# Voices of ABLE2 Episode 8: Game-changing leadership: Advocacy through lived experience featuring Jim Kyte

[00:00:00] **Emelou:** Welcome to Voices of ABLE2, where we share real conversations about disability, inclusion, and community. I'm Emelou Porquez, and today's episode is called “Game-Changing Leadership: Advocacy Through Lived Experience.”

In today's episode, we're joined by someone whose life speaks powerfully to resilience, leadership, and advocacy, Jim Kyte.

Jim is known as the first and only legally deaf player in NHL history, but his impact extends far beyond the rink. He co-founded the Canadian Hearing Impaired Hockey Association and has led hockey schools for deaf athletes, creating pathways for greater participation in sports. Jim has been a dedicated champion for disability rights through board leadership, community advocacy, and his support for organizations like ABLE2, [00:01:00] where he served as honorary chair of its annual fundraiser Evening in the Maritimes in 2022 and 2023.

He serves as a dean at Algonquin College and was appointed a member of the Order of Canada in recognition of his lifelong commitment to community leadership and inclusion. In this conversation, we explore the lessons he learned growing up, how he navigated professional hockey with profound hearing loss, and why self-advocacy matters, and what it will take to move from awareness to true inclusion.

Let's get into it.

Hello, Jim. Welcome to Voices of ABLE2. Thank you so much for joining us today.

**Jim:** My pleasure to be here, Emelou.

**Emelou:** Awesome. So let's get right into it. You have lived through many chapters as a professional athlete, leader, educator, advocate. When you reflect

about your entire journey with advocacy, [00:02:00] where does that story begin for you?

**Jim:** It really starts when I was a child, when I witnessed the advocacy of my mother.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** So I, uh... Just for viewers who may not know me, I am profoundly deaf, and a lot of audiologists are surprised when they meet me to find out about my profound deafness because I speak well. Most people who have my level of deafness, uh, you can tell from their speech and so forth they have a, an impairment.

Um, so I come from a family of five boys and one girl. My father and all five boys are deafened, and, uh, varying degrees of, of deafness within the, the boys. And, uh, so I have a profound loss. I wear two very powerful hearing aids, and, uh, the most powerful you can buy. But I am a lip reader, so if [00:03:00] we were talking, today I have closed captions to help me, but if we were talking and you put your hand in front of your mouth, I would hear something, but I wouldn't understand what you were saying.

**Emelou:** Okay.

**Jim:** So back up a little bit. So my dad was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** After the Great War, World War I, my grandfather put his name into to... He was working for the Royal Bank, and he put his name in for international service. So he was stationed in Port of Spain, Trinidad. And he was there, and that's where my father was born.

And when he was a baby, he contracted the, the, the whooping cough.

**Emelou:** Oh, okay.

**Jim:** And they think that's why my father lost his hearing at the time, because there's no history of a hearing impairment prior to my father in the family.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

[00:04:00] **Jim:** So there's six kids in my family, and I'm the third. I have an older brother and an older sister.

It wasn't until my older brother was having difficulty in school that they said, "Hey, well, maybe we should check his hearing." They didn't think to check his hearing because they thought of the whooping cough and it wouldn't be hereditary. But my brother had a difficult... Uh, he was... His hearing was tested,

**Emelou:** and,

**Jim:** um, he was found to be deafened.

And so my hearing was tested when I was three. He's three years older than I am. And I was immediately set with a, a pair of hearing aids, actually, hearing aids strapped to my chest.

**Emelou:** Okay.

**Jim:** With a buckle with wires going up. And, um, so when the school board found out, you know, my brother and then myself and then my younger brothers, uh, they wanted to send our family, all the boys, to the Belleville School for the Deaf and Dumb.

And that's [00:05:00] what it was called in the '60s. And, uh, my mother became the head of the PTA, and she fought the school board, and she wanted her children to be integrated into the school sy- into the, a regular school system. And, and, uh, as long as we did well in school, we were allowed to stay.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** Um, so o- uh, at least I did.

I don't know about my brothers exactly 'cause I wasn't in their class, but I always sat in the front of the class.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Uh, so I could read the lips of the teacher, but also because if one of my classmates asked a question, I could turn around and read their lips when they asked the question.

**Emelou:** Yes.

**Jim:** If I was in the second row, let's say, not in the first row, and someone in front of me asked a question, I wouldn't understand what they would say, what they were saying.

Mm-hmm. So, uh, so because my [00:06:00] mother's advocacy in fighting the school board, that, um, was my first exposure to it, you know, fighting for her family. And because of that, uh, my brothers and I are what I call, uh, to be orally deaf in a sense that I communicate orally. I don't sign. I know how to sign very, very slowly, very like stage one, but, uh, I'm not in the environment enough to really practice.

