

Alice Pan & The YLI Pt. 1 | Discover Stories Episode 79

Announcement 00:08

The Strong Sessions are back. The Vancouver Adapted Music Society's Flagship Event celebrates musicians with disabilities, featuring performances from four talented artists and bands from our community. Join us on August 25 at the Roundhouse Community Center from 5pm to 8pm. Tickets are by donation. For more information, visit the Vancouver Adapted Music Society on Facebook, @vamsociety on Instagram, or on our website, www.vams.org We hope to see you there.

Tanya Griffiths 00:43

Hello and thank you for tuning into Discover Stories on Reimagined Radio. My name is Tanya, your host and a student intern with VAMS while completing my Social Justice Practicum. Today, I have the gift of talking with Alice Pan. As a project coordinator for the Youth Leadership Initiative, Alice leads a transformative national project supporting young individuals with disabilities in their employment journeys. In her leisure time, she enjoys exploring different cultures and histories through travel, embracing the diversity and richness of global cultures. She strives to bring this holistic perspective to her professional pursuits, weaving empathy and a commitment to inclusivity into every endeavor. Alice currently serves as a Project Management Coordinator in hopes of making a more lasting impact on a community through various initiatives. Hi Alice. Thank you for joining us today.

Alice Pan 01:39

Hi Tanya, thanks for having me here.

Tanya Griffiths 01:42

How are you?

Alice Pan 01:43

Very good and yourself?

Tanya Griffiths 01:46

I'm doing very well. Thank you. I'm so excited for our conversation today, because I think it's something that many people can benefit from and learn from, and also look more into.

Alice Pan 01:59

Yeah, for sure. I'm just hoping to bring, yeah, what I have learned throughout in the past, like three years to to all the listeners.

Tanya Griffiths 02:10

Yes, yes. Like condensing three years worth of research and work into however long this podcast episode will be, um, but yeah, let's, let's begin. Can you start by sharing your story from studying commerce at UBC to becoming involved in the nonprofit sector?

Alice Pan 02:31

Sure. Um, so when I was in school, I started to get involved with school clubs and through getting involved in the school clubs, I got to know individuals from different nonprofit organizations, including the local and international organizations like World Vision. And just coincidentally, I volunteered for both organization and they also had some initiatives, either serving the youth community or having some leadership training as well, so that just all those experience has really ignited my interest in in supporting the youth community. So that's how everything started. Yeah, and this was all at UBC? Yes, it was.

Tanya Griffiths 03:31

When you graduated from UBC, it was the nonprofit sector, the place that you went straight to? Or how was that like?

Alice Pan 03:42

Actually, no, I think in my last year of study, I started to notice some vision loss. So for the longest time, I do see an ophthalmologist from time to time, but it was that year that I realized Yes, there were some difference in my vision and yes, and also the doctor confirmed that, yes, you do have some vision loss. So that really, that did have a big impact on me, because it was my last year at school, and I start to think I have to think about my career. Back then, I didn't know anything about workplace accommodation or just I just somehow, I don't know why just seeking help wasn't an option for me. I didn't think about if I should go to the accessibility office to ask for help — that didn't come, come to my mind. So I was thinking, "Okay, what should I do after I graduated?" So then I said, "Okay, I guess self employed is my only option. That's the only option that, that allows me to have like,

flexibility, if my timetable, if I need to visit doctors, or just, yeah, just have more control in my own time, in my own time and life.” So then I ran my business for a couple of years. The career that I picked it's, it required me to do a lot of travel, like back and forth Canada to Asia. I really love that job. However, it was very draining, either physically or mentally, and I have to deal with all the time differences. I I do feel like, although I find, I find it rewarding to in my work at the same time I do, I did notice that my health and also my vision has, like further deteriorated in in the next couple of years. Yep. So then, I think it was after a couple of years later, I start to notice further vision loss that I could no longer, like handle my job with all the traveling and in my earlier career life, I masked my vision loss. I didn't use any cane. I didn't let anybody know that I have vision loss. Back then, I could still like fake it, but until a point that I could no longer fake it, I could no longer handle my job. I flew back to Canada, I start to, just to rethink what my career should be, what I could do. So like, I think at that point, it hit me really hard that, “Oh, what should I do next?” And, yeah, it was, well, a while back ago.

