Full Transcript – Article 19, Episode 10 Education, Work & Media with Nimit Kaur

Voiceover:

Expression is one of the most powerful tools we have. A voice. A pen. A keyboard.

The real change, which must give to people throughout the world their human rights, must come about in the hearts of people. We must want our fellow human beings to have rights and freedoms, which give them dignity.

Article 19 is the voice in the room.

00:00:00

Marty:
Hello, and welcome to Article 19. My name is Marty Molloy, chief of staff and catalyst at Tamman, and I am our host for our conversation today. Joining us is Nimit Kaur. Nimit is a disability advocate as well as a user validation consultant for Tamman, and a full-time student at Rutgers Camden. Her passions include public advocacy and policy around many other issues, but especially around disability rights and activism. Fake fact about Nimit: She won the Pulitzer Prize in drama for her collection of plays, where each character speaks a different language. Also with us today are my esteemed cohost Amanda Roper, program manager of Tamman's accessibility initiatives, and joining us as a cohost for the first time is Liza Grant. Liza is our accessibility document guru and specialist, and an amazing woman in her own right. I'd like to set the stage for our listeners before our conversation gets going, that this podcast is born from the decision at Tamman to state clearly and plainly that access to information is a human right. The developers and designers at Tamman work hard to make sure that, no matter what use constraint a user may have, be it due to a temporary, situational, or permanent condition or disability, that they'll always have access to the information designed and built by Tamman. This podcast is a call for others to join in a bigger conversation with us. We build the inclusive web, but to do that, we need all of us working together and learning together. Thank you so much for listening. Let's get this conversation started. So, with that, let me bring in Nimit. Nimit, how are you today?

Nimit:
Good, thank you for having me today.

Marty:
Oh, we are so excited that you're here. We have a lot to get to. But before we do, I'd like to, as we usually do, start off with something nice and easy, since we're recording at the end of another long day. This is for everybody here. In your opinion, what's the most graceful animal in the animal kingdom?

Nimit:
I'm a little biased, but I would pick a dog. Because of their personality, being very loyal to individuals.

Marty:
Ms. Liza, what would you say is the most graceful animal?

Liza:
You know, excluding myself, I've been really seeing a lot of jellyfish that I have been perceiving to have a lot of grace. I know the water helps them a lot, achieve that effect, but kind of where my mind went.

Marty:
I really like that. Well, yes, absolutely. That's a good answer. How about you, Amanda?

Amanda:
I was thinking hummingbirds.

Nimit:
Oh, wow.

Amanda:
They're essentially the jellyfish of the air, just floating gracefully.

Liza:
Took the words out of my mouth.

Nimit:
These are much more creative answers than my typical...

00:03:01

Marty:
Nimit, I am right there with you. I am actually going to go with the ever-so-humble, but amazing housecat. My cats are so amazingly graceful. Now, granted, sometimes their depth perception isn't so good, and so they shoot for something and fall. But in the moments when they're not doing that, they are delightfully graceful, and stealth like ninjas. It's amazing to me, so, I'm right there with you. Dogs, cats, hummingbirds, and jellyfish. I am all about it. Well, Nimit, we have a lot to talk about today. Let's get into our segment that's all about you. Can you orient our listeners to who you are? Tell us a little bit more about yourself.

Nimit:
OK, so I came into the United States around 2009, 2010, from India, where I went to a special boarding school for the blind. This is because at that time, they did not

accept children with disabilities in public schools, due to the lack of resources. So, I went to a special private school. That's where I learned a lot of blindness-related techniques that still continue to help me, and I think is the reason for my independence today. But I lack opportunities in the mainstream, which is why my parents and I moved here. So here, I attended a public school throughout my middle school and high school years, and that was a very great and inclusive experience. Then I went to Camden County College, where I earned my Associate's in Liberal Arts, and here I am at Rutgers, earning my B.A. in Sociology. I will be graduating in this May, and then I hope to pursue disability law in my future graduate studies.