Mm-hmm. So if I had, if my brothers and I had been sent to Belleville, who knows what would have happened, but I would think that my, my speaking ability would not be what it is today.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** And I would be a, a proficient signer And there's nothing wrong with that. Absolutely nothing wrong with that. American Sign Language is beautiful.

It's a beautiful, beautiful language. Uh, it's just that I am a product of my environment, and, uh, that's, [00:07:00] uh ... So it's a long-winded to say, you know, if I look back, my advocacy started with my mother.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** And then my father was my role model, though, uh, in a sense that they were both role models, but in terms of potential of what I might be able to accomplish, my dad being deaf and he was a good athlete.

Uh, he was voted the athlete of the half century. And, uh, so my dad grew up, and that is the ... Antigonish, Nova Scotia is where St. Francis, uh, Xavier University is located.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** So, uh, anyways, whatever the season was, he played it, football, basketball, boxing, tennis, he did it all. And, um, so he was a great athlete, and then he became

He was also a very good student. He got by by lip reading and someone taking notes for him. Yeah. And, uh, he went on to become a dentist. So he always had a saying, and it was not [00:08:00] politically correct to use the term anymore, but he said, "You may have a handicap, uh, but you don't have a disability." It's a mindset.

**Emelou:** Yeah. Interesting.

**Jim:** I do a, a presentation I call the five Ps.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And it's really based on my, my, the learning that I got w- from when I grew up.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And number one is, you know, number one is perspiration. You know, you have to work hard.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** That's attitude. Uh, preparation.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** Uh, perseverance, and then passion. And so if you do all those things, you should be able to accomplish most anything you put your mind to.

And, but a lot of that is I, I c- I was raised in a family, in a big family, right? So I, I'm a product of a team, of a team

**Emelou:** environment.

**Jim:** Mm-hmm. And you don't do anything by yourself in this world. So you do need support. I was very, very fortunate to be born into a loving and caring family.

[00:09:00] **Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And with that support, and so I feel privileged in that way.

Uh, but you can't do anything in this world alone.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** And so it's really important to To work within that team, but it's also really, really important to self-advocate. I did a lot of corporate speaking, and I would be approached afterwards by someone who may be disabled in the community, and they said, or particularly the deaf community, and say, "I was too shy to come to the front."

And so, and, or ask questions. And I said, "Well, that's what you need to advocate."

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Well, people want to help, generally, in my experiences, people want to help others, but nobody's a mind reader. Mm-hmm. And, uh, so you need to articulate, you need to come forward and ask for help if you need it. Mm-hmm. You can't just assume people know that you [00:10:00] need help, particularly with a disability that is a, an invisible disability- Yeah

that I have. But there's so many people that have disabilities that are invisible.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** And so we need to let people know. And some people don't like doing that. By the same token, people don't know what they don't know.

**Emelou:** So anyways,

**Jim:** yeah, so advocacy is really, really important. And then I had a hockey school for, for deaf kids.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And, uh, the things sort of changed when my third son was born.

**Emelou:** Okay.

**Jim:** My son, Owen, has been diagnosed on the autistic spectrum.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And so his hearing is supersonic. But, you know, uh, I didn't know what autism was, uh, 31 years ago.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** I call it the day the A-bomb got dropped, and, uh, it's sort of like a what the, what is this?

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** The internet was new, and, uh, so I spent all my time researching-

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm ...

**Jim:** about what it was, and I found out that the brain was [00:11:00] still, you know, according to science, the brain was still malleable till they were six years of age. And so my, uh, sole focus was, wasn't so much the label-

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm ...

**Jim:** but it was, uh, what's the diagnosis?

What's the treatment? And so that's what I was focusing on. And so we didn't leave any stone unturned, uh, uh, to... I was doing 30 hours of therapy a week with him. And then, uh-

Um, but the, the label I didn't care about until you hit the school system.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And at that time, uh, that's when my mother's, the ghost of my, my mother's still alive, but shouldn't say the ghost of the, my mother's, uh, spirit embodied me. So she advocated for me. It was my turn to advocate for my s- my child.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And I would go into, uh, meetings with the principal, the [00:12:00] IPRC meetings, and say, "This, these are the services that my son requires." And I felt,

no, the, the principal was doing the best job that they could. Yeah. Uh, this, this principal was twinning. They would do, they were, they were a principal at two different schools, one in the morning, one in the afternoon.

At that time, the, the, the rules were changing constantly. I knew the rules better than sh- than she did, and I would educate her during our meeting. She said, "I'm sorry, we can't provide that." And I would say, "Well, actually, yes, you can. It says right here."

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm. Mm.

**Jim:** But so that's the preparation side.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** You know, knowledge is power.

