

THE RESILIENT KID PODCAST

Season 2 – Episode 2

Accessibility For Everyone

Ashley: Welcome back to the Resilient Kid Podcast with me, Ashley Costello, psychotherapist for over 25 years and now author of the “Parents Guide to Raising a Resilient Kid.”

I am so excited about today's guest; it is such an important topic for us to shine a light on.

Let me introduce the lovely Chantelle Venter to you. She began her adventure with websites, doing lots of different things. When she officially launched her first business in 2020, she was trying to do everything herself.

She read the blogs, watched YouTube videos, and played around with code until she could figure out how not to break things. I mean, if that is not the definition of resilience, I don't know what is. It's definitely persistent. I'm sure that feels like a lifetime ago for her as the adventure has turned into a love affair.

She's now a freelance developer exclusively powered by WordPress and has yet to find a limitation in this magical piece of software. She also specializes in course creation and is a member of the MemberVault preferred partners.

She is the owner, principal designer, and developer at Website Fae, a small agency that employs one person so far, but with a couple of support fairies on the side. In addition to creating WordPress websites, she also assists her clients with making online courses accessible and offers one-to-one business coaching.

Now, you might wonder why I've asked Chantelle on the Resilient Kid Podcast. Well, that is because accessibility is Chantelle's number one priority, as she's been personally impacted by disabilities, some temporary and others more permanently.

Welcome, welcome Chantelle to the podcast. How are you today?

Chantelle: Thank you so much, Ashley, for having me here. I'm very excited to share a bit of my story and to maybe make sure that some more websites and online courses are accessible not just to people with disabilities but to everybody.

Ashley: Absolutely, and so I must just say, Chantelle, anybody who knows me knows I was born in the lovely country of South Africa, and Chantelle is live from South Africa as we're recording this today. So, thank you for joining us.

Now, I know that somebody's going to listen to the top of this and think, "Well, why has Ashley got, like, you know, a website content creator on the Resilient Kid Podcast?" But what you did for my website was completely change, not just the look of the website - and I don't mean the aesthetics - but actually, you changed the website for things I didn't even think about, really. You not only changed that, but you changed the way I thought about it. So, just tell the listeners what's a couple of things that you kind of did your fairy magic on that is now making my website more accessible?

Chantelle: So, generally, people would create a course with a person in mind, but they don't really know that person so very well. You think it's a normal, able-bodied child of 11. But that child can have color blindness, that child can suffer from ADHD or dyslexia, they could maybe be blind or deaf and you've got a video. So we need to make sure that we are covering all our bases and that we are providing the content in a manner for the other person to consume in a way that they prefer.

So this is not just specifically for people with disabilities; you could just prefer reading to listening because you're in a noisy situation, sitting in the office and you can't be wearing headphones so you can't listen to a video, but you can read the transcript of the video.

If you are colorblind and you are using colors only and not including lines under a link, nobody's going to know that that is a specific link if they can't see the color difference in it. So when we worked on your website, we went through the whole course, the whole website, and looked for little things that could improve the next person's experience in the course or on your website to make it easy for that person.

Ashley: Yeah, I absolutely love that, and one of the things that, because when Chantelle first did it, you know, I'd spoken to her and I was like, "Oh yeah, yeah, absolutely, we need it to be more accessible because, because also, you know, I have a lot of parents visit my website and they struggle themselves, with, you know, various different things, or it can be just that they're busy and they want to say rather than watch a video, they want to just listen to the audio version while they're, you know, taking the dog for a walk or making dinner or things like that." Which is amazing and, you know, so I was like, "Oh, yeah, that's brilliant," but one of the highlights for me was the bar, their focus bar, that goes across. Just tell us a little bit about that, Chantelle, and what it's for.

Chantelle: So, since I have installed that little widget on your course site, it has come to my attention that some of those functionalities do make the site a little bit more inaccessible. So, I've gone and switched off some of those functionalities, but one of the functionalities that I've kept on was that specific bar. So, for ADHD people, if you are

looking at a document with a lot of words, you struggle to focus, you struggle to keep your eye in one line and move to the next, and this bar just highlights one or two sentences so that your focus is kept on that. The rest of the screen gets darkened so you can't read all those letters. It won't catch your eye as quickly, and I just think it's an amazing tool. It helps my son, who has ADHD, to just focus on that two sentences before he moves down to the next two sentences.