Tanya Griffiths 07:06

Yeah, yeah. I can imagine, like, also how you were sharing, I was like, seeing this younger version of you trying to make work work for you, and only believing that self employment was the way to go, which is a narrative that many folks with differing disabilities have also adopted, this belief that, oh, my my needs are too much or no workplace will accommodate my needs, therefore self employment is the way to go, and it's actually one of the topics that I go into with another guest at our podcast called Margaux. But yeah, it's so interesting, and coming up to a point where even the self employment isn't even serving you, because, as you said, like it deteriorated, like your health also deteriorated too, because you weren't also, perhaps getting the support that you need, and having not come to terms yet with the vision loss, I'm also sounds like it prevented it actually getting the help that It needed. So while you were talking about that, how did you come to terms with it? Was it the fact that it had just gone to a place where it deteriorated even more? Or how did you come to accept your visual impairment?

Alice Pan 08:36

Yeah, so when I when I was back to Canada, because at that time, my vision loss has deteriorated to the point that I could no longer use the computer purely with my vision. So it was such a big impact on me, I feel like, “Okay, I am, I'm incompetent in doing anything, basically without my computer, what can I do with it?” And I was glad that back then, I was involved with an organization called CNIB. They mainly provide programs and services for people with vision loss. So, so at that time I, I was reached out by one of the program

coordinators, and she suggested me that, “Oh, maybe I should join their peer support group and see, yeah, how things go.” And back then I was, okay, sure, I'll go for it, since I don't know what, what else to do anyway. So I think I just appreciate that opportunity, because for the next year, basically, I attended their bi-weekly workshop. Just went there, and they have different topics. Mainly it's around the topic of coping with vision loss. Like it, it teaches me and, and I think just there are a lot of technical and hard skills that I learned, but I think the most important thing is that it gives me the time to really accept the fact that, okay, this is the reality, then what I should do next? And, and then I just appreciate this opportunity. It also allows me to to get to know a lot of people in the group, like people with, who are also going through this coping journey. And I think this peer support, it's like one of the main reasons, like helping me coping with the vision loss. And I think in addition to that, the space, it's also important. What I'm what I meant is that, um, my family and friends have been giving me space, yeah, and just allow me to immerse, either immerse in the emotion, like if I have in a having grieving, they just let me be. Yeah, and I especially appreciate my friend's support. Um, they they notice that, yes, there is some difference in Alice. And I start—like I stopped driving, I start to need help. Whenever we go out, we hang out, and whenever I reach out for help, they would never say no, and they never asked, and they never asked them, “Oh, what happened to you, Alice?” Like they just give me the space, and until the moment that I am—I feel comfortable sharing my journey, and they reveal to me that, “Yes, Alice, we have been worried about you, but for the longest time we we didn't want to ask you because we didn't—we just want to give you enough time and space. So for that, I really appreciate that. So I think for me, time, space and peer support are the biggest reasons like and also biggest support for me to to go through this coping journey. Oh, beautifully said, and I really agree that time and space and support from community are so healing. They're all healing, and they're so important to get to a place where you feel more accepting of where you are, and yeah, receiving that support from others too. And this actually brings—and I definitely see how this all comes together, too in your work with the Youth Initiative Research Project. So because you were the program coordinator for the Youth Initiative Research Project at Disability Foundation, I'd love to hear more about it. It focuses on building confidence, attitudinal barriers, and employment for youth with disabilities. I would love to hear about the three phases included, if you can talk about each phase and the interesting findings that you and your team have uncovered. For sure. Yeah, when I first heard about this job opportunity, I I was so excited, because the goal of the of this initiative, like deeply resonates with me, because I was also once youth with disability who who was like, who was lost in my career path. So for for this Youth Leadership Initiative is national initiative aiming to identify and overcome employment barriers that post secondary youth with disabilities are facing, and we are also aiming to to come up with solutions. And like I said, it's a three phased project,

