The Heumann Perspective Podcast
Psychosocial Disabilities in Latin America with Alberto Vásquez
Transcript

Kylie Miller:
Welcome to The Heumann Perspective, a podcast with the internationally recognized, bad-ass, disability rights activist, Judy Heumann. This episode, Judy interviews Alberto Vásquez. Alberto is a human rights lawyer and disability rights advocate. He is the co-director of the Center for Inclusive Policy (CIP) and president of the Peruvian NGO Society and Disability. He works globally on disability policy with an emphasis on mental health in the global south.

The Heumann Perspective is produced by me, Kylie Miller, and Judy Heumann. So let's roll up, lay down, dance around, whatever makes you feel best, and let's meet this episode's guest.

Judy Heumann:

Hello everybody, and welcome back to the Heumann Perspective. Today I have the opportunity, and really privileged, to talk with Alberto Vásquez, who I have known for how many years now, eight or 10 years. I have always been drawn to Alberto and his work because he is a very solid thinker and also very compelling and he doesn't let you get away with things so when we spoke a couple of weeks ago at a meeting that we were at, it seemed like a great opportunity to invite him to come onto our program.

Welcome, how are you, Alberto?

Alberto Vásquez:

Hi, Judy. Thank you very much for inviting me to this space.

Judy Heumann:

Alberto, let's jump in and help our audience get a better understanding of who you are. How did you get involved in work in the area of disability?

Alberto Vásquez:

Well, I have been working on the field of disability and mental health for at least 17 years already. When I finished law school, I was really interested in working on social justice, so I got first involved in working with labor law and unions. Then I got the opportunity to work in a new committee at the Peruvian Congress called the Disability Studies Committee.

That was a great opportunity to get involved and that same year is actually the year where my journey as a person with psychosocial disabilities also started. I think it was a good coincidence to start working on the Disability Studies Commission the first year I started struggling with my mental health.

Judy Heumann:

Do you want to talk a little bit more about when you talk about struggling with your mental health issues, what is that about?

Alberto Vásquez:

Well, that was a rough year and after a couple of crises I got diagnosed with bipolar disorder and I started medication and therapy and I still asked myself how I managed to keep working after taking so much medication for so many years. I think through that journey that I would call initially was a mental health journey, I also realized the problems with the mental health system and the responses to people with lived experience, it still exists in most countries where it doesn't really offer a path for healing or recovery because recovery in many countries is still seen as no longer having symptoms and sometimes at the cost of social participation.

For many of us, what this is about is about having control of our own lives, learning about our own mental health journey and embracing new ways to live and to enjoy. I think the disability rights framework gave me a way out of that very biomedical model I started experiencing in 2006 and took me away from probably a different path of life because today, for example, I get the support I need mostly outside the health system.

Judy Heumann:

Do you think had you not been getting involved in disability at the same time that you began to experience the effects of bipolar, would you have potentially gone down a different path?

Alberto Vásquez:

Yeah, I think so.

I mean, it was not an immediate recognition and sometimes it takes some time to put things together, but I think over the years, especially those initial years, I realized, "Why I'm not applying the same framework to myself? Why I'm focusing all the problems on myself instead of seeing, okay, what's not working in my life in my community that I actually need to help so I feel better and I feel I can actually be part of things?" I think reframing just that helped me out of that.

Then so after that, I started working in the National Human Rights Institutions in Peru is called the ombudsman office, and that's how life works. One of my main roles was visit the psychiatric hospitals across the country to monitor human rights conditions and that was also a very enlightening experience to see the failures of a system, but also to find ways to make it better and make it work. That was also a very interesting parallel while I was myself moving from being a user, let's say, or a consumer of services to be more a person with psychosocial disabilities.

Judy Heumann:

Were you learning at that point about issues going on in the area of psychosocial disabilities beyond Peru? Were you looking at other examples and what role did that play in helping you as you were rethinking what needed to happen?

Alberto Vásquez:

I did. I did. I started reading about activists involved in the negotiation of this new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, many of them with psychosocial disabilities, many of them that identify themselves as survivors of psychiatric services or people with psychosocial disabilities.

