



## TRANSCRIPT

### Advancing Equal Employment Opportunities and Creating Inclusive Workplaces

#### Part 7: Sharing Your Story with Confidence in the Workplace

January 21, 2020 from 2:30 - 4:00 pm [Eastern Time]

>> **Pamela Williamson:** Well, good afternoon or good morning everyone. My name is Pam Williamson and I'm the assistant director of the Southeast ADA Center and a member of Georgia APSE's Board of Directors. So, I am really excited to have all of you with us today. So-- Because-- and so I would want you to know we already have 178 participants online that I can see plus we've got all of you that are groups among the folks who are participating out there. So then lets me know you're very interested in this topic. So, the Southeast ADA Center, a project of the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, Georgia APSE and the Washington Initiative for Supported Employment also known as WISE, W-I-S-E, have been partnering together to bring you this eight-part webinar series, Advancing Equal Employment Opportunities and Creating Inclusive Workplaces. We're very excited again to have you with us today. Today's webinar is going to be Sharing Your Story with Confidence in the Workplace. The goal of the whole series is to build awareness of employment first, a movement to advance at meaningful employment, fair wages and career advancement for people with disabilities.

This series features a variety of topics for supported employment providers, vocational rehabilitation professionals, people who identify as having a disability and their families. Each webinar embraces the vision, mission, and values of APSE and

provides tools and resources that can be used to advance equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities. I want to thank APSE National and that's A-P-S-E for their support and encouragement of this eight-part webinar series. APSE is the voice of employment first movement and the leader in advancing equal employment opportunity for people with disabilities in the workplace. They also provide guidance, speakers, and promote the series.

And for those of you that are APSE members, you already know you're part of a great organization. If you're not an APSE member I encourage you to consider joining the group so that you can take advantage of all that they have to offer and learn more about the APSE membership at [apse.org](http://apse.org). So, now, today our presenter will provide an overview of the RESPECT Institute of Georgia. The RESPECT Institute of Georgia is designed to help-- these persons with disabilities construct and present their stories of lived experience so that they are able to effectively self-advocate in the workplace. The philosophy of the RESPECT Institute, the training experience, the benefits to the participants and the impact to-- of the RESPECT Institute that has on all stakeholders will be presented. The RESPECT Institute is a potential tool that can be used to teach individuals with disabilities, how to share their story or to disclose effectively in the workplace and request additional accommodations under the Americans with disabilities act.

Now, we're also fortunate that we will have Toyia Mather, a graduate of the RESPECT Institute joining us to share part of her story and how she used it-- use this RESPECT Institute experience to disclose a disability or request an accommodation in the workplace. I've been fortunate to hear Toyia in another setting. So I'm very excited about what you're going to hear today. Now, at this time, I'm going to turn over the microphone to Jean Mevoli-Cannon because she's from directly with Joel Slack in the RESPECT Institute for many years here in the state of Georgia. She's the director of Work Opportunities and Peer Support at Community Friendship also known as CFI. And CFI is a comprehensive provider of recovery-oriented services for adults with mental illnesses in the Atlanta, Georgia area. She's going to introduce our speaker today. And in addition to her role at CFI, I also have the privilege of serving with her

as a fellow member of the Georgia APSE Board of Director. So I'm really excited. And Jean at this time, I'm going to turn this over to you to introduce Joel. And then Joe you can take it away from there. So, Jean go for it.

>> **Jean Mevoli-Cannon:** Thanks Pam. I am so very honored to introduce Joel Slack today. Joel Slack is the president of Slack Consulting, LLC and founder of the RESPECT Institute of Georgian. I first met Joel about 20 years ago when he presented a training about RESPECT and told his story at Greedy Hospital. I will never forget how impactful it was to me. Joel is a person who I greatly admire. I am so very thankful that he took time today to discuss the RESPECT Institute with us. Joel is a leader in the national and international mental health consumer advocacy movement.

Over his 30-year career, Joel has utilized his lived experience with mental health challenges, treatment, and recovery to develop innovative programs that create opportunities for his peers and advance the issues of RESPECT and recovery that destigmatize mental illness at all levels of the mental health system. Joel has transformed mental health systems by spearheading the creation of senior management position for Peers, reformed the culture of mental health service providers by sharing his RESPECT seminar to over 400,000 participants in 42 countries and most recently, developed the RESPECT Institute of Georgia, a program that helps peers to confidently articulate their experience with mental health challenges so that they can bring hope and understanding to their respective communities. To date, RESPECT Institute of Georgia graduates have presented their stories to over 140,000 citizens across the state of Georgia. Joel is a graduate of Allegheny College and resides in Montgomery, Alabama. In addition to providing specialized consultation and training services, he serves Mrs. Rosalyn Carter's Mental Health Task Force in Atlanta. Joel, I'm turning the webinar over to you.

>> **Joel Slack:** Thank you Jean for the very warm welcome and introduction. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to share a little bit about the RESPECT Institute of Georgia program. The title of the webinar today is Sharing Your Story with Confidence in the Workplace. And what I always like to do is to start off any kind of

the informational sharing about the RESPECT Institute by having someone share a little bit of insights from their own personal perspective. And so I've invited graduate of the RESPECT Institute to share some thoughts with you first and then after she finishes in a few minutes then we will go on into the agenda of the webinar, and I'll explain the RESPECT Institute program. So, Toyia if you'd like to share, I would have certainly appreciate it.

