

# Quest

## PODCAST



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### **Episode 40- Unlocking Access and Inspiring Action with Sophie Morgan**

**April 10, 2024**

(Music playing)

**Mindy Henderson:**

Welcome to the Quest Podcast, proudly presented by the Muscular Dystrophy Association as part of the Quest family of content. I'm your host, Mindy Henderson. Together we are here to bring thoughtful conversation to the neuromuscular disease community and beyond about issues affecting those with neuromuscular disease and other disabilities and those who love them. We are here for you to educate and inform, to demystify, to inspire, and to entertain. We are here shining a light on all that makes you, you. Whether you are one of us, love someone who is or are on another journey altogether. Thanks for joining. Now, let's get started.

My guest today is a woman who clearly never sleeps. Named one of the top 10 most influential people in the UK, no less, Sophie Morgan's advocacy work leaves me speechless. She is a BAFTA nominated TV presenter, producer, writer, disability rights advocate and artist, and I've probably left some things off the list. Paralyzed in an automobile accident when she was only 18, Sophie became one of the first female wheelchair users globally to host on television and is transforming representation of disability on screen. Sophie can be seen anchoring live sports, fronting in her own primetime travel series, and hard-hitting current affairs documentaries and as a regular panelist for ITV's Loose Women. She recently co-founded Making Space Media with Keely Cat-Wells, another powerhouse woman a lot of you may be familiar with. Making Space Media, a production company that focuses on increasing representation in TV

and film recently also contracted with Reese Witherspoon's media company, Hello Sunshine. Come on. Could you be any more fabulous? I know I didn't even mention everything that you're involved in, but welcome Sophie.

**Sophie Morgan:** Thanks, Mindy. Thank you so much.

**Mindy Henderson:** Well, I have been really looking forward to this conversation. You and I have gotten to know each other just a little bit over the last year. We've done some work together on accessibility and air travel, which I know we'll get into and we'll talk about here in just a few minutes as one of the many things that you're working on. But would you mind talking just a little bit about your disability story for our listeners and talk a little bit about maybe how it impacts your daily life?

**Sophie Morgan:** Sure. So I was paralyzed in a car crash when I was 18 years old. So that's now 21 years. I'm aging myself aren't I, but 21 years this summer. So I was paralyzed from the chest down. So that was obviously quite a traumatic experience. In the car crash itself, I didn't just sustain the spinal cord injury, there was also a number of other injuries that I sustained, including severe damage to my face. I've had to have quite a lot of reconstructive surgery as a result. But yeah. So how it impacts my day-to-day life. I'm a permanent wheelchair user, so I think for anyone listening who has any lived experience with that you know immediately what that means. All of the challenges that face that come with using a wheelchair I deal with on a day-to-day basis.

But my paralysis itself, I'm paralyzed just above my core so I have very little balance and I have no sensation and no movement below the level of my injury. So I'm what you call a complete injury. Which means that I have issues with incontinence and sexual function and temperature regulation and all of the things that come with spinal cord injury and paralysis. The secondary complications are multiple and complex and difficult. But yeah, I manage them as best as I can. At the moment, I've just had the privilege of moving over to the US. So I've been living in London in the UK for the last 20 years. I grew up near Scotland in between the south of England and Scotland, but now I'm living in the US and loving life, very much loving life. Although to your point, yes, I don't sleep, so there's a lot going on.

**Mindy Henderson:** Yeah. Well, and this podcast is going to be just audio, but if you could see our faces, you could see the dark windows behind Sophie right now.

**Sophie Morgan:** And the dark circles under my eyes.

**Mindy Henderson:** No. None of that, but it's clearly very late where you are right now. So I mentioned Keely and Keely was not able to be with us today. But do you want to talk just a little bit about your partnership with her and how you both met? Your

backgrounds, there are a number of similarities and things in the work that you do, but how did you meet?

