

Alex Schiwal 0:04

music plays Hello, and welcome to the Mental Health Crossroads podcast where we explore the intersection of mental health and developmental disabilities. This week we hear from Justin Olson, a longtime friend of our host, Jeff Sheen. We hope you enjoy this episode. Make sure you like, subscribe and share on all of our channels.

Jeff Sheen 0:31

Alright, so I'm here today with my good friend Justin Olson. And Justin, you want to kind of introduce yourselves to the folks?

Justin Olson 0:38

My name is Justin Olson in Salt Lake City, Utah. I've been married for about 23 years and then moved over to West Jordan, moved over to Midvale, moved over to Riverton and now back to Midvale. So I've been over Salt Lake County pretty much.

Jeff Sheen 0:53

So Justin, when you meet somebody for the first time, what are some of the things you like them to know about yourself?

Justin Olson 0:58

I like them to know that I'm very active. I'm very punctual. And I'm very much on time and I stay on task.

Jeff Sheen 1:05

Can you tell us a little bit about some of the different advocacy projects you've been involved with over the years?

Sure. There's a we used to call the bacon, bacon lettuce tomato group, but it's becoming Leader Tomorrow group. And may I just add that Jeff Sheen was part of that group as well, along with Dr. Al Romeo, along with some of my north friends that are not here today, but that's okay. But, you know, being part of that program, we were able to go talk to doctors and talk to them about how to treat patients and help students transition from pediatrichood to adulthood. And that transition's still having struggles today.

Yeah, that was that was a lot of good work that you were part of, and I that's when I first met you. So it's kind of fun to reconnect with you. It's been several years since we've been in regular communication, but I know one of the things you've done for a lot of your life is you've been really involved with the Best Buddies program. Do you want to talk a little bit about your role with Best Buddies?

Justin Olson 2:05

Sure. Back in 2001, I became the the Buddy Director for Best Buddies University Utah that was located outside the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center. And I got to meet a director named Marshall. And that was the director of the band center and he, he asked me to be the Buddy Director for Best Buddies where I met Dr. Blake Gillette. He's a doctor now up in Penn State in New York. He's all over the country actually. But I've been in Best Buddies since 2001. And if we can go current now and leave the past a little bit. We're going to talk about where I stand today with Best Buddies. I am now the Special Event Coordinator for Best Buddies statewide. And also still the Buddy Director as as mentioned before, and I'm also a training to become a national advocate for Best Buddies.

Jeff Sheen 3:07

That's awesome man. What what are some of the things you do in your in your work with Best Buddies? When you say you're the Buddy Director, what does that mean you get to do?

Justin Olson 3:15

Well, I get to mingle with the buddies in and go into their place of living in and make sure that they're being, make sure that Best Buddies is helping them to our full capability. And when I say that, I mean making sure the college buddy's going out with them, making sure they're getting out in that social setting. So they don't go into that depressed state of mind.

Jeff Sheen 3:43

So speaking of that, you know, one of the projects that we're working on now is this Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities project. When you think about your your work with best buddies, and you kind of mentioned it a little bit, how does that help your own mental health and your own mental well being?

Justin Olson 3:58

Well, sir, you know, being that I had to be the, the upbeat one, I try not to have my down days. But as as any normal human being Jeff. And Alex, I would say that we we still have those down days. And for a minute, I'm just gonna go sidetrack for a minute because I always do. And back in November 14, of this

year, I kind of fell off the bandwagon. And I'm the one that needed help. And I didn't think anybody was out there for me. But somebody from Best Buddies International, called my chapter and said, "Now your Buddy Director needs help." And I had about 16 people at my door, just willing to help me. And that was, you know, that was back when I was transitioning from August Sun to another company that that I can't even pronounce their name because it's 16 letters long. But that's where I live now currently in Midvale but, you know, we, it goes to show that we all have down days. And even though I'm not supposed to have a down day, you know those still happen.

Jeff Sheen 5:18

Well, and I appreciate what you're saying, Justin, because and you're saying it really well that we all we're all human, we all have times when we're able to help others and lift others. And then there's times that we need other people to come in and support us. And it sounds like you've experienced both sides of that.

Justin Olson 5:34

Yes!

Jeff Sheen 5:36

Can you tell me a little bit about anything that you you know, we used to go around and talk to doctors about how to help young adults with disabilities transition to adult care. We had this little speakers panel, we'd go out and do that we had some great conversations. Do you have similar thoughts on what you would tell psychologists or other mental health counselors on what they might do to better support young adults that have developmental disabilities

Justin Olson 6:00

Sure because I've been through that as well. I'm going through it right now, in fact. And as a, as a person going through this, I can tell you, they listen to our problems, but they don't give us any exercises to do. And then we go meet with them three months later, they're like, "Well did you work on anything?" Well, how do you work on something you're not going to be given the resources to work on something. You know, they need to give us an action plan. There needs to be an actual plan out there. And there is no action plan.

Jeff Sheen 6:31

So in your experience, you're going to visit with somebody and you see them every couple of months, but there's not necessarily from your experience, clear instructions on what you can do on your own time.

