# Day 2 Transcript: Isabelle Ducharme

**Alison Whiting:** Our third speaker this hour is Isabelle Ducharme. Isabelle is a is the current President for the Board of Directors for Kéroul. Her personal experience of living with spinal cord injury since her car accident in 1988 combined with her Master's degree in Tourism Management and Planning at UQAM university in Montreal gave her a unique perspective on the barriers faced by tourists with disabilities and on solutions to be implemented to promote tourism for all. Welcome Isabelle.

**Isabelle Ducharme:**Thank you so much. It was so nice to get the invitation. Um I'm very happy to be with you today. Like many, I wish we could have been in person because uh Bonnie that spoke just a bit earlier has been a reference for me for years. I know that Simon Darcy from Australia is going to be is going to be on as well and um I'm working with Tilak and Shira on the Canadian standard uh for uh outdoor spaces. So it's really an honor to be with you even though we can't be in person. So as mentioned um I have both the academic and living situation to help me give this presentation today. Um and what I will be talking about is what are according to our team at Kéroul, what are the three main obstacles that we see when we try to go to parks and what are some of the solutions we think that could be easily done and make it uh more accessible for all. So Kéroul. Uh next next slide.

Sorry um I've forgot to begin by saying that I am a Caucasian female. In the picture in the slide we see that I have light blue hair, with the long part being dark blue. Since then I have changed and now my hair is green at the top and blue at the bottom. Um I am um referred to by she or elle in French. Next slide.

So just a quick bit on who Kéroul is. We are an organization based in the province of Wuebec in the city of Montreal. We were um founded in 1979 by Mr. André Leclair that had cerebral paralysis and wanted to create an organization to make sure that tourism and culture became more accessible to all. Kéroul comes from a combination of Quebec and roll and we are lucky enough to have the support of the ministry of tourism here in the province of Quebec to help us promote accessibility and reach out to the travel industry to have them listen to our speech about accessibility and also use our tools to become more accessible. Next.

So the first obstacle of the three that we identified is built in existing environment and infrastructure. Next. I forgot to say that we had a nice picture of a man in a skiing downhill in one of those accessible ski structures. Um so with the first obstacle, some trails and activities will never be accessible for all. So what does that mean? It means that sometimes the environment is not it's impossible to make it accessible because maybe it's too steep, maybe it's the rocks that can't be moved. It could be there are trees and and that we need to protect those trees. It could also be because of safety hazard um Noah mentioned. So some of those hazards before sometimes they can be removed but sometimes they can't because again of the uh structure that is already there whether it be in a park because of trees or in the hill because of uh different materials that can be moved. And also uh sometimes it's just conditions uh some things can be changed because of the seasons because of um it's protected by uh it could be UNESCO. It could be any type of reason that is related to something that we can't control and that is just protected for all and lastly the some um some of the infrastructure cannot be modified to be accessible period. So some of the issues are just for everybody and some of the issues are related to accessibility. Next.

So our advice is to always go and make accessible what is possible. That is the easiest way for everybody. And also uh the safest way for everybody to get around. When it is not accessible look into what is available for solutions. Sometimes we think that it's not possible but by just looking at other parts, other areas that are similar to ours, we can find solutions that we didn't know exist. When there are no solutions, let's say there's a nice waterfall and people can get to the waterfall when they don't have a wheelchair. Well, an option could be to have a nice viewpoint. So I can't get right to the waterfall, like everybody else but at least i can have access to the view. And finally, if you think about accessibility in everything that you do in all of your projects whether it be a new website, a new service at the park anything that you think of that is an improvement, that is either something that is new or an improvement, you should always include accessibility in all aspects. Next.

The second obstacle is multiple multiple guidelines and regulation. And here we see a nice picture of two people coming in to a park to pay for their tickets. Next. So, in that obstacle, the first one is multiple legislation. There could be federal, provincial, municipal. There's also different building codes the Canadian one, the provincial one and then there's our park regulations. There's Parks Canada but there's also other regulations. So what do we do with all of those legislation and how do we choose? What we do to improve the accessibility is definitely a big issue. And finally for the visitor um standards and skylines are not the same in all parks. Sometimes you need to buy your tickets ahead, sometimes you need you can buy uh directly on site only. Uh there's not all the same equipments from one park to another. So how do you find your way when you want to go to the tour park? Next slide.