>> **Toyia Mather:** Hello everyone. My name is Toyia Mather and I am a RESPECT Institute graduate. I'm also a woman who lives with mental health challenges. And going through to the RESPECT Institute which I went through a year and a half ago, it really help me to be able to pick that story that I have lived with for so long and to bring it out of like my head and put it on paper to be able to articulate it not just for work purposes but for myself too. And being a certified peer specialist, you know, now that I am going to the workforce, you know, it's going to be higher based on my lived experience and being able to-- after going through the RESPECT Institute and being able to get my story done and articulate it in a way, it help me to be able to articulate that to my future employer. And in doing so it helped me to just better foster a relationship with my colleagues, with the peers that I work with as a CPS. And not only with that, it also helped me to be able to better advocate for myself and for the-- some of the needs I may need in the workplace. And being able to know my story in articulating it, it helped me to know my need.

And so therefore, whenever something may come up in the workplace and I need to say, you know, I need some different type of accommodations, I was able to do that. And so that is what the RESPECT Institute and being able to tell my story has done for me. And I'm so grateful for the opportunity to have gone through this wonderful process. It wasn't easy. You know, I did not realize I'll be able to get 51 years of information down to a 10-minute story but I was. And like I said, now it just had helped me not only in my workplace but also helped me in my personal relationship also to be able to articulate my story better. And I thank you all.

>> **Joel Slack:** Thank you Toyia. [Inaudible]. Thank you so much Toyia. I've

certainly-- We all appreciate your sharing.

>> **Toyia Mather:** Thank you.

>> **Joel Slack:** So the first slide that's up right now is sort of the agenda for the webinar, Sharing Your Story with Confidence in the Workplace. And I'd-- This is just simply what I would like to go through here today is that just talk a little bit about my background because I think by doing so, it'll help you to realize why learning how to tell our story is so important. Then I'll describe the program and highlight the many benefits of it and, of course, we'll have time for question and answers. So if we could go to the next slide.

OK. You'll notice that in the personal background, I was an athlete, as a basketball player at one time. And I went to college on a basketball scholarship. I finished my first year and went home for the summer, but I became very sick. I had a breakdown. And over the course of the following eight years, I spent almost three of those years in psychiatric hospitals and then four years, getting different types of rehabilitation and all the array of mental health programs that were available at that time. And one program that did help me was a work-oriented program, the fountain house model.

And so employment has been very important to me in my own personal recovery. I was fortunate enough to get better and go back to college. I graduated from Allegheny College in Pennsylvania. And my degree is International Economics and Business Psychology. I'd like to tell people that after eight years in the mental health system, I had all the abnormal psychology I wanted. So I decided to go into business psychology. I then went to-- moved to Atlanta to take a corporate job. But I just had trouble sleeping at night because I kept thinking about all the people I had actually suffered with and endured my illness with.

And so one day I went in and quit my corporate job and became a volunteer advocate for people with mental illness. Because back then, there were no certified peer specialist positions, no opportunities for peers to become advocates and be able to

make a living doing that and sustain themselves. So I got a little bit innovative and I used my education to develop a program called the Office of Consumer relations. I started it in the state of Alabama, which was coming up from underneath a major lawsuit and they want to do something creative. And my belief was is if you follow the line of money, you will follow the line of power. And so, I decided that the best way to get consumers, people with mental illness experience to have some influence was to have them work within the senior management of the State Department of Mental Health where they could infuse the patient's perspective into management decisions. And this was a success in Alabama then it went into Georgia. And the next thing you know almost every state in the country had one, including the federal organization SAMHSA. And again, the whole idea behind it was to make sure that we brought the lived experience into the arena where major and routine decisions are made, that we were tired of professionals making with all the decisions and not having much input into them.

So you can just imagine, suddenly establishing an office at the highest level of management. And in order to qualify to be employed in that position, you had to have experienced a serious mental illness and received treatment for it. So the human resource people were trying to figure out, well, how do we measure lived experience? You know, how do-- what kind of questions do we ask people about and why is lived experience so valuable? Well, it sort of turned things upside down for a while. But in the end, we began to realize that the most effective advocates are people who are able to utilize their lived experience in order to demonstrate points that they're trying to make.

In other words, it's one thing for a manager to tell employees to be respectful to the client. But if a manager can use their own personal experience of what it was like to be treated with respect or with disrespect of how it affected the outcome, then you have a better tool of teaching. So the-- We began to realize too in looking for people to work in these positions and in these offices because everyone that working in the office had to have experienced the serious mental illness. As we began to realize that it was the people who can articulate their experiences, most effectively. Those

were the ones that seem to be able to do this work of articulating the patient's perspective and infusing that into management decisions.

I then realized that there was another gap at the direct care level when I developed the RESPECT seminar that was presented in my introduction. And then I started presenting my story so many times that all over the world that I sort of got tired of hearing my own story. And I also realized that there was nothing more therapeutic than for me to stand up and tell my story, that every time I did, I became more empowered. I got more clarity to my experiences. And whenever I got more clarity there was more closure to my past. And I was able to move on with my life. So I decided to develop the RESPECT Institute to give other people an opportunity to learn how to tell their story and then stand up in front of people at a podium and share their story, and with the expectation and hope that it would be just as empowering for them as it was for me. So if we could go to the next slide.

So, the mission-- There's a few mission and principles. And the mission is to give hope, recovery and independent living a voice. I think that's self-explanatory on one level, but I do know that there's many different organizations out there that work with different types of challenges and disabilities. And I think we all understand perhaps what hope is. But the word recovery is something that probably needs a little more definition, especially if you don't work in the mental health and substance used environment. Recovery for people with substance used and mental illness is something that's very self-defined. And it has to do with finding a way to live a fulfilling life. Recovery is sort of the opposite. The antithesis, you may say, to the old clinical jargon from the past of remission and symptom relief. Certainly, that's important to finding relief from symptoms.

