

Youth Leadership Initiative | Discover Stories Ep.54

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Noah Stolte 0:49

Welcome to the VAMS Re-Imagine Radio podcast. I'm your host, Noah Stolte and Bryden Veinot from VAMS is also here with me.

Bryden Veinot 1:00

Hello everyone.

Noah Stolte 1:00

Yeah, thanks, Bryden. And today, we are interviewing the folks from the Youth Leadership Initiative, and I'm sure they'll have lots of great things to say. We have Alice.

Alice Pan 1:15

Hi everyone. Hi Noah, hi Bryden.

Bryden Veinot 1:19

Hey, Alice.

Noah Stolte 1:20

Hello.

Alice Pan 1:20

Honoured to be here.

Bryden Veinot 1:22

Thanks for being here.

Noah Stolte 1:24

Yeah. We have Max.

Max Muratov 1:26

Hi everyone. Yep, thanks, thanks. It's great to be here.

Noah Stolte 1:29

Awesome. And we have Josh.

Josh Cabecinha-Alati 1:31

Hi everyone, yeah, what Max and Alice said, great to be on with you guys.

Noah Stolte 1:36

Awesome. Yeah, thanks for joining us. So right out the gate, I think a great thing to start with would just be an explanation of what the Youth Leadership Initiative is, or YLI, and I'm not sure who wants to take that question, but.

Alice Pan 1:50

Sure, I can take on that. Hi, my name is Alice, and I'm the project coordinator with YLI project. It's been two and a half years since I'm with this project, and what is the YLI? The Youth Leadership Initiative empowers youth with disabilities to identify, discuss and come up with solutions to attitudinal barriers faced by post-secondary. Youth with disabilities, because we find that even up till 2023 the unemployment and an underemployment rate of post-secondary youth with disabilities are still significantly higher than those without disabilities. So through this project, we are hoping to come up with solutions to help them overcome these barriers faced by them in the job seeking process. And the YLI project is run by a diverse youth, including those with disabilities. So this project is run for youth and by youth with disabilities too.

Bryden Veinot 3:02

Nice. Yeah, that's awesome. I mean, it's a pretty special, unique thing. I think I haven't really heard anything like it before. Alice, who came up with this idea for YLI and what circumstances led to, you know, realizing something like the YLI was necessary?

Alice Pan 3:21

So, um, the YLI project was inspired by another project run by our another affiliated society Connectra. So back in 2015 they had a research project bringing 250 people with disabilities, and also volunteer mentors coming together to set up career goals and to

guide them through to find meaningful employment. And towards the end of the research, only 31% of people secured employment. And during the research, they find that there are barriers that they are facing and the attitude barriers are the main, key challenges. So, for example, the self confidence, the perceived discrimination, or just the perception of nine to five structures are the key barriers. And this is how we originally came up with the idea. But I can let Max to speak about how he how he began all the literature review and such.

Noah Stolte 4:35

Okay, great.

Max Muratov 4:38

Yeah, sure. So the project initially started, I believe it was fall 2020, so I was hired as a co-op student back then, and the person who actually initiated the project was Ruby, the former Executive Director at the time. And yeah, as it was mentioned that it was sort of inspired by another project that was run, I believe by UBC actually at that point, and they sort of found that attitudinal barriers were important, but in that previous project, it wasn't quite clear sort of how they were affecting the youth.

Bryden Veinot 5:39

Like wasn't enough research at that point.

Max Muratov 5:41

Yes, and that's why a new project was needed. When I started as a co-op student, I sort of looked at the literature, sort of what was there and came up with, sort of a theory where you know, attitudinal barriers, like walls of confidence, or like low performance, expectation and things that you know affect employment chances of youth with disability. So those were the sort of circumstances, how the project started, and then I came up with survey questions, and the survey needed to be distributed and even marketed in a way, I guess. And that's when, I think Alice was the second person who got hired for the project. There was Serena and then, and then Josh joined us a bit later. So yeah, that's the context. Why, I suppose.

Noah Stolte 6:55

Okay, I actually have a question. You've been saying attitudinal barriers quite a bit. And I think it'd be awesome if one of you could maybe just kind of go into detail to describe, like, really what that means. You've said a little bit, but I think it would be great to hear, like, a full explanation of that concept.

