**Emily Davison:** Hello everyone

Welcome back to Fashionability I’m Emily Davison and today we are going to be talking about universal design.

Universal design is a concept very widely used within the disability community when Ferring to put resign. Essentially the idea seeks to make products more inclusive for as many people as possible by making them widely usable by all.

The concept has been implemented by Brands like P&G, Kellogg’s and make up Revolution.

But what place does universal design have in the beauty and fashion industry when it comes to adapting products to fit the needs disabled consumers who make up 15% of the worlds population.

Today On the podcast we’re going to be discussing Just that.

Joining me on the show today is Laura Legendary business owner fashionability co-founder, Trishna Daswaney founder of inclusive make up tool brand Kohl Kreatives and Mary Cayten Brakefield Founder of start-up adaptive fashion brand Brakefields to discuss what universal design means to them.

First I caught up with co-founder Laura Legendary.

Laura is a blind disability advocate and owner of the braille jewellery company Elegant Insights

Laura told me her thoughts on what universal design means to her and her specific needs.

**Laura Legendary:** universal design is a design or environment, whether that's a product or a place that is a design, that's usable by all people to the greatest extent possible without the need for adaptation.

So that's a very general definition of universal design. So basically what they are saying in this particular definition is that a product that's usable by as many people as possible, under as many circumstances as possible to the greatest extent possible.

**Emily Davison:** We've seen recently some really big name brands. PNG recently bring out a collection of shampoo and conditioner bottles that had distinctive, tactile symbols on them to differentiate with different packaging. We had makeup a revolution recently launched their 5 D Lash Pow Mascara, which has a push to open.

Handle as opposed to the traditional screw cap. All these kinds of things I think is a really important thing. And I think when you see big brands, like really big name brands, actually doing these sorts of things, I think it makes you very optimistic for the future of universal design and then where it's going.

**Laura Legendary:** Additionally, there are more and more inclusive marketplaces. For example, Zappos adaptive is a wonderful clothing, shoes and accessories marketplace specifically for inclusive fashion. And there are several other major multinational corporations that are taking this up, whether it's Tommy Hilfiger,

big brands, as you say, who have taken on this idea of inclusive and adaptive fashion . it's given us more places to which to turn more places to go more places to shop.

**Emily Davison:** What do you feel as a blind person? What products do you feel like you struggle with currently that perhaps you wouldn't, if they were made inclusive by using universal design.

**Laura Legendary:** I think one of the things that I struggle with most as a person who is completely blind is the notion of.

And while I did have some eyesight earlier on in my life, and I have a memory of colors. If it's something like a makeup palette, for example, I need some pretty specific information. That's relevant to my skin tone as to what colors I'm working with, because let's just use an example of. Peach. There could be a range of variations of the color peach, whether that's coral, whether that's more of an orange tone, peach, a pink tone, peach, a pastel peach.

**Emily Davison:** And I also think on the note of things like color, for example, when you've got perhaps like a makeup palette and it has a multitude of different colors, it doesn't even have maybe a system where it goes from light to dark or it's even sectioned off with matte colors, always be in one section.

Then you have shimmers in one section or warm tones in one call turns in another perhaps. And there's no real system for actually organizing colors by a certain system.

**Laura Legendary:** Well, it's funny that you should say that because even when I had enough ice, to be able to see colors in a color palette and to read the label on the back, there are different ways in which even the packaging shows the order of the colors or the names of the colors.

I can remember looking at labels and. The compact over. Sometimes they show the colors in the order in which they would appear. If you were looking at the pallete with the lid open, and sometimes they show the colors positioned literally on the under side.

Or they may not even put the colors in the actual order in which they appear in the pallet. So even if you're sighted, there is sometimes a bit of confusion as to which color is located, where, so I think even simplifying the labeling and creating a little color map, Of where the colors are situated in a palette would be really.

**Emily Davison:** If you could actually have a conversation with some big beauty brands that you love and that you use on a regular basis, and you could say to them, I would change this and this and this to make a product more accessible for me and people like me with universal design in mind.

What would you say to them that you wanted to recreate?

**Laura Legendary:** The notion of universal design is tricky because there are so many circumstances that you would have to accommodate.

 To answer your question specifically, even if a brand were to create a a color map on their website, where they show, perhaps they can show the colors up close, maybe offer more descriptive language as to what the color is, as opposed to a cute color name.

And then they can describe where that color is situated in the palette. And it's something that I could access on the brand website that would be one very helpful feature that I would encourage.

Just to give another example. Accessible dressing rooms in a department store. The last time I suffered the obstacle course, that was the dressing room in a department store.

