Interview Riley at KHS for AT The Heart podcast

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**SPEAKERS**

Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles, Riley

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 00:02

Welcome to at the heart. Assistive and inclusive technology stories. I'm your host Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles. Each episode we will feature stories about assistive and inclusive technology directly from Assistive and inclusive technology users. Today I am honored to welcome our guests Riley Cerabona to the show. Riley is a senior at Kennebunk High School, and will soon be off to college, where she will be doing some amazing things in theater and is one of one of a high level, at user. Welcome to the show Riley. So, let's get right into it. Can you tell us what types of assistive technology that you are currently using.

**Riley** 00:42

Um, so, what I mostly use is speech to text for homework assignments or tests. And then also I have used on things like AP tests or the SAT. I've been able to type on things that are usually handwritten. Also having access to online textbooks, which I haven't used a whole lot in high school because, like a lot of teachers sort of just let you not bring textbooks to class but like with going forward into college, I will definitely use that.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 01:25

Absolutely. So having those supports kind of first where the digital text might be available to all kids or putting content online, kind of helps you, if I'm hearing you correctly kind of helps you to access a little more readily whereas before you might have had to wait to have the book available.

**Riley** 01:42

Yes definitely and also just not having to lug around these textbooks, which is harder to do with one arm and sort of being able to just have them easily accessible to me.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 01:55

Right and that doesn't matter if you're at school or at home and with energy conservation and

**Riley** 02:00

Totally

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 02:02

keeps you more towards the goal so so you kind of talked a little bit about how having, you know, digital accessible text materials empowers you to be more independent. So, how does having access to something as simple as a laptop or an iPad with voice typing or dictation empower you as a user?

**Riley** 02:22

 I am a very academically like competitive person, especially with myself, so I never want to feel like my disability is slowing me down from achieving what I want to do or even just like being caught up on homework like I never want to feel like that's dragging me down so having this assistive technology has made it so that if I've had a really long day and I like my hand is tired from writing, I can just use voice to text dictation and not have to be feeling more and more tired, and like I'm being slowed down. And then also, I took some AP classes. And I was concerned that my disability would affect how well I could do on the test because it would my hand would get really really tired after writing three essays straight. So we were able to get voice to text dictation for that as well. So that was really helpful to be able to put for what I believe was my best work instead of just being happy with what I could put out.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 03:33

Exactly. Let's talk a little bit more about that particular accommodation of having voice to text because typically the College Board or the AP board or the people that make those standardized tests will allow certain accommodations. And when they usually allow a dictation accommodation. It's a human scribe, as opposed to dictation. Can you talk a little bit more about why dictation in particular, as opposed to having someone sit with you while you're dictating your thoughts. What makes it more empowering to have that access as opposed to a human scribe?

**Riley** 04:11

Yeah so when we were sending proof, or like evidence to the College Board we did some tests to be doing handwritten me typing doing voice to text and then also having a scribe. And I felt like I was sort of being held back like I had to wait for the scribe to catch up. And I'm like, my, my brain was going faster than their hands could write which is understandable because they're human, but with voice to text. It's a lot easier, because I can just sort of talk, and like I don't have to feel like I'm waiting for someone. So it just makes the whole process like smoother and much easier to, like, complete whatever task is given.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 05:02

So you're finding it was more efficient.

**Riley** 05:04

Yes,

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 05:04

In terms of a process I remember doing that with you and we came up with the fact that your output, and how much we could get was much bigger than having, you know, a human scribe as opposed to dictation so thank you for sharing that. Have you ever been told that using your assistive technology tools is a form of cheating whether it was direct or an unconscious feeling, or just a perception or. Have you ever just been told them some ways but that might be cheating, and if so, how did you address it.

**Riley** 05:40

I haven't been told that it was cheating I sort of had like the opposite thing which I think is also relevant which is people being like, oh, lucky you get to type this test, or, you know, like, Why does she get to use a computer and it's sort of a little invalidating I guess because it's sort of like well this stems from me, having a paralyzed arm and not being able to do what I feel like is my best work without these assistive technology accommodations. So I feel like I've kind of had the reverse of that where people are feel jealous in a way I guess but that is something that stems from an inability to like put out and process like all my best work if I don't have these accommodations right.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 06:30

It kind of honors the variability that we all have. Do you feel that that's kind of a construct that comes with people that we've been told that we're supposed to all have the same that it's all the same support that if I have a computer you have a computer.

