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**SIMON**

**BUEHRER:**

Welcome to *Inspiring Change*, our forum of stories and connections from our ongoing work of inspiring change and promoting access for people with disabilities. I'm Simon Buehrer. Our first podcast episode focused on the 2019 Transformation Summit and featured conversations with leaders, provider agencies, and change agents from across Ohio.

We discussed their continued collaborative efforts to ensure people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have access to services that prioritize their individual goals and emphasize community membership and community employment. Well, as we all know, a lot has happened since last year's summit, and the entire world has changed in significant perhaps irrevocable ways. Registration for this year's Transformation Summit opened in January. However, we soon realized that the face-to-face event would not be possible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

But that desire, that yearning, that need to connect didn't disappear during the lockdown or statewide restrictions on mass gatherings. And so OCALI and our partners at DODD pivoted and began planning a virtual Transformation Summit. We knew that this year's summit would be different, not just in form, but in substance and spirit, too.

The pandemic has touched all of our lives in profound and meaningful ways and has been especially challenging for any agency, or organization, or company who provides direct services. Inherent to those services is the need for proximity, presence, interaction, direct human contact, and these are deeply impacted by the state's stay at home order and social distancing measures. How do you continue to provide direct support and a continuation of services safely and effectively?

It's not easy, and of course, you're trying to navigate the heightened anxiety and worry about the spread of the disease itself, which is especially concerning for people who have compromised immune systems, underlying health conditions, or

who may be members of racial and ethnic minority groups who face an increased risk of contracting COVID-19 because of longstanding systemic health and social inequities. Speaking of longstanding social inequities, and we should add systemic racism, we've also had the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and many others this year, which has resulted in nationwide, worldwide moments of protest, reflection, conflict, and reckoning.

It's been quite a year, and so when we met with DODD earlier this spring, we knew we had to design and offer a Transformation Summit that spoke to the moment, where we are right now, and helped all of us sort through and deal with all that we're dealing with. We decided that we needed someone to help set the tone, the vision, the framework, not just for the day itself, but the ongoing commitment and collaboration to the work of transformation in a very different world. We needed someone who could help us pause, step back, acknowledge where we are and how far we've come, and help us tap into our personal and collective wellspring of energy and possibilities.

We needed a keynote speaker who could honor the moment that we're in and give us time and space to focus on our own resilience, which led us to bringing in Sarah Buffie as the 2020 Virtual Transformation Summit keynote speaker. I had the honor of interviewing Sarah in episode 6 of *Inspiring Change*. We titled that episode *Playing Pictionary With Ketchup*, which came from one of Sarah's many thoughtful, creative, and wonderfully imaginative reflections that she offered during that interview.

That interview with Sarah was a gift, and so for our second podcast episode, we wanted to share the gift of Sarah's Transformation Summit keynote address with all of you, whether you attended the Transformation Summit or not. As I told her in a recent email, I always leave my encounters with Sarah feeling energized, inspired, maybe a little dizzy, but with a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to do, to make, to move. Here's your chance.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Hey, everybody out there. It's wild to be on this platform, but I'm really excited and just honored to be with you all today, so looking forward to the whole day, all of the sessions, and getting to know folks and really putting our heads together. Not just

our heads, though, let's say let's take a moment here to drop in to our bodies as they accompany us wherever we go. I'm just going to take a moment to bring us into this space a little bit more emotionally and mentally.

I know we're here physically in front of our computers or maybe on our couches or at our desks, but I want to bring us into the full space. Before I do that, I don't know if you saw on one of the slides that was going by on the intro, but if you can grab a pen or a paper or journal, we are going to be doing some reflection this morning. So if you know me, you know I am a huge fan of the small group. We can't do so much of that today in our opening session, but we will have some time for our own personal reflection and then some sharing in the chat. So before we get there, let's come a little bit more present.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

I'm just going to invite you in this moment to take a step back from your computer or wherever you are right now in the morning and just take a moment to notice the support beneath your feet. Notice the support beneath your seat, and if you want to press back into your chair, just notice how you're held there. And just know that there's no other place you need to be other than right here, right now. And together, take some collective breaths across this virtual space I know hitting all corners of Ohio.

We're going to take some breaths together as we inhale possibility, and exhale any tightness you might feel in your shoulders, your neck, your back. We'll inhale creativity and exhale constriction. We'll inhale together innovation, and exhale isolation. With one final breath, we'll settle into this present moment as we breathe here now.

