

MUSIC:

Disability Inclusion: Required.

Justice Shorter:

Happy new year's, good people, and welcome to a new incredible episode of Disability Inclusion: Required. I am your host Justice Shorter. Today, we are kicking off the year with some harmony and some hope as we are joined in conversation with Grammy nominated artist Lachi. Lachi is an award-winning music executive, disability culture champion, host of PBS series, Renegades, Recording Academy national trustee and producer of a Grammy nominated album.

Born legally blind, Lachi created the UN recognized organization, RAMPD, which stands for Recording Artists and Music Professionals with Disabilities. It's a consultancy group that collaborates on disability inclusive solutions with the likes of Netflix, Live Nation, and more, while bringing opportunities to its growing network of professionals with disabilities.

Lachi's cultural activism has landed her spots on national ads, TEDx stages, discussions with the White House, NPR, the BBC, and features in People Magazine, Time Magazine, Good Morning America, and the New York Times. I'm proud to say that we can now add Disability Inclusion Required to this illustrious list. Let's get into it. Lachi, we are so happy to have you. How are you doing?

Lachi:

Hey, girl. I am so glad to be here. Thank you so much for having me.

Justice Shorter:

Oh, it is our pleasure. So I want to delve straight in. I know that you are a recording artist, so I got to start us off by way of this prompt now. If you had to create a soundtrack of your life right now, what would be the top three songs on it and why?

Lachi:

Well, hmm. So first and foremost, now I don't want to toot my own horn, but-

Justice Shorter:

Come on, toot it now.

Lachi:

... listen, I wouldn't make music I didn't like, right?

Justice Shorter:

Absolutely.

Lachi:

So first and foremost, I have this track called Cornrows (Reimagined), and it is essentially my self-description, Black girl cornrows. And it is this beautiful combination of vocal work and piano of me really singing about myself and my self-history as well as my self-description. So that would be one of the songs. And then the other two would either be... So I am on a kick of SZA because I put out a track called The Bag. And you know who came into my DMs talking about something, "This is a beautiful track, you're such a great writer," was SZA herself.

Justice Shorter:

Oh, wow. Oh nice.

Lachi:

I went ahead and laid out on the floor for a few days.

Justice Shorter:

Understandable. As one should. As one should.

Lachi:

Exactly. So SZA and Doechii's new joint, I would put up on there. And then, and also hello, Black girl magic. And then there's another artist that I love, love, love, and her name is Qveen Herby. And she is sort of this singer, rapper, mental wellness type of artist. And she has this song. I love a lot of her songs, and I got to recently meet her. She's not the hugest artist, but she's huge in the indie realm, and she does electronic dance. She has a couple of songs. I like her song called Thank Goddess. So if any of y'all are out there that know who she is, you know what I'm talking about. It's a very just sort of women energy, female empowerment forward song. So I probably have that on there because it gets me hyped up and it's what I exercise too.

Justice Shorter:

Listen, I'm noticing some themes, some empowerment themes, some self-love themes around here. So understanding who we are and where we're going, where we've been type of thing.

Lachi:

But period though. But period.

Justice Shorter:

Yes. I really love the track that you mentioned around the cornrows. I'm popping with my cornrows right now. So I'm happy that you have mentioned that.

Lachi:

Love it.

Justice Shorter:

So let's transition from the music to the work of writing because you have a new book out. And I want you to tell us a bit about it, and why those in the philanthropic sector should be adding it to their reading list this season.

Lachi:

Absolutely. So one of the things I noticed that everybody really struggles with, whether you have a disability, a neurodivergence, a mental health condition or not, is masking. We're all in some sort of closet that we're not all the way out of. And whether we are masking the deepest part of ourselves that society has told us to hide, has told us is weak, or what have you. I've come to realize that what it is is, I don't know, something that is our deepest spark, something that is our deepest inner visionary. Because it is those adversities that we mask and that we hide behind and that we try to shove deepest down that is our strongest point of growth.

So then the question is, if this is the strongest point of our growth, why are we hiding it? Why are we masking it? And I think that folks look at these things that we need to overcompensate for, et cetera, et cetera, and they want to hide them because they're afraid of being pathologized. Folks are just so afraid of being seen as weak, as seen as too different, too much, too this, or too that. They want to do everything they can to fit in specifically so they are not pathologized.

