

Vivons visibles, the accessible podcast

Episode 2. Leigh Smit

### INTRODUCTION [00:30]

Felicity Spence, Host

Hello everybody!

My name is Felicity and welcome to Vivons Visibles: The Accessible Podcast brought to you by AQEIPS. So first off, what is AQEIPS? AQEIPS is the Québec association for equity and inclusion in postsecondary education. We are a non-profit organization founded in 1991 by and for students with disabilities. Our mission is to support students with disabilities by supporting and defending their collective rights.

We decided to start a podcast at AQEIPS to create a space to talk about all kinds of things that could be of interest to the community of students with disabilities and to the public in general. The goal is to share ideas and experiences to better understand ourselves, and of course, to discover new things. As for me, I am the project manager at AQEIPS. I am passionate and curious about all things related to education. I love learning and trying to better understand life and society. Like many of you, I am an eternally curious person. Today's guest is Leigh Smit, a CEGEP student at Dawson College in Montreal, currently studying social services. Leigh plans to continue studying in university once they have completed their program. Before studying in social services, they earned a DEC in modern languages at Dawson in 2008. Leigh was also an AQEIPS bursary winner in 2022.

### Leigh's situation [01:48]

Felicity Spence

Hi Leigh, welcome!

Leigh Smit

Hi, thanks for having me.

Felicity Spence

Yes, great to meet you finally!

Leigh Smit

Yes.

Felicity Spence

You're back at Dawson, you are back for the winter semester.

Leigh Smit

Yes, I just started two weeks ago, at the beginning of February.

Felicity Spence

Yes, how's it going?

Leigh Smit

It's going pretty good, it is a little stressful but it is pretty good.

Felicity Spence

Are you in the last year of your program?

Leigh Smit

No, I am in the second year of my program so it's a three-year program.

Felicity Spence

I'm imagining you are enjoying it so far?

Leigh Smit

I am! Yeah, there have been a few stressful moments but overall, it's pretty enjoyable.

Felicity Spence

And after you mentioned to me before that you wanted to go on to university, after you finish the social services program, you can work as?

Leigh Smit

A social services technician, which I would describe as a social worker-light. You are doing a lot of the same things but with less education, so you have a lower level of responsibility.

Felicity Spence

Your plan to go to university, that would be to do a degree in..?

Leigh Smit

In social work, but I have always had a fondness for psychology and social work has a dual master's degree in like law and social work and like "oh no this is another five years" haha.

Felicity Spence

Yes, you will be a student forever.

Leigh Smit

It is okay though...

Felicity Spence

Yes, learning is kind of addictive, I am addicted to learning.

Leigh Smit

Yeah! It's a problem hahaha.

Felicity Spence

It can get expensive if you try to do it in a school environment.

Leigh Smit

Yes, it can be. We're lucky our program is keeping the cost very low, so we don't have books to buy and things like that. I mean they were in the first semester but not really after that.

Felicity Spence

So, this podcast, we're talking about students we're talking about disability. You are a person with a disability, I was wondering if you could talk to us a bit about your experiences and school.

Leigh Smit

Yeah, so I have a few disabilities actually, they are all invisible disabilities. It can be tricky to manage that. Again, I have been in a very lucky position where I've had a lot of support from people who are really knowledgeable. So, I have ADHD, PTSD, and Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. Yeah, so haha I almost forgot.

Felicity Spence

Oh, I've never heard of that.

Leigh Smit

Yeah, it's a connective tissue disorder, so it makes a lot of things very difficult. I get fatigued pretty quickly. I would say that it's like a low-grade chronic fatigue, I have a lot of joint pain, especially in my lower limbs, hands, and back, so kind of all over the place haha. But I've had an ADHD coach who was incredibly amazing, who helped me learn everything I need to know to be successful in school, and I've also been going to rehab for the Ehlers-Danlos, and that's been enormously helpful, like I understand a lot better what to do to kind of keep my symptoms, maybe not at bay, haha, maybe that's not the right word.

Felicity Spence

To better manage the symptoms.

Leigh Smit

Yes, exactly! It makes it more...yes, better, manageable.

