

Follow-up Interview with Destiny Watkins

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Alex Schiwal, Jeff Sheen, Destiny Watkins

Jeff Sheen 00:08

music playing Hello and welcome to the Mental Health Crossroads podcast where we explore the intersection of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities. This week we caught up with Destiny Watkins. Destiny is a self advocate who lives in Washington State. You might recognize their name from a previous group interview that we did with them. They are part of the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Partnership, also known as the IDD-MH partnership. That episode is linked below. *music playing*

Jeff Sheen 00:37

So I'm here talking with Destiny Watkins, who was a previous guest on one of our podcasts with Jessica Kramer and Micah Peace and Janet Shouse. And we wanted to check in with Destiny since a lot has happened and a lot has changed since the last time we talked. I think last time in in February or so. So, Destiny welcome. Thank you for being here.

Destiny Watkins 00:59

Thank you, Jeff. I was just gonna say it's great to be back on here and talk to you again, and talk to everybody else that listens.

Jeff Sheen 01:08

Well, I appreciate you making time. And, you know, we wanted to just check in with some of our previous podcast guests and and see how you're doing since we last talked. Obviously, there's a global pandemic, which was not part of our conversation last time. So how are you doing? And what have you been busy doing, since we last talked?

Destiny Watkins 01:27

Um, well, I stay pretty busy with my advocacy groups that I'm involved. And yeah, it's a little bit more challenging. I'm just doing a lot of it from home and trying to work with everybody's schedule because of working from home and you know, people with kids and, you know, sometimes I babysit and so it's just like, how are we shoveling this all around? And I'm picking it up and dealing with it. It's just taking one step at a time and, yeah, it's been kind of crazy and I've been making do. I guess I could be doing

better, I feel, but I'm dealing with the lack of sleep on trying to keep up with all the stuff is kinda getting to me. But I'm, it's happening I'm getting there, so.

Jeff Sheen 02:19

So it sounds like you're you're still connecting with other self-advocates and whatnot.

Destiny Watkins 02:24

Yeah

Jeff Sheen 02:24

How is your kind of day to day world changed with this, with this pandemic? He kind of mentioned a few things but, how well, how let's start with how are your friends doing? How are, how are you kind of supporting each other? What's kind of the conversation with your friends?

Destiny Watkins 02:37

Um, well it's kind of weird, but we do a lot of video chat and like, we'll be playing video games or something over video like they'll be on their game system, I'll be on mine, and then, you know, we'll do online but we'll keep the line open and we'll support each other that way and just hang out virtually. Sometimes it's just like, it's so challenging, but we'll try and start a movie. And we have to start it in exact same time, and be there by video. And so we can chat back and forth on the open video. And sometimes it's challenging because you can't always get it at the exact same time and we're like, okay, gotta restart, gotta restart, each time because you always hit it one second too early. And then it's like, the other person hears before and then echoes and oh, it's a nightmare mess, but one they can do.

Jeff Sheen 03:34

It's funny, because we used to worry about people spending too much time playing games online and now that's like the way that we connect.

Destiny Watkins 03:41

Yeah, I mean, I never used to play this much video games either. I'm more outdoors. I like to be active playing wheelchair basketball or sled hockey. It's all adaptive sports for people in wheelchairs or some sort of physical disability. So not having that it's been really hard. Or just going to the park and doing photography stuff. Being isolated is been very hard for me to stay active on top of everything else. And so I'm like, why not? I guess it won't kill me that much to you know, play more video games or work out in my living room with my weights and stuff. But I mean, you got to do what you got to do to stay active and busy. We all, you know, my friends, we do video a lot. So we'll be working out together over video and it's just crazy. I mean, it's definitely a challenge, especially when video chat goes down and has an error or an update. It's like, huh, there's more anxiety because it's like we have this plan. We were looking forward to it and that's our only connection. Then can't even get it to work. So, yeah.

Jeff Sheen 05:02

And so you're, I think you're up in the Washington State area. It sounds like you have very active lifestyle being out and around people.

Destiny Watkins 05:14

Yeah.

Jeff Sheen 05:14

So what's your current situation as far as like, the self isolation and quarantine stuff? Are you getting out at all? Are you staying pretty close to home? What's your thoughts there?

Destiny Watkins 05:26

I'm actually I'm right next to Washington and then Idaho and a small little town, Post Falls and

Jeff Sheen 05:35

-Oh, that's right. I kept thinking you were from Spokane but because my friend's from Post Falls so you're in Post Falls.

