GAMERella Podcast E01

Meredith Hall – AccessJam, Australia

1	**Intro:**	0:04	*Welcome to the GAMERella podcast. I'm Desirée De Jesus and*
2			*in this episode, I talk to Meredith Hall; games industry*
3			*consultant, public speaker, advocate and co-founder of*
4			*Accessibility Unlocked: a network of folks supporting disabled,*
5			*neuro-diverse, queer and gender diverse developers in Australia*
6			*and New Zealand.*
7	**Desirée De Jesus:**	0:25	Meredith, welcome to the GAMERella podcast. Thank you so
8			much for joining us.
9	**Meredith Hall:**	0:31	Thank you for having me. I'm really excited to be here.
10	**Desirée De Jesus:**	0:34	So who are you? And what do you do?
11	**Meredith Hall:**	0:38	So my name is Meredith, I am a game developer and consultant
12			based in Victoria in Australia. I tend to work with a whole bunch
13			of different teams, consulting on their business approach, their
14			project plan, their pitch, their production timeline, the
15			accessibility of their game, anything that is not necessarily
16			directly related a lot of the time to their active day to day work,
17			but getting them to look at the bigger picture and how it's going
18			to get them closer to their goals. That's my kind of day job for
19			lack of a better term. And then outside of that, I run an
20			organization called Accessibility Unlocked with a couple of other

21			people, that's focused on supporting disabled developers across
22			Australia and New Zealand.
23	**Desirée De Jesus:**	1:21	Wow, I have so many questions. This sounds amazing. So let's kind of start at the beginning. When and how did you get involved in gaming?
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26	**Meredith Hall:**	1:32	Oh gosh, I would have been very little. I grew up with a very tech-savvy and tech-interested father, who was very happy to share that love with me. And my brother was a big avid game player as well. So I kind of always grew up with it around me. But I did not have any kind of understanding of what sort of roles there were in that space. No one wants me to do art. It will not help anyone if I'm the artist on a project, and I am not great at coding either. So I didn't really have an understanding of that being a space that I could move into. So for a really long time, it was a hobby. It was something that I did for fun and kind of engaged with in playing and thinking about games. And then over time, I moved into marketing, because I knew that I wanted to look at how to communicate things to people that brought them joy or value or made them feel good and ended up running into a friend that I've known for a really long time. She mentioned that she was working with a studio that needed a marketer. They were working on a game and it kind of all fell together from there, and I moved into production after that.
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44	**Desirée De Jesus:**	2:35	I love how you just described marketing. It's kind of like this invitation to help people to find what they love and what they enjoy. I don't think I've ever quite heard that description before.
47	**Meredith Hall:**	2:48	I get really sad about marketing, because I think we've all seen advertising. And advertising and marketing can be very different. And to me what drives me when I think about marketing is it's almost like you have a glass of water and someone's thirsty. You have a power to give them something that they'd like and that they'd want. It's very rare that anyone sees an ad for something, and he's like, "Well, I have to buy this now because I'm being forced to." We buy the things and we engage with the things that make us happy and make us feel like part of something. And it's very similar in a way with game jams. You chase the things that give you connection. And I think that's really special.
58	**Desirée De Jesus:**	3:25	So you've just kind of alluded to there being a connection between marketing and Game Jam organizing. But how did you make that shift?
61	**Meredith Hall:**	3:35	So I never expected that I would support running a game jam. I'd been involved with a couple of game jams in my time, especially like Global Game Jam locally here in Melbourne. But I had never anticipated that that would be something I would engage with. I saw how useful a tool it was to give people opportunities to explore concepts or themes that they hadn't explored before, and to meet people that they hadn't met before. The biggest thing that

68		it did for me when I engaged with it as a kind of creator was
69		giving me permission to explore disciplines that I wouldn't have
70		otherwise. Like letting me play around with art because someone
71		needs to be doing art right now. And there's only four of us. So
72		let's go for it. So I think it has this unique ability to give
73		permission and make space for doing things a little bit differently.
74		And so when we saw that as a team, when we started
75		Accessibility Unlocked, and we saw the potential for that as a
76		tool to encourage specific types of creativity, it seemed like a no
77		brainer, I think, once we got to that point.
78	**Desirée De Jesus:** 4:39	So you were participating in game jams, what's that scene like
79		where you live?
80	**Meredith Hall:** 4:44	Yeah, I think the game development scene in general in Victoria
81		is really strong. We've been lucky to have government funding
82		at a grant level that's been consistent for a really long time. And
83		that was part of the work that I did before I moved back out into
84		industry was kind of administering that those grants and
85		supporting those developers. But we have a really, really strong,
86		independent scene at all scales. We have a lot of people who are
87		frequently making micro-games or small games that a lot of
88		people would expect to come out of a jam experience that are
89		very focused and very specific, and really strong, like telling
90		really, really cool stories in short format. And I think a lot of that
91		is down to the fact that we do have such a strong Game Jam scene
92		here. There is always something going on where there's an

