

## *Thresholds*, Episode One - Wild Night

**Dolly Menna-Dack:** Hi I'm Dolly, the clinical bioethicist and the youth engagement strategy lead at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital. You're listening to *Thresholds*, a new Koffler Digital podcast produced by Maya Bedward, in collaboration with members of Holland Bloorview's Youth Advisory Council. Presented in five parts, each episode of *Thresholds* explores the experiences of these youth with disabilities as they transition into the adult world. In this episode, we'll be listening to Maria in her piece entitled "Wild Night."

**Maria Bangash:** (background music, rhythmic beats and snapping)

Let me tell you a story about one of the most craziest Girls Nights I have ever had. When you think of a crazy Girls Night you probably think oh my God, she got drunk, she was partying, but no. I ended up crying and balling my eyes out with some of my closest friends.

(long pause, music picks up)

So, it was the end of August, I invited five of my best friends over for one last Girls Night (girls laughing) before we all went off to college and university. We ordered in pizza, (doorbell ring) we were watching Netflix and we were having a great laugh (girls laughing, sounds of utensils and eating). These are my people, my best friends. So, one of my friends pipes up and she goes, "Why not we all talk about one thing that we're nervous about when we all go off to school?" Some of us were staying at home and some of us were living on campus. I was one of the ones who was going to be staying home and commuting. (background music gradually intensifies) All my friends are also able-bodied, so I was really nervous about how this conversation was going to go. My friends all go around the circle. One of them says, "I'm scared of my professors, what if they don't know how to teach?" The other one says, "I'm scared if there's no cute boys on campus, I'm going to end up forever alone!" and they all kept going. Thankfully, I was the last one to talk so I had time to think about what lie I was going to tell them.

(background music quiets and violin sounds) I didn't know how to tell my friends that I

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was nervous about taking the bus alone. I didn't know how to tell my friends that I had no idea what this thing called ODSP was and why they needed my social security number at least five times over the phone. I didn't know what 'Attendant Care' really was and how it was different than my Home Care. I had no idea what I was going into as a post-secondary student with a physical disability and I didn't know how to tell them that without them looking at me like "Well, that sucks for ya," and not knowing what else to say. So I lied, lied through my teeth and I was like, "Yea I'm just like scared of my professors, like what if they suck?" and it was like something in me triggered because the second that I said that, I started sobbing my eyes out, (intense music picks up and violin) and they all looked at me like I was crazy they're like you're really crying over your professor you haven't met Maria" and I just cried and cried. (intense music and violin continue, then ends)

So, we ended the night. Later that night I was sitting in my room on my computer just browsing Netflix and I still felt really uneasy from before. (rhythmic music begins) It was really hard on me because I didn't know what all this transition looked like and I felt so alienated because everyone around me was going through transition in a much different perspective. They were scared, yeah but the anxiety they faced wasn't as severe as mine. I just felt like no one could understand me because I didn't have any friends with disabilities who were transitioning in the same year that I was. And I just didn't know what to do.

So out of the five friends, one of my friends that I've been friends with her since we were in kindergarten, since we were four years old, well I called her. (telephone ringing) And right when she answered the FaceTime call, I looked at her and my eyes just welled up and I told her, "I'm scared, I'm stressed, I'm nervous, I don't know what I'm going into. I'm scared of adult care; I'm scared of everything that has to do with growing up. I don't know what I'm doing, I just want to be a kid again. I'm so so scared." (music slows) And she looked at me and said, "Maria, why didn't you just say so." (long pause with music) And I was already emotionally fired up so when she said Why didn't you just say so it

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triggered an anger in me that I didn't know existed. I got so mad at her and I was like, (music intensifies) "What do you mean, why would I tell you when you can't even relate to me?" and she was like, "Well I do get it, I can understand you and listen to you and help you out but I might not be able to relate to you but that doesn't mean I don't care," I'm like, "yea but if I tell you it's like talking to a brick wall. You won't be able to do anything for me..." we were yelling and screaming for about an hour. Just back and forth at each other and nothing was coming out of it. (music intensifies, fades out)

And she said, "Maria we need to relax." So I took a deep breath (slow rhythmic music enters) and I said, "okay what, what more could you enlighten with me now," and she said "I know you're nervous, I know you're scared, and I know that this is really hard for you because it's a lot of things that you have to think about and consider but we're your friends and we're here for you and even if we can't directly relate to you it doesn't mean that we don't want to help you, that we don't want to listen to you. We'll help you fill out the paperwork, we'll help you go to the appointments, we'll listen to you, we'll take you on that Wheel Trans thing that you keep talking about, we'll do whatever it takes, if it can ease a bit of your stress, if you had just said so." And that's when I said, "You know what, you're right." And I have a hard time saying that, I don't know if anybody else does. Telling someone they're right when you think you're right but you're not, is really hard. So, I said, "You're right and I'm sorry." I apologized to her because I knew that I was wrong, assuming that she wouldn't want to listen and be there for me. And I think that that's what made our friendship even stronger - the fact that she listened to me wholeheartedly. She even helped me fill out some paperwork and before she went off to campus, she came with me on that Wheel Transit bus and I learned the bus routes, I learned my way around Toronto because I'm not from Toronto. And she helped me and supported me the entire way. (bus wheels driving on road)

So yeah, now we're not at each other's throats which is great. We're best friends and we're closer than ever. From my first week of school too she even checked in with me and I checked in with her and we called every night to talk about what we were feeling

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and thinking. I think had it not been for her, I don't think I'd be sitting here telling everyone this story and being somebody that wants to be an advocate for people with disabilities.

I saw what I struggled with, my first year of college sucked. It was so bad. There were so many days where Wheel Transit forgot to pick me up and I was standing at school for hours. There were so many eight-hour days where I didn't go to the washroom because I had no attendant care. There were some days where I was so sick and tired from all the commuting and waiting in the snow and the cold that my body wasn't able to accept and I wasn't able to go to school. It was hard, it was really hard. But I saw my struggle and instead of sitting there and not doing anything about it, I took my struggle and I empowered myself. (pause, music intensifies and fades out)

It wasn't easy and it took a lot of overcomings. (rhythmic music, upbeat, piano keys) It took a lot of tears. It took a lot of phone calls, it took a lot of meetings, a lot of emails and most importantly a very strong mentality. I had to fight for my right to go to the washroom, I had to fight for my right to eat, I had to fight for my right to be transported around the city safely. These are all basic things that I shouldn't be fighting for, but I had to, and I never ever want anybody else to go through the same things that I did. I've now dedicated so much of my time to speaking with students who are in high school to being an advocate for Transition. I don't want anyone to go through the stress, and anxiety, and the fears and the problems that I faced. I think that when you start something new, you should start in a positive space that's welcoming and that's accepting to you and your differences. Every single thing that an able body gets, somebody with a disability should get those same opportunities too.

**Dolly:** Thank you for listening to *Thresholds*, this podcast is created by Koffler Digital. Produced by Maya Bedward. Ben Wood is our recording engineer. Music and sound design by Laura Dickens. I'm Dolly Menna-Dack, clinical bioethicist and the youth engagement strategy lead at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital. You can learn more about this project at [koffler.digital/thresholds](http://koffler.digital/thresholds)

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