and our target age group is young Canadians living with disabilities between the age of 17 to 29 we we identify this age group as our target target group. It's because we, after some research, we find that just research around this age group has been under explored, especially the attitudinal barriers that we are looking into and post secondary can be a very broad age group, and we identify that youth up to age 29 it's because we just threw out our literature review. We find that there are young people who went through post secondary education yet they weren't able to to find to get a job or secure a job. So what we feel like just halving our research including youth between age 17 to 29 would work for our project. And this three phases include research, um, second is to brainstorm, and three is the solution. And what we said, the first phase is the research part. So we did our research through survey and also focus group. End up we have a total of 450 young Canadians across the country responded to our survey. And in our research, we first, so first of all, we focused on the attitude, you know, barriers. So that includes self confidence, perception of discrimination, and also performance expectation. What we meant by performance expectation, it's it's a concept that relates to one's ability to evaluate the performance compared to the job requirement. And for the purpose of this study, we assess this by looking into if if an individual felt like they need more hours to perform a job task compared to a person without disability. So there's one question in the survey. In the survey, we asked if you felt like you need more hours to perform a job task, and yes the answer is certain that yes, they do need more hours. And in addition to these attitudinal barriers, throughout our literature review, we also find that some research suggested that some vocational training or transitional programs also help people to gain employment. That's why we felt okay. Maybe we should look into that and see if it's true. So we also include that into our research and and I think back, I think around summer 2022 we released our research report, and there are four main barriers that that we identify. One, low self confidence, two, perceived discrimination, three, lack of workplace accessibility and four, hesitation in disability disclosure. So I think out of these four, this low self confidence is more — it's it's very predominant within the study, like in both quantitative of qualitative study as well. So we think that this will be one of the major barriers that we really should tackle, and out of others as well. And just throughout this research, there are two interesting findings that we find. One, the perception of discrimination. There are a lot of young individuals indicated that they weren't sure if they were being discriminated because sometimes it's it was subtle or so, but however, what they noticed is that some individuals indicated that they did disclose their disability, to to their employers, to the prospective employers, and end result is that they didn't get a job. They didn't get the reason why, but that that was the end result. So from that, we can see that, yes, discrimination sometimes hard. It's hard to notice, and it also like the implicit bias that we might have and and there's another surprising finding is that the performance expectation part so in our hypothesis,

we we just think that if there is a high performance expectation, it's less likely that youth can find a job, meaning that if they fail, if a young individuals felt like that they need more hours to perform a job task is unlikely. It's less likely that they are they are able to obtain employment. The result is vice versa. Is totally opposite. It's not a barrier to employment or it means that the young people who we talk to, they indicated that, yes, they are willing to work longer hours. They knew it might be a fact, however, they are willing to do so. So. So it means that this longer hours is not a barrier. And so we think that there are a lot of young individuals who have passion, who have the skill set they are willing to work, maybe stay longer to get their job completed. However, there might be not as many opportunities for them as we hope so. Yeah, these are the two, two interesting findings that we find in our first phase of the project.

Tanya Griffiths 21:12

Wow, wow. Yeah, that that's definitely very eye opening, for sure. And also looking at, for example, the the the issues that are happening, not just at the personal level, so the internalization of what having a disability means, but also it being systemic as well, such as as you were sharing, like disclosing that you have a disability and then being met with not being accepted for the job and not also hearing the reasons why, because maybe it doesn't have to do with the disability, but not having a reason cannot clarify that. So yeah, that really is interesting. And did you say this is just the first phase?

Alice Pan 22:03

Yes, that's right.

Announcement 22:07

This podcast is brought to you by the Vancouver Adapted Music Society. Since 1988, VAMS has been supporting and promoting musicians with disabilities in Metro Vancouver through various programs including music lessons, recording projects and live performance opportunities. To learn more about us, visit our website at www.vams.org, @vamsociety on Instagram, the Vancouver Adapted Music Society on Facebook, or email us at info@vams.org. Thanks for listening.