

# Episode 13: Follow-Up Interview with Micah Peace

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Speakers: Alex Schiwal, Jeff Sheen, Micah Peace

## Jeff Sheen 00:01

\*Music\* Hello and welcome to the Mental Health Crossroads Podcast, where we explore the intersection of mental health and developmental disabilities. In this week's episode we catch up with Micah Peace who was part of an earlier group interview with members of the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Partnership, that episode is linked below (in the show notes). We hope you enjoy the conversation \*Music\*

## Jeff Sheen 00:32

Today I'm speaking with Micah Peace, who is an autistic multiply disabled educator and community organizer from Louisville, Kentucky. You might remember we talked to Micah as part of a panel a few months ago. Micah, we're delighted to have you on today. We just wanted to do a check-in with you and some others that were on that previous podcast, and start with how are things going since we last talked?

## Micah Peace 00:55

Well, thanks for having me, Jeff. It's great to talk to you again. And things have been, I guess the best word for it is complicated since we last talked. I mean, I don't know if you're aware of the state of the world, the whole sky is falling thing going on. It's been a strange two months, I'll say. Because in some ways, it has been very, very hard, very challenging, but I don't think that I could say that it's necessarily been bad. I think that in a lot of ways, the quarantine, the shutdown, has given me some time and some space that I was really needing. Even though I've definitely had my share of really bad days and stress as a result of this, I feel like I'm in a pretty good place since we last talked.

## Jeff Sheen 02:04

I'm glad to hear that. Yeah. When we talked back in January or February, whenever it was, I think it was February. There was some rumblings of some things happening in China at the time and now fast forward to talking to you in May and we've all been kind of in quarantine for the

last two months and the world's completely upside down. That's really why we wanted to call and you know, check in and say, you know, what, what have you been busy doing in this interim and how has this pandemic, COVID-19 situation changed things in your own life?

### **Micah Peace 02:40**

Well, it's interesting. In a way, things have slowed down and yet I've been very busy. I think that lots of folks can relate to the feeling of living life on Zoom these days. I'm a teacher's aide and do some educating of younger kids, so I've been still working each day, although less than I'm used to. Previously, I was used to being out in the world and having my home as very much a kind of a sanctuary to come back to. Now, the whole world is coming in. To me, and as an autistic person, that is a very big change and has been a lot for me to cope with. I'm not a very online person in the first place. It's a connection, but it's a different kind of connection, right? This distance that we have from people and yet now I'm talking to people more than I ever have, in some ways, socially, I'm playing more Dungeons and Dragons than I've ever played in my life. And that's really been great for me. Being at home, it blurs the line between work and home, at least it has for me. That's been kind of tricky to deal with. But also, I'm starting to learn more about setting boundaries in that way now that I can't just get in my car. I don't have that transition time anymore. That's been a big change. And I guess part of the whole like, I mentioned how important my home has always been to me as a sanctuary. Now, it's like everyone's here all the time and everyone's in it. I'm closer to my roommates than ever. We got together and all watched Tiger King, like just each night for a week or whatever and then that was fun. Because our schedules have always been, you know, pretty different so we're getting to reconnect and that's been cool.

### **Jeff Sheen 05:13**

Yeah, it's definitely this strange mix of silver linings and more connection in different ways. But I think you really have a good point. I was talking to my friends about this. What is so important is that transition time of being in the car, from the office back to home or from home to the office. It got you in a different headspace and you kind of put on your hat for the next role that you were going to play. Now, it's like it's a 10 second walk from the living room into wherever your office is or wherever you're using your computer. And all of a sudden, you're at work and there's no time to make that mental transition into a new space. Then, like you said, it just feels like all of your coworkers are now in your sanctuary. And you're on Zoom six to seven hours a day. There's pros and cons, like the Dungeons and Dragons is fantastic. Then, with all of these Zoom meetings you get so burned out. I've been doing game night with my friends on Saturdays, and it's lovely. But if I've been on Zoom all day, having game night just is not fun at all.

