

One Step at a Time with Joey Wesselink

Judy: Welcome to Disability Exchange. I'm Judy Warth.

Mike: And I'm Mike Hoenig.

Judy: Our guest today is none other than the infamous Joey Wesselink. Welcome, Joey. Thank you for joining us.

Joey Wesselink: Hello, Judy. Hello, Mike. My proper name is Joel Wesselink. I am Joey. I go by that. I am currently the administrative assistant at Access 2 Independence, a center for independent living organization. I'm currently a former graduate of the LEND training program. I graduated from the University of Iowa in 2013 with a journalism degree, bachelor of arts. And I've been told I'm a pretty good guy. So I'm going to roll with that.

Mike: We'll second that. So Joey, tell us a little bit about centers for independent living for those people that might not be familiar with those.

Joey Wesselink: Well, centers for independent living, or CILs, C-I-L, as they're known, we have six of them in the state of Iowa that cover 33 counties. They provide primarily help in finding services and resources for people in the disability community, their families, their friends, and whoever else ask. We provide five core services, which would include information, referral, advocacy, peer counseling, transition, and independent living skills training. So basically call in, our staff can support you in anything that you need to live an independent life. Whether it's transitioning from a facility to a community support based home, you need help with independent living skills like cooking, cleaning, you need assistance in applying for SSI, or you just need basic information on where to find a certain resource, that's where Access 2 Independence comes in. That's where a center for independent living comes in. And as I said, again, there are six of them. For Access, we cover Johnson County itself, Linn County, we also cover Washington and Henry County too. There are four other counties. I believe Jones County is one of them. Those four I know because those are the most-

Judy: Cedar too, right? You go to up to Cedar too, don't you?

Joey Wesselink: I believe we do.

Judy: And Joey, why do you think the work of the CILs are so important?

Joey Wesselink: The biggest reason, to help people who want to become independent. People in the disability community. The goal is to help them connect with resources to help them live a free and open life. But it's consumer based control. As in the consumer has the full decision and power. Their decisions, their goals, they have to make on their own, and they have to follow through on them.

Mike: Joey, I'd be really curious to know how you got connected to Access 2 Independence, if you'd be comfortable sharing that.

Joey Wesselink: I was connected to them. I unconnected from them after I graduated and left. When I moved back up here to Iowa City in 2016, I did get back in touch with them. By that time they had moved out to where they're currently located, 1st Avenue. And yeah, I started out as a consumer. They actually helped me figure things out how to get my life back on track.

Judy: That's pretty important work.

Mike: That is. That's very important work.

Joey Wesselink: That's where it started. Slowly, but surely, I managed to get work with their help. They get work with Goodwill of the Heartland. I was able to work on their Walgreens training program, which got me a job to get me something like a job at the University of Iowa Library Annex for a year. Temp job. Then I worked at Mercy Hospital for a year and a half. They were with me as well. The job opened up when the executive director, Sarah Martinez, she posted the job on Indeed. She told me about it. So I interviewed for it. I did have some help for the interview process. She offered me the job, and I started working August 10th.

Judy: Joey, you mentioned that you were LEND training. For people who are listening who don't know what that is, what is LEND?

Joey Wesselink: LEND is a leadership training program. There's one in every state. This one is connected with the University of Iowa. I would say, in a way, it's a cross communication grad program. Very first time I heard of it and encountered it, there were various disciplines involved. There were people there that were family. Many of them were clinical. I was discipline self-advocate. In a way, it was structured similar to a grad class. I was one of two that was there that was part of the self-advocacy program. Being disabled myself, I have experience living in the disability community. I have experienced being disabled, even though for 25 years of that life, I had no clue I was disabled.

Mike: Could you share some of your experiences as a person with a disability in LEND?

Joey Wesselink: The biggest thing I remember from LEND was how it was cut short because of COVID. We still met virtually. But when I was there, yes, I did speak to the group about my life experiences, my trauma, my struggles, to where I got to to that day when I talked. Wish I could talk to them again now because I have moved a lot more since that day.