Destiny Watkins 05:40

Mhmm. I was actually born in Spokane, Washington. We're now just opening up in different phases is the trial, but staying isolated just because of my health issues is been the best for me. I mean, not mentally, but physically, and being healthy is my biggest concern. With all these people that are out still, I see a lot of cars even though it's like we're supposed to stay at home. I know there was like, one or two times I went to the store for like, groceries and that was a whole nightmare and a half. They made, you know, some stores were like open for disability people like early-early In the morning, like seven o'clock or six o'clock in the morning, and so then I had to find a ride. You know, it's really hard with not having a caregiver or transportation that I usually use every day for wheelchair accessibility or help. It's been just me solo. And so I'm struggling, but I'm just taking it one step at a time. If I can get these accomplished, great, if not, I try to just let it go. It is what it is. You know, when I went to the store, and I was just like, I don't want to go all the way to the next aisle just to loop around, because they have these little stickers on the floor over here and it says, enter exit and I'm like, I'm in a chair. I am not going all the way over there. Just a loop around to grab this one item. If you've got an issue, stay six feet apart and just be patient. Like I was not wanting to go all the way around, trying to push your grocery cart in a manual wheelchair, because my power chair doesn't fit in any vehicles.

Jeff Sheen 07:38

Yeah, wow. That's, you know, that's a another level that a lot of people don't have to think about as they go get their groceries.

Destiny Watkins 07:46

No.

Jeff Sheen 07:46

I'm wondering so, do you use paratransit regularly or were you using paratransit regularly before this? Or do you drive yourself with your manual chair places? How do you get around most of the time before the pandemic?

Destiny Watkins 08:02

I relied on a personal care assistant, and I don't drive I've never had a license. I just made it work and I use our city transport. And everything has been like shut down or because of the schools my caregiver, she's a single mom, and she had to quit because she has to homeschool her daughter now. I've been I've lost all my help all my support and I'm like, 'Okay, I have my cat.' She's motivational, my cat is not normal. She acts like, she is a drill sergeant and the queen of the house. She's very demanding. So usually if we're on a routine every day, and I'm like, so tired, I don't want to get out of bed and I just want to play video games or watch TV or something. I just want to stay in bed with my cats like, no, you're getting up, getting in a chair and you're coming out into the living room at least. She'll sit me out and she'll like paw at you when she wants attention with her paw. I guess I need to get my wheelchair and go out in the living room at least. So it's been kind of nice to have a pet that's on a routine schedule with me. And that we're a really good bond for each other. She's helped me a lot. I mean, right now, I'm really thankful I have a pet that's supporting me through this whole COVID-19, just because of the isolation and struggling to, you know, socialize with somebody. I mean, they're happy animals. They're just thankful every day.

Jeff Sheen 09:52

Yeah, that's really great. I know, you know, pets are such a big part of supporting a lot of our well being. I'm glad that you have your cat there. What's your cat's name?

Destiny Watkins 10:03

Her name is Miss Kitty. Yeah, that's what I call her, but her name was Gladys when I adopted her from a homeless shelter,

Jeff Sheen 10:14

and how long have you two been together that way?

Destiny Watkins 10:16

I've had her for a good two years now. I got her when she was about one years old.

Jeff Sheen 10:26

Well, that's great. So she's about three, four years old.

Destiny Watkins 10:29

About three. Yeah.

Jeff Sheen 10:32

You said a couple of things I wanted to follow up on, one was, you know, you made this comment, and I'm in a similar situation, I have some underlying health condition. So trying to stay physically healthy is kind of been the top priority. So I've certainly been very conservative and really haven't left to go any place with any other people. I'm home with my family. So I've got some other human beings to interact with. But yeah, I'm not going out and doing things that I would typically do. But it's an interesting trade off, right, between trying to stay physically healthy, and the impact that can have on your mental health,

when it isolates you. To stay physically healthy, you have to avoid a lot of things that keep you mentally healthy.

Destiny Watkins 11:18

Yeah, that's the challenge.

Jeff Sheen 11:19

Yeah, absolutely. So what are some of the, you know, I know you're connecting with some friends online and whatnot. Do you have folks that are checking in with you or are there folks that you kind of regularly check in on and see how they're doing if they're in a similar situation?

Destiny Watkins 11:32

Um, yeah, we use a lot of like social media, but usually my acquaintances and friends, they already share everything on social media. So it's just like, we can check on each other that way. When we do like our videos and stuff like that, we'll talk and make sure we're all doing better. You know, how can we help each other out? Just that kind of stuff. I mean, obviously, it's really challenging to, you know, cook a meal for somebody and deliver it. But there has been times where they've helped me out, because I have struggled and I'm like, I don't want to cook tonight. But then there's other times where it's just like they need help with paperwork or organization and they're just getting frustrated. So we'll do like a video and they'll just be like the robot, and I'll help them organize so they don't be in their mind. It just kind of helped us balance each other out, because our minds are so tunnel vision. Just looking at the walls and stuff like that. So it's been like, really hard, but we're making due. I'm checking in with each other seeing what we can do to help each other out.

