

Skills & Wisdom of Disabled People: Covid-19 & Beyond

with Dzifa Afonu & Lani Parker

SAARA [00:00:01] Welcome to this session, this podcast. This session is called Skills and Wisdom of Disabled People during Coronavirus and Beyond: a reflection by Lani Parker and Dzifa Afonu. So if anything comes up after the session for you, you can always email us at: 'info@healingjusticeldn.org'. So to introduce our absolutely incredible speakers whom we are so grateful to be in collaboration with. Firstly, Dzifa Afonu, they have an eclectic set of interests and skills. They are an artist, writer, community builder, workshop facilitator, self-confessed geek with interest in graphic design, illustration, programming and gadgetry. They currently work as a clinical psychologist in a child and adolescent mental health service. They are specifically passionate about how to support frontline workers to incorporate healing justice values while being engaged in work with marginalised people. You can find out more about Dzifa and their work at their website, 'www.wavesfromripples.com'. And then we have the amazing Lani Parker. Lani Parker is a facilitator, trainer and coach with a background in providing advice, information and advocacy within disabled people's organisations. She is passionate about making connections and developing new ideas and visions that center disabled people and other marginalised groups in both theory and practise. Since 2015, she has been a steering committee member of Sisters of Frida, a disabled women's collective building campaigns and peer support with an intersectional perspective. In 2017, she founded Sideways Times, a UK based platform and podcast for

conversations which broaden and deepen our understandings of the politics of ableism, racism, whiteness, classism and gender oppression.

LANI [00:02:07] Thanks Saara.

DZIFA [00:02:09] Thanks for that introduction. So yeah, I guess the title of our podcast conversation today is Skills and Wisdom of Disabled People during Coronavirus and Beyond. And I guess I kind of was thinking, you know, just kind of giving a bit of an introduction really to that, to that conversation and how we kind of came to it and what has just drawn us to that conversation. Lani and I have worked together for many years on different projects and have had lots of conversations about things and I think this podcast will just be a kind of snapshot of where we are in terms of thinking. And some of it, some of it's evolving, some of it's things that we've been thinking about for a long time. Some of it's kind of new and also all of it's slightly new in the context of coronavirus. And, you know, thinking about these things from a position of having spent several months kind of mostly in a very small network of people doing most things virtually and online. So that's the kind of that's really kind of given our context and, and a lot of what we want to talk about kind of comes from personal experience. And like, I think there's some really real benefits about talking from personal experience because it has like a richness and I really enjoy hearing people's personal experiences, as well as their thinking. But obviously that means there are some experiences that we might not be able to cover in our conversation, their might be disabled people who have particular

environments that they're in that this doesn't necessarily speak to. But we try and do our best to kind of speak from where we're coming, from where we are. I guess the reason I was particularly interested in this topic... Actually, you know, even just really personally, I think when, when coronavirus hit and like the beginning of lock down and even just before, lots of people kind of try to kind of jump in and help because I'm a visibly disabled person. And I kind of felt like, well, I know I do need support, but I also felt sometimes people offer support, offers of support, were not necessarily recognising how much I had to give and how much else like... How many strengths I had, how many things I was blessed with, even in, even in a really horrific situation. Even in a situation that feels really scary and threatening, that I felt like I still had a lot of resource to give as well, and that there was this assumption. There's often the assumption that disabled people are only in need of support. And so I felt like it was really important to have, have a space to kind of talk about that and have it situated within a disability justice framework. How about you, Lani?

LANI [00:05:23] Well, yeah, similar for me, I think that, um, I was really interested in this conversation because when, at the beginning of the pandemic, I was, I was kind of... I was really pleased and blessed to be part of, like communities who are doing a lot of things in response. So I'm part of a community called Akwaaba, which is a migrant social centre. And we... There was a lot of work and there still is a lot of work to support people, in terms of a crisis, in terms of having to close the centre and all those sort of things. And there was... and I was connected to a lot of people who were trying to do things

in the beginning and, I found it... I found it both kind of really humbling and amazing to be part of all that and also difficult to find my place and what I can contribute and those kind of things. And so I think having this conversation, um, drawing on like some of the, the kind of skills and politics that I draw on in my everyday life and try, and try and put forward in my everyday life in this new situation was kind of what I was interested in. And that also I found that there was a lot... That a lot happened around support like you were saying, around you know, the terms 'vulnerabl'e and things like that, which I guess we'll probably talk about more, which I was kind of interested in, the way it was developing, but also kind of like, oh, that was quite a few things that I wasn't... That didn't sit comfortably. So I guess I'm really wanting to have this conversation to see where we're at now and how we, where we can bring things to at this point if you get what I mean?