But there's-- even if you find the magic pill and find a way to, you know, minimize your symptoms, there's still enormous amount of loss and recovery that needs to go on. So, recovery is defining, self-defining what's important to you. What does-- What's your vision of a fulfilling life and it's strength-based as well? It's not based on whether or not your symptoms have been relieved, all that's important, it has to do

more with someone pursuing sort of self-actualization and achieving the goals that they want to achieve. And then, of course, people who understand the terminology of independent living, we put that into our mission because we do these programs, these training programs for people with cross disabilities, who prefer the terminology of independent living and not recovery.

The principles is-- There's several here that I've listed. Participation is voluntary. We've learned that the program does not work if people are coerced or forced into participating. The-- It doesn't matter how the challenge someone is. The indicate most-- The greatest indicator of success is whether or not they want to tell their story or not. So if someone wants to tell their story, then they're very likely to succeed in going through the RESPECT Institute. When two and three go hand and hand, and this is where I'd like to share a little bit of-- sort of editorialized a little bit.

You have a unique story. You are the sole proprietor and you-- and only you can articulate your story. And that's true. People don't always realize that their story is unique, that they own their own story, and that they're the only ones who can articulate it. I've been in the advocacy world for 40 years now. And there's been one cardinal rule since I started. And that is, don't tell someone else's story for them. Let them tell their own story. The problem is, if the people don't learn how to tell their story, it'll never be told. And so that's where we begin to look at what is the loss to our community when someone doesn't learn how to tell their story? Well, the biggest loss is, is that other people don't get to hear the hope and the inspiration and the techniques and the wisdom that's generated from going through challenges. The RESPECT Institute runs on the premise that enduring challenges and even suffering through different illnesses and challenges, actually generates wisdom. And that was-- What we try to do in the RESPECT Institute is to sort of smoke out that wisdom through a process so that person can determine what the gems of wisdom, where did they learned while they were going through these difficult times, and how to share that with other people who are perhaps in the process of going through something similar.



So, again, there's this enormous amount of wisdom that really goes on tabbed and the community is not able to access that if somebody doesn't-- if we don't tell our stories. So, if we could go on to the next slide, I think its participants. Yeah. So what we've been doing is using this in a variety of different environments. And the first is community education, which has to do with what I was just talking about, is, you know, if people don't tell their stories, then we lose the information in the community.

I mean, I never knew, for example, what it was like to live in my community and have cerebral palsy until I heard one of our RESPECT Institute graduate shared their story of what it was like to live with cerebral palsy in our community. And the same is true for all challenges. And the fact is, it's the healthiest communities are ones who create environments for people to share their story with each other. That's what engenders empathy in a community is when people are able to share their story. The problem is its not everyone knows how to share their story. And that's when of course the RESPECT Institute comes in is we help and we coach and we help process and prepare someone so that they can constructively learn how to tell their story. In Georgia alone, we present-- a portion of our graduates have presented their story to over 140,000 citizens across the state, people who would otherwise not hear stories of recovery. Now, not everybody wants to be a public speaker, though.

So the RESPECT Institute-- By helping someone to create their story helps people to be able to share their story on-- in a personal level. One thing that you'll find common in the mental health community in particular, is that even our parents didn't understand what we went through. The problem is, is that part of the problem is that we didn't know how to articulate our experiences to them. And that's what the RESPECT Institute does is its help people to articulate their experiences so that people can understand what it is they experienced.

And then in the last year or two, we found that it's very helpful in judicial settings. We've had met several of our graduates who have gone in for-- to be sentenced, start to go into court for a crime they committed when they were sick. And they just

asked the judge, can I read my 10 minute story, RESPECT story? And the judge says, well, certainly. And, you know, they read their story and the judge-- and almost all of the cases, the judge has looked at the person and said, well, thank you for letting me know about your history and your experiences. And we've had a couple say things like, you know, if I would have-- had been locked in a closet for three days at a time when I was young, I'd probably be right where you are. And instead the judge-- instead of the judge giving them jail time, they'd send them to a treatment environment. In other words, their story engendered some empathy or from the judge's perspective, because the RESPECT Institute helps people tell their story that shows how they developed their challenges, how it manifested.

And then most recently and especially working with Jean Cannon and CFI and Community Friendship, and that we've been talking more about the benefit in an employment settings, which Toyia spoke to. In the mental health field, there's certified peer specialist. I mean, they're hired based on their experiences, their lived experiences. But how are you going to get hired if you don't know how to articulate those experiences? And again, that's what the RESPECT Institute does. And it helps people to articulate their experiences. And what we have found is that just by having confidence and being comfortable and learning how to share your story, that you just approach interviews, you approach interfacing with people with more confidence and more-- and you're more comfortable when you know how to tell your story. So-- And, well, I'll talk more about this later. So if we can have the next slide, please.

I always like to make these two quotes here because they really highlight a couple important aspects of the RESPECT Institute. The first is by Maya Angelou. It says "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." There's enormous amount of truth to that. And what we've come to find out in the RESPECT-- by during the RESPECT Institute is that when people hold their story inside and they do it for a variety of reasons, one is just to avoid being stigmatized or someone not wanting to you as a roommate or being a friend. So, people hold their story inside. And what we've come to find out that if you keep your story inside, if you keep it a secret, if you keep it in the darkness, it actually becomes an impediment to one's recovery.

