

What's Up with Docs feat. Ranell Shubert (DMA) – “Star Baby”

Intro

(music starts) Hi, and welcome to our DOK Industry Podcast season number six. Here is your podcast about creative documentary and animated film industry. It is in collaboration with our dear friends, the Programmers of Colour Collective, What's Up With Docs and Talking Shorts. Big shout out to our partners, supporters and contributors, please check them out. And hey, good to have you here again, enjoy the conversation. Here is your DOK Industry Podcast season number six. (music fades)

Toni Bell

Okay, well, I just want to start by welcoming Ranell to the podcast. She is on the other side of the mic. And I also just want to thank Anne and Nadja for inviting What's Up With Docs to participate this year with the DOK Leipzig podcast. So, Ranell, welcome.

Ranell Shubert

Ah, Thanks, Toni. Yeah, it's, um, it's really good to actually be in conversation with you instead of listening in on conversation with you.

Toni Bell

Exactly. So, um, let's just start off with some visual descriptions. So I am a brown-skinned Black woman with sister locks and a ponytail, and I'm wearing a black t shirt, and I believe I have a white background.

Ranell Shubert

Uh, yeah. So I am a white woman. Um, in my early 40s. I like to think I can still pass for early 30s. Maybe, maybe not. Uh, I have medium-length, brown hair, blunt bangs, right now. I'm wearing a black dress with, um, some flowers on it and some movie posters and, some records in my background and you might hear a little bit of a click clonk of Zeta, one of my partner's dog in the background.

Toni Bell

Yeah. Onyx my black cat may make an appearance. So, you know, she likes me in these things. Alright. So I just want to start off by. I always like to start off this conversation by talking about, like, how we met. So we met when I was hired to, at the IDA, and originally I was a part time filmmaker services associate, whatever it was. And I got promoted to filmmaker services manager. So that's where we met at the International Documentary Association.

Ranell Shubert

I can't even remember what my role was at the time. You know, I had so many different jobs at the old IDA. So, um, but. Yeah, absolutely. Um, I spent a lot of late nights. Uh, I actually think it was a late night when you came over and said, uh, Hello to me but immediately, you know, we started talking about RuPaul. Um, and that was, it was it was on from the air.

Toni Bell

Um, that's really about it. Yeah, we were too many a drag cons together, so.

Ranell Shubert

That's for sure. That's for sure. Yeah. I think, you know, RuPaul is why I moved to LA. You know.

Toni Bell

Oh, yeah.

Ranell Shubert

It was a real, uh, RuPaul gave me a kick in the butt in terms of, like, you need to get on your career and you need to, like, get it together. It was a real influence as to why I moved to Los Angeles.

Toni Bell

Well, okay, so talk more about that. So do you mean you were watching that first or second season of Drag Race season?

Ranell Shubert

First season. Very first season, the interesting lighting they had going on in the first season, everyone's very shiny. Yeah I had just graduated from film school, studying documentary and was trying to work on some films on my own, you know, in a very rural area without a lot of support system or a community around me. Um, and then started watching this show and just. I can't explain it. It was just kind of, you know, just seeing people just work so hard on building their identity and building this, like, just fabulousness around them. It was just like, oh, I gotta get to work. Like, I got to get to work and also, I need more community around me. I had a friend who was living in LA. She was working at Netflix and she said, come sleep on my couch and I did. A month later, I was working at IDA.

Toni Bell

Yeah. Okay. I didn't realize that. And so what year did you move to LA?

Ranell Shubert

Oh, gosh, I can't even remember. It's been it's been about 12 years now. So if you can do the math, I'm not good at the math, but it's been a long time. Um, and yeah, it was just finally this year that I really officially, finally left IDA for the last time.

Yeah, we can talk a little bit about that, but yeah, yeah, it's, um, I, like I say in a lot of ways that, IDA did raise me, because I did come in as an intern, basically, and sort of, you know, went up the ladder and worked on, like I said, so many different positions at the organization. Um, but it really has helped to, like, come together and cumulate the work I'm doing now and the skills that helped me really build the skills to really get this organization off the ground.

Toni Bell

Right, right. Yeah. So I think when we met, you were working. You're doing, like, half events and then half education.

Ranell Shubert

Yes, and I stayed in the education department for about eight years. Eventually, I started working on Getting Real in its first iterations in 2014. Had a little bit more of a influential role in 2016. And then by 2018, I was the co-director of Getting Real. Um, and, uh, yeah, really got to put a lot of influence into what the programming and the directions and the communities that we supported with that particular iteration. I'm really proud of that work.

Toni Bell

Yeah, absolutely. Getting Real would not have happened without Ranell. You were doing everything. Yeah. You're amazing. You're amazing.

Ranell Shubert

Just another spoke in the wheel, Toni. Just another spoke in the wheel.

Toni Bell

I'm trying to give you some flowers, girl. Yeah. So like, we definitely bonded at the IDA. And I feel like working with you, really gave me a taste of, like, what every working environment should be like. Because with you, it was always extremely collaborative.

Ranell Shubert

Oh. Thank you.