The rooms themselves were small. It would have been impossible for a wheelchair user to even get through the dressing room door in part because the door swung inwards. And even if a wheelchair could get through the door, there would be no way to turn around in the room and close the door. The hallways are littered with racks and tables and chairs.

Clothing and hangers everywhere, simple things like just making the spaces accessible. Clutter-free this is the type of thing I think of when I think of barrier free, don't put something in my way that if removed would otherwise prove to be accessible to me. And so the things that can be done can be little things that make a big difference.

**Emily Davison:** You've touched upon something that other people have spoken about on the podcast before, like when we had Sam Renke who spoke about, changing rooms and how sometimes she went into one as a wheelchair user and it was being used as a storage cupboard and stuff like that.

And I think it's about saying that it's about making something that people, both non-disabled and disabled could use and have little barriers

One thing that you tend to see when you think about inclusive products and especially in beauty for people, who've got sight loss, a lot of the brands that I've found and I've covered.

Have braille on them, which is fantastic, but obviously not everyone can read braille. You're a braille jewellery designer. You love braille. Braille is a big part of your life. Would you still want them to add braille if that was an option?

**Laura Legendary:** That's a really tough question for me to answer because the first time I was given a gift of a box of L'Occitane merchandise, I was. Thrilled that it had braille on it. It actually did something for me that I think would be really hard to convey to people who take, being able to access product packaging for granted.

And that is, it made me feel like I matter, it made me feel like this particular manufacturer. Thought about someone other than their typical mass market customer. And I felt really good about it, and I felt really good about that brand.

But whether or not that would actually make a difference to people other than those who are totally blind and who are braille readers is hard to say because the rest of the packaging doesn't necessarily have large print on it.

So braille doesn't do any good for them and regular product packaging, text isn't large enough for them so that it leaves them out.

It's tough. As I said to really get to that place where as many people as possible are included, and if a brand is going to put braille on their packaging, then again, as I said before, someone is always going to get left out. What about the people who have manual dexterity issues, who can't twist off the cap?

What about the people who have trouble lifting or holding something in their hands? What if they drop it? . There's just so many things to take into consideration that I think for most manufacturers, it must to them seem like.

Impossible. It's when you try to please everyone, you end up pleasing no one, and it's a losing proposition for them literally and figuratively. And so I think it dissuades a lot of manufacturers who want to do more, but really don't know how

**Emily Davison:** I agree. I think it must seem for brands who are starting out on this journey.

It must seem like a real mind field.

As long as you're actively trying something, then that's what I think me as a consumer would care about that you're actually trying to make a

difference.

**Laura Legendary:** I think it's incumbent upon everyone to participate in the process, whether you act proactively and be a part of the solution as you are, as I am as many disabled advocates of. Website testing or product testing or writing articles or active advocacy. There are many more people who are for whatever reason, not able to be part of the process in an active way.

And yet they're still consumers. They're still users and they can still make a contribution, even if it's just dropping a note to the company.

There are myriad ways in which we can all make a difference. We are our own best, most articulate advocates as to

Emily Davison: Of course, there are brands who are already doing universal design and doing it well. Kohl Kreatives is one such brand founded by Trishna Daswaney. The brand offers a collection of user friendly make up brushes and one such range known as the flex collection has been praised for its ease of use for people with motor disabilities due to the easy grip handles and the ability to bend them. The brand has been featured in British Vogue, Elle and the New York Times.

The brand is also currently stocked in Boots, One of the U.K.’s most well-known high street beauty retailers. I spoke with Trish to ask her how she created her line to be At the forefront of universal design.

**Emily Davison:** So Trish, can you tell me how you first began

Kohl Kreatives?

**Trishna Daswaney:** We began Kohl Kreatives as a real pet project. Honestly, the main thing with the brand in particular is the running of the workshops and before any products were even a part of it, it was just about teaching people, techniques, tips, and tricks to be able to reintegrate themselves into society by the way that they feel and look, growing up, I was really impacted by my appearance and makeup was a way where I was able to face the world and really personally became my armor.

And so. With the catalyst of the workshops, we really wanted to grow them. And in order to grow them, I needed a revenue stream. And in order to honestly make them sustainable, I then decided to create tools, but again were tools I wanted to make sure these were things that everybody could use. And that's where I started to personally realize that actually there isn't a lot out there that everyone can truly.

And so I then made the decision to start Kohl Kreatives

**Emily Davison:** You actually made a Flex Collection of brushes. And it's one of the things I think whenever there's conversations surrounding. Inclusive design beauty brands. You know, your brand always comes up and I think that's what you're very well known for within the disability community.