## Academic accommodations [05:36]

Felicity Spence

Okay, so you mention you have more fatigue from the Ehlers-Danlos, is it like, with school, are you able to manage the fatigue, are there accommodations?

Leigh Smit

So, there are things I do to manage it but in general, but there are not many accommodations for that at school, which is unfortunate. So like, something that was recommended to me at rehab was that, to see if I can do some classes from home. Like if there are any kind of home hybrid, kind of option or if I can just stay home to learn. And you kind of have an allotted amount of absences that you can have before they fail you which is 4 for the entire semester. There is no wiggle room currently with that, and I find that very difficult to manage because you never know when you're going to need to take advantage of that so you have to kind of have to save them, haha and be very strategic and I know I'm not the only person in that position where it is like, actually quite problematic.

Felicity Spence

Yeah, I feel like especially with COVID there would be more understanding or wiggle room with sick days or just studying from home during your classes at home especially if you have a diagnosed medical condition.

Leigh Smit

Yeah! So like, the school was running during COVID, from afar, so people were allowed to stay home and classes were online which is not ideal but it is to say that...it is possible, they can do it they would do it for the general population just not for people with disabilities.

Felicity Spence

Yeah, it sounds like they won't make the extra effort...

Leigh Smit

I think people are willing to think about it, but I keep hearing things like, I think "those are the rules" or "that's just the department rules" or whatever else it is...

Felicity Spence

It is almost like they don't quite know where to put the limit, like the boundaries. Like "okay we will allow you sick days, we want to be fair to everyone, we don't want to seem like we're giving too much..." they just don't know where to put it but...

Leigh Smit

Yeah, it's a bit of a weird position for like everybody involved. It's not easy to like... to decide what's the best route for that, but like, I know that people are open to listening, but I don't know how much will be actually done about these kinds of things.

Felicity Spence

What is interesting is that it is a topic that we are often discussing at AQEIPS, just questions about services offered to students with disabilities, CEGEP and universities and yeah to better define there a lot of discussion about ADHD, anxiety, how to accommodate students with those issues, where there doesn't seem to be a clear definition all the time of what the accommodations should be.

Leigh Smit

I think that for some cases the accommodations are there and I really appreciate them but there are instances, like for example a note-taker, I don't know why, but I have such trouble finding a note-taker and...

Felicity Spence

You have to find a note-taker, another student in your class who is willing..?

Leigh Smit

Yeah, exactly. So I don't know why it is so difficult to find but that's the situation. And the other thing is, like you can go to a separate room for tests or whatever else it is. I actually don't use that accommodation because for me I have such memory issues that is it easier for me to do the test in the class where I have cues for memory, rather than to go to a whole separate room where I'm not going to be distracted.

Felicity Spence

Interesting!

Leigh Smit

So you kind of have to make choices that way.

Felicity Spence

So you are saying the services at Dawson are pretty good?

Leigh Smit

Yeah! I mean, hahahaha it's the first time I've ever been accommodated at school so I don't have much to compare to but my impression is that they are very caring about that kind of thing.

Felicity Spence

During your previous DEC in 2008, did you...

Leigh Smit

I didn't even know that, haha. I didn't even know that accommodations were available to me. I was diagnosed with ADHD as a child and even then, I was never offered accommodations and I am now a bit furious about that but, hahaha, it is what it is.

Felicity Spence

Yeah, it's kind of shocking although I am not surprised because of all the stories I've heard.. just the knowledge of disabilities, especially an invisible disabilities, it seems that it's taking some time to be understood and known... "What are accommodations?" I don't know. When I was working in teaching, there was a lot of confusion around accommodations and this idea, teachers would sometimes worry that the student was almost cheating if they had accommodations which is ridiculous.

Leigh Smit

Yeah, it is ridiculous. I think everybody should be accommodated to be honest, hahaha. At least it used to be quite discouraging, but it is getting better.

#### Primary Schools and disability [10:35]

Leigh Smit

I remember even, forget cheating, teachers knew I was different, and I've had teachers straight up look me in my eyes and be like "you don't belong in my class" and like, not teach to me, so like that was the experience during childhood of school. So, it actually took me a long time to get back to school because of that.