I think that that was important but I think it took me many years to move myself out of a mental health framing and thinking that what I needed to do is to let's say fix the mental health service and think beyond that and think beyond a paradigm where actually I'm many things at the same time and I have different needs beyond the mental health system. I think that also took me a while and I think it was very important for me to get involved with activists from outside, from different countries and also to travel because I did my master degree in Ireland so that also gave me some exposure to people doing many things in many countries.

Judy Heumann:

How do you define psychosocial disability?

Alberto Vásquez:

Well, that's the million-dollar question because it's really an umbrella term that we use to put the focus more on the social aspects of mental health experiences to call it something rather than into the conditions.

We use psychosocial disability to show this interaction between someone that is experiencing actual or perceived mental health conditions with this environment that is not supportive of the rights. That's what we use, but in that umbrella term, we have a really broad range of individuals that identify in different ways and I'm very active now in a network in Latin America, for example, and we use the term psychosocial diversity because many people don't feel close to the disability paradigm, many people prefer mad identities, reclaiming this term mad and you have also people that actually identified more as survivors.

I think the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has really helped to put some framework that is very useful for us to organize and to try to achieve things because it's a very broad framework that can be applied in different aspects.

Judy Heumann:

Maybe we could focus a minute on the work that you're doing right now in Latin America. I think if I understood you correctly, you started experiencing psychosocial disability yourself in around 2006/2007 so you've been involved in this area now for about 16 years.

When you think about it from that perspective, both coming in as a user probably with little knowledge and then getting immersed in the disability rights movement, what do you see as some of the important changes that have been occurring in the community of people with psychosocial disabilities?

Alberto Vásquez:

I think one of them is this changing of identities. Many people saw themselves as users or consumers of mental health services and now they see a broader picture, they see themselves as people with rights, rights holders beyond access to health, it's about social inclusion, it's about participation, it's about being able to sit where decisions are made.

I think the agenda has changed, but also the framing has changed completely from services and health to rights. That has been very positive too. I mean, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Global South at least has helped to access funding to self-organize, to advocate and many changes had happened because of that.

The other day I was telling you that in Peru we did something that few countries have achieved, which is we managed to abolish guardianship. For those who are not familiar with guardianship, guardianship is this legal process that is used to appoint someone to make decisions on behalf of an individual and this is normally based on the assumption that the individual, normally a person with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities has no capacity to decide for themselves.

Guardianship has many names, sometimes called curatorship, sometimes it's called administration but in practice, it works in those lines could be a full guardianship, could be partial guardianship, and it will affect decisions around properties, about contracts, it will affect decisions about care. In Peru, we actually manage to advocate and organize to abolish guardianship and to create a new system. I think 20/15 years ago when I was reading about the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, that article in particular I thought we will never achieve to change that, and we did it. Of course there is a lot of problems in implementation and there is a long road to go but just having that change in the law I think is an important example of how things have changed in the last 16 years as you said.

Judy Heumann:

Maybe you can speak please a little bit more about what some of the challenges are and what are being done to help ensure that the voices of self-advocates, consumers are being recognized and that they're getting the supports that they need in an appropriate way.

Alberto Vásquez:

I mean, I don't want to pretend that the psychosocial disability community is as organized as the disability community in general. I think we're still struggling in many ways to organize ourself and many groups are still framing in very medical terms but I think things are coming because of these small groups of organized civil society plus some self-advocates.

I think one of the key issues that people is struggling is the issue of lack of social support, access to housing, access to social protection. Many of the benefits that are being implemented for people with disabilities actually are not being implemented in the case of people with psychosocial disabilities because sometimes it's difficult actually to get access to those benefits because to some extent it forces you to go to the mental

health services you don't want to go to get a recognition that you're a person with psychosocial disabilities so you can access those benefits, that's a challenge in many countries.

Many people are also struggling with the trauma of coercive mental health systems and coercive families. Many people have been institutionalized or mistreated in mental health services. People is looking for reparations, people is looking for acknowledgement of what happened to them so there are a lot of challenges, I think still.