**Riley** 06:47

Yeah.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 06:47

And so on and so on.

**Riley** 06:48

I think especially like you know public high schools want everyone to have sort of the same accessibility and the same levels for a lot of things, which well in some cases can be, like, a really great thing, it, it does sort of for some people who need accommodations make it more difficult to either get those or even just like have those be understood by other students.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 07:16

Exactly. And that's something that I think that there's a perception too that everyone should use the same support at the same time, even though we provide access to the same tools and variety of tools, you might not use all of them. What would you suggest that teachers could do to kind of support, a common use of accommodations or support students and understanding that not everybody needs the same thing at the same time and that's okay and then some might need more support to access the same content, as someone who might not.

**Riley** 07:51

So I think the truth of the matter that people need to just remember is that everybody has different abilities, and that that isn't something that can just be sort of tossed to the side or, like if we give them all classwork at the same time they just have to do it the same way at the same time, There has to sort of be an understanding that you have to accommodate student needs if you want to see them. Like, not just pass whatever they're doing but like actually thrive in the, the classes that they're doing. So I think for teachers, it's important to understand that, like the wide range of abilities or needs that their students have even if they're not super visible even if that's getting fatigued while writing or feeling like having stress on tests. So it's just sort of things that I think to keep in mind, and to be aware of the needs of each individual student

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 08:48

And planning for them.

**Riley** 08:50

Yes.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 08:50

Ahead of time and not waiting for. Oops.

**Riley** 08:53

Yeah.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 08:55

Yeah. So what advice would you give to others, other students or other users who may need to use similar tools or even different tools. Might be reluctant, or unsure to use them in school or even out of school.

**Riley** 09:10

When I was, like, younger I was very very reluctant to use any form of dictation. And I like felt kind of like embarrassed about it and I didn't want other people to like see me dictating or even just like typing on assignments that are usually handwritten. And I think the, like, the thing to remember is like 99% of people are not going to care or even notice, like, a lot of times people are too wrapped up in their own schoolwork to even notice what someone else is doing. So, I think, trying to put aside that sort of like anxiety about what other people are thinking about you when you're using assistive technology is the best thing to do. And then another thing is just like communicate with your teachers that's sort of like 90% of what I've done through high school is like just making sure that whatever I'm doing my teachers know, and they've been really great to accommodate and willing to like talk about any things I feel like I need for assignments or homework.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 10:17

And that's one thing to touch on that you've always had a clear sense of what you've needed. And when you've needed it. How has that helped you to use assistive technology or to advocate for yourself throughout school?

**Riley** 10:36

I think that because I've had such a clear understanding of what I need. It's easier for me to communicate those needs to other people, whether that's, again, teachers, or even like trying to give evidence to like AP or SAT tests to let me type on the test. So I think just being able to communicate those things. And sort of understanding my own use has helped a lot with that.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 11:13

And lastly, what else would you want people to know about you, or about assistive technology in general?

**Riley** 11:26

Um, I think one thing that people don't really think of is sometimes there is sort of like a, like a thought that, like, Oh, these people who are using assistive technology might not be working as hard as me because they're using voice to text or because they're typing on this written assignment. And I think sometimes we have to work even harder. Just because, like some of us get really fatigued or some of us just don't like aren't able to physically write so I thinkit's important to understand like the same as,like, You might feel like you're struggling on this assignment that other person has to and just because they're using different tools and new doesn't mean that they have worked any less hard.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 12:16

Right. Riley thank you so much for sharing your stories, and for also your advocacy and advocating for what you needed when you needed it. It's been an honor to have you on the show and also to work with you throughout your school career and technology's come a long way. So the ease of use has been, I think something that's been helpful too. So off you go to college

**Riley** 12:45

yes

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 12:46

And those accommodations will travel with you. And whatever you do in life. I know it is going to be utterly amazing. Thank you for sharing your story with us today.

**Riley** 12:58

Thank you.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 12:58

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