Max Muratov 7:14

So by attitudinal barriers, we mean barriers that sort of, in a sense, prevent youth on a level of you could say consciousness or whatnot. So in particular, we looked at low self-confidence, meaning when a person just doesn't have enough confidence because of their disability, it another one was performance expectation that me, it means that a person with a disability thinks that they need to work a lot more than a person without a disability to either get the job or even to stay at the job.

Noah Stolte 7:59

Right, okay.

Max Muratov 8:02

And also, perceived discrimination is when the person feels like, well, they're essentially being discriminated upon, either during the hiring process, let's say like during any stage, like when they mentioned their disability or whatnot, or the job itself. So this was sort of the main aspects, I would say, that we focused on.

Bryden Veinot 8:35

Right. So it's like a lot of it is the attitude of the actual person who has the disability looking for maybe employment. But you could say it's also the employer themselves, they might have put up some kind of barrier as well, like, maybe without not even realizing they're doing it.

Max Muratov 8:55

Yeah.

Bryden Veinot 8:55

Okay.

Max Muratov 8:56

It is twofold, in a sense, yeah, you're right.

Bryden Veinot 8:58

Okay. But the focus is on the actual person looking to gain employment. And like, the structure as it is, kind of, isn't beneficial to people with disabilities all the time. Like you said, that nine to five structure isn't always the best, right? Sometimes people have to work harder just to feel like they can catch up when that doesn't necessarily have to be the case, right?

Max Muratov 9:24

That's right, yeah.

Bryden Veinot 9:27

So Max, you kind of mentioned how you got started with YLI. Maybe Josh, would you want to chime in and just say how you got involved and maybe, like, what leadership means to you. Maybe we can talk a little bit about leadership in general too.

Josh Cabecinha-Alati 9:45

Yeah, for sure. So as Max said, I kind of joined the project on the tail end of the process of actually gathering the information and doing those group questionnaires. Where we were getting this data from, and since then, we've kind of moved on to, like, creating this advisory committee to oversee the creation of the toolkit. And what really attracted me to this project was I had worked in municipal politics for about two years prior and I could really just kind of see this need and barrier for youth in general, in accessing employment, especially right out of like post-secondary institutions, universities and colleges. And then you kind of add that second barrier of being a youth with disability who needs accessibility, and it becomes this whole other like issue that kind of needs to be solved, and that really hasn't been taken into account before. So I was really kind of attracted to that idea of being able to help and and doing some research on the Disability Foundation and the YLI, their mission statement just really spoke to me. And the idea that they were not only kind of targeting youth who were seeking accessible employment, but also employers, was really something that I've never really seen before. So that's that's one of the things on the toolkit that I've been really excited to help out with was how it's been targeting employers as well who are looking to create more accessible work opportunities, and kind of marketing that as or showing it for like the positive that it is, not only in hiring youth who have disabilities, but just in creating a and fostering, like a healthier work environment.

Bryden Veinot 11:46

Wow yeah, maybe, yeah, that's fantastic. I didn't realize, Josh, that you were working in municipal politics before that, so you kind of have, like, a little insider info, a bit onto some of these things. Almost. Alice, yeah, how did you kind of get started with it? I don't know if we mentioned that earlier, but Ruby, having started it in 2020, you kind of took over at some point. So maybe what drew you to it and why you have kind of taken on this project?

Alice Pan 12:21

Yeah, I joined the YLI project because the mission really deeply resonates with me as I was also once a youth with a disability. So, I know how it like to struggle through all these challenges after I graduated and tried to look for work, but then I experienced my vision

loss when I was in my 20s, and at that time, I felt very inadequate and often like battled low self-confidence. Despite having some work experience, I still felt very incompetent, and it took me quite a while to overcome all these feelings. So when I discovered this YLI project, I can't wait to be part of this project, because I really, because going through those feelings myself over the years, I really emphasize the child with the challenges like faced by these young people with disability. So I want to contribute to creating solutions and trying to really create this inclusive society for everyone to really try to shift everyone's perception about hiring people with disability. And I think there are a lot of work that people have achieved so far, but there are also work to be done.

Bryden Veinot 13:58

Totally, yeah, which I guess goes towards the toolkit, right? This is something new that's going to be coming out. Whoever wants to answer this, but can you describe the function of the YLI toolkit and the process of creating it, and just, yeah, what it is, in general, I think it's a it's going to be a really cool thing for people to access.

