

[Transcript] Global News Podcast / The Happy Pod: The disabled TV director pushing for change

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Hi, I'm Nancy. I'm from the United States and I'm going to be talking about why dogs make you so happy. I'm Toby Cumberbatch and I'd like to shed a little light on happy pod. I'm Catherine in Ithaca and I am Farah in Ithaca and this is the happy pod.

This is the happy pod from the BBC World Service.

I'm Jackie Leonard and in this edition uploaded on Saturday the 19th of August, improving the representation of disabled people in film and TV and the director pushing for change. Disabled kids in particular, disabled talent needs to be able to dream and I think we're starting to make steps to do that. The Ukrainian soldier who became a ballet star after losing both legs in the war, also in this edition.

The rescue of four surfers who spent 36 hours lost in Indonesian waters. We'll hear about the increasing evidence for the health benefits of even brief interaction with dogs. People often think of it as kind of a feel good, nice to have. It's actually more than that.

And the yellow dress and the shock of going viral. Oh, I mean horror, I would say. I felt a bit overwhelmed. I was quite horrified actually. I was delighted.

One in six people in the world has some kind of disability, but a lot of industries simply aren't that welcoming or inclusive. Jordan Hogg, who's been a TV director for 15 years, is trying to change that. Jordan, who has cerebral palsy, says he has never worked with another disabled director. He and his close friend, producer Jules Hussie, have made a documentary about opening up the industry. Jordan told us why it matters so much.

What people don't realise is that literally everybody on the planet at some point in their life will become disabled. We did a show called Ralph and Katie last year, which was the first ever show to our two learning disabled lead actors. We had any people with disability in our industry. So we had to have trainees with disabilities. We were thinking, why isn't our industry doing more? I mean, I always say, we're in the industry of making magic and dreams. How come we haven't made these disabled kids dreams come through to work in our industry?

And our main objective with this documentary and this project was to kind of raise awareness that there is all this talent out here with these unique points of views and these unique stories to tell. But do you think it's improving? Do you think, for instance, the days of an able-bodied actor playing someone with a disability are over? We're in the age now where you can't be done anymore. It's completely unethical. We've split to another wonderful actor called Kurt Yeager, who used to be in the World Championships at BMX, and he lost his leg in the most bike accident. Everyone like I talked to who's a writer, unless they have a friend who's a wheelchair user, they think the wheelchair is a character trait when it's just a mode of transportation.

So to me, like missing a leg is the least interesting thing about me. What's interesting is my disability is I wear pants and all of a sudden I'm able-bodied. I am treated as a man

walking into the room unless I'm wearing shorts and then I'm treated as a disabled guy walking into a room and they are starkly different. I became a better human because of it. I became more honest with myself. I am nicer to other people. Everyone says, well, would you want your leg back?

And I say, do I get to keep my experiences? Because if I don't get to keep my experiences, I don't want my leg. And people can't wrap their head about it. I'm like, you don't understand, losing my leg was the best thing to happen to me. It gave me a level of perspective that I would never got any other way. In your documentary, you do illustrate some of the change that is coming to the industry, not least a big breakout star called James Martin. I'm the first person with Down syndrome can win three awards. One is the BAFTA and the Oscar. People with any disabilities will come up to me and say, you've inspired me so much. And I think that's really lovely. I would just say to them, follow your dreams. How big a difference do you think visibility makes in your industry? I'd like to see disabled actors playing non-disabled characters and disability just generally not be a thing in our industry. Disabled kids in particular, disabled talent needs to be able to dream. And I think we're starting to make steps to do that, but there's still a lot more to do. That was Jordan Hogg and you can hear directing disability by searching for the documentary wherever you get your BBC podcasts. Now imagine walking into an

art exhibition and unexpectedly seeing yourself on the wall. That's what happened to grad student Farah Bakari at a gallery in Ithaca, New York. The artist was Farah's neighbour, Catherine O'Neill, who had rather cleverly suggested that Farah might like to wear the same bright yellow dress to the exhibition as she was wearing in the artwork. We'll let Catherine describe that painting.

So it has fire and smoke. I think smoke is the most unusual thing about it. And Farah in her lovely yellow dress with her beautiful dark skin and some neighbours who also live across the street, a little boy looking into the fire is very lush and there's lots of flowers.

So Farah, tell us about the point when you realised you had been immortalised in art.