Toni Bell

Yeah. Very collaborative. And you were always interested in, you know, hearing other people's ideas. And even if we didn't necessarily agree on something that was not a place of conflict, it's just a place of negotiation. Yeah. Yeah. And then you were always so open to not only hearing feedback, particularly from like, the filmmakers we serve, but also absolutely 1,000% incorporating that feedback to make things better for them. And like you were the rare unicorn in that place, you kept me sane. I have to say the, amongst a lot of unfortunate turmoil and, um, a work culture that was not really conducive to growth. Okay, so enough of that. So I actually kind of just want to talk about, um, some our relationships with the ways that we work together, particularly with, how we came to work together on the podcast. What's Up With Docs? Because that is a story and actually that has some DOK Leipzig roots, too. So I think it was the first or second time I went to DOK Leipzig. Um, Nadja and I were cast to work together to do a presentation at Montreal, and I happened to be in Germany at the time, and we're trying to coordinate a time to meet, and I knew she was in Germany, but I didn't realize she was in Berlin and Nadja was like oh, I'm in Berlin. I was like, oh, I'm in Berlin. So Nadia and I met up to talk about this presentation that we're going to be doing at the Documentary Festival in Montreal.

We were doing a presentation on funding for documentaries in the US and Europe. So when we both arrived in Montreal, we did the presentation. It went really well. There was a lot of great feedback from people who were in the audience, and Nadja and I actually went out for coffee like a couple of hours later, and we were having a conversation, and I was kind of like lamenting some of my experiences of the IDA. She asked me, well, what do you really like to do? And I said, you know, I really enjoy being in conversation with people like you and like talking about the field. And that night, I kind of, like, stayed on my mind. And then I woke up the next morning, I was like, ooh, podcast and a podcast with people that I've met throughout the industry who don't necessarily get celebrated because in the documentary industry, only certain people get platformed. And I was very tired of seeing that. And then it came to me, What's Up With Docs? And then when I came back to the US, I told you about it. This is like in 2019, you know, before the world shifted and and you were like, Okay, bet, let's do it. I went over to your house and you had all this equipment, and apparently you had the secret life as a sound person.

Ranell Shubert

I do.

Toni Bell

Yes. So talk about that.

Ranell Shubert

Yeah. No, I, um, you know, I studied filmmaking, um, at Columbia College in Chicago. But you know, I actually when I started school, I thought I wanted to be an audio engineer. I thought I wanted to record albums. Uh, yeah, I got into that, deeper into that. I said, oh, no, no, I don't know. I don't, uh, um, you know, it's just it was a very alienating space for women for sure. Um, and I felt that, but, you know, it was also there wasn't a lot of agency, or at least I didn't feel like there was a lot of agency and that kind of media form. And so, I was in a production class, I was in an audio production editing class, and I got to do a audio documentary about the transition of analog to digital specifically for library systems. It was specifically around there, Harold Washington Library there in Chicago. It's a big, beautiful library in Chicago. And just fell in love. Just just fell in love with, being able to edit, to be able to manipulate, to be able to have control, to be able to tell stories. Um, just felt it just felt so freeing in a way that I didn't I didn't even know that that was something that I could do. And then it just kind of been a lover of, you know, audio editing ever since, but kind of, you know, keeping a little background.

I've got a lot of interests, and I do a lot of different things all the time. So, um, you know, it was really great. I eventually got to teach at USC. I taught an audio podcasting course and it was great because it was all students, you know, there was no prerequisite. It was just students from all different majors. And it was really cool to, like, see, particularly students who weren't necessarily initially creatives or saw themselves as creatives, like, find themselves through that medium. It's just one of the things. One of the aspects of myself that came out, but it was, you know, we started our podcast around the time of George Floyd's murder and there were there were aspects of what was happening in a lot of legacy organizations, that needed to be pushed back again. So they needed to be changed that needed to be talked about. And, um, yeah, you were just the the right, uh, person to come in, uh, with the right point of view at the time and I really look back on that, that, that set of work that we did together on the podcast and just really proud of it.

Toni Bell

Thank you, I appreciate that. Yeah. Because we recorded our first episode at big Sky Documentary Film Festival with Tracy Rector. We did two episodes there and we were very excited because the plan was, because we were traveling to all these festivals together was like, we just bring our equipment and do and then record episodes like each festival. Right. And but then Miss Rona (Note: referring to Corona Pandemic) started to change things up a bit, and, and we had to do this online format, which actually kind of the norm, but, you know. But yeah, it was a really great time. And then also, yeah, looking back, I, I think there was this zeitgeist happening in the industry like this conversation around like decolonizing docs have been in the air for a long time. But in my opinion, there have been really no concrete movement on that as far as like changing the industry within because, one thing I've noticed, like when I was in the fully in the documentary industry, is there is this need to almost talk about things and the idea of

talking about them is enough versus actually implementing the change.

Ranell Shubert

Oh yeah, leadership's got to buy in. It's the it's the biggest challenge that we see in the disability community as well is, you know, that commitment has to come from the top.

