**CUDA Brisbane Symposium**

**Edited Transcript for Melissa James**

**Accessible and Inclusive Tourism**

Melissa referred to an earlier comment about governance not being sexy and was upfront in saying that as far as tourism in concerned, there is nothing sexy about disability. She supported this comment by asking how many advertisements showed people with lived experience of disability.

Advertising a place as ‘accessible’ is often misleading. The hotel room might meet an access standard, but the room might be up three flights of stairs. Accessible can be taken as meaning close by or easy to get to. In her case the room was ‘accessible’ to Times Square”.

Melissa spoke about her initial idea of having a website listing places with real disability access, but she could see that wasn’t going to work.

“So, I quickly worked out that my brilliant idea of the website wasn't going to work, and that I needed to, as we say, "pivot" in the start-up game to become a consultant, to actually start to educate tourism businesses about the accessible tourism market and what they could do to start to provide services and accommodation and all the rest of it to people with access requirements.”

Operators did not think there was a ‘disability market’ to explore. However, when the government offered funding for accessibility, some people became interested. The Commonwealth Games provided opportunities for education and workshops to build capacity within the tourism industry. The outcome of course, is that if you make a place accessible for visitors, you make it accessible for locals.

“So, the whole thing flows over, and it doesn't just become about tourism, it becomes about a much broader aspect of, "How can we make a more accessible destination?" And creating accessible destinations doesn't just benefit the tourists that come, it benefits the community as a whole.”

Melissa made the point that Australian Standards are a basic minimum and tourism operators need to go beyond those requirements – universal design.

“? So, when I'm working with operators, when I'm looking at things, we're in the outdoors, looking at where Australian Standards don't apply, we're taking an all-of-field approach, so a universal design approach. That's what we're basing our framework on that we're creating to do these things. We go Australian Standards first, we need to meet that, then we go universal design.”

It requires several things to get more accessible places and experiences: government funding and backing, the will to do it, education of operators, and building capacity. Some operators don’t know they have accessible features because they don’t know what accessibility is.

“It is happening, but it still needs to have the backing of [governments, state and local] and destination management organisations. They can be driving this, and they need to keep driving it, and they need to keep putting that effort into … providing support and assistance for businesses to improve their accessibility. And I think that that will happen.”