So how did you first come up with the idea of the flex collection and what is it about?

**Trishna Daswaney:** It's such a big deal and it's such an honor to be known as that brand, and be a part of that conversation.

The idea of the flex collection was just a natural progression. So when it comes to our workshops, we started off serving the transgender community and cancer care communities. And as you can imagine, a lot of people going through cancer, also lose a lot of their dexterity, their strength, their grip, they may have tremors.

 And I just wanted to make makeup more accessible and easy for them to, and as we started to open up our workshops into the disability community, we started to notice, you know, different grips, different issues, different needs. Even looking at autism, for example, there are certain people with autism that need to have certain things feel a certain way in order for them to be able to feel comfortable to use them because of a sensorial disorder.

The Flex Collection for me was the first time that we were able to think about how can we make makeup truly inclusive. Now, I think it's important to highlight that I personally do not have a disability, but I use the same brushes and that's kind of the point of the brand it's to be able to have these tools that I can use you can use.

And so can somebody that maybe could use them before. It's that, that the flex collection hope to achieve and we offer a lot of ad-ons as well. So if you wanted to freeze in a position, we've got an add on to support that if you need to extend the length, we can to support that, but the shape and the design of the brushes was to really facilitate a happy medium, and to be able to achieve contouring, you know, complicated looks with one set because.

The whole function of holding this brush and stamping and blending in different places with different products was really what I was trying to achieve a quick, easy way that everybody can look and feel like they want to.

**Emily Davison:** I wanted to talk to you about being a brand. Making these brushes and making them adaptive.

Did you personally come across any challenges when you were creating them in terms of things like the design, the research into them, the production or even the financial aspects that you think that other brands maybe should know about?

**Trishna Daswaney:** I think one of the most important things to mention when it comes to designing inclusively or any product is.

There is never a guarantee that anything is going to make you money. And I, I certainly did not come up with this idea and spend all this time designing these products because I thought it was going to be a lottery, you know?

I really wanted to be able to achieve universal design.

And so that became a priority for me. The other thing is that that I think is important is that everything takes time and everything takes research. So yes, there were struggles with designing. Then there were struggles with patenting and it cost me a lot of money because I was doing it on my own, but I just really, I had tunnel vision.

I just wanted to achieve that because it was everything that I believed in. And when you throw in the sustainability angle, people love to throw the word around. But for us, it was really truly research. I spent ages looking for the right materials and finding ways of creating my own materials.

 I wanted to not only achieve great design and support communies. But I also wanted to make sure it was not damaging the environment at the same time, because I feel like people feel like you can't can't have one without the other, but you can, you can, you can do both.

 And so that became my next challenge within running this business. There are always challenges.

**Emily Davison:** And I think that that's really wonderful that you yourself did it because it was a passion and it was something that was led by a desire to do it and make it happen,

, What has the response been from people who use your brushes and specifically, I think from people who you're trying to cater for. So for people who do have disabilities, who maybe do struggle or have in the past, how has the response been from them?

**Trishna Daswaney:** One of my favorite things is when buy something on our website, you have the opportunity to fill in a question box.

And you can definitely talk about, you know, what, what you're looking for, why you bought the brushes, if you want support, because we create tools to fund workshops. So if you want to workshop and you've bought tools, like, of course that's totally the purpose of it. I think that's been kind of the best feedback that we've been able to get.

The workshops are always so heartwarming and so amazing to run because we meet so many people from different parts of the world. We, engage with them on a weekly basis and we talk about whatever we can do to help facilitate that make-up journey. And it really does kind of lead on to the next product.

**Emily Davison:** And I also want to touch upon something else because when you look at your website, everything is very cohesive. And I think in the past, when there's been maybe something that is made for people with disabilities, it's always been. Dare. I say it less, fashionable, maybe a little bit less stylish.

Yours are pretty much in keeping with, the whole vibe they're very cohesive.

And I guess how important was it for you to create, an entire range of brushes, including the flex collection, which, still looked aesthetically pleasing?

**Trishna Daswaney:** I think one of the most interesting things and you just touched on it there. I didn't realize. That this was the case, but previously, anything being sold to the disability community was always kind of medicine or medical.

 Sure design and functionality was certainly at the forefront. Branding didn't really exist. Aesthetic didn't really exist. When I did the multiple sclerosis, trade show in Birmingham. Everything else was just so clinical and someone actually came up to me and they were like, oh my gosh, like, this is beautiful.

I'm so excited to see this. At the end of the day, makeup's fun. fashion', fun beauty, fun it's aesthetic. It's supposed to be something that you enjoy using and enjoy displaying and enjoy having around you.