Ashley: Yeah, and it's just brilliant, and I mean that's just like one of the tools, so let's hear if you're okay with sharing this, Chantelle, a little bit about your story because this isn't your, you didn't just kind of trip over and think, "Oh yeah, that's a really cool thing to do." This is a passion of yours, isn't it? And this is the whole reason why I want you on this podcast because I think it's so important that we hear different experiences and also how they impact our life, and you know passion is a big thing of mine, and I love the story that you say is so heartwarming, but the impact and the difference that you make because of it is just amazing. So, tell us a little bit about yourself and why you then started to look at accessibility.

Chantelle: So, when I just left school, I was barely 21, and I was at work one day and walking up the stairs, my legs just collapsed, and I was paralyzed for about 10 days where I landed up in hospital and they did a bunch of tests to try and find out why I don't have any feeling from my hips down. And it was a scary time in my life, you know, I'm not even 21 yet, I've got my whole life ahead of me, and I'm not able to walk.

I have to say that I am relieved that I got my feeling back, and it was just my body's way of saying you need to shut down and take a break because I was just pushing too hard at that stage. Doing too much, worried about too much, my mom and dad were going through a divorce, so there was a lot going on in my life, and my body just said time to take a break.

And that definitely put me on this path of caring which I probably never thought about before then and as time progressed, you know, I've got an aunt who was 100% able she dived into a swimming pool, broke her neck, and she's paraplegic today. A couple of years ago, I was diagnosed with epilepsy, so driving becomes scary because if I start feeling a little odd, you know, it doesn't matter where you are, you need to pull off the road. My son was diagnosed with ADHD, and that comes with a whole new set of issues and things that I need to figure out because it's not something that I was exposed to earlier. It's not just something that, "Oh, I'm gonna make money from this, you know, there's a gap in the market." Yes, there is a gap in the market, there are about 98% of websites online that are not accessible. So yes, there is a market for my service out there, but for me, it's more about giving equal access to everybody no matter what their abilities are.

You know, about 15% of the world is permanently disabled, that doesn't include people who break an arm and now need to use a keyboard instead of a mouse or people who

go for an eye surgery to remove cataracts and they can't use their eyes, so now they can't look at a video or watch TV for I don't know 10 days, two weeks, three weeks.

So you get permanent disabilities and temporary disabilities, and I just want to bridge that gap and make it accessible to everybody. This is really a passion of mine, and it doesn't just apply to the online space. When I get to a shopping center and I see somebody's vehicle standing in a disabled parking and there's no little disabled sticker, I get furious. I would stand there and wait to make sure that the person coming out of that shop is disabled and not able to just park in a normal parking spot because unfortunately people with disabilities are seen as second-class citizens in our world and that is not true. They can offer just as much as any of us can; they can do just as much or even more than what we can.

Ashley: Sorry, Chantelle, I just, you're so right because actually I think one skill that I have seen is the adaptability because they've had to, and I think as an able-bodied person and many of us out there, I think what happens is we don't adapt because we don't have to, and then suddenly something, you know, life throws rubbish at us and we're left stranded almost, so you're absolutely right in that.

Question for you, well what I really loved was when you were talking about your son who's been recently diagnosed with ADHD, and I love the fact that you're figuring out stuff for him. We do that as parents every day, you know, we help them regulate their emotions, we pack their lunch, we remind them they've got PE, all that kind of rubbish, but actually what you're doing is going that one step further, is going almost seeing it through his eyes, okay, how do I help him with this? And I think for me, the biggest thing about you but also your service is that you're removing those barriers to everyday life. That's how I feel, is that, you know, and as a business owner, as somebody who works with kids who are neurodivergent, if parents who are, or just, I have got quite a few disabled students or clients on my books at the moment, and actually, you know, really thinking it through their eyes, how do they do this, how, what's the struggles they have, what difficulties, so as a business owner, if there is something that I can do that is really easily done - I mean, I'm saying it's easy because I don't do it, obviously Chantelle does - but easily done when you know how and that actually will just remove those barriers, is amazing. Tell me, so the question is, what difference have you found since your son's diagnosis that you have had to kind of adapt or see in a different way and being able to help him?

