



## The Think Inclusive Podcast

### Season 6, Episode 12

#### Jen Tennican | Hearts of Glass

Tim Villegas (00:00):

Have you ever thought about starting your own podcast? When I was trying to get the think inclusive podcast off the ground, I didn't know where to start. I had so many questions. How do I record an episode? Where do I find background music? How do I get my show on apple podcast, spotify, and all the other places? People like to listen? Where do I even find advertisers? The answer to every one of these questions is really simple. Anchor anchor is a one stop shop for recording, hosting, distributing, and monetizing your podcast. And Best of all, it's 100 percent free and 100 percent ridiculously easy to use. So if you ever wanted to start a podcast, go to [anchor.fm/start](https://anchor.fm/start) to join me in the diverse community of podcasters already using anchor. That's anchor dot FM slash start. I can't wait to hear your podcast.

Jen Tennican (00:59):

This is Jen tourniquet and you're listening to this thinking inclusive podcast

Tim Villegas (01:32):

recording from Beautiful Marietta, Georgia. You were listening to the think inclusive podcast, episode 27. I'm your host, Tim Vegas. Today we have a fantastic conversation with filmmaker Jen [inaudible] about her new film, hearts of glass, but before we get into the interview, I have a few announcements. The first thing I want to talk to you about is how you can support the podcast. You can go on [Patron.com](https://patron.com/backslashthinkinclusivepodcast) backslash think inclusive podcast or [anchor dot FM. Backslash think hyphen inclusive](https://anchor.fm/backslashthinkinclusive). Um, anytime anyone signs up for a monthly contribution, it helps pay for the production and transcription costs for the podcast. We do have a lot of our podcasts that are available through transcription. And if you are interested in those, go ahead and Click on the podcast tab on [thinking inclusive.us](https://thinkinginclusive.us). Again, thank you for those who have contributed. We really appreciate it. The other announcement is something we talked about last week.

Tim Villegas (02:39):

We are officially offering a inclusion coaching and educational consulting through our website. So if you want more information about that and go to the services tab on [thinking inclusive.us](https://thinkinginclusive.us) there, you can subscribe to our think inclusive, not so weekly email. Um, we try to do it, but, uh, you know, uh, less spam in your inbox is probably a good thing. Uh, we'll be sending out an email very soon if you missed out on the podcast discount for the inclusion coaching, uh, we'll be sending out an email very soon. I'm on a way you can get a discount on those services. Um, so, uh, those are all the announcements, um, and I want to tell you about a Gen. so today on the podcast we have to make or Gen 10 when we talk about her most recent project, hearts of glass widths, which she sees as an opportunity to raise awareness about local sustainable food production and the need for inclusive fair pain, job opportunities for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. If you like the podcast, help

other people find us by giving us a five star review on apple podcasts or wherever you listen to the thing, conclusive podcasts, you can also tell your best friends. We love word of mouth promotion. Um, so please, please tell people about us. Um, and so without further ado, here's the interview.

Tim Villegas (04:17):

Hello everyone. Welcome to the thinking please. Inclusive podcast. I'm your host, Tim Vegas. Uh, I am very excited to introduce Jen, 10 akin a filmmaker. She began making documentary films in the late nineties in Boston before moving to Jackson, Wyoming, and 2000 to her previous award winning documentaries, the stage coach Barr and American crossroads and Far Afield the conversation love story, sorry. Conservation love story has been distributed nationally by American public television. Currently, she is partnering with her local slow food chapter, slow food in the tetons to produce hearts of glass, a film focused on cutting edge vertical hydroponic greenhouse with a social mission in Jackson Hole. Hearts of glass tells the story of the first critical year of operation of vertical harvest, a highly innovative but risky experiment in growing crops and providing meaningful employment to people with disabilities. Jen's films have community at their heart and hearts of glasses and opportunity to raise awareness about local sustainable food production in the need for inclusive, fair paying job opportunities for adults with intellectual and developmental disability. Thank you for joining us on the conclusive podcast. Jen,

Jen Tennican (05:45):

you're welcome, Tim. It's great to be here. I can, I can tell you how long ago I wrote that though, because our film changed from being the first year to covering the first 15 months, which is not as sexy number. It's hard number, like couldn't it just be like a year and a half or two years or a year? No, it's 15 months.