Judy: What would you tell them, Joey? Some of your classmates may be listening here.

Joey Wesselink: Well, I now work at Access 2 Independence, obviously, that's probably the one thing I would say, as an administrative assistant. I would tell them that I'm right now looking for some next step things to do, like continuing my education and admin support, along with grant writing. And I'll tell them that I was recently involved with a grant writing group, [Track 00:05:55], and another group called Barrier Removal Fund, where we deliberated and discuss 26 organizations looking for funds for items to become disability accessible. Whether it's through moderated doors, doors that are disability accessible, to making the parking lots disability friendly, to blankets that are weighted and noise canceling headphones too.

Mike: Well, Joey, one of the things that it strikes me is that you are really passionate about different types of programs that work with lots of people with different kinds of disabilities. I'd be curious, you said a little bit ago that you didn't know until you were 25 that you had a disability. And I'd be curious where do you think all this passion and interest is coming from?

Joey Wesselink: I think what drives me is to make sure maybe another person that went through that same struggle doesn't have to go through that struggle again because I lived in a time when diagnosing autism, or diagnosed on the spectrum was very different.

Mike: Was it liberating to get a diagnosis, or was it hard, or both?

Joey Wesselink: Well, I'm actually writing about this for the Autism Society of Iowa's newsletter. I've been reliving those past days. So I remember my father's reaction was the liberating one. He was a parent 25 years. He'd been looking for what was going on with his son. He finally had that answer. He had literally threw his arms up in the air and said, "There it is. We have our answer. That's what it is. There we go. I am relieved." My mother, all I'm going to say so I don't embarrass he, because God rest her, she was devastated. She was basically like, "Well, how is he going to connect with people? How's he going to end up in a relationship with somebody? How is he going to do..." And it was like, okay, how about what you think about now instead of thinking of the future is what I was trying to think.

Me, I was in self-denial. That was my initial reaction. It was. Because you're told something for 25 years, and all of a sudden somebody else that you just met basically says, "No, no, no, no, no. This is who you are." You're like, no. You want to deny that. I guess the five stages of grief is what I was going through. And it took, I'd say, about three years to finally begin accepting it. It took three years and a pretty messy break up with somebody during that time period that left me hurt and looking for answers.

Judy: What sort of things helped you navigate to coming to this place now? I mean, what kind things helped you to be at this point where you're comfortable saying I have autism?

Joey Wesselink: I'd say the first thing seeing other people that are on the autism spectrum. Second, seeing other people actually say they're disabled and they're proud. Seeing that. That was probably the very first steps that made me accept it. The second was that those days after I broke up with someone, I had met her while I was in college. This was during the stage when I was in denial. Looking back, I made every wrong mistake with that relationship. But in a way that relationship pushed me on the path towards where I'm at now. I should thank her, but I don't really want to give her too much credit right now.

Mike: I get that.

Judy: Fair enough. Fair enough. And so as a person who is autistic, I mean, I think a lot of people don't understand that. They think if you have autism, you're Rain Man. And I mean, what would you tell people to help them understand autism better?

Joey Wesselink: Well, the first thing I would tell them not to watch movies to get your ideas of what autism is. That's the first thing. I would not exactly look at that. Second, yeah, also don't look at anything television related. I feel like in a lot of those cases, it's just one person who saw this viewpoint of a disabled person. They put this person up as this is what a disability is. However, disability is not that. Disability is anybody, anyone. Anyone can become disabled before you know it. Anyone can. And I learned that lesson pretty well when my father's health started to decline.

Mike: Did you become a caregiver then as well?

Joey Wesselink: Yes, I did. When a year after the lowest point in my life, my father who had been battling diabetes for decades, he got an infection on his foot, and well ultimately it led to amputation. And he did have months of rehabilitation ahead of him to where he was finally able to live at home. He did live in a facility for a couple of months because the hospitals, they wrecked him. The person I knew him as was pretty much gone. And I started becoming an advocate for him when he was an advocate for

me before that. And I basically became his caretaker. He did have supported assisted aid, but lost it due to complications with insurance. So I found myself and my mother basically trying to find whatever help we could, and also try to figure out how we could get those services back for him, the home community services and almost got it. But well, he passed away before we were able to make that happen.