### **Micah Peace 06:18**

It's not even attractive. It almost makes it's hard to even log in online for. You've been doing it so much. But then when you're out in the world, it doesn't feel that same way, to leave one place where you've been around a lot of people and go do something. Sometimes it does for me, but I get over people easily.

### **Jeff Sheen 06:37**

Yeah, I do as well. For me, as more of an introverted person, there's been some quite lovely things like not having to find an excuse for why I don't want to go out and be amongst a larger group of people. Because nobody can. And so the rest of the world kind of caught up to the way that I like to be in the world, which is small, very small, intimate groups and not a lot of big crowds.

### **Micah Peace 07:03**

Yeah, exactly. Like I've been practicing for social distancing all my life.

### **Jeff Sheen 07:09**

That's right, exactly. So tell me a little bit about and you talked a lot about, you know, this battle. Well, this transition from like work to home and being with roommates, more and all of that. And, you know, the world likes to talk about work life balance, but now that it's all kind of blurred together. You did mention boundaries and things. What are some things you've been doing to kind of take care of your mental health and also any tips you would have for other people that might be having a more difficult time with all of this isolation and things? What are your thoughts on that?

### **Micah Peace 07:42**

The number one thing has just been giving myself permission to slow down. I think that for all the stress and the pain and everything that this causes, both COVID-19 directly and the quarantine situation. I think that this is an invitation to for us to slow down and to re-examine what's important to us and what we need, both as individuals, and as a society. I've seen a lot of memes about you know, what are you doing there in quarantine if you don't come out of quarantine ripped with three new skills and a bachelor's degree, what have you done, or whatever. And it's like, why, you know, it's odd to me that kind of pressure for productivity is following people and I think that the best advice I could give is to take a nap, ease up on yourself. You know, right now, things are moving slower, and that's okay. Um, I think that a lot of the speed and the competition of our society is a little unhealthy. And so you know, there's nothing wrong with taking time to take a nap or to take a walk, to just sit on your porch and be, Especially, right now when all of the news coming in is so negative and so heavy, like we need time to process everything that we're going through, and it's important to include that in your day. Another thing that I've been doing is making sure to stick to a routine and at least try to

break up my day. You know, if I've got to zoom calls back to back at least I'm going to get up and stretch in between them. I usually take about two hours in the afternoon before I teach my second reading group where I give myself a sensory break. You know, I don't look at a screen. I just-I maybe I take a walk, maybe I lay in the dark. I'm trying very hard in this time to learn to listen to my body more.

### **Jeff Sheen 10:01**

Yeah, you said so many great things in that segment, the whole idea of slowing down and really listening to what you need. I know that in the first couple weeks, I was having so much screen time that it was just so overstimulating, that I finally figured out, 'oh, I've got to take breaks in between all of these meetings, I've got to go out and walk around the yard. I've got to go feel the sunlight on my face.' Yeah, that idea about productivity and the pace is probably unhealthy to start with, this treadmill that we're all on in this rat race. This is a time to reflect on what really is important. People are losing loved ones and particularly in the disability field and community people are much higher risk for serious complications. Maybe it's okay to take a pause and look around and think, why am I running so fast? And where am I running to? And what's really most important? I really appreciate your thoughts. I feel very much like my thinking is very similar to yours on a lot of these things. I know there's been some of the memes on the other side, which I think a friend told me yesterday, the Canadian government emailed out all of their government employees that are working from home and said, 'hey, you know, your productivity doesn't need to be what it was.' We're in the middle of a global crisis. You're, you're working from home, not to increase your productivity. You're working at home, because it's a global crisis. And you're keeping people safe by staying home. And, you know, our mindset pre-quarantine, it's gonna be really interesting, right? The world's never going to be the same. We're all going to have this pre-quarantine memory of what things were like and then things are different now and who knows what they will be two months from now or six months from now. The idea of taking a nap and maybe having some compassion for yourself. Sounds about right for me.