Toni Bell

Yeah. And you have to do, you have to do, you have to do. So I do want to I want to talk about the Getting Real convening because I say, like, this is where I begin to see you in action. But then also, like the purpose of the, the Getting Real convening that you that you developed was to actually build a platform for marginalized communities, just to have a space to engage in any way they wanted. And then I have to work with you directly when we did the one from the indigenous convening. But I want for you to talk about some of the convenings that you helped to develop, particularly the one for Asian Americans. And then, the filmmakers with disabilities. Actually, let's skip that one, because we're going to get to that because when we get into Disability and Media Alliance. But let's talk about the Asian Americans and then just the planning. I want to talk about some of the logistics of planning something like that, because, you know, there's all this conversation about, which I've, I've backed away from around, like creating a seat at the table. And I've come to realize, like, I don't want to be at some of these tables. In fact, I don't want to be in some of these houses. Yeah. In fact, in the country. I live in Mexico now, so that's how much I want to be different. But what I feel like in the spirit of what you were doing with these various convenings was, you were helping people to create their own, you know, and giving people the space to be in dialogue with each other so they could decide like, what they wanted and what they want to be.

Ranell Shubert

Yeah, you know, I like to say I didn't do much, it's the communities that did the work, but we just gave them space and gave them what they want. I think a lot of times we overcomplicate what support has to look like, and we have to insert our ideas or insert ourselves into what that has to, you know, what, what support looks like. And I like to keep it simple and just, like, listen to people ask them what they want and give it to them. And so a lot of that was just recognizing, as you said, like people needed just to be together, just to like, ideate, just to dream and talk about what the different possibilities can be. And a big part of you know, it's start I believe that one was the A-DOC convening (Asian American Documentary Network) meeting started in 2016. It was really started a lot by Grace Lee. It's now since going on and grown to be its own organization, but it was clear from the success of A-DOC and what, you know, what happened there that we needed to create that space for more communities. And so we continue to do that and continue to develop space as people are rising as like institutions were organizing.

Sometimes it just takes that that ability and at that moment to be able to come together for bigger things, to come, to come out of it. Another one was FWD-Doc. Initially, I was in 2018 and I had a lot of personal reasons why that was important for me. And we can go into that, but we organized the first convening of disabled filmmakers in Los Angeles with the support from Jim LeBrecht, of course, who's the co-director of Crip Camp. Um, and Cassidy Dimon, who's now the executive director. She helped to get that convening together. Um, and, you know, we also did a really amazing panel, from that convening is what FWD-Doc um, you know, has now come to be, which is the largest organization of disabled filmmakers in the world. And so I'm really proud of that work, you know, it is honestly, it is the beginnings of a DMA as well. Um, uh, but yeah. Yeah, it started there.

Toni Bell

Yeah. So let's chat a little bit like what it takes to do these things because you said you don't do much and that's a lie. You didn't do much. That is a lie. No, because I'm speaking from the perspective, like working with you on the convening we did for the convening for indigenous filmmakers, because there is a lot of purposeful work that you and I did in the lead up to having those conversations that actually made this convening happen. So the first thing we did was, you know, the questionnaire that that.

Ranell Shubert

Well, yeah, it just it also finding collaborators from the community itself. Right. That really is already passionately engaged and involved and wants to connect larger or wants to have a platform to connect with a larger group of people. I think, you know, it's just like finding your collaborators is really key. Um and we had such lovely people working with us on that and like. And I, you know, like you said, like the questionnaire is like, what do people care about? What do people like? What is on the top of minds of people right now? And, um, where where are they not seeing the support that they need? Or what are the things that they're ideating and dreaming about that would be supportive to them? Um, yeah, you have to you have to engage with the communities. Like you can't just come in and make decisions for people. I think that, again, you know, my background as a caregiver has really influenced that for me. My mother was in a car accident, when I was in my early 20s. She became quadriplegic from that accident. She did a job that was very similar to me in that she would travel around and speak at conferences and speaking engagements all over. Um, but she did it for the car industry.

Um, but it was after her accident, her job was no longer accessible. They made no attempts to make her job accessible and so she she stopped working. And it changed who she thought she was, the value of who she thought, uh, of what she contributed to the world. And I just had a

real strong effect on me. Um, and so, you know, I, as the organizer, you know, as somebody who's starting to have a lot more influence, um, in the institution that IDA. I just knew it was my responsibility to speak up and say, okay, we need to make this more accessible to all of our communities. And we need to make sure that, um, and also in a kick in the butt from Jim LeBrecht also helped. It really, it does you have to engage. You have to ask people what they want and not making decisions for people and really learning how to listen was really. Yeah. It's something that, um, you know, it's only like in the past couple of years that I've actually recognized that for myself was like, oh, yeah, it comes that comes from my caregiving background to really make that sort of connection. .

Toni Bell

Right. It's like not being paternalistic. Yeah. You know like really stepping away from that because, when I think back to the questionnaire, it was really involved, and we asked people essentially like overall like when they were going into industry places, what worked for them. Then we also asked them what didn't work for them. And then we actually initially created the questionnaire. We went into the community. So like, you went to imagineNATIVE and conducted the survey there. And then we both went to Big Sky, you know, met with a big group of indigenous filmmakers there. And people at that festival were so helpful and like, helping to organize that they were really engaged in that. But then also we were very deliberate in incorporating that feedback they got. So for one of the questions we asked is, if you want this convening, open or close. Yeah, yeah. And we ask that of all the group, you've asked all the groups. So the the Asian-American filmmakers opted for a closed convening. And I remember that distinctly because it was at the firehouse, like right around the corner from the Academy, and there was no AC on the bottom. And I had to check people in. And I have a heavy sweater. So, yeah.

Ranell Shubert

I apologize.

