



The Think Inclusive Podcast

Season 9, Episode 12

Greta Harrison | Born Fabulous Podcast

Tim Villegas (00:01):

Recording from Atlanta Hartsfield Jackson airport. You are listening to the think inclusive podcast presented by MCIE. This podcast exists to build bridges between families, educators, and disability rights advocates to create a shared understanding of inclusive education and what inclusion looks like in the real world. To find out more about who we are and what we do, check us out at thinkinclusive.us, or on the socials: Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. So why am I recording this intro from the airport? I'm on my way to Tampa/Clearwater, Florida for the 23rd international conference on autism, intellectual disability and developmental disabilities. My colleague Nolan Taylor and I are presenting on MCIE's student-centered planning tools more about that with my upcoming recap of the DADD conference. And in case you missed it, I wrote a reflection about the council for exceptional children conference in Orlando earlier in January, check that out in the Weeklyish newsletter at weeklyish.substack.com. So today on the podcast, I interview Greta Harrison, the host of the born fabulous podcast. We talk about the reason for starting born fabulous, why hope should be an essential characteristic of an educator, and that the goal of inclusion is always life in the community. I'm so glad you're here. Thanks for listening, subscribing and rating us on apple podcast or Spotify. And now our interview with Greta Harrison

Tim Villegas (01:38):

Today on the podcast, I'd like to welcome Greta Harrison, the host of born fabulous and welcome to the podcast. Welcome to the think inclusive podcast, Greta.

Greta Harrison (01:54):

Thank you, Tim. It's quite an honor to be here.

Tim Villegas (01:58):

So Greta, I wanna talk about I wanna talk about you and your podcast. I want to introduce you to our audience. Will you please give yourself a little bit of introduction and then we can talk about born Fabulous.

Greta Harrison (02:13):

Okay. I'm much older than you, Tim. I have been married longer than you've probably been alive <laugh>, but I grew up in the Midwest. I live in Virginia now. I came here a long time ago to go to college and I have two beautiful, wonderful, amazing daughters. My oldest is 33 and she is, she works for the Virginia board for people with disabilities and she's head of planning, research and evaluation. She has her masters in public policy. And my youngest is 21, which is hard to believe, and she has down syndrome. And most recently we found out she also has autism. We found that out in August and in this

journey, I guess I've kind of done what many parents have had to do the last 21 years. I've really had to educate myself and really try to learn the most that I could learn to make sure that my daughter, my youngest daughter has the fullest life that she can have.

Greta Harrison (03:21):

And that's involved a lot of traveling across this country to educate myself. I do believe in becoming involved in your community, not just your school community, but your local community, as well as knowing what's going on nationally. All those things take time. And I decided a couple of years ago, after hearing from a lot of other parents that they didn't have the time to do these things, or they were kind of lost to try to give back like parents ahead of me have. One of the things, Tim, that has really hit me when my daughter was little, when she was a baby, was that people were already putting her in a box. You, you know, you're a parent, you have children. When you're a parent of kids and you take them out in public, you usually hear, oh, what a beautiful baby or people wanna ask you questions about your baby, but right away, I started getting a lot of well-meaning people giving me a lot of stereotypical answers or advice or input as to what people that they knew who had down syndrome were doing.

Greta Harrison (04:37):

And they were very stereotypical things that young parents really don't wanna hear. I'm not putting down any kind of meaningful work. There's a lot of people in all different kinds of jobs who want to be in those jobs. But when you're a parent of a young baby, you want to think that baby has the world ahead of them. No matter whether the baby has a disability or not, the world should be their oyster. And I noticed that that was not the case when it came to the public, that was happening far too often. So when she was little, I think she was five or six. I started to notice in the media Melissa Riggio, who was a self advocate with down syndrome in New York city. Her dad was a CEO of Barnes and noble. Her mother was an educator. And Melissa was doing great things.

Greta Harrison (05:27):

Melissa was the age of my older daughter. So there was a 12 year difference between Melissa and my daughter. So I could watch and see what she could do. I could see possibilities. And Melissa was writing and she was saying very profound things like "know me before you judge me" and having pieces published in national geographic kids and having her poetry turned into music and just watching her from afar gave me hope. I also learned early on as I was learning that I had to educate myself and travel. I said, you know, I was gonna meet her parents one day. I just knew it. I was gonna meet Melissa and her parents one day. And then in 2008, she passed away tragically from leukemia. I did not get to meet Melissa. But in 2011, I did get to meet her parents, which was a highlight and meeting her parents was just a profound moment for me because I, I saw these people who their daughter had passed away three years earlier, and they were still changing the world. They were starting inclusive education in college, in multiple places. They were transforming what a group home was into a much more inclusive experience. They were, they, they were still changing the world in Melissa's name. And I was, I saw that you can be the change that you wanna see in the world really, really through them and started following, after the Riggios, a lot of other families who had kids who were doing amazing things.