Justin Olson 6:42

No, they just tell you well come back next time. We'll talk about it again. And then when they ask you "Well, did you did you improve?" Or, like, what am I improving on and how much. Where's the action plan? *music plays*

Jeff Sheen 6:58

So you're quite busy. Between your work schedule, Best Buddies, and these other kind of community activities you're engaged in.

Justin Olson 7:05

Yeah, but Jeff, there's always time to fit you in. I mean, you know, I mean, I'll just, I'll just move everyone to the side. And it'll be a whole mudslide, but I'll pick it up later.

Jeff Sheen 7:14

Well, I appreciate you taking some time with us today. It's fun to talk to you. I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about how how has your work in your community activities supported your well being? And what does that do for your mental health?

Justin Olson 7:28

Well, especially nowadays, since I moved in here on December the 31st, I'm kind of the only one you know, I'm kind of the only one living here right now with with some staff that don't, are not much of a conversation person. And so I kind of have to keep myself upbeat. And so I when I go out, I can be like, Oh, I can see the sunlight today. I can see a snowflake today. You know, also having your having the windows open your blinds open. They said a dark room brings on sadness. One thing I can point out for Jeff is his room looks very dark right now. He doesn't look sad, but he's showing the signs of sadness. So we gotta help him now. But we'll help him later. Um, but I do want to add that having your blinds open and maybe a sunlight at the computer would always help and, and being in contact with friends and but not pushing anybody away.

Jeff Sheen 8:37

That's fantastic. Yeah, absolutely having contact with friends and I appreciate you pointing out the circumstances of the room right now. I did have to close the blinds so the glare wasn't in the camera, but I appreciate you watching out for me and being paying attention to that. So because you're a good friend and that's-

Justin Olson 8:54

That's why you pay me big bucks. Jeff.

Jeff Sheen 8:56

That is why we pay you the big bucks.

Justin Olson 8:58

Five bucks, huh?

Jeff Sheen 9:00

What are some other things Justin that you have done throughout your life to kind of help with your mental health and keeping a balance between just like you said, as human beings, we have ups, we have downs, we have these different things. Sometimes we might be in a spot where we go and visit with the therapist to get some extra support. There might be medications involved, things like that. What are some things you do to stay positive and to kind of keep your mental health in good shape?

Justin Olson 9:28

So the things I do to stay positive, Jeff, is I'm going to be starting my own YouTube channel here soon. And, and kind of recording my own story. Because I can't write, I type things out and I record them. And I want to tell my story through through things like this. If I if I'm talking like to people like this, I always, I'm just always there. It doesn't matter if I'm in a bad mood or good but when people ask me information or they want to come hang out with me. They bring, they bring a tear to my eye. Back on December 16 when I was really bummed I thought I'd be single the rest of my life is part of mental health. That's why I'm bringing it up. I met, I met a girl on Facebook dating. Those online dating sites do work. They may not work for people like Donald Trump or you know, a Utah State quarterback or U of U basketball player but um, you know, they do work. Met a girl, she came over and we were together for six hours. And then my one staff that was my caretaker that night wanted her to leave and go home. So who came back after meeting me for six hours like my girlfriend and now now look where we are. We're going to plan a wedding and we're gonna, we're going to get hitched. So it's all part of mental health.

Jeff Sheen 10:58

Absolutely having a good close relationships is certainly a big support for our mental well being. Justin, I want to talk to you a little bit about stepping back. How did you actually what's the story? How did you get where you are today? Doing the things that you're doing, what was kind of your, your path to this point your life?

Justin Olson 11:16

Well, let's let's start back when I was about 22 23 years old that that's going way back there because now I'm 37. Let's just cap that off right there. But, you know, Claire Mantonya, who is a close friend of mine and you're Jeff and Marsha Honore-Jones, who has now moved out of state but also another former good friend I think. They got me going to the legislature and speak about a bill and I was on the bottom of the DSPD waiting list, division for people with disabilities, waiting list and I was all well on the bottom. And when I say this next statement when it comes true, the squeaky wheel gets the oil. And I didn't think I would. So I became the real squeaky wheel. And I didn't really want the oil, but I got it anyway. But on June 9, the same year, I got a phone call saying you're funded and you have to move out by June 15, you're gonna lose your funding. And I had two days to find a place and to transition from being at mommy's house and mommy taking care of you for that long and do like a group home like we are in now. With complete strangers taking care of you, and all you get to meet is the owner of the company. And, you know, it's, it kind of feels like it's almost like foster care, but it's not. Because you know, you get to be friends with these people. I've been through a lot of providers. I've been through a lot of ups and downs. I've been through a lot of transition. But I think today that I'm in a place where the company that I'm with now is ran by one of the Lost Boys of Sudan. And he came over here when he was six years old and the youngest one was six years old when he was 12. And there's books out there on the Lost Boys of Sudan. But he kind of when I met him in December, and we moved in, there's still some kinks. We're working out, but pretty much. I'm, I'm as happy as I can be.

Jeff Sheen 13:30

I appreciate you sharing that part of your story with us. Justin, I want to ask you. Now that you're 37 because you put that out there on the record. And you think about your 22 year old self, if you could give your 22 year old self advice from what you know now, what kind of advice would you give yourself?

