

## Get with the Program and Nadia Edwards-Dashti – Walk the Talk podcast transcript

Nadia: Welcome to the Walk the Talk podcast series - a very special short series as part of the DEI Discussions. Through tangible action and clear follow-up, we're here to celebrate the wins, raise awareness of the challenges and walk the talk for change across the entire FinTech industry. Today we're joined by Jeni Trice, CEO, Founder and Chief Coding Adventurer at Get with the Program. This fantastic initiative inclusively inspires the tech innovators of the future with exciting live and virtual theatre-in-education events in schools.

Jeni heads up this amazing organisation, educating and inspiring children. She uses her 25 years within the IT consultancy and tech implementation world, where she specialised in programming, integration and training project teams. She now turns these concepts of computational thinking into fun and engaging adventures - whilst dressed as a professor and helped by a robot!

### 1. Tell us about Get with the Program

Get with the Program is a social enterprise which links schools with business sponsors to create exciting tech learning events designed to inspire the tech innovators of the future! Our unique interactive theatre-in-education experiences teach children coding concepts in a fun, inspiring way, capturing their creative imaginations. The overall aim is to encourage them on the path to a future in tech, so today's children can ultimately lead the way in solving the world's biggest challenges.

### 2. Why is it so important that we do this?

There are a number of hugely positive outcomes from the approach we use. By working with children from 5 upwards and normalising visibility of less well-represented role models (whilst of course making tech fun and engaging), we're immediately broadening horizons and aspirations. Not everyone is naturally drawn to learning about how technology works, but if you can make it relatable and accessible to everyone, then you immediately diversify the learning engagement and potential workforce. I've recently heard of a friend's daughter who gave up GCSE computing as a result of peer pressure and the unwelcome feeling she got from being the only girl in her class. More girls in the computing classroom would encourage more girls **stay** in the computing classroom - it's a self-fulfilling prophesy!

So in short, what we're doing in a crazy theatre in education way, is uplift computer literacy, broaden the diversity of those engaged and involved, and ensure it captures the imagination of all those who we want to encourage to be the tech innovators of the future!

### 3. Share some of the successes you've achieved at Get with the Program

We started out running popular assembly events about healthy eating (and coding) and rockets to the moon (and coding). We were then selected for a grant from Hampshire County Council to write an Eco Coding Adventure about reducing packaging in a weekly shop. When lockdown prevented us from taking this into schools, we quickly pivoted to filming our shows and discovered the success of remote delivery. Our biggest success was when our pantomime collaboration with Winchester Science Centre and STEM Learning went global and was seen by quarter of a million children worldwide!

The filmed shows still use kinaesthetic learning to engage the children with the coding concepts in a physical way, but by filming our stories and explanations, we were able to make the coding adventures more scalable. This meant they are now accessible to many more children particularly those who come from groups what are less well represented, and need these inclusive role models to extend their ambitions.

Our next success is our soon to be announced partnership with a well-know global healthcare organisation, and this will extend the global access to our coding adventures even further!

### 4. Tell us a bit about your background?

Well, during my 25 year career in technology consultancy, I realised my real superpower is taking complex concepts and making them fun, engaging and accessible to everyone in the room. When I've developed teams, and taught project member and end users about technology, I do this in a way that makes the content accessible to all, and so they can go on and use their new found skills to develop creative solutions in their own specialised areas. My own areas of expertise have ranged from programming and integrating systems, to teaching high level enterprise architecture and strategy. And at the same time I've also been the primary carer for my two children. They are now teenagers, and both now have autism diagnoses, so I have a keen personal interest in inclusivity from a neurodiversity perspective as well.

### 5. What was the lightbulb moment for you to leave your senior IT role and pivot into education?

As my children went through their primary school years, I was observing how children and teachers needed more support from those in the tech world. I've seen there's a need for this

support in education through my own children's schools - there are some wonderful 'tech able' teachers out there, but there are many more who are intimidated by technology and would love more support. So that's what we've done at Get with the Program – following my own experience in the wider IT world, we've taken the complex concepts and made them fun, engaging and accessible to everyone in the room - even if some of them are only five years old!

We know there are plenty of people out there who are keen to help improve diversity in the tech world and encourage children from a wider range of backgrounds. My original goal was always to find ways to help them action their support – walk the talk if you like- and make it easier for supporters to really do something.

## 5. How have businesses responded to the initiative?

We've been delighted that they've recognised the importance of the role they play in supporting early education and grass roots coding - and the fact that this will be vital in creating the workforce they need. They realise that a tech event for a 7 year old can inspire that child to pursue a computer science GCSE and ultimately become a 21 year old with an aspiring career in FinTech, who wants to work for their company.

But this is not only about the individual employee, it's about making a paradigm shift, encouraging those around them, diversifying the classroom, and creating an environment in which they can all learn more successfully. If we want to have more diversity and more diverse thinkers in our companies, both in the workforce and the boardroom, we need to encourage more grass roots diversity, and give those without tech role models in their home lives, a route to finding them.

This is a great opportunity to get involved - we need more businesses and individuals to step up and help with funding, more companies to take the first step to support organisations like ours, and help us inspire all students to see themselves as the tech innovators of the future.

## 6. How can people get involved?

How can they walk the talk with Get with the Program? Honestly, it's easy. Initially we need more funding to pay for the schools already interested and engaged in what we do, but who can't afford to fund our events right now. Anyone listening who is ready to walk the talk - the simplest and most effective thing you can do when you stop listening to this podcast is to go to our link, [www.getwiththeprogram.org.uk/walkthetalk](http://www.getwiththeprogram.org.uk/walkthetalk), where you can find out more and decide to pay £360 for a coding adventure for a school who needs more diverse tech role models for their students. We already have a list of interested schools we know have this need, and we can quickly link your donation to them.

The next step to walk the talk would be to get involved yourself with a school local to you, perhaps one which you have a connection to, and help co-ordinate a coding adventure there. We need support getting the schools ready for their adventures, as some gentle guidance about the activities is often needed initially, and it would really help to have someone on the ground on the day too. We're happy to give the training, and if it's local to us, we may be able to join you too! We would also love to get your organisation on board with our inclusive adventures - that could be through funding within the women in tech groups, support for ethnically diverse groups or through other CSR initiatives to simply inspire children with more diverse interests that technology might actually be for them. Some businesses pay for a series of schools to run the coding adventures – some chose 1 some chose 10!

The third step for some organisations is to become sole or co sponsors to develop a newly filmed coding adventure - we're currently writing an adventure using a healthy eating theme with the help of a global corporate. This sort of commitment costs in the region of 40 - 50 thousand pounds, and can make an enormous difference to young people's career aspirations and goals. We want more girls to see themselves within the tech world, and we need to make sure representative for less well-represented groups is normalised from a young age - our coding adventures range from 5-9 years, and our new initiatives are from 9-14. My commitment is to give 100,000 more girls access to inspirational inclusive tech events through Nadia's walk the talk initiative - are you able to help contribute to our goal?

So, in summary, how can people get involved and walk the talk with Get with the Program?

**Firstly – sponsor a coding adventure in a school in need**

**Secondly – volunteer to help co-ordinate a coding adventure at a school near you**

**Thirdly – explore the possibility of your organisation sponsoring a series of coding adventures in schools, or co-sponsor the creation of a brand new one!**

**'Professor' Trice | Founder and Chief Coding Adventurer**

Get with the Program | [www.getwiththeprogram.org.uk](http://www.getwiththeprogram.org.uk)