Greta Harrison (07:10):

When you have a child who's included in the school system. One of the things that I really really tell parents behind me is to meet those teachers before the school year starts. And in an ideal system, you can do it the spring, but in my system, our school system's too big. There's, there's too much change in

staff. We can't do that. So we would usually meet the week before school starts. And, you know, you can have a one pager, you can have a, a little video about your child. You can actually bring your child with you to that meeting. So the new teachers can see, but one of the most powerful things that I did was I brought examples of what's already been done by those ahead of us, because that really puts a stomp on a lot of the nay saying. Okay, here's Melissa Riggio. I have met her parents. Her parents have said, there's no reason she can't do A, B or C.

Greta Harrison (08:02):

Here is Brandon. There's no reason that he can't do A, B or C. Connor, A B or C. Name after name after name. I had so many examples to give them. And that is really, really important because a lot of educators don't know, they haven't seen, it is their a first child. They don't know what can be. So when you give them an example and they know they're not having to recreate the wheel, that really did help I think, in, in a lot of situations. So a couple of years ago, I decided to just make a podcast. And Tim, I don't know what I was thinking. It's not easy. My, a podcast, anybody who thinks it's easy they just need to try. There's a lot to it. And I am not a spring chicken. I had to teach myself the editing, everything behind it, but I, I just wanted to do it because I wanted to get these stories of amazing people who are out there out there because every single one of them is moving the needle forward. And that's what I think we wanna do. So I'm also a writer. I, I write for the Mighty, I'm writing fiction book at, at the same time too. I really love, love, love to write. So that's your very long winded answer there.

Tim Villegas (09:26):

A couple things popped in my head when, when you were sharing about stories. And so let me tell you a story because, okay. So you mentioned how you would bring the stories to educators about other people with down syndrome, you know, who were successful and stuff like that, and that, that communicated well, if there's nothing, there's nothing that, you know, my daughter can't do that someone else can can't do. So I was a classroom teacher for 13 years, and then three years after that, I was a district support specialist. We had lots of different titles during those three years, but essentially I would support educators special educators to work with students with disabilities and whether they were included or not. So that was sometimes in self-contained, you know, segregated, self-contained special ed classrooms. Sometimes they were fully included sometimes, you know, they were not. But what your stories reminded me of was that educators don't know what is possible. And, and so I remember as a teacher, knowing these stories and kind of sharing these stories with my families and saying things, there's no reason why your son or daughter can't go to college essentially, right. And when I got my district level position the feedback I got from my supervisors, the people that were above me was like, Tim, you can't say that, you know, you can't, you can't give these families false hope.

Tim Villegas (11:21):

And so, and, and so here's what, this is my point, right? That I think there are educators listening to us right now that want to believe in the hope, I think there's families that want to believe in the hope, right? And the, the problem is that there's so many educators that work in systems that for whatever reason, you know, whether it's malicious or not, they, they strangle that hope and they say temper expectations, you know, don't give the parents everything they want, because if you do that, then they're gonna, blah, blah, blah. You know? And so, and I've Greta. I like, I don't like I'm pulling back the curtain for everyone that those conversations happen all the time. And they're framed in a way that is like, oh, well, I can't believe that's what the parent wants. That's so unrealistic. Right. And not everyone's like that. A lot of people aren't okay. A lot of people aren't and educators are fantastic people, and I'm very proud to be one. I still consider myself one and I still consider, you know but I don't

know what happens. When you are in a position of leadership that you, you become so jaded, that that is what you think you're so cynical that you don't want to let families have that hope. Like what, what kind of world do we live in that, that happens, right?

Greta Harrison (13:08):

That should be like the first, the first red flag for people who are hiring. Hire educators with hope. If they don't have hope, don't hire them. You're absolutely right. And you're reminding me of a recent story from Twitter, which I'm recently starting to become active on. I had a, I believe he's the special education director from small town in Massachusetts messaged me. And he wanted to just have a zoom call with me just to chat. And I said, okay. And we zoomed. And I said, I'm kind of curious, you know, why do you wanna chat with me? And he said, well, I'm fairly new to this position. And I have a lot of parents who see us as we, as us versus them. And I know that you, he could, I always preach about relationships. And I really, really try to tell parents behind me to build those relationships, because that gets you through the hurdles.