Chantelle: So, firstly, to get to your comments that you made, we all have a social responsibility to make things accessible, and then us as parents, we know, obviously, we can't change the world from today to tomorrow; that's not going to happen. Every little bit we do makes a difference, but it's not going to be overnight, "Oh, now the world is accessible," and when my son leaves school and goes out and ventures on his own, you know, it's not like the world is going to treat him differently just because he's got a disability. It's going to treat him exactly the same as everybody else, and he's going to

need to adapt to that. So, it's not just about trying to remove those blocks; it's about, yes, giving him an extra block to stand on to see over that fence and teaching him how to manage his disability.

He has very sensitive ears, so that's what I'm going to focus on now. So, he's got very sensitive ears; there's nothing I can medically do to fix it. So when he's in class, the kids are making noise, people talking and laughing and making jokes, so he struggles to concentrate, which affects his ADHD. You can't make the world quieter; you can't put the mute on on the world because it doesn't work. But he's learning that when he leaves the house, he takes a set of earplugs with him so that when he's in a situation where it is too noisy, he can just put in his earplugs. It doesn't mute the sound; it just lowers the tone, so it is bearable for him, and he doesn't come home with ears that are bloodshot red and hurting.

So it's about teaching your kids ways of living in the able-bodied world and then educating the able-bodied world on how to make things accessible. If we think of a ramp outside a shop, those ramps weren't built for people with a stroller; those ramps were built for people in a wheelchair. But it makes life easier for a mom with a stroller; it makes life easier for a person who slept really bad last night and now their hip hurts, and they don't want to walk upstairs. So making changes to the world does not just make it better for disabled people; it makes it better for all of us.

Ashley: I love that, I absolutely love that, and that is so true that if we just think a little bit beyond ourselves, we're not just helping those who need the help; we're shining a light and being an advocate for those people, but actually, we're helping everybody.

Chantelle: We're helping everybody. You know, think of yourself going to a high-rise building, and you need to walk up 10 flights of stairs. I don't think there is really anybody who's going to walk up 10 flights of stairs unless you are very fit and do it regularly. You know, we all take the lift; we all take the elevator, but the elevator wasn't built for us, but it's easier, it makes life easier.

Ashley: Absolutely. So, I'm a big believer in particularly when I talk a lot about how resilience isn't just surviving or powering through that trauma or that challenge that you've had, and by God, have you had a big challenge, you know, at barely 21. But actually, it's about what it takes to build that resilience. So one of the massive, big components that I talk about is those connections, that support network. Who, obviously, mum and dad were going through a divorce at the time, who helped you through that time?

Chantelle: I have to say that yes, I've done a lot of bad things in my life; I've had a lot of bad things happen to me in my life, and most of them I just dealt with myself. I didn't always have a good relationship with my mom. It's, I think, mostly broke down because of my father and my ex-husband. But as time progresses, we are building it up, and at

this point, we are in a very good situation. So, you know, if I have any issues, my mom is my go-to person. Cool, I haven't up until about 2018, I have not at all dealt with any of my past issues, and for the first time, I really sat down with a psychologist and a psychiatrist, and we unpacked my life and everything that's happened in between, and I was diagnosed with PTSD from childhood trauma. So yes, there are some things that you can sort out by yourself; there is some stuff that you can figure out, maybe read a book, watch a YouTube video that can give you some guidance. But I am a firm believer that you need to get professional help at some point in your life, even if it is just six sessions, just to unpack some of that trauma and see the light at the end of the tunnel.

You know, when I eventually went and got help, I was at a point where I wanted to climb into my car and drive off the mountain. I had enough; I couldn't take it anymore. When my husband took away my car keys because he was too scared of me doing something ridiculously, and he had to go for a meeting at work and hid my car keys, and I took them, got him packed a little bag, got in my vehicle, and drove to the hospital and said, "You need to admit me right now, or I will not be alive tonight." And they did, and it saved my life; it saved my relationship with my son because we were having a really hard time; he wasn't diagnosed yet. I was having issues because I wasn't understanding this child, why is it so difficult, why can't he get his school work done, you know, he was in grade one, so it was a lot going on in that start of the year, and I just didn't know what to do. And really, don't wait to that point where it was now or never. As soon as you start realizing something isn't in the right space, speak to someone, speak to a friend, a family member, I don't know; they always say speak to an adult or a teacher, you know, speak to somebody, even if they don't give you advice, and they just listen, that also helps just to unpack it and to hear yourself unpack it, it definitely helps. But a professional, like yourself, is what I would recommend.

