Transcript: Podcast episode #4

Introduction: 00:00 – 01:34

Felicity: Hello everybody. My name is Felicity, and welcome to another episode of Vivons Visible, the Accessible Podcast, the new podcast brought to you by AQEIPS. The goal of this podcast is to have 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.

It's a place to share ideas and experiences, to better understand ourselves and, of course, to discover new things. We will be joined today by my co-host Leigh Smit, who you met in the second episode of our podcast. Leigh is a student in social services at Dawson College.

Today, we will be talking with Mary Boswell, a cegep student currently in her third year studying social services, also at Dawson College. Mary's goal is to work with neurodivergent children or young people once she has completed her program.

How is school going? 1:34 - 5:57

Felicity: Hi, Mary. Hi, Leigh.

Mary and Leigh: Hi.

Felicity: Thank you so much for being here.

Mary: Thank you for inviting me, I really appreciate coming in.

Felicity: How's your school year going? It's a couple of weeks in.

Mary: I'm not gonna lie, it was a lot because my schedule wasn't as great. So, I'm at school from Monday to Wednesday between 8:00 to 5:30. So I'm at school pretty much the whole day, it's kind of like a working shift. But other than that, everything is really good, I really enjoy my class. I really like the teachers that I am partaking in the class.

Felicity: Is this your last year in the program?

Mary: Technically it is supposed to be my last year, but I took an extra year just to finish up my other general education courses, so I am taking my time to graduate. It's really important to take your time when learning new things.

Felicity: And you have a “stage” as well?

Mary: Yes, my stage is currently at a resident home, so I'm working with older adults with minimal to no autonomy. So far, it's going really well, I'm learning a lot from the field that I'm in.

Felicity: Okay. I find it's cool that you're doing classes and then once a week you have a stage, and the stage goes the whole semester?

Mary: Yeah, for the year.

Felicity: It's a great way to put into practice what you're learning.

Mary: Oh, of course. I noticed that a lot. Like even for my stage from last year, every time there's a situation I'm like, “Oh! This makes sense, I know what they mean by that”. And I'm like, kind of constantly connecting between theory and actual practice.

Felicity: Yeah, it's interesting. I was a teacher before and our stages were, you know, you cram all the courses into the semester and then at the end of the semester or during you have this intense stage. I sometimes wonder. Maybe if it had been more relaxed like one or two days a week stage, a couple days a week courses, you can really sort of look at what's going on a little bit better.

Mary: It's interesting that you mention that. That's how our program works too, they base it on what kind of class that we're taking and then the amount of stage that we're supposed to partake like, in second year you can take stage once a week and then gradually it goes from once a week to two days a week, to three days a week. Because a lot of times some students take more than eight classes and then they juggle up with the stage and on top of the responsibilities and work and stuff, so there's a lot of cramping. That's why in my situation, I like to take my sweet time, and I really emphasize mental health. So, I would plan things ahead of time, like I'm going to find a date where I'm just going to not focus on school, not focus on work and stage and just focus on my mental health and myself.

Felicity: I feel like there's certain programs where self-care should be the number one priority, in order to do your job well. And so, eleven classes should be discouraged if possible.

Leigh: Yeah, that's what we're taught. But I think there's also a lot of pressure to graduate “on time”. You know what I mean? Whatever that means. But there's also a lot of pressure to finish quickly so you can start working because, you know, it's hard financially for a lot of students. And so, they kind of want to just power through it so they can actually start making a living wage. And it's just not sustainable.

Mary: I think of especially younger students too, who live with their parents. Like what if their parents have high expectations on their child? Like, “You better finish on this certain date” or “You better get married at a certain date” or “You better have this job or else like I'm going to disown you” type of stuff. So, it's like, I really wish some people could have like, you know what, it's OK to take your sweet time. Because I find that I've done this before where I rush, rush, rush, and then when I get into the actual position “I'm like, oh, God, what the hell? What did I just learn?” So, I feel like it's really important to take it easy, really listen to your body and your limits. Because I feel like there's some who don't listen to their limits, and then they end up being burnt out.

Mary’s early school experiences - 5:57 – 13:15

Felicity: Leigh mentioned that they had a friend who had an interesting school experience. And then we talked and yeah, you have a really interesting school and educational experience, which I think may have led you to now at cegep, being very mindful of how you take care of yourself and your learning process and all of that. I was wondering if you can tell us a little bit about your elementary school experience and all that.

Mary: If I have to describe it in one word, it was hell, I'm not going to lie. Like I didn't had a great experience in elementary school. So, I went to one elementary school where I grew up in Laval and at the time they did have special ed technicians, but they weren't the type to be like very supportive and very like, not nice in the sense that-

Felicity: Because you went to a specialized school- And just for people listening, why were you at a specialized school?