Toni Bell

Dehydration memories, you know, but, um, but then the filmmakers of disabilities, they all wanted to have an open conversation.

Ranell Shubert

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

You know, it just depended on, like, you know, who they were trying to reach and who they were trying to speak to. I think in that moment, you know, the disabled community really wanted funders to hear the struggles they were going through. And so they wanted to make sure that

they were in that space so they could hear. Because I think a lot at the time you know, there hadn't been a lot of opportunity for the disabled community to really, you know. It really took the release of Crip Camp for the industry generally to take disabled makers seriously because then they said, oh, well, nominated for an Oscar and it's got a Netflix release and da da da. And, oh, there's this whole community of stories that haven't been told. Um, and so, um, yeah, it was, um. Yeah. Yeah.

Toni Bell

Yeah. And then the indigenous convening, they opted for a close convening, and I actually wanted to get back to some of these with Crip Camp. But I did want to say this, that I think, you know, even though, you know, Miss Rona changed plans and we ended up having to do the indigenous convening online, I actually think it might have been better because we had such more of a worldwide reach. I think we probably reached more, more filmmakers.

I remember we did two sessions, um, to accommodate different time zones. And then also we had it was in multiple languages, so Spanish and English, and then some of our facilitators like graciously translated the materials and the registration materials into Spanish for us. So, um, you know, it was a really it was.

Ranell Shubert

Oh, yeah. Amalia.

Toni Bell

Yes. Amalia. Yes. Amalia. Cordova. Yes. Say her name right. Yes. Yeah. Exactly. Yeah. And David Hernandez, too, who helped as well with that.

Ranell Shubert

For sure.

Toni Bell

I mean, they single handedly particularly David was instrumental in so much of the outreach. Um, and the um, precipitation we got from, um, indigenous folks in South and Central America because there was, there was tied into that. So I do want to get back to Crip Camp quickly on the on the question of visibility, because I remember during when the pandemic happened and then all these festivals were doing their filmmaker and their and making meetings online. I think between March and November, when I was asked to leave the IDA, that I maybe did like 200 plus filmmaker meetings. It was a lot because I liked to engage with filmmakers, even though that was a lot. But one thing I distinctly remember was there seemed to be all of a sudden, and I know it's not all of a sudden this whole influx of filmmakers of various disabilities. So I was

meeting with. And then when I would step back to think about, okay, where we're all these people. Well, there have always been there has just been number one, a lot of these festivals aren't accessible.

Ranell Shubert

Yep.

Toni Bell

You know, when you when we go to these events, it's always on to go. And it's very hyper stimulating probably for a lot of people potentially neurodivergent. Because I actually have might have found myself in conversations with neurodivergent filmmakers and they felt like this online forum was, beneficial for them because, you know, they could participate when they wanted to, but they needed to step away they could, you know. And I was really hoping that once the I guess the pandemic technically didn't end, but once, like, things quote on quote got back to normal as far as, like normal outdoor day to day activities that we would actually some of these festivals would keep like a hybrid model. So these filmmakers normally for whatever reasons, don't don't travel to festivals. Oh, another issue with travel is people with equipped with accessibility, um, equipment. It might get damaged.

Ranell Shubert

Yeah, it's a huge. Huge problem.

Toni Bell

So that's another reason why a lot of filmmakers may not with disabilities are very cautious about when they travel. So I was hoping that some of these festivals would keep some aspects of that hybridity in order to, to make these spaces more accessible to all these amazing filmmakers. But I don't know if they've held on to some of those things because, um, yes, Covid was very hard, but also, I think it opened our eyes into like different ways we could work and be in the world.

Ranell Shubert

and live. Just different ways of living. I mean, it really, um, it really dramatically changed, um, at the time, especially for non-profits, the life work dynamic. Right. Um, which many non-profits, um, have been unhealthy environments. People are overworked, underpaid, and not even sometimes even given, you know, the respect that they deserve for the hard work that they do. Um, and so, um, yeah, I, you know Corona was definitely awful, uh, but it also taught us that we can live and work differently. And it's possible and it's easy and it's it's not hard. Um, but I agree with you. We're seeing more and more especially institutions asking their folks to come back to

the office and working full weeks in office and these kinds of scenarios, and it really does. Um, and, you know, I don't know if people really understand how much that really, truly does impact the disabled community and the opportunities that are, you know, made available to them, whether that's as as makers or just having a job just in general. I think, you know, clearly, a lot of this is driven by capitalism and our new, the new dynamic, especially here in the US with our new administration. but yeah, I hold on to those values and, um, you know, it's it's a very hybrid environment at DMA still. Um, and we'll continue to be. I really encourage, you know, institutions to really think about that and to think who that you're leaving out, when you, you know, bring those kind of structures back into your institutions.

Toni Bell

Exactly, exactly. Yeah. So I want to get back to the brief time you left the IDA and you began to work with 1IN4 coalition.