That it's not until people stand up and own their story and start to get comfortable talking about their experiences. Do people start, you know, feeling better about themselves and willing to go out into the community and just feel more comfortable about it.

You know, I've always wanted when I-- When a lot of people who go through mental health problems, they-- when they go through a hospital, for example, and they come out into the-- ready to come into the community, everyone talks about social integration, you know, reintegrating back into society. But I've always wondered how can you totally feel like you're part of a community if you have to walk around your community hiding something about yourself? And I was a basketball player when we used to be losing a game, you know, and with a minute left and we found a way to come back and win, and we were all beat up at the end, it was a victory. And that's how I think we should feel about overcoming challenges, their victories. We shouldn't hide them. We should be proud of them and know how to be able to articulate, you know, what we went through. And, you know, the victory that comes with, you know, fighting through our challenges.

Now, is learning how to tell your story easy? No. It's not. That's why we have 10 participants in each training because we need the support of our peers in learning how to tell our stories. Dr. Bill Anthony, who wrote about recovery in the beginning stages of it years ago, said that sometimes those of us who have gone through this challenge, spend the rest of our lives trying to make sense out of experiences that never made any sense when we were sick. And that's what we try to do in the RESPECT Institute is fine tangible words and phrases and ways of describing our experiences so that other people can understand them. We don't use slang to describe how we were feeling or what we were experiencing. We go into detail about our experiences so that people-- not only do we make sense out of them but we can then present them to people and they can better understand what our experience was like. So next slide, please.

The process that we go through, and I'll speak to some of the cautions of doing this

later. We're very supportive of all organizations who encourage people to tell their story, but the RESPECT Institute does do it a little different only than other organizations. And-- So I always want to caution everyone that just going out and trying to do this without proper training and no wisdom and how to facilitate can actually cause some harm more than good. But basically, our process, I always call this sculptors process, because what we do is we start off with raw material, which is our past. We then shape it and work with it. You get feedback from other people in the room, the other participants. And sometimes just like a sculptor, we, you know, the sculptor will shape and cut things and sometimes pieces will fall to the ground. And this, you know, you don't need it anymore, so you just kick it to the side. Sometimes you reach down and pick it up and put it back on the raw material and continue sculpting and shaping. And at some point, you begin to then start polishing your, you know, the work-- your artwork, and it becomes this beautiful piece of art.

And this is very similar to people learning how to tell their story. They start off with raw material and over time they hone in on it. They learn how to articulate it. And then in the final day of our training, they learn how to, you know, polish it up and it becomes-- and their story becomes this beautiful piece of art. Day one, I call cleaning out the attic, you know. People need to sort of go up and look through the attic, look through things they've stored up in their minds for sometimes years. Clean it out. Take it down to line it up in front of you like a smorgasbord. And then pick and choose what it is you want to take with you as you move forward. I mean recovery is difficult enough as it is. We don't need any extra baggage. So we want to start cleaning out the attic and that's not always that easy either just as it would be cleaning out a real attic because you have things that are sentimental that you want to hang on to. You don't know-- You have to make a decision what you're going to put back up in the attic. But what we'd like to point out is that if you can clean out your attic and more-- make more space that that's space that you-- you've created is potential. It's potential to bring other positive things into your mind and into your processing. And so, just as we clean out an attic and then make room to put more stuff up there, you know, what we're trying to do here is to clean out the attic to

make more room for something more positive. And the fact, this is a lot of the information that we hang on to. We really don't need to hang on. We can let it go. We don't do any analyzing, psychological analyzing. We consider all of our past to be neutral and to simply be a part of our story.

So that evening, that day, they do some sharing with each other. And then they do homework which is to start writing out their story. Day two is they present their story from the podium. And presenting your story from the podium allows a person to feel more ownership over it. You know, just talking about your story casually in a greasy spoon restaurant is one thing. But when you stand up at a podium, people at a podium have authority. And what the participants have is they have authority over their own story, their own life and so it is-- it's empowering. And I'll talk more about this later when it comes to self-directed stigma. Because when you're standing in front of group of people sharing your story, it's hard to stigmatize yourself. And there's no room for it.

And at some point, you've learned to become comfortable with it. And you began to realize that yes, your story is simply a story that has some gems of wisdom in it that actually, by sharing it, you're giving back to your community. You're inspiring other people and you're educating other people. The final day is when they present the polished version. At the end, it's amazing what can be done in three days, but at the end, they have a story, their articulate story. And on the fourth day as a formal graduation ceremony where several other people share their stories, and we've come to find out that this has more value than what we thought mainly because we realize that many of the people with serious mental illness never graduated from much of any kind because of their illness. And so this graduation ceremony is a big, big deal for a lot of the people we serve.

The other part of the process is outreach, which is our speaking engagements. We have two people who are full-time in reaching out to the community to get our speakers out there circulating. And the more they tell their story, the better. It puts them out there where people can see them, but it's also-- you know, the goal is to

educate our people. And we have standing invitations, and all of our universities, you know, students are learning about the lived experience firsthand by our speakers. But we also speak at many of the meetings and conferences and we're always on first because what we've heard from the top management is that when a RESPECT Institute speaker shares their story first, it warms everyone up in the room as to why they're there in the first place. Can I have the next slide, please?

OK. So I think I've talked about eliminating self-directed stigma. It just seems that when people start getting up at the podium and sharing their story, you know, there's no room for someone to be embarrassed about their own experiences anymore.

