

## GDA podcast – Young disabled people’s takeover

Welcome to this podcast by Glasgow Disability Alliance, produced by young drivers for change. GDA is a disabled person’s led organisation with over 5000 members ensuring that all disabled people’s voices are heard. GDA provide free accessible learning and events. Here’s Debbie to tell you more about this episode.

We are here to talk about our experience on voting and accessibility, mental health and autism and humour. Thank you very much.

[Music]

This is DJ panda here, bringing you a podcast and with me is....DJ Kirsty. So, today, guys, with this podcast, we are going to be talking about a touchy subject. It may affect some people, it may not but we are not trying to hurt anybody; we are trying to bring an upbeat to this subject. And the subject that we are going to be talking about is mental health and how it affects everybody.

And that you are not alone whether you suffer from a mental illness – you are not alone. There is help out there. DJ Sam will tell you a bit more. With these podcasts that we are doing, we are part of GDA – aka the Glasgow Disability Alliance and we are a bunch of young disabled people that have various health problems: We have some from mental health issues, Autism, ADHD and we’ve come together and banded as one to make a change to the world. We can rule the world. [he he] And some of the problems that some of the members have been having is what’s gone on right now – is the lockdown. So, we are going to share some of our personal stuff that we’ve had that’s helped us – maybe it can help you – maybe you can adapt it to your own way but I’ll let KJ explain some of her helpful tips.

What has been helping me through lockdown over the past year is I made only a couple of weeks ago – I made a happiness jar which the GDA – the Glasgow Disability Alliance had sent me out wee quotes which they got online – and we were to fold them and put them in a jar and whenever we felt down, we could open the jar and read them out to ourselves. What I’ve actually done is I’ve opened two to let you hear what they say. One of them says ‘happiness is found within’ and the other one says ‘do more of what makes you happy’ and also what has helped me through the past year is the GDA have done zoom classes, 5 days a week sometimes – and taking part in them I’ve got to know a lot more people who I hadn’t met before lockdown but I’ve met them through

zoom – I know it's not the same as face to face – but it's all about building that friendship or relationship with that person that makes you feel amazing inside. So, I'll let DJ panda carry on.

Thank you KJ. Yeah - So, zoom. It's a free application that you can download on a computer, phone, tablet – anything that has an internet connection. You can download it for free. All you have to do is make an account up and you get the free part of it; you get 40 minutes in a zoom call and you can also pay to get a premium account. And the premium account gives you unlimited time on zoom. It is good for reuniting with family members, friends or other people that you can't see in person. But for me as well, what gets me through lockdown is GDA zooms have helped a lot – but also talking to family members and friends and finding out from them what they love about you. It really helps to bring up your confidence and your happiness to know what they love about you as a person. From that, you can make a vision board – and it may sound a bit weird – a vision board - but its what you want to achieve in life – and with that, you can look at it every day and see what your goal is – and you can take steps towards that goal. I also do videos on tiktok about mental health and how much your life matters...you should never give in with your life. You should always believe in yourself and the people around you. And you never know – but you become part of a family. Cos we all care for you – please, please, never give in with your life. Over to KJ.

Never feel alone. As they say 'loneliness is a faux pas'. You are never alone with the GDA. It's like a family – like DJ panda has said. I explain it to family members – that GDA is like a second family – so welcoming.

[MUSIC]

So since the election's coming up soon – I was wondering what everyone thought about voting and how accessible it is. So, Merissa – what do you think about it?

I mean, I quite like voting because it gives us a voice – the same as everyone else. Because we are not different from anyone else – we just have different needs to everyone else so we might have to do things a bit differently. When it comes to voting, accessibility can be a big thing because of doors being too heavy, or not being a lift – or there being stairs. So, it can be very difficult for everyone with a disability to access the voting and then it comes into respect –

and people offering help or you asking for help. Yeah – that’s a really good point, Merissa. And Scott – what do you think about voting?

I agree. As mentioned, voting is one of the important things – especially for young disabled people. It gives us a voice in who we can vote for. With the right support, if it’s there, means that we can all play our part and vote. And you know - it’s really important that whoever we vote for, does represent us. Because for far too long, I feel as if we’ve been at the back of the queue and it’s important that we know we get our voices heard. And you know – we have a great part to play.

That’s also a really good point. Debbie – what do you think?