Jeff Sheen 12:54

Yeah, I think you know, just even some of those online check ins on a regular basis can be a big deal for everybody involved. I was talking to my friend, Justin, who lives in a group home situation. His situation with staffing they've definitely had less staff available to assist him and the staff that do come in kind of assist when they absolutely have to, and the rest of the time kind of keep their their distance. Again, to protect his health, his physical health as well as their physical health. But that's that's taken an emotional toll on him, as well. And he talked about, you know, just the lack of physical contact that he's used to having with people and, you know, even fist bumps and hugs and things like that, where he's feeling fairly isolated right now. You know, I think Micah was talking about how more people that haven't had to experience that are suddenly getting a small taste of what people with different disabilities have kind of dealt with for their whole lives. As far as challenges with accessing things and other stuff. So, I'm curious, you know, with your caregiver situation. So are you just making do are there- is there are you thinking about trying to find somebody else you could hire in the meantime? Or are you just gonna ride this out? What's kind of the plan there?

Destiny Watkins 14:18

Well, I do have ads out and I've been looking, but at this point I'm not sure where we're going to go with this. Just because of this whole virus and I mean, our area is doing phases to open up the city. So I'm just kind of staying back trying to you know, assess, you know, how this is gonna happen. You know, if more people get sick, then I'm just going to have to try and ride it out the best I can. I have been staying

really good connection with my doctor over the phone or video. Just kind of going from there. I mean, trying to be positive through this whole thing's been really hard. The only good positive thing so far that I've thought about was when I went to the store people don't force their help on you and treat you like you're an invalid when you're in a wheelchair. So that's kind of what I say in my mind when I'm going grocery shopping because that's always been my biggest challenge. When I'm by myself in a wheelchair, people want to force their help or try and come up behind you and push you. It's like, sweet, they're not forcing their help on me even though I don't need it. Like if I do, there's workers, you know, that are safe and you know, they're using protection and I'm using it so it's like, I try to avoid it if possible. And just kind of think well is it a necessity like can I just go without? You know, that kind of stuff. But it's it's been definitely challenging to be positive through this whole thing. That's for sure.

Jeff Sheen 16:00

Absolutely, and it sounds like it's been quite a significant challenge. I mean, to lose a personal care attendant that you're used to working with and to grocery shop. That's a really interesting perspective Destiny that before this all happened, people would kind of, you know, just kind of get into your personal space and force their help on you unwanted. Now because everybody's trying to keep their space you actually have a little bit more, ironically, freedom to move around without people forcing themselves to help and get into your personal space. But at the same time, the trade off is this whole quarantine thing.

Destiny Watkins 16:39

Yeah. I just thought it was funny just to think about it. When I go to the store, I'm just like, I'm not struggling more with communicating with others to like, respect my boundaries, you know. I got this like, I'm okay, thank you and they'll just still force their help on me. And it's like, thanks. You just put it my grocery cart where I physically can't reach it now. That's brilliant. I said, No, now I gotta ask a worker to grab that for me. Like now I don't have to, like fight with anybody, but it's just like, whoa, I mean, I got more freedom here. Now I can actually take my time and I'm not being rushed and it's not going to hurt me physically by trying to rush anymore. I can take my time, think about things you know. It gives me time to sit there in my wheelchair and breathe if I need to, to calm myself down, just, you know, having patience and not being forced to just get through things and people cutting you off. And I mean, that's the only positive thing out of this whole thing when I go out and about to like the grocery store when necessary.

Jeff Sheen 17:52

Yeah, that's and you know, but that skill of looking for a silver lining if one can be found. I think that's fantastic that you found like this kind of silver lining that makes you kind of laugh like, 'Oh my gosh, this is so bizarre that in this situation, I actually have this more freedom, but everything else is more complicated'. So how are you kind of getting groceries and stuff these days are you able to get them delivered or somebody's bringing them in or what's going on there?

Destiny Watkins 18:22

Sometimes I can get them delivered online, but there's some stuff that website says in-store only, and so we have to go to the store. Um, so that's been a challenge, but usually I just put them in my bags and either I'll set them in my lap or I'll put them in my backpack on the back of my wheelchair. Just kind

of doing what I can and I mean it's a challenge, that's for sure. But I mean, I'm making do with what I can.

Jeff Sheen 18:58

Yeah. So do you have family that's closer by this interacting with you a little bit more than they would if you had your personal attendant?

Destiny Watkins 19:06

No, I don't have family. It's just me and my cat.

Jeff Sheen 19:11

Yeah, so you're really-

Destiny Watkins 19:13

Being independent.

Jeff Sheen 19:15

You're navigating this. Wow, that's a lot to deal with, though. For sure.