DZIFA [00:07:37] So one of the things we were... We wanted to kind of start with was thinking about how we can state... What do we define as resources for disabled people? And how do we how do we understand resource in the context of disability justice?

LANI [00:07:56] So, like, [00:07:57]for me, like [0.5s] [00:07:57]some of the, the first things to say is that we are like, infinitely resourceful. That we have... Like as disabled people, we are amazing and resourceful. And we have so many resources that are undervalued and devalued and exploited by like the current system of racial capitalism that we're living in. [30.0s] So sort of, from that

perspective we live in a world where it seems like everything's very scarce and, in practicality, I think a lot of lot of disabled people don't have access to the resources that they need, and so we spend a lot of time, rightfully fighting for access to resources. And... But I, so there is that kind of, there's that context. Often makes me feel like I don't have anything to contribute or, you know, I'm not really kind of... The kind of things I can do are not the right kind of things or those sort of things. So I think from, from my perspective, in terms of defining resources, there's two main things to say. One is that there is enough resources for everybody and it's really about access to resources. And the second is around just the wide sense of resource we have and where we get our resources from so, we don't... You know, we have internal resources. We get resources from, you know, our communities, from our families, from people around us, you know from surviving isolation, from surviving oppression, from battling every day, from all of those all of those bits, whether they be like terrible or joyful, like they all have resource in them.

DZIFA [00:10:19] I totally agree. I think that, you know, like there's often this kind of assumption that there's not enough resource and disabled people have to kind of fight between each other for kind of some, some things that really are kind of basic rights, like rights to independence, rights to, to be able to, sometimes it's simple things like just the right to be able to have the health care that you need or the right to be able to have someone who kind of checks in on you or the right to have someone to help you physically get around if you have any physical limitations. I think we can be so focused on, on that world. And,

you know, one of the things that I have been through so many times that I find incredibly traumatising is going through kind of assessment processes for some kind of whatever resource that might be, whether that's financial resource in terms of like getting some money, because it costs more to live in this, in a world that's designed for able bodied people as a disabled person or whether that's about access to care in my own home and getting support for the things I need to do in my life or support at work. You always have to have this process of an assessment. And in that assessment it's, you know, the position that you're in, the story that you've got to give is really, of one of deficit, that you're this poor, poor, disabled person and you really, really, really, really need the help and you're really, really deserving. And you get put in this very kind of receptive place. And I think, I think that can kind of put you in a state of constantly feeling like under-resourced and in deficit, somehow feeling like that's like your fault and somehow feeling like without those things, there's no point. And I, I think, resources... I feel like I really think it's important to move beyond thinking about money as a resource, even though I think money is an important resource. It doesn't... Like it's not a, it's not to kind of like sidestep the fact that poverty and not having enough support is a massive.... Has a massive impact on, on people. But I suppose it's also about thinking about, you know, you can both be in complete, an impoverished situation and still have loads of resource. It's just the resource that you have isn't seen as valuable in our current economic system. Like even the resources, I mean, like the resources it takes to kind of like, make out of nothing. You know, like you look in your cupboard when, you know times where I haven't had, like, financial resource, and you kind of look in your

cupboard and you've got to try and, like, invent creatively something tasty out of like whatever you can or whatever money you've got. You know, like I learnt how to look at the small print on a, when you go into the into the shopping stores, those like, you can get the price per kilogram, then you got to kind of compare them to make sure you get the best out of your pennies and things like that. I mean, those are kind of skills and resources that people who have limited resources really just kind of automatically find themselves kind of developing. And it just, there's not enough highlighting of it so we kind of go around sometimes really full or stuck in that place of feeling under-resourced and and lacking in resource and then also feeling like that's somehow our fault.

LANI [00:14:10] Yeah, and I think things like resources around making connections and especially in isolation, you know, like the ability to build relationships or the ability, I've seen, for example, like Facebook groups with disabled people making connections with each other to have fun, to support each other, you know, to kind of share the resources that we do have. And then there's also, I don't know, what also made me think around is like, that when you're talking about sort of assessment cultures and things like that, I was thinking about... There's also something about, that's important about the way we think about resources, because we need to shift the... We need to shift the way that it's thought about. Like, for example, for me, I don't tend to have a huge amount of difficulty getting assessed and getting the right levels of support. And that's partly to do with the fact that impairments are very stable and you can see it and it's very like obvious. And it's also to do with like, I have

citizenship or my whiteness and all of those things. We really need to kind of move away from that, thinking about those things, because they're just so binary and, you know. And I guess in this, in this period, there has been some big, trying to do that in big, big ways. Like in different ways than before in a sense, with the mutual aid kind of thinking that's come up.