Josh Cabecinha-Alati 14:24

I can kind of speak to that. So basically, all the data that was done before was courtesy of Max and Alice in the team prior to me joining. So I'm very thankful that all that groundwork was kind of laid for us already. From there, it's really been trying to kind of answer those needs that they've identified. And to do that, we've kind of looked at various like government resources, like videos posted online, and the toolkit is basically a compilation of all these different resources and tools that we've found to answer these questions. And the cool thing about the toolkit is that it's accessible via the Disability Foundation website, so the whole interface is fully accessible and meets the needs of anyone who may need certain accessibility options, and we also provide these summaries and key findings for the toolkit on each article website training as well. So it's a very like easy-to-skim-through site.

Alice Pan 15:40

Yeah. And one point I want to add on to that is all the resources that we gathered are based on the recommendations of the YLI Advisory Committee. And during this process, we had like multiple in-depth discussions to go over the findings that we identified in the research and trying to come up with solutions, and based on these recommendations, we are able to find the very, very valuable resources online that really tailored towards post-secondary youth with disabilities.

Noah Stolte 16:18

Nice, yeah, that's great. Can you maybe go into some detail, but like, what someone might find in the YLI toolkit? Like, what are some of the resources, just broadly that are that youth are able to access?

Alice Pan 16:32

I can speak about that. As mentioned the toolkit, it's mainly compiling like solutions to the attitudinal barriers that we have identified. So for example, there are low self-confidence, coping with stress in the workplace, asking for accommodation, disclosing their disability, dealing with discrimination. In addition to that, we also have gathered a lot of career tips that are really specific for youth with disabilities, and hopefully they have they can have more success in their career journey.

Noah Stolte 17:16

Okay, cool. So like, if there's something they need to talk to their employer about, you've kind of laid out how to approach that, what things to really like, make sure to say and what to emphasize is that kind of the idea.

Alice Pan 17:31

Exactly, and in addition to that, there will be a myth-busting component in the as well. So oftentimes, employers might have, for example, employers have misconceptions about, oh, providing workplace accommodation costs a lot of money, but in fact, it's not a lot of accommodations. In fact, it's free. For example, flexible hours or a longer break. And these are just flexibilities that employers can provide without any cost, and if the employees do need some accommodation, for example, and a screen reader, in fact, all our provincial governments have some kind of programs that can assist people with disabilities to acquire these assistive devices to help them in their employment and on our toolkit, we do also have these, a list of organizations that are able to assist people in acquiring the equipment they need. So, these are just a few examples that I listed, and there are more to be discovered in the toolkit.

Max Muratov 18:46

And I just wanted to point out that we also have resources for employers as well to sort of to try to assist maybe smaller organizations that maybe do not have as much knowledge about people with disabilities and youth with disabilities in particular, and sort of the goal is basically to help them and sort of expand their sort of horizons, say in terms of what it's like to work with a person with disabilities and how they perform as employees, and sort of this. Alice mentioned, there is this myth-busting element as well.

Bryden Veinot 19:38

Yeah, yeah, interesting. I know we kind of sent some questions just to prepare, but this is just something I thought of. Was there any like, data you collected during the research phase of this that was surprising, or something that stood out that you're like, "Oh, whoa. This is, this is something that maybe more people should know about," or something that, yeah, surprised you even.

Max Muratov 20:07

One surprising finding that we had was the theoretical expectation about the concept of performance expectation, the one I mentioned about when you think that you need to work more than a person without disability. So I expected that that's going to be a negative factor, meaning it's going to like decrease chances of someone getting a point, if you think about it too much. But apparently, it was the opposite, actually, the when a person thought that they need to work a lot more because of their disability, they were more likely to be hired than the person who did not think that.

Bryden Veinot 20:57

Interesting.

Max Muratov 20:59

I do not really have an exact explanation why we got this result, but one of the things that could be an explanation is that these people could have, like a sort of a work ethic that's sort of helps them to,

Bryden Veinot 21:27

like, be more desirable.

Max Muratov 21:28

Yeah, or like, navigate the job sort of.

Bryden Veinot 21:32

Yeah.