Destiny Watkins 19:25

Yeah, it is. It's overwhelming. That's for sure. I mean, I am thankful for like, you know, the crisis lines that are available that, you know, can help you if you need to call and talk to somebody when you're feeling overwhelmed about the COVID-19. I will say I did call once. When this first started, and I found out I was losing my whole support, and I panicked, and I'm like, oh, boy, I don't think I can do this. But, you know, it just took that one phone call and they talked me through everything and we figured it out. I've been doing it now, I got past that first lump of anxiety and here I am today. Feels like it's halfway over.

Jeff Sheen 20:14

Yeah, here you are talking to us. I'm so grateful to just hear this part of your story. We, Alex and I were thinking of all of the folks that we interviewed recently and and really wanted to check in both on a very on a personal level to say, 'Hey, how are you doing?' And also like, if there's a way we can record some of this and it could benefit other people, maybe we could do that. So even just you talking about this crisis line is something that we're going to want to make sure people know about. I'm curious if you know if that's a kind of an Idaho specific number, I'm assuming there's probably some things available in every state. How did you how did you find out about this crisis line? Because that'd be important for other people to know.

Destiny Watkins 21:00

I actually, I googled it. I love Google. Anytime I don't know anything or can't figure something out. I ask Google. I know a lot of people say don't go to Google. Google internet is just bad for information. Actually, I see it at a different perspective. Growing up with a disability, I struggled with reading and writing. I asked Google how to spell a word. It tells me if I don't know a word, I will spell the word to Google and Google will tell me how to pronounce it. That helped me so much growing up. So I asked

Google who I could talk to about COVID-19 when having a panic attack, and it actually pulled up a bunch of numbers. I just called and if they didn't, couldn't help me, I asked if they could help me find out a number that I could call and talk to. Eventually, I got a number and I talked to somebody and that's how I did it.

Jeff Sheen 22:03

I'm so glad that you were persistent until you found somebody that could kind of help you with that. So I mean, not to get too personal but like, was that a long phone call? Was it a short phone call? What kind of some of the things that they said that maybe helped you that others might need to hear?

Destiny Watkins 22:20

Um, it was a pretty decent phone call. It was at least an hour, maybe an hour and a half and I just kind of talked about a little bit about everything that was going on. How overwhelmed I was with losing all of my support. They actually gave me some resources I didn't even think about for after, you know, the whole COVID-19 calms down that I could reach out to because on top of everything else, I had my power chair broke down on me. So, I went without my power chair for a little while until my tech person could come out and fix it. But that was a big obstacle. I mean, the limit of contact and stuff like that it was really concerning. But I mean, we used protection, hand sanitizer, face mask, and kind of stayed at a distance when talking and that kind of stuff. I was transferred out of my chair, so when they came in I had it ready for him. They could stay at a distance to look at it and figure it out. They changed my batteries and that was that. But I mean for a couple days I went without it. That was the icing on the cake for me, I was just like, okay, can't do this. I have a shoulder injury that I've had for couple years now. So I'm like, no personal care attendant, lost all my support, you know, I was just really overwhelmed with life in general at this point. I got some information that I didn't even think about using it was the United Way. I had no idea they existed and that they helped all over the state, of donation. So I was like, great, maybe they can help me with a wheelchair or something like a manual because my manual chair's kind of old anyways and fallen apart. But I was thankful I had it for when my power chair broke down, because I have no support. So, I mean, now I can prioritize and plan things a little bit better knowing that there's actually alternatives out there in this world that actually can help you still.

Jeff Sheen 24:42

Yeah, I'm really glad that you found some resources that have been helpful to you and, you know, connecting to other people. I'm glad that you have kind of the online connections through social media and others, and, you know, playing video games online watching the movies online. I'm glad you have that contact. I'm really glad that you have Miss Kitty there with you. As far as some emotional connection and all of those things. I'm wondering if there's anything that we might be able to help put you in contact with any resources or anything else you think that you might need that we could help with? Or if you think you're doing alright for now.

Destiny Watkins 25:17

I think I'm doing alright. I think I'm just taking one day at a time. I mean, that's the best that I can do. I mean, I think anybody is just looking at what they can do right now for this day, you know, for just meals and you know, my house is clean. Kept me busy so I've had some stuff to do physically. I mean, yeah, it's challenge, but I just look at, well, I don't have anywhere else I need to be, you know, no

appointments. I can do this now. I can catch up on this or, you know, it's time for spring cleaning! Go through, get rid of all this old stuff that don't fit. Then after this one COVID-19 I'm like sweet now I can upgrade and get new stuff or whatever I need to put back in my house and plan for the next crisis moment. You know, that could occur, but this time, I will plan for an emergency kit. *music plays*

Alex Schiwal 26:26

music plays Thanks for listening to this episode of the MHDD Crossroads podcast. We hope you enjoyed this episode. If you did, make sure to like, subscribe and share our podcast wherever you download your episodes. Also, make sure to follow us on social media at MHDD center, and visit our website mhddcenter.org for more resources and trainings. Until next time, thanks. *music plays*