I came in and I was walking through the gallery and the upper artists were all looking at me and I thought, oh maybe I just look like somebody that they know. But then I saw the painting and I was very surprised and it was kind of stunned and it was very moved. It wasn't just that I was in the painting but it captured something that is very true to our street. It's talking to other neighbours in this beautiful garden. What was your neighbourhood like, Catherine? I think in the immediate neighbourhood

we're very close and go back and forth for dinners and glasses of wine and gardens.

But also that's a bit international because several people here, myself and the neighbours on the north side have refugees from Ukraine and Afghanistan and then there's Farah. I'm from Somaliland and my housemate is from Somaliland. It's very intergenerational and international and very close-knit community. You know, Catherine is a fixture of our street. My housemate and I always joke about that if the street had a sound, like a signature sound, it would be the children yelling Catherine's name. Like you just hear that name all day long. Catherine, Catherine, she takes care of everybody. She takes her to swim practice, to driving lessons and that is really wonderful to hear. Even though I'm the one who's in the painting, for me when I think of Ithaca and our street, it's like Catherine and the other neighbours who I think about. Well, that's extremely nice. I don't think of myself as a fixture but certainly there are children who can play a lot.

And so what did you make of the internet reaction? Oh, I mean horror. I was hiding for a week. I really, it was horrifying to learn how big it has gone because I wrote it in, I'm very small Twitter account. That's mostly just academics. And I wrote the story and then I went to bed and I woke up and my friend texted me and she told me this and I opened my phone and I was horrified. And I muted everything immediately within a day. All these people were like people I went to high school, I went to college with, they text me or like I would try to get on the bus and the bus driver recognized me. I was quite horrified actually. I was delighted. I don't know. I feel like even though the reaction was so wonderful, it's rare that the internet ever has a nice thing to say and they all agree on something being nice. But it's not natural for tens of millions of people to look at a picture of you. Although I love that people love the painting and Catherine's painting and the story. Ultimately, I was horrified. I thought it was kind of wonderful.

Artist Catherine O'Neill and her friend and neighbour Farah Bakhari and I will of course share that painting on social media using the hashtag the happy pod. Now this is something you might be able to get involved with. A project to deliver cheap, efficient, environmentally friendly light to the many millions of people who live in places where that isn't readily available.

Toby Cumberbatch is one of the organisers of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers Let's Make Light competition. For anybody who's ever lived in the dark, I think you soon come to appreciate a tiny, tiny bit of light. When there's no moon and no sun and you're in the middle of a rural area, so there's no reflected city lights, it's absolutely pitch black and you really can't do much. You have to feel your way around. So a tiny bit of light in those circumstances is transformational. So when you talk to people in these situations, you learn an awful lot about light, its usage and what's good light and what's bad light. Let's Make Light is your competition. Tell us about that. What are you looking for?

There's lots of organisations out there which wake lights for this environment, but in general, people cannot buy them or they're just not available. So this competition is asking for a design revolution. So you've obviously got the manufacturing of the light which we want to consume as little energy as possible, design something which fits into a particular economy and ideally be something which you could replicate anyway. It would be self-powered, use very simple machinery. Then nationwide distribution, how do you get this light source and basically take it into the rural areas? And I don't think any system exists like this anywhere in the world. It always stops at the bigger towns or the bigger villages. So to me, the biggest challenges in this is getting it out into the rural areas where you have to know the community, you have to know the culture and then of course there's a big problem payment because if you're a subsistence farmer, your income tends to be very variable. So we hope that people who actually understand the problem and think they have a solution are going to be those that contribute.

We're looking for ideas in a sense which nobody has had or people have had but aren't well known. A deadline is the end of September but this is a multi-year competition and so we see this as very much as a learning year and perhaps using this then to jump start a competition which gets better known and attracts more people as time goes on. The winning team will get four thousand dollars to help develop their idea and if several good ideas come in then I think it is our intention to try and help each of those ideas move forward. Toby Cumberbatch and yes he is related to Benedict. I asked and if you want to get involved in that competition just put IEEE Let's Make Light in

your search engine. Now let's hear from Sophia originally from Spain but now living in the US. That was the sound of bread crackling straight out of the oven. So when bread cools when you pull it out of the oven the crust rearranges itself, it expands and it makes this really happy sound, it sings. You described it as the sound that brings you joy. You obviously love baking but you don't just bake, you bake with a purpose. Tell us about the bread you started making in March 2022. That day was March 8th 2022 a woke up and I was hyperventilating. I was very excited

because I had an idea that I had to bake bread in the shape of sunflowers, sell it to my neighbors and gather the money they gave me and send it to World Central Kitchen. They help disaster victims around the world. I heard about Ukraine and I felt powerless. I had met Ukrainian people before that were so lovely and they saw images of their country being shattered and just broke my heart but I thought well here I am in little Belair, Maryland. What am I to do about it? But then I had this realization, this clarity that yeah there's something I can do so I decided to post a picture of this one little sunflower that I made out of bread on my neighborhood page and all the neighbors were on board and it's been amazing ever since and people love it.

