

## *Thresholds*, Episode Two - Lessons We Want People to Learn

**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 Mika and Tai in their piece entitled "Lessons We Want People to Learn."

(pause, background rhythmic music)

**Tai Young:** Hello, my name is Tai, I'm fifteen years old and currently, I go to Unionville High School in their AU Drama Program.

**Mika Hjorngaard:** And I'm Mika, I'm a third-year at York University.

**Tai Young:** Today, Mika and I are going to be talking about some of the issues we face as people with disabilities but more so on how people's perceptions affect us and create more barriers than the physical ones.

(pause, rhythmic music continues)

**Tai:** So Mika can you tell me a little bit about a time where you may felt like you were treated differently because of your disability when there really wasn't a reason for that?

**Mika:** (kids playing in playground) Yeah so when I was in Grade 2, we had a play structure in one of the playground areas and there was a slide on it and I didn't normally play on there but I decided one day that I wanted to. And so I climbed up, I used a walker at the time, and I left it - because I could walk without it. So I left it and I climbed up then

## *Thresholds*, Episode Two - Lessons We Want People to Learn

I got ready to go down the slide and there was somebody there monitoring, a school monitor, and she stopped me as I was going down like she physically stopped my body from sliding down the slide. And she said, "you shouldn't be doing this." I was very confused, I didn't know what she meant, other students were doing it, and then she said, "you shouldn't come on here again." And I didn't understand why, like she didn't provide an explanation. So, I was just like, *that was fun I'll do that again* and just ignore her. So, I climbed up again and started going down the slide again and she was like, "okay you can't do this is again, this is not okay." (music continues) And then I realized in that moment that the reason she was stopping me was because of my disability. It was very strange, and it was like my first introduction to like - people are going to make assumptions of you and especially at that young age they don't really care that whether you say you're fragile or not.

(long pause, music continues)

**Tai:** You know I can really relate to that because growing up for me too I felt whenever I wanted to do anything that was ever so slightly risky...

**Mika:** Right.

**Tai:** ...I would always have to ask my parents. I'd always have to call them and make sure that they were okay with it,

**Mika:** Yeah

**Tai:** because nobody wanted to get in trouble for letting me do something.

**Mika:** Yeah (chuckles in agreement).

**Tai:** (continues) that I knew I could do.

## *Thresholds*, Episode Two - Lessons We Want People to Learn

**Mika:** Of course.

**Tai:** A lot of those perceptions I feel come from things in the media.

**Mika:** Yeah.

**Tai:** and comes from what we see and what we assume. If she just been used to the idea of people with disabilities participating in the same activities as people without or able-bodied people...

**Mika:** Mhm

**Tai:** ...I think that probably wouldn't have happened. I remember one time I was at the fair (kids screaming and playing) roller coaster kids scream. There is this huge midway full of a bunch of different rides (kids continue, a bell rings) a bunch of different games and activities. And of course, there was this one, like a Halloween haunted house kind of thing but to get up there was like about four or five steps. I went up and the carney was like, "you can't come on this ride, you're gonna have to walk if you want to get on this ride," in front of a bunch of people that I didn't know. And I was just like I don't really want to argue with somebody or have to convince them that I'm able to get on. So it was, it just felt really kind of embarrassing like I felt like he didn't want me there and other people were just like judging this entire fair wasn't even accessible in the first place. All of the rides had steps, there was literally nothing...

**Mika:** Wow.

**Tai:** ...that I could have gotten on myself without assistance.

**Mika:** Yeah.

## *Thresholds*, Episode Two - Lessons We Want People to Learn

**Tai:** But I had that assistance and I noticed that the real problem was that people were not open to the idea of adapting, or to the idea of you know assisting me so that I could get on that ride. But luckily my friends were there (kids scream happily on a ride) and they were able to help me eventually get on to the ride and you know have a good time.

(pause and some twinkling music)

**Tai:** When I talk to my online friend or people that I meet...

**Mika:** Right

**Tai:** ...they don't really see the wheelchair

**Mika:** Yea

**Tai:** for example if I'm ever playing video games or something...

**Mika:** Yea

**Tai:** ...and I just like meet people through that connectivity online, I have to kind of tell them. I have to be like, "oh yeah I use a wheelchair," and they're like so shocked. I was talking to this guy that I had just met on like I think it was Minecraft or something...