Greta Harrison (14:13):

And he knew that. And so he wanted to talk to a parent who believed in that and he wanted, he just wanted to chat. But one of the great things he said was he gets these parents who are so used to being told no, and they go over his head and he pulls 'em aside. And he says, just come to me because you'll probably hear yes, more than you'll hear. No, and let's stop this, you know, tug and pull. And it was such a refreshing conversation because I thought if only everybody could be like him. He got it. You know, he totally got it. He said, I'm here to make the system better. He said, I know the system's broken. I know I'm not perfect, but I don't wanna make it worse. I wanna make it better. And, you know, just him spending, I think we chatted for almost two hours.

Greta Harrison (15:02):

Just him spending that time, just chatting with a stranger in another state to try to learn more about parents journey. I, you know, we need more like him and we have to make sure our school boards and our superintendents and our administration hire people like him, because that's a, you know, that's a very important position. Which is why I go back to relationships because parents, you know, we have much more power than we think we do. I remember when my daughter was little and I was in an anti-racism committee at my church, you know? And it, it, it was a time when people seemed a little bit down and I said, well, what can I do? And somebody said, well, Greta, you write, because I was writing a lot of op-eds for our paper. And he said, you write. And I said, yeah.

Greta Harrison (15:56):

And he said, that's power right there. And I thought, he's absolutely right, because you know, the op-eds I wrote some of them. I had a superintendent way back when my daughter was young, who didn't believe he actually said, when I went into his office, I led our special education advisory committee. And I went into his office for a private meeting. And he said, you know, I think that the special ed department is a Cadillac and we just don't have funding for a Cadillac. We need you to be a Ponto or something to that. He used this terrible analogy. And I'm like, are you kidding me? <Laugh>, you know, we had a great special ed director who was building teams and educating them and having them come back to, to spread that into schools. And he just chopped that off at the knees. But so we, you know, we had, there was a little tug and pull there.

Greta Harrison (16:51):

But always respectfully, always tell parents, don't go to school, board meetings and yell and scream. A lot of, a lot of things get solved behind closed doors again, by building relationships and by being respectful when you're at meetings. And I also wrote some op-eds that, you know, he just couldn't dismiss. So we, we got a mutual respect for each other. I think that's the best way I can put it. When he left, I was glad he left. We had much better superintendents after that, but at least there was a mutual respect there. And that was earned from a, a power that people don't think they have from me being involved in different committee. Me knowing our school board, me writing up bids. These are things parents that we can do and that we need to do. You know, there's, there's a, I'm not gonna get political here.

Greta Harrison (17:47):

<Laugh> but I'll just, I'll say a lot of people think parents can't be involved in their child's education. Well, talk to somebody whose child is included because they're very involved in their child's education. They have to be. And, and, and it's not a secret. The curriculum guides are out there for your state and for your district, your curriculum leaders are really, really accessible. I have so much praise for the curriculum leaders that I've dealt with in social studies and science and math, they were, they just were so they were very thrilled that I came to them cause parents don't do that, but they helped me. They gave me materials. They, they helped guide me. I mean, parents, you can be involved in your child's education very, very easily. There's no reason not to be.

Tim Villegas (18:40):

I have a question about that. So what you, you're talking about curriculum leaders, are you talking about district leaders that are in charge of curriculum? Just to clarify.

Greta Harrison (18:51):

Yes. The district leaders you know, I'm, I'm still friends with them to this day. Some of them have retired, but yes, they were amazing, you know?

Tim Villegas (19:01):

And yeah. Yeah. I, so I wanna echo that too, you know, the difference between at the, at a schoolhouse level a mindset of inclusion. I find that a lot of times you have curriculum and instruction you know, an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, or maybe a, a math coach or some like that that is very open to inclusive education. And because they have a, they have a bigger picture, right. They have a, a bigger view of what it's all about. And so when you pitch it to them, they're like, oh yeah, I can, I can see that they're connecting the dots. Whereas maybe classroom teacher in fourth grade is like so focused on their fourth grade class. It's like, Hmm, I don't know. Like, I, I don't know how that works, you know? And then just systems change wise. What we've seen, you know, with the nonprofit, with MCIE is that really convincing the district leadership is, is the way that you're gonna make sustainable change. You know, you can convert as many teacher classroom teachers as you'd like, but they don't have the power to actually make anything different.