DZIFA [00:16:23] I was thinking as well about resource, is that... Like I think about, I don't know, and I always feel so... If I do any speaking or if there are any kind of, things that I do like writing, there's always like a request for a bio and I kind of, and you know I get that, that there's this is kind of situating yourself and introducing yourself so that people have some kind of orientation to who you are, what you do where you're talking from. And so I'm not kind of against bios, but sometimes I feel, I feel like I kind of want to make my bios much more about like, I don't know, Dzifa who likes to do fingerpainting with their child, and Dzifa, who is really good at smiling at strangers on the street, and Dzifa who sometimes does parenting by just having a nap on the floor and being a climbing frame and, you know, like rather than be like, oh, these are my qualifications and these are all the places I've worked. And this is what makes me resourceful because of the things that I've had access to and actually. You know, like [00:17:45] sometimes I feel like I have been told or made to feel like that's what my value, that's where my value comes from, is from like my qualifications or my education. And actually, in reality, in terms of like what actually gives me value on the day to day level of what makes me happy and what makes me feel good in my life, the things that I bring to it, are usually like, I

don't know, comedy and the willingness to get it wrong and friendship, making friends, keeping friends, deepening friends. [44.9s] And I just wish that you could put that on a bio, I mean, you can, but it just would make you kind of stand out and people wouldn't get it, so you'd have to need this like, five minute preamble in order to really give that as your full bio. And also, then it seems like you're hiding your educational experience, which I don't want to also do, end up being like, not situating myself within those things because those obviously have an impact on, you know, where I'm speaking from and what, the knowledge I have inherited.

LANI [00:19:08] Yeah, we could do like, if we all could have all of that all the time, like think about all the things that we can do and do all the time that are amazing, like checking in with each other, you know, like, oh I can... You know, like you were saying about you being a climbing frame and having a nap. It's like, well, you may be... And it's resourceful, you know, to just sit and chill out sometimes and like do nothing like sometimes that is, a quality that is a resource as well.

DZIFA [00:19:54] And I think, and I guess the reason we kind of, I started thinking about this and we thought of starting all this was because one of the things that we've kind of noticed that disabled people have been involved in, and has, you know, ok.... So on the one hand, since coronavirus kind of, meant that lots of people had to shield and lots of people had to lock down, [00:20:23]out had popped all these kind of mutual aid groups in different

locations throughout the UK and across the world. And, you know, on the one hand, I think it's really important and interesting to see that this is a new thing that's happening. There's something new about it, the scale in which it's happening, the people who are involved in it. On the other hand, it's something that's really old and disabled people have been using mutual aid as a resource between each other for a really, really long time. [36.0s] And I can remember at the beginning of the, of lockdown feeling like I wanted to engage in mutual aid groups. And there was there was a mixture of resistance. And I think part of it comes from like our own internalised ideas about like what we have to give and what it feels like to ask for things. And so I think [00:21:25] really understanding and defining resources from a disability justice point of view is really important as part of the first step to even conceiving of and understanding how mutual aid and collective care really works. [12.9s]

LANI [00:21:39] What was really exciting to you about mutual aid, or what is really exciting to you about mutual aid and collective care?

DZIFA [00:21:53] Yeah, I mean, I find it really exciting because it was like, a mobilisation of ordinary people, ordinary local people to kind of support each other and I think, you know, we have this kind of an attitude that we have to each other as we go out and see people on the street. But there was kind of, you can sometimes, can sometimes feel like everyone's just out for themselves. And so I think mutual aid was really amazing because it felt like, oh, actually like, you know, people are coming out to be... People who wouldn't ordinarily go

out of their way to help other people with feeling like pulled towards kind of doing something around that. So I think it was really exciting in that way. And I really like the term mutual aid. And I'm finding a way outside of a government model and outside of a charity model to kind of share resources among local people. I think it really has the capacity to be something sustainable and a network of support for people so that, you know, that we actually can support each other to not reach our complete bottom when it comes to resources and make sure that we're looking out for each other and that those of us who have resource that other people need can give that resource and, and that it... I really like you know, I really like the idea at the centre of it, which is that we all have resource to give and we all have resource that we need. And for these groups to work well, then everybody needs to come from that position.

LANI [00:23:33] I think it was interesting because I, I started to sort of try to organise in my neighbourhood around the mutual aid, and I found that we did in the end, the mutual aid in my area was bigger and I ended up kind of trying to get my neighbours involved. And there was, I think there's that, there was that attitude, but there was also a difficulty around really needing to build up that trust with people, that for some people it was very easy or it felt like for some people it was kind of exciting. And we had this new way of doing things and for other people, it was kind of like, well, I had that attitude anyway, but it had to be, had to come from people that I, I trust and people... And for some people I know, it was around, you know, difficulty in using it because using those kind of new structures. Because in a funny way, because it didn't center disabled

people, I think, or it didn't, and it didn't center relationships in a particular way, that, you know, it takes a time to build that trust up.