Tim Villegas (06:09):

Yes. Well that's okay. Yeah, we, you know, the, it had been awhile since I had watched the film and now as having this conversation, um, but as reviewing it for before we are having this conversation, I was just reminded about how beautiful this story is, um, and how wonderfully it captures the idea of this innovative practice of sustainable food but also a disability rights. So it's kind of like this Mashup of agriculture and disability rights in a documentary and I have never experienced that before, so, so Kudos to you. This was great.

Jen Tennican (07:00):

Fantastic. It hadn't been done before. Yeah,

Jen Tennican (07:06):

it is a, is a really interesting story and the great thing about it is it was happening in my backyard so I didn't really have to go very far to cover it and I'm actually in the same way that the slow food movement has practice, sort of locavore local food. I'm, I'm a local filmmaker and I don't think any of my last three films have been farther than 20 miles from my house so that I'm trying to save the world by only making local films.

Jen Tennican (07:36):

Right, right, right. And um, yeah, because I, I had reached out to you to be a test screening of the film. Um, unlike the previous two films that I had done. I, I, with this film, I went through a series of test

screenings with various audiences and we didn't focus just on disability but we, we, we obviously reached out to some disability viewers and advocacy groups, but we tried to mix up our audiences so we had a lot of different perspectives on it. And um, yeah, your feedback was helpful. So that's why, that's why in the write up that I sent you when we were going to originally do this podcast, I don't know, six or eight months ago that, uh, it was covering a year and not 15 months. So some things have changed. Yeah. But, um, it really is something that is incredibly innovative and, and is not going on anywhere else in the world at this moment. This particular combination of a high tech vertical farm in a purpose built building on an extremely small footprint with the amount of technology crammed into it. I, you know, I mean in ways you don't even have to say so much the technology because the images of the vertical carousels and the horizontal carousels just sort of speak for themselves. They look so cool in high tech.

Jen Tennican (09:07):

And then the, and then the combined social mission, you know, vertical harvest was always envisioned to sort of bring these two things together. A community need for local year round produce, which is a very difficult to do grow in Jackson, which has a four to five month growing season, outdoor growing season and, um, meaningful competitively paid jobs for community members with disabilities

Tim Villegas (09:39):

now. So I have two questions to kind of start us off. What was, what was your involvement in this project as far as vertical harvest goes? How did you, how did you first learn about it and why was it important to you to, you even make this documentary about this particular, this particular issue? Um, the combining of issues, the, you know, the greenhouse and then the, uh, employment for people with disabilities.

Jen Tennican (10:16):

Um, well I first became Dean Jackson is a small town. We have 10,000 people in our town, so chances are a lot of people. And I, I did know the, the two and then it turned out to be three women who kind of founded it. And um, so, and it was an eight year, I think it was about an eight year process from the idea and the inception of the idea of vertical harvest to the combination where the doors were opening and they were growing produce. So, um, I think that I helped my friends at some point with the kickstarter video for it or I contributed some footage. Um, it went through several iterations where in the beginning it was, um, uh, a nonprofit where people were donating and then it eventually morphed into a. and this is very sexy low profit, limited liability corporation.

Tim Villegas (11:15):

Yes.

Jen Tennican (11:15):

Which is a, it's a, it's a low profit l'm company. Uh, so the social mission is his primary. There are investors, uh, that expect a return on their investment, but it is slow money and um, and patient, patient capital. So all that kind of b Corp social investing, that is quite, quite hot at the moment.

Tim Villegas (11:43):

Yeah. I was actually just thinking about the court because that's something that it, the only reason that popped in my head was I'm a low profit organization. That sounds a lot like thinking inclusive.

Jen Tennican (11:58):

It is bad marketing.

Tim Villegas (12:01):

It is,

Jen Tennican (12:04):

that's a great business. It's completely low profit. Would you like to invest?

Tim Villegas (12:10):

That's right. So all the investors out there. No, that's fantastic. Um, and so you just kinda see, it sounds like you were just trying to help them out and then. And then what drew you to wanting to make the documentary?

Jen Tennican (12:25):

Well, yeah, so as I said, it was an eight year process for them to really bring this to fruition. So I was making other films during, during the interim, and I happened to finish the last one, a far field and conservation love story just as they were finishing building the greenhouse and I did have this moment where I thought, Ooh, I really could use a break because being an independent film producer makes you want to curl up in the fetal position a lot. But I thought, you know, this really is a once in a lifetime chance to capture this moment in time. It's a, it's a very exciting time for this. It's a startup. It, I'm not only has the social mission, but it has all of this high tech hydroponic vertical farming equipment in it. Um, it just seemed, it seemed like I, I should do it and I, uh, and I couldn't pass it up and you know, it's very important to have editorial separation in the work that you do as a documentary filmmaker and um, you know, the film is not for vertical harvest and they did not financially support it.

