# Day 1 Transcript: Keynote Address by Maayan Ziv

**Alison Whiting:** Today's keynote speaker is Mayaan Ziv.

Mayaan is a creator and CEO of the internationally recognized Accessibility app, Access Now. Access Now is instrumental in crowdsourcing and sharing information about accessibility status at places around the world.

Welcome Maayan.

**Maayan Ziv:** Thank you. Thank you so much. I am so excited to be here. And I'm hoping you can all see me. I'm not sure if it's possible yet because I'm looking at the screen and I don't see the changes yet, but I know for sure you can hear me, so I will start with a description of myself which seems appropriate anyway.

My name is Mayaan Ziv. I'm based in Toronto, Canada. I am beaming into you today from my apartment in the city. I have shoulder-length brown hair. I'm sitting in my power wheelchair. And I'm really excited because I'm also wearing my “You had me an accessible” T-shirt specifically for this conference. I'm going to be wearing my T-shirt all throughout the week as we tune into these amazing presentations.

So, a little bit about me and my experience and then I'm going to open up with some remarks.

I was, you know, I was born with my disability. I have always used a wheelchair. And, you know, even from a very young age, I remember being presented where a world which basically it was just a given, that I was different, that I would always need help and therefore you know, we'd always need some MacGyver things. Barriers would exist, but that's really just because I had a disability. And this concept, you know, I remember even as a very young girl being quite frustrated with this picture of reality that, you know, I would need to be adaptive and I would need to be flexible and that the world would just stay as it was. And you know I was so frustrated with this reality that I set out to kind of solve my own problem and build an app that focused on sharing information about the accessibility of places from the perspective of people with lived experience. And that's really what Access Now is all about.

And in doing that over the last seven years, you know, at Access Now I had the tremendous opportunity to learn from so many people with disabilities, from friends and family and caregivers all around the world who shared perspectives and desires and dreams of what the world could be.

What it could be if everyone bought into accessibility? What it could be if we all believed what many of us - the converted already know.

And that's why this type of conference today and the conversations we're having are so exciting because the world is changing.

The world is opening up to the idea that adds people with disabilities.

We have always known that accessibility benefits everyone, that accessibility means different things to different people. But one thing that I'm really going to drive home on this morning or afternoon depending on where you are is you know what accessibility really is and how can we define it.

In many ways, you know, people still see accessibility as an afterthought. They see it as something that you know you, you think about at the very end of your experience. If you consider a checkbox, you know you'll go down your list of everything you need to do and accessibility might be one of those things on that list. It's like the grab bar that you see in the washroom. They designed a washroom and then in the end they bolted it to the wall.

But accessibility, in my opinion, is far from that. It is not really about the end result, the products, the things that we need to do to be MacGyvered and adapted in order to suit the needs of others, in order to suit the needs of people with disabilities, but that accessibility when truly understood shows up and manifests for people in so many different ways.

When done well, accessibility establishes an experience, a sense of belonging, a feeling of inclusion, but sometimes is intangible. You might not even know that that's what's at play, that there are these secret, magical ingredients that people have spent time to consider, to design inclusively in order to give you that experience where you feel that you can just be.

But often one of the major drivers behind that experience is accessibility.

So, what does that mean?

Well, accessibility can show up in our products. It can show up in the way in which we've designed our technologies. It can show up in the way that we even design something like an eyeliner applicator to be more inclusive to allow people to more steadily draw a line on their eyes.

And recently, Selma Blair, who's a vibrant and vocal advocate for people with disabilities, shared her experience discovering an inclusive and adaptive accessible eyeliner that she could now have the agency and independence to use.

It could be in a space that you visit. You know when you show up and perhaps there is a bridge that has tactile surfacing and a smooth entrance and exit to the bridge it allows you to feel a sense of inclusion within that space, and those are just two examples of ways in which accessibility might show up on a bridge, as an example.

It can show up in the way that we share information to allow people to gather information about the specifics that they need anywhere however, they gather information best. Perhaps that's through visuals. Perhaps that's through text. It could be through audio and it could be through many other forms in which we share information.

Accessibility truly is about recognizing that people have different needs, that it's not about defining who we are, what we can or cannot do, but simply about creating options, about creating flexibility. And that in itself is a form of accessibility in thinking.

