

Matt ([00:00](#)):

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Speaker 5 ([00:22](#)):

Unsettled.

Matt ([00:24](#)):

Hello listeners and welcome to episode 10 of The Sensory Friendly Solutions podcast. The season finale. The finale of season one. It's hard to believe that we're at the end of our first season. If you're just joining us, welcome. If you've been with us the entire time, we thank you. We know you've been there for us the same way that we've been there for you each week. A little bit of advanced news, we won't have an innovation segment at the end of this episode. Christel and I who you know very well will be getting on the microphone's towards the end of this conversation for a review. We want to think about what we've heard. We want to leave you with some parting gratitude, and we want to set the stage for what's coming next. For the season finale of episode one we had a triologue. I was lucky enough to speak to two really interesting ladies who are delving into the world of sensory friendly solutions in their own right in their private practice in their professional life.

Matt ([01:45](#)):

The first is Dr. Peggy Bown. She is a dentist in St. John, New Brunswick, originally from Newfoundland, and is a graduate of dentistry from Dalhousie University. Initially in a group practice, Dr. Bown later opened her new modern and fully digital clinic in St. John, New Brunswick in 2015, which she talks about in this episode. Her passion is creating the ultimate patient experience and performing interdisciplinary treatment planning using digital technology including iTero scanners, the Invisalign system and Digital Smile Design. Dr. Bown's passion for the patient experience stems from a childhood exposure to dentistry where patients were made to feel special, educated and included in the treatment process. This is completely clear throughout the course of this episode that patient focused design, including sensory friendly solutions is precisely what Dr. Bown is about.

Matt ([02:49](#)):

Our second guest was Laura Caswell. Laura came to us from Halifax, Nova Scotia. She's a performer, director, choreographer, cabaret artist, producer and arts educator at the Neptune Theater. Born and raised in Ottawa, she's performed all over Canada, trained in New York and London, earning a masters in performance. She's also studied puppetry, dance, comedy and singing extensively and loves to explore different types of theater. Now, given our circumstances, adding Zoom teaching and facilitation to that list. She's eager to learn and grow with different communities and has been the director of education at Neptune since 2017. This also became completely clear throughout the course of this episode, we learned about relaxed performances. How to make performances of all kinds sensory friendly and accessible to all. Thank you to Dr. Bown. Thank you to Laura Caswell. Thank you to you the listener for being with us this far. This is episode 10 of The Sensory Friendly Solutions podcast.

Matt ([04:12](#)):

Hello listeners and welcome back to the very first segment of the season finale of The Sensory Friendly Solutions podcast. It's hard to believe we're 10 episodes in on this journey. We've heard so much from industry experts, from those with lived experience, from entrepreneurs and it's excellent to have brought in two guests for the first segment of this podcast. Peggy, I'm going to get you to introduce yourself first. For those listening who don't know you, tell us a little bit about yourself.

Peggy Bown ([04:49](#)):

Okay. Well, thank you Matt. My name is Peggy Bown and I am a general and cosmetic dentist in St. John, New Brunswick. I have been practicing for almost 20 years and I have my own, in the last five years, a new modern patient experience friendly oriented dental practice here in St. John. My vision for that practice was to make it all about the patient experience. And maybe that's partly how Sensory Friendly Solutions kind of found me too because I really know how important it is and how difficult and how much anxiety dentistry kind of brings with it. So being a patient myself at times or as a child I remembered that and I wanted to make this practice all about helping patients forget about the fact that they were in a dental clinic. So the clinic itself is all about that. And there's a lot of things we do of course that kind of help make sure that that becomes a reality for our patients. So we do get a lot of responses that people do feel that they don't feel like they're in a dental clinic and that warms my heart because that's, again, my main goal. Not to do just good dentistry but to do it with the patient experience in mind.

Peggy Bown ([06:08](#)):

So yeah. So that's what I do. I also ... I'm a mom of two girls and I love all kinds of things including I have a new passion I guess for marketing and social media. So I also do lecturing for a Align Tech and also another company where we talk about how businesses can promote themselves and market in a way that is authentic and it's really exciting for me. So I have lots of thing that I love to do but dentistry is my truest, biggest passion for sure.

Matt ([06:47](#)):

I love how you described it as the patient experience. In many ways that's been exactly what this podcast has been about. And we're going to really unpack that in this episode. But before we do that, I feel almost an obligation to do a COVID check in. We've interviewed people all over the world. I know I'm also on the east coast of Canada right now and we fared pretty well throughout the course of this thing but it strikes me that dentistry ... I mean, a completely hands on industry. Can you talk us a little bit through your COVID journey? What's it been like since March of this year?