They begin to realize that there's actually value to their story. And when they realized that there's value, they're more willing to sort of stand up and proclaim it and own it. What we have found is when people tell their story articulately instead of people saying, you know, I'm sorry you went through that. Now they're saying because you're amazing for what you've come true. And the only thing that's different is how they presented their story. The other stigma reduction focuses in the community. And what we have learned is that most communities are fully aware that people-- human beings are designed to get sick. They're just not as well aware that human beings are designed to recover.

So we want to make sure that our stories are balanced and that we educate our communities about recovery. And then the last thing about stigma reduction is this glimpse of humanity. You know, the study show that most anti-stigma campaigns that are done by professional organizations or other organizations have not been successful. And one of the reasons, of course, is because they want to go out and try to convince everyone that we're not dangerous. But what that does is make people suspicious. Well, why are you telling me that they're dangerous? They must be if you're trying to convince me they're not. What we've come realized is the most effective way of destigmatizing mental illness and substance use is for people to stand up in front of the group of people, live and in person, and share their story. It gives people in the audience an opportunity to look you in the eye, to get a glimpse of

your humanity, and when people get a glimpse of your humanity, it's a lot easier to treat you with respect. And if you don't believe me just turn on the news because people do awful things to one another and it's basically because they don't see the humanity in the person they're hurting. Can I have the next slide, please?

Self-advocacy. What I hear from a lot of the folks that we train is that they don't have to hide who they are anymore. For some, they want people around them to know that they're in recovery. And now they have a tool, they have a way of articulating, you know, what's they've been through, and they're able to talk to everyone around them. You know, whether it's someone living in the apartment complex with them, someone at work. And it's just important to some people. So now that it gives them a structure on how to inform people about the fact that they're in recovery. I talked about being more self-confident and comfortable. And making a connection with others, you know.

We've had about 25 people go out and share their story. And within two weeks of sharing their story at a venue, they were offered a job as a certified peer specialist. And I believe that someone who works in this environment when they hear someone articulate their experiences with so much confidence and the touch with such comfort that it appeals to an employer to know because, you know, part of working together is having relationships and making a connection. And when people are able to share their experiences with each other, it just creates more cordial environment and a less secretive environment. There's more connections made. And people just don't feel so alone when they're able to talk about their experiences.

The other part that we like to talk about is that, you know, when you-- part of our stories is giving advice at the end. And, you know, and the reason is, is this, the people telling their stories are the experts of their stories. And it's-- Some of the advice is just very profound and it's-- that wisdom that I was speaking of earlier. Next slide.

I think we're getting close to the end, folks. OK. So, employment and job development. I-- I'd talked-- I mentioned that fact that we've had 20 some people go

out share their story and within two weeks, they were hired. Going out and sharing your story puts you out there in the work-- in the market, so to speak, the workplace. And it allows people to see you, to be aware of your experiences. You know, it's interesting because many-- everyone has a different focus and so there is some who go out and tell their story about how supported housing was the key to their recovery.

Some people go out and talk about employment. And depending where they're speaking, someone might say, oh, boy we actually have that person there. We have the great certified peer specialist in our organization. So just, you know, being able to get out, you know, a lot of people just stay in their apartments and dwell on their past experiences. We offer an opportunity to them to go out. We don't wait for people to call us either. We are pro-active in getting people out to share their story. We're knocking on the doors making sure that, you know, our graduates have an opportunity to share their story.

As I was talking to someone the other day, they say that the RESPECT Institute and learned how to tell your story provides a framework for them to be honest no matter what kind of work environment they're in. When they didn't know how to tell their story, they would make stories up as to why they weren't able to come into work or what they needed. The other part about, it's about sharing your story. And once you've learned how to articulate it is you don't have to talk about just the darkness because that tends to push people away.

As a matter of fact, the more you tell your story we've come to learn, the more you focus on recovery and the less you focus on the past pain. So there's a therapeutic value to learning how to tell your story. You leave the bad parts of the darkness in the past where it belongs and talk about the strengths, I mean in recovery. Next slide, please. This is sort of some things I just added. And, you know, we've always talks about in the work environment the importance of person first language and, of course, that is very important. I'd like to think that we do by telling our-- learning to tell our stories is we take it a step further. And we show who we are as a person, you know, in a courageous sort of way we share our story. And we stop worrying about



other people think because what's interesting is once people do hear our story that's not as bad. They don't react as bad as we thought they would.

I had one fellow who's come to the RESPECT Institute training and he was afraid to share anything about his past. He said he was afraid because he thought it would-- by letting certain-- some of his anger out and then it would be like a hungry tiger that would just come out and chew everyone out. And he said as he started to learn how to tell a story and let things out, he realized, you know, it was just a little kitten inside, and that it wasn't nearly as bad as he thought. It's just because he kept it a secret for so long and it grown into this monster. Employers also liked the fact that-- they like when people are able to use their lived experience to demonstrate a point. I talked about that position I perhaps helped create years ago. I mean if we're going to be able to-- it contribute to the development of the policies then we certainly may be to able to articulate and demonstrate points by using our lived experience. And so our lived experience becomes the slope-- skill set, an asset. Is there anymore-- on the slide?

OK. Well, some of these I think I've already talked about. Yeah. I don't-- We said-- We present in lots of different venues. Most of this, I've already discussed. So, we can move on to the next slide.

So this is the caution I wanted to point out. And I'm going to read it just to make sure that it's very clear. Encouraging someone to tell their story can place them in an extremely vulnerable mindset and open them up to their past and unresolved traumas. It requires a specialized skill set to facilitate a comprehensive storytelling process. So, I always warn people. You know, it took me 20 years to develop this program. If you are not trained and do not have the necessary skill set to do this, you can actually cause more harm than good. In other words, you can open someone up to their past and if you don't know how to take that and help them mold into a constructive story, you'll leave them hanging, so to speak. And you leave them with this unresolved wound. So, I just caution everyone that before you decide to sort of develop a program or do anything like this that you seek advice and do it very

deliberately. So, that's the information I had plan to present. I-- That's my contact information.