93		encouragement to explore a topic. We also have a lot of
94		government organizations like creative Victoria, who will
95		sponsor very specific focused game development exercises that
96		may not look like what you would expect a game jam in its
97		traditional sense to be, but still is. It's around a theme. And it's
98		go and make something in this short period of time, that might
99		only be a month or two, that allows people to really explore. So
100		that scene has been built over many, many years. Our organizer
101		for Victoria, Gisele Rosemond, has run those game jams through
102		Global Game Jam for a very long time, and they're always
103		incredibly well attended. You get hundreds of people, both in
104		industry actively working as well as students or people that just
105		want to try it as a hobby. So it's always been a very open
106		environment. And it's led to some really interesting creations
107		because of that.
108	**Desirée De Jesus:** 6:21	It sounds so fascinating. Now, I'm wondering, just as you're
109		talking about how there's so much support for different
110		approaches to making games, how did you come up with idea of
111		centering accessibility in game jams?
112	**Meredith Hall:** 6:41	Yeah, so for us, for myself and my co-founder, Cameron, we met
113		towards the end of 2019, because we had mutual friends that put
114		us in touch with each other, because we both had the same goal
115		of wanting to start some kind of support network or system for
116		developers with disabilities. There are a lot of really incredible
117		people who are focusing on accessibility in games for people who

118	are playing them. But the game development space in general is
119	often not very accessible to both people with disabilities, but also
120	people who are getting older, and people who become parents.
121	There are a lot of barriers to being able to be in this industry that
122	is often driven by very young people with less responsibility on
123	their shoulders a lot of the time. So we knew that we wanted to
124	start something that could help provide resources for people in
125	power in those companies to do better at supporting their team,
126	and to make sure that they weren't crunching. Because while
127	crunching is awful for everyone, it's often unfeasible for lots of
128	different people. If you've got kids at home, you can't just say,
129	"Oh well, I'll stay and I'll eat the pizza. And I'll work till 1am."
130	You don't have that choice. So that was something that was really
131	important to us. And we had a couple of different people come in
132	and support us. We've got our core team now, which is myself
133	and Cameron, Zala, and Calliope, and those three are based in
134	New Zealand and myself is here in Australia. And we knew that,
135	that was important to us. So once we started exploring that idea,
136	and what we wanted to do for the community. This was 2019,
137	we're looking at... The pandemic was not happening yet. So we
138	were planning all these physical events, and all these kind of
139	hybrid events so that we can make sure they're accessible to our
140	audience, and then the pandemic hit. And so for us as a volunteer
141	team, all of whom, to some degree grapple with disability, and
142	therefore are limited at times in what we can contribute, then

143			we're facing down, "Okay, how do we create something that can
144			still challenge people in the ways we want them to be challenged
145			to explore some of these topics, but doesn't require us all to get
146			in a room?" And a game jam was a perfect fit.

147	**Desirée De Jesus:**	8:49	Something that strikes me as you are talking about the team
148			makeup and what your aims were for this jam is, how do we talk
149			about accessibility? What does it mean, to make something
150			accessible?

151	**Meredith Hall:**	9:06	It's a great question. And it's one that there are so many different
152			answers, because it is one of those topics that is so multi-layered
153			and at times complex. For us, when we were thinking about
154			accessibility, we were looking at if there is something that affects
155			you on a day to day basis, that may be a consistent day to day
156			basis, or it may come and go, that changes your ability to interact
157			with the world around you. And that can be at totally different
158			and varying severities. It can be anything from neuro-divergence
159			that changes the way that you interact with your work or with
160			other people, right through to kind of motor disabilities and
161			similar. And we really wanted to encourage broadening that
162			language and that understanding of it. An accessibility issue can
163			be situational. It can be temporary. You can break your leg or
164			break your arm and suddenly you can't play a game with a
165			controller unless there's a one handed input. So it's really about
166			building systems that truly at the end of the day benefit everyone.
167			Also known as the kind of curb-cut effect, where if you soften

168			the edge of a curve for people that are in a wheelchair, it's
169			actually also really useful for young children and other people
170			that have those needs. So it was about finding a path to opening
171			that conversation more broadly, and understanding this is not as
172			simple as, "Oh, you need to throw an easy mode on a game." But
173			it's actually about what are the options that you have the power
174			to provide people, if you're in a position of being a director of a
175			company. What are the relationships that you can build with other
176			developers that will further your practice? When you're creating
177			games to make them more accessible, it's really about providing
178			access to language and access to a space where people can reach
179			out without fear, and actually ask. We get people that email us all
180			the time going, "Hey, I'm working on a game and I really want
181			to make it accessible, but I just have no clue where to start. I don't
182			know who to talk to." And there can be a lot of fear and shame
183			associated with that, because people want to do the right thing by
184			each other 99% of the time. So they need a path where they can
185			feel safe to ask those questions and be pointed in the right
186			directions and start that journey for themselves. And that was
187			really what accessibility was about to us, how do we help people
188			start that journey and find what they need to find.
189	**Desirée De Jesus:**	11:27	What's really meaningful to me, as I'm listening to you share
190			what your desire was, is that you are shifting that responsibility
191			off of players, to developers to be more hospitable in a way, to
192			kind of maybe broaden their understanding of who their audience