Greta Harrison (20:27):

That's exactly right. It's the leadership. Which again, parents, we have power with, you know, when, when we chose our, we have a very good superintendent in, in my area. He was in the top four for the country last year. And he's very well respected in Virginia. But when he was chosen, I know school board

members and, and I was giving input to them saying, please look out for X, Y, and Z. Now there's a process, you know, and they followed that process. I don't want you to think that they did anything special for me behind closed doors, but, but a good school board member, which, which we have, they wanna know all aspects of their community and they wanna include people with disabilities. So they wanna educate themselves along the way of, you know, what to look for. And, and you have to keep track of these things. Who is gonna be your superintendent, who is gonna be your new, special ed director, your assistant superintendent, all these things are really, really important.

Greta Harrison (21:26):

And a lot have, you know, I've had parent, I've had a lot of parents come to me for help. I try to help them the best I can, but I'm not a person who goes to IEP meetings. But I will, when I talk to them about relationships and I say, serve on any committee that you can, and if you don't have the time, get to know the people who are there so they can share the information with you. But I say, and you, you've got to know who your superintendent is and your assistant superintendent and your special ed director. And I've had parents say in crisis, you know, they're suing their district and they don't even know who their special ed director is. And I'm like, no, no, no, let's, let's, let's backtrack here. That's, you know, we don't wanna to that step until, you know, excuse me until you know, who all the people are.

Greta Harrison (22:13):

That's, that's just really, really important, but you're right. That's, that's where the change starts and stops. You know, I've had some really bad, special ed directors and it took years of myself and other people parents and other people shining, you know, pulling back the curtain. As you said. To get rid of those directors, it didn't happen by me alone. But again, my voice counted along with other voices, you know, and when I have too many parents who just give up, when they get a bad spend director, they get bad, this or that don't give up, don't give up. Tim, do you know who Cindy Pitonyak is with Montgomery? She was with Montgomery county schools in Virginia. Now she's with VCU. She's a big, huge inclusion guru.

Tim Villegas (23:03):

No, it, it is, is she related to David?

Greta Harrison (23:07):

She is. She is. That's his, it's his wife.

Tim Villegas (23:10):

Exactly. Okay. I know, I don't know, David, so we republished something David wrote on think inclusive a long time ago. I don't even think it's on the site anymore. It might be to be honest, I, I don't think it, but I don't think it is. And so we've had a few email exchanges, but that's about it.

Greta Harrison (23:35):

Well, while Cindy has a really, I wrote down some things here, so wouldn't forget, Cindy has a really, really good video how to bring a, I think it's called how to bring a small county to inclusion. It's about 20 min, 20 minutes. And Cindy is c-i-n-d-y. It is fabulous about how they became an inclusive school district, spelled it out. And she talks about in that video that you're gonna have stones in the road. You know, there's no road, that's clear. You're gonna have stones in the road. There are rocks in the road. But, but what I try and tell parents is don't let those stones or those rocks deter you. I mean, you, that's why the

relationships are so important because if, if you build those relationships over time and don't wait till you're in crisis to build those relationships, have them already so that when the crisis happens, which it will, that you have those relationships there, you can pass those stones.

Greta Harrison (24:39):

You know, we had to, you know, people think that a lot of people think our road was super easy. It wasn't, we had stones, but we had a lot of superstars. You know, I call educators like you superstars. And it's the superstars who get us through it. It's the superstars who are keeping the system going. It's the superstars who keep the hope alive. And it's the superstars who are gonna be in the student's lives forever. They're always gonna be in my daughter's life. You know, my daughter was a class of 2020, and in January of 2020, I had a meeting with our assistant superintendent. And I said, you know, my daughter has so many rock stars, so many superstars, so many rock stars in her past who want to come to her graduation from outta state even, and I'm gonna need tickets cause you know, there's only like, I don't know, four allowed per family.

Greta Harrison (25:34):

I think I was gonna need 20 tickets or something like that. And he said, no problem. You know, we will make it happen. It didn't happen because of COVID. Graduation looked different. But the fact that she had so many rock stars who wanted to come was great. You know, it that's what means the world to us is just the fact that they really, really seriously wanted to come and that they were, they were more upset when graduation got changed than we were. I think it, it would've been quite something to, I think I would've had somebody for every year of her and probably some years more than one. Because it's those rock stars that keep you going. They, they just, they, they keep you going. So yeah, we, we can't let those, those, those rocks stop us by any.

Tim Villegas (26:26):

Well, I, I want I want you to spend a little bit of time sharing about born fabulous. And so I know that at the beginning you talked about, you know, starting it, you know, wanting to start it, but it's, you, you are wrapping up your second season, is that right?

Greta Harrison (26:44):

I've already wrapped up the, the second season's been out for a year now. Ah, okay. And I'm starting and I'm starting on the third season. Okay.

