

Transcript for Podcast 3 (Part 2 of 2)

Speaking Out: Human Trafficking Survivors and Individuals with Disabilities Discuss their Lived Experience and Interaction with Services

MARGARET POTKAY: We would like to advise our listeners that this podcast discusses topics that include human trafficking, sexual assault, and domestic violence. Though we do not discuss graphic details, listener discretion is advised.

Greetings and welcome to the Trafficking of Youth with Disabilities Education and Outreach Project podcast. Thank you for joining us. The purpose of this podcast is to raise awareness about the reality of trafficking of youth with disabilities. We talk about what trafficking is, risk factors for youth with disabilities, and how providers and the disability community can support survivors.

This podcast was produced and organized by the International Organization for Adolescents and the National Human Trafficking and Disabilities Working Group. I am your host, Margaret Potkay, project consultant with IOFA.

Welcome to part two of our podcast, titled, "Speaking Out: Human Trafficking Survivors and Individuals with Disabilities Discuss their Lived Experience and Interaction with Services." Today, we are speaking with TJ, with the goal of raising awareness for anti-trafficking providers and youth-serving organizations on becoming disability aware and inclusive in their services. We are grateful to the individuals who have agreed to share their work and lived experiences as people with disabilities. Their valuable information comes from years of personal and professional experiences working on issues facing the disability community.

We know that youth with disabilities are trafficked in every part of the United States. As we identify survivors of trafficking with disabilities, it is important that the services they receive are trauma-informed and accessible.

The purpose of the interview is to bring awareness to social services providers who may come into contact with youth trafficking survivors with disabilities and to learn more about how programs and services for trafficked youth can improve their work to be inclusive to youth survivors with disabilities. This information could benefit all youth service providers so that their services are inclusive and welcoming to all youth.

So today, on our episode, thank you for joining us so much. We have TJ, a self-advocate on the line. Love to get to know you

better. TJ, can you introduce yourself to our audience, whatever you are comfortable with?

TJ GORDON: Sure thing, Margaret. I'll definitely do that. Hello everyone, my name is TJ Gordon from Chicago, Illinois. My pronouns are he/his pronouns and I am a researcher at University of Illinois at Chicago. And I am also a autistic self-advocate and writer, and one of the co-founders of Chicagoland Disabled People of Color Coalition, or Chicagoland DPOCC. So I am a man of many acts.

MARGARET POTKAY: Yeah, very active in the community. That's great. I wanted to ask, is there any organizations or communities that you identify with further?

TJ GORDON: Yes. I identify with the autistic community. I identify with people of color in general, especially the African American community and the whole African diaspora. Because I have auditory processing disorder, I also could identify with people who are hard of hearing or deaf. And I also ally with the LGBT+ community, too.

MARGARET POTKAY: And for anyone that might be listening, would you mind describing or defining autism for anyone that might not know about autism?

TJ GORDON: Yes. Autism is a developmental disability that affects not only how you process certain information or senses, but also affects how you interact with people as well. It can range from some people who use a communication device to express themselves, to people who use their voices but may not be good at certain situations, like interacting with peers. So it is like a spectrum of disabilities.

MARGARET POTKAY: OK. Well, thank you. Thank you for sharing and letting our audience know a little bit about your background and who you are.

And I wanted to ask, from your perspective, if you could share, what are some barriers that providers and organizations may unintentionally create to best respond to and meet the needs of people with disabilities?

TJ GORDON: Sure. I think one of the barriers that people with disabilities face when trying to receive services from either providers or organizations such as independent living centers is the location, sheer location. Because in some places, you have to go to more affluent areas to get the services because there may not be any quality services available in underserved communities.

MARGARET POTKAY: OK. So literally a physical place to go that there is not accessibility in less developed areas.

TJ GORDON: Yes.

MARGARET POTKAY: And then, in terms of any access that you have had, if you've been to an organization or a provider. When you have reached that location, is there anything, once you are there, even in these areas, after going through the trouble of getting to the location. Is there anything that you would say that you've experienced, or from your perspective, that providers may have done differently to meet the needs of people with disabilities?

TJ GORDON: Sure. I have a wide range of experiences. In some places, they literally ask me how my disability affects my daily life. And once they get that information, they will either put me in touch with somebody that could help me more if they are not able to help, or they would provide with the resources that I need.

But on the other hand, in other places, I was able to get the resource that I need because people did not perceive me to be disabled because I appear able-bodied, even though I have many barriers because of my disability.

MARGARET POTKAY: So there may be an assumption that providers or organizations may have that creates a barrier in your experience.

TJ GORDON: Yes.

MARGARET POTKAY: And so, from your work and from your experiences, what suggestions or recommendations would you give to youth service providers and organizations on how to become more disability aware and inclusive, to think about these things and not to have these kinds of prejudices.

TJ GORDON: That's a very good question. I wish I could give an answer from the textbooks, if I can say. But my personal advice to you providers, is, listen to the youth with the disability. They will tell you all that you need to know.

And also listen to the parents as well, for support, or in case, the parents-- or the family members, I should say-- of the youth with the disability may need others to advocate for that person. I think it's all about listening to people first instead of making assumptions.

