

## Episode 32 | Josh Alati

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### **Graeme Wyman** 0:31

Hello and welcome to Discover Stories on Re-Imagine Radio. I'm your host. Graeme Wyman with the Vancouver Adapted Music Society. Today on the pod, we have Josh Alati. Josh is the outreach coordinator with the Youth Leadership Initiative Project. Josh, thank you so much for coming out today. How's it going?

### **Josh Alati** 1:07

It's going well. Thanks, Graeme. So my name is Josh. I work with the Youth Leadership Initiative as an outreach coordinator, and I predominantly focus on outreach, but kind of have a mixed role, doing video editing and working on a project brief right now to bring TikTok to the YLI.

### **Graeme Wyman** 1:25

Nice. Well, Josh, could you tell our listeners, maybe a bit more about what you just explained in your role and how you got involved with the Youth Leadership Initiative, and just for our listeners, we may call it YLI from here on out.

### **Josh Alati** 1:41

For sure, yeah, YLI is definitely an easier, it's not as much as a mouthful as Youth Leadership Initiative. So as I said before, I do outreach with different clientele. Right now, the YLI is focusing on a three phase project. The first phase comprised of research for Canadian youth with disabilities. The second phase is an advisory committee that we're assembling in the third phase, which is kind of the culmination of everything we're doing is creating a database and toolkit for Canadian youth with disabilities to use and have access to help them find jobs. So right now, I am working on the outreach portion for phase two, and doing some video editing, mixed in working on some various project briefs and hopefully growing the wildlife.

**Graeme Wyman 2:34**

Great. Well, you mentioned phase one, and that culminated with survey and results and looking over looking over the survey results. It mentioned that 450 Canadians between the age of 17 to 29 took a part in that survey. What are some of the insights that the team learned from those results?

**Josh Alati 2:58**

Yeah, so the completion of the survey was mainly to identify the attitudinal barrier, barriers faced by disabled youth with regards to securing work. And the results were basically the identification of these barriers. So it included low self confidence, perceived discrimination, lack of workplace accommodation and hesitation in disclosing disability. So really, the survey was made to kind of act as a foundation for what we're doing with the project, and how we're going to address the perceived issues that disabled youth have with securing jobs.

**Graeme Wyman 3:42**

And again, the three areas, or, sorry, four areas that you took. So those four areas that you just pointed out, how, this might be a little bit down the line, but how is YLI looking to address potential solutions to those issues that you brought up?

**Josh Alati 4:04**

So that would be more of our third and final phase, which looks towards addressing and promoting the solutions to these attitudinal barriers. We're looking to actually create an open access database and toolkit for Canadian youth that provides them with job knowledge, a list of equitable employers in their region and province and possible employment opportunities. And we're also hoping to kind of foster a community among Canadian youth with disabilities to help create networks to kind of help and build their careers.

**Graeme Wyman 4:44**

And when will this toolkit be available?

**Josh Alati 4:49**

I think the toolkit would, I think we have, like, a year left. So right now we're in phase two, which is actually something like an advisory committee to overlook the creation of this toolkit. So I would say maybe ETA is a year.

**Graeme Wyman 5:08**

Right, a year out. Sounds good. Well, we'll definitely have to look out for that. On a bit more of a personal note, maybe you could tell our listeners a little about your double major in political science and disability studies, and what drew you to take that at school?

**Josh Alati** 5:26

For sure. So I've always kind of been interested in politics and activism, so political science was kind of a natural path for me to take in university. But while I was in university, I kind of struggled I identify as someone with an invisible disability, so kind of in my formative years, I was really struggling with that idea of self identification as someone who is disabled. And I actually took a disability studies course as an elective, and I ended up loving it, which took me into the double major in Disability Studies and Political Science, and it kind of it tied in perfectly actually, with political science and the activism work that I'm interested in, but also helped me become more secure in identifying as someone with disabilities and gain a better understanding of myself and people in my community who also identifies as disabled.

**Graeme Wyman** 6:23

Well, and on a personal note as well, I could actually see how invaluable this, this toolkit, will be for people, especially youth, at that current time, because I know going trying to get into the job market, or even just whether it's if you're in high school or just transitioning into college, trying to get a job, and what you go through in the processes. And I feel I've gone through a process where it feels that you're just getting through the interview to check a box.

**Josh Alati** 6:56

Yeah, exactly.

**Graeme Wyman** 6:58

So, Josh, you mentioned that the YLI team is currently in phase two of the project, you did mention a little bit about what that was, but maybe you could give our listeners a bit more detail of what that will consist of, and when you might move on to phase three.