But overall, I think what is changing, at least what I see through the work we do in the region through this Latin American network of Psychosocial Diversity is more people interested in challenging traditional narratives and having the tools to fight back abuses and I think that's very important, but a lot of things have to be done yet. I think one key aspect that is an opportunity is there is more emphasis now on community inclusion and community support and I think it's a good opportunity to think what kind of community support people with psychosocial disabilities may need beyond just access to mental health services.

Judy Heumann:

In the area of disability inclusive of psychosocial disabilities, it's also people can have these various disabilities so when they're younger or like in your case you are older, but there are many children also who may be experiencing various forms of psychosocial disability.

Is that an area that you've been working on? Children who have intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities who are young and in primary or secondary school in relationship to supports for the families and also helping to ensure that these children are getting access to education?

Alberto Vásquez:

Well, not as part of the advocacy I do in Peru, but more broadly as part of the research we do at the Center for Inclusive Policy. I'm co-director of this Center for Inclusive Policy, which is based in Washington and we have an office in Geneva where I'm based and we have been working in the last years with UNICEF and other entities to think better what can be done in terms of community support.

One of the key aspects is how do we support families, especially low and middle income countries where it's not so easy to increase the funding for community support services. Rather, we need to think about how do we mobilize resources in the community so with additional investment from governments, but with resources in the community, how we ensure that people have access to community support services but what we see is a lot of carers being overwhelmed with the support they have to provide to family member with disabilities.

Of course, that's a reality all around the world, but in many low income countries, there is no really alternative to that. That has an important impact not only on the economic development of the person with disabilities and their family, but also in the mental health of the family.

Judy Heumann:

What type of work is the Peruvian group and others that you're involved with doing in helping to reduce the stigma around those who have psychosocial disabilities?

Alberto Vásquez:

In Peru, I'm president of this organization, Sociedad y Discapacidad, society and Disability and we work in many topics including issues around mental health and we have been engaging in discussions around anti-stigma campaigns but as part of the other movement networks of people with psychosocial disability, I think we are a little bit more receptacle in terms of what are we achieving with the anti-stigma campaigns? Because many of them are frame in a way that is not really against the stigma of being a person with psychosocial disabilities, but it's more about the stigma going to an access to services, which is positive, but it doesn't give you the full picture of what are the challenges that people are experiences because it may lead to the idea that there is no problems that you will face when you go to the mental health system.

We're pushing people to the mental health system that actually are not very prepared to give you support, not having even just available appointments for you to get support, to very coercive and medicalized services that are really focused on expanding less and not really focused on how do you feel or what's going to be the outcome of this healing journey? I think we need to rethink a little bit those campaigns to see what are we targeting? Because we may be promising something that at least those that have more support needs or are encountering a lot of stigma in society won't see from those campaigns. People really need housing, employment, and I think the anti-stigma campaigns and at least the evaluations I have read, are helping to change the conversation but that not helping enough to provide support for those more marginalized.

Judy Heumann:

What do you see as some of the major disparities that are going on between rural and urban areas?

Alberto Vásquez:

Well, that's a big gap and today I have been actually working on a reveal of... in country, we're trying to understand policies around community support for people with disabilities for example, as part of this assessment we're doing on community for Latin American, the Caribbean, and there is very little information about what support is provided at rural areas or remote areas.

When you see a good practice, most of them will be based in the capital or in the big cities. I think also that talks a lot about the significant inequality that exists in many Latin American countries between urban and rural areas. Disabilities is not the only group affected, by those inequalities but that's something to keep in mind.

It's a pity because from my own experience visiting rural areas when I was working in the national humanist institution in Peru is there are a lot of opportunities to mobilize communities that actually have more strong social capital and more strong connections

in rural areas to make things happen, it's just a matter of how do we support those communities also, many of them indigenous, to find their own ways to organize themselves, to provide support, not in a top down approach where we tell them this is what is going to happen and this is how service should be structured. I think this is a longer conversation about thinking about not only the disability perspective, but thinking about intercultural and different other layers that needs to be addressed to improve access in, to support in rural areas, at least in a country like Peru.

Judy Heumann:

I think these comments are relevant in any country because the disparities that exist between urban and rural communities, even in wealthier countries are quite stark. You've been in a unique situation because you pretty early on got involved in disability from a human rights perspective.