DZIFA [00:25:12] Yeah, I agree. And I think that, I think also what's really difficult is they're developing in the context of a kind of a charity model way of thinking and like a lot of people don't question charity, it's like this benevolent force. Obviously, you know, like give to the poor, that's completely fine. So I don't think there are many people within these mutual aid groups who necessarily are coming from, from that position. And so, therefore, it has the... Some of the yucky stuff about charity that doesn't feel comfortable, like asking somebody who's in a more privileged position who you don't know and you don't have any relationship with for food, can be really harmful for people. It can be really embarrassing, can be really scary to step out and ask for support. And on the other hand, you might feel like you have to present yourself in a certain way to get, to get the support. So, you know, people feeling like they have to kind of, you know, reveal their trauma and their pain on an online forum to people who don't know them in order to get their basic needs met. I think that that, you know... You know, the most exciting thing about mutual aid is it's not about charity. It's about people all being resourced - resourceful. And that even if you have resource, that you still need each other. And I think that's one of the key things around the disability justices is around the, you know, taking, moving away from this idea that disabled people are the people who are dependent on others and able bodied people are independent and disabled people just need to be more like able bodied people for the world to be a better place. And

actually that we are all interdependent, that we all depend on each other constantly and in a cycle and a network of interdependence. And there's no way that there's anybody on a mutual aid group who doesn't need some, some support at some point, because that's what we are. And sometimes it's really hard for people to tune into that part of themselves. And it's really complex because I think this is one of the things that we've spoken about Lani, is this like, even for me personally, like I kind of like, well, I've got a lot of resource and I've got a, I've got a job and I've got a salary coming in. But there are times where I am struggling and, but they feel like they're quite short, and then if I think, well, if I was to compare that to somebody else who's in more need, maybe I should be the one who, like, stays back and doesn't ask for support. And I think working out the balance between how much support you ask for and how much support you give in a mutual aid group is also something that needs to be actually tackled. I think, I think that's part of the problem with the mutual aid groups is that it needs people to actually articulate clearly about what they understand about the mutual aid groups to kind of encourage people to not feel there's any shame in asking for help, no matter what your situation, and to kind of help people work out that balance or have some kind of way of talking openly about how we work out that balance between asking for what we need and and giving what we have to give.

LANI [00:29:04] Yeah, and I think that, you know, you can also, you know, feel like you have to feel very grateful for the support that you get. Like, within some, within some organising like with Akwaaba, for example, you know, it's slightly

different because we're already in a community with each other. But it was, it was difficult to... Or is difficult to, to be providing that kind of support which, which we were around food, and shopping, and or those kind of things without it slipping into a sort of service or charity modes, because that's what we're used to. And the people who've got more "resource" open quotes, close quotes in terms of like, often time, education, those kind of things, you know, give more and don't take, this sort of like a vulnerability thing as well, I think. Like, not, it's easier for people in more structurally powerful positions to not be vulnerable or something, and so kind of set the system up a bit like that sometimes. So those are just some things I noticed around like... I guess I saw that mutual aid is a practise that we're doing all the time and it's suddenly got really big and it's, but it's still a practise, like we're still trying to get out of all these patterns of like... And structures as we do it. So it's going to be like difficult in that sense. And one of the things that.... You know, like, yeah, that's just a response in terms of what struck me from what you were saying about it's difficult sometimes to use that resource and figure out which balances and how to do it.

DZIFA [00:31:24] Yeah, I really like the idea of it as a practise, and it's constantly changing and moving. And that you're not going to like, you know, you can't just write up the rules of mutual aid groups and then like, OK, and just let them self-function. Like, it's a way of being with each other and with ourselves that we have to kind of learn and grow and respond to changing situations. And it has to be kind of an emergent practise. On the other hand, as well, I guess the mutual aid, mutual aid groups, I think there's a... I definitely

have my own tendency for things like this where I'm kind of like, well, if it doesn't meet my kind of political values, if, like, not everybody involved is always, is on the same political position as me in relation to all of these, like, list of many important things... You know, like they need to be on the right side in this way, in that way and that way, then it's not worthy. And I think I really appreciated there was an article that we've included as one of the resources that kind of talks a bit about this and about how, you know, in a pandemic, in moments of crisis, there's mutual aid groups will encompass people from lots of different backgrounds and they need to in order to be right. Because the people who need support are not all going to agree with my political views. And the people who give support are not all going to believe in my political views. So there has to be an element of like practising how to be in communication and in relationship with people who you don't necessarily agree with, but under at least the umbrella that you believe that we all have resources to give and to, and an entitlement to receive them. And I think that's the challenge and exciting thing about mutual aid groups.