Peggy Bown ([07:26](#)):

Well, the first few weeks was almost denial, although I was one of the first clinics to close even before asked to. I just couldn't have imagined it and I knew as we got into it how much it was going to change everything. Honestly I think maybe April was a bit of a blur. I was quite stressed. I did however just dig deep and realize I had a team to lead and I had to get it together. So what I did is I started having weekly meetings with my team even though everybody was really technically not working. Tried to stick together and tried to find ways that we could still reach out to our patients and make them feel like they were there. I know a lot of offices, they just kind of dropped the ropes and just waited until things got back up but no patient of ours could honestly say that. I really wanted to make sure the patients still felt cared for. We actually even did as a fun sort of hygiene drive if you will, we created these little hygiene kits and we did door drops in a COVID friendly way. We left a little note. We had all signed it. And

anybody who was missing their hygiene appointment we had done little door drops. And it was a little note saying, we miss you and then we can't wait to see you again.

Peggy Bown ([08:48](#)):

So we did things like that as a team and did keep up with the social media. It gave me a lot of time to look at my systems and really take a deep breath and go, "Okay, what would I change? I've got the time right now. What would I change? What are the systems? What are the things I would do differently when I do open? How do I want my future to look?" And so I took that time, first to be stressed for a few weeks and then to just dig deep, connect with my team and then come up with strategies and ways that I was going to come back stronger, better than ever. In fact, we created a new mission statement in that May. And just all about together as a team, stronger, better than ever. We wanted that to be the message from internally, from how we felt about how we were going to come back, and also we wanted our patients to know we cared. So I can honestly say my clinic, although of course production is down, costs are up, very significantly, the connection and the strength and the energy of the team has never been better in five years than I've ever seen it. And I think, given the situation, we're breaking records in other ways.

Peggy Bown ([09:59](#)):

So I'm quite proud. A lot of work. Don't get me wrong. But just knowing that if you've got the right people around you and you're willing to kind of get it together and ask questions ... I've also received help from outside business coaches and paid for that. Because I'm like look, I think I need to be better here. I think we can be better and we're going to have to change. So let's find out what we can do. So we've actually implemented things like virtual monitoring of our Invisalign patients. We have different systems and different ways that we communicate with our patients now than we did before. Our patients are almost now ... Well, we were pretty paperless before but now we're completely paperless. So we have all kinds of cool things that patients I think actually appreciate. And if COVID hadn't happened, if this pandemic hadn't happened, I would never be where I am. And I'm in some ways very thankful for that.

Matt ([11:01](#)):

Laura, let's come up to you. As our second panelist do you mind introducing yourself and tell us where we're finding you and where you are now in your life?

Laura Caswell ([11:10](#)):

Yeah. Well, where am I in my life? No. I'm Laura Caswell and I am in Halifax, Nova Scotia and I'm the director of education at Neptune Theater which is the regional theater here in Nova Scotia down on Argyle street. Right downtown Halifax. And yeah, I loved listening to what Peggy had to say because I can relate to a lot of her discoveries through the COVID times. But my relation to sensory friendly and relaxed performance is that I started my job here in 2017 and that was at a time when I will say sensory friendly performances and relaxed performances were gaining ground and people were starting to think about them here in Canada. I think prior to that it had mostly been in the UK and in Europe and someone from Autism Nova Scotia approached me to let me know that this was something. And I will admit, I didn't really know what that entailed. And I went to my general manager at the time. I don't even think Jeremy Webb was the artistic director yet and I said, "Is this something we want to do?" And she said, "Yes, I think so." And with that I suddenly found myself becoming the rep for relaxed performances here at The Neptune Theater as part of my job here as director of education.

Laura Caswell ([12:29](#)):

So it's been quite a journey for me understanding and educating myself and attending trainings and if we have time I can speak about ... I was selected to go to the Access Activator program for the British Council and Tangled Arts and it was in Toronto in February. End of February. And that was one of the last, I'll say big things, that I did before COVID hit. I was flown to Toronto. I was there for a week. And that was when things were just starting. At lunch we couldn't share food. We all had to have wrapped sandwiches. It was all starting. Yeah, so I have this wealth of knowledge that I haven't yet had a chance to implement because our theater did shut down as far as doing productions starting on Friday the 13th, March 13th. But I will say we are planning to do A Christmas Carol beginning next week here at the Neptune Theater so we'll see how that goes.

Matt ([13:28](#)):

And will that be in front of a live audience?

Laura Caswell ([13:29](#)):

That is intended to be in front of a live audience. We have also put that show along with some other content online and have digital showing as well so that you have the option that works for you. And again, as far as making these situations sensory friendly and a relaxed performance ... I have to say, and maybe this has come up in some of your other podcasts, but it's really interesting to me because COVID friendly is inherently relaxed performance friendly. It's so interesting. Because people are like, "What? We have reduced audiences and we have to have more people on deck and we have to have clear signage and arrows and we have to send videos so people know how their day's going to go. And we have to give extra communication." And I'm just like, "Yeah, that's what relaxed performances are basically." So I just find it interesting, the link between accessibility in times of general health and safety. Anyway, those are my big thoughts. But one more time, I have to say Peggy's ... The thing that she said that I can relate to is costs are up, production is down but still we got this great team and everyone's dreaming big and being really creative.