Mm-hmm. And, uh, I would try to share that information with others, other parents as well. Um, so the advocacy for my, my son, and being a professional athlete, people look at you as a, whether you like it or [00:13:00] not, you are a role model.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm. Mm.

**Jim:** And, uh, so that's something that I took very seriously.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** When I, I was a first-round draft pick to the Winnipeg Jets, I mean, the first thing I did wasn't related to hearing.

I helped out with, um, a, a campaign for dyslexia

**Emelou:** Mm, okay ...

**Jim:** in, in Winnipeg. So if I can be a positive influence on one person, that's fantastic.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** Right? And if I could use my position to affect change, that's even better. Uh, if it's one person or an organization or a community, then I would, I, I thought that, uh, everybody had the responsibility to try to make the world a better place for when they leave here-

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm

**Jim:** compared to when they arrived, so.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** Wow.

**Emelou:** It's really great. No, I really appreciate the, the whole, uh, you know, storytelling of your [00:14:00] journey and how, uh, the influence of your parents on your advocacy, your self-advocacy, and how it translated to your own children, to your career as an athlete. Um, the, and it's very beautiful how you talk about it and how you say people should self-advocate because it's also our responsibility to take care of each other and look out for each other 'cause everyone needs support.

So I really, really do love that. Thank you so much for that.

**Jim:** Mm-hmm.

**Emelou:** Um- And, and in speaking in your entire journey, uh, I understand that you grew up in a loving and very caring household, you know, the very supportive environment that you grew up in. Um, were there any barriers at all growing up? Uh, obviously there are, but, like, what are the particular barriers growing up, um, during your NHL career?

Did you feel like you were seen or treated [00:15:00] differently because of your disability? And if so, how did you navigate around that?

**Jim:** Yeah. So a common question I would get from the media when I was a player was, uh, how do you play in the NHL when you can't hear very well?

**Emelou:** Mm.

**Jim:** And my response normally, uh, is I don't know what I'm missing, so I don't, I can't...

It's very difficult to answer that question. I was born this way, and I was given a set of tools to do the best I can with what I have. But I know that I did things differently than other players-

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm ...

**Jim:** in a sense because, uh, the echo in, in the arena-

**Emelou:** Yeah ...

**Jim:** in minor hockey, I never went first in a, in a drill, a new drill.

And even in the NHL, new drill, I'd try to strike back a little bit, not go first, so I could see it happen a couple of times. I really [00:16:00] got by on monkey see, monkey do. So you hear, you think the explanation, but you see it happen a couple times, okay, I know what I'm doing, boom, and I go and execute on it.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** So that was one thing. And then I had to teach my coaches, so the higher level of team sport you play, whether it's hockey, football, volleyball, b-basketball, there's a ton of communication, talking between the players and the coach on the sidelines and, and so forth. I didn't have that ability. So, uh, I tried to compensate for that and, but one of the things is, is the coaching when he, when he's doing a chalk talk.

And I had to teach this to my, my teachers as well. So a teacher would like to turn their back on the class or coach and go to the whiteboard and write and talk at the same time. So I had to teach my coaches. I said, "If you could just do whatever you're doing on the board and then turn to face the team to explain what you [00:17:00] just wrote, that would be wonderful."

Or I would position myself so that if the person was right-handed, I would, I would position myself on their right, so I'd be able to see their mouth when they were talking.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** So I would get up, and I would physically move myself, but I would teach my coaches that. And then it wasn't until junior hockey

**Emelou:** when

**Jim:** people are starting to pay to watch you play, you have paid attendance.

And in each arena, they clean the glass on the inside and the outside of the plexiglass going around the rink so that the fans have an unobstructed view of the action on the ice. But so, but now I'm told that regular hearing players can hear skates on the ice, and you can judge how quickly someone is coming behind you and how close they might be and so forth.

I never had that ability, but what I would do is I'd go back and [00:18:00] instead of looking through the glass, I'd look at the glass, and you get a mirror-like reflection.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** At least I would know if the player was coming off my right shoulder or my left shoulder. On the fore- I played in an era of touch icing.

You had to go back and touch the puck if it's an icing call.

**Emelou:** Okay.

**Jim:** Today they play in an era of no touch icing. So as long as the puck goes back, they'll blow the whistle. The reason being is a lot of players would chase to get to the puck, and sometimes injuries occurred when they, you know, just like-

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm

**Jim:** you're going as fast as you can trying to get this open puck into a, you know, hard boards.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** And, uh, so injuries happen. So now they do no touch icing. And so, uh, I would use the glass to see where he was before checking. And if I'm in the corner, you could see the reflection on the other side of the ice to see if maybe there is a, a, a [00:19:00] teammate in position to receive a pass from me.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** Another thing, how do I communicate with my goaltender? I'm coming back for an icing call. The goaltender is looking up. I want the goaltender to put their hand in the air. And I may have started a trend where the goalie would put their arm in the air because I'm going back to let me know that it's actually icing.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And if the icing is not, if it's not icing, the goalie would point one way or the other as to which way she thought I should turn with the puck.