LANI [00:33:27] Yeah, and also, that also made me think about, you know, under the umbrella of you were saying under the umbrella of knowing that we all have those resources, but also that we're all connected and that it's, that it's important that we're in community with each other, wherever we are. Like, that was one thing, or is one thing that's really amazing about mutual aid is you can you can set them... These ones were local during the pandemic and are. But like people set up mutual aid for all kinds of different reasons with all kinds of

different groups of people. And one thing around local organising is that, yeah, nobody's ever going to agree with everything. And I think that, I think that's, yeah, that's really important. And for me, I suppose as well, it is, it was kind of, oh, I don't, I'm not sure about, you know, my neighbours kind of. There was quite a lot of like, oh, "You did this for me and I'm so, so grateful." And I was kind of like, well, "It's OK" because I'm just, you know, I'm just doing it because I can. And I find that quite difficult. But I also think there needs to be like space for those things as well.

DZIFA [00:34:59] And I guess, I think part of what you know, for me about this conversation and why the kind of idea about the skills and wisdom of disabled people in relation to mutual aid groups is that, you know, I think even for myself and I feel like I'm in a really lucky position where I can kind of advocate quite well for myself. I do kind of, feel fairly confident asking for help if I need it, but I still felt like there was these kind of conversations inside my head that were kind of internalised, stuff really, that made me find it really hard and I guess when I say internalised, I mean kind of like being a disabled black person and having kind of my own feelings about whether I deserve, like, certain amounts of support or how much do I deserve or like, am I a worthy enough person to receive this type of care or am I receiving too much care or am I not giving enough care? Or do I, you know... How much, how big are my needs? And I think it was, yeah, I think I found myself really kind of struggling with that and still feeling nervous, I guess, in a group of strangers to be able to, like, put myself out there. And I guess I was thinking about not necessarily that I would

do anything different, but, um... But if I had been a bit more orientated to thinking about the skills and the wisdom and the history of mutual aid groups and the theory behind mutual aid groups that we might feel, more comfortable or more... I might have less anxiety or self-doubt about asking for support in those groups or giving support in those groups?

LANI [00:37:07] Yeah, I think I also felt really like I, I couldn't possibly ask for the support that, that's offering. Somehow I can give it but it was difficult to think about asking for it because I don't need it as much as this person or that person or whatever. But I also found it quite difficult to figure out like what I could give. And I think. Often I mean, I think I've sort of said this already, but I think often like, because there was quite a lot of things around, like delivering things or administrative stuff, which both of which my impairments weren't really like... I wasn't really able to do. So I had to kind of think about what is it? What else is it that I could, that I could do? And also, what is it that I can draw on from, from like knowing about, you know, from my own experience of what, what can I do. So I, in the end, like, I thought about trying to break social isolation with disabled people and setting up a space where we just listen to each other: where we try not to, like, flatten out our experiences and have a space where we just listen to how it is for us. So that was, that's also part of the mutual aid structures that came up and have been happening for a very, very long time. And so it's not just around, like, really real practical support, like shopping and things like that, but it's also around community care and self-care and and those kind of structures. Yeah. Which is really exciting to be part of.

DZIFA [00:39:27] Yeah, I really liked, I really like that idea of, you know, like going through that process of trying to like look inside and see what is it that I, I can give and what is it that I can create. And just giving space is like, it's like, it's sound so simple. You know, like let's meet this time every, every week or whatever. And here's the space for people. But it's so complex, you know? Like to make that space safe, to make sure that the right people feel like that space is for them. To orientate yourself to welcoming people into that space and going to battle with your own, like, internalised stuff about what you know, putting yourself out there. Well, I think I remember like, at the beginning when I was on social media at the beginning of the pandemic and like so many people were like, OK, yeah, like I'm on, I'm on it, I'm getting, we need to sort everything out. We need to kind of like this is an opportunity. We need to, like, come together as a community. We need to support each other. And things were like popping up all the time. I was just like, oh gosh, I have that feeling often. It's like, oh my gosh, I'm not a proper activist. I need to do more to change the world right now. And, um, yeah, I know that this is a choice. I've made that choice and it's something that I still sometimes wrestle with it. But I you know, I really believe that my activism is in my every day and in my mutual aid is in my relationships with people, whether that's checking in with people. And during... And, just like like you say, like a practise that I'm constantly involved in, which is around, yeah, compassion for people giving people space to talk. I'm working on my relationships, making sure that I take accountability in my relationships, making sure that I'm willing to like turn up for people and be there for people at times,

whether that's like having mental health crises or having crises with housing or food or just like being in relationship, being present for people, being in connection, being open to listening out for where people need support. Talking to my neighbours, talking to people in the park from a socially distance position. You know, like checking in with people and like making that mutual aid be part of how I am in the world. And that I think, again, when we talk about resource, those are the kind of resources that don't get seen, and even within activist circles, that can be this tendency to have this like CV of like, you know, doing all these actions. Whether that's like protests or, you know, changing laws and things like that and I think that's important and I definitely been involved in activism with a big A, but I think also the kind of everyday activism of who you are and how you, how you kind of shape yourself. I think that's also really crucial and a massive resource and part of that mutual aid model of like what we're doing all the time.