Jen Tennican (13:42):

Um, but, um, but it clearly is about them and I'm sure it will, I'm sure will be a benefit to them in some ways, but it is nice to have editorial separation and it is nice that I live in a small town and people were comfortable with my reputation and they let us have really unfettered access because I'm sure there were some things they would prefer that we didn't film. And I know every time, um, the people from Vertical Harvest Watch it. They, uh, they enjoy it, but they also go through an angst around some of the, um, the highs and lows around the business model. And I'm dialing in the growing of crops there. There were a lot, there were a lot of variables for sure.

Tim Villegas (14:26):

Yeah. Yeah. Um, so there, there are several themes that are really in this, uh, in hearts of glass and the filmmaker. But I'm, so I'm wondering if these themes were intentional or are they just kind of grew, came out organically in the, in the film. But, so you have this theme of, of a, of creating an environment where you have, you know, you have, uh, people with intellectual disabilities and typically developing or you know, however you want to say it. Uh, uh, you know, workers working together. Uh, and, and just how empowering that is because when you look, when you watched the film, the, the people that are working side by side, it is not a, um, um, it's not just a help her help he type of role they're working together, um, well for, for a common goal. And while their support there, you don't see the, um, the workers talk down to the people with intellectual disabilities.

Tim Villegas (15:47):

They're really, they're equals in their peers. And that is as a, as an educator and someone who wants to, you know, promote that, that type of inclusion in, you know, in our communities, in schools that was so refreshing to see and to see play out in such a natural environment. So I, I really loved that. And then you have, um, the idea that uh, people with a disability are working, but they're also working for a competitive wage. They're not, you know, having sub sub pay at all. Uh, and then you have this whole other story of just how the greenhouse works in general, which was fascinating. So it, could you talk about those, about those themes where they intentionally, um, put out or, or were you, how, how did that play out in how you were making the film?

Jen Tennican (16:45):

A couple of things. I feel like I missed part of your other question before I'm going to go back because it touches on disability. So you know, a lot of, a lot of people who make films about disability have a personal connection to disability and I didn't really have one before before working on the film. And so for me, just from a very personal experience, I started to get introduced to people in my community that for whatever reason I hadn't been aware of or in the same circles with, and it was very, I think very rewarding just to get a sense of what people's capabilities are and um, meet families, a job support caregivers, lots of different people involved in the whole process and just really get a sense of, um, the complex web that is created with the community. And then I think just seeing the employment model, which is not, you know, there's a, I think, and I have, I have had a quick learning curve. I think I'm working on the film. Um, I've, you know, as we started filming in December of 2015 and in really early on, I reached out to um, the University of Wyoming at the University of university centers on excellence and developmental disability to have advisors on board from the get go. And they were extremely helpful. And from there I got connected with um, the, uh, association for university centers on Disability. And I'm trying not to use all of the acronyms.

Jen Tennican (18:36):

Yeah. Um,

Jen Tennican (18:38):

so, um, I think vertical harvest model is, is not all the way towards one side of the spectrum on completely integrated and competitive, but it is definitely towards the correct side of the spectrum in my opinion. And um, I think that their breakdown of workers is probably 50 percent with disability and 50 percent without. And I'm seeing how, again, I think it comes down to sort of a core corporate, you know, their startup culture, corporate culture, a culture of inclusion mean there they were just very, um, inclusive and accepting and yes, everyone was contributing to the same mission and people with disabilities, uh, as employees there were extremely visible and a vital part of the um, and continue to be a vital part of the business. So I really hadn't had much exposure to the disability community before, so it was eyeopening in that respect.

Jen Tennican (19:46):

And um, you know, just to see, as you mentioned, people treated with dignity and dignity to fail, right? To perhaps not achieved something. Um, and it was also different from the other films that I've done in the previous films had been retrospective, you know, I had found a story that I wanted to tell that had already happened and I could choose my characters and I could do my research and figure out who I, you know, which stories I wanted to tell this was unfolding. And um, it was extremely stressful in terms

of, you know, are we following the right employees, will there be enough drama, will people evolve and change, you know, what's going to happen. So, you know, nobody has the budget, nor should they spend, you know, every day filming in that greenhouse during our 15 month period, that would have been a disaster in terms of trying to go through. So we tried, we tried to do really a get a sense of what was going on, figuring out the dynamics. We probably followed eight, eight or nine characters and then had to whittle that down to five main characters that ended up cross disability and ranging in age from their twenties to their fifties, um, men and women. So it was, I think, a very, a good spectrum that we ended up following. Um,

Tim Villegas (21:20):

yeah. So the, uh, so the, so the, the, I guess the diversity in your characters was intentional.