Felicity Spence

It really is heartbreaking that it was the case...and it kind of still is the case.

Leigh Smit

It lowkey is...

Felicity Spence

I don't want to blame teachers, teachers have a lot on their plate but there is not enough support in schools to really take care of everyone, and so then this one teacher with the 30 students, you know, is trying to manage but then, you know, students really suffer and it can affect them for the rest of their lives.

Leigh Smit

Yeah, it is also very easy to say, "well if I spend any more time on this one kid, then I won't be able to teach to the rest of the class..." that's like another very common thing people say like systemic ableism.

Felicity Spence

Yeah! Oh my goodness, like if I ever go back to teaching, I will never have these ideas, that I will become education minister and change in the world hahaha.

Leigh Smit  
You should!

Felicity Spence  
But yeah, small classes, it should just be normal! No kid wants to spend, like who wants to sit in a class with like 25 other kids, that's a lot of people!

Leigh Smit  
It's a lot of people!

Felicity Spence  
Even if all the kids are like, you know, sitting at their desk doing their thing..

Leigh Smit  
That's also weird! Hahaha.

Felicity Spence  
Like you know in the 1950s in those pictures.

Leigh Smit  
Yeah, it's a little unnatural hahaha to say the least.

#### ADHD-Coach and learning skills [11:31]

Felicity Spence  
And I am just curious, you mentioned before that you had an ADHD coach and you said it really helped. I was wondering if you could talk a bit about that because I've never heard of an ADHD coach before.

Leigh Smit  
So my ADHD coach was like absolutely amazing! She doesn't even live in the same province, she lives in Calgary, her name is Carey, I'm just going to put that out there. I found her through Coach Mathy at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. And she like, she literally taught me everything I needed to know to be a person, like a functional human being. She taught me how to not be late, she taught me how to stay organized hahaha! I'm laughing because it is still quite a challenge to like, actually, you know, follow through on those things, but like it's so much better than it was before, because I actually understand like, "Oh! That's time blindness!" like I actually don't understand what time is so if I have a time timer showing me physically the time passing then I'm like "oh I can actually not be late!", Like I was on time today!

Felicity Spence

Do you have one of those timers that are like red?

Leigh Smit

Mine is blue.

Felicity Spence

Yeah! And the timer, you see the color gets smaller and smaller.

Leigh Smit

Yes! I found the red one aggressive looking so, hahaha, I got a blue one! And it looks nice in my home. But like, yeah I use it like all day every day! She also taught me how to understand assignments like what the teacher wants from you. There is a very specific way of underlining and highlighting the documents or whatever it is they give you. So like, I actually understand - oh she wants it like this! I can actually do that!" and like write it down and schedule it, so it's like not all last minute! Hahaha! It is really good, I highly recommend it.

Felicity Spence

And since you've had this coach, Maddy her name is?

Leigh Smit

No, I found her through Coach Maddy, no my coach's name is Carey, I found her through coach Maddy, and yes I would highly recommend an ADHD coach if anybody can afford it, you can find one's that work on a sliding scale so that it's easier for people to afford it, but yes, it is quite expensive otherwise so I have to say, just look for one that can be accommodating in that way.

Felicity Spence

I think I've heard maybe one other person mention this, maybe it is something that will become more common because it just seems like ADHD, for example, AQEIPS has a bursary program that you know about, because you won! A lot of students writing us have an ADHD diagnosis...

Leigh Smit

Yeah, I think, I am actually not surprised about that, I feel like that's happening because ADHD is like, a particularly maligned disability in school. It, is that to word? No. It kind of comes with a stigma around it.

Felicity Spence

Right right.

Leigh Smit

And so it is really common for teachers or other classmates to be like, if they find out about it, automatically just kind of write that person off. And so like, a lot of people with the

experiences like I had are really common with people with ADHD. Like shockingly common so, wait what was the question? Hahaha!

Felicity Spence

I was just thinking it's good to mention ADHD coaches because ADHD seems to be way more prevalent, I don't know, there's different theories of like our society causing ADHD or there's more diagnosis now as we know more about it. I read the book Scattered minds, by Gabor Maté, I kind of follow his, I kind of agree with what he's talking about in that book. But I like the idea of ADHD coach, and teaching those skills that may be what someone with ADHD has trouble with, like the time thing, which could be a game changer for going to school or, you know, postsecondary education.