193			is and what a gamer might be like. And, I'm just really struck by
194			that. Thank you for sharing it. So going back to the game jam that
195			you began planning, right before the pandemic, and then had to
196			do some shifting, well, what were the kinds of requirements that
197			you set out for people who were participating?
198	**Meredith Hall:**	12:15	So access jam was really interesting in that, in order to create a
199			system and a foundation that was going to be functional, we have
200			to consider the traditional game jam approach and how that was
201			inaccessible to some people. Running a 24 hour or 48 game jam
202			for someone who has a chronic fatigue problem and needs a huge
203			amount of sleep comparatively, is just not going to be functional.
204			They're not going to feel like they get to engage at the level they
205			need to. So understanding how do we create something that has
206			a fixed goal and has a deadline and has a timeline that is also
207			accessible to the people that want to engage with it, and that
208			allows them to have the time they need to create something. That
209			was a really tricky line to walk because game jams are often about
210			work within constraints and find solutions. And that is the beauty
211			of a game jam. And that's not something that we wanted to take
212			away. So it was about building constraints that functioned well
213			for the people that we were going to engage. And we deliberately
214			made it super broad for that reason. We made sure that people
215			could approach it in any way they wanted. So the end result does
216			not have to be a game. It does not have to be a completed game.
217			It doesn't have to be a polished game. It could be a video. It could

218	be us sitting down and recording something talking about your
219	experience with games. It could be you talking about a time
220	where you had a temporary disability and how that changed your
221	relationship with games. We were encouraging people to try
222	taking active time to develop tools. So if you were someone that
223	was a developer, take the time to look at building a subtitling tool
224	that might work or take one that already exists and see how you
225	would need to retool it for the project you're working on. So it
226	was very specifically open in that sense. So that whether you
227	were someone who was a consumer of games, or a creator of
228	games, or someone with a disability who played games here and
229	there, it didn't really matter. It was just about providing a space
230	where the common theme and the common thread was your
231	experience with accessibility, and where can you poke at those
232	edges and explore the feelings associated, or the stories that you
233	have, or the stories that you've heard, or the tools and capabilities
234	that we have. You mentioned before about that moving the power
235	into developers' hands and I think it's the same thing for disabled
236	developers. It's about who has the power to make a space more
237	accessible. And for developers, it's the game they're working on,
238	they have that power. For them and their team, it's often the
239	director above them that has the power to determine if the
240	workspace is going to be accessible. So it really is about
241	challenging the people that have that power to wield it in a way
242	that supports people. And that was the same focus with the jam.

243			How do we give people the power to wield what they have access
244			to, whatever that looks like to come to some kind of conclusion,
245			whatever that looks like?

246	**Desirée De Jesus:**	15:22	I love it. I absolutely love it. But I can imagine that some people
247			would say, this is not what I think of when I think of a game jam.
248			How did people respond?

249	**Meredith Hall:**	15:33	For the most part, people were really interested. I think, it is that
250			double edged sword in a way, because it's like, "Oh, this is so
251			interesting, because it's so broad, and I can do whatever I want."
252			But then often, when you're faced with a blank piece of paper,
253			it's really scary. Like, where do you go from there. So we did try
254			and build in things that people could pull on. So it was kind of
255			like, here are sort of the sections that you could approach. You
256			could tell a story about your experience with disability in game
257			form, or you can record something, or make something that is
258			more about your experience as a creator, or you can look at tools
259			and systems. So we tried to give sort of like, if you were standing
260			at the edge of a forest, there's a couple of paths that you can take.
261			And then if you look up at the canopy, that was where we kept
262			the theme. So it was like, you don't have to engage with it, you
263			don't have to look up and pull that down but if you need a starting
264			point, that's one that you can take. I think our 2020 theme was
265			growth and how can you grow as an individual, or how have you
266			grown as a creator, or where areas that you can push in or can
267			you tell a story about growth and your journey through

268	accessibility. And then last year's theme was around connection,
269	because obviously, we were another year into the pandemic, and
270	especially for a lot of Australians, at least, a lot of us had spent a
271	lot of that time locked down and were struggling with that feeling
272	of being disconnected. So we did try and give "wrappers"
273	[meaning theme or context – Ed.] and I think they did help. But
274	we had people reaching out all the time being like, "Hey, I've
275	been working on this other tool that is about creating a more
276	accessible interface for Ren'Py, which is a visual novel engine.
277	Can I submit that?" And the answer was almost always, "Yeah,
278	if you've got something that fits this space, and this is going to
279	motivate you to explore it, that is exactly what we want." It's
280	about giving you a space that will motivate you in the way you
281	need and want to be motivated. But yeah, it definitely doesn't fit
282	the traditional game jam format. But I think that's where it's an
283	interesting question to go, well, what can game jams be? How
284	can they look different? What are the tools that a game jam uses
285	that can be stretched or shaped or changed? And just like with
286	accessibility, what are the options that you have at hand to play
287	with to change the way people might interface with it. That was
288	something that was really important to us. And people, for the
289	most part responded really, really well.