Tim Villegas (26:52):

Yep. Okay. So you have so born fabulous has two seasons could you share their audience if it, if our audience has not listened to born for fabulous yet just recap those seasons as, you know, as much as you want in the next few minutes. And then I know, I know we're keeping season three, hush hush right now, which is totally fine. But do you have a but maybe at the end you could say when we can expect season three, I can

Greta Harrison (27:24):

Do that. Okay. All right. Okay. I season one goes with the, I have themes for the season. So season one, the theme is, is parents, parents of behind these superstars, because I know as a parent, that's who I was reaching out to. Don't get me wrong. I also reached out to the self advocates when I met them and that worked with them as well. But I season one, I reached out to the parents and I have Steve and Steve

Riggio and his wife, and they're talking about their daughter, Melissa. And that is my first interview here. I am starting a podcast, which is out way outta my comfort zone, Tim. And my first interview is the CEO of Barnes and noble and his wonderful, wonderful wife, Laura Riggio, and their daughter has passed away. You know, so it was, it, it was hard.

Greta Harrison (28:23):

And, and I, and I admire them so much and I loved their daughter so much from afar. That was hard. It was tough, but it, but it was rewarding. We were talking about stones on the road and here's Laura Riggio telling me that she always felt her daughter had to prove her worth in the classroom. Now how many times a of you? And I heard that and we still hear it in 2021 or 2022, whenever this airs it'll still be true. So that was a profound moment for me that here's, you know, we're far more alike than different, you know, that she, they had to prove they're worth in classroom. They had to move to get to a different school district because Steve Riggio says I was sitting in an IEP meeting and I asked everybody who knows my daughter. And nobody knew my daughter.

Greta Harrison (29:18):

I said to my wife, it's time to move <laugh> they moved, you know, there are, there are so many profound moments in there and, and they share their journey. But if you think about it, she's born in 1988, she was fully included. She was on her swim team. You know, that's still a big hurdle for people nowadays to get on their typical sports team instead of a special team. You know, all of these things were done way back then. It's not new. We know it's not new. So, but that, so that's one interview. I also talked to Sandra. Do you know Sandra she's Sean's mother?

Tim Villegas (30:02):

Not personally. Just I think we're Facebook friends. I think that's as close as I'm close as I'm getting, or I've gotten.

Greta Harrison (30:09):

You are well, are you, are you familiar with born this way?

Tim Villegas (30:12):

Yes, yes.

Greta Harrison (30:13):

Okay. Sean was on born this way and Sandra is somebody who I knew before that because she she's written three books. Sandra is one of those parents who is always willing to help those behind her always. So I knew her from that aspect. And so talk to her about Sean's journey, because again, you know, and I've heard you say this in many of your podcasts, you talk about you your guests, what do you think of those functioning labels? And Sandra loves, you know, to talk about that because people will always give her that high functioning stuff with Sean and Sean's had many, many, many challenges starting with, you know, he's deaf in one ear. And you know, his speech was a huge issue until after he was 18.

Greta Harrison (31:02):

And all these things that people don't realize, people just assume because he was successful on TV, that the road has been easy, but it has not. And Sean has had a lot of discrimination and, you know, she really, really wanted a fully inclusive journey for him and really strive for that up until a point when it, it, it became an issue. And I do wanna share one quick story from Sandra. She has so many, listening to Sandra's stories are great. But one quick story is when Sean was in high school, he wanted to be in drama class. And the drama teacher said, we have to save these seats. This is Los Angeles. We have to save these seats for people who have a future in acting. And just so he didn't want Sean in his class. So, you know, fast forward, Sean gets on born this way, they win an Emmy.

Greta Harrison (31:51):

She wrote that teacher a letter. She didn't get a response, but she wrote a letter. It was respectful. Cause Sandra's always respectful. I don't, I'm sure she didn't write what she wanted to write, but she wrote a letter, you know? So teachers out there, the ones who are listening to your podcast care, it's up to them to help encourage the ones who are just around them, who are totally unaware. Somebody who's listening is working with a teacher like that. And you do not know what anybody's future is gonna be. How many other Emmy winning students did that guy have in his class? Right? Now, Sean didn't personally win an Emmy, but the show did, you know, I'm saying he was on a show that won Emmy. So yeah, so, so that was, that's a great conversation. I could talk to Sandra forever. And then Tim Harris, Tim Harris is an amazing self advocate. I met him, oh seven, seven or eight years ago. He came and did his speech in my area. And, and I got to spend some time with his family and Tim, and that is truly one of the best speeches or presentations I've ever seen.