**Emelou:** Hmm.

**Jim:** Okay? So just with hand signals.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** And then when I was on the bench, I wanted to know who was up next to play. So instead of watching the play on the ice, I would look at the coach.

And it's not because I was giving him the Puss in Boots eyes, like- Mm ... "Please play me."

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Uh, you know, it was, "Okay, who's up next?" Find [00:20:00] out who's up next. If it's me, great, I go back and I start watching the game again. I just needed to know using my visual cues as to who was up next.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And another thing that I didn't realize I did until I started teaching other kids how to play defense, I was in a defenseman camp.

It was Gary Galley's defenseman camp. Gary played in the NHL. It was myself, Luke Richardson, and Gary Galley. He had a D camp And I remember specifically, we were playing in Edmonton against the great Edmonton Oiler team of the 1980s, Gretzky, Anderson, Messier, Kurri, Coffey. And if you're a hockey player, you'll understand what I'm saying. So I'm on the offensive blue line. Okay. I'm on the other team's blue line, and I constantly counted

subconsci- subconsciously counted how many visiting team, how many opposing team jerseys were in front of me.

So I'm on offense, and I'm thinking, "One, two, three, four, five. One, two, three, four, [00:21:00] five." I see where everybody is. I just know that everybody's in front of me. And then one, two, three, four... Oh, where's that fifth guy? My bench is screaming at me because Glenn Anderson had snuck behind us. I couldn't hear my bench.

**Emelou:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Jim:** I didn't know. I would not have known, but because things didn't add up in front of me- Mm-hmm ... I said, "Well, where's the missing player?"

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** The player was behind me. So that is another thing that, that I did. Mm-hmm. So, and then I would study game film of the opposing team, uh, what their systems were, how they killed penalties, or how they had the pow- I was never on the power play, but I was a, a penalty killer.

And, um, the tendencies of various players and their favorite moves and so forth, but really what our systems were. I get the puck, there's option one, there's option two, there's option three. And [00:22:00] so I knew our systems just as well as our coaches did.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** And I became a very positional player on the ice. I was always, for the most part, in the right position all the time.

And if there was any talking to happen on the ice, I did all the talking. I did the directing. If my partner wanted to talk to me, everybody in the rink knew because he would yell as out loud as he can. So a combination of all those things that I know that other players didn't do.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** There was a study done in 1999 and 1997 that was released.

They looked at the 1985 birth year in Ontario.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And there were 30,000 kids in Ontario playing minor hockey.

**Emelou:** Okay.

**Jim:** And they followed all 30,000 kids and what level of hockey did they get to. And so out of the 30,000 children in [00:23:00] Ontario, six players played in the NHL. So I- Was able to perform at a very high level

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm

**Jim:** But I did it differently

**Emelou:** Yeah

**Jim:** Than other players.

So that's what I talk about pe- when you, when you hire a person with a disability, you're going from A to B

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm

**Jim:** You know, I, I say a non-disabled person or whatever would do something the traditional way

**Emelou:** Yeah

**Jim:** Right?

**Emelou:** Yeah

**Jim:** But then a person with a disability may do it differently, but the end result might be, will be at least the same or better.

**Emelou:** Yes

**Jim:** In my case, I was better than-

**Emelou:** Yeah ...

**Jim:** 99% of the players

**Emelou:** Yeah

**Jim:** Right? And so give somebody an opportunity-

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm ...

**Jim:** to succeed or fail, but you won't know until you give that opportunity to somebody with a disability. [00:24:00] And people with disabilities are the largest untapped resource for any organization. But you know, what barriers I had

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm

**Jim:** The barriers, I, I just looked at I have a problem

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm

**Jim:** What's the solution?

**Emelou:** Yeah

**Jim:** And with my son in the autistic spectrum, we always use the movie The Martian with Matt Damon.

**Emelou:** Mm. '

**Jim:** Cause he would say, "Let's work the problem." Yeah,

**Emelou:** yeah. "

**Jim:** Let's work the problem. What's the solution?"

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** So we say, "Okay, let's work the problem." And we do run into barriers, for sure. It's usually from people with closed minds.

**Emelou:** Mm.

**Jim:** Like my, my son from grade, up to grade six, uh, he was never invited to a birthday party. And, uh, but the unique thing about my family is my, my twin boys and my son Owen are born on the same day. [00:25:00]

**Emelou:** Oh, wonderful.

**Jim:** Yeah. So it was one big birthday party.

**Emelou:** Oh. One

**Jim:** big birthday party. So he never felt left out.

Yeah. Or anybody had a... But he was never invited to somebody else's birthday party. And so that's, that, that's, uh, not easy for a parent to watch that. Yeah.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** So I, I, I've always been focused on problem-solving.