Laura Caswell ([14:46](#)):

And I love she also said, thinking about what we can do versus what we can't do. That's what we've really been working on here.

Matt ([14:55](#)):

So you get home from Toronto end of February, the ominous March 13th, Friday the 13th date hits, how did your work evolve from there? Is there that little period of fear and stress as Peggy alluded to that we all felt and then it's action time or how does that evolve?

Laura Caswell ([15:12](#)):

Well, I don't think it's ended Matt. But for me ... And again, in my job the reason that was extra ... That weekend was very, I would even say traumatic if I look back because we were supposed to start March break camp on the 16th, on the Monday. So we had all these kids and parents lined up and on the Friday it seemed like camps were still going to be okay. It really did. I know the chief medical officer here and I messaged him directly to find out how what he was thinking and he was at that time still believing things were okay. And then by the Sunday it was like no, we're shut down. So we had to call all these families. And it was very scary. All the news hitting us all at the same time. And then in May we decided here we

would do our summer camps in person so starting in April and May I was making documents and researching and figuring out what our safety protocols would be so that we could have ... We ended up having about 400 students through in person this summer. Again, compared to some of the rest of the country, some things were kind of "normal" for me here but with extra protocols in place.

Matt ([16:33](#)):

So throughout the course of the podcast ... And we're going to stay with you Laura before coming back down to Peggy. There's been some interesting themes when you interview experts in the field, when you interview people with lived experience. Time and time again, thematically things come up. But whether we have sensory processing issues or not, we all feel a sense of overload right now or a sense of stress and you both alluded to that. And Laura, we're going to stay with you for this. But we point out this stat to all of our guests. And I would just ask for a little bit of reflection. We're putting people on the spot here but we're all human, we're all going through 2020 together. The stat is this. So as of June this year the word sensory overload was being searched over 40,000 times a month on Google. And that might not seem like a very big number but it's a trend increase of 50% from June of 2019. I mean we're all feeling this. Just as a person Laura, what are we all going through right now?

Laura Caswell ([17:34](#)):

It's so hard for me to speak for others. I know that I've had a great deal of a hard time shutting off. And I don't know if it's a hero complex or workaholic complex. I also will tell the world here, I'm single and it's just me and me and dog. So I think the only thing I've had to get me through this is work. And the fear that if I stop it too will go away is ... It's there. I know that for myself. But then also I find myself feeling this pressure to stay on top of everything because I'm also a performer and a creator. And as soon as someone posts a video of this amazing song and dance that they recorded and put ... Part of me goes, "Oh my gosh, why didn't I do something like that? I have to create a video too." And then it's just like this constant ... It never stops. The list only seems to get longer. And then I doubt I've ever used screen time and multiple screens. I find myself sitting there. I'm on my computer, I have the latest news broadcast on my phone, and my tablet's on the other side where I can write my next list. It's a lot.

Laura Caswell ([18:49](#)):

Thanks for bringing this up because I have to remind myself to go for nice long walks with my lovely dog Bella to get in nature and just breathe. Breathe safely.

Matt ([19:02](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. The more we talk about it, it only benefits the people listening because we're going through this globally. We interviewed a big time author in the autism space from the UK and they were about to go into full lockdown until December where we're really blessed on the east coast of Canada but we're going through this as a people right now. And so this search trend is something that isn't going away any time soon. And Peggy, I'm wondering if you piggyback off of that. I know from the work you've done on social media and the work you're doing with your patients, you'll have some good ideas about what we're all experiencing right now.

Peggy Bown ([19:42](#)):

Yeah. Really a good point exactly like Laura said. I have been much more inundated with communication with all the ways and the Zoom calls and all the things that we're doing. I actually now ... Like she said, she walks her dog. I have pretty much always taken my phone with me on any walks because I like my

music and all that. But now I just tend to just go out and I'm like, I don't need any of that. I just want to have peace.

Matt ([20:13](#)):

Exactly.

Peggy Bown ([20:14](#)):

Yeah. It's really interesting. I think though that one of the things that we want to do or for me, like I want to do when my patients come here for example, is I want them to feel like they're in a space that is very safe and we are considering, again, their sensory experience. And again, I'm just making sure I'm following off where you're going with that. But I want to make sure that I'm utilizing all the technology that I can for them but yet when they come in I don't want them to feel like there's so much going on. Like they have a space where it is somewhat more quiet and protected from all the craziness that's going on outside. Specifically though, do you have a specific question about how it pertains to my clinic or [crosstalk 00:21:14]-

Matt ([21:14](#)):

Yeah. The exact lead in Peggy ... And thank you for doing that. The exact lead in to that is, given that this is what we're experiencing, given that you're seeing patients who are experiencing this no doubt, we do want to introduce your sensory friendly journey I would say. How did you come to consider this as a big part of your practice going forward? Because I've been to the dentist lately and I love my dentist but it strikes me that you're probably ahead of the curve here. Am I right?