290	**Desirée De Jesus:**	17:48	So what I'm hearing is that the Game Jam was really expanding
291			people's understanding of what game jams can do, what game
292			making can be like, who it can be for, the different kinds of

293			experiences that you can kind of construct and invite. And I'm
294			wondering what have participants gone on to do after this really
295			enriching experience with access jam?
296	**Meredith Hall:**	18:16	I think for a lot of them, it's been an opportunity to, like we said,
297			tackle something that sits a little bit outside of the space. But even
298			if people don't actively end up participating in the jam, I think
299			it's had an ability for people to have to take pause, and think for
300			a moment about like... One of the most exciting tools of a game
301			jam, I think in a way, is actually not even when you actually
302			engage with the jam but it's that moment when you discover the
303			jam, and you go, "Oh, I wonder what I would make. I wonder
304			how I would tackle this." And if you're not someone who already
305			works actively in industry, which a lot of the time a lot of our
306			kind of people that engage with the jam are, people that are
307			actively in industry and using this as a chance to further those
308			skills, I think it gives an opportunity to go, where would I take
309			this, and that initial path of being invited to the conversation, I
310			think allows a lot of people to consider what they might create in
311			the future. We've had people that kind of come into contact with
312			access jam, and they don't have the time or they can't actually
313			engage with it, but we'll get an email or we'll get a message that's
314			like, "I saw access jam. And I think the idea is so cool. And I've
315			actually been working on this thing and, do you know anyone
316			that you could put me in contact with or I'm thinking now that
317			I've seen this, maybe there is a path for me in traditional game

318	development, if these are conversations that are being had. Do
319	you have recommendations for where I could study or what I
320	could go and look at for courses?" So often it ends up being kind
321	of like a slightly open door and they can kind of see through that
322	little crack in the door and they're like, "Oh okay, there's
323	something in there and maybe it is for me." And so access jam is
324	that door itself that lets them come up to us and say, "Hey, just
325	wondering, is there a space for me? Is there a place for me to do
326	these things in the industry?" And so much of those
327	conversations don't happen in the Itch forums of the jam, and
328	they don't happen in really public places. Part of why we formed
329	Accessibility Unlocked was because we all felt comfortable
330	enough, or were in enough of a position of power in the work that
331	we have access to, to stand up and say, "Hey, I'm disabled. This
332	is my experience. And I want to be active and honest and open
333	about that." But not everyone has that privilege. Not everyone
334	has that ability to do that. So being able to be visible with access
335	jam and open that door, lets people start the conversation with us
336	privately, where they feel safe to with people that they know
337	understand. I think that's been the biggest thing that has come out
338	of it is that even if people don't end up participating, it's a nod in
339	their direction, it's a glance that makes them feel a bit seen, and
340	that can be enough for them to then actually have that moment
341	going, "Oh, maybe there is space for me here." And that at the
342	end of the day is the ultimate goal for us with Accessibility

343		Unlocked is to allow those developers that don't feel like they
344		could exist in this space or go, "I'm never going to be able to go
345		into an office." Which is very different now? But pre-pandemic,
346		that was a massive concern, if you had a disability, access to
347		remote work, or access to sick leave, or all those sorts of things.
348		So by being able to see a jam that's organized by people that are
349		in the industry that happen to be disabled, that are doing that
350		work, it tells them that there is opportunity there and there is
351		space there and they have allies there that can help them with that
352		process.
353	**Desirée De Jesus:** 21:35	So were you reaching out within your networks first? How did
354		people find out about access jam?
355	**Meredith Hall:** 21:42	So it was a couple of different things, we tend to look at comms
356		across like Twitter, our mailing list and our website as a way to
357		kind of put that forward to people. The challenge that we always
358		have, and that a lot of volunteer organizations have is that you've
359		got a group of people who all have full time work or have other
360		kind of pressing things that are affecting their lives. And then you
361		add a pandemic on top of that. And then you add on top of all of
362		that the entire team having some level of disability that they deal
363		with on a daily basis. And so the capacity for output is really
364		different, and the capacity for that output to always be consistent.
365		We wouldn't be practicing what we preach, if we were saying,
366		like, "You need to give yourself space, and you need to give
367		yourself time, and you need to give yourself energy." And then

368		we're all hustling all the time and writing a million press releases
369		and sending them out to everyone we know. So we very much
370		tried to do it as a grassroots community focused effort. We
371		focused when we started on building up that community and
372		letting them know that we were here and that we were visible.
373		And then going through and using our networks as professionals
374		to then signal boost those things and tell people that access jam
375		is coming up and remind them and encourage them to engage.
376		One of the things that I saw the most when I was working in the
377		grant organization was the level of that's not for me, imposter
378		syndrome, that sits within people when engaging with any
379		system. And so being able to use the networks that we each have
380		as creators in this space and show, "Hey, you know us, you know
381		who we are, you know what we stand for, you know we're
382		running this jam, so you know kind of the edges of what that's
383		going to look like, please think about exploring it." And so
384		usually it's our Twitter, it's our mailing list, it's Itch itself
385		because it gets visualized, and often they'll spotlight us and we'll
386		reach out to them to do that. And then allowing people who've
387		engaged with it to spread that word, as well.
388	**Desirée De Jesus:** 23:47	So all of this sounds incredibly wonderful. I really like the
389		supports and the networks that you're talking about, and the
390		possibilities that you're opening up to people. Now I've got to
391		ask, what have been some of the challenges that you've
392		experienced? Now, I know that you said we had the pandemic.