Leigh Smit

Yeah it definitely is. I think that meds are great but like, they don't, like you said medication is not skill. Hahah, it won't help you with the things like, I don't know, like being on time. There's a reason you are not on time and that because of lack of organizational skills because of time blindness, all these things that kind of compound, that once you understand them it's so much easier to deal with. So, I really do hope ADHD-coaches become a lot more popular, I really hope people use them more.

Felicity Spence

Just hearing about your experience and just thinking about again, and because I worked in education, I think this would be a nice approach to help guide people. Like the time thing I really noticed it with students. Think of these skills, teach these skills, and have people who are specialists in ADHD. That would be really helpful. There's a growing number of students with ADHD, it seems to be the number one diagnosis, the new diagnosis that people are coming away with, in postsecondary education, I think that some people are being diagnosed later in life with ADHD...

#### Disclosing disabilities [16:42]

Leigh Smit

Yeah, I guess it depends on the circumstances, I guess but it is really important, especially if you're going to school. But there's also that issue of like, do I disclose that or not cause like, you know, discrimination still exists.

Felicity Spence

Right, right. What has been your experience, do people know you have a disability at school?

Leigh Smit

Yeah, I'm, I'm very open about it. I feel strongly that it's important to talk about and normalize in society because systemic ableism is a really real and big thing that if people continue to

hide and I really understand people, like the reasons to hide that. Like I'm not saying that anybody should come out if they are not really ready, but it is really important to be visible.

Felicity Spence

Yeah, I think we should be talking about this kind of thing, kind of the idea of this podcast, I just think these things, disability needs to be talked about so much more because generally, my impression when I talk to people, is there's not a lot of knowledge out there. The general population, they don't think about it that much, and there is this kind of negative view like "oh you have a disability, poor you!"

Leigh Smit

Hahahah yeah!

Felicity Spence

And it's like my sister says it's not a disability, it's different ability.

Leigh Smit

Yeah! It's just like being differently put together which is absolutely fine but yeah there is that pity and that fear from other people. I've actually had people come up to me, like strangers come up to me and be like, "you need to pray to Jesus so you're fixed because you shouldn't be the way you are!" I'm just like, oh my gosh, do you know what's coming out of your mouth right now?! It's just...yeah, that actually happens! And I don't even look very physically disabled, I just have a cane and braces I put on my arms. You know what I mean, so I can't even imagine the experiences for people who are visibly disabled.

Felicity Spence

I talked to our director, the director of AQEIPS a lot about this, he's in a wheelchair, he is quadriplegic and yeah people come to him and "oh my god you are so brave" kind of always talk to him in this cheery, you know, happy go-lucky type of attitude as if he needs cheering up all the time.

Leigh Smit

Yeah! Hahahaha! Which is ridiculous!

Felicity Spence

Stéphane is a very happy person, yeah so you talk openly about your disability, and you've had these experiences.

Leigh Smit

Yes, I am at a point where I am not taking it anymore. Like my education was something taken from me because of that and so I am not putting up with that anymore. So, it is like, no I am here and taking this and you're going to treat me with respect.

Felicity Spence

And my feeling is, even though the road is long if people keep talking about it eventually, I think this message will catch on.

Leigh Smit  
Yes, I think so.

Felicity Spence  
Just accepting basically, it's diversity, different human experiences and different human existence... But do you feel, like, tired?

Leigh Smit  
Always! Hahahah

Felicity Spence  
I mean spiritually like always having to explain a lot.

Leigh Smit  
Yes and no, so if people are asking me questions like "oh what's wrong with you?" or like "oh are you going to be better soon?" like that is like "ugh" it's like please! but if people are asking me genuine questions to better understand, you know to expand their knowledge about whatever it is, I am happy for that. I find that very, actually in class the other day someone asked me for the first time asked me what I had and I explained it and I felt seen for the first time because they took time to like "can you tell me about that? What's that like for you?" instead of making assumptions of what it is like for me, you know because I'm like, pretty, I don't know, I consider myself as a funny person and I'm like a risk-taker and like all these things, and so when people come to me and they're like, you know, they feel bad for me, it's like you have no idea I have this whole plan to climb out this window to make a garden (don't tell my rehab center hahaha) I got a huge lecture about it, but anyway, the official opinion is that no, you should not be climbing out of windows to make a garden,

Felicity Spence  
Like a rooftop?