Greta Harrison (33:08):

I don't care if you love people with disabilities without he is a great presenter. He is a great presenter. He gets the whole room involved. You're all going, oh, oh yeah, that's his tagline. And Tim is the most vivacious, outgoing person out there. He collects hugs. He's the first person in the world with down syndrome to own a restaurant. He doesn't have that anymore, but he's definitely somebody I knew that we wanted to talk to and talk to his parents. So I talked to his mom Jeanie. So she's the last one in, in, in season one. Again, Tim had an inclusive journey up to a point when the dumping started and that's what I call it. When disproportionate inclusion happens, you know, we're gonna have a truly inclusive world when we stop saying inclusion classes. Why are we? Why are we doing that?

Greta Harrison (34:05):

Because where I live an inclusion class means you have more IEPs than you don't, it's very disproportionate. And I can tell you all through middle school I had to have in my daughter's IEP very early on put no pull outs because special ed teachers would just pull out all the IEPs. Well, that's not inclusion <laugh> yeah. If they're teaching a class somewhere else for the entire time period, that is not inclusion. And, and when, when Tim got to whatever grade, I think it was fifth grade and she saw the dumping, which is what I call it, but it was disproportionate inclusion. You know, she was very, very disillusioned, but she made up for that in Tim's social life, in high school. And that, that story goes through and what he did in college, you know, because Tim went to college long before people with disabilities were going to college like they are now.

Greta Harrison (35:03):

And he went to a one year program and they just sent him back for four more times. So he could make it a four year program <laugh> they had him go for four years because, you know, they knew he wanted to open a restaurant. They knew he had to shadow somebody for a long time and really learn. And they made, you know, you have to think out of the box, you have to follow, you know, self-determination, you have to follow what your child's interests are. And you have to think out of the box, how's that gonna happen? And sometimes it takes more time. It doesn't happen instantly, but they knew they did not wanna follow the traditional transition guidelines that most school districts have, which by the way, every successful person that I have talked to ahead of me be they self advocate or especially the parents they've said don't stay after graduation.

Greta Harrison (35:59):

Just don't unless you're in an exceptional school district like Montgomery county, which has a partnership with Virginia tech, that is cool, you know? And there are some districts out there like that. So I wanna give those exceptions big kudos, but the majority of districts are doing the same old, same, same old after graduation for people with disabilities that they've been doing for 30 or 40 years. And it hasn't worked and they keep doing it. And Tim's parents to their credit. They knew that the vision that the school district had for Tim did not match Tim's vision for himself. So, you know, they, they helped him create the, the life that he has now. He's a, he's a great public speaker. He, he did, he did close down his restaurant for love many years ago, and then the love didn't work out. And he's working in a restaurant right now and he has some other plans.

Greta Harrison (36:58):

He has a book out. Now he has a book about hugs, he's living on his own. But that, that was a great conversation with Tim's mom. And that restaurant that they did have for many years changed the lives of many people, because so many people traveled just to go to that restaurant. It was on their, it was on my bucket list. I'm sad that I didn't get to it, but it was on my bucket list to see his restaurant. So then after season one, you know, you always, when you have a podcast, you look at feedback, right? And parents liked parents liked hearing from other parents, but I heard from some nonprofit leaders and other people, Hey, here's a reminder, get the self advocates involved. And I was like, you're right. You're right. You know, my, the logo on my podcast was drawn by my daughter.

Greta Harrison (37:49):

It was drawn long before I had the idea to do the podcast, but I'm trying to involve self advocates as much as possible. The music is from Melissa Riggio's collaborative effort with Rachel Fuller. And so yes, I said, okay, season two, we're gonna talk. We're, I'll be talking to, to self advocates. And then when I was talking, cause I do like to, I mean, I have relationships with these people. So in just a conversation with Jeanie's mom, they had nothing to do with podcasts. We're just chatting. I, I told her, you know, if I didn't know better, I think Tim wasn't genuine. Cuz Tim always calls everybody's best friend and how can everybody be your best friend? And so she told me the story of why Tim does that. And the minute she told me, I said, that's season two. I wanted to be self advocates with disabilities who was very successful.

Greta Harrison (38:43):

And they're best friends who do not have disabilities just to show that organic involvement into the world. And you know, I, I wanna mention something because MCIE they state, we envision a society

where neighborhood schools welcome all kinds. Okay, wait, I need my glasses. I might do this again. We envision a society where neighborhood schools welcome all learners and create the foundation for inclusive communities. That's why we do this because we will have inclusive communities. You know? So in season two, you see organically, how did these amazing self advocates, Micah Fialka-Feldman. Who's an intelligent lives. Everybody out there, if you haven't seen that movie, see it is, it's a great movie. Dan Habib is one of those people out there changing the world with his filmmaking. And I really admire everything Dan does. And, and his son Samuel is doing. So I talked to Micah, Fialka-Feldman, who I met in 2018.