**Sophie Morgan:**

Yeah. I know, it's funny, we get asked that quite often and I think we've both got two different versions of this because my memory's terrible and there's just been so many times that our paths have crossed. For Keely she remembers we were on a panel together that was an online panel. She was based in the US and I was in the UK. I think what she tells me it was like the BBC or something. I've completely forgotten. I blank out all these panels. You know how you have all these panels about something to do with disability and I'm like, oh gosh, they all merge into one. So I don't remember that moment as clearly as the moment I actually interviewed her on a podcast that I was hosting and executing and we got to meet. And I'd known about her work for some time before I met her or before I got to speak to her, I should say.

I was so excited to get to dig a little deeper. So in the interview we covered off a lot of stuff and I just knew, we just clicked because there's so much that we care about and so many of the same things. And also our mission's very much in work, although they show up in different ways, we are very much aligned in our mission. So when she came over, I was coming over to the States for some reason, I just said, look, we've got to meet, we've got to meet in person. And we got to talking. That first meeting became clear to me that I just needed to work with Keely. You feel that with someone. It was more than I just want to be your friend, which of course I did know right immediately that we would be friends. But it was that sense of I really want us to work together.

And one of the things that I had been really passionate about and still am to this day is ... So this was about four years ago, maybe five years ago now, I was really determined to find a way to inspire a replication of what had happened in the UK when it came to broadcasting the Paralympics and using disabled talent. I wanted to replicate that or find a way to inspire that over in the US. And I was talking to Keely about it. At the time she managed, she owned C Talent, and I was talking to her about what are the opportunities here for disabled talent? What is the opportunity for shifting the dial when it comes to representation in disability sport and promoting the Paralympics in a way that they did with London and the 2012 games and on channel four of which I had been a part of?

And we just put our heads together and we're like, I don't know, but let's figure it out. Let's just figure it out. So we pushed and pushed all the doors that we possibly could and eventually fast-forward, now we're working together and we've been working with NBC. It's taken us such a long time, but we are so proud and excited to be where we are which is just working with them to help improve the opportunities for employment for disabled people primarily to start with on screen, but also that's going to move forward and move on from there

into production roles and internal roles at NBC. So we're really excited. It took a lot of work, but it was exactly what we wanted to achieve. It's brilliant.

So I should add that I've been living in the UK and been working on television as a broadcaster, and I have been doing that for the best part of a decade, I'd say. And the most recent project I was making was underneath Hello Sunshine. So Hello Sunshine had opened up an unscripted department in the UK and I was working with them on a documentary. And during the process of making that documentary, we got to talking and it became clear that there was this opportunity to create a production company. And when I was talking with Keely as we were about all of the projects we wanted to get off the ground, including the NBC one, I said, I think we should set up this production company. I think we need to do it together. And that was the beginning of Making Space Media that we set up together. And then we combined forces, brought all our plans together and put them all under this one banner, which is Making Space. So I hope that all makes sense because there's so many parts of it.

**Mindy Henderson:**

I don't know if it's the most ... There's so many important things about what you just said and about what you and Keely are doing together as just this force of nature. But I think that what strikes me as so important is that what you are all about and what you're working on and what you are very tangibly doing is creating opportunity for the disability community. And that is huge. And not even just creating opportunity but creating opportunity in a space that has been so challenging for people with disabilities to find opportunity. It's a market that's so ... I'm preaching to the choir, but so difficult to get into for anyone, but nevermind if you have a disability. And so you are changing I think a lot about the way that people see and view disability and view the right to jobs and to work. I could go on and on and on because I think you're really breaking boundaries and doing things that people have never done before.

**Sophie Morgan:**

Oh, I love you saying that. And I hope so because that's our mission. It's one of the things that we feel so passionate about. Keely started off in C talent. The mission was to get disabled people representing in spaces that they had never been in before for, and she thrived in that environment and it was incredible what she achieved. And we are aiming to do the same with Making Space. And so to be able to know that we are influencing or creating opportunities, that's the whole point. That's the name. The clue is in the name. We are making space for talent and we want to make space everywhere we possibly can.

