**GDA Refugee Week Podcast**

**Hello and welcome GDA Voices podcast by Glasgow Disability Alliance.**

**In this podcast, we are celebrating refugee week and Scottish refugee festival. My name is Jamila Shaikh, and I work with GDA’s BAME network – the Black ethnic minority disabled people. GDA is run by and for disabled people. GDA has over 5,000 members from all backgrounds, and all types of impairment and health conditions. We provide accessible learning and peer support, open to anyone in the Glasgow area who has a long-term health condition and long-term impairment. Disabled people are diverse, and the BAME network brings together disabled people from all diverse cultures, including refugees and asylum seekers. I hope that you would enjoy listening to the voices of the refugees and their stories.**

My name is Michael Ansu. I’m from Sierra Leone in West Africa. I come from the second largest tribe in my country. We originate from Liberia, Mali, you know, I can go into the history for the Mende tribe in Sierra Leone. I’m here in Glasgow with my daughter. Life is good. We can go out for life here in Glasgow and some challenges are there. We know that it’s not easy all the time, but in life, we have to take all those things as part of your life journey, and we want to be treated and treat people that way. That’s my own life.

**Good morning, Mr C. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?**

Yeah. I was born in Kenya, Nairobi, in 1981, in a family of three. Having been the first born, together with my younger brother and my younger sister, of whom my brother is deceased, and I don’t know whereabouts of my sister. Both of my parents are deceased. With Glasgow, I always say, it’s like, come for Scotland is more like a small heaven to me. It has given me of so much opportunity to plan more and it’s a great land of which I always consider it as my father’s land, if Kenya is my mother’s land. Kenya, we’ve got 52 tribes, and I come from the largest tribe in Kenya called Kikuyu. More of our culture is more welcoming with what I can compare with what I’ve found in Glasgow, it’s almost similar because people are welcoming, and we love to learn more of different cultures as well, from people from different backgrounds.

*[Member speaks Kurdish Sorani]*

Interpreter: I am from Kurdistan region of Iraq. My language is Kurdish Sorani.

*[Member and interpreter speak Kurdish Sorani together]*

Interpreter: I live here in Scotland more than 1 and half year.

*[Member and interpreter speak Kurdish Sorani together]*

Interpreter: To be honest, I left my country because there is no justice there, and the whole country, or the whole region, capital, all controlled by two family. And really because of the injustice, I left my country. To be honest, as you know, every nation has different country, and I want to participate with a good part of my culture with the community here, and also take opportunity to benefit from what I have seen here in this country.

*[Member and interpreter speak Kurdish Sorani together]*

Interpreter: To be honest, I severely miss that kind of connection with family, family reunion, seeing your family member, and unfortunately, I’ve seen here that, for example, that people don’t care about those people who they are isolated like me, because if you see here in this country, they have their own family connections, they have their holidays, for example, they want to see family members, but for example, a person like me or maybe some other people who they couldn’t see their family member for 10 years or 15 years, they don’t concern about that. For example, it’s how that kind of isolation affect their mental health, that isolation affect their life, you know. So really, I’ve seen that I’ve been left without support.

Talking of that, I can’t talk for myself alone, because the problem is not for myself alone. So many people are suffering a lot. They can’t speak for themselves. Other people are not that strong to stand for themselves to speak whatever troubles them. If I have got anybody whom I can confront about what I feel as a disabled person, I can say it out. Other people can’t say. I see so many people suffering and the way the process of to be acknowledged as a disabled person, the system is so, so, so, so bad on that one. You can see that this person is a disabled person, so why just want to complicate their life more again?

Like, going to the assessment and the assessment maybe they will say, ‘No, we don’t—’. How can you believe somebody’s initial, I just disagree with that one. They mustn’t make people suffer more. We are more differently. We are born maybe ok, but as time goes on, that disability just appears. We don’t beg for that to be—nobody can beg to be disabled. It’s very rare, and it’s so wrong with the way they take it and put people in that big trauma. That’s why people are just dying silently. Because when you go to the assessment, the way you be sent left right and centre. Let’s say you’ve got arthritis. Maybe you can’t even stretch your legs; you can’t even walk a long distance or some metres away from where you are, but they will try to tell you, ‘Just do it’. So why are you doing that to that person?