Jen Tennican (21:33):

Intentional in a way, but also just, I think good luck. Um, you know, we ended up, um, yeah, with a good range just because that's whose stories panned out. It would have been good no matter what, but it was very, it was important to us to have at least at least one female character. We did manage that.

Tim Villegas (21:54):

That's good. Yeah. So the character of Micah that you're talking about is fascinating. Uh, and she also has that her side, I guess, business of producing art, artwork, uh, which is, uh, uh, a, a really nice, uh, as a part of her story. Um, I did want to, I did want to bring up one part of Johnny's story and I guess this is the educator in me. Here's a scene. There's a scene where, uh, they're having, um, some sort of like beginning of the day pep talk or something like that. And the, the, I would assume the manager and asks everyone to share, know I guess how they bring joy to the world or something like that. And uh, and Johnny, uh, you know, perks up and he says, well, you know, I recite movies, I saw movie lines and uh, as the educator in me, it would've been so easy for that manager to say, well, that's really not, you know, that's off topic or you know, let's bring it back Johnny.

Tim Villegas (23:13):

But instead she, she goes with it and she uses his interests, which is obviously reciting movie lines. And then he recites this movie line, which is so on point with, um, with just the, uh, I guess the tone of the tone of the group. And I know I don't want to spoil anything, but it was just really a great moment. And uh, it, those kinds of things as a, as someone who is interested in disability rights and inclusion, uh, that I love to see and I would love to see people see that scene and, and um, and experience the dignity that is given to the workers. So I just wanted to share that because that, that was really powerful for me.

Jen Tennican (24:08):

Oh, that's good. I mean, I think there's things coming from outside the disability world and maybe being sometimes hypersensitive not knowing, you know, we wanted, we ran those scenes by advisors to make sure it didn't seem like people were laughing at. I mean, yeah, laughing at Johnny. So much is laughing with him or you know, like it wasn't a derisive kind of field to it or I'm like making someone perform kind of thing.

Tim Villegas (24:37):

Right, right. Yeah. That's good. Did you have a favorite story or um, something about the portraits that you did that really stuck out to you?

Jen Tennican (24:53):

Well, I mean, I think I have a favorite scene in the movie and um, once they actually. I probably have several favorite scenes, but I, Johnny, in addition to, um, being a big movie fan is, is a brony he loves, he's a, my little pony fan. And um, there are bronies who don't have disabilities and they're bronies with disabilities. And so I, I've met, I've had some feedback, uh, occasionally where people are, like, that's infant tile. And uh, you shouldn't show that and I was like, Whoa, if a person without disability can be a brony, can a person with them

Jen Tennican (25:32):

disability be a brony? Yeah. So I'm a senior

Jen Tennican (25:38):

ben where, where johnny it puts on his, um, a my little pony outfit for the character, a shining armor and performs at a three year old's birthday party and deals with all the chaos and the noise and you can really see how he has developed skills to deal with some of it. Um, and it even gets out a little out of hand in a moment, but he, he pulls it back in and it's just, it's, it's about, I think, seeing growth in characters over the course of the film. And to me that was sort of a beautiful little story which is just, I mean, there's nothing better than somebody in a pony costume, in my opinion.

Jen Tennican (26:23):

And really. And Really

Jen Tennican (26:25):

Julia, like he's really working the room in that three year old birthday.

Jen Tennican (26:31):

Yeah.

Tim Villegas (26:34):

Overall, how did the making of this film impact to you personally?

Jen Tennican (26:41):

Hey, I think, you know, as I said, I didn't have a lot of exposure to, um, my fellow citizens with disabilities here in Jackson, so it's allowed me to develop some friendships with people that I, you know, I mean I say friendships because they extend beyond the, the filmmakers subject lines delineations and um, you know, it's just, it's great to know, like, I just know Sean, I don't necessarily, I mean Sean has strengths and weaknesses and he's a great worker and he's Super Fun to hang out with and I mean it's a small town so I feel like it's just opened my eyes to how I can extend my community and the value I think of natural supports, um, on, on the job. Um, or, you know, just in life I saw that happen at vertical harvest. I don't think we, you know, there are only so many things we can show in a film and I think that's one thing that you probably don't get as much of a sense of.