Ashley: And it sounds like, I mean, lovely, like there are a few things that you said there, lovely, that you and your mum are kind of back on track, and it just goes to show it's never too late; you can always work on relationships, and that's not accepting toxic people, of course not, but if you both want the same outcome, you can make it happen. So that is beautiful, and I'm really pleased that you have got your mum in your corner for sure. And I think the other thing is, I was listening to Kate Middleton, Princess of Wales, here, and she said, you know, therapy is not for everyone, and, you know, as a therapist when she first said it, a lot of people said, "Oh, you know, look what she said," but actually what she said was, therapy isn't for everyone, not everybody needs therapy, but sometimes it's not the formal process is not for you, sometimes a certain type of therapy is not for you, doesn't mean say you can't try a different one. I've had that where clients have come to me after CBT or different things, and they didn't like it, and they come to me anyway, "Oh, wow, you're a little bit different," you know, and but actually, I think you're right, I think it doesn't have to be a therapist. If you have got trauma, if you've got something that's big that's happened and you need help unpacking,

absolutely get a decent therapist, and you know, go on, if you're in the UK, we have the BACP website, which is the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapists, and in every country, they have a professional body like that, so please just check it out and get one, you know, that you know is qualified. But actually, sometimes it just takes listening; it takes a supportive friend who's not going to jump in with their emotions, and sometimes with family, that happens, you know, if my kids ever needed therapy, it wouldn't be me they'd be coming to. Of course, they can come to me as their mom, but not going to be their therapist, it's a whole different relationship. But sometimes, just somebody who hasn't got a vested interest and just listens really can help, and I think knowing who's in your corner really helps in those times when, you know, crap happens, and it hits us hard. And actually, it sounds like with you, Chantelle, it took a lot of things for you, and it just kept building and building, and you just said, you've got to do something. And how brave, what a brave act that is to go to the hospital and just go, "Take me now," like, now, really, really brave. And it feels like that wasn't only amazing on your behalf to recognize that you needed that, but actually, a godsend that you did, and they took you for you and your family as well.

Chantelle: You know, I've got a very loving husband and a very supportive, so I know I can always go to him and speak to him, but sometimes, there's stuff that you don't want to share with your partner, you know, there's stuff that I don't want to share with my mom. And if you don't have a close friend you can speak to, we are all in different religions, but go see your pastor or your whoever is in your religion or find somebody to speak to, you know. We tend to think that we're in this world alone, I need to do this on my own, but there are communities out there, and last week I posted a little ad about a woman's networking group I want to start in my area, and within 24 hours, I had 114 people join that group. It's been a week later; it has just exploded. You know, find a group on Facebook that is of your area and say you can even post anonymously and say, "I'm looking for help, somebody to just talk to." Someone will comment on it, and you send them a direct message and say, "Hi, this is me, you know, I just need to talk to somebody." We are never alone; there's always somebody.

Ashley: And do you know what, that's so true. I recently spoke at a, well, Manifest, it's a big Festival here in Cheshire, um, in the UK, and, um, I have to give a talk, and I was like, okay, okay, what am I gonna talk about? We've got this massive group of women here who have come together for the weekend, some a lot came on their own, like, what is it that I want to say to them? And actually, um, I started by saying, "What's resilience?" you know, and they were answering the usual questions, so it's getting through adversity, it's that bouncing back, blah, blah, blah. And I said, "What if I told you you could build it?" and they were like, "What?" and I was like, "You can build it ahead of time, like, that's that's my thing, you can build resilience ahead of time before all that crap hits you." And they were like, quite surprised, quite taken back, and I said, "You know, the one thing that I'm going to teach you today is about your tribe, your people, and how they having that and then behind you can really help in the difficult times." And so, I went on, and the talk, everyone, you know, there was laughter, there were tears, the high five, the whole lot,