But to your point about changing perceptions around employment, it's a huge challenge because there is still these outdated tropes and beliefs that we don't add value to, say the economy or to a working environment. That we more detract. It's just those outdated ideas of what productivity looks like. All of those things. We have to challenge all of that. And it's not going to be an easy journey

to do. So. Sometimes I think the two of us, we put our heads together and we despair because we know that there's so much work to do. But nevertheless, we're in it together and we will do whatever we can. And I know we're not alone. And that feels great too. There's so many amazing organizations, certainly in the US that I'm ... Having just moved there, I'm still learning about who's who and who's doing what. And it's so exciting and impressive, and I think the tides are turning, it's just slow. It's just slow.

**Mindy Henderson:**

It is. It is. And I think any just advocacy work that you do, period, it moves at a snail's pace. You've got to be okay with that and take your wins where you can get them. The trailblazers that you are, it's amazing. And I've seen the fruits of your labor and what you're doing and what you're creating, and it's absolutely wonderful. And the Muscular Dystrophy Association serves the neuromuscular community largely, and it's such an important priority to them to see the conversations changing and to see people getting on board with representation and opportunity and all of that.

I'm going to give you whiplash for just a second and ask you a different kind of question because I've been so impressed every time I've had the opportunity to speak to you about how transparent you are and how open you are about your own personal story. And I think that when you do what you do ... You are a storyteller and it's so important to have that element of vulnerability and transparency. What motivated you or even inspired you in the first place to use your experience living with a disability which happened to you so young, to educate and advocate for other people? Where did that come from?

**Sophie Morgan:**

Thank you for asking this question because I've asked it of myself so many times. Where did this come from? Somebody asked me the other day, how do I become an advocate and how do I become a ... I'm like, I don't know. Oh yeah, I am one. Okay. So how did I do that? So if I was to teach this, what would I teach? And anyway, to answer your question, I think for me, the reason I ... So I became disabled. I wasn't born this way. And when I became disabled and I woke up into this world and I went on this extraordinary journey of learning and unlearning everything I knew about what it would mean to live as a paraplegic or as a wheelchair user or as a woman with a physical visible disability I realized then that there was so much A, internalized ableism that I carried, but B, so much ableism in the world around me that I wanted to change. And I didn't know what tools I had to be able to influence change. I was like, how do I do this? Because I was learning rapidly how wrong I had been about disabled people because I had become one, and I was like, oh, I was wrong about that. They can have a great life.

**Mindy Henderson:**

Interesting.

**Sophie Morgan:**

They can do all these ... For example, I didn't know that I could drive. As simple as that. I didn't know that you could be paralyzed, not be able to use your legs and drive a car. And all these things I had to learn at the young age of 18 when I was still just figuring myself out, let alone all the stuff around disability. There was a huge learning curve. I was learning all this stuff and I was thinking, hold on, if I don't know this, I wonder who else doesn't know this? But it was worse than the basics. It was more the actual really limiting tropes that I was coming face to face with that didn't sit well with me. Things like, oh, you can't have a job. I was told I wouldn't be able to work. I was told I wouldn't be able to live independently. I was told I would have to depend on my family or on the state.

There were these perceptions about me. And I was very much as a teenager, quite a belligerent and difficult girl, and I was a bit like questioning. I said, well, why? How come? Why can't I do that? And at first it was just a curiosity and a little bit of stubbornness, but soon it became this motivator that was like, hold on a minute, what have I got wrong about this? What has everyone else got wrong about this? I need to go and figure it out. And then I need to tell them. And I had this real moment of, I need people to know because you are limiting my life and I don't think that's right, just because your perceptions about me, you think they're fact. What if you were wrong and what are the consequences of that ableism in you? How is that going to stop from living? And so at that point, I was like, okay, right. What do I do? I need to tell people about us.

The thing that was a really unexpected turn of events, and I'm really glad it happened, was that not long after I had my injury, I was invited to be on a reality TV show, and it was a really wild show. It was called Beyond Boundaries, and it followed 11 disabled people, pan-disability, as we went "on foot" from the east coast of Nicaragua to the West Coast. And it was a big expedition through the jungle just literally on foot from one spot to the other. And we had to navigate this all independently just as a group.