>> **Pam Williamson:** OK. Joel, thank you so much. This is Pam. I really appreciate the fact that you have told us about the RESPECT Institute, how it set up and the successes that you have. I also-- I know Toyia had to leave us but I appreciate her being able to share with us upfront. You know, I want to remind everyone that this is really a tool that can be used to allow the people you're working with to learn how to tell their-- their own story. I think many time those of us in the field unfortunately, we-- Because we're helpful people, we will to help people tell their story whereas we need to be empowering people to tell their own story. And then in turn, it will allow them to be able to articulate what they need in the workplace either with disclosure because of reasonable accommodations or other needs that they may have. And as we all know this is a great way to decrease the stigma, increase self-advocacy. And I love what you said, give that glimpse of humanity. It really makes a difference when we do that. So at this time, what we're going to do, we have this-- we have half hour left for questions, and do stay with us until the end because those of us that know that stay until end, you got a special present on the post test that you take. And it's-- So we're going to ask folks if you do have questions to please put into the chat area and then Joel, what I will do is I will those out to you and let you answer them for the whole group. So the--

>> **Joel Slack:** OK.

>> **Pam Williamson:** -- first question that we already have is what do you think of the 12 step programs?

>> **Joel Slack:** Well, that-- that's a very good question. And, first of all, as I said earlier, I'm supportive of any organization or opportunity where people are provided the opportunity to share their story. So even at the NA or AA programs where they're allowed to share their story, but one-- There's a difference between those opportunities and what we do at the RESPECT Institute. We-- First of all, our stories are condensed into 10 minutes because we're trying to get as much clarity as possible.

And so there's guidelines to follow on how to present. We don't tell people what to talk about but more of how to present chronologically. The 12-- People who come from the 12 step program initially, they're so used to having a 45 minutes to an hour to tell their story that-- Many times, their story is not well-organized. I mean if you give people an hour to tell their story, sometimes it goes all over the place. In 10 min-- When-- if you have 10 minutes to tell your story then you really have to cut out all the underbrush. And the goal is to-- by cutting that out, all the underbrush is to leave that behind, to leave it on the cutting floor if you will. And just get clarity. Now, that doesn't mean that you can't go from the RESPECT Institute and tell your story in an hour opportunity. But the idea is to get clarity, to get-- to crystalize your experiences, to build up and then build on from there. So they are different--

>> **Pam Williamson:** All right. Joel--

>> **Joel Slack:** -- but--

>> **Pam Williamson:** Yeah.

>> **Joel Slack:** Mm-hmm.

>> **Pam Williamson:** Thank you. So I think that was very helpful explanation. The next couple of questions I'm going to combine because they are basically same, what I just-- the same question just asked two different ways, is basically is how do I, you know-- If I'm Central Oregon, how do I get to your program or is there a place that list that locations of the program and how you get in-- how do you get it-- had to come to where you are?

>> **Joel Slack:** Right. Well, that's started in the state of Missouri. And then I started at there. And then I went to Georgia. And they're very advanced in their recovery and peer initiatives. And so the RESPECT Institute really took off in the state of Georgia. What I've come to learned is that the best way to implement this is to have the state mental health department or, you know, a state agency invite the program into their state. Because it takes a while, for example, to-- I'm looking at these

questions too. It takes a while to train someone in this. There's on-site training. But if a state is willing to set up the sort of the infrastructure to do this, it's a lot easier to develop the program. And frankly, we're just now beginning. So we're not in a lot of states because we're just now beginning to sort of consider that. We've-- Georgia bought almost all of my time to do this and-- but now I'm ready to start to move out in-- out into other states and communities. And I've done that in the past with the Office of Consumer relations taking something national. So it's just a matter of getting the interest and the infrastructure in place. It generally--

>> **Pam Williamson:** So, Joel if folks were interested in having this come to their state in some way with the best thing to be for them to contact you and then discussing this some next steps potentially?

>> **Joel Slack:** Yes, yes.

>> **Pam Williamson:** OK, all right.

>> **Joel Slack:** We have contacted through that contact information that-- with end of May.

>> **Pam Williamson:** Yeah.

>> **Joel Slack:** So, yes.

>> **Pam Williamson:** All right, excellent. All right. Marsha [assumed spelling], if you'll just put Joel's contact information back there-- back up there that would be good so that we can-- folks can have that right in front of them. The other-- One of the other questions Joel is can someone with a developmental disability benefit from the RESPECT Institute program?

>> **Joel Slack:** Yes, yes. That's been a very interesting development for me. Because I remember when I started doing this, I would-- I always allow the host agency to select the participants. And it was amazing how many of the clinicians would say something like, oh, they're not able to function at that level or they're not

going to be able to sit still for three days because of their disability-- whatever type of disability or other developmental or they had schizophrenia or something else, you know, the attention deficit disorder. Well, it's very interesting to know that once somebody realizes how valuable their story is, they'll sit through three full days without any problem whatsoever. And sometimes, people with developmental disabilities, we need to go in a little different pace. However, when they learn how to tell their stories, it can move everybody in a room. It can inspire everyone. It's very similar to an adult telling their story versus an adolescent.