393		But I'm wondering just down on a brass tacks level, what did that
394		mean for you with organizing the Game Jam?
395	**Meredith Hall:** 24:13	A lot of the time it's balancing time and energy of our team.
396		We're a small group and so it often tends to be that like with
397		anything else, everything happens at once. And so it always
398		seems that when we're coming up to organizing access jam again
399		and getting those materials together, we've all got a million
400		things that are going on outside of any kind of global stuff that
401		we're managing. So it's been challenging to communicate it as
402		well, purely because it doesn't fit the mold perfectly. If you're
403		talking about a game jam in a traditional sense to people, they
404		can kind of pick that thread up really quickly, of like, "Oh yeah,
405		cool. So it's going to be 48 hours with my friends. And we're
406		going to get a team together and we're going to make a game
407		based on a really wacky theme and there's going to be all these
408		constraints that we can add to it if we want to." And because
409		we're so much more fluid than that, like we mentioned before
410		with that blank piece of paper, it can be really quite scary to
411		people and quite off putting, because they go, "I already am low
412		on time. I don't know if I can engage with this." So I think that's
413		been the biggest barrier is that combination of people being
414		unsure about how to engage with the constraints and going, "I
415		think I have to put this in the kind of too hard basket for right
416		now." Because everyone has pressures on their time and their
417		energy, but also in getting people to engage with it and kind of

418	allow themselves to complete something, even if it's incomplete,
419	in the sense that they'll work on something, and we always say,
420	upload whatever you've got. It doesn't have to be complete, it
421	doesn't even have to run, but you did something, you created
422	something and that's important, too. But I think a lot of people...
423	We get a lot of people who join, start making something and then
424	life gets in the way as it does, and then they don't end up
425	submitting, which is a challenge for any jam that runs over a long
426	period of time. But I think for us, we look at those challenges as
427	kind of confirmation in a way because if someone's engaged with
428	it and started, and then they're unable to complete it, there's no
429	punishment for that, in this scenario. No one's going to come and
430	chase you up via email and go, "I can't believe you didn't submit
431	to the jam." And you're not going to get the sad email in your
432	inbox that you might get from another jam that's organized, and
433	you've accessed saying, "You've only got two hours to submit,
434	and you better do it." There's none of that. It's not about the
435	outcome. The outcome is very much not the focus, which when
436	it comes to a game jam, seems totally wild, because like most
437	game jams, it's about what can you make, what can you get to
438	and it's all focused and centered around productivity and
439	outcome and conclusion. And access jam just isn't about that. It
440	is about what happens when you reflect. When you reflect on
441	your experiences, or when you reflect on what you could try and
442	create where do you get to. And it may be that it takes 10 access

443		jams before you submit something but it encourages you to do
444		that reflection. And that's really, really important to us, but
445		definitely a challenge.
446	**Desirée De Jesus:** 27:05	Well, what advice would you give to our listeners who are
447		interested in doing something similar? Where do they start? How
448		do they make that kind of space, and that shift in focus from
449		productivity to relishing the experience and having space to
450		reflect?
451	**Meredith Hall:** 27:23	I think it's a really, really hard challenge. And something that is
452		so entrenched in the systems that we deal with every day.
453		Productivity is held as like the goal of everything. And you wake
454		up every day, and it's like, what are you going to get done today.
455		But the emphasis is on that because we're in a capitalist structure
456		and, of course, that's where the emphasis is going to be because
457		if you don't be productive, in some sense, then you don't get paid,
458		and then you can't afford to live. So it is a massive challenge.
459		And again, when we think about that power, it's not something
460		that on an individual level, you're going to necessarily be able to
461		change overnight. But I remember having a conversation with a
462		really dear friend of mine, six months into my time in the games
463		industry. And I called him up and I was like, "I want to create
464		this thing, this Accessibility Unlocked thing." Long before it was
465		that. Long before I had the collaborators that I have now that
466		make it happen. And I was like, "Do you think if I go pitch this
467		to someone and they'll take it and they'll start kind of building it

468	out? Because I'm working full time, and I don't know--." And he
469	was like, "Look, I would love to say that that's what will happen,
470	but no one's going to do it if you don't do it. No one is gonna
471	pick it like this, unless you just start doing the thing, no one's
472	going to do the thing." And looking back, I'm like, "Of course,
473	you're so right." No one's going go. "Yeah, great idea, I'll take
474	it and run with it." Because doing the work is really hard. So the
475	thing I would say is that it's always more and less work than you
476	imagine. Like the actual process of creating a jam and creating
477	the outline and the structure is not that much work. You sit down,
478	you think about it, and you come up with it, and you figure out
479	what kind of materials you need to go alongside it. And often, if
480	you're running a more traditional game jam, it's like, get a theme,
481	get a timeframe, figure out how you're going to talk about it and
482	go. But when you're dealing with a game jam that's quite
483	different and quite broad, the real work comes from knowing
484	what you can and can't control about that space. And that all you
485	can do is offer the space and make the edges of that space really
486	clear and make them feel welcoming, and do the work to connect
487	with people so that they understand that. That's where the hard
488	work comes in because you're not going to be able to talk to
489	everyone, and you're not going to be able to make everyone feel
490	comfortable with the jam. There are a lot of things that you will
491	have to weigh up. If you start doing a jam where you're charging
492	people and you're providing them some kind of specific value