Ranell Shubert

Yeah, yeah. Um, that was a real life changer working with that group of folks. So, yeah, after I left IDA for a little while, my good friend Jim LeBrecht reached out to me and said that, you know, he had in addition to FWD-Doc, he was also starting another new organization with, I think it was eight other disabled individuals, industry individuals, that was more focused on the Hollywood system. They needed someone. Um, they were all sort of industry figures whether, um, Aaron Brown, she is a manager for writers. Um, and, um, Caitlin Yang, she is a visual effects artist and supervisor. She runs her own visual effects company. Everyone, all the founders are a part of that organization are all, you know, really, established folks in the industry. And they just wanted to use their influence to bring more disabled folks and get more disabled folks jobs in the industry. Like I said, everyone, uh, it was a it was a different dynamic for me because everyone on that team identified as disabled at the time, and I didn't. But you know, it was, you know, I gosh, I learned so much. And as I was going through it, I started to, like, really recognize that. Oh, girl, you're neurodivergent.

Toni Bell

Oh, yay.

Ranell Shubert

Uh, you have mental health conditions, and like, that is part of the community. And there is it's time for you to come out. It's time for you to start talking about these things and these parts of your identity and recognize that they are what, uh, makes you unique. And what, like, um, has helped you maneuver through this industry the way that I have. And so, um. Yeah, I'm, I now,

you know, proudly identify as disabled and it really took being in an environment where that was okay and that everyone was welcoming. And, um, yeah, it was a real change for me. But it was also working in that environment, you know, that I saw, like, how, uh, this really great. You know, I always say that they they cured me of my cynicism of the nonprofit industry. Because I was working with some really passionate, dedicated people that truly believed in the work they were doing and I really, I really appreciate them and, um, sing their praises constantly because they brought me back. They brought me back to this work.

Toni Bell

Love that, love that. Well, I don't think you ever. Do you mean they brought you back to the nonprofit piece?

Ranell Shubert

I was ready to. I was gone after that first time of IDA. I was so burnt. I was so burnt out, and so affected by my experience. And, um, just felt like. Yeah. I just didn't feel like that. The, the, um, everybody was in it in the same way that I was in it. And, um, uh, it just felt really alienating and just I felt alone, and mostly hurt and, um, yeah, just being in that environment was just like, oh, right. There are all these, like really authentic people that truly believe what they're doing and aren't going to compromise their values to get there.

Toni Bell

Yeah, I, I always say that, but post-traumatic nonprofit syndrome is a thing. And like, for me, when I was at the IDA, I was also working with was last years I was working with Ani Mercedes and Looky Pictures. Like working with you was amazing, right? But everybody else. Um, but I particularly in 2020, I just began to notice a contrast, like how I feel when I would do my work with Looky Looky and how open it was and how collaborative and the care that it went into it.

Ranell Shubert

Yeah.

Toni Bell

And then the contrast at the IDA. Where there was a lot of urgency, but it wasn't purposeful, you know. But also lot of performative stuff as well. You know, and that contrast, particularly just the isolation that was the year 2020, like, really it made things very distinct. You can feel the difference. You can feel the difference. Yeah. So, um, so how long did you work for 1IN4?

Ranell Shubert

Oh, I was at 1IN4 for, like, two years. Yeah, it was for a while. Yeah, it was, you know, it was being at 1IN4 that brought me back to IDA. We were asked to. So IDA received quite a bit of money from the Ford Foundation. They did a grant application in partnership with FWD-Doc to create a fund specifically for disabled makers. And they were creating an advisory committee to help, you know, formulate the idea around that. And they asked 1IN4 to join. They, after a little bit, uh, at the time, Keisha Knight was running that, and she asked me to come back. She's just like you. You need to come back and just sort of finish this workout. And that's what I did. It was interesting, too. They also, I think one of the things that really helped seal the deal for me to come back, um, was also they invited me to participate in a panel at Getting Real and to talk about my experience and to talk about, you know what institutions, how institutions are damaging to the people that work within them. And to really be open and to like, speak my truth and so, you know, that was a really it was a really big influence to as to why I came back. Yeah, yeah.

Toni Bell

I think thinking away, maybe it's like the organization making a little bit of amend. That conversation is online, and you interviewed a group of amazing people and including Gemma Desai, who wrote, I think a masterpiece called This Work Is Not for Us. Like everyone who has ever felt sidelined or marginalized in the industry needs to read that it's actually a dissertation she wrote about people, about her experiences, and in the experiences of other British folks of color in the documentary industry.

Ranell Shubert

Yeah, the beautiful thing about that report is it's not just data. It's really experiential. It really goes into the actual, like written experiences of what in the emotions of what people have gone through. Because data shouldn't just be numbers. It was a real I would say it's definitely a big influence on the research study that we did when I went back to IDA, that's what the the purpose. Again, we had that fund, but, you know, we didn't want to, didn't want to start a fund on something in which we didn't actually know what people needed. The disabled community is one of those communities that hasn't, there's barely, hardly any research and data on this community specifically. They're often left out of, you know, research around diversity and inclusion. It's starting to get better. It's starting to get better. But, you know, at the time, specifically around this fund, there just was no understanding of where people were. Um, and so, you know, I gathered together a whole group of disabled-led, disabled centered, uh, media organizations, as well as disabled practitioners. And we sort of brought everybody together to create this survey, to create this data and to ask questions that needed to be asked, but just hadn't been asked of this community yet. It was super long. It was way too long. I'll admit. But we asked a lot of open ended questions. And took the time on our end to, to collate and to

process all that data. And it did take us longer because of that, but, oh, it was so worth it. It was so worth it. Um, and then we released a report around that data.