Peggy Bown ([21:46](#)):

I mean maybe. I really don't pay a lot attention. I do know a lot of dentists aren't always adopting the latest technology. Sometimes they look at the technology that they can adopt or that they could invest in as strictly of like what is it going to give me as dollars and cents? Like what is the ROI on that technology? But for me ... And I'm going to talk about one specific type of technology here in a second. But I've seen a much different angle on that and it's that the technology isn't always about how can I profit directly from that? It's how can I create a better experience for the patient? How can I wow the patient in a way that they will then go and talk about my clinic and then refer me other patients who do want to do other work. Because they've never experienced anything like it. So it's like an indirect benefit. But it comes down to me for me, just a quick backtrack to when I was a little girl. I'd always see the dentist regularly and my mom would bring me in. No one would ever talk to me. I was always a little bit afraid. But then my mom brought me to a new dentist when I was about 13 years old and that experience changed my life. It helped me to decide I wanted to become a dentist.

Peggy Bown ([23:03](#)):

And what that dentist did was not care about the fact that he had a filling to do that day on me. It was that he cared about that I understood what was going to happen and that I felt safe in that environment. So he explained everything. I really do remember this honestly. Explaining how it was going to feel and how I was going to feel and why this was happening and really directly continued to care about my emotions and my understanding. So education and how you make that patient feel from an emotional standpoint became that pivotal thing for me that I was like, when I become a dentist ... Which I walked out of his office that day telling my mom I would become a dentist. That I would do that for my patients. And so some of the technologies that I've adapted and things I do ... Well, just the little

things that I say and do for my patients are one thing. But there's a recent technology that a lot of clinics could be adopting and it's called ... It's like a digital impression technique. So if anybody remembers having braces or having any sort of impressions growing up with this poofy material in their mouth. The dentist may be good at taking those impressions but did the patient have a good experience?

Peggy Bown ([24:18](#)):

So we do everything as digitally as possible and then with that digital file we're not only able to create products for the patient. It could be a crown, it could be Invisalign, it could be a sports guard or a night guard. But it can also be then used to educate my patients. So when I take the time to use it to educate the patients, they start to relax because they become a part of the experience and they become a part of understanding what's going on. So they don't feel like I'm talking over them or trying to sell them something. They help make decisions or we kind of co-diagnose using it. So the whole experience is like education first and then once people understand, it takes away the fear. And again, dentistry is just so anxiety-ridden I really have a major ... I think I have a really good advantage when it comes to that because anybody who's adopting this is going to have ... Their patients are going to say, "Wow, I've never had that done before. I never understood it before. I didn't realize dentistry could do that." I want to change how people feel about dentistry so it's part of my bigger why.

Peggy Bown ([25:30](#)):

Making it sensory friendly, it just happens to fall in there. I didn't realize I was doing that. It was just because of a childhood mission that I kind of got started on basically.

Matt ([25:42](#)):

For other medical professionals listening who are thinking about walking this sensory friendly road, I'm hearing that adopting technology is certainly important but also the importance of setting that emotional setting for the patient and like you said, crafting that patient experience.

Peggy Bown ([25:58](#)):

Oh yeah. In the words you say. Preparing them for what you're about to do. Tell, show, do especially for children. Offering them a blanket. Offering them to turn off the lights. We offer music. It could be having certain smells in the clinic or making sure those smells don't enter the clinic. So certain dental materials historically will create a memory or emotional response for patients that really creates anxiety. So we don't have certain products in this clinic because of those smells. Because I know that that will trigger an emotional response. So I'm very careful to think about what it's like to be a patient. So walking through the clinic, what do I see? What do I hear? What kind of smells? Is the lighting good? Is this a bright open space? Everything. From the design details of my clinic to how I even talk to my patients. I tell them before I'm going to lay them back. I make sure they're comfortable throughout the appointment. These are little things but they're big things.

Matt ([27:07](#)):

Yeah. No doubt. Thank you so much Peggy. And Laura we want to come up to you to talk about your sensory friendly journey as well. And you are more than welcome to volunteer a personal experience if you wish. But professionally, I know our audience is going to be interested in Tangled Art + Disability. And then also I'm curious and our listeners will be curious about what a sensory friendly performance actually looks like. So start from anywhere and unpack it.