Leigh Smit  
Yeah! But listen! Like I'm still thinking about it! I am probably more willing than other people to just have fun and live my life.

Felicity Spence  
Yeah! if people would come and ask you what are you doing instead of making assumptions "oh you must do nothing because... you are in these categories"

Leigh Smit

Yeah, you know and "oh it must be so nice to rest all the time!" and I'm like "must be pretty nice to like make a living, I've never had that" hahaha!

#### Social work and knowledge of disability [21:37]

Felicity Spence

Do you find people who study in social services are more well-versed in the issues of disability or...?

Leigh Smit

Hahahaha I would hope so, but I don't think so. I think it depends on the person's interest, their level of education, their willingness to examine their beliefs, and the understanding that they already have. I think that is a very personal question about the person who is in these studies...because like, I've heard about people who work with people with disabilities and even they are like...hahah they kind of miss the mark a little bit because they've had some bad training maybe or whatever else it is but, I don't know, I don't want to say yes or not but I am hopeful about that.

Felicity Spence

I mean, in the program, do you learn about people with disabilities?

Leigh Smit

So I'm in my second year, I'm in my second half of my second year, and this is the first time we will be learning about people with disabilities and it's only one class and it's squeezed in there with addiction and homelessness...so, hahaha.

Felicity Spence

Oh my goodness!

Leigh Smit

But it's, I don't think we are receiving adequate information at an early enough stage, because we have stages starting the second semester of being there and everybody is already dealing with clients with disabilities whether they know it or not. A lack of skillfulness can be very detrimental to people with disabilities.

Felicity Spence

Yeah! I mean especially in this area, line of work, it's an area where you might come across more people with disabilities and should probably know more.

Leigh Smit

Yeah, I think so. I should say though that my department is extremely open to learning about these things and incorporating more information about disability in the program. They do

have governmental requirements that they have to, so I'm not sure why the structure is the way it is, but I know it has something to do with the government. But we work with what we can.

Felicity Spence

Yeah, they always have the subjects that they have to cover and they only have a certain amount of time to pack it in there and then they hope that people will learn on their own and once you're working there's also professional development training and stuff like that.

Leigh Smit

So yeah we do hope that people will learn on their own but if I am being honest, I don't think that it should be expected because it is extremely exhausting working in this field. It is exhausting going to school, it's exhausting to learn about you know, all these traumatic systemic things that are just kind of ever present. And that's what we're hearing all day long, so we kind of need to have that separate space at home where you can...not live in that world a little bit, you know what I mean, so like, yes we expect people to learn on their own but also, they need time to be human beings.

Felicity Spence

Actually, my next question because we could continue talking about...I imagine one of the hardest lines of work, social work, it's like front line worker kind of like nursing, teaching, kind of category.

Leigh Smit

I mean it is exciting!

AQEIPS bursary program [24:53]

Felicity Spence

So you are an AQEIPS bursary winner!

Leigh Smit

I am!

Felicity Spence

2022!

Leigh Smit

Yup!

Felicity Spence

How did that impact your academic experience?

Leigh Smit

So, like I mentioned before, I've had so many bad experiences with school and this bursary got me through financially. I was able to pay my tuition and that kind of thing. But the biggest thing it did for me was it made me feel very supported in a way that my family and my school experience had not. It really filled the gap that was really very empty.

Felicity Spence

It really makes me happy to hear that because when I think of students, I just think, you know, it is just tough, it's a lot of hours, a lot of years of life and to just get those little taps on the back like "you are doing a good job! Keep going! You can do it!"

Leigh Smit

Yeah! It was like "oh somebody believes in me!" and they're actually willing to put something behind that!