You know, and then when we started to see the results of that survey was, you know, the majority like over I think it was like 60% that took it were folks that have been in the industry for more than ten years. So these weren't new filmmakers who didn't know the field. These are people that, um, you know, have been doing this for a while. Um, an 80% are self-funding their projects. That's huge. I mean, you know, I recognize the independence that self-funding can give you. Uh, but it also alienates you from the system. It takes you out of the system, and unfortunately, um, you know, the doc world is a system. To get your project elevated to be at the festivals where you're going to, you know, acquire distribution or get your project in front of the right people takes inserting yourself into that system. Um, and so it was just clear that like, and, you know, of course, we got an avalanche of responses around, you know, festivals, programs, funds, all these things are not designed for us. They aren't thinking about us. People that review this content, they're not disabled people. The reason why they're called 11N4r, you know, just the United States itself is because 1 in 4 people identifies disabled. That's a huge population of people. It's huge. And so it's just, um, yeah, it's a population that's consistently ignored. But there is so much there, there is so much there.

Toni Bell

I want to kind of get into, um, the climate for folks with disabilities in the context of this very unfortunate current US administration, because that thing. I refuse to call him a man and said some heinous things about people with disabilities. And then these cuts with Medicaid and Medicare are coming down the pike in the next 2 to 4 years. Um, so just within the context of this current administration, particularly concerning the kind of like where we were with the past administration because obviously it wasn't like super great in regards to people with disabilities because, one thing I learned, um, was that when I was working on when I was working at Odyssey Impact, I did it helped to do an impact campaign for a film called Breaking Silence, which is about people who are the experience of people who are deaf and hard of hearing, and coda, who are incarcerated. And one thing that I learned for, um, within the context of the American with Disabilities Act is even though that is a civil rights act. That is a civil rights. That's a civil rights act specifically for people with disabilities. It is not enforced as it should be. And then in some place that is not even applicable, for example, if you're incarcerated and you have a disability, you're pretty much you have no access to resource because apparently the Ada unofficially does not apply in incarcerated places. But there are cases where it doesn't imply, even though we assume this has been the law of the land since the 90s, um, there's still like so many gaps. So can you just talk about that a little bit?

Ranell Shubert

Yeah. I mean, there's a real. You know, from the I'm just speaking from the US perspective. You know, Ada is really important to us here. But it's kind of the flaw. Um, it's the bare minimum, right? Um, and that is now being challenged, particularly in courts. Um, you know, it suggests that, um, um, I, you know, I don't I can't understand this new, like, reverse suggestion that DEI is, um, discriminatory to other. You know, it's it's that sort of same, like, thought process and thinking that, if you provide support to one person, then it's not fair to others, whatever that means. I it's not but that's also it's not about it's not about about fair is not the word we're looking for. It's, it's it's equitable. And so, um, it's about equity. Um, and so yeah, but you know, what concerns me most is that this is a US attitude. Often we hear that this work only happens in the sort of more colonial spaces like us, Canada, the UK, but that's just not true. That it is happening everywhere. Um, and so my concern is that, you know, of course, the attitudes of the US will influence the attitudes of the world. We just got to keep fighting for to at least maintain the ADA. As things move forward. But, you know, also, at the same time, the disabled community has always been excluded and so the disabled community will continue to take care of itself. And folks will continue to invest in mutual care and support around each other. Um, and so all is not lost because we still have each other but there is a lot of there is a lot of concern in our community right now.

Toni Bell

Yeah, I went to Costa Rica a few years back for vacation. They have a whole they have a whole political party for people with disabilities that has some power.

Ranell Shubert

Yeah.

Toni Bell

Yeah. If you go to the Costa Rica political party website, wikipedia page is all the parties. It's a blue flag and it has the symbols on people in the wheelchair and so on signing. And yeah, so there are in other places there are, um, and actually Costa Rica is really well known, particularly for a lot of, um, foreigners moving to Costa Rica. They're known for their health care.

Ranell Shubert

I was I was invited last year to Bam Bogota, which takes place in Bogota, Colombia. Um, you know, and their country has a mandate around disability and accessibility. And so they also, as a country did a report on the disability community and what they need and we presented together our findings, which was a really, really great opportunity. But, you know, it's good, like, there's a good and bad in that, right? Like, sometimes when it's a government mandate, it

doesn't necessarily mean that disabled people are leading that initiative but at the same time, it does require, everyone to participate, so, you know, give and take. But I think, um, yeah, it's been, um. Yeah. Sorry.

Toni Bell

Oh, no. That's good, that's good, that's great. Okay, so, let's get into DMA Disability Media Alliance. So tell us how that grew from your you're going back to the IDA.

Ranell Shubert

Yeah. So yeah, as I was saying, you know, I started this new department at IDA called the Nonfiction Access Initiative. It was really around creating that fund. We did eventually, uh, you know, with the data, we're able to create a fund. It was called the Direct Access Fund and essentially it supported 21 projects to provide access support to their project for either their director or their producer, which is a very important fund and much needed support. That doesn't happen, as you had mentioned earlier, many programs that support disabled makers aren't designed for disabled people and they a lot of times the disabled maker will have to provide their own access or something like that. Um, and so we, we had this fund that we were very open minded about what I what access looks like and what access can mean. You know, we supported people paying some folks rent. Um, we paid for some alternative medicine treatments. You know, we paid for all kinds of interesting ideas because we just wanted people to understand that, sometimes it takes a little bit more for a disabled maker to just do their work. It is part of their work. So yeah, so we did that fund, but it really it was just kind of a way to chip at things. It wasn't necessarily a larger solution you know so the Ford Foundation came to us and was like, you're very good here at IDA, at like creating communities, come to us with a bigger idea.

