



## ADVERTISEMENT:

### HOST:

Accessibility often doesn't take into account different needs — if it is accessible for one person it might NOT be for another. Accessibility is not universal, but according to Aimee Louw it can be harmonized across our country.

This may look like more elevators in subway stations or ASL and LSQ becoming official languages. In her talk, Louw advocates for a future where accessibility isn't treated as a favour or charity but as justice and equality. Where people are paid a living wage, where taking care of yourself is prioritized, and where ableism is abolished.

Welcome to The Conversation Piece. This is Aimee Louw

### AIMEE LOUW:

I'm so honoured to be here tonight and a huge thanks to The Walrus crew who have really centred accessibility in their planning. And that's made it possible for me to be here for sure. And also a huge thank you to the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre for having this perfectly ratio ramp to this stage - that doesn't always happen. Yeah. Yeah. So it's the 150th anniversary of the Confederation of Canada. It's the anniversary of settler colonial Canada, as we know it today, more or less, and while it can be good to mark milestones and recognise where we come from, as others have suggested tonight, it's more a time to acknowledge them to celebrate per se for me. It's a moment to really take stock. It's important to honour, and remember those who have been left out personally, I think we need to look backwards in order to best move forward, which is what this series is all about.

I'm interested in where the stereotypes and cultural understandings of disability and difference that are expressed today, come from. They can be traced back to the founding of this Confederation, which is sort of the source code for our legal and social systems that Sarah wonderfully articulated. When the country was formalised, it was founded on a very exclusionary image of who was a legal person. That was a white European-descended man who was heterosexual non-disabled and was of a certain economic class who owned property. And this history affects people today in really real ways.

So, we have no choice in how Canada began, but we do have a choice as to how we move forward. For me, the future is accessible. I have a very good imagination over five years ago when I began being confronted by more inaccessibility in my daily life and began to think about accessibility and disability



as a political term, I began making podcasts and blogging and basically seeking answers to questions like what is accessibility.

And I imagined what it would be like at the same time to swim over to friend's houses instead of dealing with bus ramps that don't work most of the time in Montreal and a ridiculously low accessibility percentage of the Metro stations in Montreal. I think they're at 5/ 68 now. So, I basically was imagining life would be like without ableism, the systemic discrimination against people with disabilities and just like, you know, no human is universal, no accessibility can be universal either. In other words, what makes something accessible to me might not make something accessible to you. We have different needs and desires and at the same time for me, there is a common sort of critique of the utilitarian view of human bodies and minds is only productive things and getting value out of only our productivity. Because accessibility, isn't something universal, something that everyone can know all the possible facets of.

I reached out to members of the disability communities that I'm a part of to share just some of their imaginings of what an accessible future would be for them. I got quite a lot of responses. I'm not able to share them all tonight, but some major themes emerged.

Self definition, self-representation in the media, including the news media, ASL and LSQ languages being recognised as official languages of Canada.

Everything from, you know, disabled people-led trainings for all public institutions, including educational institutions to enforcing the accessibility measured outlined in building codes and something that also came out, especially given the current boom, the current legal project that the federal government has undertaken, which is to draft the first ever federal legislation on accessibility. There was a lot of discussion of like the harmonisation of services and rights across the country, because as you may know, someone in Quebec might have more access to home care.

But as I mentioned, we have really poor transit options vs, you know, somewhere I've been spending time in Vancouver this winter and transit is amazing there, but there are no equivalent home care services in B.C., that I'm aware of. So, all these sorts of things, harmonisation could be a huge part of the future of accessibility. And so many of these things relate to policy and policy enforcement. However, ableism is found in more locations than what is governable. It's also found in public perceptions, interpersonal relations and social interactions. So, anything from, you know, the pretty recurring retard jokes in Hollywood movies or the seemingly benign, "What happened to you? Why do you use a wheelchair, et cetera?" These things are all locations of ableism as



well. So, for me, an accessible future, must go beyond understanding accessibility as an accommodation, towards a cultural understanding of access where it's not considered a favour or a charity, but justice and the slogan, nothing for us without us comes to mind in this instance, for sure, for me, the future is accessible.

I've come to learn that when I say accessibility, I'm referring to a lot of things, myself things like freedom to wait to live the way we want with the ease of accessing culture, sexuality, education work, and having a living wage, no matter what. For me, it's a negotiable goals for projects and timelines to really account for times when I have to do the valuable labour of taking care of myself and the rest of the future is accessible. And with my remaining time, I invite you to imagine with me, imagine when accessibility isn't defined in resistance, but in flourishing, I invite you as I encourage myself as a settler to recognise, to reckon with the exclusionary beginnings of the country and shift our thinking of accessibility from integration and accommodation to social transformation, because integration feels a lot like assimilation requesting accommodation constantly feels like an inundation, even for the slightest things.

And too many “crips” spend our precious time on symbolic participation. Frankly, I'm tired of being told to be patient. Liberation from ableism will be a celebratory elation. We will not go back and that that's not just my imagination. Thank you.

HOST: Aimee Louw is an activist, writer, and podcast host, and former fellow at The Walrus, and she's just one of the over 800 speakers who have wheeled, walked and web-rammed on to our stages at The Walrus Talks.

Speaking of The Walrus Talks, this season is starting up again, with talks and topics you're not going to want to miss. Head to [thewalrus.ca/events](http://thewalrus.ca/events) to find out how to register for our virtual events and sign up to the events newsletter.