



## **The Think Inclusive Podcast**

**Season 10, Episode 20**

**Ryan Wilson | Team Trust**

### **Audio Transcript**

**Tim Villegas**

From MCIE.

Producing podcasts on the road can be a bit tricky. This episode is going to be stripped down a bit. My name is Tim Villegas from the Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education, and you are listening to Think Inclusive, a show where with every conversation we try to build bridges between families, educators, and disability rights advocates to create a shared understanding of inclusive education and what inclusion looks like in the real world. You can learn more about who we are and what we do at [MCIE.ORG](http://MCIE.ORG).

For this episode, I speak with Ryan Wilson, the director of Team Trust Productions. Ryan created Team Trust to help mission-driven organizations reach and serve their communications. He wants to help connect people with the entities, organizations and resources they deserve to grow and flourish. Ryan's heart is advocating for persons with disabilities, because he is one. Ryan has befriended persons with the same disability as his (Osteogenesis Imperfecta), and established life-long relationships with persons with visual impairments, hearing impairments, cognitive disabilities and mental illnesses. Each one of these relationships changed his life.

Before we get into today's interview. I want to tell you about our sponsor, Together Letters. Are you losing touch with people in your life but you don't want to be on social media all the time? TogetherLetters is a tool that can help. It's a group email newsletter that asks its members for updates and combines them into a single newsletter for everyone. All you need is email. We are using Together Letters so Think Inclusive Patrons can keep in touch with each other. Groups of 10 or less are free and you can sign up at [togetherletters.com](http://togetherletters.com).

Thank you so much for listening. And now, it is my pleasure to welcome Ryan Wilson to the Think Inclusive Podcast.

Why is it important for people with disabilities to be represented authentically in the media?

**Ryan Wilson**

And that's a good question. I think it's very important, I guess that generally speaking, for anybody to be represented authentically, and the media, whether you have a disability or not.

But for the disability community, a lot of times we are inaccurately represented in commercials, films, movies, shows, marketing, and photos. And in the news, we're oftentimes although this is changing, more often cast as inspirations by the disability, I'm in a wheelchair, I'm inspiring because I'm conquering my disability. For one, I don't think I'm conquering my disability, I just have a disability. But we're just not necessarily portrayed accurately. But when the person telling our story, for example, really takes a moment to understand who we are on a personal level, then I think that really changes that perspective of not only the storyteller, the journalist, whatever, but also the person receiving a reading or viewing the story, you would have a better idea, Tim, and any listener out there that, you know, I'm not necessarily conquering my disability, I have a disability and I have a wife, just like anybody else out there. The only difference is that perhaps my experiences are a little bit different than yours. You might not know what it's like to go to a beach with your family and not realized you can't get to the ocean because there's sand and a wheelchair power wheelchair does not necessarily go in the sand. But at the end of the day, we're all humans, and I think a genuine, authentic connections. Super powerful in many regards.

### **Tim Villegas**

Can you remember a time where you saw disability authentically represented and what did that do for you?

### **Ryan Wilson**

I think a couple powerful examples of this ability being authentically represented are two films that come to mind. One is *Crip Camp* that was released a couple of years ago. And it was just a remarkable story about this remarkable camp doing great things. And the individuals with disabilities are not cast as inspirations, or suffering from this or that. They showed them laughing, smiling, it basically showed their whole range and whole spectrum of emotion and experiences. And so I think that's, that's a big highlight in my mind. In addition to that, I tend to like this film called *Rising Phoenix*, it was also a good highlight, I suppose in the disability community really focusing on powerful stories that Paralympians and we saw, I think, an equal balance on disability, but also humanity. Tell me about team trust productions. So, Team trust Productions is disability web production company, so I have a disability. And the main goal of what we do is to authentically portray and tell the stories of individuals with disabilities originally started from a film we did, and went to Park, Colorado, on visually impaired skiers, and are able sighted guys. And so we've worked with a lot of nonprofits, all over the US, to help them create videos that highlight their impact on the disability community. But we are expanding progressive way into higher education. So that's working with universities, and community colleges, to help them really ramp up their understanding of the disability community. And what that looks like is making sure what their marketing is now is accessible and inclusive. And also, of course, accurately represents this ability. And so that does come with videos that comes with just revealing content, and strategizing ways to make sure that current students at universities, and future students feel like they belong. And they know that they are welcome all around campus.