Justin Olson 13:47

You know, this can be crazy because I thought about this during the week. I thought to myself, I would tell myself therapy is a good thing. Because in my mind when I was that young, I thought I don't want to go see those crazy people, go crazy. I don't know what they're talking about. They might not give us an action plan, Jeff, but they, they sure are good listeners, you know, and and being a good listener and being a third party may not know, the other side, is a good thing to have that neutral party, you know,

together is just a real good thing. Because it really makes you look at both sides. Well, if I did that wrong, I wonder what else I've done wrong. You know, you know, if I had an anxiety attack over just not being able to go to a game and that's kind of ridiculous. Put me back in place, because I need to go back to school and learn some more stuff. You know, I think it just becomes that we need to be able to open up we need to be okay with opening up.

Jeff Sheen 14:51

Great. Thank you for sharing that, Justin. I know you're a big Jazz fan. So I think that's one of the games you're talking about. Right?

Justin Olson 14:56

Well, yeah, it was but it was also a couple U of U basketball games, you know? I mean, you know, we won't talk about the small school of Logan and Weber state because we know that you're good at football but that's about it.

Jeff Sheen 15:11

Well, there's some truth to that. So I appreciate your honesty. Justin, one of the things we like to ask our guests on our podcast is for an action item or something they would tell the listeners to work on this next week after they listen to this podcast that might improve their own well being or the well being of somebody they have in their lives. So what's your advice for the listeners?

Justin Olson 15:35

Don't be afraid to reach out to your friends, even if it's been a few years that you haven't talked to them and ask for help. Or don't be afraid to even call. Call. You know, there's numbers out there that you can talk to, don't be afraid to open up. And there's always people out there even if you just meet them on a walk. And you know, you need to a service animal to make you happy. That's one of the things you can do. Find what's good for you, but always be aware that there are people to help you.

Jeff Sheen 16:06

That is excellent advice. And I know that's advice that you follow yourself. Justin, when you think about the conversation we've had just briefly today, are there other things that you would want to talk about as far as mental health support for people with developmental disabilities or your own experience or anything else you want to share with the audience?

Justin Olson 16:26

You know, just to just to be ready to flourish, because you got you got people out there that do care about you, even though you don't think they do they really do. And I've learned that through through Best Buddies, through People First, through many, many programs I've been involved with. I mean, look at me and Jeff. Jeff goes away for about a decade and a half, and then decides on Marco Polo to ping me one day and it's 10pm at night. Let me tell you that much. And if you know me very well, I'm always up to 2 am. So I'm, I'm ahead of his schedule anyway. So it's okay. But I mean, for friends to come back into your life. Just make sure you always leave the door open.

Jeff Sheen 17:11

Yeah, and I appreciate you answering that POlo of my friend because it had been quite a while. I don't know, that had been a decade and a half, but it's been a little while.

Justin Olson 17:19

Well, you need to come back down into Utah where you belong, son.

Jeff Sheen 17:23

Well

Justin Olson 17:24

Horse-back riding

Jeff Sheen 17:25

I appreciate your invitation. So, yeah no, it's I think that's a really important point that, you know, there's different people come in and out of our lives at different times, and friends are an important part of support and support in our mental health and all of those kinds of things. It's been a lot of fun to reconnect with you. It's been a lot of fun to have this conversation.

Justin Olson 17:45

And Jeff, may I just add one more comment. It's very important for a long distance friend. If you can have like a FaceTime app like Zoom, Marco Polo or even an iPhone, and all these iPhone elevens they're amazing. I know they're expensive, but they have a feature called FaceTime. When you're talking about friend that's either 45 minutes north, or all the way down in San Diego, California, where the beaches

are, it's 80 degrees. Thank you very much. That you can see them face to face. And that's even a better connection than just a voice.

Jeff Sheen 18:19

Yeah, I agree. I think that's a lot of fun. So today we're doing our interview over Zoom. So we're able to see each other. And if those of you that don't know about the Marco Polo app, that's been a fun app. It's a free app that Justin and I and several other people use, but it's been fun to be able to talk to you and see you and kind of have that other level of connection versus just your voice.

Justin Olson 18:38

There's also another app out there, Jeff, it's real good. I'm just gonna pipe in for it, it's Google Duo. G-O-O-G-L-E D-O-O-S. It's for people that don't have iPhones. They can also do Google Duo. They can have up to 16 people in one conversation. So it's a it can be a group meeting or just a one-on-one coffee break.

Jeff Sheen 19:02

We could reconvene the whole bacon lettuce and tomato leader group.

Justin Olson 19:06

Hey, you start paying me and we can talk.

Jeff Sheen 19:09

That's a, that's another conversation for another day. But I appreciate your time and it's been fun to talk to you. *music plays*

Alex Schiwal 19:18

Thanks for listening. We hope you enjoyed this episode where we heard about Justin and his work. Make sure you follow us on social media at MHDD center. Like, subscribe, and share our podcast wherever you get your podcasts. And make sure to visit our website at MHDDcenter.org

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>