**Emelou:** Mm.

**Jim:** And what actions can we do to make things different.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** So there's a lot of people have these false filters.

They make assumptions about what people can and can't do based on what they see or what they hear, and you gotta get rid of those.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Mm-hmm. Um, so the barriers that I faced were mostly, you know, the, in the NHL, there are no accommodations for anybody. Mm.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** It's the high level, highest level of professional sport.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Right? So you need to [00:26:00] survive or you don't. So that's where I came, you know, I said, "Well, I'm sure I need you to accommodate me-" Yeah ...

**Emelou:** but that's not

**Jim:** going to happen.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Uh, because as soon as you make it, there's someone else o- every year, every day trying to take your job. Mm. There's highest level of professional hockey.

And so, uh, but when I came to- To when I joined, I guess, the real world and I started working at Algonquin College, you know, there are accommodations in place and, uh, I didn't really ask for it, but I was not afraid of starting every meeting. If people didn't know me, I said, "Listen, uh, I am, uh, deafened. I'm profoundly deaf.

I'm a lip reader." I usually say, you know, if they didn't know I was, I, I played professional hockey. Yeah. I made a fool of myself in front of thousands live and millions on [00:27:00] TV. Who wants a few more people? I don't really care. But, but, but, uh, you know, if you're going to speak, keep your hands away from your mouth. Use your big boy or big girl voice.

Right. And, yeah, because I, because I'm a lip reader, so I put people on notice. And some- uh, many times you're sitting on these long rectangular tables with a lot of people.

I'm not afraid of getting up and, and just moving around so they can see their mouth.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Yeah. And the people are like, "Oh, what's he-- He's moving." Well, I have to move.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** I have to move. I don't expect them to move to me, but, you know, I ma- I make mistakes all the time. I try to laugh about it. People are very generally understanding.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** Um, uh, you know, that's my hearing side of things. But I've also, you know, I had a traumatic brain injury when, uh, my, my career was ended by a car accident. Uh, [00:28:00] somebody ran a stop sign and T-boned my car, and, uh, my car flipped three times according to witnesses. And, uh, I woke up with the fire department cutting me out of the car.

So I ended up with a severe post-concussion syndrome. Mm-hmm. So I was a, a kid on the couch for a couple of years. I was-- I deal with headaches and, um, and I've had five different heart surgeries. And yeah. So, uh, you know, so I'm limited into what I can and can't do. Mm-hmm. Um, but I tell people, "You know, you still feel sorry for yourself?

Just open up the paper." There are so many people out there that are worse off than you. Mm-hmm. We are so fortunate to live in Canada.

**Emelou:** Yeah. We're

**Jim:** so fortunate, you know... So bar-barriers to me are problems to solve.

**Emelou:** Mm.

**Jim:** Now, um, recently, you know, I used to cycle quite often [00:29:00] in the Gatineau Park, part of my training.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And then the people who managed the Gatineau Park, the NCC, decided to close the parkways- Hmm ... uh, during COVID to private motor vehicles. And so it became, it became to the exclusive use of active users, but the majority of the population does not have the ability to cycle in the Gatineau Park by self-propelled modes.

**Emelou:** Okay.

**Jim:** So I spent five years advocating and filing a human rights complaint against the NCC. Mm-hmm. It was done with the tribunal, so now we have a, a shuttle service- you know, for people with disabilities, and now we have an on-demand, a shuttle service for anybody, but anybody. There's an on-demand shuttle service this year because the shuttle would normally end at 4:00 in the afternoon.

Mm-hmm. 4:45. The last bus is at 3:00, 3:10. And [00:30:00] one of the most popular things to do is to go to the Champlain Lookout. If you've never done it, it's a beautiful spot for, for sunset.

**Emelou:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Jim:** But now, uh, there is a on-demand shuttle that people can take. You have to order it, um, the day in advance.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And you don't have to be...

They say, "Well, I'd never take paratransport." Well, para- the STO Paratransit provides the service. To me, it's anybody-

**Emelou:** Yeah ...

**Jim:** who doesn't have the physical capability to cycle in the very steep inclines in the Gatineau Hills-

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm ...

**Jim:** is eligible to take that service.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Right. So at least they're providing a more reasonable accommodation for people.

And if I hadn't fought them or advocated for and used the the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Tribunal, they wouldn't have anything in place.

**Emelou:** Wow. [00:31:00] Hmm.

**Jim:** Yeah. So it's, uh, it's, so I, and I wasn't fighting for myself. It's not just about me, but it's, it's everybody getting that gets-

**Emelou:** Yeah ...

**Jim:** that decision.

And, and it's all about accessibility being bolted on after the fact rather than, you know, part of a universal design process. If this is our service, okay, we're gonna close the parkway. Well, we have a duty to accommodate people who can't get access, so what is that? And they should have that in place before they make any changes.