When an adolescent tells their story, it just has more emotion to it. And, I guess I had one person who had both developmental disability and co-occurring mental illness. And we were told they just couldn't do it. And they certainly weren't going to be able to participate. But finally, the person convinced them to give them a try. He'd get up at five o'clock every morning to work on a story with someone. He ended up getting selected to present at the graduation. And at-- And he presented. And I'm telling you, it was-- the world shifted that particular day because it was so powerful. We're not trying to create the greatest or tours in the world. Sometimes the most moving presentations are quite raw and sometimes they're very poignant. So, you know, yes, people with developmental disabilities can benefit just as much, if not more, from an opportunity to learn how to tell their story.

>> **Pam Williamson:** Joel, thank you for talking about that. And I know in the state of Georgia, you've worked with several groups who have developmental disabilities as well as those that have--

>> **Joel Slack:** Yes.

>> **Pam Williamson:** -- psychiatric disabilities or mental illnesses. And I'm just going to put a plugin for all for Joel because he's very modest. One of the things that Joel does in his program in the state of Georgia, it also works through one of our Centers for Independent Living, and that is a variety of people. And many people have gone through this program. They are the Center for Independent Living. So I've-- I love the fact that the program in and of itself is inclusive. It may have started because of

someone with a mental health diagnosis, but it didn't stay there. So, I think that's great.

>> **Joel Slack:** Right.

>> **Pam Williamson:** So--

>> **Joel Slack:** So, we've-- We learned a lot from working with each other. And that particular organization has the most vibrant chapter of almost anyone. They've really taken the RESPECT Institute run with this.

>> **Pam Williamson:** Yes, they have. Yes, they have. So, I'm going to ask the next question. And if we need more clarification, just let me know. It says, what is your recidivism rate? And I'm-- I'm having to assume they want to know if you have people that just drop out and don't ever give their story again.

>> **Joel Slack:** Well, yes. We-- Remember the-- one of the principles is participation is voluntary, and that's true for the training and thereafter. So, even though we may ask somebody to present they may not feel like they'd like to do that. They may want to just present their story to their mom or their dad or their, you know, loved ones. And that's fine too. We also believe that the process that people go through in learning how to tell their story has such a therapeutic value to it. That whether or not they go out and share their story publicly, is irrelevant. It's-- Going out and sharing your story publicly is something that people-- some people want to do and some people don't. So, we don't really look at it as a recidivism rate type thing. We look at more just a personal preference of not wanting to go out and share their story publicly.

>> **Pam Williamson:** Thank you, Joel for that perspective. And I, you know, and I do want to reemphasize because I think this is one of the most important parts of the RESPECT Institute. It is always voluntary because-- and even as someone like myself that works for the Southeast ADA Center when we talk about the Americans with disabilities that disclosure of a disability even under the law is always voluntary. And

I think we need to remember that as a service providers many times because, again, how come we want to get in there and make things right. And it's-- that's not our job. And, you know, it's our job to work with someone to help them to be able to share their own story and ask for their own accommodations. So--

>> **Joel Slack:** Right.

>> **Pam Williamson:** All right. Now, just-- If-- I've got another question here and just as a reminder to folks.

>> **Joel Slack:** OK.

>> **Pam Williamson:** If you do have more questions, we do have a little bit more time so feel free to go ahead and put them in the chat area. We had someone kind of a statement slash question, would like to know if this would be a-- it's just-- would this not be a great agenda topic for VR counselors or vocational rehabilitation counselors, or is this a conflict with HIPAA, and that's the Privacy Act?

>> **Joel Slack:** Right. Well--

>> **Pam Williamson:** So--

>> **Joel Slack:** We've never-- Again, since participation is voluntary, what we do is we do basically hold all the participants responsible for confidentiality, and we've never had a problem with that whatsoever. And-- But in terms of-- so, you know-- and we don't disclose-- The organization itself doesn't ever disclose any information about anything. What we do once we trained someone how to tell their stories, we become sort of a broker to allow them if they choose to go and share their story. So-- And we do it in a lot of vocational rehabilitation environments. So, we've really-- we've never really had any kind of issues come up about HIPAA in recently eight years in Georgia. Yeah. So I-- I'm not sure I can answer that. Perhaps it's clearly if someone who's a HIPAA expert, but we've just never had that as an issue, a problem. And I'm going to look more into it though because it is a good question.

>> **Pam Williamson:** OK. Thank you, Joel. So-- And if the person who had this question has more-- has some more explanation or background about their concern with that particular issue, you know, feel free to follow-up. And, you know, if there are some other questions that might go along with that because many times it's easier to talk one on one by phone, you know. All right. This time, I do not see any other questions. So, Joel, I just want to give it back to you momentarily. Is there anything else you would like to say briefly before I do the wrap up?

>> **Joel Slack:** Well, there's a couple sort of little-- sort of vignettes perhaps I'd like to share that just, I think help to clarify the value of learning how to tell your story. The first was-- The very first one I did was at a-- in a hospital setting where people had lived there for many years because it was a forensic hospital, psychiatric hospital. They've committed an awful crime and-- when they were sick. And the first couple of days, none of them could share anything about themselves. It was like they were just completely locked up. And on the second day, I was there. I was taken on a tour of the hospital and they brought me into the medical records department. In the medical record, since people would stay there sometimes for decades, you know, they had walk-in closets for some of the patients. And I-- Which just nothing but charts all over the walls. And I remember thinking to myself, why are there so much information about this patient, but they're not able to articulate anything about their own experiences? And it dawned on me. The reason that they never is, is they've never had an opportunity to share their own story. Everybody else has written about them in their charts. But they've never been given a chance to share their story the way they would like it to be presented. And so once those patients realize that it was their turn finally to share their story, it was like, you know, a ketchup bottle. It's hard to get the ketchup out it first, the new one. But once it starts flowing, they just keeps coming out, and that's sort of what it was like. And I just-- I think that everyone who goes through these different types of challenges, their story is right on the tip of their tongue. They want to tell it. It's just that they're not given the opportunity and the skills and the coaching necessary to learn how to tell it. And then the other little vignette is I think, one that applies to everybody who's been