you know, really a really good um half an hour with these women. And in the end, I said to them, and there was a, there was a few people, about three people, who I'd seen actively cry, not just tear up or, you know, with what I was saying, but actively cry. And I went to one of them at the end, and I said to her, and it was the one that was scribbling notes all the way through, and I said to her, "I noticed that you've took notes, but I also noticed that you got really upset when I said about our tribe. Do you want to share that with me?" And she said, "I don't feel like I've got my tribe." And I said, "Okay, tell me a little bit about yourself." And actually, what happened was she started to talk about how she hasn't got that best friend in her corner, and she's moved; she's moved County, so she's not got the old, you know, her old friends that maybe she grew up with and things like that. And I said, "Okay, so what are you doing?" because, you know, this is not the playground anymore; we have to actively go out there and seek um new friendships. Um, and when I moved back from Abu Dhabi, I knew the first thing I had to do, because I was moving into a totally new area, was immerse myself because if I didn't, I would not settle. And she said, "Well, I have joined this group," and I said, "What group?" And she said, "Well, there's this women's group on Facebook, and actually, we meet up for coffee and blah, blah, blah." And I said, "So, you have got a tribe?" And she went, "Oh, but it's all new and blah, blah, blah." I said, "Listen, do you feel like you've made a connection with some of those people?" And she went, "Absolutely." So, I said, "Well, what makes you think they haven't thought that, too?" I said, "You know, don't be shy, don't play this safe, go out there and say, 'Do you know what? I'm really connected with you, fancy meeting up?'" I said, "Get and do you know what the look of joy on her face when she realized actually she had made some connections, you know, that could turn into new friends." And I said, "Yesterday, you know, I made a point of speaking to at least five people that I didn't know while I was at the festival, and um, it was really lovely because I found out a little bit more about them, a couple of them came to my talk, you know, and I said, 'Hey, that person that you struck up a conversation at the crazy hat stand, go back, see for them, you know.' And it's important, isn't it, because I think we're a society where you think your best friend should be the best friend you made at school, and that's all your life, no, absolutely not, we change, we grow up, we're different people, we have to make the effort to have our tribe, for sure.

Chantelle: I definitely agree. And the thing is, I understand you get introverts and you get extroverts and you get like a mix in between, and it is difficult for introverts to go out there and meet people, I get it, I completely understand it. Um, I would classify myself as an introverted extrovert; I do come across as an extrovert when I go to events on my own, I'm definitely an extrovert because I try and speak to as many people as I can and learn as much as I can. When I go in a group, I do tend to be more reserved; I don't know why, I don't, it's like I would stick to my little group and not speak to many other people, but we need to push ourselves, you know. You are never going to learn anything new or experience anything new if you do not push yourself, if you do not get out of that comfort zone, and I know it's hard for introverts, but you need to do it, there is no other way. It's like my son, he needs to go out into the world; it doesn't matter how loud it is, he needs to be out there; he can't be sitting in his room every day the whole day just to

keep away from sound, that's not a life. Go out there, meet people, you know, standing at the counter at a coffee shop, strike up a conversation with the person next to you and ask them if they want to have a coffee with you, you know, just something to build those connections. And if you really don't want to go out there, use Facebook groups, they are a great resource.

Ashley: I think the biggest thing as well is that, you know, saying hello at a coffee shop or chatting to the Barista, or, you know, saying to somebody, "I really like your outfit," you know, it, we're not saying you have to be best friends with that person, but actually, that human interaction, that face to face which we don't get anywhere else, lights up a part of our brain that makes us feel happier. And if you live alone and you don't speak to anybody else in the day, that is the easiest and quickest way to boost those happy hormones for yourself, you know. And you never know where it leads; you never know, you know, you might see that same person down the charity shop, at the coffee shop, you might see them for a few weeks on the trot and end up having something in common. Um, but for sure, if you feel the connection, they'll have felt it too. And sometimes I think the other thing is that in a group, there's always room for the introvert; not everybody can be the funny one, not everyone can be the extrovert, the cheeky one, you know, there is always room in a group for somebody who's quiet, discerning, you know, things like that. So yeah, I absolutely, yeah, absolutely agree with you there. And Chantelle, tell us a couple of things that we can do, whether it's on our website, everyday life, that would help either kids or people with disabilities, to either, for us to be an advocate for them or for us to be able to make stuff more accessible.