Now a lot of the stories that we're most interested in don't start from a joyful place but celebrate the resilience and creativity of people who find a way to use or work with their misfortune and this is one of those. Oleksandr Budko was a graphic designer and coffee shop barista when Russia invaded his native Ukraine in 2022. He signed up to fight and lost both his legs below the knee. Now though he is part of the United Ukrainian Ballet Company performing with and without his prosthetics in a work about the consequences of war and human resilience. Oleksa Gogidze is a fellow dancer and was Oleksandr's interpreter for us so what took Oleksandr to his unlikely new career? In general I've been always interested in culture. During the war and after that happened to me I've been looking for different elements of culture and Oleksiy Tutunik invited me to see the body and when I first saw it it came to my mind that it's so difficult and this exact difficulty it inspired me to try it myself. Tell us a little bit more about the choreography.

First of all we've been looking for a choreographer who was ready to work on this piece and Emma Evelling agreed to work with us and first it was something simple but it was way easy to me so I asked her to make it more complicated and like two weeks before the performance we changed it and it started out to be what it is. And you also are involved in Invictus Games for injured soldiers all of this is physically very very demanding. Why do you feel compelled to do what you do? Even before the war I was pretty active so after the injury absurd it sounds I acquired even more possibilities so I'm still always doing something so I was with ballet and Invictus I just can't sit at the same place all the time. And just finally what does it mean for you when an audience responds at the end of a performance? That means that what I'm doing

is a right thing because if people around me appreciate what they do means that it's not just entertainment and it is what moves me forward it might give people inspiration and hope for a better future and a better presence. Alexander Budko and his colleague Olexy Gogidze of the United Ukrainian Ballet Company. Now a lot of us are having to think about weather extremes and how to be prepared for them and our chimpanzee sanctuary is doing emergency drills with its residents to ensure that they are ready to take cover too. Jordan Gaborino is the chimpanzee training supervisor at Chimp Haven, a retirement home if you will, in Louisiana. So what's the

appeal of working with chimps? Oh gosh don't get me started I became really fascinated with them this is my favorite topic because they're so individual and unique watching them forge relationships explore their environment learning their light and dislike it is just amazing to me so I've enjoyed getting to know them they're they're just completely individual and that's what drew me

to them. And so this should be a nice peaceful retirement shouldn't it but extreme weather is becoming an issue? It is it's been a particularly cruel summer we've had some storm right at the beginning of the summer that kind of took us by surprise with their intensity but then since then we've had incredibly high temperatures I mean multiple days with it over 100. One of the ways that we're working with the chimps to prepare them for extreme weather is recall training and that is the process of asking the chimps to come inside with a very specific auditory cue it is very specific to the group each group has a different sound and we're training them to when that sounds like they know to come inside their bedroom get reinforced with some popsicles or bananas and then they can be locked inside they've been found.

And just to pick up on the the different auditory cues for different groups of chimps they all have a different tone they may sound somewhat similar but they're all a bit of a chirpy noise we've had to kind of scour the internet first of different ones with so many groups of chimps and that we have here one of our more produced sounds that staff make is a cowbell so they'll ring the cowbell for a specific amount of time but from there we kind of had to source some different auditory cues such as like a chirpine or like a bicycle horn sound but we also have a chimp here who is deaf so with this training involving an auditory cue we kind of had to get creative since she cannot hear that cue though her specific cue is actually visual we show her a bright orange frisbee and that is her pairing with that training and there was one time specifically that we drove down to the moat flashed her that frisbee and she started booking it right up towards towards the building it was amazing.

Jordan Garbarino at Chimp Haven now some of the other things that we noticed this week 16 young activists in Montana won a court case over their right to a clean and healthful environment the state is appealing but if the judge's decision is upheld the state will have to redraft its environmental policies to take climate change into consideration for future power projects. Ricky Held was the lead plaintiff. We're not blaming everyday Montanans at all or not asking them to throw away their tractor keys it's not about that we're asking our state government who has control over our state energy policies to protect their citizens and our land and resources and Ricky says she's ultimately an optimist. Just having the chance to live and be part of this world is just a reason for optimism and it's all a gift and I want to give back to this world and make it a better place in any way I can. Now you might remember that Indiana Jones in Raiders of the Lost Ark really really hates snakes well now Harrison Ford who played Indy has had a snake named after him a new found species in Peru has been named tachymenoidies Harrison Fordi to honor the actor's environmental advocacy he already has an ant and

a spider named after him and the International Coin of the Year awards have taken place the highlight of the new Mismatists calendar with the Royal Australian Mint taking two top prizes best circulating coin went to the two dollar honeybee coin which has a rather nice sort of golden

honeycomb bit in the middle and the most artistic coin for the 2022 Beauty Rich and Rare Great Barrier

Reef and now to the story of four Australian surfers who were missing for 36 hours off the Indonesian coast in waters known for being home to several aggressive species of shark.