Laura Caswell ([27:33](#)):

Right. Well, I think I already ... As I said earlier, I kind of, I'll just say, fell into learning and growing with relaxed performance and sensory friendly performances here at Neptune. Tangled Arts as I talked about earlier is an amazing company out of Toronto who focuses in all kinds of different accessible performances. And they brought us together with The British Council. As I said, the people all over Canada. Now there's about 40 of us who are kind of with the name Access Activators who have this wealth of knowledge. And now we have to set out and train. Again, I think all of us got at a bit of a standstill with COVID. This is one frustration, I'm going to be candid, that I do have about accessible programming in theater right now is that it all came to a standstill and I don't think just here. And one of the main reasons is financial. And it's going to take a while to get that going again. And I find myself ... I know I'm not I'm not alone. Not fighting for it but I find myself putting up a hand and going, what about this, what about this?

Laura Caswell ([28:38](#)):

And the new challenge will be how to ... Now that lots of theater experiences are digital, how do we make sure that is accessible to everyone as well? So that's something we're really working on. I know I'm rambling here. As far as shows here, our first show that was a relaxed performance here was Shakespeare in Love, which that whole development of how we were going to deliver that I did with my right hand person, Julia Topple, and with the assistance of Autism Nova Scotia. And we came up with our visual stories and we got our signage, we trained our staff. And it went really well. And then cut to Christmas, it was Cinderella and that was way bigger. Bigger audience, bigger experience and it was really great. The show itself was not just closed to different ... It was open to the public but they were notified that it was a relaxed performance. And the most fun thing is that we don't do applause during those shows. We shake our hands like fun jazz hands or a gentle snap. The fun thing was watching and talking to the artists after the show. Talking to the actors and the stage managers and the way the whole thing hit them all differently.

Laura Caswell ([29:55](#)):

Lots of the actors find that when they do these relaxed performances they kind of get a little back to like the natural storytelling elements because it's not all about the big lights and the big loud bangs in our big musicals. It's back to the core story. And even though you know the audience wants to scream, just watching these shaking hands, it just feeds a different energy. So that's something I'll really take away. I do have to share also, when we did Color Purple there was a group of adults, many of them had never been to our theater before. And this one person was at the back and when they were singing, they could not sit still. And they were just dancing in their seats just out of joy and energy and I love that person could come to the theater, enjoy that show, not be told to be quiet, not be told to sit still. That to me was why we do it. Everyone should be able to enjoy a night at the theater. Everyone should. So that's make big takeaways. And again, I think that this is going to continue to grow.

Laura Caswell ([31:04](#)):

Again, Peggy was talking about all the digital stuff. I'm finding that our digital videos and our visual stories, all of those things are going to become a part of our whole theater experience for everyone from now on. And it is education and it is making sure everyone feels safe. And it is making sure everyone feels comfortable. So I think maybe we won't have to have as many "special nights". That theater will actually just be and hopefully accessible to people.

Matt ([31:36](#)):

Laura, we're going to stay with you. You've both been so generous with your time. But there is one last question that our audience really loves. And we zone in on you a little bit. You alluded to this early on in our COVID check in, but I'm very curious about strategies. This is called the Sensory Friendly Solutions podcast. The final question. What are your strategies to reduce the noise of the current era? It's a noisy time. It's a loud time. Spill the beans. Are you a yogi? Do you go for runs? What do you do to reduce the noise?

Laura Caswell ([32:12](#)):

I'm going to be really candid, I'm not doing a good job of that. These days it's often a beer and some Doritos. I'm trying to make a conscious effort to be more ... I used to do yoga all the time. I think now I'm at a point where I'm almost scared to start these things like dance and yoga that have meant so much to me because I'll be so sad and scared of where I've ended up right now after not doing a lot of self care. So I wish I had more motivational knowledge. Netflix. But I do-

Matt ([32:53](#)):

Well Laura, I'll fill you in.

Laura Caswell ([32:55](#)):

You what?

Matt ([32:57](#)):

I'll fill you in. A lot of guests think that I wouldn't like that answer or that the audience wouldn't like that answer. But I actually love that answer because it's so relatable. As Peggy alluded to, there's people who have doubled down on their strengths during this and that's amazing. There's also people who have felt unable to do so for one reason or another. And so to answer straight up like that and candidly, I thank you for it.

Laura Caswell ([33:24](#)):

No problem. That's what I'm here for.

Matt ([33:28](#)):

Peggy, we're going to end with you. Same question. I know you have some strategies. I can tell already. What are your strategies to reduce the noise of the current era?