But I say to that, I could be pathologized for being a woman if we're talking about hysteria. I could be pathologized for being Black, if we're talking about phrenology. Folks could be pathologized for being trans, for being queer, for being anything. So I am here to openly celebrate disability pride, my disability identity and my disability power because it essentially says, "Well, screw your pathology. That kryptonite is not going to work on me."

And a big thing too is we have trouble figuring out how to talk about disability because of all of the internalized ableism it comes wrapped in. We immediately assume it's going to be a pathology talk. Or you know this, people are going to only look at it through a medical lens or a charity lens because of the way the mainstream talks about it, because of the way Hollywood showcases it.

And so what this book does is I talk about it with jokes, I talk about it with rap bars, I talk about it with really from a place of joy and soul because I don't believe you're going to change a system until you get the people benefiting from it excited to change it with you. And so that is what this book does. We bring in a bunch of interviews from top celebrities and public figures who have disabilities, neurodivergences, and other conditions. And we just have a really, really great time with this book. Now, you said, why should philanthropic folks, why should they be interested?

Justice Shorter:

Yeah. Why should they get it? Yeah.

Lachi:

Exactly. Well, I feel like for several reasons. It again dismantles charity thinking. And it really showcases, it pulls back the curtain on pity-based philanthropy, honestly. And shows how good intention can still reinforce harm. So readers learn that the difference between helping and empowering, that is what this book does. And so I really showcase the difference between what it really truly means to support the disability community. It's not a question of pity-based helping, but culture-based empowerment.

We also turn empathy into strategy. At the end of the day, philanthropists, I know y'all love impact. And I identify as blind. It reframes disability as a driver of innovation. I mean, disability, if you think about it, everything that we have ever done, all of the innovations that we have created started off as access needs. Honestly, like clothing was an access need. A table, a chair, was an accessibility innovation. It was an accommodation that became universally necessary. And that's what this book talks about. We talk about how disability is a driver of innovation and culture. And so it really gives funders a smarter lens for investing in solutions for disabilities.

And last, but definitely not least, well, I talk about things like how we can humanize disability without sentimentalizing it. Is that a word?

Justice Shorter:

It is now. Sure. Yeah. Yeah.

Lachi:

Okay. Good. All right. Somebody write that down. And how we can humanize disability without sentimentalizing it. Because at the end of the day, I believe, I truly deeply believe that everybody currently has some form of disability identity. Not that you're going to get it in the future, not just that

maybe a nephew has it or a friend, but I believe that the disability umbrella is so vast and so large. I mean, it includes, yes, physical and mental and sensory, but it also includes things like tinnitus and asthma and MS and diabetes. And it includes dyslexia and ADHD, so many non-apparent disabilities. It even includes temporary situations. Yeah, breaking an arm or breaking a leg. But what about seasonal depression? What about some of these things that when folks think, what about just general anxiety? Some of these things that folks openly talk about having, but don't associate with the term disability.

Well, everyone can benefit from being able to take that mask off and openly have these discussions and everyone can benefit from philanthropic folks turning around and investing in the ability for us to unmask and take away this systemic internalized ableism that keeps us in this rat race, that keeps us pulling each other down, that keeps us crabs in this bucket, and that keeps us from actually, I don't know, just really understanding and experiencing true and authentic liberation.

Justice Shorter:

[inaudible 00:11:40].

Lachi:

That's what you would be offering your dollars for. I truly, let me just say this one last thing, Justice, because you was like, "People be taking too long to answer questions." Let me just say this last thing.

Justice Shorter:

Yeah, go ahead.

Lachi:

I believe that the biggest imprisonment that we all face is internalized ableism. And once that is lifted, that is true and ultimate liberation. And that is what folks will be funding, and that is why they should be reading my book because we go way into that.

Justice Shorter:

Yeah. I'm coming back to a lot of the things that you mentioned. But before I do that, remind folks of the name of the book, when it will be released, and where they can get it. Look at me going so hard on this book. Don't even nobody know what it's called.

Lachi:

So the book is called *I Identify As Blind: A Brazen Celebration of Disability Culture, Identity, and Power*. And it comes out January 27, 2026 from an imprint called Tiny Reparations Books. It's a Black-owned imprint by a Black comedian named Phoebe Robinson under Penguin Random House, so let's go. And we're really excited because we will be launching it in LA, January 28th at Reparations Club, which is a Black-owned bookstore. So let's get it. So we're really, really excited. So please go get you a copy, pre-order if you haven't yet.

