

Alice Pan & The YLI Pt. 2 | Discover Stories Episode 80

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.

Alice Pan 00:42

So with all these findings in mind, we move on to our second phase. In our second phase, we form a voluntary nationwide Advisory Committee. It comprises of youth with disabilities, academic professionals who specializes in Disability Studies, vocational trainer and also staff members from university accessibility office, so we can recomprise of all these professionals coming together, look into all these research findings and try to brainstorm solutions for for, for all those barriers. So it took us six months to really go deep into these barriers and try to brainstorm with a lot of solutions. And the conversation had had to be very eye opening. There are a lot of things that we have thought about and and just for that, it really helped us to move on to phase three, which is to compile all these recommendations and solution in the form of toolkit. We call it YLI Toolkit. It's, it's um, rather than, it's just like a one piece of paper of toolkit — it's an online resource hub that contains a lot of resources and solutions helping youth navigate all these employment barriers. And we released this toolkit last summer.

Tanya Griffiths 02:21

Wow, and is the toolkit constantly being evolved or how, how is it right now?

Alice Pan 02:30

Yes. So this is, we constantly keep this toolkit updated with information. So how we structure this toolkit is based on all these barriers that we identify, we have come up with the recommendations and resources for each barrier. For example, there is a, there's a section tackling low self confidence and and also dealing with work stress, which is the high performance expectation part. Like, because we felt like, although performance

expectation is not identified as barrier in our research, we find that, yes, work stress does exist, and it does bother some young people as well. So that's why we want to include some resources for work stress management as well. And of course, there's a discrimination, disability disclosure part. And last but not least is the increasing workplace accessibility. So with all those category in mind, we have come up with different resources, for example, for self confidence part, we have included a lot of self-help tools in helping young people to to to boost their self confidence, how to reframe their mindset in looking at disability, or don't let disability be the sole identity. So these are a lot of self-help tools, and also they are and just within the self the self-confidence discussion, we find that social learning can really help increase one's self confidence. So for that, we have included a lot of organizations that runs leisure activities for young individuals. So we have include a list of organization that do that, and most importantly, all our resources are nationwide. So we want to make sure that with like anyone, regardless from which province, they come to our toolkit, they will be able to find some local resources that they need.

Tanya Griffiths 05:03

Yeah, yeah. It sounds like the toolkit just composes of all these actionable steps and resources that people can benefit from and can learn more about, whether it's about the low self confidence or being able to socialize and being in these specific settings, anybody can really benefit from it, especially within these attitudinal barriers. And I'm wondering, how does this toolkit also help folks advocate for themselves?

Alice Pan 05:41

That's a great question. I think throughout our conversation, when we talked about discrimination, we have been thinking how and also, I think the disability disclosure part as well, they're all like interrelated we think we have been thinking, how can we help our young individuals to advocate for themselves? But in terms of the disability disclosure, we do have guides that guiding young adults to go through, okay, when they should disclosure, like, what are the determining factors they should consider before they choose, because I think disclosing their disability is a personal choice. But then we have some guiding questions that help them guide through this conversation, like when they should disclose it, how they should disclose it. And I think in the in this toolkit, the communication is one of the big themes. So we, we, we just, we strongly believe that having a mutual understanding and communication is important. So throughout this toolkit, we have a lot of relevant resources in just guiding young adults how to just, how to carry on this conversation, especially this is a difficult one, how they should do it, and how to do it and just, and also have the mutual respect and understanding in mind that's important. And in terms of the

next step, okay, if they are, especially if they are wondering if they are being discriminated for that we have been thinking about, yes, we do have, like provincial and also federal wise, we have human rights. We have a lot of accessibility acts which protect the rights of people, including those living with disabilities. I think those, those are good resources. However, oftentimes all these legislations might be, might not be accessible to everyone, especially those maybe living with learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities. So for that, we have a section called, “Know Your Rights” in the toolkit. Basically, we have summarized all the federal and provincial legislation that protects the rights of people with disabilities. We have summarized all these legislation in in plain language. So hoping, hoping that is more accessible to to people with different abilities, we will use plain language to summarize, especially the sections that that talks about employment and also protecting the rights of people with disabilities. So it's in a very short paragraph with point forms. So we try to make all these resources as accessible as possible for people with different abilities. So I think having we are just hoping that having all these summarized legislation in hand, young individuals will be able to advocate for themselves, at least they have the resources, they understand what rights are protecting themselves, and from there they can, like, start the conversation and advocate for themselves.