Peggy Bown ([33:39](#)):

Well, it's great. Thank you Laura for being so candid because I don't know anyone honestly who isn't struggling to some degree. Especially now as we go into this second wave and it's getting darker and it's been hard. I've been taking more vitamin D than ever honestly. But I think one of the things that has helped me through is just remembering what my good habits are and then trying to make that promise to myself. Like on Sunday's I will sit down and say okay, what do I really want to accomplish this week? And I do have a fairly strict morning routine that I ... Again, not perfect. We're all guilty of certainly not meeting all our commitments for the week. But the old Peggy would have probably given herself a guilt trip about that. Because I am a bit of an overachiever. I'm like one of these super highly energy driven high goal setting type of people. But now after the last few months I've particularly been kind of looking

into more like mediation. Just things like learning just how to be okay with myself and just okay with maybe ... Okay, you didn't do that today. How would you treat your friend if she said to you, "I can't believe I missed my workout this morning."? Would you say, "Oh yeah, I can't believe you did that."? You would never say that.

Peggy Bown ([35:14](#)):

So I'm being a little bit more self ... More self care. A little bit more patient with myself. And just being happy with what I can do in a day. So I do really do have a pretty good morning routine. I walk my dog and workout and I try these things. But I certainly slip and I have those evenings where I'll just dive into a bag of chips and-

Laura Caswell ([35:37](#)):

Yes.

Peggy Bown ([35:39](#)):

I completely agree. Or just scroll through Facebook with the America's Got Talent videos. Honestly. So I'm probably a bit of both. I think my habits though are getting me through. I do have this team to lead that I feel very high responsibility to make them feel that I'm taking care of them. So I feel like if I don't take care of myself first then I won't be able to do that and that's a bigger why. That would be worse. I'd rather not let them down. I'd be okay with letting myself down before I would let them down. So because I have to get up and I have to show up with that, I try to put a lot of energy into my routine.

Peggy Bown ([36:23](#)):

But if I don't make it and I don't ... Again, this morning, I didn't get there. I walked my dog, I didn't get my workout. I didn't give myself a hard time. The old Peggy would have done that for sure.

Matt ([36:35](#)):

We're all in this together. It's a strange time but you've both been so generous. Thank you so much for being on the season finale of The Sensory Friendly Solutions podcast.

Laura Caswell ([36:45](#)):

Thanks Matt.

Peggy Bown ([36:45](#)):

Thank you for having me. Thank you. Thanks Laura.

Laura Caswell ([36:47](#)):

You too. Nice to meet you.

Peggy Bown ([36:49](#)):

Yeah, you too.

Matt ([36:51](#)):

You're very welcome. Both of you take care.

Peggy Bown ([36:54](#)):

Okay.

Matt ([36:55](#)):

Bye bye.

Matt ([37:00](#)):

Christel, we're back at the tail end of what is the season finale. Can you believe we made it? In a pandemic and all.

Christel ([37:10](#)):

10 episodes and it went by like a flash.

Matt ([37:16](#)):

Did it ever. And I feel so, honestly lucky, when I was reflecting on the things that we heard being in the hot seat. You and I have talked about how it's interesting being on the camera and on the microphone as someone who's technically an industry outsider because I get to hear these things firsthand and guide our amazing speakers through a wonderful conversation. And there's so many things that I've learned and hopefully some things that you've learned along the way as well as an industry insider.

Christel ([37:47](#)):

Yeah. I have. It's been amazing. The new connections we've made. The network we've solidified with the guests we've been speaking to and our audience and their response to the conversations that we've had. It's been interesting and enlightening and really inspiring. I hope and I think to give people ideas and yes, maybe some inspiration and some reflection to find those sensory friendly solutions.

Matt ([38:33](#)):

And for those listening to the podcast and who have been listening the whole way through, what you're expecting right now is an innovation segment. You're expecting some reflections on the conversation you just heard. But what we'd like to do, and it's going to be a bit of a whirlwind, we'd like to walk back through the first season. We've come to a close. We feel like we need to tie a bow on it. So we want to talk about some of the themes that we've discovered throughout the course of this podcast. And we actually have a special bonus episode coming for you but we cannot spill the beans quite yet. We're very excited to be releasing that in about a week's time. But Christel, I was reflecting on three themes that I had in mind that stuck with me throughout the course of this podcast. I'm guessing you did as well. But I'd like to lead us in with one that I didn't quite expect. There's a few episodes I would point to. So when I was reflecting on the season I thought okay, I want to do a COVID check in with our guests at the start of every episode. And it's not to rehash things we already know. Hopefully it's not to talk about COVID fatigue, although that is inevitable.

Matt ([39:47](#)):

But it was just to check in because it applies to the sensory friendly solutions space more than I could have possibly imagined. I really, really underrated that coming into the show. But it came up time and time again. I'd start by pointing to episode two with Maureen Benny. She was the first one to introduce

... And it was reintroduced in episode nine with Trish Hamilton. But she was the first one to introduce the big effects of routine disruption at the hands of the pandemic. What did you think about that?