How would you say you've been influenced by early on getting involved in the discussion around human rights? My presumption is it never has been just a human rights issue and disability, but a broader human rights issue itself. How have you felt bringing the discussion of disability rights and human rights together has been important?

Alberto Vásquez:

That's very true and I really never thought much on that, that I had the privilege to start working on disability from a framing of human rights, which has not been the case for many people. Let's say my involvement on this is at the moment of almost at the moment of the international adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities, it really changed the way probably have approached this.

So I think the human right framing really helps to put things in a different perspective because you have these key values that you will use to analyze and also to find solutions to public concerns, also for me it's about dignity, liberty, equality, solidarity. Those values really help to navigate this difficult area, which is public policies, which is the action of the states and how do we organize, but also it helps to frame the way we people with disabilities organize in our communities now so I think having that framework is very positive.

As you said, I also had the privilege to work in different countries, at some point I left Peru and I moved to Geneva to work with Catalina Devandas, the former Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and that really also opened the space to travel to different regions, to different countries and to visit different realities.

What I have seen is that the human rights framework and particularly the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has helped organization, person with disabilities to advocate more effectively and also with a more clear paradigm. The convention really has seen, has been a cataly... Catalyst, I don't know how that term even exists for changing many countries and from local people is advocating to local authorities, to national governments, people is really active in the Global South, that has been brilliant change thanks to the convention.

Judy Heumann:

Maybe for the purposes of the audience who many may not know of the convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities, nor that there is this position called the special Rapporteur and you were very lucky to be able to come in with Catalina Devandas, as you said, who was the first special repertoire and in my view, both a friend and brilliant and committed.

What was it like working on the CRPD in its early stages and again, looking at psychosocial disabilities, have you seen the value of the treaty, both in relationship to, as you were discussing, more people learning about it, using it when working with governments, but also in the reporting that the committee has been doing on disability? How would you say there's been an advancement in discussions around psychosocial disabilities?

Alberto Vásquez:

I think psychosocial disabilities has been one of the challenging areas, but also more exciting areas of the work of the human rights system. For those that are not familiar with the United Nations human rights mechanisms, so in the Human Rights Council where this is the political body where all the states sit to discuss human rights, they appoint different experts on different topics.

One of the independent experts they have is the position of the special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with disabilities. It was the first time they had this position in Geneva so Catalina was the first special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with disabilities so that means a blank page to set the mandate and to start working on different topics.

During that period, I was the research coordinator and we did 12 reports on different topics, that's one of the roles of the special to produce reports. We did reports on support, on participation, older people, [inaudible 00:24:36], different topics and then we also did country visits because the special Rapporteurs are expected to do country visits to assess the situation of a country, to interview authorities, to contact civil society and to visit and see to know the situation of people. We did nine country visits if I'm correct? Also that was a very great experience to see what's happening in the ground, how things are changing.

I think the convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities really helped civil society to mobilize and we saw during those visits in most countries, very active movements with a lot of understanding of the rights and a lot of understanding what needed to change. I think there has been, especially in this initial years of the convention, a lot of excitement about reporting to the committee on the Rights of Persons with disabilities and the committee has been, the committee which is this body of experts that monitors the implementation of the convention through different ways, the reporting through individual cases. The committee has been very supportive of the disability community, and I'm very active in providing good recommendations so some things can change at country level.

I think that the civil I has been very active and very engaged with those processes, I think for the first time, probably people have seen the UN as an ally and because we

were so behind in the human rights agenda and the development agenda, a lot of things has been achieved from better data collection in some countries to improved legislation, to improved policies, budgeting. Many things has been changing, but we know a lot of more things need to change.

I think this is where we're going, I think after the first review, some countries are going to for the second review and third review of the committee and I think what you can see, because Peru is coming to the new review, is that change happen between those reviews, but still a lot more needs to happen.

