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Trudy Smith:

Hello, and welcome to this week's NextSense Institute Podcast. My name is Trudy Smith and I am the Manager of Continuing Professional Education, and your host for today, and I'm so delighted to be joined by my friend, Dr. Jenna Voss. Jenna, can you please introduce yourself to our audience?

Dr. Jenna Voss:

For sure. Hi, everyone. I'm Jenna Voss. I am a teacher of the deaf. I'm coming to you from St. Louis, Missouri, which is right in the middle of the United States. I currently work as an associate professor and Chair of the Communication Disorders In-Depth Education Department at Fontbonne University, where I have the privilege of preparing future teachers of the deaf, and speech language pathologists. I guess also relevant is that I also serve in a volunteer role as the chair of The AG Bell Academy. So in addition to pre-professional preparation as an area of interest, I also like thinking about building our workforce of certified listening and spoken language specialists, to support listening and spoken language development for kids who are deaf, and their families.

Trudy Smith:

It's really great to have you with us, Jenna, and you're actually going to be our keynote presenter at the Itinerant Teacher of the Deaf Conference on the 10th of September. Your keynote's actually focused on **promoting resilience for children who are deaf and hard of hearing, and their families**. How did you get interested in this topic?

Dr. Jenna Voss:

Yeah, so over the years, this topic has sort of been a thread that has continued in my professional scholarship and practice, and it all started from when I was doing early intervention and going on home visits. So when I was a practitioner directly serving families and their young children, I had the privilege of being invited into a lot of people's homes, living rooms, kitchens, backyards, to do our family-centered sessions, and when you are invited so intimately into someone's life like that, you learn so much of a richness about their family experience that just never would have come through if I saw them only in my clinic, or only in a classroom, or only even on paper.

And so, I feel like my initial dipping my toe in this line of inquiry was really when I was serving families who are from a life circumstance that was dramatically different than the one I had had the privilege of experiencing on my own. I felt like I knew my content knowledge and the discipline, and I was ill-prepared and ill-equipped to really meet some stark needs that at the time, I recognized as poverty, right? Families who were experiencing poverty of resources, or of wealth, or of access, or even of services and goods.

And so, initially, when I started thinking academically about this, it stemmed straight from seeing a family's experience different from my own, and now over the years, this has evolved into recognizing that all kinds of families are resilient, and all kinds of families are resourced differently and have access to different supports. And my role as a practitioner is to really identify what they see as a need, the family identifies as a need, and then be a connector of resources and make sure that I get out of the way, because some of the times, I was in fact, part of the problem and not part of the supportive solution.

Trudy Smith:

Sure. And you've kind of touched on it a little bit, but we've heard you talk a lot and we're looking forward to hearing more about the sources of adversity for deaf and hard of children and their families. Can you tell us a little bit more about that and some of the impacts that they have on a child's development?

Dr. Jenna Voss:

Yeah. So, there's a lot of jargon and terminology, and hopefully in the talk, we'll unpack a little bit of that. So adversity, other people have a reference point of that as trauma, so families who are experiencing trauma. That could be harm in relationships in the home, if there's domestic disturbance or abuse, some of that could be families facing lack of food, like food insecurity, or housing instability. Families who are unhoused face different levels of challenge accessing services. Adversity could be medical or health, concomitant health conditions, either experienced by the caregivers in the home, or the child themselves. Really, it's a broad encompassing category, and we can parse out what the sort of big, big ones are that we may encounter so that then we can, as practitioners, be more prepared and more equipped, and ready to serve in a more effective way.

Trudy Smith:

Sure. So is that why you really want teachers of the deaf to know this information, so that we... You said when you first started, you walked in and you really didn't know, and you were potentially part of the problem. Is that why that's so important for you, to bring this to the attention of teachers of the deaf?

Dr. Jenna Voss:

Yes, yes, yes, yes. So, as a teacher of the deaf, or a speech language pathologist, or an audiologist, pick the related service, but I'll speak from my perspective as a teacher of the deaf to other teachers of the deaf, if we care about child language outcomes, or child communication outcomes, or child cognitive outcomes, then we would be foolish to ignore all the other factors in a child's life, because the evidence is clear that all of the other factors, the whole child, the whole family system, impact those narrow deliverables that we might like to measure and chart in our work. So selfishly, if I want to look good as a practitioner, then I need the children and families to achieve the outcomes, and if I ignore or have sort of blinders on and only am focusing on this most narrow area where I might have had the most preparation and training, then I'm really ignoring the truth of a family's lived experience and influences that are going to matter.

So why I think our professional workforce needs to care about this is ultimately because this is going to be the key to more successfully supporting children and families, to achieve sort of their best and enviable life, and I think that teachers of the deaf are like me. I think that people relate and want to be more effective in their work and in their realm, and so, there are some things we can do to make that more possible. We can, I'm not going to give it all away, come to [inaudible 00:07:11] be more connected, we can be more equipped, and we can start having one bigger systems level kinds of thinking, and change outcomes for a lot of families, in addition to sort of thinking about individuals that we might serve.

Trudy Smith:

Oh, and we're so looking forward to hearing it. I've seen you unpack all of this before, and I know that our participants at the Itinerant Teacher of the Deaf Conference are in for such a treat and such a rich

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learning experience. So Jenna, we're looking forward to having you with us on the 10th of September. Thanks so much for your time now, and everybody come along. Why would you not want to hear more from this lovely lady? So Jenna, thanks so much for your time.

Dr. Jenna Voss:

Yeah, thanks for the invitation. I can't wait to connect with all of you.