493	outside of that, whether it's feeding them or whatever, now
494	you're riding a whole host of other work and a whole host of
495	other questions and a whole host of other constraints. Because
496	whether you like it or not if there's a financial entry that is a
497	barrier for some people. Technology is a barrier for some people.
498	We could run a jam that is entirely focused on screen reader
499	technology but if most of the developers don't have a screen
500	reader to test that with, it kind of falls apart. So it was about doing
501	it because no one else will. So make the space and make it present
502	and put it out there, try and connect it to as many people as
503	possible, and then just keep doing it. Consistency is a massive
504	thing for us. We know we won't be able to run a bunch of events
505	a year. We know we won't ever have the capacity to do
506	everything that we want to do with Accessibility Unlocked unless
507	it's our full time job, and that then adds a whole other host of
508	other questions. So for us, it was about what can we do and be
509	consistent with and allow the community to see that they are
510	valued and seen and just keep doing that. So much of our work is
511	about being present on the other end of the phone. It's about
512	being there to pick up the phone. We won't always be calling you
513	because we won't necessarily have capacity to but we'll always
514	be there to pick up the phone. And it's the same thing with the
515	game jam. We won't necessarily be moving it towards a more
516	traditional game jam function, because that would destroy the
517	functions that it has. But we want people to feel like they have a

518		space that they can engage with, and then go, I wish I could have
519		been able to do XYZ and tell us that and we will build that into
520		the systems for next time. But the number one piece of advice is
521		it is less and more work, but no one else is going to do it. So if
522		it's something that's important to you, you should just do it.

523	**Desirée De Jesus:** 31:31	I love that. I need to write that down somewhere as well about it
524		always being much more than you anticipated. But I think at the
525		same time, that is really affirming, in a way. Because it not only
526		helps you to be realistic about your dream, but just kind of lean
527		into it, and that there can be a lot of good that comes out of that.
528		So I am wondering how with some of these challenges that
529		you've experienced as a team, and some of the barriers that are
530		just built into this experience, I'm wondering how your own
531		understanding of game making accessibility, how all of that has
532		changed? How it may have shifted throughout this process?

533	**Meredith Hall:** 32:13	It's definitely been a hugely personal journey, at least for me, in
534		terms of how I think about game making, as someone who
535		doesn't have those traditional programming skills and doesn't
536		have traditional art skills. Anytime that I want to engage with the
537		Game Jam, if I'm doing it alone, or if I'm doing it kind of on a
538		really small scale, I have to learn it all. And in order to do that, I
539		need time and I need energy and I need space to do that. So as
540		someone that is so often driven by their productivity, and because
541		I have limited capacity, has to balance it really carefully. It's a
542		really unique challenge for me to re-structure, why I'm doing

what I'm doing. So much of my work is about, again, the outcome. It's about, "Okay, how do we build you a production timeline that gets you to ship when you need to ship?" Whereas when I'm engaging with access jam, as an individual, it is much more about what do I feel like I need to say, and what do I feel like I need to express. It gives me ownership of the creative seat in a way that I don't always have access to. And it reminds me that that's the point. It reminds me that the point is, if you have something that you can say, and you can share, sometimes sharing it through a game is so much easier. And the emotions that are associated with having a disability can be really difficult, and really hard to work through and to kind of grapple with. And there's often not a lot of room for those conversations of giving you room to be angry or to be upset or... Because you're trying to further this space so there's this sense of like, I need to need to be really friendly about it and really welcoming about it. I'm like it's fine that you don't understand, but for a lot of people that have those kinds of issues it's frustrating. They feel like they've said the same things a 1000 times and are up against that wall. So allowing me to re-center on my practice as a creative and go, "What do I need to say? How can this game say it? And what do I need in order to do that? How do I marry those things together?" Traditional game jams, I wouldn't have the time to learn in the way that I need to. But I also wouldn't have the impetus to learn if I wasn't trying to create something for access jam. So for me

on a personal level, it's about that framework, fitting me as someone with a disability really nicely, and giving me the opportunity to create something on my terms, which is a lot of the time not something that we get to do as creators. There's always someone else's terms coming into play. So being able to find the people and find the team or do it yourself and know that if you don't finish it, that's okay too. If you get to a point where life gets in the way, that's okay too. It's kind of a space to give yourself permission that we don't have if we're doing this as our jobs, because you don't get to give yourself permission to take a week off because the world is too much. But with access jam, it's a month long. And if you get a couple of weeks in, and you're like, "I'm having a really hard time at the moment, and I really don't want to think about doing anything that is productive." You can do that. Or if you want to knock something out in a day with an engine that you're really familiar with, that's totally fine, too. There is no right answer. And I think that's something that can be forgotten in traditional game making. It feels like there's a right answer a lot of the time. It feels like if you just do the right thing the right way, you will make a million dollars and everyone will be happy and the game will sell super successfully. And there isn't that formula. But it's easy to convince yourself in an environment that is driven by productivity and capitalism that there is a right answer. Because that's what people want you to think. So being able to know that there's no right answer. And