**Josh Alati** 7:14

Of course. So phase two of the project is actually an assembling of a National Advisory Committee, and the advisory committee right now we're looking at to have it composed of experts. I think we have some professors and academics from each province who will be able to provide insight on the different disability policy from each region of Canada. That way, we have, like, a well-rounded approach to the look at disability issues within Canada.

And really the advisory committee is going to be overseeing the creation of this toolkit and database and making sure a well rounded approach is being taken. And we also really want to make sure that with each representative from each province and region that we're taking a very equitable approach to how we're releasing the information for this toolkit, right? And we want to make sure that no area of Canada is left out.

**Graeme Wyman 8:14**

Yeah, no, and that certainly makes sense now with this advisory committee, I imagine that you are you going outside of the regular 17 to 29 age group? Could people over 29 be involved? Or are you trying to keep it within that group?

**Josh Alati 8:33**

Yeah, so for the advisory committee, we're really looking for people who are well versed in disability activism, disability rights and provincial policy. So I think the age range is very loose. We're also looking for people from 17 to 29 just to make sure that we are taking a well rounded approach, and the youth perspective is being taken into account, right? So it's a very open committee.

**Graeme Wyman 9:02**

Okay, gotcha. And just, I guess, if someone was interested in, say, joining the committee, learning more about YLI or how they could get involved with the project, how would they go about that?

**Josh Alati 9:16**

Yeah, so you could actually visit the Disability Foundation's website and go to the YLI tab and that will have all the contact information you need, and you can reach out to either me, there's Serena, Max and Alice part of our team, send us an email saying that you're interested, and then we can kind of have a little precursor chat and see if it's the right fit for the committee.

**Graeme Wyman 9:41**

Okay, great. Again, going for more of a personal note, since joining the YLI team, what aspect of the project has stood out to you and what they're doing?

**Josh Alati 9:54**

I think really the openness in the research and the amount of people who have actually come forward. I know that we had around 450 people participate in the surveys, and that was actually before my time. But reviewing the survey responses, it's very enlightening to

see how open everyone was and kind of the shared barriers that everyone is facing. So I think really the information is invaluable that we're getting, and very eye opening to see how future leaders really are being affected by the current political socio climate and securing jobs.

**Graeme Wyman** 10:51

And I guess, I'm not sure if you may know this offhand, but out of the 450 participants in the survey, was it pretty spread off, spread across Canada, or again, being an organization that's out of BC. Do we have more concentration from BC?

**Josh Alati** 11:10

I think it was a more concentrated focus group since it was based out of BC, and we did partner with Royal Roads University, yeah, which is, I think, a BC university, so it was very much skewed that way. But I think that there were some participants who were outside of BC. So we did get a fairly decent sample size, but I think in the future too, with phase two, by implementing all these different provinces and kind of geographically diverse members from all over Canada, we're going to get a more well rounded picture of what's happening.

**Graeme Wyman** 12:04

Of course. Now my last question for you today is, say phase three is completed next year. What do you hope the project will achieve long term?

**Josh Alati** 12:17

Yeah, so I'm really hoping that the project hits the goal of helping youth with disabilities overcome these attitudinal barriers and become more comfortable in themselves, more comfortable in applying for jobs, and I also really hope that it affects the employers as well in creating more equitable work opportunities. If anything, the pandemic has shown us how easy it is to make accommodations, especially with working from home.

**Graeme Wyman** 12:47

Yep.

**Josh Alati** 12:48

So I hope we really just continue to, I guess, lead the charge with showing that accessibility can be made, can be done like so easily for employers. -

**Graeme Wyman** 13:01

Yeah, more universal for sure. And yeah. And I think one thing just having talked to you a bit more today is just letting again, that age group between 17 to 29 and even over that is, you know, you're not alone when it comes to these issues that maybe you're feeling, it's an issue that is across the board.

**Josh Alati** 13:23

Exactly, yeah, and really kind of building that sense of community and kinship and networking, I think, is really important. So everyone knows that it's not really an issue that is on the individual. It's more of a societal issue in how there is a lack of accessibility.

**Graeme Wyman** 13:45

Yeah. Well, Josh, thank you so much for being on the podcast today. And again, thanks to you and the YLI team for all the work that you're doing.

**Josh Alati** 13:54

Yeah, thank you so much. And it was a great opportunity speaking with you. 4

**Graeme Wyman** 13:57

Yeah, well, and to all our listeners out there, thanks again for tuning in today.

**Sponsor Message** 14:02

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