Justice Shorter:

I'm so thrilled that you mentioned one of the really huge points of hindrance being internalized ableism because it very much reinforces all of those external barriers that people with disabilities deal with on a day-to-day basis regarding access, regarding attitudinal biases, outright discrimination and prejudicial treatment. I also am sincerely hoping that we will do a future episode here on the pod about protection and pride. Because as a means of protecting oneself in a world that seldom protects Black and Brown disabled bodies, a lot of folks have shied away from that disability pride for very understandable reasons,

as a means of keeping not only themselves, but their families safe. You can even think about that in terms of people losing custody of their kids because of ableism, people losing the ability to live in their communities freely, being involuntarily institutionalized because of ableist standards on what normalcy looks like and how you should show up in community.

And so I'm really happy that you mentioned that. And I want to now come back around to the music piece because we started off with music, and I want to center a good bulk of this conversation around that because, listen, I know you keep your ears to the streets, Lachi. And I want to know what disabled artists that you are listening to who you can amplify, put us up on, who should we be thinking about and listening to? Because I know a huge portion of your work focuses on lifting up and celebrating disabled artists. So I want to kind of lift some space up here for you to go forward and talk about those artists now.

Lachi:

Oh yeah, girl, that is my favorite thing to talk about. Well, I'll start by saying that I run an organization called Recording Artists and Music Professionals with Disabilities. And we are twofold. We are a consultancy and training group. So we go into the music industry and we train and consult folks on how to be more inclusive of disabled musicians and music professionals, whether that's neurodivergence, et cetera, et cetera, as well as venues. We do walkthroughs, et cetera.

So really what we're doing is bringing accessibility and disability inclusion to the music industry, starting from the top down. So we work with the Recording Academy, which runs the Grammys. We've worked with Live Nation, we've worked with the Country Music Awards. And so we're really excited for the movement we're making there. But on the other side, RAMPD is also a global network of said music professionals and creators with disabilities, neurodivergences, chronic conditions, et cetera, who openly identify, or maybe they don't openly identify and they're still able to be a part of our network.

So before I even answer that question, I do want to just encourage folks to go over to rampd.org. And we just have a bunch of folks openly listed that you can check out their links, you can read their bios. All the ones listed openly have been peer vetted as professionals or folks who are releasing music and art and are out here doing the thing, doing tour dates. You can follow them as well. So just, I might miss a few, so I just wanted to give you that reference to go and check these folks out because they are dope.

But I do want to list just a handful of folks. So first and foremost, there's this amazing artist named Chris Redding, who is neurodivergent. He does sort of a hip hop tinged new age that specifically discusses neurodivergence. And he actually recently did a project that he and I worked on together that he put up for a Grammy, and it is now Grammy nominated. So we actually aren't going to know if we won by the time this episode airs, but we are nominated.

Justice Shorter:

Come on.

Lachi:

It's called *The Colors in My Mind*. And the reason I mention it is because it's not just that it was a great album, but it was a great album that specifically discusses his lived experience that he worked on as an artist, I produced, and we got to get out there.

Some other artists I just want to throw out there is there's a really great producer named Jay Manuel. And Jay Manuel is a little person who also has a mobility disability and is a little person. Also a Black trans man. Let's go. Also a really, really great producer. And then also has a TV show on TLC about him and his wife out here just doing a thing. So-

Justice Shorter:

Come on.

Lachi:

... he's just famous. So check him out. And there are so many others. There is a really amazing Puerto Rican artist named Precious Perez that-

Justice Shorter:

I know Precious.

Lachi:

... you might know. She's such a talent. Check her out. She does both Latin, Spanglish, and American music as well. Of course, there's me, check me out Lachi. Don't act like you don't know. Let me throw myself in the list.

Justice Shorter:

Throw it out now.

Lachi:

Also, I also want to throw a little bit of space to the fact that there are sort of mega celebrities that have disabilities at the end of the day. Very recently, Gucci Mane came out.

Justice Shorter:

Yes he did.