Aesthetic has always been at the forefront of those decisions.

**Emily Davison:** And I think it's really fantastic as well, because it's just nice to see brands that actually just make their products look cohesive and look nice and look pretty. And as you say, it's not about having things that just look like adaptive devices for people with disabilities.

It's about making things that actually showcase that people with disabilities are in fact, still people that want to look nice and have nice aesthetically pleasing looking things. My last question I wanted to ask you is why do you as a brand owner, think it's important to make products that are widely inclusive and as adaptable as possible to as many people in the way that you

**Trishna Daswaney:** have

such a good question, but also equally, why not?

Why should everybody not want to include everybody in their amazing brands? And so for me, that was always the target and I understand there is a cost associated to it and it is more expensive.

I wouldn't have a brand at all if I didn't involve everybody in it.

**Emily Davison:** And onto that note, where can people enjoy and find and use your products?

Where can our listeners find you.

**Trishna Daswaney:** I would say honestly, the best place is our website, Kohl Kreatives.com. All our new launches are always up there first, so it's always good to check it out. And of course we have tap to shop on Instagram, if you do through our website.

We'll keep you in the loop. And of course you have the opportunity to sign up for workshops and. Share your feedback then and there, and , ask us about any support that you may need.

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Emily Davison: Sometimes universal design isn’t just exclusively beneficial to just disabled people.

Sometimes it benefits an even wider market.

And sometimes universal design just happens by coincidence. As Mary Cayten Brakefield candidly describes in her recent Instagram video, let’s take a listen…

Merry Cayten is due to launch a start up brand Brakefield’s to offer adaptive clothing for people with a variety of different needs. As she told me in her interview, sometimes universal design k.

reaches many more than you may initially think.

**Emily Davison:** Mary Cayten, first of all, can I ask, how did you first started Brakefields and what was the story behind it?

**Mary Cayten Brakefield :** Brakefields is founded by myself and my mom slash business partner, Stephanie, and it kind of came about through a number of different ways. We learned how to sew when we were really young, we love fashion. We love the idea of starting a clothing label together one day.

We realized that we really wanted to work in adaptive fashion and work with customers with disabilities and make really beautiful clothing that works really well for a number of different bodies. And my mom's background is in special education, so she's worked a lot with disability. And when I was in college, I was a student athlete and I got to work with a number of different disabled athletes through leadership program that I was in, in college. And so I kept hearing from these athletes how frustrating it was trying to find clothing that worked for their bodies. And so that was just kind of brewing in the back of our minds, that there was really this hole in the market.

I actually got sick myself and I was diagnosed with a genetic condition that has very, very much changed my body and my ability levels. And so everything got much more personal, all of a sudden, personally experiencing disability and realizing how much it impacted everything about my life clothing included.

We started in 2020 really going at it and actually making a go at this thing and designing our clothes. And we're about to launch our first line hopefully in about a month.

**Emily Davison:** You touched upon the fact that you're trying to make your clothes work for everyone. Was that a challenge for you?

**Mary Cayten Brakefield :** Some ways. Yes. And in some ways, no.

We started during the pandemic. We started at the time we did, because I came back from my senior year of college.

But it actually was an opportunity for us to really do tons and tons of research because there were people all over the world that we could talk to, everyone was getting comfortable using zoom and virtual communication. And so we were really able to expand. We were talking to, to the entire globe.

We got so much feedback from so many different people on what frustrates them and their clothing and what they wish they saw differently in the fashion industry. We took all that information and we started applying it to some of our designs ,

And once we came up with our first samples, that's when we started trying actual pieces on a local focus group. And in that process, that's kind of when we realized, okay, we need to actually simplify this whole thing.

When we were trying things on the feedback that we kept getting was why don't you just simplify this? Why don't you get rid of the closures? Why don't you make things just pull on and pull off?

And that was pretty eye-opening to us.

We don't need to reinvent the wheel here. There's so much out there that is kind of accidentally adaptive.

 We would start telling our friends and our family about these clothes, that we were designing and they wanted them so badly.

They wanted the stretchy waistband at the big Thanksgiving dinner and they wanted the neck line that lets you access your chest so they could breastfeed.

And so we realized what would be the point in marketing separately? What would be the point in designing separately for the disabled community and the non-disabled community?

There are definitely times to design specifically for specific conditions include things that might not be applicable to others.

But right now, for this first line, we've kind of found this middle ground that works really well for so many different body types, so many different abilities. And we're really excited because, it feels like there's a bridge between the two communities that can be found through this clothing versus specifically marketing.