Chantelle: So, looking at any digital platform, so your website, an email, a Word document, or a PDF, or an online course, an easy, easy fix would be, firstly, make sure all links have lines under them; don't remove that underlined link; don't rely on color, specifically using red and green, red for no, and green for yes, because some people are colorblind to red and green or even blue and yellow color blindness. So, we need to have that underline or an asterisk that at the bottom explains something. And then we also have images; if you ever use images on your website or in a document, you can add alt text to those images, so if somebody is using a screen reader, the screen reader can read the image. But, yes, putting an image of a lady there just for decorative look, you might not want to add alt text, but if you're using any graphs or statistics, and you want to convey a message through the image, you need to put alt text. And the nice thing is, just about every social media platform, as of today that I know, allows for alt text in images, so if I post on Facebook or on Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, I add the alt text so when somebody that's blind uses it, it reads what's on the image. I know Threads came out, what, a week ago, they don't have alt text yet, it is not there yet, but all the other social media platforms have it, it's maybe not easy for you to find it at this stage, but just do some research. To make life easier for everybody, just be considerate. You know, we have disabilities that you can see, you can see if somebody is blind and they're walking with a cane or a dog, we can see if somebody doesn't have a leg or an arm or is in a wheelchair, but we have invisible disabilities as well, you know, and that

doesn't just mean hearing, it can be a cognitive disability. So be nice, doesn't matter who it is, be nice. You can have a crappy day, but you don't have to take it out on anybody, you know, go home and shout at yourself in the mirror, not at the guy in the store that is taking too long; he might just be struggling to read because he forgot his glasses or he can't comprehend as well as you can.

Ashley: Amazing, and you know what, they are such simple things, you know, leave your line under links, simple kind of, oh yeah, alt text on pictures, and obviously, the last one, be nice, be kind to people out there, absolutely. And I love that, Chantelle, thank you very much. Um, I would just want to say a big thank you. I have known Chantelle only this year, but it feels like forever because she just gets me, you know. I will say, "This is what I want to do on the website," and I'll do it or I'll have this brain surge of ideas, and she'll go, "Right, Ashley, no, you don't do it that way, we'll do it this way." She's really, really good at reigning me in but also, my ideas, making them happen, and she is absolutely brilliant at that. But the, I think the thing I'm most proud of, and I've got to, um, absolutely credit you for that, is that my website, my course is now more accessible to, and actually, it's bizarre how much I start to use, like, the focus bar and stuff, you know, things like that. And I just really want to say thank you because I can't, you know, I pride myself on trying to be kind, trying to be there for everybody. I work with lots of various different people with various different disabilities, and the minute that you told me, I was like, I can't not have that; I can't put those barriers there anymore. And I think it is just that sometimes we are ignorant as able-bodied people, and we don't realize, and actually, there's a really simple solution to just be able to help and advocate for others. So I just want to say a big thank you for that, Chantelle, you've been amazing, and I am going to post all your links underneath, so if you want to find out more about Chantelle and what she does, and how she can do it for you, then click on the links; they will all be underlined, obviously. But yeah, anything else before we close, Chantelle, that you'd just like to say?

Chantelle: Making things accessible is not a one and done thing, there's always room for improvement, there's always something that we can do better, and just once again, being kind to others and keeping our eyes open. You know, if you come across a website that you notice the color, you can't read this because they're using a light pink on a white background, right to the owner of the website on their contact form, you know, tell them, "I'm struggling to read this, but I'm interested in the content that you're providing, would you mind looking at it?" That just, that doesn't only make it better for yourself, it makes it better for other people that use that website, you know. We need to be courteous of everybody, and thank you so much for having me here. It was really nice just to unpack some of the stuff that I do and share some of my story and share some about me and my beliefs.

Ashley: Absolutely, our pleasure, honestly, Chantelle, and you have made such a difference to the resilient kid and will continue to. So, thank you very much for joining us today. Now, guys, um, look out for the next podcast, um, and share it with your friends

and, um, yeah, if you haven't already got the book, have a look at "The Parent's Guide to a Resilient Kid," it's available in all good local bookshops, and that is where I would steer you first. If not, and you need to contact the big giant that is around the world of Amazon, then absolutely go there and get it delivered to your door. Um, take care, everyone, look after each other, and let's finish on Chantelle's last tip: please be kind.