Four months ago, we were all told to stay in. That going into our communities, embracing our loved ones, connecting with a stranger over a cup of coffee, all of this was off limits. In fact, it was our duty to stay inside, socially and physically isolated. Those of us deemed non-essential engaged in the heroic act of staying put. Those of us deemed essential hit the front lines as health care workers, direct service providers, transportation officials, grocery store attendants and farm workers, all in our own heroism as we kept the country plugging along, one foot in

front of the other.

Four months ago for the first time, those of us without the label of developmental disability understood on a visceral level the detrimental emotional and mental health implications of being socially isolated from others. Let me go back a bit further, though. It was 10 years ago that I heard for the first time it is not the functional aspect of disability that prevents a good life, it's the social isolation. It became a personal and professional mission of mine to share this understanding with others, not in lecture form, but in a way that opened up the imagination. In a way that invited in possibility and creativity for what it would mean to dream with others about what a big full life might look like outside of programs and passive services designed to congregate and segregate people with devalued labels.

For 10 years, I worked alongside of and watched in all the leaders in our field. Many of you here today self advocates, families, hard working direct service professionals work within a system to try to combat the social isolation folks with disabilities experience. Smaller groups of folks going out and about together, school inclusion programs that invite others to show up as they are. Neighborhoods and citizens shifting from the concept of volunteering with groups of people to getting to know folks on an individual level and becoming curious about one another's stories.

But this shift has been slow. This shift has not yet made it into some of our settings. Our conversations and plan making are ripe with good intentions, but we still see so often a system that has persisted in the congregation and segregation of people with disabilities. But now, today, we are four months into that system crashing and burning. We are slowly emerging from a state of shock, having been frozen with the despair of job loss, disrupted routines, lack of connection with others.

We are at a collective crossroads where the phrase, a new normal, is on the tip of everyone's tongues. A new normal that we are called towards creating. It can be hard to imagine a different future in the comfort of our routines of systems that meet means, of structures that are upheld with very little effort from the ordinary citizen. However, today, we're not interested in looking back, because you can't create the new normal through the lens of the past.

The invitation here is to not look backwards, but to lift our gaze to what is right in

front of us. To seek out allies and citizens, community members who are ripe for the reimagining. Reimagine belonging, reimagine togetherness from a place of abundance. This is the moment we've been waiting for. In fact, we are the ones we've been waiting for.

From the Buddhist tradition, we understand that the obstacle is the way. We've all known that systemic segregation and congregation of people with devalued labels is not working, and as a community, we've gathered at this summit for years planning for a shift, and now, in a time when all humans are missing out on connection, we have more of an opportunity to align around a shared story. The notion of social isolation is no longer a mystery or a far away from a shared reality. The empathy created around this pandemic makes way for this invitation.

An invitation to challenge what we think we know. An invitation to unite together around a shared experience. To tap into the thirst each of us has to connect with others who share our gifts, our passions, our interests, not just our labels. This is an incredibly exciting time. We are so brave to see it as such. We are not only being confronted with a viral pandemic.

We are being confronted with our history, as racist systems and the legacy of white supremacy are being challenged in a new way by the collective. The awakening happening in our nation and around the world one might say is long overdue, but we are here now. We are confronted with our freedom to birth a new way of being with one another. One in which our gifts will guide our past, not our deficiencies. Where we will explore more about how to regulate our nervous systems versus regulating behavior.

A future in which we are all called to bring our gifts to the surface, where we can value personalism over professionalism. How might we co-create this new chapter together? I believe it starts by going within. It starts by recognizing and honoring the resilience that lies within each one of us. To notice and to celebrate. To learn from what has been nourishing you and others during this time.

So like I said at the beginning, I'm going to invite you now to take out your notebook or take out that Word document on the computer. Bring a pen, and I'm going to invite us in to some reflection questions that help us look at our own resilience as

we explore that which has helped us bounce back during this time.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

When we talk about resilience, I know my work and I know many of you here understand these five resilience factors. So with the next couple of minutes together, I'm going to walk through these factors and invite you to contemplate and to explore how each of these shown up in your life, especially over the past couple of months. And we'll take a moment to recognize and honor that ourselves. So where in your life have you been able to elevate your voice? Make choices through the lens of abundance, rather than scarcity or shared control with others to step into your power?

How is this manifested? How is voice, choice, and control shown up in your life over the past several months?

[MUSIC PLAYING]

How can you recognize the unique voices of the people you support, connect with, engage with?

[MUSIC PLAYING]

How have you noticed your growing sense of self over the past few months? I know a lot of us have been in survival mode, checking out, just getting through the days. But what are the small ways that you noticed something about yourself that you valued and you appreciated differently this time? Where has self compassion and grace made their way into your daily routines? Not just self compassion, but compassion for others, grace for one another.