Christel ([40:16](#)):

Yeah. I went through for every guest and kind of thought about the key takeaways. And what I really ... And you draw a link between Maureen and Trish and one that I hadn't made until you just called it out, but for Maureen what really stuck with me was she talked about the importance of being committed and finding that consistency in that daily routine. But Maureen used this word. She talked about being fluent in what works. So not just sort of that strategy that you pull out when things are getting out of hand, but that really developing that capacity and that fluency to draw on resiliency. And when I think of what Trish shared in episode nine, just advising parents to follow their gut to get answers, Trish completely reworked her life at the beginning of COVID to structure it in a way, I'm going to say now, that's fluent for her. She really went back to what works and not those things just pulling them out when things get difficult, but really restructuring her work life and then her home life around that concept of fluency.

Matt ([41:53](#)):

Yeah. And it made me think as well. We dug into this new work from home culture that we've built over the past year or so. And it was something that had been bubbling. A lot of companies were doing a hybrid model. But then we were obviously painted into a corner by the pandemic and it's become such a buzzword that is just known as WFH now in most articles. You know that as work from home. And in episode three we talked to entrepreneur Renee Warren. Not only like Trish being a parent of a child with sensory processing disorder but also having to work from home. Trying to discover the family balance in all of this.

Christel ([42:32](#)):

And you talk about that balance Matt. My sort of take home from Renee's just excellent in coaching and mentorship shown through. But Renee talked about down cycles. And that to me was something new. Just sort of an expectation. We have sometimes this expectation that we have to make it work all of the time. And Renee just introduced that concept that we do have ups and downs. She also talked about leaning in. And I think just reflecting on that in this time of sensory overload, in this time of seeking sensory friendly solutions, modifying our expectation, that there are ups and downs and that's part of the flow, that really stuck with me.

Matt ([43:33](#)):

I love ... I listen a lot to Adam Grant. He's also got a great podcast sponsored by Ted I believe. And Adam probably had the quote of the pandemic in terms of the work from home moment that we're in. He said, "You know what, we're not working from home in a pandemic. We're in a pandemic trying to get as much work done from home as we can." And that was a mic drop because that's ... What a great quote and finding that balance and think about the world we're in right now and for the foreseeable future. So that was my first takeaway. My big overarching theme is I underrated the importance of that COVID check in but it really did do leaps and bounds in guiding us through a conversation around sensory friendly solutions. So over to you for another big takeaway.

Christel ([44:22](#)):

Yeah. I was really I'm going to say reminded by our chat with Stella Waterhouse. Stella ... She was a big reminder. But she had just that perspective for us. Why are we doing this podcast Matt? What are we hoping to achieve? Why do we think another podcast is needed here? What are we doing? And Stella just in her chat reminded us about this deluge of information. So part of the sensory overload and part of the actually noise and just the noise of, I'll say, all the things. She reminded us of the importance of the need to connect, to have clarity, and to have some help sifting through things. And that to me was a big takeaway. Okay, so why are we having another conversation in a time of sensory overload about sensory overload and sensory sensitivity and sensory friendly solutions is because we're trying to help people sift through it all. And in the structure that you brought to the podcast to have the innovation segment where we sort of clear things and clarify and give some pointed direction is needed.

Matt ([45:55](#)):

I thought a lot about Stella. Especially when she informed us that although she's cozy in the UK countryside, the country would be going on lockdown and still is in lockdown until December 2nd, at which time they're going to do a modified lockdown by county I believe. But I thought a lot about Stella because there is that thought. There is that thought right now is will you become more noise if you throw your ideas into the fray? Or will you become signal as they say? So parsing out the signal within all of that noise. This is what first came to mind when you said that. My third big takeaway was the evolution and the acknowledgement of the sector as a whole and as it evolved. And the way that we learned that is because we got to interview some serious pioneers. Some literal industry pioneers from a million plus copy NYT best sellers like Carol Stock Kranowitz down to Dr. Winnie Dunn in episode eight, a 40 year career. For context for our listeners, that's 12 years older than me. She's been working on these topics so I bow down to Dr. Winnie Dunn tuning in from the University of Missouri.

Matt ([47:13](#)):

It's all to say that what you just said and what Stella crystallized for us, the guests on this podcast have been doing that for the industry. It's been amazing.

Christel ([47:26](#)):

Yep. Yeah. Dr. Dunn just ... Again, we talk about our senses and she just put it out there. Our sensory experience unlocks our brain and unlocks our body. And that goes back to our first guest, pediatrician Dr. Sarah Gander, and talking about that mind body connection and how to reconnect with just a whole little pause and a little breath. To go into sensory rich environments but those that are nature bathing. We started with the fundamentals and what is key to that sensory experience. And wrapping it up with Dr. Peggy Bown and Laura Caswell this week, and just those two diverse environments. What is going to the dentist and enjoying a theater performance, what does that have in common? And they both talked about ... They used these words. They talked about making the audience or the patient ... Making people feel safe and making them feel protected to be who they are. And Dr. Bill Wong talked about being yourself. The comfort of just being you.