### **Micah Peace 11:59**

And to and not just keeping it to yourself, you make such an important point about, you know, there was a pre-COVID and there's going to be a post. And we're at this really pivotal moment where you know, we have a choice, we can have a say in what the post-COVID world looks like. And it can go back to closely resembling the world that wasn't working for a lot of people or we can turn inward and try to address some of the hurt and some of the things that drive us to continually push ourselves on that treadmill or compare ourselves to other people. Like you said, people with disabilities are especially vulnerable right now. But a lot of things about this lifestyle aren't particularly new to us. We're used to isolation. We're used to economic precarity. And we're used to banging our heads against a wall and asking why do we live in the world that allows this? I saw someone's back window on their car had written in, they had

written in window markers, something like my liberty doesn't end where your health begins or something. And it just struck me as so bizarre because aren't we all in this together? If we aren't considering the health and the well-being of our neighbors, then what is liberty good for in the first place? And just this like conflation that people have about, oh, their freedom is being taken away. Well no, like you said, we're doing a good thing right now to keep people safe. It's not- it shouldn't be about just yourself and just how this is affecting you. I think it is vital for people to be able to take a nap and to sit with this and do well for themselves but also think about who you're staying connected to. Think about what you're putting into the world right now. Who are you helping? Who do you know that might need help? In what small way, can you make the world a little kinder when this is all over starting today?

### **Jeff Sheen 14:34**

Yeah, that's beautifully said. And you know, I think, that part about people with disabilities have long experienced a lot of the things that are now being experienced by a vast majority of people. We were talking to another person we interviewed, Justin Olson, a couple months ago and he was talking about the lack of physical touch for those people that are isolated. And he's like, that's something as a as someone with a disability, I've experienced long periods of time, not being given hugs or not having people close by to have that physical connection to. Now more people are experiencing that. The idea that I would love to see is that we all take a second and say 'Oh', and we have a little bit more empathy for each other, a little bit more understanding of what this is. Like you said the economic precarity and all of that has been an experience for people with disabilities for a long time. Maybe this is an opportunity to more people to wake up to those realities and get behind. You know, you've got your shirt on I can see right now it says the future is accessible. The hopefully the future is accessible. And it's more inclusive and it's kinder. And I think you're right, we're in this moment of time where we can help shape what the future is. There is the pre-COVID stuff. We have this kind of pause that's been put upon society at large. And if we can use that pause to say, you know, I'd like to do some things differently individually, and then collectively. And I love that idea of start today thinking about how can you be just a little bit kinder to yourself to others. What are the little things you know, if everybody made a 1% change in how kind they are, or a 1% change in how they looked at the world and how inclusive they are, that 1% change collectively would be a huge and asking anyone person to be 1% kinder, or 1%, more inclusive or 1% more accessible is such a small ask but collectively, the impact of that would be tremendous.

### **Micah Peace 16:43**

Exactly.

### **Jeff Sheen 16:44**

I love that you're out there advocating for these things and your voice is getting out there. I appreciate you being on the podcast because we want to keep amplifying this wisdom and this

lived experience while people are out there. What better thing to do than to listen to a new podcast while you're in quarantine? Hopefully more folks will get a chance to hear your wisdom. I really appreciate you taking the time Micah to just touch base. I wish you well. I wish you health and safety and those that you care about as well.

### **Micah Peace 17:18**

I wish you and your family safety and health and grounded-ness in this time. Sending you love and grounding energy and I'll definitely spread the word about your podcast. Thank you for doing what you do and uplifting the voices and the experiences of self-advocates.

### **Alex Schiwal 17:34**

\*Music\* Thanks for listening to this episode of The MHDD Crossroads podcast. We hope you enjoyed this episode. Remember to like, subscribe, listen, and share the MHDD Crossroads podcast on whatever platform you use. Additionally, remember to follow us on social media at MHDD Center or visit our website [mhddcenter.org](http://mhddcenter.org) to find more resources, digital stories, transcripts and trainings. Thanks for listening in. \*Music\*