Mike: Joey, and I'm sorry about your loss, but I think when you make the point about anybody can acquire a disability, that is so true. And I think it's a testament to you, that it's another example we often talk about in the disability community in general and in advocacy where roles can reverse. And that's okay. That he was your advocate, and then you ended up doing some advocacy to support him. And a lot of that happened, I'm sure, because of some of the things that you observed as he advocated for you. So that's kind of a neat exchange that happens in the advocacy arena.

Joey Wesselink: Yeah. I became his caretaker, his physical therapist. Made sure he kept going, kept walking when he could. But it was difficult. At his age, it was difficult to do. But I would do it again if it happened again.

Judy: Joey, you mentioned that you have a degree in journalism here from the University of Iowa, right?

Joey Wesselink: Yes.

Judy: How was college? What was college like for you?

Joey Wesselink: Well, I'm going to say how I look at it now, it was a blur. It's almost like a completely different person took the degree. Which by the way, I wonder if I could have that person pay the student loan debts. But yeah, at the time I figured I wanted to do something that was a career. I did have a skill in writing. I did have a skill in investigating, a skill in researching. So I figured why not do that? Well, my passion for it pretty much died out by the time I was in year two of the program. It was completely different than I thought it was. It was just something that was not the right fit for me. But I persevered through and I still got the degree, but unfortunately I never took the opportunity to try to figure out what was my next steps, what goals do I need to do to insure I get a career. I never did that.

Mike: So you came to LEND after you graduated with your degree in journalism, right?

Joey Wesselink: Yes. I graduated in 2014. So we'll say about five years after that period. A little over five. Yes.

Mike: And you had pretty much decided that journalism wasn't going to be where you wanted to go in the future, right?

Joey Wesselink: Well, I know I can use some of my writing skills. Some of the things I did learn in the journalism school for something else. Admin support, grant writing. I could use it for those because I feel like I'm on the right career path. And I was assured of that very recently when I did part in that Barrier Removal Fund deliberation grant program that I did last week that was connected to the National Center for Independent Living Organization that's in DC. Feel like I'm making the right path. Studied over 26 grant applications. And I felt pretty good grading them and rating which ones receive aid and which ones don't.

Judy: Speaking of grants, you mentioned that you're participating in a lot of different things. And one of the projects you mentioned was the TRAC project. Can you share a little bit with us about what that is and what role you're playing with that?

Joey Wesselink: Ah, yes. TRAC. TRAC's overall goal is to create a program for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities to be able to transition from childhood to adulthood healthcare. I will say, to see in a year's time to be on both sides of the grant funding process. With Track, I'm on the side of creating and putting the grant together. The Barrier Removal Fund, I was on the other side. The side where the determination of who gets a grant and the funding. Who gets on a wait list and who, well, won't receive the funds either due to sloppy grant writing. Which, yeah, several of those applications I saw we're that. Yeah. I will say one grant I did notice was only for \$1,000, but the way they wrote it, they were writing for like they wanted half a million.

But for TRAC, I feel like the process is going well. We have a program that's three years. Looking to make a three year program if I'm understanding correctly. One thing that at least I'm looking at right now is how can we connect self-advocate groups with self-advocacy people with providers and with the people that are disabled, the people that want someone that understands what they're going on.

Judy: What is the issue in moving from pediatric to adult care if you have a disability? Why is that a big deal?

Joey Wesselink: Well, for some people with disability, change is a very scary factor for them. It's the terrifying factor for starters. They feel like, for one thing, they might not be heard. They had such a long relationship with someone that was in the pediatric healthcare, then all of a sudden, you're transitioned over towards something else, to a completely different type of healthcare system almost. It's a pretty much a night and day situation. So for someone that's going through that, it'd be nice if they had

something there to help them ease into the transition program from the pediatric level care to adult healthcare with less hassle, I think would be the word.