Greta Harrison (39:52):

When my daughter spoke to congressional committee, Dan Habib was at, at that hearing. And he presented his movie that night in DC. I talked to Tim Harris and his best friend who gave us the idea for the, the season two. I'm talking to Kayla McEwen, who is the lobbyist professional lobbyist, first professional lobbyist with down syndrome in Washington, DC. She is a firecracker. And I can't, I can't remember when I met her, but I can tell you, my daughter who works for the Virginia board of people with disabilities, met her before me. And she sent me a picture of herself with Kayla and my daughter's not that kind of person to take pictures with celebrities or anything, but she was so excited to meet Kayla. She took a picture with her. Kayla is a firecracker and Kayla is, she is always positive, always engaging, so intelligent, so charming.

Greta Harrison (40:48):

She has her own podcast. And Kayla's corner. If you, if, if anybody hasn't heard that you, you need to hear Kayla's corner. And speaking of that, I wanna give a plug for her because on Kayla's corner, the most profound episode for me, there was Johnny Taylor. He was with the society of human resource management. Here's a guy leading and HR directors in corporations for the country talking to Kayla about true diversity. You know, that's what this is all about. You know, it's people like that who ch who move the needle forward, listening to his conversation was, was great. Kayla is amazing. So I talked to her and her best friend who she met working her best friend, worked in a beauty. It still works in a beauty salon and Kayla's first job was in a beauty salon. So she met her working.

Greta Harrison (41:50):

And of course, Sean, we can't forget Sean and Sean's best friend was on board this way with him. His name is also Sean <laugh> so spoke to them and they were hilarious, cause Sean is hilarious. So you know, one of the things with PE, a lot of people with significant disabilities and I'll just, she's my daughter's an example. My daughter's very shy. She's painfully shy. And now, you know, now we know some of that is the autism and it's harder for her to make friends. And I'm not saying she doesn't have friends, she does have friends, but it's harder for her. You know, Tim Harris, you know, he out the door and first person he meets is gonna be his friend. He's that engaging? My daughter is not like that. And there are a lot of people who are having a harder time, making friends and friendships are so important in having a, a fulfilled life.

Greta Harrison (42:50):

So, you know, that's one of the things that we talk about is how important friendships are and, and engaging that. So I loved season two just because I love the people so much and whenever they text me or call me or whatever, I'm they just make my life so much fuller. If, if you don't have friends in your life who have disabilities, your life is lacking. It really is. It's not a well-rounded life because they make your

life much more well-rounded and they have a much better perspective on so many things. Hmm. So that season two, and with season three, I'm just gonna give the teaser that we are gonna be recording in January and February. And then just depending on when I edit it, I will, I will get it out. As soon as I can, after that, you know, how much fun editing is, <laugh> the way I do it is I re I do all the recording for months and then I do the editing. That's how I do it. That's how I do it.

Tim Villegas (43:50):

Go ahead. What were you gonna say?

Greta Harrison (43:51):

I was gonna say, can I tell you a story? The first and I'm sure that, you know, this, the first man who ever was diagnosed with autism was a man named Donald Gray triplet and he was born in 1933. He's still alive. As far as I know. And he lived in forest, he lives in forest, Mississippi. He was first diagnosed with autism because, well, first of all, he came from a very well to do family. And they were very educated and I believe it was his father heard about a study that was being done. And I think it was at John Hopkins, but I could be wrong about that. And he wrote this missive about his son when he was very little.

Greta Harrison (44:38):

And the missive is kind of like still to this day, one of the foundations of, of what constitutes autism, that father was that detailed. But anyways, he grew up included. He went to his school and because of that in his little town, he's part of the town. He, everybody in the town knows him. People understand that there's certain quirks he may have as for lack of a better word. A don't, all of us have things that are different about ourselves, but he is part of that town. I believe he's in his eighties now probably close to 90. And I learned about that recently, also in my town, I live in Hampton, Virginia in my church. I go to the old, this church in the United States. It's 411 years old. It's called St. John's Episcopal church. And I had a friend at church named Tommy Sinclair. And everybody in my town knows Tommy. Tommy had a disability. Nobody knows what it was. I don't know that it was diagnosed, but we know he had a disability.