Now that experience, whilst I won't go into how difficult it was, what it did was it made me realize that that tool that I was missing, the tool that I was looking for that would help me in the shifting of perceptions and breaking down of attitudinal barriers was TV, it was television. I was like, oh, so television is how I get to people. Right. Okay. So if I can tell stories through television, this is where I go. So that was the beginning of this passion that I had to get on TV and show people what we could do. That was where it began. It took me another 20 years to get to where I am, and I'm still working my way up the ladder because it's incredibly challenging to do that.

So to your question about why did I use my story, the only other tool I had in my toolbox aside from television, is my story and my life and my reality and being honest about it and saying, look, this is the way it is. And bringing other people

into that. I know that there are boundaries that we must have around how much we expose ourselves and our medical history for the exploitation or entertainment of others, but I certainly feel that if we have power over those stories and if we have agency over how we tell them, and we have the tools to be able to do that correctly and effectively, that's how we shift perceptions. So I've really lent into telling my story and I've now done it for so many years that I'm just like, this is me. This is who I am, this is how my life is, and I enjoy it. I don't share everything but most things, most things, yeah, yeah.

**Mindy Henderson:**

Yeah. Amazing. And I love what you said about television because that's something that I have believed for so long as an advocate myself, is that just people with disabilities need to be in everyone's line of sight, if nothing else. So much more than they are now because the trickle-down effect is huge to employment, to fashion, to travel. It influences everything else in our daily lives.

**Sophie Morgan:**

I couldn't agree with you more. I don't know where I've got this from. I'm sure I'm stealing this from a source that I wish I could source. But I think there's three main ways that the disabled community can shift those perceptions. It's increased visibility, it's more authentic representation, and it's actual leadership from our community. Those three things, those secret ingredients will be what will lift us out of being so marginalized.

So for me, that first box that increased visibility is where I really go in. We need to be everywhere. To your point in the line of sight, I'm like, right. What is it that we need to do to make the wider world, than the non-disabled public, or the decision makers who don't think that we are part of the lived experience, how do we shift that? What do we need to do? Well, they need to see that we're out and about. But then you come back to this next part where you've got the infrastructure around us or the financial barriers or medical barriers that might prevent us from being able to be out and about in the world so easily. So it's all part of a bigger piece of the puzzle. So you can't just take one in isolation as the solution. But that's where I've always gone in. I've always gone visibility, visibility. But then you layer into that authentic representation. That's the bit I love the most.

Of course, the last part of the puzzle, as I mentioned, the leadership and having us in decision-making roles is integral and imperative. It almost goes without saying that's what we need to achieve. And that's where I love working with Keely because that's what we are trying to create in Making Space with employment opportunities is career paths for disabled people to get into those decision-making roles and stay in them. So yeah, we're trying to tackle it all.

**Mindy Henderson:**

Yes. I love it. It's so good. I talked to someone like you and I feel like we could rule the world.

**Sophie Morgan:** We will rule the world Mindy. We will.

**Mindy Henderson:** Of course we will. But yes, your enthusiasm is so infectious. I love talking to you. So let's talk about ... And I'm going to try really hard not to get on my soapbox because this is one of my biggest pet peeves is air travel for people with disabilities right now. And as part of your advocacy journey, you founded Rights On Flights. I would love just to have you talk about Rights On Flights and what exactly your approach is and how you're working to impact air travel.

**Sophie Morgan:** Rights On Flights was created almost ... Where are we now? Just over a year ago. It started because my wheelchair was broken. Like so many other peoples, it was destroyed by an airline. At this point I've been traveling by air for 20 years. I've been using air travel as a way to get around the world since the beginning of my disability journey. This was not the first time this has happened to me. And it was not the first time that I'd had a problem when flying.

But the thing about when it happened to me last year is it had come off the back of a number of other very high-profile stories, including like Maayan Ziv who lives up in Canada. And she had had her problem with her chair through Air Canada I think it was. She was going through it, and I have a huge amount of love and respect for her. I had followed her story and was heartbroken by what happened to her. And there was also others. And in the UK, there had been a plethora of them coming out. Again, I'm not the only one this has ever happened to. I came away from the experience and I was on a TV show that I am part of in the UK called Loose Women, which is a panel show. And I was sitting on that panel show the next day having a good old rant about it. And I was saying ... My story, I'm just the tip of the iceberg. There are so many other stories of people who've had their equipment broken, lost, damaged, their bodies impaired. So many things have gone wrong and we're fed up and enough is enough and we've got to do more. But I did also say, whilst I was on that show, why is it we can't travel in our wheelchairs? I want to know from somebody who knows why can't we?