**Emelou:** Yes.

**Jim:** Right?

**Emelou:** Yes.

**Jim:** Five years later

**Emelou:** Yeah ...

**Jim:** incremental change every year, it should be right at the front. So, um, so barriers can be overcome, but the challenge really is attitudes.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** Ableist attitudes that you have to look at. Sometimes that's education. Some people just have an unconscious bias. They're n- and, [00:32:00] um, really are trying to...

You know, you need to be forceful when you're advocating, whether you need to use the law of the land at times to get that enforced, and that's a last resort that you would think you would need, but, you know, that's the reason why it's there.

**Emelou:** Yeah. It's really incredible to hear, um, especially as someone who has very limited knowledge on hockey and how the game works.

Yeah. Um, it's really interesting to hear how you've navigated the game. Like, you have your own strategy in playing the game, and it's very different from how o- other players do it. But really, it reflects the broader disability community of how they work through barriers. Like, they have creative solutions.

They think of different ways that people necessarily don't think about. And I- I love what you said about that's why we need to give [00:33:00] people with disabilities more opportunities, like in the workplace, because they have these solutions that not many people have the same perspectives on. As we record this now during National AccessAbility Week, it's certainly, you know, a time to celebrate the progress we've made in inclusion and accessibility while also recognizing that there's still more work ahead.

So from your perspective, where can we, the broader community, get better at, and what can we continue to work on?

**Jim:** Well, I sort of touched on it by, uh, opportunity.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** Those in the positions of, I won't say power, but, uh, whether it's a, an entry-level job An executive job, you need to give opportunity to people.

And I, I like to f- quote Frank Zappa. Frank Zappa the musician. Yeah. He said, like, "The mind is like a [00:34:00] parachute, it only works when it's open." Right? So if you're closed-minded- Mm-hmm ... or you, if you have these false filters. So it's about, it's about getting people out there who have been successful in, uh, navigating a disability, proven themselves, and hopefully their mind will be open to be giving, not them, but people who see that will be given an opportunity to others.

So we've come a long way, but we have a long way to go.

**Emelou:** Yes.

**Jim:** Uh, politically, I look at the Senate, the, the Senate of Canada. As far as I'm aware, now there are invisible disabilities, so I don't know for sure, but there's only one senator in the Senate who identifies with a disability.

**Emelou:** Mm.

**Jim:** And that's Chantal Peticlerc.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Former Paralympian, world champion, and she is in the Senate.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** However, there's 105 seats in the [00:35:00] Senate, but Statistics Canada, uh, Survey of Disability in 2022 said there are 27% of the Canadian population identifies with having at least one disability.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm

**Jim:** So I'm not saying that we need 27 senators with a disability-

**Emelou:** Yeah

**Jim:** in the Senate, but surely more than one.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Right? So nothing about us without us-

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm ...

**Jim:** is very, very true.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And so we need proper rep- representation.

**Emelou:** Yes.

**Jim:** You know, there's been so many great things coming out with the Accessibility for Ontario Disability Act, uh, the Canadian Accessibility Act- Mm-hmm

Accessibility Canada, and we're working towards standards, so things are getting better. But it's almost like I don't need to preach to, to the, to the choir here, but people don't [00:36:00] appreciate disability until it happens to them.

**Emelou:** Mm. And

**Jim:** the saying that David Onley taught me, the former lieutenant governor of Ontario, he said, "Disability is the only visible minority or that, uh, you can join at any given moment."

**Emelou:** Yes.

**Jim:** So I would hope that the attitude that people would have would happened before they got a disability-

**Emelou:** Yeah ...

**Jim:** rather than, "Oh, okay, this has happened to me now. Now I realize, oh, the... I'm in a wheelchair. Wow, I didn't realize that people in wheelchairs, you know, how difficult it is to access the built environment."

You know, here in Ottawa, there was a, uh, a building that opened that hosted events. I'm not gonna say which one, but it got approved. It was brand new, and, uh, they didn't have accessible washrooms. Like, how does that happen in today's day and age?

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** And so they had to create accessible washrooms [00:37:00] after the fact.

How did, uh, an architect design a building without accessible washrooms? How did the city council approve plans without accessible washrooms? So I, I think that accessibility needs to be on the forefront of our planning because accessibility helps everyone. Mm-hmm. It helps everyone.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** And, um- You know, so I'm thinking about me being a lip reader and so forth, but the most challenging time I ever had in my life, and for my brothers as well, was COVID, because everybody was wearing a, a, a mask.