Stephanie Prentice told us what happened it was the nightmarish plot twist to a dream holiday that none of them had expected a group of friends from Australia enjoying a trip to celebrate one of them turning 30 was split up by a sudden storm with half of the group left floating in the sea the friends had been heading to a remote part of Indonesia to go surfing together but when the storm struck it destroyed one of their wooden boats leaving four of them in a guide bobbing on their surfboards in waters known for being home to bull sharks hammerheads and even great whites they had no food no water and no way of calling for help but they did have a positive attitude they grouped together on their boards and one of them Elliot Foote volunteered to paddle off alone and look for help while he was gone a secondary boat that survived the storm made it to land and called in rescuers who searched and searched until they got to the group 36 hours after they'd gone into the water a video shows them straddling their boards in a vast expanse of water exhilarated to be found do you have Elliot they shouted concern for their friend

who hadn't been seen for hours but after another search he was found as well alone and exhausted close to land but unable to reach it he called the rescue miraculous and despite a bit well a lot of sunburn and some grazes the group told press they were all fine and ready to continue that once in a lifetime trip it's definitely prentice reporting now we know that a great many hospitals and care settings inviting dogs to help calm and relax patients now there's increasing evidence that even brief periods spent with dogs good dogs anyway reduces stress hormones and increases oxytocin the feel good hormone and that can actually have real impact on our health nancy g is a professor of psychiatry and director of the center for human animal interaction at virginia

commonwealth university so we know that dogs cheer people up but what's new with this research what our study is showing us is some really measurable improvements from having a dog visit them in the hospital people often think of it as kind of a feel good nice to have but what we're finding is that it's actually more than that it's really delivering measurable effects to those patients and importantly to healthcare staff but what if you're just not a dog person or you have allergies or something is there any other way that you can get some of these benefits a study was done at washington state university where they had university students interacting with dogs in a library setting and other students were just standing in line so they weren't even interacting with the dog they were just watching other people interact with the dog their cortisol went down their mood went up so we still see similar effects even when the person isn't physically touching the dog and you've also talked about young people children who've had short exchanges with dogs in the classroom haven't you yes we did a study with researchers at the university of lincoln in the uk and in that study it was with eight-year-old children and what we found is that the children who interacted with the dog had decreases in cortisol and they had increases in executive functioning and it's highly correlated with success in life so it's interesting because there's some evidence that interacting with a dog makes us smarter and the results that you found don't just relate to the immediate time around interacting with dogs do they some of the results can be quite long lasting some of the findings we're seeing still at a one month time period we see the dogs and we think wow this is a great mood boost it must just be temporary but it's not

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it does seem to be a bit longer lasting so the big question would be why first of all we need attachment figures we need social support and dogs in particular provide that for us so we need to care for another living being but i think it is even deeper than that even when we just interact with the dog we see things like blood pressure decreasing and stress decreasing and it's possible that this goes back to our long lasting relationship with animals animals through this process of domestication and selection have become extraordinarily adept at socializing with humans they respond to our social cues they respond to changes in our emotions so i i think it goes back to we've both learned to read one another and therefore sort of benefit from one another that was professor nancy g in the us

and that's it from us for now remember if you'd like to be part of the happy pod you can email us the sound that brings you joy as ever the addresses global podcast at bbc dot co dot uk this edition was mixed by louis allsop the producers were anna murphy and tracy gordon thanks to all the people who made it possible for me to do this from home this week because yes i finally caught covid don't worry i'm fine and since editor caron martin has been busy here at the cassiopee festival in corfu our editor this week is paul day i'm jackie lennard until next time goodbye

what in the world is the podcast exploring the stories and the issues that you need to know about 93 percent of fast fashion workers aren't getting paid a living wage the former president is accused of trying to overturn democracy how do elite athletes train in and around their menstrual cycle understand more feel better with what in the world from the bbc world service find it wherever you get your bbc podcasts and hit subscribe