I think we still need a shock that the push countries to do much more, as one of the things we did or Catalina did as a special Rapporteur that I think will be one of her main legacies was to promote a UN disability inclusion strategy, which is basically a strategy for the whole United Nations system to make the UN more inclusive across operations and programs, which means employment of people with disabilities, improving accessibility, ensuring consultation, ensuring better programming. This is not only in all the UN entities like the work organization or the Office of Human Rights, and there is I think more than 80 UN entities, but also at country level because many countries have UN country teams so that's also creating a new opportunity for civil society to engage with the offices of the UN at country level to see how they can use the UN to improve the conditions on the ground and to advocate with the government now. I think those structural process are very important, but you still need the people on the ground mobilizing and enthusiastic and to some extent with the frustration of wanting to do something.

Judy Heumann:

I think the convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities from its inception was really being driven from the grassroots because when discussions began to occur in the nineties about the need for a treaty, because when looking at other treaties that had been ratified and implemented by the UN, like on the child, on women, whatever it might be, disability was usually not even a word within the treaty.

And then with the convention on the Rights of the child, while disability is mentioned in the treaty, it's not really being included. What I believe is so important about the CRPD is that it really merged from the bottom up, and it was disabled people in countries around the world who were convening and meeting with their government representatives. It was really, in many cases, not exclusively where these kinds of discussions had not been occurring and so government representatives really had little to no connection within the disability community in their countries unless they perhaps had a family member with a disability or for some reason had been working in their country either on the government end or the non-governmental end on disability.

I think what we saw in the development of the CRPD, which I think was the quickest treaty developed, was this growing acknowledgement that there were very significant problems, areas of discrimination that disabled people were facing, and that we needed a treaty which was going to look at the human rights violations that people were experiencing. As you've been discussing, it's like an onion peeling the onion and looking at all the different sections where disability hasn't been, but needs to be included.

While we've discussed right now psychosocial disabilities a little bit more than others, maybe you could speak for a couple of minutes about what impact you've seen the CRPD having on elevating issues of human rights violations and being able to get governments and more people at the local level to begin to acknowledge the fact that discrimination does occur, that it has had a very significant adverse impact on the lives of disabled people.

Alberto Vásquez:

I think one of the key aspect has been discrimination. I think we had a very narrow understanding what discrimination means and I think because of the convention that understanding is expanding in many countries, even while we had very difficult situations during the last two years because of the pandemic, and I think just having a strong non-discrimination provision in many countries has helped to fight back in terms of access to health services, access to vaccination.

We have seen also the use of, I think, challenging discrimination in employment has been also very, very strong in many countries in the inter-American region for example, the inter-American Court of Human Rights also has been very supportive of including provisions from the convention of the Rights of Persons with disabilities as part of their own assessment of the American convention and that has been also very, very positive. I think the most important part for me is that the convention is so broad, it recognizes so many substantive rights. What is more important is it creates an agenda, it creates a path for change and I think many of the aspects are very structural, recognition of legal capacity, accessibility and...

Judy Heumann:

Education, employment.

Alberto Vásquez:

Education.

Judy Heumann:

Healthcare.

Alberto Vásquez:

I think we can see some agendas that didn't have visibility before getting more attention, like the institutionalization, community support were challenging today, the issue of guardianship that before it was a given, even it was a given for human rights mechanisms and now it's being challenged, I think it's really changing many aspects.

I think we have achieved to some extent, to give more visibility to the disability rights agenda, the question is how much we can change through legislation. I think in many countries in the Global South, like in Peru, we know legislation has a limit that there is no strong enforcement that needs budgeting, that needs better data, that needs better institutions to actually make it happen. I think that also demanding for many of us advocates to get involving more the [inaudible 00:33:11] and nots of how the

government operates, how money is allocated, because we know now it's not enough to have the law, we need to have the budget to make it happen, and we need to convince the policy maker that will implement it.

I think we are getting better in strategizing, and I think that's a very important aspect, but it is a learning curve and I think in many things that are very structural, as you were saying, rural areas, we need to work more with cross movement alliances, we really, but that goes in two ways. I think it's about solidarity, how do we work with other communities? Because at the end, we are part of many communities so how do we engage with the agendas of other groups and how we built broader agendas so that are not just a disability agenda, but it's as agenda of social inclusion, of social justice.