Mike: Personally, have you ever run into healthcare providers who you didn't feel understood you, or didn't know how to communicate very well with you?

Joey Wesselink: Yes. I've experienced that multitude of times. The biggest struggle for me is, I will tell you, I have not had a doctor in adult healthcare, one doctor that stick with me for more than a year. I feel like that is the biggest struggle I've had. I'm getting my yearly physical soon. And it's going to be with my fourth doctor in four years. So to some extent I can understand individuals with IDs and DDs going through that transition period. Because I'm still kind of going through that myself. I would love to see if I could keep a physician around for two years maybe. No, I'll shoot for two years. We'll do that.

Judy: Double your time. And for those of you out there who may not know what ID or DD, it's intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities.

Joey Wesselink: Ah, yes. I forgot to-

Judy: We use those terms all the time. And so it occurs to me some of them might not know that. Joey, have there been pivotal moments in your life so far that have really put you on this track? Things that have kind of taken you and gone, this is where I'm going to go and what I'm going to do.

Joey Wesselink: I would say the first thing that did occur that put me on the track was when I was diagnosed on autism. I didn't know it was on the track until my father lost his leg and I became his caretaker. I finally realized it the day both of my parents passed. I moved to Iowa City, and my life was completely different now. I changed over time. And then I think the next pivotal step was becoming part of the LEND program. That was the next one.

Mike: Wow.

Judy: Because you got to know me and Mike.

Mike: That's it.

Joey Wesselink: Yes. And to get a job that wasn't temporary also was-

Mike: Oh yeah. And one you seem to like.

Joey Wesselink: Access 2 Independence, it is a job I definitely love. And I definitely want to continue doing admin, administrative support for a career. And besides, I've done grant writing as well. I've been enjoying it ever since I started working there.

Mike: Well, one of the things that's so cool, Joey, that I think about you're working with Access 2 Independence is that I remember when we talked several months ago, it was after LEND, and you made some comment about how you'd like to get involved with administrative support and also grant writing. And I remember saying to you things like, "Maybe those two are two totally separate jobs and two totally separate areas." Well you, because of your ingenuity and your creativity, have figured out a way to connect the two already. So it just goes to show that sometimes those of us that think we know a lot can get in the way a little bit.

Joey Wesselink: I can be stubborn that way. Pretty much my entire family falls into that stubbornness.

Mike: Well, it's paying off for you.

Joey Wesselink: Yeah. I think it's going to continue paying off more. I think it's going to.

Judy: I have a question that's going to take us back a little bit. What was it like growing up with autism and not knowing that you had autism?

Joey Wesselink: Well, for my parents, I know it was a struggle because, again, they were looking to figure out what was going on with me. They didn't know why I was behaving the way I was behaving. They didn't know what a meltdown was. They were basically discovering that disability, discovering it, finally put names to everything. But yeah, in my perspective going through it, I didn't notice because I felt I was not disabled. Because growing up, when you're taught disability in school, the very first image I remember of an image of a person that was disabled, wheelchair, someone that is blind, someone that cannot hear. The first encounter I ever had with somebody who was deaf and blind was Helen Keller. That was the first time I ever heard of that, of what that was.

So to me, I was blind in the dark to begin with because disability wasn't taught much growing up. It wasn't acknowledged. It was not paid attention to basically. No one ever talked about invisible

disabilities, or the ones that are mental, cognitive, intellectual. Those rarely, rarely pop up unless they are stuff like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder. I think those were the first ones I ever heard of. When I first heard of autism, yeah, Rain Man was the first time I heard of it. And when you see that representation of Rain Man, you'd be like, okay, so that's what autism looks like. Your brain puts it there because it's like a safety valve, and you grab on to it, or a security blanket. This is what it looks like. You have the image. There you go. Move on to the next topic. Move on to what's the square root of 75. There you go. Off to gym.