So anyway, after that rant on TV, a politician who had been one of her aides had been watching the show, contacted me and said, look, we would love to be able to support you on this and see what we can do collaboratively. And that was the beginning of what would become Rights On Flights. So in the first instance, we went out and we asked our government in the UK to do more to protect disabled flyers when airlines failed us by just giving the regulators more power. So we formed a group of us and we basically the MP, wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister and asked for this to happen.

And then whilst we were looking in that area, we also decided what else can we do here? Because the reality is we can talk about the problems until the cows



come home, what are the solutions? And I'm really like if I'm going to use my voice and my platform, which I have worked really hard to have for the last 10, 15 years ... I've got a platform now; how do I use it effectively? I was leaning on experts from the industry. What do I need to say? What are the laws we can change? What needs to be done? I honestly was just ... Anyone that would listen to me, I was asking them questions, and thankfully a number of people were really willing to support and help, and they could see that they could use me and I could use them and we could come together and affect change more quickly. So we then drafted what we've called the Assisted Air Travel Act, which is a draft legislation that we would love to see our government adopt because there's an opportunity for them to improve the legislation in the UK right now because we've just left the EU and so there's opportunity there for us to improve things.

So we've been working very hard on that behind the scenes for the last year, we are facing a general election in the UK, so there's a little bit of jeopardy around whether or not we're going to see change, but we're feeling confident that we will in the right direction and we'll see. But it also Rights On Flights brought me over to the US and I've been now really lucky to meet people like yourselves, advocates who are doing the same work and seeing where we can lean on each other and work together and collaborate. And there's just been so much going on.

The final part of what Rights On Flights is really about and what I've always wanted it to be, but I've struggled because I don't have the resources to do this both and financially is I want it to be a real hub of information for disabled travelers. So when you don't know what your rights are or when you feel that your rights have been abused or you feel lost or confused, or you just want some guidance, I want Rights On Flights to be a hub of information, of support, and a place where you and I can go and have a good old rant about something bad, watch some videos about some stuff that's been going on that's good, find out about other advocates in other countries, see what's going on, know my rights. I really want that to be successful. So I've recently teamed up with some brilliant, brilliant people to help me. They're students with passion. Students, by the way, the most amazing resource.

**Mindy Henderson:** Students are the best.

**Sophie Morgan:** The most amazing resource because they've got a lot more time, but damn are they hungry. So I'm really lucky that we've found some brilliant people to help. They're just amazing. So they're helping bring all that content together and just grow the community. So anyone who's listening to this, who's interested in any of this, just head onto our Instagram and find out more and our TikTok and all of that stuff. We're trying to build it all up. So yeah. That's the final part of it, but it's ever evolving. The campaign has, as I said, lots of different things going on,

but at the heart of it is just this mission to create change and a lasting impact and not let it go. Not let it go until we see it because enough is enough.

**Mindy Henderson:** Exactly. Well, and it's interesting that you say that because ... I said I wasn't going to get up on my soapbox, but I will just say it boggles my mind that it's 2024 and you still have to be separated from your wheelchair to be able to fly to another city to go do your job. It's crazy to me. For people who are listening and want to do something, but they don't know what's within their power to do what would your advice be to them? What would you tell them to do?

**Sophie Morgan:** I find this question incredibly frustrating sometimes because I wish I had a direction. I'm like, do this, let's do that. Don't you find that. You're like, oh, there's so many of us and there's so much passion behind this course. I'm like, ah. So the only answer I've got, there's a couple, I suppose. One is obviously engage with Rights On Flights and share your story that we've got a whole page on our website where you can just drop in information about how you might want to get involved.