So our advice is first of all, regarding legislation we say go with the strict rules. If you go with what is more um defining more there's it it's accessible to more people. Than you're going the right way and for uh information to make it easier for all visitors in a park, it's always think about the entire journey to begin with. So not just even before they leave, like your website, your phone call, your phone number then from parking to signage to activities to every aspect of the park. Make sure it's all readily available and always in the same way from one park to another. Especially if you're like Parks Canada, have a lot of parks and areas under your legislation but also um just from one part to another even if you're not the same owner, it should always be presented the same way. Next.

So the third obstacle that we saw was visitors experience in parks and now we see a nice group of older and younger people some in wheelchairs and some standing up. Next. So in this obstacle, the main thing that we see is how people are not aware of their own abilities and needs. Sometimes it's because you've never been to a park so you don't know really what you need in the park. Sometimes it could be because um you didn't get the right information or you didn't know how to get the information even before going to the park. It could also be that oh this looks pretty easy to me so I'll go anyway and then halfway through you can't walk anymore because it's it's just steeper than you thought. Or sometimes it could also be that for the person they just didn't notice that they're getting older or that it's more difficult for them to walk for or to uh pull um go up at a hill with a wheelchair. So these are all obstacles that are coming from the person themselves. Next.

And so for our advice is for the parks or for the management of the parks is first of all, to try and and help the person that is coming to your park. Be clear about your accessibility levels. Really have um explicit signage saying this is for beginners, this is um a big slope. Anything that would be very informative for the person that wants to come and visit your park. And communication to us is really the key and we've heard that many times since the beginning of this conference how key uh communication is in making sure that everybody understands what they can and can't do and how they can get to your park. So make sure you have a dedicated section in your website that is clearly identified for accessibility information. Every detail, every map that is possible to see ahead of time and once you get to the park is key. And training staff is something that we keep we think is utmost uh of importance for the visitor especially when they get to the park and they need information right away. Next.

So those were the three obstacles. The last thing I want to mention is we have resources and contacts and right now we have a picture of somebody looking at a map and next. So we have documents online one is le plein air pour tous. It's only in French for now but it has a lot of pictures showing you what to do to become accessible. A lot of links to other uh organizations and parks that can give you information on outdoor activities and our website as well as a lot of information in the business section with again technical sheets and how to uh how to get the trainings that we can get we can give sorry. And next. That was uh everything I had to tell you for today. Thank you for your attention and I guess we now have two and a half minutes left for questions.

**Alison Whiting:** Thank you so much Isabelle um. We do have a few questions that have come in. Um first I will say you guys shared your uh le plein air pour tous with us and it's a fantastic resource. Really great. So we're very grateful to you guys for putting that together and sharing it. Uh so one question came in from the audience and that is when you uh when Kéroul and is communicating with guides and attending activities, what sort of advice do you have for staff so that they're keeping accessibility in mind?

**Isabelle Ducharme:** Well the first thing is understanding um I think it was Bonnie that mentioned it earlier today, the importance that um not one size fits all. That disability doesn't just mean a person in a wheelchair or a person that is blind. It's a lot wider and that even uh somebody in manual wheelchair for example, doesn't mean the same they don't have the same ability from one person to another. One might be able to go up a hill another one might need somebody to push them up the hill. So it's really to keeping keep in mind that not one person is the same and make sure to ask questions. Don't hesitate. Some people just say well I can't ask him if he's able to push his chair or I can't ask him if he can see a little bit or you know. You have to ask those questions. As long as you ask them because it's related to your work and not just because you're curious about what you can do then it's you it's justified to ask those questions.

**Alison Whiting:** Absolutely yeah thank you. We uh have quite a few questions that have come in and I think I'm just going to take this time to remind everyone that we are going to gather all of the questions that we're getting for each of the presenters and send them over to each of the presenters afterwards and we have a slack channel where we would compose all the questions and the responses. Um you know this is something that we're hoping we can kind of make everything a little bit more accessible and available to everyone with the time constraint that we have. So uh Isabelle if you're if you're open to it we can flip you all the rest of the questions and we can we can get them posted on slack later.

**Isabelle Ducharme:** Of course I'm we're always happy to respond to questions and and to help in any way we can that's why we shared our document because we think it's very important that we learn from each other and not start everything over when something's already been done.

**Alison Whiting:** Absolutely no it's been fantastic but thank you so much for sharing your time with us today. We're really really grateful for that.

**Isabelle Ducharme:** Thank you.

**Alison Whiting:** Thank you. Alright and that brings us to the end of this hour. Uh we will now take a short break our next session starts at 2 pm eastern standard time. We will see you all again soon.