From my experience voting independently because people give you options, but voting, I think it should be an independent statement to vote. Because you can be influenced by your parents or your peer group. So, yeah – and I think it is important for the Government - whoever Scotland have chosen - to listen to disabled voices – and keep their promises as well.

Yeah – that’s another really good point, Debbie. For me personally, I usually take someone with me when I’m voting so they can guide me into the building and when we get inside they can assist me to make my vote. I have heard of some things being in place for people with certain impairments to help make voting a little bit easier. So, I’ve heard in my case of a tactile overlay which would go over the ballot paper and I think it would have a little square cut out to indicate where you’ve to vote – and I think there are braille numbers on it as well - but obviously, it’s still not giving me full access to the list of candidates. I’ve never actually been offered the template. I believe that every polling station should have it but because I’ve never been offered it, I’ve never felt the need to actually ask somebody to get me it– because I’ve not really...while it might help some people, for me, I haven’t really seen it to be that much use – or it doesn’t sound like it would be. So, I usually just get somebody to fill out my paper for me and I’ve never had an issue. The polling station staff have always been fine about allowing a family member to help me do it. So – but I do really wish that polling stations were more accessible so that everybody could cast a vote, independently / on their own if that is how they wish to do it.

If I take someone with me, sometimes I've got to ask someone to read it out for me – because the paper is white – and because I need writing on a different coloured bit of paper – it's difficult for me to read what party's which and the only thing I can understand are the pictures on the paper which makes it quite difficult because it means I can't vote independently like I would like to.

Yeah - That sounds quite difficult. I think we are in agreement – aren't we - that polling stations need to be more accessible for a whole range of different needs.

Yeah definitely

Absolutely.

Especially when it comes to like people standing outside enforcing their party in your face as well. I don't think that's very accessible either for a lot of people.

I think one time, somebody was just holding out their leaflet for a while and obviously I didn't know they were there but my brother told me about it afterwards.

Yeah – it's because they thought that you were giving them eye contact Amy – that's probably why! [Laugh] that's where you went wrong.

Ok thanks – I'll know for next time.

Yeah - you should! [Laugh]

You could make the manifesto digital – rather than on printed paper – then people with visual impairments could actually have like a kind of manifesto. So that's my opinion. I don't know whether any of you have a different option to having a manifesto which is a digital form – so the people can hear what the MP / MSP are trying to tell you as well.

Yeah – I think there are things in different formats – it is really helpful when things are online, though, so that I can use a screen reader either on my phone or computer to read it out to me what they are saying. But actually, you reminded me of something there, Debbie. So in terms of voting, wouldn't it be really good if we could vote online and that be fully accessible so that people wouldn't necessarily have to go out to a polling station and vote. I know there is a postal voting but for me, that's more inaccessible than it would be to actually do it in person. Because obviously, I'm not going to be able to fill out.

I think having it online would be a really good idea. Because it means – like you said – it could be read out to you – and then I could change the colours so I can see it online as well. It would make a lot more accessible for a lot of people because a lot of people can't leave their houses on a regular basis – so if they are in pain that day or something else happens that day, then they won't be able to go out to a normal place to vote.

And paper is bad for the environment. So, basically, if you are voting on paper, it will be bad for the environment. So, I kind of agree with Amy and Merissa that voting digitally is appropriate.

It's also important as well that voting online – it's a lot of time and people can be in their own comfort zone because not many people can leave their houses. And you can access different techniques to be able to vote online as well. I also think as well at polling stations there should be safe spaces for you to be able to vote. And then coming out of the polling station, when people are handing you leaflets - it shouldn't be the way that they are putting them in your faces – they should do it in a more manly way. Rather than, you know, put it in your face, because they don't know people's circumstances and they might make people feel uncomfortable and that shouldn't be the case. Because you are going to give up your time, to be able to vote and you are casting your vote for the party to represent you – and then they are doing this to you – so how is that respect at all? You are going to lose that respect if you do that to us. At least show us respect and be more mature about it.

Definitely Scot – I do agree that it all comes down to respect and trust – because if that's not in place, then, there's nothing.

[MUSIC]

Basically, not a lot of people know about autism, for example, as one of the hidden disabilities. Even although quite a lot of people got it, still quite a lot of people don't actually know what autism is. So, it would be good if more people got more training on autism.