I think that's still something that we're still working on because the disability community has been so isolated for many years in many countries we're not recognized as a social movement, not recognized as even right holders so you are not part of the human rights movement either. I think we have been working so long that sometimes it's hard to engage with other constituencies, but I think we're doing that, especially younger generations are doing that and we see more and more collaboration but I think that's the future because many of the challenges we face cannot be solved just from a disability perspective.

Judy Heumann:

I mean, I completely agree with you, I also think that the other rights movements have not necessarily really been welcoming of the disability communities into other discussions. It's like we don't know each other and the reality is people have their biases around disability, and those biases exist in every country.

One of the important aspects, I believe, of work that you and many others are doing in helping to strengthen the local movements is also to be able to sit at a table with other movements and be able to discuss, as you were saying, how disability cuts across all of the groups and if those other movements are not willing to integrate disabled people into their movements, then they're not effectively addressing indigenous disabled people's issues or women's issues, whatever the topic may be.

I think the CRPD has really done so many things in part, as you've been saying, helping to develop and formalize local disability rights groups which are becoming more empowered. I mean, I think that's one of the real values of people coming together in groups is bringing our voices together and recognizing that we have a similar goal and objective.

What would you say from your perspective, are some of the areas of weakness that you hope and work that you're doing, how things will change over the next couple of years? What are some of your major areas of concerns that are not getting the attention you believe that they need?

Alberto Vásquez:

I think one area that is getting more attention, although the framing may not be familiar for many of us working on the disability communities, is the issue of community support. I think community support, especially in low American countries, had very little attention

in the international agenda, but also in national agendas, in high income countries, the focus has been for many years in services, but also very medicalized, very institutionalized with very little control over those services by the individual receiving them.

That has been changing in some countries, and that's very positive, there is this move towards personalization of support so people can actually decide, but at the same time, that's creating new challenges in terms of how much you can actually get from the market. Again, this comes back to solidarity, how this is affecting other groups as workers, women, migrants. There is a lot to think about that, but in the Global South, we don't have those processes, we don't have services, we don't have services to make... We don't have also the investment to have individual budgets to get support in your own community so we need to really think how we're going to achieve that because clearly we don't have personal assistance if we don't have, that doesn't exist in most countries in the global south that doesn't exist.

It's family members supporting the individual unpaid. We got service from a couple of countries in Latin America and is 90% of them of the person receiving human support is unpaid. How do we change that? I think the care agenda, the global care agenda, which is actually very strong in Latin American and the Caribbean today is a great opportunity, for example, to change in that conversation and to think, okay, instead of how do we reframe this old traditional care agenda, what was about caregivers and see people that saw person with disabilities as dependents, how do this new care agenda that actually will sit all of us in the same level and how do we ensure that includes people with disabilities that we have a say and the new investments are coming will help to create autonomy and independence.

I see that as an opportunity, again, at something that requires this cross movement collaboration but I see this as a great opportunity. That's something I'm a little bit excited of, how Fast it's changing, at least in Latin America, there is a lot of focus now today on the care agenda and how we can make it inclusive so we don't miss that opportunity. That's something I'm excited, something I'm concerned, that's a good question.

I think I am concerned of the, which may not be about government work, but something I'm concerned really is how do we ensure that change actually reach those who need it more? That's something that really concerns me, that we may be too complacent with the big change we're achieving, but how do we ensure that actually people is actually receiving it and their lives are improving? Because I think that's a challenge I have personally because I'm working more and more at global level, despite I shared this organization in Peru, I'm still based in Geneva.

How do we achieve that what is decided in New York that was decided in Geneva actually have an impact on people living in rural areas of Peru. I think there is a huge gap and many things that international agencies are trying to do, they're not going to have an impact until six, seven years at country level. I don't think that's fair, because also when they start having an impact, probably we will start thinking at global level, maybe that was not the best approach, we need to change [inaudible 00:40:36], that's how it happens sometimes. Money is running out, it's not a priority anymore, we have invested many years.