As I said, you know, we were bringing together all these different constituents from the community. And for many, particularly the organizations, it was the first time that they got to talk to each other. Um, and about what's going on and, like, how are they doing. And one thing that really came up and that was very distinct. It was clear, the institutions were competing against each other for funding which is it totally against goes against the values of the disabled community and that we embrace collaboration over competition. And so, in those conversations, we were like, okay, well, how can we figure out a way to make fundraising and disbursement of money more equitable around within the disability community, but also data from that report. That was clear, again, that most support systems are not designed with disabled people in mind. And it's truly the organizations that are already embedded in these communities that already are, you know, doing the work are the ones that need to be supported the most. And so we, that's sort of the beginnings of DMA. You know, we really wanted to focus on creating more

funds, more mentorship opportunities, more development programs that are specifically for disabled and designed for disabled people that are being given and being administered and decisions were being made by disabled people themselves into order to better serve the community.

Toni Bell

Awesome, awesome. So I just kind of like talk about like what are some of the first projects that DMA is going to be working on?

Ranell Shubert

Yeah. We've just been spending the past year. We're like, you know, I mean, a lot of the work that we're doing is about building infrastructure, right? It's like putting disability, disabled people in the positions of power and making decisions. And so, you know, and if we're going to promote that for others, we have to do that for ourselves. So this past year has been really about, really building a strong infrastructure for ourselves. Doing things like community agreements and like having, you know, a written document about how do we say that we work, what is our staff culture internally? How do we work with others? So that's a lot of those kinds of things. Um, just like a lot of interior values establishing sort of work. But as far as, like actual outward stuff that we're going to be doing initially, the first thing we want to do is to do is to create a mapping tool and just to really get a sense of where other organizations are and other institutions are, that are doing this work to support disabled people all over the world. We have a good sense domestically of who's doing this work, but we know that there are other regions of the world, other countries that are doing this work, and we want to know what it is. And so yeah, so that's really our first step is to, to see where people are and then to really map that work, um, for filmmakers. So they have a sense of like what's out there for me, what can what can support me.

Toni Bell

Right.

Ranell Shubert

We're also, you know, there aren't isn't support in your region. Um, and you're like, hey, I'm, I'm a disability filmmaker in this part of the world. I'd love to see more support for me. What do you know? Right. Who? What can we do? Um, you know, this is something that we kind of did with our founding organizations. You know, I call them our founding organizations, which are AXS Film Fund, QWOCCMAP, FWD-Doc, of course, and then the Documentary Association of Pakistan, and then 1IN4 coalitions are all co-founding organizations. But with the Disability Association of Pakistan, the executive director at that organization is somebody who identified

with having a disability. Um, and they joined the conversation being like, you know, I know there's a big community of folks here in Pakistan, but we haven't identified them yet. So we would like to do that work. And so I worked with them to just like, let's let's see how we can do outreach. Let's see how we can get to them to help develop a community there. And then those folks participated in the Nonfiction Media Makers with Disabilities Survey. We collected data on them. And then we gave that data back to them so they could utilize that for their institution, for their organization to help develop programs, help with funding, you know, whatever it is to help progress that organization. And so that's also part of this, what we want to continue to do. And also through that mapping, we'll start, you know, we want to start like just asking the organizations what's going on.

How are you doing? How are you surviving? What kind of programs can we create to help you you reinforce your institution, your nonprofit so that you stay soluble. Also, how can we work together on certain issues in the disability community, you know? The challenges and the barriers for disabled makers is not a monolith. It's not just a single oh, here, just, you know, we'll give money to disability and that's going to that'll take care of it. There's a lot of different myriad of issues that need supported, you know. And so, it's also changing the idea in people's brains about like, what are all the different complex aspects of disability support that are needed? Um, it's not just getting people to film festivals. It's not just captioning. There are a lot of other issues that need to be addressed. And so, yeah, I, we we are also trying to fundraise an emergency fund for these organisations. Particularly, Um, as the **rhetoric (TBC)** of ideas about who disabled people are, particularly disabled professionals. Um, you know, is being **spewed (TBC)**. It's making it more challenging for these institutions to get supported, to find funding. Um, and so, um, yeah it's an interesting time to be starting a nonprofit, but I think it's, because of the kinds of work we're trying to do it feels absolutely necessary that we unify these organizations in this way at this time, because we're stronger together.

Toni Bell

So if someone from an organization hears this podcast and they work with people with disabilities in their country, and they want to be part of your mapping process. Like, how do they get in touch with you?

Ranell Shubert

Yeah. Well, uh, you can get in touch with us through our website. It's disabilitymedia.org. There's a form on there. You can you can reach out to me directly. I'm also not afraid to give out my email address, which is ranell@DisabilityMedia.org. So I love engaging with people, I love out of nowhere email. So, um, if there are folks that are that want to engage in this work, oh, please reach out, because I want to know about you.

Toni Bell

And how do people contribute to Disability Media Alliance?