I feel also that autistic people get treated absolutely differently. Like the way they get treated like a child or they think they are a bit thick.

I feel like people with hidden disabilities or anything that would make them a minority or ostracised but it's not immediately visible, kind of feel it the most,

because they will see the change in behaviour in people. They will see people treat them normally and then learn they are autistic and they will see the change in behaviour and I think that could hurt more because you know they are doing it because they have pre-conceived notions about you. It can also be that some people get a surface level understanding of autism and they can also be almost worse than people with no knowledge because they are confident in a very shallow understanding, for example, things like Rain man who the person it was based on wasn't even autistic, kind of thing. And some people will go around for decades with that being their entire understanding and almost confidently saying incorrect information back to you.

There definitely needs to be more awareness of autism and I think, you know, I totally agree with what Mary Jane and David with what you have said. There needs to be more awareness – there's a lack of awareness and in 2021 that's not what you expect. You want there to be more information out there and I think as well, because although it's been around for a long time, autism, people still don't – there's still a lack of information. And I think there's still a lack of all these changes, you know, because everyone's autism is different, that's what makes it hard to actually get general information on autism; what it is and how to understand it.

Having a hidden disability is what I find really hard because if I'm walking down the street or on the train or the bus or driving my car to go get something to eat, or like, going for McDonalds or filling up the car, every member of the public will just look at me like a normal person and wouldn't expect me to be disabled – even though they think you look normal, but they don't. Sometimes, when I show my disability travel card, some of the people that work on the railway or sell the tickets, for example, they sometimes give you that look at you – as if why has he got a disability card – he looks completely 'normal' and may be think I'm at it or trying to dodge the fare or get the fare cheaper, and you just want to say something at them like, 'listen – I've got a hidden disability.'

So, the next point you wanted to talk about was what it's like being autistic with jokes and banter. So, Mary-Jane; would you like to come in first.

Sure – well, the two main factors that just cause difficulties with jokes is that we have a poorer ability at detecting social cues very often and also autistic

people are often hyper analytical and so they will go by, you know, the rules of language that they previously understand. So, some people find it as an insult that autistic people are asking for explanations of jokes. But like, how are you ever going to understand them if every time you ask for an explanation, you get treated with hostility and you're just going to stop asking, you know?

Eh Lucas, would you like to come in? What's it like?

I don't really mind it. I've always understand jokes and have a laugh with people and I think, you know, sometimes on what Mary-Jane was saying, some people can be hostile. Autistic people don't understand jokes and they ask, you know? Personally I have a friend who doesn't always get my sense of humour. He asks me; 'What do you mean?' I'm more than happy to explain and that's the way it should be. People need to be more open and need to understand and that not everybody has the same sense of humour and understands what you mean by something funny that you say.

Not everybody with autism can understand jokes and that – some people can take it serious – But I don't mind if some people have jokes and that – but depending on how serious a joke can be as well– like if someone said they had covid, I might take that serious. But then you can never tell and that.

Autism with jokes and banter what I find the most hardest thing to deal with and I've felt like this for quite a lot of the times. In a working environment, for example, when people are sarcastic, or maybe make a comment about you or they can push your buttons. I get really defensive, really sensitive can get anxiety and get confused. And then I get really – they think I'm getting offensive or taking it seriously, and they can say 'do you not get the joke?' People have said to me 'you need to get a sense of humour' which I think is one of the most disrespectful thing that a person can really say. Not everyone may doesn't get their joke. Or sometimes it can lead to bullying if they do it all the time and it can go a bit far at times. Sometimes – you might have to say 'Right – that's enough – that's not funny actually.'

If there's a word or a phrase that you would like to share with other young people with autism.

Mary-Jane: Mean people aren't worth your energy.

Lucas: never stop being you.

David: I'd tell young people and that. Not all disabilities are visible. It's who the person is. You should basically look at one another in the same way if they have a disability or not.

And Stuart – what would you say to other autistic people.

Stuart: Follow your hearts.

I'd like to say a big thank you to all you who have listened to the podcast – and I would also like to give a special thank you to everyone who took part in the podcast. So, I'll list their names:

Amy, Scot, Debbie, Mary-Jane, Stuart, Lucas, David, Merissa, Sam and Kirsty.

And an extra special thanks to GDA staff involved: Charlotte, Ruth and last but not least, Cara.

Thank you.