Lachi:

Talks about how he was schizophrenic. Lil Wayne has epilepsy. Lil Jon has vision loss. Who's the other guy with vision loss? apl.de.ap, who I've worked with, from the Black Eyed Peas, also has vision loss. We just have so many people out here who are navigating that have different things. I believe Toni Braxton has lupus.

Justice Shorter:

She does. Yes.

Lachi:

And I recognize I'm only naming Black artists. I mean, let me name some others. So I talk about Lil Wayne. He's like the king of rock star rap, but we got Elton John, who is like the king of rock star gay music situation. I'll be out here singing his stuff all the time. He also has epilepsy. And one of the reasons I'm just so up to it...

Oh, and let me just name just a couple more. We have Missy Elliott out here. She has Graves' disease. Solange is neurodivergent. She has said that openly. And a lot of people are talking a lot more openly about their mental health conditions, about their chronic conditions. And I list and talk about the stories of so many of these different artists and celebrities in the book to the point where you're going to walk away and you're going to almost start thinking like, okay, what does that person have? Okay, what you got? What you got on the menu? So check it all out in the book.

But if you really want to get into the nitty gritty of some really great up and coming artists, stop by rampd.org. We're doing a lot of really great work there. And for y'all philanthropists out there, we are fiscally sponsored. So we're here to chill with y'all and work to change culture with y'all as well.

Justice Shorter:

Listen, for folks who may not be aware, you have already heard one of the artists that are featured on the RAMPD website because Precious Perez did our sound intro, our music intro for this show. I'm also going to shout out Deshaymond Solomon, who I found on the website. He also goes by the Blind Savage, coming out of Georgia, showing out musically. He is an extraordinary artist, and he contributed a song that has quickly become an anthem for an artistic initiative that we did last year called Portraits and Portals. So much love to Deshaymond Solomon and the work that he does. He's wonderful. And we found him again on RAMPD's website. So when we say that-

Lachi:

I-

Justice Shorter:

... you can go there and find-

Lachi:

... love-

Justice Shorter:

... great people-

Lachi:

... that. Oh my God.

Justice Shorter:

... we really do mean that. We really do mean that.

Lachi:

Okay. Why did you just make my heart smile? So first of all, the opening song is with Precious and Andre Louis, who is also a member of RAMPD. And the beauty of Deshaymond is actually Deshaymond is the treasurer of RAMPD.

So RAMPD is the global network of all of the RAMPD artists and professionals is actually a self-governed network. So they actually elect their leadership, which is like the secretary, the treasurer, the president, and the VP. And so that body starts to determine what programs that we do at RAMPD, whether it's song camps, whether it's mixers, whether it's mentorships, whether it's ambassadors situations, and whether it's our leadership programs to get more music professionals into leadership boards within the music industry.

And so it was really important to us to make sure that RAMPD was led by those who were most impacted, which is not only music professionals, but music professionals with the disabilities that we are trying to advocate for. So Deshaymond is up there in that executive role. So big shout out to Deshaymond for all the work he's doing with RAMPD as well.

Justice Shorter:

As people with disabilities, we know a little something about self-determination. And so having that body in place to be able to determine for themselves what is to be prioritized, what is most valuable to the wider population that you all serve is really, really invaluable.

I want to ask you a question, and coming back around to ableism, because we talked a lot about internalized ableism before. But I now want to talk about some of the most common forms of ableism in the music industry that you have noticed after having worked with so many disabled artists. I want to talk about the ableism that prevents progress or the type of ableism that curtails careers. Can you talk about some of the most common forms you've noticed?

Lachi:

Well, I mean, at the end of the day, overarchingly, it's going to be the fact that there is no discussion on disability. Disability is completely erased within the music industry. So that's going to be number one. So we've seen a little teeny bits of progress here and there. In Hollywood, we've seen teeny bits of progress here and there, corporate world. But no one has seen much progress in the music side of things. And I think it's why RAMPD is so quickly being sort of people are watching and seeing what we're doing because I think, overarchingly, it's going to be that nobody's talking about it, nobody understands it, nobody sees it, and nobody understands that it actually doesn't have to be expensive if we think about it at the design phase. So that's number one.

And I say that because we can talk about so many things. We can talk about the fact that there's poor venue access. We can talk about the pay gaps. We can talk about the social aspect. We can talk about the fact that it is a financial hurdle. One of the biggest things, specifically for blind folks, and in 2023, I did a thesis paper through my NYU master's on just assessing accessibility for blind and low vision producers and engineers, myself being a blind producer and musician.