Marty:
That is so impressive and awesome. Congratulations for graduating soon.

Nimit:
Thank you.

Marty:
I am super excited for you for that. So, you recently took the LSATs. Why law as your next step?

Nimit:
So, as you know, we have the Americans for Disabilities Acts, which provides legal access and reduces discrimination in public and private access. But a lot of the knowledge and awareness still lags today, and even though things are lot better than, say, 1900s or even 1990s and the early 2000s, there's a lot of cases, even today, where either it's access to places or access to information or access to anything that everybody else is getting that people with disabilities are not getting. This could be an appointment, experience, basically anything around the realm of ADA. So, I would like to help people gain their rights and also educate the general public about disability awareness, about the ADA. And one day I would really like to be in the policy spectrum, where I have the opportunity to help legislature process, to actually change some parts of the ADA to meet the current standards. This includes technology, so, technology's growing very rapidly and very quickly, and some of the standards that we have used for a long time, they're still good, but could be better. So that's what I would to do this. Not only help individuals, but basically improve the lives of individuals through policy changes and ADA compliance.

00:06:36

Marty:
That's fantastic. I do have a question that came up in a previous podcast episode that we recorded, where, at Tamman—and I don't know if you've ever been a part of any of these conversations specifically—but we've debated the terminology of awareness versus empathy. And I noticed in your last answer there, you were talking about educating and building awareness. And I'm really curious: do you have an opinion about that? Do you have an opinion of whether or not you think

awareness is really what's lacking, or do we have to build empathy, or are they inextricably linked? What are your thoughts there?

Nimit:
This is very interesting. I think they're definitely linked; however, awareness, to me, is just knowing that ADA is out there, and empathy is the ability for employers, for example, to be able to apply the law and accommodate individuals. Empathy, I think, means to be able to relate to and connect with, while awareness is just, 'here is the knowledge you have; here is what you should do and leave it.' And empathy, I think, goes much into, in depth, where, 'here's the knowledge you have, and here's what you should do.' And the employers then take that knowledge and improve their services or whatever they need to do to make sure that the individual with a disability has an equal experience as any other person. I think they're definitely linked.

Marty:
Applying that, did you find that, in your undergraduate experience, whether it was at Camden County or at Rutgers, did you feel like the institutions and the professors were empathetic to you, and were most of your classes accessible?

Nimit:
Most of my professors have been very empathetic, and pretty accessible. I feel like Camden County College, it's a community college, and their office of disability was great. They were very helpful and accommodating, and always helped out. Where Rutgers is very large, they have three campuses, and they have a lot more resources, such as being able to scan the books, and if I can't find them on book share learning [inaudible: 00:08:51] accessible medium, they have a lot more capacity and a lot more resources. So, I think that's why they're considered more disability-friendly, I guess I can term? I don't know the right word, but basically, even though Camden County disability office was very accessible and assisted me in the process; however, I just feel like Rutgers has a lot more resources, in terms of technology. And my professors in both colleges, most of them have been very accommodating, because they do understand the law. Sometimes I've had professors who just, they want to help, but they just don't know how, because they have never had a visually-impaired student before. So sometimes it takes a lot of exchanging emails, or even just, and then talking to them after class. And sometimes even more than that, just to prove to them, like, that I'm asking for the accommodations, but I will also be giving back. Like, doing my best ability in the class. So, for the most part, I feel like the professors and more classes have been accessible. And if it's not the professors, I usually could get around the students, so I would usually buddy up with a couple peers, and if there's a visual information in the class, such a movie that has subtitles, and it's in a different language, like my Spanish classes, I would just usually—this is before the pandemics—so I would just usually ask the person sitting next to me if they could just read the subtitles to me. So, I feel like I have found ways around things that I found inaccessible.