*My name is Susan, and I’m one of the welfare rights advisors at GDA, and my job is to assist people when they’re at a very difficult time in their lives, to negotiate the benefits system, which can be quite tricky, and enable them to get the benefits they’re entitled to, and also introduce them to the various other opportunities that they can take advantage of at GDA. Myself and my colleague receive referrals from the Scottish Refugee Council. So, at the first point of contact we have with someone, we’ll go through all the eligibility criteria for various benefits. We will then arrange further appointments to complete application forms. If necessary, we can assist the person to request a mandatory reconsideration and also go into appeal, if that’s required, and maybe represent that person at the appeal.*

*Also, we’d look at the holistic situation with the person, so some people may have issues with housing or they may need an occupational therapy assessment for aids and adaptations in their home, so although we wouldn’t deal with that directly, we would certainly make the referrals for the appropriate agencies for the person. And also we would ask the person if they would like to become a member, and the vast majority of people do, and they are then able to access all the free online learning, wellbeing, events, peer support groups, and I think that this is really helpful for people to be part of a community when they’re at a very difficult point in their lives.*

With the help of GDA and so many other few organisations, churches, and all that space, because I’m a Christian, you have people to talk to, people want to talk to you, people want to connect with you. The organisation out there that want people to connect, so they are working so hard for me not to dive ourself in depression. It’s encouraging, actually encouraging.

*[Member and interpreter speak Kurdish Sorani together]*

Interpreter: To be honest, they provide me an iPad and internet access, just to occupy my time. Thank you for that.

*[Member and interpreter speak Kurdish Sorani together]*

Interpreter: Of course, it’s beneficial because I got information, I build my connection, for example, to get information and it’s just like a window to have more information.

I’m doing making of sandals, and these sandals, I learned to do them through the internet, through the YouTube, and if it was not for the GDA, I don’t think I will have been able to do such a thing. So with GDA, I would say, I’m getting help.

Oh, the accent! Oh, yes, yes. The first day, you know, at the airport, I start having that problem with the immigration officer. The way he speaks to me, and I don’t even understand what he was saying at that time, you know? But he was just, like, simple question, but the accent throw me off. I don’t really understand at that time.

With Glaswegian English, the way the people speak and, at first it was difficult for me to understand it, but as time came up, I understood it and I love it.

But now I think just take your time to listen, and if you don’t understand, ask them back. That’s what I believe, in communication, that people here, they are ready, because they know, and they are ready to break it down, and ready to make you understand.

My experience, I’ll say, I appreciate the way people with disability are taken care of. Like I say before, our culture is almost the same, but a little bit difference, because here, when somebody have been going through depression and being in a mental illness, here it’s considered as an illness, but if I compare with back at home, they’ll always consider you, like, a mad person. And people that are not treated with respect about disability, of which, as we know, disability is not an ability. And the way people appreciate it here – I love it so much, and I appreciate it.

To be honest, the first time I came to Scotland, I feel that there’s a different country, different nation, different culture, and even different language, you know. So just, I remember my country, Kurdistan, it’s totally different from the other part of Iraq, for example. Different people, different language, different culture, everything is different from the south part. So just, I’ve seen here as the same thing as Kurdistan. To be honest, the people here, they are very good people, and I like them. They are good with me, as a disabled asylum seeker. I have seen that life is easier for disabled people here, and also I have my own skills. For example, I am a good hairdresser, I can work as a mechanic. I have multi skills, and if they allowed me to work I can guarantee my life with the skills that I have, and I don’t need any financial support from the authority or from the other organisations.

I want to encourage my other colleagues of the disabled community, that, especially as immigrants, they’ve got a long way to go for us to be acknowledged and for us to be known that we exist in this country with our disabilities. I would just appeal for the government to just consider us as human beings as well as them, and just appreciate whatever happens within our community. And we need the Scottish Government to stand with us as well, not to neglect us, because most of us are just dying in silence, because the system stigma – that’s oppressing us as disabled immigrants in Scotland. So we just appeal for Nicola Sturgeon and these colleagues to just look on our issues and on our capabilities.

I don’t have family here, and as I always say, I feel like GDA is one of my family. Yes. And… I always feel like I’m home at GDA.

**I’d like to take this opportunity to thank all who have helped me put this podcast together, and a special thank you to the Glasgow Disability Alliance members – the refugees themselves – and I hope that you enjoy listening to their stories and their lives in Scotland.**

**If you are a disabled person living in Glasgow and the surrounding area and would like to know more, go to our webpage:** [**www.gda.scot**](http://www.gda.scot)**. Follow us on social media, or email us on** **info@gdaonline.co.uk****.**

I really thank you guys. The only thing I would say: just, thank you.