Max Muratov 21:33

Sort of fuel or whatever. So maybe that is why we got this result. But honestly, in the future, that would be interesting to look at further.

Bryden Veinot 21:48

Yeah, like maybe the employers realizes, "Oh, this person actually is willing to work harder than the next person." That's interesting.

Noah Stolte 21:56

I suppose then, but the danger is then you need to make sure the employer isn't taking advantage.

Bryden Veinot 22:03

Yeah, for sure.

Noah Stolte 22:03

And making the employee work more hours than like they should, yeah, so they might be so that's like, kind of the opposite problem then, is that you have to deal with, like, "Okay, make sure that you aren't being taken advantage of," place kind of then.

Bryden Veinot 22:18

It's weird though, like the actual attitudinal barrier ended up working in the favour of the person instead of against.

Max Muratov 22:27

Yes.

Bryden Veinot 22:28

That is wild. Yeah, yeah. Interesting.

Alice Pan 22:31

I think also that may, like, there is a possible explanation that the respondents might be more resilient, like they're more adaptive to the work environment. They are willing to work longer hours to get the things completed. However, at the same time, I think it's like, to your point, it's important to let employers know that don't take advantage over these and allow them to take longer breaks, take breaks in between. And it doesn't have to be straight that, okay, you can only take breaks between 12 to one, and that's about and they that might not work for everyone, right? This is the point that we want to bring out too.

Bryden Veinot 23:13

So that's all in the toolkit as well, like so instead of doing a nine to five, maybe it's a longer day, but with more time in between to rest or to have break and not feel like you are being overworked.

Alice Pan 23:26

Exactly, like there is one thing we want to emphasize, is that accommodation should be personalized. Everyone would have different needs, and it is important for employers to really attend to their individual needs in order to to let their employees to to really fully shine in in their workplace. Did that make sense?

Noah Stolte 23:52

Yeah, yeah. So are there some, like, tangible ways you've seen the work of this toolkit impact youth in the community. Like, have you any examples, maybe, of some feedback from people?

Alice Pan 24:08

Josh, would you like to take that?

Josh Cabecinha-Alati 24:11

Yeah, for sure. So as of yet, we haven't, like, we've just gone live with phase one. So we're hoping to get more feedback from youth. So we've actually incorporated a feedback option on the toolkit website where youth can kind of, or even employers can, kind of speak to what they found helpful and what they didn't. So at this time, it's more of an experimental phase, if you will, where we're kind of trying to perfect what we have, and trying to more, not individualize it, but make it more accessible for a larger audience as well. So we've, we're in the fine tuning process. We've also kind of created different avenues of marketing for the toolkit that we're hoping will kind of reach out to larger audiences, like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok as well. So it's our hope that they'll really use the feedback feature and kind of give us more constructive things to work on in the future.

Bryden Veinot 25:15

Yeah, you just mentioned those different ways to get connected. This is a perfect chance to plug that. How can they how can people find these channels? Like, what are the names? How can they locate them?

Josh Cabecinha-Alati 25:33

Yeah, so right now, we're on TikTok and Instagram. Instagram, we're under the Disability Foundation. So if you want to go to Instagram and search that Facebook as well, on Tiktok, we have our own personalized channel, and I believe the handle for that would be YLI_2023, and we make new videos every week. And we've also kind of been incorporating some resources from the toolkit into our TikTok channel. Our most recent video is kind of

interview tips, which was done by Serena. So we're hoping to kind of create an integrated multimedia toolkit as well.

Noah Stolte 26:19

Oh, cool. So like you're sort of turning your TikTok channel into like mini episodes of toolkit topics?

Josh Cabecinha-Alati 26:27

Exactly, yeah. So kind of just kind of getting, like these short-term videos out there to kind of increase clicks for the toolkit and disperse information.

Noah Stolte 26:40

Yeah, and even if that reaches not the target audience, probably the more visibility about youth with disability, it's probably for the better, because I don't think the average person might think about that very often, hey? Like with the different challenges a youth with a disability might face.

Alice Pan 27:02

Exactly, and also our targeted age group is from 17 to 29 so they are at the age of post-secondary. So they are facing barriers, like from transitioning from school to workplace. And in addition to that, they are facing other barriers due to their disabilities. So we can see there are multiple challenges, and there are some gaps that I think, while I can help fill in, in order to help them to bridge the gap.