LANI [00:43:01] Yeah, and I think that's like a, it's not an easy thing to, to do and those, those kind of every day, you know, how, how you want to show up in the world. Sometimes it's like I know I want to show up in this way, but today I just I, I just can't show in any way. I'm really sorry, but like, but yeah. I just... That that practise of kind of, showing up for each other is... It's something that we do. So I think I've fallen back a lot on kind of disabled people in this pandemic and kind of my old oldest friends, I guess, about when I felt really like, "oh, I'm not doing enough or I'm not doing the right things" or whatever. You know, people are kind of saying, "OK, maybe, maybe you're not maybe today

you don't do anything", or "actually yesterday you spent seven hours on the phone to other people." So, you know, it's kind of trying to, also remind each other of the things. Even if you're not doing anything now, like even if you never did anything else in your life, you are still a magnificent person. Isn't that an amazing concept?

DZIFA [00:44:38] I've been thinking a bit about... I mean, we're going to get to this, we kind of come to the end of this bit of the podcast, really. And we're going to go into thinking a bit more about, like practises to kind of help us with this practise of mutual aid and developing our skills and wisdom. But, yeah, I've been... And I think also just having a chronic health condition which can, like, just jump out at me whenever I'm unaware, like right in the middle of something. Right in the middle of trying to get something done or finish something. And you kind of just have to give up to the, the waves of which your body needs... To, to what your body needs in a way that, you know, everyone should do. But some people probably have bodies that they can deny... The denying of their own bodily needs doesn't have such a horrific instant consequences. But, yeah, I think that has really taught me about how to value... Yeah, like to have value right at the base of everything, no matter what. Like, even if I can't make it out of bed that day, I'm still valuable. And what I've done and what I've contributed to the world that day is still really valuable.

DZIFA [00:45:56] So we have two, we have two kind of practises. One that Lani is gonna lead and one that I'm going to lead. And hopefully they kind of, join up

together quite well, but you can kind of listen to either and, do whichever practises that really suit you or fit with you?

LANI [00:46:18] OK, um, so, yeah, this is a really short practise, I'm going to offer you three questions. They're designed to support you to think about skills and resources and different levels. And, yeah, we've talked quite a lot in this podcast about different kinds of skills and resources that I don't get valued by the system that we live in or get taken over and exploited by the system. So it's really an offering to kind of reclaim your own resources and recognise and reclaim your strengths. So when I ask the questions, try to think about the questions in the widest sense. And what I sometimes find useful is in terms of answering the questions, you might want to do like a free write, which is just writing what the first things that come to your mind on the topic for probably a minimum of ten minutes, I would suggest. If writing is not the best thing for you sometimes, which isn't for me, sometimes I do a voice note to myself. Also you can draw or any other way that might help you to really think through the questions. Sometimes it's kind of, you know, I think about a question. I think, oh, I know the answer or that's the answer. And if I think about it only in my mind, my body doesn't get a chance to kind of feel it. So it's good to do something with it. You can meditate on it, too, potentially. So use it in whichever ways are best for you and accessible for you. So. I have chosen these questions intentionally to help us to think about our interdependence and interconnectedness. So the first question is about yourself and the question is: 'What is one skill or quality which you are proud of about yourself?' The second

question is about the people around you, so second question is: 'What have you learnt from the people around you to help you survive and thrive?' And the third question is a bit of a wider question around identities and communities. So the third question is think about an identity which you hold, which is important to you, doesn't have to be an identity, can be many in your life. And then answer the question, 'What are you proud, proud of about that group of people?' But don't forget to put yourself in that group of people as well. OK, so those are the questions, like I say, it's an offering to, to you just to sit with those questions and I hope they're generative and useful for you and thank you for taking them up.