And one of the things that came out of that that really got me was that was time. Time. So if you give a non-blind producer and a blind producer a project and say, whoever gets this done first, you get the pay. Well, that is already taking the blind person out of the running because it just takes us often a little more time. We can showcase the same exact product with the same exact skill, with the same exact, whatever we can find the tools that we need to be able to navigate. However, we're just not at a place yet where those tools will allow us to create at the same speed as our counterparts.

But at the same time is this a social discussion of where is the leeway of recognizing that folks work at different paces of time? So there is a very large sort of rat race vibe, but there is erasure. Now, I personally think that there's just not enough integration. There's just not enough representation, and there's just not enough community of folks with disabilities. And so it's one of the reasons why one of my personal goals, especially as right now, I sit on the trustee board at the Grammys, it's one of the highest elected positions in the music industry. And one of the biggest things that I work to do is get more folks with disabilities in leadership positions on boards.

Because as much as I want to see people on stages and singing and having a good time, I actually want to go beyond prop and into purpose. I want us to be able to make those decisions. Especially if we're folks that are not just part of the general disabled population, but folks that are actually within the disability community and recognize the struggles, understand the ancestry, and are here to really make change systemically in these boardrooms, in these committees to start making change. And I think that only starts to happen when folks, A, start to recognize the disability identity within themselves, and then B, start to have those discussions and start to see folks with disabilities in the same rooms that they are.

Justice Shorter:

Moving from props to purpose. I love that. And I want to go a bit deeper and talk about pay parity. There have been many discussions for years about artists not being fairly compensated in the music industry,

particularly with the transition to streaming services. These concerns have only grown in some circles with the advancement of AI. So what can both disabled artists do to not only protect the artistic integrity of their work, but what can funders also do to help ensure artists are equitably compensated in 2026, 2027, and beyond?

Lachi:

I have been talking with so many people about this question, especially since you mentioned AI. And there's the argument of how AI is actually helping in some aspects with access, but it's certainly hurting with discussions on IP and taking away jobs and things of that nature. There is one thing that AI is never going to be, and that is a human. It's never going to be an actual human.

So we need to recognize that the discussion of disability is the discussion of humanity. You are not going to be able to get an AI to have the same effect on a person that the holistic experience of Lachi will give them. I am a human being that has worked, that has overcome. Not my blindness, because girl, I'm still blind, that has overcome inaccess and prejudices to get to where I am. This is a human, just like you are, person listening to music, right? You listen to these songs so that you can extrapolate what parts of your soul are in that song that you can relate to get through a hard day, to celebrate love, to understand how to get through a breakup.

And yes, the song itself could help you through it, but today artistry, the art is the human life. The art is the story. When you listen to a song today recognizing that, let's say Fetty Wap puts out an album, this is a post-prison album. It's going to hit different than the pre-prison album. Gucci Mane puts out an album now that he's out about his disability. It's going to hit different than before that.

What I'm trying to say is that the human story, the full 3D, 4D human story is now becoming the art. And people are saying, AI, AI, AI. But listen, we are starving for human story. We are starving for authenticity was the word of the year in 2025. We're starving for it. And where are we going to find the most untold and untapped stories ever yet? Really like the last bastion, the last identity left with untold stories is disability. And it is the most necessary. Because what did I say before? We all got something. We all have something. And people want to know how to get through it, especially since we're going through disabling event after disabling event after disabling event.

People have gone through heartbreak and they turn to music. Well, where are they going to turn for a disabling event? I want them to be able to turn to music too. And so my response is, let's lean in to disabled creators. Let's fund those stories of humanity, of ongoing purpose, of overcoming the deepest part of yourself. The last wrapping paper that we're trying to scratch off of ourselves. Let's invest in that. Let's invest in that growth because that is the last thing left that will save us.

Justice Shorter:

People are starving for human and authentic stories is what you said. And I want you to feed us a little bit with the story of your own because you have done-

Lachi:

Justice, you are-

Justice Shorter:

... a lot of cool things.

Lachi:

... so good.

Justice Shorter:

[inaudible 00:31:48].

Lachi:

You are so good.