And it can also show up invisibly. When you show up in a space and you feel that you can be safe. In which you feel that your needs are met. In which staff on site or event planners or caregivers or just people that you're meeting with are signaling to you quietly even that you're comfortable here, that you can relax, but you can drop your anxiety that maybe you're going to have to speak up.

You know, it could be something as quiet as someone next to you, nudging a glass of water closer to you or grabbing a straw for you without, you know, just putting it on the table in case you need it. We're just asking you, hey, if there's anything you need, please let me know. I'd be happy to kind of make that happen. It can be those quiet little things that we do for each other to let us know we're OK.

And it's not about anyone having to step out of their comfort zone and say: hey, you know, I'd like to self identify as a person with a disability. These are my needs and, you know, have that kind of awkward or uncomfortable tension inside where you feel like now you've been othered. It just all melts away. That's another form of accessibility.

What's amazing about this conference is that the outdoors is an incredible space where this can happen. The outdoors are our places that can support us physically and mentally. They can give us a sense of space and in many ways can be an awe-inspiring equalizer.

Because who has access to the outdoors? Who has the privilege or the accessibility or the sense of invitation and belonging to be included in the outdoors? Everyone should.

That's why this conference is so exciting. Because when we work together to remove some of the barriers, not only are we creating a more independence and more exciting opportunities to be involved, but we're also paving the way for others to realize that they can too. They can for themselves, and they can for others.

And really, I think when we get down to it that's really what this is about. It's about demonstrating that it's not about who you are, how you were born, what you need or you don't need. Whether you use a wheelchair or, you know, have a white cane or you're looking for, you know, tactile surfacing, or perhaps, you know, you need a quiet space, the list goes on and on and on. Never should it be your responsibility as an individual to wave a flag and say I'm here, this is what I need, but we're still in that space. That's our job as advocates, as allies, as people working within the accessibility space to raise awareness about some of the barriers that still exist in the world, so that we can identify them, so that we can share information, tools and knowledge to remove those barriers and then we get to the fun stuff.

And then we get to the place where all of those elements of friction. All of those barriers, both physical and intangible, melts away. So that we can simply show up as our best selves with or without disabilities. In all of the diversity in which way you identify and feel included. And feel a sense of belonging.

Whether that is that you'd like to go on a stroll independently alone, or whether you're partaking in a group activity in which you, you know, get on an accessible sailboat and enjoy an amazing adventure with a group of friends. I love that element of the outdoors, that there is variety and there is a sense dynamic engagement that any person can contribute to.

That's the beauty and the joy that we're here to create over the next few days, to engage in conversations, to learn about personal lived experiences, to learn about educators and leaders who are paving the way. To identify those barriers, to share ways, possible ways of removing barriers, and to show what we can do and how.

And I promise you that as we continue to work on these conversations, as we continue to engage and work collaboratively, which is one of the most beautiful things about the disability community. That we often will get ways to work together to remove these barriers. We're able to get closer to that space, that sense of belonging, that sense of inclusion.

So thank you for showing up. Thank you for raising your voice, even when sometimes it feels like you're the only one. Because it matters and whether you share a review on access now or you show up at a conference and you ask the question. Or perhaps this is something new to you and you're just looking to learn?

This is how we make progress.

It's not about identifying people for their specific needs, it's about creating opportunities and flexibility so that any person can see themselves reflected in the products we design, the experiences we create, the events we organize, the information we share. Accessibility shows up in everything we do. And that is the magic and the power of accessibility when it's designed with intentionality. When people with diverse lived experiences are involved and included in creating and innovating the solutions that we need to see in our world.

I'm super excited for this conference. Congrats to everyone for showing up. This is the first step. And looking forward to an amazing few days of jampacked, awesome, mind-opening conversations. I am Maayan Ziv, thanks so much.

**Alison Whiting:** Thank you, Maayan, that was wonderful. You've given us so much to think about as we move through the next few days.

So, this brings us to our first break of the day. Our next session will start at 1:00 PM Eastern Standard Time. Please use the next 15 minutes to take a screen break. Get some fresh air, move your body. And we'll see you all back here soon.