through any kind of challenge. And that was we were finished in one of our trainings. And this one young man, I remember he sort of pounded his fist on the table. He said, man, I wish I'd had this training six months ago. And I said, why do you say that? Why did-- And he says, well, six months ago, I went to my 15th-year high school reunion and everybody knew I'd been sick, you know. Everyone knew I'd gotten-- I've been into drugs, went into hospital, went into prison jail. But he said everybody was so polite in asking me what had happened. And he said, but I didn't know what to tell them. Because I had never thought about how to articulate what I've been through. And he said, now, I have-- I've learned what I want to share with somebody and I can articulate my experiences. And he said, but while I was there and I didn't know how to do it, I was just kept putting my foot in my mouth. Everything came out off awkwardly. And I-- he said, he went to bed booze nights that week and feel like he had stigmatized himself more. But now he's able to go, and when people asked him what happens, he's able to articulate. He's comfortable. He's confident, that he's saying what he wants to say. And he knows how to say it. So I think that story probably wraps up better than any other sort of what we try to accomplish in the RESPECT Institute.

>> **Pam Williamson:** Joel, I love how we started with someone's story. And now we finished with two stories. And for those of you that still had things to add, I will make sure that those-- that information gets to Joel so that he can follow-up with you because I-- Being able to share your own story is one of the most important things that there is. And I want to say I've been a-- I've not been through the RESPECT Institute, but I, too, now have been able to share my own story of lived experience and the last few years and it has made such a huge difference, the fact that I'm now telling my story. No one else is telling it for me.

>> **Joel Slack:** Yep.

>> **Pam Williamson:** And it has given me the confidence to be able to move forward in many areas of my life. So, thank you for teaching folks how to do that, and for also sharing with all these wonderful people on the line today. Folks, if you'll hold on for

just a couple of more minutes, I want you to hang with me so we can answer any questions you may have about credits and also give you that little Easter egg you're going to need on the test.

So-- But we do appreciate Joel and Toyia and Jean participating today, as well as all of you Part 7 of the eight parts webinar series Advancing Equal Employment Opportunities and Creating Inclusive Workplaces: Sharing your Story with Confidence in the Workplace.

Now is to reminder, there are two types of education credit for this webinar, a certificate of completion and a credit for certified employment support professional, abbreviated CESP. To receive credit for today's webinar, you must meet four requirements. First, you must have registered for today's webinar. You must have listened to the Part 7 webinar and its entirety. You must-- Your attendance for the Part 7 webinar must be verified and you must complete the online multiple choice test for [inaudible] for Part 7.

Now, because you have stayed with us, you are going to now get your little Easter egg. So for one question, so I want to introduce you to Basil the Beagle, who put himself in the warm laundry earlier this week. This is my bed-- my Beagle nephew. Keep that in mind. You'll need it for later when you take the post test yet.

So, now, after you submit the post test and verify your attendance you will be provided with a link to print your certificate of completion for Part 7 webinar and an additional copy of the certificate of completion will be sent to the email address that you provided when accessing the post test for the Part 7 webinar. Your feedback is very, very important to us. We use your input to improve future webinars and identify topics. As a matter of fact, we haven't done that with each webinar that we have done in this series. So, the link to the post test and the evaluation for this Part 7 webinar will be emailed to all participant-- all registered participants for-- within one hour after the webinar ends. And the post test is also listed in the chat area if anyone would like to access it.

Marsha, we are getting one person requesting that we please show the picture again so-- of Beagle the Beagle. So-- Basil the Beagle. I should know my own puppy's name. So-- But-- for the webinar post test. So, OK. There's Basil the Beagle in the laundry basket. All right.

Now, the Part 7 webinar and materials, all of the PDF files, the caption videos, anything that was shared by [inaudible] will be available along with all of the other files for the eight-part webinar series. There'll be archived, both video and audio with the presentation and transcripts, and they are available online at [adasoutheast.org/webinars/archives.php](https://adasoutheast.org/webinars/archives.php).

Thank you again for joining us today. Save the date for the next and final webinar, Part 8 in this series on Tuesday, February 25, 2020, from 2:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern Time. The title of that webinar is the Large Employer Initiatives and Public Sector Employment. And that will be presented by Susan Harrell. We encourage you to ask your friends and colleagues to register early for the next webinar if they have not done so already. We want to make sure everyone gets a spot. And you can share the link for registration for the series at [bit.ly/equal-employ-opp-webinar-seada-2019](https://bit.ly/equal-employ-opp-webinar-seada-2019).

And if you have any questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act, please remember you may contact the ADA national network at 1-800-949-4233 Or you may contact the Southeast ADA Center by calling 404-541-9001 or via email at [adasoutheast@syr.edu](mailto:adasoutheast@syr.edu). All calls and emails are confidential. And again, we thank you and wish you a great rest of the week. Bye-bye.

### **End of Transcript**

Webinar Part 7: Sharing Your Story with Confidence in the Workplace Webinar Series:  
Advancing Equal Employment Opportunities and Creating Inclusive Workplaces

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