593		just be comfortable in that is a really nice way to refocus about
594		where the value of games comes from. And it is right back to that
595		thing at the start of it's about feeling connected. And feeling
596		connected to the work that you put together and the people that
597		you want to share it with or don't want to share it with and what
598		that looks like for you. And that's a really personal thing. But
599		that's why any of us are artists and creatives because it leads to
600		connection. And that's really special.
601	**Desirée De Jesus:** 36:20	I can see how instructive this approach can be or life changing in
602		so far as people, especially in this current moment, you're dealing
603		with so many different pressures, and responsibilities, kind of
604		alongside these desires that you might have to participate in life
605		in different ways. And what I'm hearing from you is, it's kind of
606		this radical reimagining of how you approach these things, how
607		you approach those pressures and responsibilities and desires,
608		and just kind of giving yourself room to be. And that just sounds
609		very radical, and very nourishing. Thanks so much for sharing
610		that. If we could switch gears just a little, I'm wondering if we
611		could talk a bit about free play Independent Games Festival.
612		What connections does access jam or Accessibility Unlocked
613		have with the festival?
614	**Meredith Hall:** 37:16	So I think more about the space in Victoria, something that is
615		really hard to understand from the outside is that a number of
616		years ago, we had a lot of really large studios that were kind of
617		satellites for international companies. And then the global

618	financial crisis happened and a lot of those shuttered. And we
619	ended up with all of this talent, kind of leaking out into the state
620	or moving overseas or whatever. But it's meant that for a really
621	long time, we've had a really, really strong independent games
622	culture, because you've got all these incredibly skilled people
623	who are really thoughtful about what they're creating, and who
624	for a really long time were constrained by what they needed to
625	make on a daily basis that then had to make the decision of how
626	do I want to make games and what does that look like. And so
627	free play specifically has been around for what feels like always,
628	as a really, really special event that is specifically around talking
629	about and celebrating games that don't fit a template. When we
630	talk about that right answer, we have a lot of award ceremonies
631	and events and festivals around the world that are about the best
632	games, whatever the best game means, and celebrating them.
633	And they're really important too, and great, but they don't always
634	have room for short games, experimental games, games that are
635	saying something really, really specific that needs to be heard.
636	And free play has always celebrated that. So I think when we
637	were thinking about access jam, we thought about the kinds of
638	games that we see coming across the free play nominations and
639	the ways in which they subverted expectations or challenged
640	thinking or didn't fit that traditional mold. And how affirming
641	that had been for some of us as creators, to have that celebrated
642	or the conversations that they were having being very much

643	pulling back the layers of traditional game making and going,
644	"Okay, we can talk about the development process all day. But
645	where are we talking about access? Where are we talking about
646	privilege? Where are we talking about your location in the world
647	and how that changes how you engage with games?" Because
648	even the scene here in Australia is totally different in a lot of ways
649	to New Zealand, is totally different to Canada, is totally different
650	to everywhere. So understanding where the privileges are and
651	where the opportunities are. And they've always built a
652	foundation by nature of being here and running that festival of
653	keeping that conversation going around what can games be and
654	what can they say. And that's a really, really unique function.
655	And I think that celebration of games that don't fit a traditional
656	mold all the time really helped us with structuring a system and
657	a game jam that did some of the same things. And was inspired
658	by that of the end goal is whatever the person needs it to be. And
659	you can celebrate via kind of one single thing. I know that they
660	have a micro-game award. And so it's about for really small,
661	short, contained experiences that say what they need to say, in a
662	really direct and straightforward way, or sometimes not at all, in
663	a straightforward way. That's worth celebrating. And it doesn't
664	have to be that all of those games in that category are about Best
665	Narrative. That's not the point. It's not. It's about what is this as
666	a whole thing. And I think when we think about people, and we
667	think about our function in society, we're not all here to just go

668		to work and come home. And at the moment, all of us are
669		grappling with these global events and what that means for us on
670		individual levels. So creating more structures and systems that
671		celebrate the whole, and celebrate giving yourself permission to
672		take time and to take space for yourself and for others that was
673		really important to us. And free play has definitely always
674		functioned in that space and celebrated that space in a really,
675		really lovely way. That was always going to be really, really
676		inspiring for us.

677	**Desirée De Jesus:** 41:23	It's so important to have venues of that scale, to support this kind
678		of work, this kind of experimentation, and not just support it, but
679		celebrate it. So thanks so much for sharing about those
680		connections. Now, as we move towards closing our time
681		together, which I've been thoroughly enjoying, I wonder if you
682		could perhaps just share one last bit of advice for someone who
683		is saying, "Okay, yes, all of this sounds great but I don't think I
684		can do it."