**Sophie Morgan:** If there are areas of expertise that it looks like the Rights On Flights team is missing and you've got it, we want to hear from you. It could be you are from industry; you are from government. It could be you're a policy maker, it could be anything like that. There's a handful of us. There can be more. But we also are aware ... We are not paid. There's no money in this. Although we are going to start trying to ask for some donations just to help us just get the running costs covered and things like that. But that really is one way. The other is, of course, to comment on the NPRM, as you've said, and we can obviously share instructions for people to be able to add those comments in. And to also not just comment on why. You've got to be very clear in your comments. The PVA have put out some guidelines and a toolkit as to how best to comment. I really recommend checking out that as a resource. So it's like, I think this particular part of the rule is a great one, and I like it because. Back up your reasons as to why it's good. Or I don't think this is right, I think you should do this and explain why. It just really makes the comments more impactful.

I think other ways to get involved, I suppose one of the ways we as a community can always fight back or help one another is to share resources. There's some amazing advocates out there showing videos of this is how I fly and this is what you need to know about a battery. I'm talking obviously about wheelchair users primarily, but it extends far beyond that. So I think there's ways you can lean into that. If you want to help other people and you've got experience, share your content. If you are inexperienced and you want to know more, follow all these different people, and you can find a lot of them through our platform. We try and reshare as many people as we possibly can. And I think finally, it depends on where you're listening to this from. I would say ultimately there is an

opportunity ... If I've learned anything, and I'm sure you're the same Mindy, I didn't know that I had as an individual the power to actually make any change. I've always been like ... But then how do you do that? I found myself sitting in the White House recently thinking, well, here I am. So if I can do it, it's possible. It is possible.

I factor in my absolute ... I'm aware of the privilege that I come with, and I'm very aware that that's not the outcome for everyone. But what I would say is don't think that you don't have the resources to also make some sort of change. You really can. And whether that be starting a campaign, whether that be using your social media to raise awareness, whether it be writing to airlines, whether it be getting involved with the ... The system in the US is a little bit different but here we would say contacting your MP and engaging with politicians to make sure that you are pushing your agenda. You can do all of those things if you have the energy. I think the more of us that can should, because it's going to take a lot of us to keep pushing this forward because the industry and the government, no matter how much they are making noises and hinting at moving forward, and I think you're right, it won't be long until we start to see that hope of a space on onboard and airplane and other solutions. In reality, it's still going to take some time.

**Mindy Henderson:** It is. It is. It's exciting to me, some of the progress that's been made and just the way even the conversation and awareness is shifting is exciting. And so I think you threw out some amazing suggestions and one voice, one share on social media becomes two becomes three becomes a thousand. And so it compounds. And it's not the time to take our foot off the pedal.

**Sophie Morgan:** Absolutely.

**Mindy Henderson:** We have to keep pushing.

**Sophie Morgan:** We must. Especially if we're talking about the two countries that we come from, the UK and the US, we're facing political upheaval and change. We don't know where it's going to go. But no matter what happens, this agenda remains the same. We must have equity, we must have equality, we must have rights when we fly. That happens regardless of who's sitting in the seats of power. We have to have that. So at the end of the day that's where we have to go. So we can't lose sight of that. Like you said, we can't take our foot off the gas.

**Mindy Henderson:** It's so true. I am going to switch gears again because there's so much to talk to you about. You mentioned NBC a little while ago. And you are very ingrained in the sports world. I would love to hear more from you about your work with NBC and anything else that you have coming up that you're working on in the sports

world. I would love for you to just talk about your own experience with sports and how that's been important for you.

**Sophie Morgan:**

Yeah. So again, as I mentioned earlier one of the main drivers behind wanting to partner with NBC and work with NBC is to see if there's any way we could take what we did in the UK and do it again in the US. So what I mean by that is channel four who are the equivalent of NBC when it comes to the broadcasting of the Paralympics. They're the network. We call it the channel that broadcast the Paralympics in the UK. And what they did to mainstream disability sport was almost I think unprecedented. They threw away the rule book and they completely rebranded the Paralympics, and they made it into an event that ... I think I'm right in saying it. Let's just say it's true, it might not be. I think they got more viewers for the Paralympics on television than they did the Olympics, or they certainly sold out as many seats. There was some stats that made it really extraordinary, which for anyone in the Paralympic movement would know that was a big deal because previously getting viewers to watch the games, let alone and getting people to attend the games had always been somewhat of a struggle. So this moment when everything changed in the UK, yes, it changed broadcasting, yes, it changed the sport, but it also did have an impact on society.