Greta Harrison (45:59):

Tommy was included in our school. Now Donald triplets mother's family started their bank in their town. So they were pillars of the town. Tommy's family had a seafood company in my town, new Hamptons on the water. Seafood's a big deal. They were pillars in the town. He was included in our high school because he was included. Everybody in town knows Tommy. He, he did drive it one time, but he didn't drive for many years. At the end of his life he died tragically because of an accident, but Tommy could walk around everywhere, do anything. And he was, it was his town. It's kind of what we all wish life would be like for everybody, for all of us, I think. And, and I look at those two examples of people who were born so long ago who were included and that inclusion got them true inclusion in their communities.

Greta Harrison (47:03):

And, and I, I struggled to think why, why leaders, you know, city council members, mayors, the city managers, I'm talking to you, everybody out there, it's to the benefit of your cities and your towns and counties and your communities to really make sure that disability is part of your inclusion effort. So I, I just wanted to mention that. Tommy is on my heart a lot, our, our church not recently dedicated

playground to him because he loved children. But I want a life like that where wherever my daughter ends up, she's part of the community.

Greta Harrison (47:44):

And she already kind of is because she was fully included in her school. She's fully included in her place of worship. You know, she's fully included in whatever she does and that just organically are little steps towards hopefully having that fully inclusive life in the future in the community. But I, I just wanted to throw that out there because I've talked to some parents, some, some very successful people lately who are not inclusion fans and they were anti inclusion and you know, you know me, I, I say I'm a rabid inclusionist so when I hear anti inclusion, I can't just listen to that. Especially when there's younger parents, you know, listening to and not say something. So I always step in and say, I understand why you feel that way, but what you are is your anti don't do it wrong because their, their experience of inclusion was it wasn't properly supported or implemented, which really wasn't inclusion. And, but that's what happens all the time.

Tim Villegas (48:53):

Yes.

Greta Harrison (48:54):

All the time. Yes. So yeah, I, I just conclusion so that all of us can have that world around us. That mirrors what it should, you know, I'm 61 years old. I didn't have anybody with disabilities going to school with me. And I went to school in a pretty progressive area in Minnesota. That's where I graduated from high school. I did not have anybody with disabilities. In fact, there were people that I went to school with after my daughter was born, who told me that they had had siblings with down syndrome who were sent away to institutions. Hmm. I never even knew do they have the sibling.

Tim Villegas (49:38):

Yeah. Greta, will you tell our listeners where people can find you, you know, you know where your podcast is at? If, well, you know, your Twitter handle, if you have a website, stuff like that.

Greta Harrison (49:49):

All right. You can find my podcast anywhere podcast or heard, including your smart speaker. I won't say the name, cause it'll pop up if I say it, but you can also go to bornfabulouspodcast.com/, which is the website. My Twitter handle is podcast [@podcastborn](https://twitter.com/podcastborn). My Facebook page. My personal one is Greta Harrison and my the, [the podcast one is born fabulous podcast for Facebook](#). I am on [Instagram](#), but I have to admit, I'm still trying to learn Instagram so I'm, I'm kind of weak there. I could use help there, but it's, it's born fabulous podcast on Instagram as well. So that's where you can find me.

Tim Villegas (50:41):

Fantastic. make sure you go ahead and check out those links and like, and sit scribe to born. Fabulous Greta Harrison. It's been a pleasure. Thank you for being on the think inclusive podcast.

Greta Harrison (50:55):

Thank you so much, Tim. I really, really, really appreciate it.

Tim Villegas (51:01):

That will do it for this episode of the think inclusive podcast. Subscribe to the think inclusive podcast via apple podcast, the anchor app, Spotify, wherever you listen to podcasts. Have a question or comment, email us your feedback at [podcast@think inclusive.us](mailto:podcast@thinkinclusive.us). We love to know that you're listening. Thank you to patrons Veronica E, Sonya A, Pamela P, Mark C, Kathy B, and Kathleen T for their continued port of the podcast. When you become a patron, your contribution helps us with the cost of audio production, transcription, and promotion of the think inclusive podcast. And you could even get a shout out like the fine people we just mentioned. Go to patreon.com/thinkinclusivepodcast to become a patron today and get access to all our unedited interviews, including the conversations you heard today. Thank you for helping us equip more people to promote and sustain inclusive education. This podcast is a production of MCIE, where we envision a society where neighborhood schools welcome all learners and create the foundation for inclusive communities. Learn more at mcie.org. We'll be back with another think inclusive episode in February with our guest Alida Miranda Wolf, author of the book, cultures of belonging: building inclusive organizations that last. Thanks for your time and attention and for listening. Until next time, remember inclusion always works.

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