How might an expansive sense of self-worth motivate you to pour into others from your full cup? What does it feel like in your body to notice your own worth, to give of to yourself?

[MUSIC PLAYING]

It's not only people that help us feel connected and safe and grounded. Sometimes it's those things outside of us that help us feel a sense of control and a sense of care. So getting curious about your faith tradition or your sense of spirituality, how has that helped you during this time? How have you leaned in and made that a part of your resilience during this time?

What has deepened for you in terms of external supports? I'm asking did you learn a new hobby, not to shame anyone who's just been trying to get through the day, right? What have you stepped into? I know I've done more yoga over the past four months than I ever have in my whole life. Not really a choice, just something I've decided to do, right? It became a space of solace.

I wouldn't call it a passion yet. It's definitely something I explore. Did your pet become that co-regulator? After these days of Zoom, or perhaps Zoom became your best friend. But did you have an animal or plants that you'd been tending to? Are you keeping bees and exploring that as a hobby and as a passion?

What treasure has surfaced that you no longer take for granted? I know belonging is such a isolating concept, especially right now in order to stay away and be physically distant from one another, but where have you experienced a sense of belonging?

How have you gotten created to overcome that obstacle? What has that meant for you in this time? What can we learn from that creativity that will lead us into our future together?

Think about all the neighborhoods that started to play music on the front porch or have social distance waving or happy hours together. Maybe that was you. Maybe if not now, it's something you can think about for the future and lean into. And the main curiosity, what have you been plotting as you've been waiting for your community to open up?

[MUSIC PLAYING]

And lastly, who in your life offers you the felt sense of being safe, seen, and heard? What are the qualities of those relationships? How do you know? How do you know in your bones and your bodies that these are your people, this is your place?

[MUSIC PLAYING]

As you look at your list, what do you notice in your body as you recognize your own resilience? Is there a sensation? A shape? A color that arises?

Name that. Write that down. Be bold with that awareness. When we can understand and make explicit the ways in which our own resilience carries us through difficult times, we are more able to honor and recognize the resilience and others, and as we lean into the rest of our day together, I hope that growing these five factors are a central part of our discussions.

As I think about these five factors, I'm reminded of the gifts that I've experienced from others and even those that lie within myself. And as stated before, we are being called to co-create new ways of being with one another. It is through the lens of giftedness that we will all have fruitful discussions ripe with inspiration, not just from that headspace, but from our heart space as well. We learn from John McKnight, an asset-based community development, that a gift is not a gift until it is given.

So as a final reflection question to ponder together, what is a gift that you have been holding in exile? What is a passion that you've kept private, if not for a nosy neighbor or a quirky job interview question, it wouldn't have been surfaced for others to enjoy? Declare the giftedness that you bring into this room today.

The question I want to leave us with is, how might those gifts lead us into a space of creativity, imagination, and abundance, as we shift now from contemplation to action? Very grateful for each and every one of you, and excited to be on this journey together.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

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You're watching and listening to *Inspiring Change* from OCALI. Our forum of stories and connections from our ongoing work of inspiring change and promoting access for people with disabilities. I'm Simon Buehrer. That was Sarah Buffie's keynote address at the 2020 Virtual Transformation Summit.



You can learn more about the Transformation Summit at [ohioemploymentfirst.org](http://ohioemploymentfirst.org). That's all one word. [ohioemploymentfirst.org](http://ohioemploymentfirst.org). Sarah is founding director and trauma responsive care trainer at Soul Bird Consulting. They're based in Cincinnati, but do work all across the state.

You can learn more about their services at [soulbirdconsulting.info](http://soulbirdconsulting.info). I-N-F-O. We also wanted to give a shout out to the Lifespan Transition Center at OCALI. They do some amazing work and have some great free offerings and services. Go to [ocali.org](http://ocali.org), scroll down a little bit, and look for the heading that reads, OCALI Centers.

If you navigate using visual cues, look for the periwinkle colored box that says, Lifespan Transition Center. There's an alt tag associated with that image if you need it. You can find more *Inspiring Change* episodes at [ocali.org/podcasts](http://ocali.org/podcasts). And we'd love to hear from you. You can hit us up on social media.

Use the hashtag [inspiringchangepod](https://twitter.com/inspiringchangepod) all one word. And you can also email me directly. I'm at [simon\\_buehrer@ocali.org](mailto:simon_buehrer@ocali.org). And Buehrer is spelled B, as in boy, U-E-H-R-E-R. Thanks again for listening to *Inspiring Change*, because the need for change is everywhere, and inspiration can come from anywhere. I'm Simon Buehrer, we'll see you soon.

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