DZIFA [00:50:13] Cool, OK, so I'm going to do a mindfulness practise that will be around similar themes. So a bit of an intro in terms of mindfulness, so mindfulness is something I have... Like mindfulness meditation is something I've been in and out of over my lifetime. I'm not a qualified teacher or anything, but I do use it in my clinical practise when it's relevant. And I also am on a few courses at the moment, so it's very hot in my head. And so I come to it from a kind of more secular approach. But I want to recognise that its roots are in East Asian practises and philosophies and ethics and religious practises, and that I'm not quite sure I picked up. I picked up methods from lots of different sources. I'm not really sure where the exact lineage is to the way that I practise, but some of the things that I've been looking into a bit more about are Vipassana, which is kind of insights meditation. So I welcome anybody to have a look into that. Some of the mindfulness teachers that I've been listening to lately... Especially the people of colour, have been really informative, including Ruth King, who

wrote a really beautiful book called Mindful of Race, JoAnna Hardy and Sebene Selassie I think who's coming out with a new book soon. And, so I guess one of the things that people kind of bring to mindfulness is maybe this, it's become kind of... They talk about kind of Mac mindfulness because it's become kind of commercialised and you can find mindfulness groups in, you know, banking and in workplaces as a kind of 10 minute break in your day to help you be more productive. And it's kind of being part, part of the kind of wellness model of things where it's about where it seems to be mostly about like, oh, this is, this is definitely going to make you feel better. This is about being well and mindfulness is just a way to relax and be more comfortable. But, you know, there really isn't... You can't go into a mindful meditation with the with the expectation that you're going to get something positive or relaxing out of it. It really is, I think that's a misconception that some people find mindfulness really, really hard. And that can be because of their, their history background or their experiences, and they might have to find their access to mindfulness a different way. I think we all have, we can all access it, but maybe sometimes the kind of more mainstream ways of doing mindfulness might not fit some people. Maybe be some people need to do the kind of grounding work first before they can do it. So I don't think it's like something that will definitely always be great for everybody. I think of it more as creating a kind of space to be able to, and increasing our capacity to be with what's, what's present and what's inside us and who we, who we are and what's going on in our world, what's going on in our in our society and our relationships. I see it as an opportunity to be, to be with that, to find, to increase our capacity to be present to that. And it's not a

time to kind of get rid of your thoughts. Some people think of it as like you've got to get rid of all your thoughts. You know, thoughts are just natural part of how the mind works. And naturally, if I'm like, OK, I'm thinking about this thing, I'm thinking about this thing, I'm thinking about this thing, and my brain will drift away to think about dinner and whether did I have enough lunch, did I even like that lunch? And that's just the brain. That's what it does. It moves away. And the only thing you need to do in the practise is just bring it back, to remembering that you're in a meditative practise. That's really, the... You know, you can't really go wrong. That's the only thing, the activity you need to do, even if you spend the whole ten minutes thinking about other things and then just bring yourself back to the meditation. That's OK as well. Like it's every time you do it, it will be different.

DZIFA [00:55:01] I want to give it like a good introduction because I want people to kind of go into it with as much thought about it as possible. So, so one of the things that I will focus on in the beginning is the breath and the breath is like an amazing thing. And recently I was listening to Sebene Selassie talking a bit about it and she was talking about how the atoms that we breathe in kind of like cycle through our hemisphere. So they, I think they cycle every two months, the same oxygen that the trees breathe it, the trees breathe out, we breathe in and the same carbon monoxide we breathe out, the plants breathe in and we share that with everybody. It's it's a really amazing way in which we're connected to everybody in, on the planet and to all living creatures. That's a really powerful thing to, to put our attention to. But it can be really hard for some people to, to

focus on the breath. I find something that can be really helpful for me in terms of focusing on the breath, is focusing sometimes on my body. So I might focus instead of focusing specifically on the breathing coming in and out of my mouth, because that sometimes can kind of remind me of like, well, times where I've not had the breath. Sometimes I'll just focus on, like a little bit of my shoulder and just think about how my shoulder goes, moves up and down or whatever direction it might move while you're breathing. Sometimes I can think of my stomach and how my stomach expands, and sometimes I might just want to move away from thinking about the breath completely and just focus on the part of my hand, a part of my body that's neutral, like my hand. And also, I find that you can close your eyes or you can keep your eyes slightly open so that you can kind of just see just kind of colours through your eyes. Sometimes I find when I'm feeling unwell and I'm having really intense internal experiences like pain or discomfort. But I find it easier to just have my eyes a little bit open because that takes, reduces some of the intensity of being with my body. And there might be things that I kind think about, we talk about in this meditation that are helpful and some things are not helpful. And it's okay to let go of the things that are unhelpful. And you don't need to either grasp on to things that are helpful. And in this meditation, I'm going to ask us to kind of focus a bit on our values and what it feels like when we feel valued by others and also our connection to other people. And any, anything in, anything in a guided meditation may be something that doesn't speak to you or even actually makes you feel uncomfortable because it makes you aware of how much you struggle to find, to see yourself as valuable. And that's okay as well. It's OK to be able to

just be with those feelings and have some compassion. You know, naturally, we have, we all have created protective barriers against things that have been threatening. And some, for some of us, it can be... it has been threatening to even, to see ourselves as valuable can be hard in times when we're feeling really low. So I would say that just putting, having that in your mind and trying to offer some compassion to that part of yourself, in those moments, just being able to... Sometimes I find that, like, if I can't access compassion in my head, sometimes it feels quite heady. And so sometimes just putting your hand on your chest or another part of your body usually in the centre maybe or your stomach, can be a way of kind of offering a bit of compassion to yourself during the meditation.