00:10:41

Marty:
You know, I'm struck by your experience there, thinking about the role reversal of you being a student and having to teach the professor now. And taking that, I don't want to call it burden, but certainly taking that responsibility on, of, you may be the first student they've had that had a visual impairment, and how that goes. Do you find that it's a burden, or something that you enjoy, when you have to educate and build that awareness in others, if it's the first time that they've encountered someone with a visual impairment?

Nimit:
I don't think I find it to be a burden. I think I definitely do enjoy educating, either my professors or employers, in terms of experiences, or general public. Because when people want to learn, it's really clear from their behavior. When people are not judgmental right from the beginning phase, and they actually want to learn, because they have never had any student who they have encountered like me, or they're just curious. So, I'm happy always to answer people's questions and to talk to them. So, I'm very open-book. What I usually find to be difficult is when people start to use their preconceived notions from the very beginning and start to act on them. So, this is funny: one time I was at college, and someone was talking to me in a very—it was not a professor, I don't know who that was—but they was talking to me in a very loud and, like, slow manner. I was like, I can hear you and I can understand you. The only thing I can't do is, I can't see. So, it's OK if you just talk normal. So sometimes that can be a little difficult, when people already have their preconceived assumptions on who I am before they even get to know me, and then I have to prove them wrong. So that's the only difficulty I encounter.

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Marty:
I love it. That's a great story. And it's a sad story, but I'm glad that you were able to help educate them. I've heard you say, Nimit, that access to information also affects to access to building experience. And in your case, that means the ability to grow in your chosen field of disability activism. Can you elaborate on that a little bit for us, this idea of access to information also affecting access to building experience?

Nimit:
So, nowadays, as you know, when are applying for internships or jobs or any type of application process, it's going to be online. And if their website is not accessible for you right from the start, this can affect how you perceive this experience. So, for example, if there's a CAPTCHA in your job application, and there's no audio option, in the case of people like me, who rely on screen readers, and then you find that to be a little discouraging, because first, the website is not accessible. Even though I feel like I can educate people, this is something I definitely look at when I apply to companies. How accessible are they from the start? Secondly, as I was talking about my interest with ADA, I am a individual who uses a service animal to navigate. That can be a lot educating in itself. A lot of places find that to be very surprising. And, which makes sense. So, it's also the disclosure of my disability.

When do I tell the employers that I am blind? Even though they are not supposed to discriminate at all, that's very illegal. Although, there have been instances where, not just with me, but with a lot of people with any type of disability, disclosure can turn down offers. But stated in other ways, so they would tell you that, after you disclosed your disability, they could tell you that they canceled the interview, or they no longer need this position, or anything like that. They would not directly tell you. So, I always choose to disclose my disability right after my initial interview process. Although, before this pandemic, when we had to go and interview in person, I would usually wait until I get the job offer, and then disclose my disability. I know that's not usually the right way to go about it, but ADA makes discrimination illegal, and unfortunately, the reality is that it still exists today. Even though not stated explicitly, that's usually the reason why sometimes you do get turned down. So that's another concern on how access to information affects access to experience. You have the information; the application itself might not be accessible. Or you have the information, but then you have to go about extra steps to make sure that you get into the experience you want to really go into.

00:15:56

Marty:
Yeah. So, thinking about your own professional experiences, and specifically maybe internships that you've had, you know, have you had any instances where you really had to overcome or create your own accommodations with that professional experience, as you're growing in your field?

Nimit:
Yes, a lot of the time, when I get into the experience or internship, sometimes there have been software that we use for data entry, is not accessible. So, I do have to work with other people to manage this situation. It's where I would usually tell my team member what I need to enter into the data entry, and then I would take on one of their responsibility. This way, they don't feel burdened that I'm giving them extra work to do, and then I can also help them. So that's one way I go around this. And we do have it. Also, I make sure to find someone, either through a supervisor or somewhere in the company to their IT Department. I make sure to report to them or give them some feedback—just giving them feedback is a better term—on how they can improve their software, too. Because I won't be the only one with a visual impairment that they're going to hire.