**Tim Villegas**

And you're currently working on a number of projects for higher ed.

**Ryan Wilson**

Ah, yes, we are.

**Tim Villegas**

You're like, I'm so busy.

**Ryan Wilson**

Yeah, we, we have a few projects going on. Right now. It's really interesting to I think I should probably shed roll this into our conversation, it's really interesting. To learn how higher education we've used disability, unnecessarily from an external side. So what we see just by looking at their website, but when we talk with leadership, there is a difference in how I perceive this ability and how they perceive it. And that's fine. We're all learning. But there's really a kind of a learning curve there for everybody. But just understand why it's important to highlights and promotes on a consistent basis disability.

**Tim Villegas**

Is there, is there an example that you can give?

**Ryan Wilson**

I think a big one is that universities, generally speaking, just don't get the importance of including disability. So there's a big plus everywhere across most industries, to include diversity and marketing to represents the world in which we live. But when we talk about diversity that doesn't include disability. And disability just so happens to be the largest minority in the world. How about that? And so the reality is, and a lot of the leadership with universities don't have this abilities, a good portion of them don't really have a personal connection with the disability community. So they just don't understand why is it important that we do, for example, a film on one of our high achieving disabled students? Or why is it important that we add ASL to our videos? And I think anymore, there is an pretty good attempt by a lot of universities to have accessible websites. Because it's becoming the law. It is the law. But to go beyond that, is something that I think they're still trying to grasp. I think you make a really good point about leadership having that there aren't enough school leaders in higher education that have disabilities, but also the personal connection.

And I think that's something that we see in K 12 education as well. Especially, let's just look at school boards. School boards often make decisions about curriculum, and hiring practices. And they set the tone and the course for equity initiatives, inclusion initiatives. And if it's not on their radar, they're not going to they're not going to think it's important. Yeah. Right. And I think you're exactly right. When one thing I try to do is I try to tell stories, personal stories to me of how this would have benefited me when I was in college. So for example, like when I graduated from high school, I went to a community college initially, and it was 20 minutes from home, I could stay with my parents and devour all their food and save up my money. But when I

went to the University of Illinois, after that, like, that was an hour and a half away from where I grew up. There was no staying at home. And so understandably, my parents had all these concerns about my safety when I went to a big D one school with 50,000 students, what would I do in an emergency? Where would I find personal assistance?

All these questions that are really left on answered and so I went to school there. And so I try to talk with universities about that experience, and just not knowing and I talk about how, if we more openly address how you serve the disability community than someone like myself would be more inclined to utilize your campus utilize your classes. One main reason I went to University of Illinois was because I knew for a fact that I was welcome there. They had a dorm that was extremely accessible. Every single door was automatic way LCC that yeah, that makes sense. If you know that a place is welcoming. You're gonna want to go there is you're not gonna want to fight just because it's closer to your house.

Yeah, and I wasn't interested in going to a four year school right next door to home just right. It's nothing I pull off.

**Tim Villegas**

University Illinois. That's the fighting alumni.

**Ryan Wilson**

That sure is the firing line. I yep, that's where I went. That's where my dad and I follow the Illinois sports flooding a line I growing up when I was a kid and Sam just had to keep on following the line I and during all the losses.

**Tim Villegas**

But you're in Colorado right now.

**Ryan Wilson**

I guess I am. Yeah. So I'm in Colorado Springs, Colorado. I moved out here. Last August. Romine went away. Oh, wow. So pretty recent. Okay. Yes. So I realized one day that I was tired of being surrounded by cornfields. So I Thought I'd see higher ground literally and figuratively where I'm at in Colorado, I don't see any corn. It's actually sometimes hard to find in the grocery store. But I don't see any corn. I am pretty close to the Air Force Academy. So I still kind of have the university and sights, but totally different vibe and Central Illinois.

**Tim Villegas**

Yeah, I bet. Wow. What are some things that would have helped you in K 12 education?