Jen Tennican (27:51):

But, you know, we saw friendships evolved and natural supports evolve through work relationships. And I think that some of the stuff that you pointed out early on where you see, um, there, there are a

number of employees who have job supports that helped them throughout this period that we filmed, but they're also coworkers that just function is natural supports. So, um, I think just, yeah, being kind, being inclusive, engaging with people at my goal was that when people walked away from this film that they knew enough about our five major characters, that they could start up a conversation or know what their likes or dislikes were or that they really got a little window into people's personality and they weren't just sort of monolithic portrayals of people with disability, you know, to be pitied or um, we're not really, you did, you never learn enough about people's characters to really care.

Tim Villegas (29:04):

Right. That's. Yeah. So Jen, what was the biggest thing that you will learn about, um, the, I guess the vertical hydroponic greenhouse in making this film? Like what was the biggest thing that, that, that you're, your thing

Jen Tennican (29:23):

that is perhaps more stressful to run a hydroponic vertical farm than it is to make a film. About a know it just, I mean, it just, it takes, it takes a brave and committed people to, I think take that kind of risk. Um, they, they did a ton of research, um, to create this vertical farm and the, um, the employment model, but, you know, I mean, where the rubber meets the road is when you get into greenhouse and you were beginning to grow things and it was just, um, the commitment, the ups and downs, the fact that these people were in it for the long haul. Um, it was, it was impressive. It was impressive. There were times when you were filming were you were just like, oh my goodness, I feel so much for you. People meaning the people who work at vertical harvest to everybody who works at vertical harvest. So,

Tim Villegas (30:30):

well, the hearts of glass is a fantastic. I can't wait for our listeners to see the film. So tell us how they can see the film. Um, if it's even possible at this point.

Jen Tennican (30:47):

Right. So we're, we're very early in our festival run and that is the first phase is distribution of the film. Um, so people, unfortunately, well people can, can see it if they come to the wild and scenic film festival in January and Nevada city, California, we just got selected for that. Um, but we're a little ways off from having public screenings, but there will come a point where, um, you know, we, we want to encourage community screenings. People be able to buy a download of the film. Um, all of, all of those wonderful things that happened, but we're a little ways off from that. We've presented some excerpts and had panel discussions at a couple of disability conferences and we're looking forward to attending caches, national conference in Portland at the end of November. And, uh, one of our main characters, ty warner will be there with his father and, um, so I think it's really important when we do these presentations to have a self advocate employee there as part of it. Um, so what you can do right now is follow us on social media and you can find out when you'll be able to see the film and where you'll be able to see the film.

Tim Villegas (32:14):

Fantastic. Um, and uh, I would assume the hearts of glass film that calm and they can see a trailer of the film. And Mate, do you have excerpts on there as well?

Jen Tennican (32:27):



We have a couple of different, I think versions of the trailer on the facebook page. We as our cover photo, we have a mosaic of a version of our trailer. Um, yeah. And then um, yeah, we, we have a presence on facebook, instagram and we're working on twitter because boy doesn't twitter need what? You have to really work that way.

Tim Villegas (32:54):

Exactly, exactly. Alright. Well Jen, 10 again, thank you for taking time out to be on the thinking podcast. We look forward to promoting the film when it gets a little bit more. Uh, so the public can see it. Um, thank you for your time.

Jen Tennican (33:15):

Yeah, thank you tim.

Tim Villegas (33:25):

That is our show. We would like to thank jen for being a guest on the conclusive podcast. Make sure to get updates about her film, hearts of glass at hearts of glass, Film Dot Com and Gen 10 productions.com. You can also follow hearts of glass on twitter and on instagram. You can follow, think inclusive on the web. I think inclusive.us as well as twitter, facebook, Google plus, and instagram. You can also subscribe to the thing conclusive podcast via apple podcasts, Google play, stitcher, or anchor dot FM. The easiest way to start a podcast if you are using the anchor app to listen, please leave us a voicemail. You may be featured on our next podcast. You can also favorite us and or you use the applause button while listening to the show. We love to know that you were listening. Also a reminder that you can support the think inclusive podcasts via patreon or anchor.fm with a monthly contribution so that we can continue to bring you in depth interviews with thought leaders and inclusive education and community advocacy. Also on that note, thank you to Patrion Donna I for their continued support of this podcast from Marietta, Georgia. Please join us again on the inclusive podcast. Thanks for your time and attention.

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