Marty:
Absolutely.

Nimit:
I'm sure, and I would like them to hire more people with disabilities. So, I would like to make sure that people around after me have a better experience than I did. So that's why I'm very interested in disability activism. This can be in anything, not just technology or internet-based, or software-based, but in any type of experience that I have. Sometimes it's very difficult. I make sure to stand up for myself, so

that in the future, other people who have same experience as me, same circumstance as me, can go through it with a better path.

00:18:00

Marty:
That's fantastic. Thinking about your work in general—and Tamman, obviously, caring deeply about this—when you're writing, when you're, whatever you might be using, whether you're using Microsoft Word or whatever software, do you have a preferred way? Do you like to use Dragon software? Do you like to use a regular keyboard, Braille keyboard? Do you have a preference, as how you're getting that information inputted into whatever piece of software you're using?

Nimit:
So, I actually like to type through the regular keyboard, because that's how I have been taught from the very beginning, when I started learning computers. So, I am mostly very fast typer. But when I like to read, I usually like it through my Braille display, because this gives me a lot more tactile feedback on my spelling mistakes, if there, and on my spacing. I don't always get that with a screen reader completely. There are ways to get that; I know Jaws has a setting where you can make it announce every single punctuation, every single spacing, but that can be very time-consuming. So, I usually like to use my Braille display to check and proofread. But typing is definitely through my physical keyboard on the laptops.

Marty:
Switching gears a little bit for a minute. I'd like to talk about how you consume media. You've mentioned to me before, you're not a big HBO and movie things, that you're mostly on YouTube and Netflix, right?

Nimit:
Yes.

Marty:
So, first off, what are you watching these days? What's something that you've got going on?

Nimit:
These days, I don't really have time to watch a lot of shows.

Marty:
Don't make me feel bad, Nimit, god! You're such a high achiever, it's...

Nimit:
No, I don't even know why that is, but basically, I'm just so involved with academics and, like, internships, work, and home responsibilities. I usually don't have a lot of time. Although, I do watch Netflix. One of the shows I watch is The Office. I used to watch that a lot, but I haven't really watched it recently. That's one of my shows I used to watch, for sure.

Marty:
So, I'm curious. When you're watching The Office, do you use transcripts? Does Netflix offer descriptive audio? How is that consumed for you?

Nimit:
Netflix is great. Netflix has—although I am from India, so a lot of movies sometimes I watch, they're in my Indian language, they are not always in audio descriptive formats, so, in Netflix. But a lot of American movies, American shows like The Office do have audio descriptive options in Netflix. And they're very awesome. I find the experience totally enriching when I watch Netflix shows or Netflix documentaries with audio description. They will tell you everything. The first time I watched an audio descriptive show, I was like, wow. I've never gotten that much information. The only thing I always got was just characters talking, so this was great. So, I think Netflix does do a great job with that, if they're available. They're not always available for every single movie, but they are available for, I would say about 90 percent of American shows and American movies for sure. YouTube, they have their own captions. They're not audio descriptive. It's just, YouTube is a lot more public consumed platform that anyone can upload videos, so I don't think their guidelines are so strict on captions. There are captions, but they're usually auto-generated, and they usually talk over the characters. So sometimes that can be very distracting, so I usually turn YouTube captions off. While Netflix, when the audio descriptive person is talking, or voice is talking, usually it's in between characters, so they don't talk over characters. So that's why I find the experience much more enriching.

00:22:11

Marty:
Do you have any tools or tricks to overcome really poor sites? Or, do you just say, augh, forget it, and move on?