Ranell Shubert

They can give us some support, that's for sure. Yeah, I think that, you know, that's I mean, that's what we're looking if you are outside and you're looking to support the community because you're not just supporting us, you're not just supporting DMA, you're supporting in whole infrastructure, a whole community of organizations with your support.

Toni Bell

So what are some things that folks who don't have disabilities who are. I don't you like to use. We're allies. I like to use co-conspirators. What are some of the things that co-conspirators can do? And let me distinguish, a co-conspirator is actually someone who's actually willing to put their body or metaphoric body on line for a particular cause versus an ally is someone who says, oh, I'm for something, but it doesn't necessarily mean they're actually doing anything. So we want more co-conspirators. So what can someone who is a person who doesn't have a disability but who wants to get engaged in this work, what they can they do?

Ranell Shubert

Yeah. I mean, you know, it's, uh, I especially really encourage this of industry people if there are industry people listening or even filmmakers, when you're participating on panels, when you're having a screening, when, uh, you know, whatever it may be like, ask for things to be asked for, things to be captioned, ask for ASL support even if you don't need it, because there's going to be somebody else who does. You have a lot of power being part of something and so utilize that power and that opportunity to ask for support for others. So I really, really, really encourage that. I also really encourage you to really for those of you who a lot of times folks, um, you know, don't really think about disability until it affects them personally, whether that's because it's something that you, it's a, you know, it's something your own experience or someone in your family. But I really encourage people to really think about their own personal attitudes and ideas about disability. We really want to try to like eliminate is this idea of pity, or treating disabled people as inspiration. I really encourage folks to fund disabled makers to tell these stories. The world of documentary has really benefited from stories of disability since its iteration. And we really should be. Um, and again, it's created this dynamic of, you know, many films are about, you know, that put people at something to feel sorry for rather than, you know, it's who we are. It's it's just makes us who we are. I really encourage you to fund disabled makers. Listen to disabled makers. Put them in the position of being to tell the stories themselves. But, yeah, those are just there's just a few things that folks can do. Um, but, like, really, I really encourage

you to investigate your own feelings around disability and why you may think that, because you'll really discover a lot about yourself.

Toni Bell

I also want to add making film sets accessible. I can't remember the name of some organization. I think The Hollywood Reporter did an article about it, but they created essentially this chart that you could use to actually make your budget accessible. So they had two pages. So if your your film budget was like under \$500,000, you could pad it by like an extra 3 or 5% to make it accessible. And that means in regards to like hiring crew with disabilities and making sure your accommodations for those folks so you can like put that in your budget. But also being like thinking about, shooting schedules because someone with a disability, it can be very difficult to do like a standard 12 hour shooting day. I mean, that could be difficult to anybody. So maybe having incorporated longer shooting times, particularly if you're having crew with disabilities like these are little things people can begin to do to even make their film sets more accessible, to increase that hiring. To open up the hiring pool for people.

Ranell Shubert

And you know, when you start investigating these things, you you may actually see that, they benefit folks that aren't necessarily disabled but have that are creating situations in which, you know, for mothers or folks that, who also have similar barriers to entry around things. You're, also supporting them. I also want to mention that, as you were mentioning budgets, the new IDA budget template now includes costs around access and accessibility. So I really encourage you to take a look at that as well. I hope we get to a place where funders see that as a requirement. That your project doesn't get funded unless you have lines around accessibility and accessibility support in your projects as well.

Toni Bell

All right. Well, we're getting the the signal that we need to wrap up. So I always like to give, um, the guests the last word. So any final thoughts, Ranell?

Ranell Shubert

Yeah. I think, one thing that I'd like us to all of us in industry whether we're filmmakers or, you know, industry people, to really start to consider, is like, let's stop valuing people's ability to endure.

Toni Bell

Oh. Come on.

Ranell Shubert

You know, it's just, uh, I know that I've compromised myself for a long time and was celebrated for it that was detrimental to me. And this is not a new idea. I hear this, again my friend Jim LeBrecht says this all the time. But when we do that, we lose so much brilliance and so many folks, that could have brought something wonderful and could have contributed didn't just because of this idea, that we in order for greatness we have to suffer. And it's just not true. It's just not true. And so, if anything, um, that's just a thought I'd like to leave folks with.

Toni Bell

Okay. That's some preaching. That is. Yeah, it's there's no need to suffer and martyrdom is overrated. Yeah. And it's not necessary. Yeah, yeah.

Ranell Shubert

It's just not worth it.

Toni Bell

All right, Ranell this is amazing. So glad to have this opportunity to chat with you like this. And, Ranell and I actually could be continuing this conversation because I teach at Saybrook University, and Ranell is going to be on a panel for the new students coming in, along with Caitlin Yang, who she mentioned and we're going to be talking about Crip Time and disability and artistic space. Unfortunately, that's going to be open to Saybrook students, but there may be a recording available, so we will let y'all know if that is the case. But Ranell is such a pleasure to have you on the show. And I want to thank Anne and Nadja again for, I guess this year, 5 or 6 on collaborating with DOK Leipzig. And thank you, everybody, for listening.

Ranell Shubert

Yeah. Thank you Toni. Um, yeah. Thanks for being such a huge influence in my life, Toni. Thank you.

Toni Bell

Um, back at you girl.

(Toni Bell and Ranell Shubert are laughing. The podcast ends.)