Justice Shorter:

Listen, you are a performer, a producer. You have created some extraordinary content. You've done some things out here. And so I want you to just share a story of a momentous moment that you've had so far in your career that still maybe gives you chills, still makes you just repeat yourself, and say, "My goodness, was that me?" But tell us a story. Feed us a little bit here. I got my cup of coffee here. I'm ready.

Lachi:

There have been so many moments. I mean, having my project Grammy nominated is obviously amazing. I mean, looking at my book, and seeing it published by Penguin Random House, of course, that's amazing. Being USA Today Woman of the Year, all of these things are amazing. But I got to say, things like seeing some a musician I never heard of having benefited from RAMPD. That's amazing to me. We have the glam cane, so I bejewel my canes. And Justice, I actually was, I didn't realize... Do you use a cane?

Justice Shorter:

I do, yes.

Lachi:

Okay. We're going to get you a blinged out one.

Justice Shorter:

Come on. Come on.

Lachi:

We going to get you a glam cane.

Justice Shorter:

Don't threaten me with a good time. And I should have been talking to you before my wedding, so I could have came down with one that was even more bedazzled. But that's all right. I'm going to be doing plenty more events in the future.

Lachi:

We're going to cute you up. We going to cute you up.

Justice Shorter:

That'll work.

Lachi:

But to see young girls out here with the glam cane going to a Taylor Swift concert, going on a first date, young men graduating with a glam cane, and just feeling confident, and wanting to be seen is a beautiful thing. But I'll give you two of my, oh, hey, whoa moments. One is going to be, so one of the big things RAMPD does is we work with the Grammys to get sign language on the red carpet. And so just to see the effect, the large global, there's so many eyeballs on the Grammys, to see the effect that that does having sign language on the red carpet to whether you're a deaf person who this is actual literal access for you to understand what's going on with all the celebrities, to whether you are just Joe Schmo off on the street and you're like, "Wait, I have never seen anything like this. I am now thinking about access." That's a huge moment.

But I want to pair that moment with the fact that we are also getting deaf folks into the Recording Academy, making sure that they are on the boards, and making sure that they are helping make these decisions. So it's not just the glitz and glamour out on the red carpet with sign language, but we also have deaf folks actually coming up through the ranks in the background so that it's beyond performance.

And then the other really fun thing is when I was at NAMM, which is the National Association of Music Merchants, it's just this huge sort of all of the music merchants come together and they showcase and display all of their latest gear. I was walking down the hall at this large convention center and I was with my big team. And then Stevie Wonder is walking down the hall on this big convention, and he's with this big team. And we literally just walk right up to each other and we just start talking.

Now, the scene is ridiculous because, first of all, we both have our big teams around us, and then we're just kind of talking. And then everybody around us that saw that was like, "How did two blind people just literally walk right up to each other and just start talking? How? Come on, y'all." But it was such a big moment with all these folks around us, we're just having a time. It was definitely a camera moment. And it was definitely very much a like, wow, I really am out here, kind of moment.

But yeah, I would say these things with RAMPD, it's very a proud mama moment. These things with glam canes is a very proud mama moment. When I was eight years old, I didn't have these things. And to be able to be honestly liberated enough to be able to create these things for myself and for those around me and those coming up after me, I mean, those are the kinds of things that make me get up in the morning.

Justice Shorter:

Give me one lesson that funders could extrapolate from those experiences. Just one thing that you would say, now having heard all of that, I want you to make sure you keep this nestled close in your mind and in your heart as you do your philanthropic work.

Lachi:

Listen, I am out here, me and a bunch of these folks from RAMPD, we're Grammy nominated now because of this work. We are out here with glammed out canes, and we are combating our on erasure with those canes because of this work. We are putting out music videos on that rival those that are of other major artist's ilk and we're getting them on television.

And I have to say that the first folks that believed in me when I first walked into the scene, and said, "I want to do something, but I don't know how or what," was a really, really cool person named Lane Harwell was one of my first funders over at... Right now they're at Ford for the arts and creative enterprise. Another amazing person that really believed in what we were doing was Nikki Brown-Booker and those guys over at Disability Inclusion Fund. Another great person that believed in me personally and my artistic work was Bridgit Antoinette Evans over at Pop Culture Collaborative.