Felicity Spence

I mean, our bursary program, we do what we can. I really wish we could give a bursary to all the applicants of the bursary program. Maybe one day we will raise enough money to be able to do that, because I think it is so important. I remember when I was a student, you know, mid-semester, after the midterms and you are just like "ughh" so just like "you can do it! Go!"

Leigh Smit

Yeah! It is like a little boost!

Felicity Spence

Oh I am happy to hear that!

Leigh Smit

Thank you so much!

Felicity Spence

Oh you are welcome, thank you donors! AQEIPS donors! If you want to donate you can go visit our website at [aqeips.org](http://aqeips.org). I want to say it clearly because if you want to go donate you really should go on our website, at [AQEIPS.org](http://AQEIPS.org)!

Leigh Smit

Yes! Please do!

The process of obtaining accommodations [26:37]

Felicity Spence

Were you always able to go to school, or were there times where you really struggled and questioned if you could really keep going?

Leigh Smit

Like I said, I had really bad experiences with discrimination... Starting elementary school through high school, I always had these bad experiences. It was always really hard to go to cegep. The first time, I was kind of forced into a program I didn't want to take by my parents, and that, the school actually, for the first two weeks of class, that school was like the safest place I've ever been in, and then there was the Dawson shooting so the school was no longer safe, and it really ripped away this thing, that kind of almost felt like it was going to be this foundation for my life. Which it was, it is not really; school is a foundation for your life, right? And so, since then, like I've always struggled to be in school, it never felt like somewhere that was safe, it never felt like somewhere I belong. Like, for me. But now I can see, I definitely have the skills, I definitely am a very bright student, I'm high performing. I love what I do, and like, I do belong there, haha!

Felicity Spence

Now you are in the right program, now things have settled down, and now you are receiving services you had mentioned?

Leigh Smit

The accommodations? Yes, exactly!

Felicity Spence

So your first diploma, you weren't receiving any accommodations?

Leigh Smit

No, I wasn't, so I had no idea that those were even available for me. I've never gotten accommodations until starting at Dawson the second time around. They made it very clear this time, which is great.

Felicity Spence

Yes, I am very curious about this, because we just finished this research project with AQEIPS, it's the first part of a three-part series but, just looking at different websites of different CEGEPS and universities and seeing what information is available about disabilities on the website. Because some students with disabilities don't know that they can have services! And, anyway, so we feel like the information on the website should be "here are some disabilities, if you are struggling with this, find out if you can access services" and so that students don't have to suffer through a whole degree without the accommodations that they need.

Leigh Smit

Yeah! I think the setup as it is... is that you don't find out what accommodations are available to you until you are already in it. You should be able to be like okay, I can go in this and know that I will be supported instead of being thrown into it and hoping for the best.

Felicity Spence

Do you mean, you went to see the services, you say "I have these diagnoses and..." and then they tell you that you can have these services?

Leigh Smit

Yeah, so you have to register for school, be in school and then go see the accommodation center and give them your diagnosis and then they would be like okay these are what accommodations are available to you and even then, they don't necessarily offer all the ones that are necessarily relevant to you. So, like, for example, I wasn't offered the elevator card. So there's two elevators in the building; one is for everybody, and it is like super slow and kind of, I hate that elevator, haha, but then there's this other elevator that is like super fast and it's for people with disabilities and for maintenance. And so, they didn't think to offer me the elevator card for that one. They did afterward and thought about it and "we didn't know at first, we didn't want to make assumptions but would you like this?" And I'm like YES, yes I would, hahaha.

Felicity Spence

This just confirms what we've been talking about at AQEIPS that there needs to be way more information available. The services available to students with disabilities, they need to be more clear. The process of accessing them needs to be more clear, everything needs to be more clear. Because if they are not, some students will really struggle and it really seems like a shame to unnecessarily struggle.

Leigh Smit

Signing up for school, that is a very big commitment, and you don't pretend to make big commitments like that unless you make sure that you have what you need. Right? So it would make sense!

Felicity Spence

Yes! Anyway, I'm glad things are going very well in social services at Dawson College.

Leigh Smit

Yeah! Thank you! I'm super happy about that too. It feels like I'm in the right place at the right time!

Felicity Spence

Oh! That is really good! A great feeling!