**Emelou:** Yeah. Yes.

**Jim:** Yeah. I couldn't understand what people were saying to me. I almost wished I was signing at that point because I'd lost, I lost the vehicle-

**Emelou:** Yeah ...

**Jim:** to, to, to communicate. It was very, very frustrating.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And, uh, so I was trying to get people to, uh, wear a mask that had like a, a [00:38:00] window that you could see.

Yeah. So that, that was a barrier that was very difficult to overcome for me, but that would be if someone is in a wheelchair, they see stairs. So slowly but surely-

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm ...

**Jim:** slowly but surely, and I, and I look at, I visited, uh, New Zealand once I visited in the '80s and I thought it was so cool how, uh, the indigenous culture was interwoven into everything that they did in New Zealand.

And I said, "Wouldn't it be cool if we did that in Canada?"

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** And then, so at that point, I thought, "Wouldn't that be really cool, not just the indigenous side, but that accessibility was interwoven into everything we did, uh, to make the world a better place for everyone?" And um- Mm-hmm ... so that's the goal.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** And organizations like ABLE2 provide an invaluable service to the community. I really like ABLE2 because it [00:39:00] provides service to all ages-

**Emelou:** Yeah ...

**Jim:** and to all disabilities.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And it's very difficult fighting for the charitable dollar, and, and I know everybody, every disability group is trying to provide service to everyone.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Mm-hmm. Um, so I'm happy to help ABLE2 in any way I can.

**Emelou:** Yeah, absolutely. And we, we appreciate, you know, everything that you do for ABLE2, uh, including, uh, chairing our Evening in the Maritimes for a couple of years, and helping us with all our fundraising efforts, and you know, spreading awareness about what we do.

You've been our champion for many, many years, so we, uh, really appreciate all that you do for us.

Um, I, I really like what you said about disability representation and how not many people understand that disability can happen at any point in someone's life. You know, and whether it be mobility challenges or mental health challenges even.

And these are- [00:40:00] invisible disabilities, um, that won't experience the many physical barriers that we already have. They can have different barriers to these invisible disabilities as well. Um, really wonderful work on what you did at, uh, Gatineau Park, getting NCC to be accommodating to everyone, 'cause accessibility does benefit everyone.

And I, I always kind of like to think about when you're thinking about a program, a, a project, a policy, um- I encourage people to, like, think about who they're excluding, um, at the forefront because then when you say everyone is welcome, well, is it actually everyone, right? So, um- Yeah ... wonderful work that you do in the community, Jim.

Thank you so much for all that you do. Um, I have a couple more questions.

**Jim:** Okay. I'll keep my answers short.

**Emelou:** um, you, you speak a [00:41:00] lot also about, you know, lived experiences and giving them opportunities to be involved in decision-making and building accessibility in programs and policies. What do you wish more people understood about living with a disability?

**Jim:** Well, it's, it's a difficult question to answer. I can only speak about my own experience. Right? Because everybody has a different experience. So what I say could be very different from somebody else, and from what my, my son would be going through.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** So, um- I just think it's, it's, it's the attitudes of people.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** But I, I look at it both ways. I could say that person's really ignorant.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** Or I can try to be more mindful and say, "Well, the person doesn't know what they don't know."

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** But it's kinda like you see [00:42:00] young kids smoking today. They know that it's bad for them, but they're doing it anyways. Mm-hmm.

And unlike my parents who were doing it, and they really didn't know the impact that-

**Emelou:** Mm ...

**Jim:** we know today, so it's education. So there, there are still some people out there, and Desmond Tutu, Bishop Desmond Tutu from South Africa- Mm-hmm ... I'm gonna paraphrase. He said more or less, "If you don't say something when someone's being oppressed, you support the oppressor."

**Emelou:** Hmm.

**Jim:** And so I see a lot of things on social media, or I see things happen in the community. If you turn a blind eye to it because, oh, that's not my responsibility, I don't wanna get involved, well, then you are supporting what's happening. And, uh, I think that it's really important to hold people accountable.

**Emelou:** Yes.

**Jim:** And, uh, point out poor behavior. You [00:43:00] know, there's different ways of doing it, right? You don't wanna show poor behavior yourself, uh, but you need to say, "Hey," like, you know, point out things. Mm-hmm.

**Emelou:** And,

**Jim:** um, be better, be better. And I'm not perfect. And I'm not perfect, so... But, so I think everybody has accountability, uh, has the responsibility to hold each other accountable to a certain extent, because if you let poor behavior go unnoticed, they just think it's okay to do the same thing.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** To continue doing it. So, um, what's it like for people with... For me, it is at times very lonely But I, but I've come to enjoy that-

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm ...