Mike: But you knew you weren't like Rain Man.

Joey Wesselink: No. Because for one thing, I don't think I could go to Vegas and replicate winning cash. I don't think I could do that.

Judy: So Joey, what you're saying is that, because you didn't know that you had autism, you didn't feel any different than anyone else.

Joey Wesselink: Yes. I felt just like one of my peers.

Mike: Did you get bullied?

Joey Wesselink: A lot. Often.

Mike: Did you ever wonder why?

Joey Wesselink: That I kept wondering. I guess it was just some people told me maybe they were just insecure. Maybe they felt they were insecure of who I was. I mean, I didn't know because I was just an average student. I didn't try to be intelligent. I tried to hide my intelligence because anything that made me look extraordinary just ended up with me getting hackled and bullied.

Mike: It's kind of sad, it's very sad actually, when you're penalized for showing intelligence.

Joey Wesselink: Yeah. I pretty much hid my intelligence. Some teachers did see through the facade and they challenged me. Those are the ones that usually have the highest grades. The other teachers who just didn't bother, they were like, well, he's just average. Just let him pass.

Judy: What kind of help do you need? I mean, you're living, you're working, you're doing that all pretty much on your own. But what kind of help do you get or need to be able to have this life that you desire?

Joey Wesselink: Well, people in my life, I think for starters. That would be the one thing I'd want. I know. I wish I could say something more complex or something more-

Mike: No. Actually, that's pretty profound.

Joey Wesselink: That would be something I would want, just people in my life. For the longest time, I have pushed people away because of being bullied and teased. The trauma just built, and just got my guard up too much. That I will say in the LEND program, it did start to come down. It did. It's coming down a lot more since I started at Access. I think maybe the pandemic is the very thing that's also played a part. Because those first days, when everything shut down, it was like, wow, I used to see people. I took that for granted. Now I'm on my own too much.

Mike: You know, Joey, it's really interesting because we've talked a little bit about stereotypes associated with autism, the Rain Man theory. And one of the other things that, oftentimes, and I have to say I've been guilty of this in the past, is thinking, well, gosh, all autistic people want to be left alone. And obviously that's not true.

Joey Wesselink: No, they do not.

Mike: You're telling me, you're telling us, and you're telling our audience that you want people in your life. So obviously that is a stereotype that needs to be corrected.

Joey Wesselink: Yeah. You do see that in media, not just with Rain Man. There was a series of books I read while I was in college. Anyone ever heard of the movie, the Girl with the Dragon Tattoo?

Judy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joey Wesselink: Yeah. The main character, Lisbeth Salander, the other main character, Mikael Blomkvist was a journalist, he basically deduced that she was autistic, that she might've been on the autism spectrum. And of course she was nothing like Rain Man. No, she was female. And one stereotype of autism is, oh, it's male centered. No, no, no, no, no. Women are on the spectrum too. It's just, I think for the longest time, it's much harder to diagnose.

I had a friend who she told me once how she got through it is because she mimicked. She was able to mimic all the social norms and all the expectations you're supposed to be in a social, [inaudible 00:26:22] world. She was able to adjust to it despite all the trauma she dealt with each and every day. So I could see from her perspective, okay, that could be why it's much harder for her. But I don't know. Maybe it's because, again, that stereotype of it's male dominated. I just feel maybe not so much. Still, I think there's a long way to making someone in media and fiction that's autistic a character not because of their autism, a character because of their character.

Judy: Joey, I think you're the one who told me, you meet one autistic person, you've met one autistic person.

Joey Wesselink: Yes I did. I did tell you that.

Mike: And she listened. So Joey, I don't know how much you remember about this. I have a really favorite story about you in LEND. And I might have a little bit of this story wrong so you can correct it. But I know that part of what happens with LEND is that you all went to the Iowa State Capitol. And so you went to the Capitol, and you were going to meet with a particular legislator at a particular time, but you had a little bit of time before you actually started having these meetings.