Nimit:
A lot of time, I can't say forget it and move on, because a lot of the times, when I am on those websites, it's either because I need them or either because it's required. So, a lot of time, I do end up using tools. So, there is an app called *Be My Eyes*, and it's where you can call volunteers who would see through your camera, and they can tell you whatever you want to know on visual information. So, I would point my camera to my screen, and they could see the CAPTCHA, and they could tell me. Another app is *Aira*. *Aira* is very good, because they have trained agents, while *Be My Eyes* has volunteers. So trained agents, it's good, because they're already trained to guide you to orient your camera, and also to know what kind of information you would need. But Ira can be a little bit more expensive on the subscription side, but I still do use *Aira* when I feel I have a lot of websites that I'm going to be accessing in a particular month, and they're not accessible, I do pay for Ira sometimes. Also, *Team Viewer* is another app. *Team Viewer* is where I can have another person access my computer. Sometimes it's just faster and easier to let other person do the job, because the website is so inaccessible. I had a website

once, it was a quiz, and the question were read aloud by my screen reader, Jaws, but the choices were not. So, I couldn't even take the quiz, and it was just so overwhelming, because I did not know that was going to happen until I started the quiz. So, I do have accommodation to have double time, but still, that was just a huge pressure at that moment. So, I had to use someone on site, which was—I think it was at home, that time. So, it was much more of a family member reading me the answer choices. But *Team Viewer* in that instance is good, because the person can navigate your mouse. It's much more easier to them to read out loud than me pointing the camera to the screen. So that's how I usually overcome these types of barriers.

00:24:40

Marty:
Those are great resources, absolutely. Thank you. Before I ask my last question, I've been so engrossed, I haven't paid any attention to bring my cohosts in. Amanda or Liza, was there anything you wanted to ask Nimit while we have her here?

Amanda:
I do have a question for you, Nimit. So, I know that you're tri-lingual, if Braille is, correct me on this, because I consider Braille another language. But is there, like, an Indian Braille that you also are able to read and write in?

Nimit:
So, I can speak and understand Hindi and Punjabi, which are Indian languages and dialects, and of course English. Braille is actually different in Hindi, because the alphabet is different, and the vowels and the consonants are different. So, reading and writing Braille is much different in Hindi. Although, the system is still the same. It's still the six-dot system, but the pattern to make a letter and to make words is different. So, yeah.

Marty:
It's not tri; it's sort of, like, sextuplet number of language, yeah. It's crazy.

Nimit:
See, I always thought Braille as a way, almost like a system, to read and write, rather than just a language. But I see what you mean by it being a language. But I always thought Braille was just a system, is how—print is a system for people to read and write, and Braille is just like that system, but different than print. Much more tactile.

Marty:
Ms. Liza, I want to bring you into the conversation, if there was anything that you had for Nimit.

Liza:

I only really have one question, and it's barely related to accessibility, but I was just intrigued to hear you speaking about how you are interested in the legal area of the world. I know you mentioned effecting legislation; do you have any political hopes and aspirations at all, or just behind-the-scenes lobbying for the big bucks?

Nimit:
See, I don't have any experience in political. I mean I have interned at Senator Cory Booker's office, and that was a great experience where I got to witness how a government agency, a federal government agency, runs, and the kinds of issues that come up from constituents. So that was a great experience. Don't have a lot of experience with lobbying or other political spectrum. However, I feel like my goal is really to be part of the local level, state level legislature. And maybe federal level. I understand, you're right, that does mean I need to have a lot more experience in political than I do right now.

00:27:25

Liza:
Well, you're pretty young still.

Nimit:
I think I have to catch up.

Marty:
Liza, I'm with you. She's already got it. There's something there, Nimit, already. As a failed politician myself, I can see it in other people, when they've got something magical, and Nimit, you've got something, kid.

Liza:
We'll design your yard signs, Nimit.

Marty:
That's right, that's right.

Nimit:
OK, thank you.

Marty:
So, my last question for you, Nimit, is, before we get to our last segment is, from your perspective, if you could wave a magic wand and instantly change something about the internet, what would it be?