**Jim:** in a sense that I hear people say, "Oh, I wish, uh, you know, the, the world's loud. I just, you know, I got a headache. I wanna..." I don't know, I just take my hearing [00:44:00] aids out, and I-

**Emelou:** Mm.

**Jim:** But, uh, in a lot of social situations, people start to laugh. I didn't see what the person said.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Uh, so I feel a little bit left out of things at times, so communication is, is really, really important. And a lot of time, and I miss a lot of stuff.

**Emelou:** Mm.

**Jim:** But I've come to accept that, and, and many times I j- or I may think, like you hear little bits and pieces, and you see, and you try to make interconnection.

**Emelou:** Yeah.

**Jim:** And interpreting, because communication is more than ver- verbal, you know- Yeah ... there's body language and everything else. Uh, but I try to make

these conclusions of what was said, and sometimes I'm way out in left field. It's kind of funny. People laugh at it. Yeah. And then sometimes it's kind of embarrassing. You go, "Oh, shh."

**Jim:** Uh, but if everybody, uh, was [00:45:00] patient, which is not easy in today's day and age, but patient and understanding goes a long way. And if you don't understand something, don't be afraid to ask. Mm-hmm. And, and I get a lot of people who ask that now. When I had hair, and you couldn't see my hearing aids, uh, you know, people wouldn't know.

Everybody goes through A different experience

**Emelou:** Yeah

**Jim:** And you have to appreciate that experience, whatever it might be.

**Emelou:** Yeah. Yeah. And, and it's definitely something that, that is relatable regardless of ability, right? Like, it, it doesn't mean it's just for people with disabilities. It's also everyone.

Everyone goes through something, and we just really need to be kind and-

**Jim:** The w- the world is a cruel place at times.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** And, um, my dad had a saying, and he didn't invent the saying, I'm sure, but [00:46:00] he, he said, "You know, life is 10% what happens to you, and 90% is how you react to it." Hmm. And th- that reaction is a choice that we all have.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** That 10% we can't control, but we control how we react to things. We can fly off the handle. We can mis- try to solve the problem. We can laugh at it. Whatever it might be. Yeah. Some things are very difficult to face, you know, tragedy, uh, death in the family, that sort of thing. But how you decide to manage things...

And one of the things I learned from my car accident is because I had these intense headaches, and, uh, I never really truly appreciated my dad. You know,

in 90/10 rule, when I had children, uh, uh, you know, had the children and everything else. Um, but, you know, at the end of the day, I [00:47:00] control what comes out of my mouth.

**Emelou:** Mm-hmm.

**Jim:** You know? And so you need to catch yourself sometimes saying, "Oh, I, I shouldn't say that. Uh, how can I phrase that better?" Because at the end of the day, everybody's trying to do their best.

**Emelou:** Wow. Yeah. That's, that's beautiful, and it, I think it's a wonderful message to close our conversation today.

Thank you so much, Jim, for taking the time to chat with me today, um, sharing your beautiful insights and perspectives, and we certainly appreciate all the great work you do in advancing accessibility and inclusion in our community. So thank you. Thank you so much.

**Jim:** Thank you very much for having me today.

**Emelou:** Thank you for listening to this episode of Voices of ABLE2.

Today, Jim reminded us that accessibility is not just about removing barriers. It's about [00:48:00] creating opportunities, challenging assumptions, and ensuring that everyone has a seat at the table. Whether he was speaking about his experiences as a deaf athlete, advocating for his son, or pushing for greater accessibility in public spaces, one message stood out: meaningful change begins when we choose to listen, to learn, and to act.

He also left us with a powerful reminder that life is not defined by the challenges we face, but how we respond to them. Through perseverance, self-advocacy, and community support, barriers can become opportunities for innovation, understanding, and growth.

We would like to thank our presenting sponsor, Sequence Marketing. As one of ABLE2's most trusted partners, Sequence Marketing has played a vital role in amplifying our mission, helping us connect with communities and sharing stories that matter. Your generous [00:49:00] support has made this podcast possible. Thank you, Sequence Marketing, for helping us make inclusion heard.

This marks the final episode of the pilot season of Voices of ABLE2. We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to all of our guests who generously shared their

experiences, insights, and lived expertise throughout this season. We are also incredibly grateful to our listeners, supporters, and community partners for joining us on this journey and believing in the importance of these conversations.

At ABLE2, we know that stories have the power to challenge assumptions, build understanding, and inspire change. This season has reinforced just how important it is to create space for people with disabilities and their families to be heard. While this may be the end of our pilot season, it is certainly not the end of the conversation.

We look forward to bringing you more stories that matter, [00:50:00] continuing to amplify the voices of people with disabilities, and exploring the issues, experiences, and perspectives that help build more inclusive communities. If you'd like to learn more about ABLE2 and how you can get involved, visit able2.org.

Thank you for listening to Voices of ABLE2. If these episodes inspired you, please share it with someone who needs to hear them. Join us next time for another story that deserves to be heard.