Leigh Smit

Yes, I love my school now! Hahaha!

## Everyday life with a disability [31:13]

Felicity Spence

So, I wanted to ask you, what do you do besides go to school and study and learn, you mentioned a rooftop garden?

Leigh Smit

Hahaha! So, to be clear, I have not done that, and I don't recommend it. Um, I mean the climbing at your window part, don't do that, hahaha! Um, for anybody, that's not a safe thing to do! But, um, I like to bike, I like to go sit by the water and meditate and walk in the woods. I started to learn foraging, but I forage really benign stuff right now just to, you know, be safe. I'm trying to think, um, I weave. I do circle weaving.

Felicity Spence

You mentioned to me when we first met, this video project; normal people doing normal things. You were like "I have a disability but I'm getting a coffee, I don't know!"

Leigh Smit

I was watching this one girl who is an influencer on TikTok and she's deaf and she's so fun! I'm so sorry I forgot her name, and so, she's so fun! She's like singing and doing the signs at the same time and explaining just like everyday stuff. Like there was this one time where she was at a cafe, and she was talking smack in sign language, and someone caught her. And it is so fun! Being able to present people in a very normal way, just doing normal things! Because we have this societal image of people with disabilities just like, not being quite human somehow and so, I just really like that idea of doing something that is also informative like cooking or something. So, you are putting together a meal and explaining the basic food groups and make sure everything is nutritionally sound for me and this is how we do it so I'm prepared for the week and I don't have to worry about it while also discussing the sociological aspect of like, access to food when you're disabled. You know, like the higher costs and low income and all this other stuff that we don't think about when we think about disability.

Felicity Spence

I love this idea! I think it's changing now but, for a while with Hollywood and movies, I don't know, we've developed this idea that like, life should be a party at all times, but I just like the everyday, like you go get a coffee, you go for a little walk and there's nice things on that walk and then the whole mindfulness of being in the present moment. But yeah, the idea of just, you are cooking, you are talking about how much you paid for your groceries and poverty. Haha, you are cooking and it's just normal.

Leigh Smit

This is a more well-rounded impression of life with a disability.

Felicity Spence

Yeah, and again because I think generally in society disability is pretty misunderstood and almost like unreal, we don't know what this is, we are scared. Just be like "oh, this is what it is and look it's fine".

Leigh Smit

Yeah! It's like "oh, that's nothing" hahaha.

Felicity Spence

The person is cooking, the person is getting a coffee, hahaha.

Leigh Smit

Coffee is good, I like bubble tea!

#### Leigh's self-care methods [34:16]

Felicity Spence

I wanted to close this interview and talk about one of my favorite topics: self-care.

Leigh Smit

Okay!

Felicity Spence

I love self-care, do you practice self-care?

Leigh Smit

I do a lot of things for self-care actually! It's kind of a part of being a student in this field, like, you really have to. So I do meditation, my exercises, I go swimming. Again, I am super fortunate we have a sauna in my building. Yeah, it's like a dry sauna and it is pretty good, I like it! You know, like preparing meals in advance, like weaving again, and it is super relaxing, very satisfying when you've finished the piece. Um, you know, reading, all kinds of things!

Felicity Spence

You mentioned that you had a candle that smells like wood burning fire? I was like I have to get myself one of those!

Leigh Smit

Yeah! So like on days where I really feel overstimulated or in like, extra need of coziness, I'll do this thing where I'll turn off all the lights and light a smoke-scented candle and I'll turn on the TV fireplace, like the birchwood log hahah! And so, like, it feels like I'm in front of the fireplace, like when I was a kid my dad used to make fires and put a blanket on and we were all super cozy. Sometimes, I do it when friends come over and they are all "oh this is amazing" hahahah.

Felicity Spence

Yeah! Just the thought of it I'm just like ahh I could make a campfire right now! Hahaha Thank you so much for doing this interview Leigh!

Leigh Smit

Yeah, you are super welcome!

Felicity Spence

It was great talking to you and I wish you all the best of luck throughout the semester!

Leigh Smit

Thank you!

Felicity Spence

I hope it goes super smoothly.

Leigh Smit

I hope so too hahahahah! Thank you!