**Mika:** Okay

**Tai:** ...and he was super cool like we were pretty good friends and then I was like, "Hey, do you have Instagram?" So I added him and then I was like, "I don't know if you know this but I use a wheelchair yada yada yada". And he's like, "oh my gosh I'm so sorry that must be awful." And I'm like, "what?"

*Thresholds*, Episode Two - Lessons We Want People to Learn

**Mika:** Haha.

**Tai:** (continues) "I just want you to know so that you're not shocked when you see my Instagram." And I think it's interesting to see how he knew me as somebody in his mind that doesn't have a disability and then the second that I tell him he starts feeling all bad so I feel like people perceptions tend to change instantly when...

**Mika:** Totally.

**Tai:** ...they see the disability. And that's like even within dating or relationships.

**Mika:** Yeah

(pause, rhythmic twinkling music)

**Mika:** So, I was dating someone and they took a lot of pleasure when I needed help with things.

**Tai:** Mm

**Mika:** And I found it, you know, sort of this relationship is new and it's just a little bit awkward and you know like that cute weird kind of way.

**Tai:** Like the honeymoon phase.

**Mika:** Yeah but then that didn't last.

**Tai:** Yeah.

## *Thresholds*, Episode Two - Lessons We Want People to Learn

**Mika:** And then the weird complex she seemed to have sort of did. There was one time where I fell, which like happens, you know, and it's not a big deal to me like, it's another day...

**Tai:** Yeah

**Mika:** ...like it's fine. But she ran over and like helped me up (Mika chuckles) and like (Tia chuckles) was holding onto me for too long, you know. I was like okay we're done now, I'm done like, I'm done falling everything's fine.

**Tai:** Yea

**Mika:** And I was like okay that was a little weird but I brushed it off and then we were walking, I think back to my place, later that day, she said something like, "oh well you know it's just like I really want to help you," and I was like, "excuse m- what, help me with what right now?"

**Tai:** Oh my gosh

**Mika:** (continues dialogue) "what about this situation seems like I need help?" And she was like, "oh no no, not now, just generally you know."

**Tai:** In life.

**Mika:** Yeah! And I'm like, "uhh, you, that's not actually like an attractive thing you're saying. We're dating, this is a reciprocal thing."

**Tai:** Mhm

*Thresholds*, Episode Two - Lessons We Want People to Learn

**Mika:** And she just couldn't really explain herself and she also did not understand why I was appalled, you know.

**Tai:** Yeah

**Mika:** The way that she was saying it I felt like a plant she was working really hard to keep alive and I'm like, "no dude I'm good," like...

**Tai:** Yeah

**Mika:** ...I was fine before you and uh then we broke up and I was fine after her too. (Tia chuckles) I think it's just so weird because when you do ask for help, it's sort of, at least sort of for me like involves not super vulnerability but there's some vulnerability there, to just being like this is a thing I can't do, please help me.

**Tai:** Mhm

**Mika:** And like that relationship I was in, was a really good example of how it could get weird when people start to see you as a thing that needs to be...

**Tai:** Mhm

**Mika:** ...like watched and monitored.

**Tai:** Actually leads me into another thing,

**Mika:** Yeah

**Tai:** it's like asking for accommodation.

*Thresholds*, Episode Two - Lessons We Want People to Learn

**Mika:** Right

**Tai:** Or feeling like we need help but we actually don't,

**Mika:** Yeah

**Tai:** or when we do need help how do we ask because for me I'm really used to people asking me constantly if I need help with

**Mika:** Yeah

**Tai:** daily tasks. For example, sometimes literally I'm just wheeling through the halls at my school

**Mika:** Right

**Tai:** and people are like do you need help I'm like

**Mika:** Yeah

**Tai:** what with what.

**Mika:** with existing (laughs)

(Mika and Tia both laugh)

**Tai:** I'm like no I'm good

**Mika:** Yeah

*Thresholds*, Episode Two - Lessons We Want People to Learn

**Tai:** I'm just going to class. But then when it comes around to the time that I actually do need help, I feel almost

(soft music)

**Tai:** because I'm like giving in to that stereotype.

**Mika:** Yeah, yeah

**Tai:** I feel like I will ask and stand up for myself if I need it

**Mika:** Right

**Tai:** um, but I feel like people need to learn that especially people with disabilities. That it's important to advocate

**Mika:** Yeah, yeah

**Tai:** for yourself when you need help

**Mika:** Mhm

**Tai:** but that also includes advocating when you don't need help.

(music fades in and out)

**Mika:** Yeah, I just think this is people when they're sober and you know, supposedly at their best capacity to think about things and consider things and just generally be conscious of stuff around them.