Nimit:
If I would change something about the internet, it would be making accessibility a mission for all kinds of web developers and web designers from the start. So that no one would have to go through extra steps, just to go and do their basic shopping, for example, or their basic banking, for example. Right now, sometimes when the process is inaccessible, that can be hindering, so I would like to see an

inclusive web world where everyone can achieve the same outcome from the same steps, instead of requiring extra steps or extra planning or frustrations or any type of extra abilities. So that's what I like to see an inclusive web.

Marty:
Amen to that. So, our final segment, we ask three questions to all of our guests, and I want to ask you. Are you ready for your first three-question segment?

Nimit:
Sure.

Marty:
All right, here we go. So, the first one is: what is one personal accommodation that you make?

Nimit:
One personal accommodation I make is the fact that I have to plan everything ahead. When I have to go to college, or when I have to get my work done, either it's transportation or it's getting something done when there are going to be inaccessible barriers. It does require a lot more planning. Say, if I want to go on vacation, I would need to plan a lot more than probably any other—everybody should plan, I'm not saying it's a bad accommodation, it's definitely good and it's preparing me to be organized and productive. But that's definitely something I always have to do, is think ahead and think how I'm going to overcome unexpected situations if they were to occur.

Marty:
Awesome. Second question: what is something about the world that keeps you up at night?

Nimit:
Something I always think about is the fact that there are a lot of communities where the resources are not there, and this can affect how children, for example, grow. If there are special-needs children attending a school and their IEPs are not being implemented, I do think about how the school's lack of resources and the school's lack of ability to help them affects this child's entire life, and it's not even their fault. It's because they're struggling due to their disability. So, that's something I really want to overcome, is expanded resources, that, as I said, through ADA compliance and policy changes, is making sure that everyone has resources to succeed.

00:30:42

Marty:
OK, Nimit. Like, that's the best answer we've ever gotten. That's so, so spot-on. Yes. Our final question, this one's going to be hard for you, because you've already said, you're not a big watcher of TVs or movies or anything, but: thinking about one

recommendation, it could be for a game, a book, anything that you've been doing for fun, what's one recommendation you might have for those of us listening?

Nimit:
Oh, geez. These days, I haven't really watched a lot of movies lately, or played a lot of games. All I would say to that question is that everyone should do what they enjoy doing. One favorite hobby I can say I'm doing these days is, I play piano, and I perform. So that's another thing that keeps me busy, too, so playing piano. And a hobby, even it's either it's playing an instrument or playing a sport, or just walking, is my recommendation. Is to develop a hobby, and to develop something to relieve stress. I'm sorry I don't have a better answer.

Marty:
No, that was a great answer. I happen to know that you are a performer. You're too humble to recommend yourself. One recommendation I have is to listen to my amazing performances, but...

Liza:
I was going to say, are these recorded anywhere that we could promote on this podcast?

Nimit:
Yes. Yes. I usually perform at Indian Sikh temples. So, Sikhism is a religion that I belong to. So, a lot of my videos are on YouTube or Facebook Live, and I can share them with you.

Liza:
Yes, please. I need access to them.

Nimit:
Yes. You can just write my name on YouTube. You'll find some. There might be some from when I was younger, so you'll see a bit younger version of myself, but there are some that are pretty recent.

Marty:
Fantastic. Nimit, thank you so much for spending time with us today. I really, I appreciate you, I appreciate your insights, and I would love for you to come back on the podcast again very soon.

Nimit:
Thank you. Yeah, I would be happy to come back.

Marty:
Thanks, Nimit.

Amanda:
Thanks, Nimit!

Liza:

Thank you.

Nimit:
Thank you.

If you like what you heard today, and want to explore more about digital accessibility, inclusivity, or to schedule a time to talk with us, you can find the whole Tamman team at TammanInc.com. That's T-A-M-M-A-N-I-N-C dot com. Or, follow us on social media, at TammanInc on LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook. We'll talk to you again next time.