I think we need to think in a different way to ensure that this is not a top down approach that we have in development, but more how do we empower those communities to find their own solutions to work together and to have something not in 10 years, but in a short term because I think that's a challenge I have, and that's a challenge I have also with the whole human rights mechanisms, I think they're important, we need to use it as an opportunity but change won't come from what the committee says, change will come if we mobilize our communities using what the committee said.

Judy Heumann:

Exactly. I mean, I think a comment you made earlier, I very much believe in strong legislation, even though I understand that frequently it's not being implemented but from my perspective, getting the community involved in the development of the passage of strong legislation, then that enables the community also to be learning and engaged with things like budgeting and implementation and staffing and accountability, none of these things happen overnight, but I think we have an opportunity, many new opportunities as a result of the CRPD and the growing sophistication of the disability communities.

As you were saying, I very much agree that things need to be locally driven. At the same time, I also think it's important for local communities to learn about what other communities are doing around the world so that we're not inventing everything. We can be modifying it, but they're things that we can learn from each other that I think can help effectively move these agendas forward.

Well, I really want to thank you, Alberto, our time is up, I'm just wondering, is there one thing that you would like to tell your younger self and younger people who may be listening to this program about what you've learned in a way that could be of benefit to them?

Alberto Vásquez:

I think something I learned through these years of [inaudible 00:42:51] work is that change happen through many paths, there is no one recipe to change. I think sometimes one individual can make the difference, it may not be enough to make it sustainable, but you going to start something and I think sometimes we're afraid that we don't have all the tools, all the resources ready to try to push for change. I think change happens in many ways and happens sometimes faster than you think. I think that's something I have learned and that I will tell myself when I was 25, starting this journey.

Judy Heumann:

Thank you very much, I completely agree with you and to me it's like every individual person can be making a difference.

Also I think as you do that, working in collaboration with other people allows us also to be able to make bigger change so I'd like to thank both Alberto for doing this program and for the audience's participation and we will put in some links so that you can learn more about some of these organizations, including what the convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is, and hopefully someday when the Congress in the United

States, the Senate recommending ratification of the CRPD to the President, that it will happen.

Again, thank you so much, Alberto.

Alberto Vásquez:

Thank you, Judy. It was a pleasure.

Kylie Miller:

Now it’s time for Ask Judy, a segment where Judy answers questions sent in by listeners.

Judy Heumann:

A few weeks ago, I was invited to a dinner and I didn't realize that Alberto was going to be there, and I've known him for a number of years. And we got into a discussion about The Heumann Perspective and he said that he would love to be able to be on it. So I realized, yeah, it’’d be great. He'd be a great guest.

Kylie Miller:

And he was. It was really great to have him on. It was super informative. I feel like I learned so much between both of you talking about the CRPD and global perspectives of this work. So really great episode, if you ask me.

Yeah. I mean, I think Alberto is very knowledgeable, as you were saying, on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. And then he also had some very significant experience working in a couple of countries in Latin America and then generic understanding and ability because he worked with the, at that point, the special adviser on international disability rights. So he has a really broad overview. He knows much less about the United States which is what I thought in the end was really interesting to look at what was going on in other countries. And I'm hoping over the next year we're going to do more programs like that.

Kylie Miller:

Yes, I hope so, too. And while this is an American holiday that we recently celebrated, it was just Thanksgiving. So today's Ask Judy question is very timely. Chris on Instagram asked, What are you thankful for?

Judy Heumann:

I'm thankful for my friends. I'm thankful for my husband and my family. I'm also thankful that we are able to have important discussions and specifically when thinking about the history of Thanksgiving and being able to really have a much greater appreciation for

the destruction of people in the United States because of what happened when foreigners came here. And so the ability to really look at being able to be thankful for working towards change at the same time that we can appreciate friends and family, I think is all important. But at the end of the day, we have to really continue to push difficult discussions that hopefully over time will enable more reconciliation and accurate information about how our lives individually and collectively, positively and negatively impact on people here in the United States and around the world.

Kylie Miller:

Mm hmm. Thank you, Judy, for answering that question. Thank you, Chris, for sending it to us on Instagram. If you'd like to ask Judy a question, you can send it to us at media@judithheumann.com or on Instagram and Twitter.

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