MARGARET POTKAY: Yeah, that's wonderful. That's a great piece of advice. Thank you. And when we talk about disability aware or inclusive, what does that look like? What is a disability-inclusive organization?

TJ GORDON: Usually, disability aware organizations-- you have places that are accessible to people with disabilities. It is not just ramps and elevators, but also providing services as language

interpretation, especially sign language. Or if you need a break, he go to a visiting room. It's more to do with making the experience comfortable for the person, even beyond the ADA. And also recognizing that all differences, I mean all perspectives of the disability community is different. So a good organization would listen to many perspectives.

MARGARET POTKAY: Yeah, and I think you bring up a really important, very clear aspect of this conversation about accessibility, is the fact that accessibility goes beyond just a physical disability. Like you said, it can be with support for language barriers, speech accessibility, to understand the wider range of what accessibility is, really.

And tell me, what are some tips for providers and organizations as they start their journey to become more disability aware and inclusive? So if an organization or a medical professional or someone who says, we really want to start providing and becoming a disability aware organization, how would you give them some tips?

TJ GORDON: A particular tip I would give those organizations or especially medical providers, I will give them literature on self-advocates explaining what inclusion will look like for those organizations. And I could also give just general information on what inclusion of disabled people or people with disabilities will

look like. I think we can start there. And organization can also do case studies or look at organizations that are already inclusive.

MARGARET POTKAY: OK, great. So those are all wonderful suggestions. Looking at case studies and then seeing other organizations who are already inclusive, and trying to mirror or learn what is working for them and perhaps trying to adapt that into the organization that is trying to learn.

And you did mention literature, so I wanted to take the moment to just mention a few books that have come out that are super, super helpful resources. The first, if anyone is interested, the first, by Lydia Brown and the Autism Women's Network. It is called All the Weight of Our Dreams: on Living Racialized Autism. And this is a collection, an anthology of essays from the autism and African American communities.

And then we also have Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century. And this is by Alice Wong. This just came out in June 2020. And that's a collection of personal stories.

And the last is actually a blog. It's called the Harriet Tubman Collective. It is on Tumblr, and it features posts on disability and racial justice from an African American experience. So I did just want to mention those books, those pieces of literature that can be very helpful if anyone wants to learn a little bit more.

And then there are also resources to help learn about disability services that can help with disability inclusion and accessibility, and those are Centers for Independent Living. You can go online, Google it, and you can find the national directory to find a local Center of Independent Living.

And also the ADA National Network. So you can also find online, a directory for where there is a regional ADA center serving your area. So it's a great place to learn about being ADA compliant and accessible.

So I just wanted to add those couple resources and I'll turn back and ask you, in addition, if you have any suggestions for where one might go for even more information, if there's anything you wanted to add.

TJ GORDON: If they follow social media and type in, I don't know, disabled advocates or disabled advocates or something to that effect, you could follow self-advocates' and activists' accounts to get more information on what's going on in the disability community, and their insights on how to be inclusive in your organization. You could also go to their blogs and they're even writing books and articles from newspapers that you could refer to, also.

MARGARET POTKAY: That's a great suggestion. I think today, with social media, and we have so much access into people

sharing about their experience, that is a great place to go for a very firsthand understanding. And that's a great way to listen, is to get out there and access what people are sharing. So thank you for that.

TJ GORDON: No problem.

MARGARET POTKAY: And tell me, TJ. I mean, we covered a little bit about some barriers, some insight into how an organization can become more disability-inclusive. Is there anything that you would like to share that we haven't discussed yet. This can be for youth, for the disability community, for anti-trafficking providers, or an experience that you'd like to share with the listeners today.

TJ GORDON: I would definitely do so. And I'm glad you made an anti-trafficking, especially the sexual experience of people with disabilities, mainly adults with disabilities, of course. I think we got to let people know, and organizations know that one, disabled people have access to sexuality and access to that information.

And we need to give information on what human trafficking looks like and what they can do if they find themselves in that situation, and how people can help. And again, just like any other service, listen to the stories of people with disabilities. It helps a lot. And that's all I have.

MARGARET POTKAY: Thank you again for sharing your experience and your insight with our listeners today. We hope that we can bridge that gap and kind of start speaking more about these barriers, about the things that we, as a society, may neglect to discuss or bring to the table. And this is our hope-- that with this podcast and with the help of contributors and advocates like yourself-- that we can spark a conversation and continue moving forward in a place that we will have a more inclusive and educated society. So thank you, thank you for joining us. We really appreciate your time on the podcast today.

TJ GORDON: No problem. Thank you for bringing me on board

MARGARET POTKAY: We are very grateful. So thank you and have a beautiful day

TJ GORDON: You too.

MARGARET POTKAY: Thank you for listening to our podcast. If you have questions and would like to contact us, please email us at info@iofa.org. You can learn more about IOFA and contact us at our website, www.iofa.org. You can learn more about the National Human Trafficking and Disabilities Working Group, NHTDWG, at <http://iofa.org/national-trafficking-disabilities-working-group>, and find additional resources on the intersection of human trafficking and youth with disabilities.

If you are concerned that someone you care about is at risk of, or being trafficked, you can get help at the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888-373-7888, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Text 233-733 or live chat with an advocate at their website, <https://humantraffickinghotline.org>.

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