DZIFA [00:59:00] So I'm going to get started. So I would advise you to kind of find a comfortable position, and a comfortable position is totally dictated by you. Like some people get really, feel like they've got to hold a very straight position that you really, you don't. If you need to lie down, if you need to have something behind your back to hold you in place. If your body is more comfortable at certain angles. Whatever way is comfortable for you, just, just be. That's OK, and there's nothing wrong with that position. So those of you want to close your eyes you can close your eyes, and for those of you who want to keep them open a little bit, that's also fine. Let's take a moment to kind of settle down. And be present. You might want to notice any kind of sounds around you. The sound of things outside or in your room. You might want to notice your sitting position and notice whether you're, whether you're sitting or you're the lying down, notice

the bits of your body that are towards the ground. Might be your back if you're lying down, might be your bottom if you're sitting on a seat, might be your feet, if your feet are on the ground. And that awareness just let gravity just... Just let yourself kind of let go towards gravity. Let gravity just pull you down. Notice the way that the earth is holding you. The surface that you are on is holding you. You can just relax into it. Just bringing your attention to the breath. As I say, you might want to bring your attention to the breath as it comes out of your nose or your mouth. Into your lungs. You might just want to pay attention to how it feels on your shoulders, on your stomach. Once you've got your attention on the breath, you might want to just take some slightly deeper breaths. Deepen those breaths by softening your stomach. Just noticing out the breath. Take a moment to kind of scan through your body and notice if there is any areas of tension, that you can easily let go of. Some of those areas might be the shoulders, just letting them fall back. Might be the front of the face, letting the jaw loosen, and your tongue fall to the bottom of your mouth. At any point your thoughts might drift off and that's ok, just bring them back to the meditation. Now to think about how, we are interconnected, connected with those around us. Think about people in your life, people who are closest to you. Maybe friends, maybe family, maybe your neighbours. People who are emotionally closest to you. Let's take our time to just think about their skills and wisdom that they bring. To you and to the people around them. Might be people in your present, might be people in your past, who supported you or, helped you through difficult times. Get in touch with that feeling of being supported by them. What it feels like in your body exactly. Present to their wisdom. Then widen that out. Think about people in

your environment, in your neighbourhood. Might be in your borough, might be in your county, might be in your city. Think about those in your environment that have disabilities, struggling with chronic pain, chronic health conditions. Those who are managing different marginalised identities. And all the skills and the wisdom that they bring to managing their days. Widen that out. To all the people in your country. To all the people in your continent. To all people managing to find ways just to be. Widen it out, all the people in your hemisphere, Northern or Southern hemisphere. At this point, think about people who have inspired you. Writers, teachers, famous people, activists. All of the skills and the wisdom that they bring. We are all interconnected. Widen it out to the world. Maybe people in places that you may have travelled from or your family may have emigrated from. All the wisdom that they carry. That they share. Connect further, widen it further, to all the living life forms on this planet. All the smart animals and plants. All of their internal, intrinsic, innate wisdom that we're all connected to. And include yourself. Think about times where you've been in the presence of others who have been witness to your value. Who have mirrored back to you how valuable you are. As a being, just for being yourself. Just somebody who's giving you a smile or someone who said thank you. And coming back now. Into the room. Notice your body on whatever surface you're sitting on or lying down on. The bed, the floor, the chair. Take some deep breaths. Gently open your eyes, if they've been closed or if they're open, bring them into the room and focus on something in front of you. Take a couple more deep breaths. You might want to stretch or move your body in any way just to kind of get a bit more

energy back into those muscles. You might have been a bit stiff or still for the period of that meditation. That's it, thank you.

LANI [01:10:10] Thank you Dzifa.

SAARA [01:10:14] Thank you both so much. That was just such a rich and generous conversation. Thank you for sharing so much of your experience and, and knowledge. Really gratefully received and going to be of immense use and benefit to so many people. So to stay in touch with both Dzifa and Lani, there's some links that we'd like to share. So Dzifa you can find on their website:

www.wavesfromripples.com and Lani's website is

www.sidewaystimesblog.wordpress.com and also on Twitter [@SidewaysTimes](https://twitter.com/SidewaysTimes).

Please stay in touch, follow us and social media. Sign up to our newsletter, which you can find a link on our [website](#) and do stay up to date with both Dzifa and Lani too. Thank you once again. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.