And that shortly after you got there, you met some friends or colleagues from the Autism Society. And they said, "Hey Joey, why don't you come in and meet with us and talk with legislators." And first of all, at some point they tried to find you and nobody quite knew where you were. And then when they did, they realized that you were doing the exact thing that you were supposed to be doing in LEND, and that was educating. And that somehow that led to your getting involved as a member of the Autism Society board. So how accurate is that? And for those parts that aren't accurate, correct me.

Joey Wesselink: Oh, it's accurate. That is 100% accurate.

Mike: Oh, I got one right.

Judy: So Joey, what do legislators need to know about autism? Why do they care?

Joey Wesselink: I'd say the biggest thing is they should listen and at least look at numbers as well. Because I feel like autism is one of the highest rise in disabilities, cognitive, mentally learning, and intellectual, and developmental right now. I think it's one of the top ones. But yeah, I'd say the biggest thing is they have to listen. That's the first thing. They need to listen to the representatives, the actual people that are autistic before they make the decisions that then need to be made.

Judy: And what sort of decisions do they make that you think are harmful for the autistic community or people with disabilities in general?

Joey Wesselink: Well, I'm also part of the Disability League that been looking to trying to upgrade Medicaid so it can cover home community-based services, HCBS. And that's one thing we've been trying to fight for. And it's been a very tough, uphill battle. It has been. But it's a battle that can be won. Can be with time. It's important. It is. Because home-based community services, this is something that'll help a lot of people that are disabled stay in their community without going through an institution or a facility that would cost more money from taxpayers than, say, the home-based community service.

Also care providers. There's a crisis going on with that, with finding it's so hard to hire people to work this job, a job that's very thankless, a job that's hours and hours of a lot of work, and for little pay as well. I do see, at least in the federal level, there is the HCBS Access Act that would make Medicaid and Medicare, I believe Medicare as well, at least be able to like, yeah, this is something that's needed. It's not optional. It's got to be needed. On the federal level, I do see that improvement. I do see that chance. State level though, it's much harder. And being a part of that league, I have heard more stories about people struggling with this kind of stuff, struggling to find a decent care worker that can help them stay in their home. It's tough.

Mike: Well, one of the things that I would imagine that's particularly tough about HCBS and autism is that when we talk about autism spectrum, it really is a spectrum. And people have wide ranges of abilities and the level of services that would be needed vary so widely among autistic people.

Joey Wesselink: It is. I will tell you myself, when I applied for SSI when I was still unemployed, it took four times before I was accepted. Four. That was just when I first moved to Iowa City. Just on that alone. I kind of lost count how many times I applied and was rejected while I've lived in my old hometown. And the reasons they always gave were just vague. It's like, okay, I showed you I'm disabled, but yet, your giving me a very, very vague reason that's like a paragraph that's like a circle that's looping back and forth. It's a mental gymnastic almost. Honestly, I should have saved some of those papers. They might've made some pretty good origami or something.

Judy: Clearly they didn't go to the school of journalism and learned to write clearly. You mentioned earlier the Autism Society of Iowa. What is that, and what do they do?

Joey Wesselink: Well, let's see, they are part of the Autism Society of America. They're here for the state of Iowa, centered in Des Moines. Kris Steinmetz, she's the executive director. The organization, I believe, has been around for a couple of decades, at least. I think about 30 years. They provide, for one thing, resources and services for anyone that is autistic, that is on the autism spectrum. Before the pandemic, they did have events. People could meet. And we did have the yearly conference meeting where people would talk about being on the spectrum. It was a whole event that was in Des Moines that I spoke at several times. This year we're hoping to do it, not do it in person.

But we wanted to do the employee conference event because the one thing on the autism spectrum is how difficult it is for someone to find a job, or maintain a job once they have it. Because being on the autism spectrum, you struggle in the most critical area when it comes to getting a job, who you know, and resume and interviewing skills. Those three factors. I will simply say a person on the autism spectrum will be able to do the job. It's just getting the job that's much harder because they have difficulty forming those networks, forming those relationships.