Noah Stolte 27:32

That's great. I mean, that's a difficult time in anybody's life. Yeah, a lot of transition going on, and I can imagine that extra complication of a disability might, yeah, quite a stressful time.

Bryden Veinot 27:43

Yeah. Last question here, where we can kind of expand on that a bit, is like, what are some new ways you hope to see the YLI impact youth in the disabled community in the future?

Noah Stolte 27:56

Like, is there any sort of direction you hope this toolkit might go in eventually?

Alice Pan 28:03

Yeah, I can talk about a bit of my personal view. I think so far, while I have a significant impact on youth in the disability community, for the toolkit, we have provided practical guidance that encourages personal growth, and also, throughout all our promotions and campaigns, we have successfully raised awareness to the unemployment of youth with disabilities and like, by sparking these dialogue around this topic, we generate responses that shed light on these challenges, and I remember receiving one comment on social media. She was commenting on our research findings, and she mentioned that it's great work, great research and graphics, and these needs to be seen by the general public. She recognizes that there are a lot of skilled workers and unemployed with disabilities, and businesses should know about this. So it really tells like it really emphasizes the urgency for YLI's work, and we are hoping to continue bringing awareness on this topic. One thing that I'm thinking is to continue on the community engagement to really to bring in all the young people with lived experience coming together to share their experience, to learn from each other, and most importantly, to support each other. And with this collective effort, it will create a very profound impact on their personal and also professional life as well.

Noah Stolte 30:06

That's amazing.

Alice Pan 30:07

The second thing that I'm thinking is to bring awareness to employers, to engage in partnership with employers. We want to have a more close partnership with employers and trying to advocate for inclusive hiring practices, providing workplace accommodations to their employees with lived experience like by working directly with the employers, we can really bring the topic up to their front and hopefully this is something that we can do in the near future.

Bryden Veinot 30:50

Yeah, yeah. I'm looking forward to seeing where this goes. But yeah, I think that's everything that we were hoping to talk about again today. Does anyone have anything else they want to add? Any final comments? Maybe open the floor here.

Max Muratov 31:10

Just in terms of the future. I remember when the project started, not a final goal, but something that we would love to see YLI do could be that the YLI itself could offer some sort of either transition program, or sort of a program that helps with gaining employment, or, you know, some offer some sort of practical assistance or whatnot, for youth with

disabilities in terms of employment. But obviously, that depends on a lot of factors, and that, I would say that would be sort of not an ultimate goal, but a goal for the YLI.

Bryden Veinot 32:05

One of the many goals.

Max Muratov 32:06

One of the many goals to thrive for. So yeah.

Noah Stolte 32:10

That's great. That's totally what I was wondering about, just like what you were hoping for down the road for YLI. So, yeah, that's awesome.

Bryden Veinot 32:18

That's fantastic, though. I just want to remind everyone listening right now again, where you can find the YLI, it's going to be on Instagram or Facebook as Disability Foundation, on TikTok as YLI_2023, and you can find more info on www.disabilityfoundation.org.

Noah Stolte 32:42

Which is where the toolkit is itself, right?

Alice Pan 32:44

Yeah, exactly. Or you can find us on ylitoolkit.org,

Bryden Veinot 32:47

Yes, the own website, too, many ways. And I think everyone, even if you aren't a youth with disability, everyone should check it out and just open up that dialogue and understand what challenges there are out there, and hopefully we can make things more accessible for everyone within this age group. So yeah, awesome. Thank you so much for coming on the podcast today, Alice, Max and Josh.

Alice Pan 33:16

Thank you so much. Such a nice conversation. Thanks for having us here.

Max Muratov 33:21

Thank you for having us.

Josh Cabecinha-Alati 33:23

Yeah, thanks again, guys. We really appreciate it.

Noah Stolte 33:25

Of course, it was our pleasure.

Bryden Veinot 33:27

Yeah. And I'm sure we'll have to get together again, once we move past phase one and get some more feedback and some users on the toolkit, we'll have to do a follow up and talk more about it.

Noah Stolte 33:39

Yeah, totally.

Bryden Veinot 33:41

All right, everyone well again, thanks for coming on and looking forward to the future.