And so we saw changes in London. Just general changes that were improvements to the day-to-day lives of disabled people. Now, it certainly wasn't the ultimate, it wasn't the panacea that fixed everything. And there's still a lot of work that needs to be done absolutely. But it was really interesting to see what happened. And I was a part of that. I was a tiny part of the broadcast in London. I was one of the lead anchors in the broadcast in Rio, and I've been part of the broadcasting team for the Winters and the Tokyo games since. And every time these games come around as an advocate, I'm always like, right, how do we use this? How do we use the Paralympics to help impact disabled people's lives in society? And so I've had that question percolating for the last 10 years. And so I brought the answers that I have created and that others have concluded with me to NBC. And obviously NBC know full well the power of the games, and they want to do the best they can as broadcasters to tell the stories fully and as well and engage new viewers and bring people into disability sport and stuff. So it's just been amazing to work alongside them and see what we can do to support them.

And what we did in the first instance is create a bootcamp. A training week for existing disabled talent. Many of them Paralympians themselves or from para-athletes. And we brought them in and we did a load of training to see if we could find the next host for the Paris games. And we also created some training modules off the back of that that we've opened up and put onto Making Space. And if you are also somebody who's aspiring to host or get into sports hosting with NBC Sports, you can do that course and be put into a pipeline of talent that

then in the future when NBC Sports are looking for new hosts, they can go into that pipeline and find you and engage with you if they think you're right.

**Mindy Henderson:** Oh, I love it.

**Sophie Morgan:** Yeah. So that was like step one. Let's find new talent. Let's uplift existing talent. Let's go, go, go. It was one of the most amazing ... Personally, one of the highlights of my career. I think it was just amazing to be able to do that. And whilst I wish I could, I cannot say what's going to happen in Paris, but watch this space, watch this space, it will be a really good game, a really good broadcast of the game so I can't wait to. And hopefully when I know what we can talk about, I'll come back and talk to you about it.

**Mindy Henderson:** Perfect.

**Sophie Morgan:** Yeah. It's going to be good. It's going to be good.

**Mindy Henderson:** That's awesome. I love it. It's so interesting that the things that ... And I don't know if it's because they're natural interests of yours or how intentional your choices have been to be involved in sports. We talked about entertainment and of course advocacy and legislation and representation and all of those things. But each and every one of those things are such examples of empowerment and the way that people with disabilities can push the envelope and really turn the world on its ear even a little bit and make change. There's so many people in the neuromuscular community who I think self-select out of things like sports because they don't necessarily believe or know that there's a way for them to ski. I'm at a loss to think of another sport at the moment. But yeah. And so what are your thoughts on people who are out there who are self-selecting out of things because they don't know that it's possible for them?

**Sophie Morgan:** Well, this goes back to the point I made about when I first became disabled, and I was like, oh, I can't do those things. And other people said, oh, you can't do those things. And then I was like, well, hold on. How come? Maybe I should find out for myself. And it led me into the down this path of discovery, which is an ongoing journey. I am literally still every day figuring out what is it that I can do? And I am constantly rediscovering opportunity. It's a journey. So to those people who are self-selecting, I'd say, stop right now because you just don't know.

So one of the other things that I do is I write a column for Condé Nast Traveler about accessible travel. And in that role, which is just, oh my God, my dream job, I get to travel and find amazing places that are doing their best to be inclusive. I'm not going to say they're the best because come on, it's really hard to be inclusive for everybody. But these spaces that I get to go to and I unpack the ways in which they are being more accessible and more inclusive all around. I get to discover all these amazing equipment that works and new adaptive sports

that are being introduced. Honestly, the world is opening up exponentially, and it is so exciting. And so I would say don't limit yourself until you've really exhausted all avenues and you've checked and you've spoken to others and you've done your research. Because the more I do that, the more I am constantly going, oh my God, I've just found a new thing I can do. Oh my God, I found a new place I can go. Oh my God, there's a new person I can speak to you about this.