**Ryan Wilson**

That would have helped me find a good university or just would have improved my experience in K 12, I think improve your experience. I guess I shouldn't assume that you had a bad experience in K 12? That's a good question. I haven't, I try not to think about K 12. Too often. I had a personal assistants helped me out every day at school. So they would carry my books,

make sure that nobody hit me, etc. I feel like overall, I had a good experience. I was in the marching band, interestingly enough, in high school, so I played percussion, primarily xylophone. And I think it could have been helpful throughout that process. If we would have included me in some of the conversations around what I could do. And what I wanted to do, and not that anything was bad. I think sometimes, it seems like I might have been limited to a couple instruments that we could modify to my wheelchair. I didn't want to play bass on my back just would not work out. But maybe I would have enjoyed other instruments in the Kachin arena. So I've played good miscellaneous type things. The cow Belva triangle is our phone, but maybe a snare drum would have been fine. And I will admit that I wasn't the best percussionist, I had priorities and those priorities. I can't say were school. I tried to compete with very academically smart brother. But he was just so far ahead of me, grade wise that my I'll just enjoy my NBA and Cheetos and call it a day.

### **Tim Villegas**

So when you we left college and you were trying to find a job? What was that experience? Like, as a person with a disability?

### **Ryan Wilson**

Yeah, I think the experience of finding a job fresh from college is and can be challenging for a lot of individuals with disabilities. And there are a whole bunch of possible reasons that, for me, what was interesting was, and my final semester of college, it felt, man, I really had some exciting projects going, super exciting projects that I just finished. And I was interviewing for a job at in Colorado Springs. And it was a very cool job, one that I really wanted and worked hard for. And naturally, I didn't get it. So that was exciting, or not. But after that there's kind of this period of applying for I think, for me, it was maybe 60 to 70 jobs or so I kind of lost track, and just not really getting anywhere you feel like you're just spinning your wheels, man. So I took I made the decision to go down the free route. So I kind of did a free internship didn't get paid unpaid internship with the big 10 network at the University of Illinois. So I was getting really good experience at the UEFI with the victim network, creating films, but at the end of the day, I mean, you do need to pay your bills eventually. That does that hit your bank account eventually. And so that did lead to a few opportunities. Within the UI system, but for me, the best and most meaningful route seem to be to create team trust. Because I just saw a lot of opportunities. And the pay is better than doing an unpaid internship. But the unpaid internship did pay off in the long run. So yeah, it was, it was the experience of applying for a lot of jobs and desperation and little bits. But eventually, kind of pulling a few moves and finding your way on the other side.

### **Tim Villegas**

When did you create or found team trust?

### **Ryan Wilson**

Yeah, so technically, it was January 4 of last year, so 2021. But it had already been brewing in the background. From the film we did and we're apart. Okay. And the film.

**Tim Villegas**

When did you complete the film?

**Ryan Wilson**

Yeah, so we were in Winter Park filming January of 2018. We did the film, we wrapped it up within a few months. But that was just a film. And then I decided, What if I made this a business? And so that's when the idea came to form an LLC. So were you like a media? Well, I don't know what the I don't know, what would the the major would be. So I was journalism. So I enter college wanting to be a play by play sports announcer for the NBA. I grew up watching Shaquille O'Neal, I wanted to be Shaq. Turns out he's a lot taller than I am. And the lava figure. So I thought the next safest and most realistic way to getting involved in the NBA was to do play by play. And at the U of I actually announced some funding Elena games, putting on a basketball games. It was great at a baseball and volleyball, and women's basketball. But I realized that I think I found storytelling to be more meaningful in our just sitting down with somebody sitting down with you, getting to know who you are, on a personal level, beyond what I see on social media, which is learning what motivates you and what your goals are. Also what life is like, when nobody is around. And that I think really struck me personally. And that's why it seemed trust formed the way it did.

**Tim Villegas**

So the film that you made the

**Ryan Wilson**

Seeing With Trust.

**Tim Villegas**

So once you made the film, and you said, Hey, I think this could be what I do. What, like what was that like? The walk me through the steps, after you had decided to go that route?