**Emily Davison:** It sounds like you really have honed in on universal design and you really have embraced this idea of universal design which leads me on to my next question.

You have a series about universally design products and you touched upon quite a lot of different things in different categories.

How did you come up with the idea to start this series on your Instagram about universal design?

**Mary Cayten Brakefield :** So this series really, it started around a pair of shoes that I had. So they're called Kissick shoes and I just loved them. And I had found them a couple of years ago and really wanted them and finally got a pair. And I just think they're the best. And they are designed to be able to slip into and slip out of them.

You don't have to bend over. Tie any laces, but they look really great. They function so well. They've really nailed the design.

I realized how much I love these shoes that I want all of my friends and family to know about them. And so whether they're disabled or not, I know that they're going to love these shoes. And so this series kind of came about as a way to promote different brands that are doing a great job of universally designing their products.

And so the first was these shoes. But then Olay came out with a line of several of their different lotions with a super accessible top. And then there's this bra that I have from Elba London that I just love. And it has these magnetic closures on it, but it's really beautiful and it's a great bra.

I wear it constantly. And it's just kind of grown from there. And so we are constantly finding these different products that we really want to promote. And we really want to help support these companies that are saying, we believe in the importance of universal design.

But then also as a way to start kind of priming our own customers and our own followers to realize that universal design benefits, everyone.

**Emily Davison:** And I think it's a really fantastic series. And even for me, as a disabled person, I came across quite a lot of things that I'd never even heard about myself.

What does universal design mean to you as someone who has started a brand and has really embraced the idea of universal design, but also as someone who has experience of illness and working with people with disabilities, what does it mean to you?

**Mary Cayten Brakefield :** I think, one way to sum it up is the universal design really just means thinking about more people in your design process.

Really it's the smart way to go because then you have such a bigger customer base.

That's excited about your products. If everyone, that designs products in this world, whether it's fashion or architecture or beauty or anything, if we are all striving to include more people in the design process, it's just going to make the world a better place. So if you currently have a disability, To navigate the world more easily.

If you're someone who ends up with a short-term accident where you don't have a long-term disability, but for several weeks or months, you're really struggling with the products that are available to you. If we're all focusing on universal design, then that's not a problem. If as you're aging, you're realizing that your body is changing and your needs are changing.

Then if everything is universally designed, you don't have to go through a process of changing the products that you use and having to find new items to use in your. And so really everyone benefits.

And so all of these things really just overlap so much. If function is thought about in the design process, then the customer benefits, and it's more, the function that more customers need is thought about in the design process, then even more customers benefit. And so really. It's I feel like it's the future.

I feel like it's the direction that if not we're going in, we at least need to be going in. And I'm really excited that there's a number of brands that are making that push towards universal design, being the norm. And I'm really excited to hopefully be a part of that and continue to support that.

**Emily Davison:** I think that's a very interesting and eye opening way of looking at universal design, actually in the whole idea that. There's so many people whose needs will run parallel. And even though the reason that they might need that thing may be different. They may also need the same thing. And that's why universal design is so important.

Finally the last question I want to ask you is what products do you feel that you would like to see being made with universal design in mind, in the future that perhaps you don't see at the moment?

**Mary Cayten Brakefield :** Really everything. But I think that might be too big of an answer. Clothing is obviously our passion and so we are really excited to join in with some of the other incredible brands that are already out there that are embracing universal design and fashion. And so continuing to see that evolve and change and and grow is going to be really exciting.

I personally have also realized that there's a lot of things in the kitchen that have changed as my own ability level has changed. And so cooking is something that I have always loved growing up is something that's very important to my family.

Definitely fashion. Definitely, cookware, things like that, that there's more options out there that just work for you, that you aren't having to create your own hack and that you aren't having to search around to find something that works.

But that you can walk into a store and go to the cookware section and there's great options that work for a lot of different ability levels.

I'm just excited for universal design to start becoming the expected and start becoming the rule and not the exception.

**Emily Davison:** And I think that is definitely one of the things we hear a lot about on this podcast, that it's something that's growing, it's continuing to grow. And I think that many of us are just very excited to see where it's going to lead in the future. And of course, finally, I just want to add for our listeners, Mary Cayten where can they find and hear about your launch of your new clothing and where can they go to follow and support?

**Mary Cayten Brakefield :** You can go to our website, which is shop brakefields.com

You can go to our Instagram, which is also shop brakefields.com. That's our username on all of our social media. So you can follow along with us there. You can sign up for our email list on the website and be the first to know when our line launches here any minute now, and please feel free to reach out and all we love hearing what people have to say. We love getting more and more feedback about what people want to see in their clothes.