685	**Meredith Hall:** 42:01	I think the number one thing that I would say is give yourself
686		permission to get it wrong. And what I mean by that, and
687		especially when we've been talking about there not being any
688		right answer, is there's room to explore and to not get it perfect.
689		And you are allowed to not understand every element of this.
690		You're allowed to not know how to tackle it. You're allowed to
691		go, "Oh my God, but if I asked the wrong thing, are people going
692		to hate me?" The reality is that the conversation is so often not

693	being had, that there's something to celebrate in just talking about
694	it. So I think the number one thing is to stay curious, and to stay
695	friendly. And I think if you're coming to something like this with
696	curiosity in mind, you'll find a thread that you want to pursue that
697	means something to you. It's very easy to dismiss accessibility
698	needs is something for someone else, if you're not directly related
699	to it. But the reality is that you have engaged with those
700	structures, and they have benefited you your entire life, whether
701	you know it or not. Often in the accessibility community, we
702	come back to subtitles and the fact that 90% of people play with
703	subtitles on, regardless of whether they have issues with hearing.
704	That is something that people engage with. And so you will have
705	a point in your life where this touches you or touches someone in
706	some way, and it's probably already happened and you didn't
707	even notice it because your friend had a situational thing that
708	occurred or someone you know just had a baby. And now they
709	can only really play on the switch because they need something
710	that they can put down and change a nappy and then come back
711	to. All of those change the way we interface with the world
712	around us. So if you stay curious about that, and start to pay
713	attention to that and start to think about what can be done or what
714	can be explored or what can be talked about, you'll find
715	questions, and you don't have to have the answers. You can get
716	them wrong, you can go I think it's because of this and then do a
717	little bit of research or do a little bit of exploring, or creating and

718		then go actually, I think I've changed my mind on that. So yeah,
719		stay curious is the number one thing, I think. That's always going
720		to serve you because if you're staying curious with a kindness,
721		there's always going to be people that want to have that
722		conversation with you.
723	**Desirée De Jesus:** 44:16	Wow, that's such great advice. Wow. So how can people support
724		Accessibility Unlocked? How can we find you?
725	**Meredith Hall:** 44:24	So one of the best ways to support us is to share that awareness
726		of us with people. We're very present across social media. We're
727		on Twitter. We have our website, accessunlocked.games. So
728		there are a lot of spaces that we're existing on online. You can
729		sign up for the mailing list as well so that when we have kind of
730		bigger events or things to send out, we can get in touch. But
731		supporting us absolutely is about taking up that mantle to a
732		degree within your own communities. We're very aware that we
733		are a kind of ragtag group of people. We're small and we're
734		scrappy. And we are trying to encourage people to take
735		ownership of these conversations within their own communities.
736		And that's something that organizations like free play, and like
737		play by play in New Zealand as well, which is a similar kind of
738		event - All these places and people that have created space to
739		have conversations that don't fit your every day. But that comes
740		from people, and that comes from individual people. And so my
741		hope is that people who hear this and are interested in it go, "You
742		know what? I'm going to go back and talk to my team about

743	accessibility or I'm actually going to go and talk to my boss and
744	say what do we have in place to support people that are disabled,
745	if they want to come and work with us? Have you thought about
746	that? Is that something that's important to you?" Because it's
747	those champions within... It's sort of like from one small ripple
748	you get waves. And so we need people making those ripples. And
749	the more people that make those ripples, and the more people that
750	invite that conversation, and the more people that are curious and
751	willing to not always get it right the first time, the more we'll see
752	change and movement. So that is the number one thing that they
753	can do to support us, is to be one of those people and do that in
754	their own communities and for their own communities and be
755	vocal about it, talk to people about it, and tell them about us. We
756	had a lot of people ask us, "Are you going to open this up to the
757	world? Are you're going to be access unlocked, not just Australia
758	and New Zealand, and you're going to focus everywhere?" And
759	the reality is, we just can't. We don't have the resources. So we
760	would love for people to collaborate with us in that sense and in
761	other places and find more ways to have these conversations.
762	Because it doesn't matter, who is having them as long as they're
763	being had. That's really, really important. So we're always
764	around. We're always there for people to reach out to us. And
765	again, whether they're in Australia, New Zealand or not, we're
766	always happy to talk to people and to engage. But seek those
767	people out, seek the people who are already having the

768			conversations out and get them into your social media feed, so
769			that you are absorbing that. And you can become curious because
770			you can't be curious if you don't know where to start. So don't
771			be afraid to engage with some of those resources and be unsure
772			and then start reaching out to people because they'll be thrilled
773			that you have. They want to have these conversations.

774	**Desirée De Jesus:**	47:22	So many great takeaways. Thank you, Meredith, it's been an
775			absolute pleasure talking with you about access jam, and
776			Accessibility Unlocked, and learning more about game making
777			in Australia, and New Zealand. So we'll provide some details to
778			make sure that everyone is able to follow the great work that you
779			and team at access jam are doing.

| 780 | **Meredith Hall:** | 47:45 | Thank you so much. It's been such a pleasure. |

781	**Outro:**	47:48	*And that concludes this week's episode of the GAMERella*
782			*podcast. Hope you enjoyed our conversation with Meredith Hall.*
783			*Thanks so much for listening, and be sure to follow us on*
784			*Instagram and Twitter.*