Judy: Joey, what do you do for fun?

Joey Wesselink: I actually do go to a pub. I actually go to Donnelly's Pub. I go to Joe's Place. Yeah, that's another thing. Most people, when they think about this, they go, wait, autistic people don't go out. Yeah, we do. They can. Sure, yes, senses can be overwhelming. But I think because I was not diagnosed until I was 25, I think I built some sort of resistance towards the sounds, sights, and everything else of night. Well, I also read, I write. I still do that at least. I play video games.

Judy: I remember your LEND research project was on video games and autism, wasn't it?

Joey Wesselink: Yeah. I was reminded of that yesterday when I checked out the electronics expo that was going on, the big gaming conference that occurs every year for everyone to show their big game and products. What's going on, all that stuff. Amazing that 10 years ago, I wanted to be a journalist to cover that event. But now, eh.

Mike: Well, it's interesting, Joey, how your interests have evolved, and you have evolved over the past 10 years to think, well, maybe I want to cover this event as a journalist. And now you're so focused on, not only your work at Access, but just also your other advocacy work with the grants, and you've taken your leadership training to heart. And you've also identified a dream. You formed your own goals, and you've really followed those since I've known you. The things that you've said you want to do. And that includes a couple of things that you thought you might want to do, and said, nah, this isn't the right time for me. And that's all part of goal setting as well.

Joey Wesselink: Yeah. I think my next goals will be to continue working in admin support and working at Access 2 Independence, find more opportunities to be a part of grant writing, and really push my writing skills to their limit. See what I can do.

Judy: Joey, is there anything you've done that you feel exceptionally successful about? I mean, this is Joey brag time.

Joey Wesselink: Well, working at Access 2 Independence, I'd say would be that time to brag. But it's not fully time yet to brag. I feel like there's still more work to do.

Judy: There's always more work to do.

Joey Wesselink: I'm challenging myself. I'm seeing how far I can really break my limit. How far? Do I break my limit, and maybe push past it, and maybe find what is my actual limit?

Mike: Well, and the fun thing about life is that you might be limited in one particular area, and then you can start pursuing something else and have another adventure.

Joey Wesselink: Yep. That's what I plan to do. Just take life one step at a time and continue to break what limits I have.

Judy: Joey, is there anything-

Joey Wesselink: Oh, I just-

Judy: ... else you would like to share with people who might be listening?

Joey Wesselink: Let's see. The one thing I'd say to anyone that's listening, if you are feeling negative about yourself and you feel like you can't get stuff done, well, the thing is you're not getting it done because you're the one that's keeping yourself down. I know what I'm saying is pretty tough. But I'm teaching you something that took me a long time to learn. You want to get anywhere in life, you want to advance anywhere in life, you have to have self-advocacy about yourself, and you have to have a self-

positive determination about yourself every day. Start doing the little stuff. Just take it one little step at a time. If you made a mistake, if you got something wrong, just admit you did to yourself, and say, let's try again. Instead of, oh, I'm never doing this again. No, challenge yourself every day.

Judy: Dude, that has nothing to do with autism. You're talking to all of us.

Mike: It's so true.

Joey Wesselink: Pretty much. You have to challenge yourself every day. It should never be, oh, I need to be better than this guy. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. For me it's always challenge yourself.

Mike: To be better.

Joey Wesselink: Yes.

Mike: Well, Joey, we really want to thank you for being a part of Disability Exchange, being our guest today. And we also want to thank our audience for joining us. I've learned a lot from you today, Joey, and this is actually the second in what we hope will be many, many more stories to come from self-advocates. And you've shared a lot of very valuable information, and wish you continued success and continuing to test those limits and being the best you can be.

Caitlin: Thank you for joining us today on Disability Exchange. Disability Exchange is produced by the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, which is housed at the Center for Disabilities and Development at the University of Iowa. Special thanks to Kyle Delveau for the music contribution.