Matt ([49:02](#)):

Yeah. Going all the way to episode one is great because the mind body connection is probably something that we cannot underrate in this moment. Any moment but particularly this moment. And when you bring up the season finale, this episode, episode 10, I love how it almost took on a scientific bent in some sense. When Peggy Bown said a patient centered design patient experience, these all sounded to me like this is like mainstream now. This is something we're all going to be talking about.

And Laura Caswell of Neptune Theater saying making programming accessible, making any kind of experience accessible, that made me think okay, this is mainstream. This is not a burgeoning industry anymore, from the time of the early career of people like Dr. Winnie Dunn, this is mainstream.

Christel ([49:54](#)):

Yeah. This is part of everyday life. And Laura Caswell highlighted how just making things COVID friendly in a theater was in many ways just aligned with making things sensory friendly. That there is overlap, again, in making people feel safe and protected and feel like they could just be themselves in whatever environment or experience they were enjoying.

Matt ([50:28](#)):

Yeah. My final major takeaway. And this one ... I mean, I hesitate to rank them, but this one may be the most important or the most important takeaway for me. Broadly I've called it naming it. We've had guests on this show ... Again, I can't overstate the experience these people have brought to the podcast. Naming it for me was crystallized first in episode four from Dr. Bill Wong. Really big Twitter following, really good reception of a great TEDx talk. And he actually in some ways self diagnosed the things he was walking through as a young adult. And he looked back through his OT training and learning how young kids play and thought, "You know what, this sounds like me. This looks like me." And he went on this journey of pursuing a diagnosis and in episode nine that came back full circle when Trish Hamilton talked about pursuing a diagnosis for her son. But this ability for us to name things almost sets us free to be able to address them. To take action. And that was part of what the innovation segment was meant to be is for you the listener to be able to take action.

Matt ([51:45](#)):

So what did you think when we were hearing this? You've known this a lot longer than I have, but naming it became really impactful for me.

Christel ([51:53](#)):

Yeah. Giving people the words, the vocabulary, the knowledge, the awareness. Carol Stock Kranowitz, again, her best selling book is titled The Out of Sync Child and it just makes what can sometimes feel as an overwhelming concept to grasp understood and relatable. And Carol's final parting advice was when we move we are in sync. And just that ability to understand who we are and why we are the way we are is incredibly important.

Matt ([52:44](#)):

Yeah. I put a star next to Carol Stock Kranowitz under the heading naming it because I can't imagine how it feels to be the one who in some ways named it for hundreds of thousands of parents. Those are big numbers. But an awful lot of them point to The Out of Sync Child as the first real document that allowed families to understand what they were experiencing. Really amazing. And there's also my final reflection from Karine Gagner adapting product lines like Manimo that are also best sellers in the sensory friendly solutions space product wise, is there's innovation in theory, but then there's also innovation practically. And actually developing product lines is an innovation that's practical. So a big shout out to Karine and her team for doing what they do as well. And that's I think my final real reflection Christel. What's another final reflection from you before we turn to our audience and give them so gratitude?

Christel ([53:50](#)):

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Yeah. I think it's a reflection I started with, which was what are we trying to do here? And Karine does it already in her sensory tool line. She's an innovator. And an innovator not just in creating sensory tools, but really wanting to create solutions that are like a friend. She wants that line of weighted lap animals to be like a friend for children, to be that enjoyable and that inviting. So I guess if anything the take home message from the podcast is our hope is that we've inspired people to understand and then to find sensory friendly solutions.

Matt ([54:44](#)):

Yes indeed. And to you the audience, if it was your first episode in episode 10, welcome to the podcast. We hope we have a lot of value in store for you. If you've been with us the whole time, thank you. We've reached five continents with this podcast. Countless cities, countless countries. It's been a real pleasure to be with you throughout the course of these 10 episodes. And Christel, I'd like to give you the last word as you turn and face our audience. But from me, your host, thank you very much for being here.

Christel ([55:17](#)):

Thank you Matt. And to our listeners, thank you for being part of our conversations.

Matt ([55:29](#)):

Thank you to our sponsor, TakingItGlobal. Ensuring that youth around the world are actively engaged and connected in shaping a more inclusive, peaceful, and sustainable world. As part of their rising youth initiative they're looking for young people who are inspired with ideas and ready to take action through youth led community service grants. Head to risingyouth.ca to learn more and to become the next Rising Youth grant recipient.

Matt ([55:57](#)):

The podcast is also supported by New Brunswick Community College as part of the community resource awareness during and after COVID-19 applied research project funded by the New Brunswick Innovation Foundation. Learn more about NBCC's efforts to transform lives and communities at nbcc.ca.

Matt ([56:16](#)):

This podcast is produced by Matt George. Is engineered by the great Zachary Pelletier and is part of the Unsettled Media Podcast Network.