, yeah" and I like want to run any other and I get a Band-Aid. He's like, "do you want a pizza?"

Everyone giggles

Danielle:

Like I had no, he was just like a total non sequitur.

Sarah:

I know before we started the recording research adding for a little bit and you had said that you really wanted to be in in film and media because you really wanted to share real stories and that you really sort of had this connection to real stories and wanting to see real stories up on the big screen. So I feel like that really lends itself into wanting to find that authenticity and I just wanted to specifically highlight that because I know we had sort of talked about that before but I really like the imagery. It's like no this is like this is a real story and these are real people that are in these stories. I think that these are the ones that need to be shared and need to be told and that we can all really identify with because they are real.

Danielle:

Yeah, I think that's what people want to see and what everybody gravitates to. You know, the best actors like the reason that they're so great is that it seems like they're telling you something real but if you are watching something and it's, I mean, there's just nothing ,you're not bringing the lived and experienced that another actor can bring it to the same way. I feel the same way about the trans community and having worked with that Community as well. I mean, there's very few, you know.

You know this like a whole political thing, but it's like nobody would ever put someone in black face in a movie. Like I wouldn't you at least try to find somebody with a disability to be on screen.

Nicole:

That's how and that's how it feels like there are so many roles that that you know, we are barred out of and that's a reality that we have to understand and that's okay. But also there's so many parts that we can play and so we want the opportunity to to be able to play those parts when we can do.

Danielle, I want to be respectful of your time here. So I'm just wondering if before closing with us? First of all, how how can somebody who's listening and they're so excited about all the stuff that that you've been talking about. How can they get involved in the disability inclusion initiative? And then also what what's next?

What what should we be looking for kind of in Castine and moving forward? So hopefully we'll be putting together that PWD refresh link and we're hoping to do to really blow that out. It's going to be in New York for the in-person element of it, but everyone's going to be welcomed to self-tape for the other areas. So that's something to stay tuned for hopefully, it'll be in July. Coronavirus could shift things, but hopefully we'll be back un and running as the world by July.

And it just means I have lots of time to prep for the event. And like I said, there's some talk of some other stuff with that that could be really really cool another initiative another organization we would be partnering with potentially.

So the best thing to do to stay tuned would be the Casting Society Cares Instagram will have stuff as well as our Facebook our casting we have a diversity and inclusion Facebook so that would be the best place to find out about all of that.

Hopefully, we'll have some announcements there and then we're really trying to put this Coalition together as I mentioned a little bit of to kind of have actors with disabilities going to networks and explain and show why we need to have better representation. We have the research to show how many people in this world are a part of this community.

And the crazy thing about this community is that it's a community that you can join at any time, without any notice which is mind-blowing to a lot of people they don't realize that you could be a part of this community at any time. And also you don't always see so many people have invisible disabilities that people don't realize or don't know about and they don't realize that like, their neighbor, has you know is actually a member of this community, or that someone in their class or –

There's so many different facets of it that I think need to kind of be put front and center. And just say we're here and we should be included in the numbers when your diversity and inclusion initiatives and doing the research and writing these roles.

So hopefully all of that will happen in 2020.

Nicole:

It's so exciting. I'm so excited for this!

Danielle:

We're going to happen in some capacity coronavirus will not slow us down completely. I just hope it all happens.

Nicole:

Yes. Yes. Yeah, it will. I will it totally will yeah, of course always let us know if we can be useful, you know, and spreading the word or doing whatever, you know to help to help ease that or make that happen, of course and and yeah, thank you so so much for joining us and for for giving us an hour of your time. We're just so thankful and honored that you were willing to have this conversation with us.

Danielle:

Bye!

Sarah:

Thank you for spending part of your day with us. We want to give thanks to our Network Public House Media for intro beads to Jason Barns with CYBRNETX for our logo art we want to remember Patrice. You can find his work at normalperson's.com.

Nicole:

Be sure to follow Disarming Disability on Facebook and Instagram and lastly, be sure to check out our website disarmingdisability.com where you can find all 13 episodes of season 1 links to resources transcriptions and discussion questions for each episode and check out our blog where we feature amazing Disability Advocates. See you next week. Bye!