We're doing all of this. We're doing all of this. I mean, and RAMPD is fiscally sponsored, and a really huge portion of our funds come from funders. And we are able to get sign language on the red carpet so the whole world can see access. And at the same time get deaf folks behind the scenes to be able to be

making those decisions. Deaf musicians, people don't even know that that exists, to be able to make these decisions. Because of funders, we were able to put out Lift Me Up, which was a song that I did that elevated creators in the background and in the foreground from the producers to the artists to be able to get paid and put this song out.

And the song went viral and it was nominated for all sorts of things because of funders. All of the work that we are doing and showcasing this movement of culture, of joy, of soul, injecting pride and power into the disability movement from a place of fun, and smiling and doing the work and getting people excited to change the system that they are benefiting from. I mean, look, we're getting people excited to change the system they are benefiting from. And it is because of the support of funders. So I want you to walk away with the amazing things you could be funding out here in these streets. We need you right now because this is where purpose and impact happens.

Justice Shorter:

Absolutely. I want to think about this in a couple of ways. So first off, when we close out, I'm going to talk to you a little bit more about the fund and the future, and some of your ideas that you have around that. Well, before we do, I want you to keep talking to these funders real quick, particularly the funders who are multi-hyphenate individuals who work within the philanthropic sector, but who have been told in no uncertain terms that this isn't the place for that. All of that creativity, all of those additional ideas, you maybe need to stifle that. You can only do one thing at a time. You need to really be in this particular silo. You need to stay in your lane.

What advice do you have for those folks? Just a singular message to people who might be a bit discouraged from pursuing their dreams. How can they, one, mesh it into the work that they're currently doing, but two, maybe pursue it via other avenues if they've been discouraged from doing that.

Lachi:

You mean this is towards artists or funders?

Justice Shorter:

Actual people who work in the philanthropic sector. So these are people, everyday folks who work on different grants, who work on maybe even in administrative levels, but people who every day are helping other organizations pursue their creative ideas and dreams, but they themselves, the organizations, institutions may not be encouraging them to do that same type of creative output.

Lachi:

Sure. And I mean, as we know right now, there has been a lot of turning away from creative funding, culture funding, music funding, arts funding. And one of the things we have to recognize is that, when we look historically, society is judged on its culture, how it's treated its folks with disabilities and how it has celebrated itself as a culture. Historically, societies aren't judged on these minute things that we're arguing over, or this line item. Society is not judged on line items. Society is judged on the culture it put forth and the way it treated what it would have seen as the folks most in need.

This is where we need to put our funds. I say this because innovation will inevitably halt if we do not invest in culture and if we do not invest in people with disabilities very specifically. Because again, like in my book, I've mentioned so many different ways that humanity is progressed because of disability culture, Because of music, because of the way we see ourselves.

And I would think that if you're going to do philanthropic work, the type of work you're trying to do is to essentially make the world a better place for the humans in it. And if we're going to make the world a better place for the humans in it, that means we have to make the world a better place for every single

human being in it. That includes people with neurodivergences, disabilities, other chronic conditions, et cetera, et cetera. And when we take away those programs from the folks who need it most, this is when we're stifling the innovation from the folks who have the most visionary ability to let us know what we need. Because the folks who are the least among us are going to be the ones who showcase what we need to progress the most. I don't know if that makes sense.

Justice Shorter:

No, it does. It does. And listen, you are always talking about throughout this entire interview, a common theme has been how do we make the world better for people, and how we are making decisions in the present that will make a more equitable, a more enjoyable, a more entertaining, a more fun, joyous future. Not only for individuals with disabilities, but all those who interact in our universe and beyond. And so I want to have you close us out by way of four prompts. And if you can just fill in the blank and close out the sentence. So the first prompt here is, success sounds like...

Lachi:

Liberation.

Justice Shorter:

Respect and resilience sounds like...

Lachi:

Dignity.

Justice Shorter:

Community sounds like...

Lachi:

Interdependence.

Justice Shorter:

The future sounds like...

Lachi:

The future sounds like... Oof. You hit me hard with that one. Uh-oh, let's go. I believe the future sounds like acceptance. Accepting the deepest parts of ourself society has told us to hide.

Justice Shorter:

Lachi, it has been such a pleasure. Thank you so much for joining us on Disability Inclusion: Required.

Lachi:

Thank you for having me.