Tanya Griffiths 09:23

Yeah, which is so important. It's so important to know everybody's rights in the workplace, because if we don't know, then how can we stand up for ourselves or advocate for ourselves in the way you do it in such an accessible manner. I know it's pretty life changing, I can imagine for many youth, and also beyond that, just many folks, too, across Canada. And for those that are tuning in, I will make sure to include the links so that anybody can access this Toolkit. It's, it's free and it's accessible all across Canada, so you can also look into it in your own time.

Alice Pan 10:09

Exactly. We hope that this, YLI Toolkit, is a one stop database for everyone, I think not just limited to young people, I think a lot of resources are, can be applicable to people just in working age group and just basically anyone living with disabilities who are looking for who are looking for work, especially meaningful employment that we always emphasize.

Tanya Griffiths 10:40

Of course, yeah, meaningful employment. And currently, the YLI is on pause because you're waiting for funding. If or when funding comes through, I'm curious what you want the next steps to be.

Alice Pan 10:56

For myself? Oh, I think I would like further research, and from especially, from the employer perspective. Yes, like last year, I attended local job fairs on behalf of the YLI project, and also get to speak to some local employers, especially those running small businesses. So I let them know my my my project, introduce my project, and I talk, I let them know that our ultimate goal is to supporting youth with disabilities to find meaningful employment. And one of them, they had like a first, first, like reaction that, oh, our office space is too small. We can't accommodate wheelchair users, and that kind of like, shut down the conversation. And that really let me think like to just to further to think about there is indeed a long way for us to go in terms of advocacy or just raising awareness about accommodations, or just in general, what disability is about. Because for a lot of people, whenever they think of disability, all they can think about is people as wheelchair users. They didn't think about disabilities come in different forms, and everyone can have unique experience and needs. And I feel like this is the part that we can further do research and to just to understand what the barriers are for employers, like what barriers hindering employers hiring people with disabilities, what their concerns are, and just I think it has to be go both way. Now we have the perspective from the young people. Now the next step, how about the employers? How we can support them to let them understand the benefit of hiring people with disabilities, if they have any barriers hindering them, we want to help them remove them as well. So I think further research in that would be, would be interesting. I would love to see that.

Tanya Griffiths 13:33

Oh, that's such a great take. I love that. I love that you're now, you're looking beyond that — sorry, you're looking beyond the employees, you're going into the employers and the barriers, as you put it, I yeah, I think you spoke so well to the all the issues and the stereotypes that exist within the workplace, and how we still have a long way to go when it comes to that. And I'm wondering, how can individuals and organizations get involved in supporting the Disability Foundation's initiatives?

Alice Pan 14:07

Yeah, although the project is currently on hold, we are still constantly updating the YLI Toolkit. So for organizations, I would encourage them to reach out to us if they have any information or resources that might be helpful for job seekers. We have, we have good relationships with a lot of community partners, for example, accessible employers, which they are known as president's group. They have a lot of great resources for employers, and we do include a lot of them into our toolkit. We do link a lot of those in our toolkit, and so we welcome like this form of partnership or collaborations. And and also, and in terms of individuals, I would encourage if they, if they live with a disability, I would encourage them to utilize our resources, use it, provide us, give our feedback. If they are interested, volunteer with us, and we also encourage employers to utilize our resources. One thing I should mention that in our toolkit, we have two main sections for each topic. We have the youth perspective and also the employer perspective. So so we intentionally make this toolkit to to have two sections. So I think regardless of youth who are looking for a job or employers who are looking for ways to accommodate their employees living with disabilities, they can also come to our toolkit. There will be some resources for them, for employers, if they are looking for some funding to get assistive equipment. Yes, we do have resources for that. We do have contacts for that. So we encourage everybody to visit our toolkit and use all the resources.

Tanya Griffiths 16:23

Wonderful, wonderful. Well. Thank you so much, Alice for for sharing all of your work so far and condensing all of those years into these 40 minutes. I'm sure many people already like benefit benefiting from this. And I was wondering if you had any last words before we end.

Alice Pan 16:47

Yes, we, I do. I think, so, right now we do have our own YLI Tiktok channel running. It's YLI_2023. Yeah, come join us if, if you have Tiktok account. In this project, other than research initiative, we want to build a community of support. That's why Tiktok is one of our communities that we are building up and within our Tiktok channel, we have put together a lot of resources, a lot of career tips and also some disability story and just in hopes of supporting young job seekers who are struggling in looking for work. So yeah, come, come see us on TikTok.

Tanya Griffiths 17:46

Amazing, I'll make sure to link that as well. But yes, thank you so much, Alice, for your time and your wisdom and for coming here and sharing with us today. I'm so appreciative of this and yeah, thank you.

Alice Pan 18:01

Thanks again for having me here.

Tanya Griffiths 18:03

Wonderful. Bye!

Announcement 18:09

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.