**Ryan Wilson**

There are quite a few steps, I think then this shoe was a was just kind of rying to find, and almost create an opportunity that would be fulfilling and meaningful, but also something that could financially support me. Fresh from college. I can't say I had too much knowledge of how to do business. I can't let's just add that sounds like a good idea to me. But the reality is, goes beyond that. Does this sound good to a university or college? Or does this sound good to a nonprofit? And what's the data backing up this and that and so, initially, it was like, Okay, I established this LLC. It seems like I should do something with it. And so as with I think most business owners who are very new to the idea of owning a business and really leveling up there for a flash and there's big trial and error period. If this doesn't work, this doesn't work. Okay, if I do a million things that don't work, maybe this one will work. And I kind of feel like I'm still in that phase. But I'm learning a lot. And I think it was, in retrospect is very important that I created teams for us just personally, I think I've learned a lot and grown a lot and been challenged a lot. But yeah, I think looking back, the beginning stages of Team trust that that period of making a zillion mistakes was very important. I just keep making more mistakes.

**Tim Villegas**

Yeah, we yeah, we all will. Yeah. So what's your goal with Team trust that you have some projects going on in higher education? But is that something that? Is that something you want to keep doing? Or is there something else that you would like to do?

**Ryan Wilson**

Yeah, I think higher education is really crucial for teams last because there is a growing number of kids being born with disabilities. And so universities and colleges will continue to see more and more students with disabilities on campus, requesting accommodations. And so it's important that they understand even at a basic level, why it's important to build a personal connection with the disability community in some way, shape, or form. In the future, you know, I'm always down for about anything with Team trust. I think the end goal was just to help businesses, regardless of size, understand deeply the importance and value of the disability community, and really integrate disability into what they're already doing now, on a consistent basis. I think, seeing a lot of big name companies like Apple and Google, do nice and very big things with this ability. But that's not exactly the case for most businesses. And so if there is some way team trust can change that, then that's going to be very satisfying.

**Tim Villegas**

Our audience is mostly educators, school leaders, principals, special education teachers, general education teachers, so a lot of people who work in schools. What is something that you would like to leave with that audience? That's good question. I don't know.

**Ryan Wilson**

I think it's just really important that we understand that any student with a disability, it's just human, where we all have hearts. And we all appreciate the feeling of feeling safe and heard and seen and understood. I think a lot of times, we can get so busy teaching a class, working on a syllabus and agenda, whatever you call it, that sometimes we can forget what matters and that's to really touch the lives of the students. On a personal level. It's great to get an aim, everybody should go for an A plus, I can't say I got many that happens. But I had a couple professors really just take the moment to understand and listen to who I was. And because of that, I excelled significantly, in each of their classes, because I knew I had somebody who had my back and was open to accommodating my requests and needs and also challenged me. And so I think that's just really important for any teacher educator to remember. We may look different, we may approach Life a different way. But if you took a moment you, I don't know, ask us what we are interested in or what we like or don't like about their classes, maybe we could really build a personal deep connection that could go beyond the classroom. And for those two professors I talked about, they became solid friends after the classes, and I still stay in touch with whatever. So yeah, I think that's, that really helped me and I did again a plus in their class, but I track how all we can do is try

**Tim Villegas**

Ryan Wilson, thank you so much for spending some time on the think inclusive podcast.

**Ryan Wilson**

Thank you so much, Tim, and everybody for listening.

**Tim Villegas**

Think Inclusive is written, edited, and sound designed by Tim Villegas, and is a production of MCIE.

Original music by Miles Kredich.

If you enjoyed today's episode here is one way that you can help our podcast grow.

Become a patron and get access to ad-free episodes, behind the scenes posts, join our Together Letters group, and sneak a preview of MCIE's new podcast series, Inclusion Stories.

In fact. I'm here in Seattle Washington ... this week getting more tape for our podcast series. This is so exciting folks.

Special thanks to our patrons Melissa H., Sonya A., Pamela P., Mark C., Kathy B., Kathleen T., Jarrett T., Gabby M., Erin P., and Paula W. for their support of Think Inclusive.

For more information about inclusive education or to learn how MCIE can partner with you and your school or district visit [mcie.org](https://mcie.org).

Thanks for your time and attention, and remember Inclusion Always Works.

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