

NARRATOR:

The Disability & Philanthropy Forum presents Naomi Ortiz, Poet, Writer, Facilitator, and Visual Artist.

NAOMI ORTIZ:

So I grew up being obviously targeted as disabled, being physically disabled. And so everything I learned in systems when I was a child was about how to appear the least disabled as possible, and that it was my responsibility. If I wasn't included or if I was being made fun of in schools, then it was my responsibility to somehow figure out how to overcome who I am and blend in somehow magically, which of course doesn't work. And before I launched into writing and visual art full-time, I ran a national youth-run disability activist organization. And so, one of the things that I found with the young people that I was working with too is, so many of us are taught this in our systems. So then for us, that first level of just advocating for our own basic needs, feel so radical because we are always taught that it's our responsibility to somehow adapt to this non-disabled world.

And so to shift that on a big scale, it was a lot about supporting myself, supporting young people that I was working with to know their own power and the power of disability community. And we did that through disability culture. And learning and connecting to disability culture, yes, it's sharing stories about discrimination and fights and things like that, but it's also disability humor, it is also how we move through the world interdependently. These parts are so huge, and we can have such different kinds of disabilities and relate so hard to other people's experiences. I can laugh at something that... I have a good friend who's blind, and we were joking the other day about something, and both of us can laugh about that because we're both disabled, and we understand that we both have these experiences that we can push fun at, because we have to laugh at it. And that builds community and that builds strength.

Here in Tucson, we've had our very first Disability Pride Day as a city, and we're coming up on our third year. And that's been so huge because disabled folks are so segregated on a day-to-day basis. So I think in answering the question, is moving from these individual access needs, which to give disabled folks credit, takes a lot of work, to this idea of systematic change, that's an investment in disability culture and pride and joy and the things that we're talking about today, because we need that reserve, we need to get in touch with our own power and the power of disability community.

NARRATOR:

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