There's just so much information out there. And the other part of this is I also would like to add in, I suppose, is that yes, you can go out there and learn about what's out there and discover for yourself what might work for you. But I would also say the thing about our lived experience is that I've found over the years, sometimes you have to be the trailblazer. You have to be the one that goes first and figures it out because perhaps there hasn't been someone that's come before you. Yes, that's tricky. And yes, that's not straightforward and it might go a little bit, but hey, it might go right. And then the joy you get in discovering this thing that works for you and that might work for others, honestly, I live for that feeling. I don't know what the name of it is, but whatever that is, it feels great.

And I would hate for people out there or people listening to this to miss that opportunity to feel that way because of something that they have decided for themselves. It's really limiting your own life. We are limited enough as disabled people. If we then limit ourselves by our fear or our lack of imagination or our lack of curiosity, or just our inability to think outside the box and problem solve, then we are doubly disabled, triply disabled. So it's like let's just give ourselves a chance to live even within the limitations in which we have to live. You know?

**Mindy Henderson:** Yes. I do. I do. And everyone, no matter who you are, everybody has limitations, whether they're physical or financial. Whatever the limitation is, we've all got them and we've got to learn how to overcome them. There's a quote that's coming to mind, kind of like you said earlier, I wish I knew who to attribute it to, but the quote that's coming to mind is success is failure in progress. And I love that so much because if I had a nickel for all the times that I've failed trying to do something that eventually I figured out I would be a wealthy woman.

**Sophie Morgan:** And at the same time, even if you didn't figure it out, didn't you have more fun than not doing it anyway?

**Mindy Henderson:** Yes.

**Sophie Morgan:** Or didn't you feel better at the end of it even if you didn't get the result that you wanted? I'm certainly one of those people that would rather regret the things I did than didn't do. And that's something that I think has led me down to create a life that I really enjoy. And yes, it's a disabled life. Yes, it's a life lived as a

wheelchair user. That's never going away. My paralysis is undoubtedly never going anywhere. Well, I doubt it. You know what I'm saying. But I live this life that I think even my non-disabled version of myself would be pretty happy with. I'm not setting my standards up by my non-disabled perspective. That's not how I live. What I mean to say by that is I don't think that it's right that we confine ourselves to these ideas of what our lives can or can't be before fully checking it out and working it out and pushing those boundaries down. Because I tell you what, the world will put the boundaries up no matter what. They'll put them up. So it's up to us, I suppose, to really work out if those boundaries. Can be brought down or how to bring them down, how to get around them. Yeah.

**Mindy Henderson:** Oh my gosh, Sophie, you're amazing. I adore you, and I can't think of a better note to leave this on. I can't thank you enough for your time. I know it's crazy late for you, and it was wonderful of you to give us so much time. Thank you.

**Sophie Morgan:** No, thank you for listening to my ramblings and just for all your lovely questions, and it's just a joy Mindy. And I know we're aligned in our mission on the air travel space, so let's keep talking about that. And to anyone listening who does want to find out more or is curious about what we're doing with Rights On Flights or any of it, with Making Space, the whole thing, just get in touch.

**Mindy Henderson:** Love it. I love it. We're going to put all of that information in the show notes so people can look for you and find out how to get involved.

**Sophie Morgan:** Amazing. Thank you.

**Mindy Henderson:** Thank you for listening. For more information about the guests you heard from today, go check them out at [mda.org/podcast](http://mda.org/podcast). And to learn more about the Muscular Dystrophy Association, the services we provide, how you can get involved, and to subscribe to Quest Magazine or to Quest Newsletter, please go to [mda.org/quest](http://mda.org/quest). If you enjoyed this episode, we'd be grateful if you'd leave a review, go ahead and hit that subscribe button so we can keep bringing you great content and maybe share it with a friend or two. Thanks everyone. Until next time, go be the light we all need in this world.