## *Thresholds*, Episode Two - Lessons We Want People to Learn

**Tai:** Yeah

**Mika:** it's a whole different thing when I am drunk or when my friends are drunk - just like a little backstory, generally when I drink I plan it a lot because I need to know like who's going to be sober or who's going to be the most sober. If I drink, I'm going to be even more unstable and I just need like someone to watch out for me. So, I tried to make that plan with a friend once. And I told her, "okay so one of us has to like not drink very much because you're the person that I'm going to like trust with, you know, me if I drink." And she was like, "yeah yeah yeah totally, no you can drink, I'm going to have one drink, I'll be fine." And so we went out and she just had one drink and another drink and another drink and then she was dancing and I was like well okay well uh not great and we had to talk about it later because I was drinking by then too because we made this plan, and she just bailed on me. And what was hard was that we were with a group of her friends and I don't know these people. I was visiting from out of town and I just I was like crap now I'm drinking, and I need other humans to help me out. And you know it's the thing where you're trying to avoid being a huge bother to anybody, but at the same time, it's like well I'm going to need desperate help now.

**Tai:** Mhm

**Mika:** So that I like stay up right.

**Tai:** Actually, in terms of people being impaired, I have a story similar to that.

**Mika:** Yea

**Tai:** It was pretty late at night the sun was down, it was really dark and I was with a bunch of my best friends. We were all there in a little group and it was just so fun but you know, as the night progresses, the teenagers fill up the entire park.

*Thresholds*, Episode Two - Lessons We Want People to Learn

**Mika:** Yeah

**Tai:** And you know that could be a good thing it's a great time for people to socialize but they were impaired. Either they were vaping,

**Mika:** Right

**Tai:** they were smoking, drinking,

**Mika:** Yeah

**Tai:** all of the above.

**Mika:** Mhm

**Tai:** And so my friends weren't doing that, they were all with me on the other side of things.

**Mika:** Right

**Tai:** But I got a message from one of my other friends who said that she was there, so I decided to try to make my way through that little group of people to go see my friend.

**Mika:** Right

**Tai:** And as I was going through, I've never visually noticed that many people staring

**Mika:** ooh haha yea (negatively)

*Thresholds, Episode Two - Lessons We Want People to Learn*

**Tai:** at me before. Or like looking at my chair

**Mika:** Yeah

**Tai:** and that was probably because most of them were impaired. And I was just like why are you staring at me

**Mika:** Yeah

**Tai:** you guys are like stoned

**Mika:** Yeah haha

**Tai:** out of your mind and I'm just like in my chair (Mika laughs) trying to get from point A to B to say hi to my friend.

**Mika:** Yeah

**Tai:** And you know it really shows even if people aren't necessarily staring when they're sober, they'll still do whatever they want and I just it really bugs me.

(music)

**Mika:** Ya it's really weird, it's not that uncommon

**Tai:** Mhm

**Mika:** for people with disabilities to exist. I mean you know we're all around. It's just so strange because some people, it's like the first time they encountered us or it's more likely just the first time they encountered us and actually noticed us and so then all of a

## *Thresholds*, Episode Two - Lessons We Want People to Learn

sudden they're like, you know *you're new to me and like you move differently or whatever so I get to react and I have the right to stare or react however I want to*. It's just really strange.

**Tai:** Mhm

(pause, music)

**Tai:** Thanks so much, Mika, for like chatting with me today this was so much fun.

**Mika:** Thank you!

**Tai:** I definitely learned so much from your perspective and hopefully whoever is listening right now will have learned that somebody with a disability really isn't all that different and when we asked for help it's because we need it. And if you are worried about something it's important to ask but not to over ask.

**Mika:** For sure and I think the thing that both of us wanted people to take away the most, is just like, you may see our physical disabilities first, but the biggest barrier isn't them. It's other people's reactions and perceptions. And so, I think that's what our goal was, to sort of point out and just have people be more aware of that going forward.

**Tai:** Yeah definitely thank you so much.

**Mika:** Thank you.

(Tia chuckles, music enters)

**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

## ***Thresholds*, Episode Two - Lessons We Want People to Learn**

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](https://koffler.digital/thresholds)