Mary: So, I went to Summit. And the reason I went to Summit is because I had a speech delay at a young age and the school that I was at before didn't have the tools. So, they, my mom put me into Summit school to help me with my speech. So when I was there, although there were times where like there were areas where they did support me, there were some educators, I find that weren't supportive in a sense of they often discourage a lot of students with disabilities saying like, “Well, you can't make it far in life because you have a disability”

and it was quite interesting to receive that cause I was like, no, I'm capable of more than that. Just because I have a disability, it doesn't mean that I'm not able to live, right. So, what I did was I spent my years at Summit and then I went to Westmount and then I graduated Westmount. I wanted to apply for cegep, but what was odd when I was applying to see cegeps, is I was getting declined a lot. So, I'm like, OK, maybe I have to go to Adult Ed and stuff. So pretty much, when I went to Adult Ed they were like, “Oh, you don't have your transcript?” So this whole time I was in Westmount, I wasn't following the Westmount protocol. I was following the Summit school protocol, and we didn't have transcripts or report cards. So, when I went to adult Ed, I had to redo everything. Mind you, I was 17 years old and doing grade 1, grade 7 work.

Felicity: It's like your parents weren't really told about your education. It was just like, “OK, your child has these difficulties, and so, she's going to follow like-”

Mary: A specialized program.

Felicity: But it was never said “Oh, and she won't get a high school diploma”. Which is just shocking to me.

Leigh: It sounds a little misleading.

Mary: Yeah, because they would tell my mom like, “Oh, she's gonna have great support”, which I did, but it wasn't like...yeah, she's gonna have that support, but she's not going to excel as in, you know, going to cegep and stuff, because of my disability. So, I remember when I was in Westmount and I was doing my math, for example, I was like, why am I doing this math and why is it so easy for me? I was like the most advanced student in the classroom. So, when I graduated that school, I found out that this whole time- because my mom asked questions like “Oh like she wants to go to cegep, why can't she register?”. This whole time I was doing grade 3 work in a high school setting.

Felicity: It’s so shocking, although I've heard similar stories and it comes back to...we sort of started talking about this before: disability, it's not intelligence.

Mary: No. And like, I feel like a lot of people are so shamed with intelligence. It does not have to do with intelligence. It's just, there's certain areas that a child or an adult has a struggle with and they just need support for that. But obviously because of, you know, the people, the stigma and like how people portray people with disabilities, they all might assume like, oh, this person is not smart. They're not capable of doing higher education. So, when I went to adult Ed, I was really discouraged because it was like this whole year of going through high school, this whole time I was doing elementary school work instead of high school.

Felicity: You could have finished like everyone else at 17 years old.

Mary: Exactly, you know, and I did want to live in the cegep life as a 17-year-old but I couldn't because there was misleading information that I received from the teachers and what my parents received.

Leigh: It almost sounds like they were giving the impression that they were supporting you, but it wasn't appropriate at all.

Mary: Exactly, and what I understood a special ed technician is, you're there to support students with disabilities and actually encourage and motivate them to excel. And what I've seen when I was at Summit School, for some teachers I've witnessed, they were just frustrated with them. I'm like, you can't get frustrated at somebody if they can't grasp on the information accordingly. Why don't you just understand the level of the child's comprehension and actually kind of, balance it with their levels of understanding in explaining it to them?

Leigh: There are many ways of explaining the same thing. And I think people kind of get stuck sometimes on like, one way of explaining it, and it's like, “If you don't understand it this way, then there must be something going on”.

Mary: Like, yeah, “How come you can't get it”?, “It's an easy task”. Like, no-

Felicity: You were at a specialized school. Where apparently this is what they specialize in, kids with learning disabilities. To help them and guide them through their education, and yet there seem to be a lot of areas that there is a lack of understanding,

Mary: Support-

Felicity: Support. This whole misunderstanding like disability, intelligence, what the child needs, that we mentioned when we were talking before...Like, just ask the kid “Is this helping you?”, “Maybe we could try a different way?”.

Mary: Yeah, because when it comes to like, not understanding for a kid, why don't you ask them? Like “Oh, describe what you're not understanding”. Because sometimes some of them need reassurance, like maybe I'm understanding, but I'm not sure if it's the same way that they're trying to ask me a question. So just navigating through what they're having a hard time with or especially emotions too, that can actually help a person who are neurodivergent to be like, “OK, I'm, I'm feeling like this, this, this”. And that way you can help them to identify like, “You're having a hard time with the questions or this topic, this feeling, etc. And I feel like people can get so easily frustrated.

The impact of negative views of disability; disability is not necessarily static; how a teacher can impact a student - 13:15 – 23:40

Leigh: It sounds like maybe the teachers also had some kind of negative view of disability. That's what I'm hearing and I'm wondering, how do you think this would have impacted students' self-image and like the way they go about life?

Mary: Well, a lot because you know, you've been told this for a very long time in a negative way that you started to slowly convince yourself like, "Maybe I am this way". "I can't excel because of what they told me". So, it does have an impact a lot, especially on a child's self-esteem. Like I know for me, growing up, I struggled a lot with like my identity, especially being a mixed-race girl who's also anglophone who also has a disability. So till this day, I'm still like, you know, understanding myself. And then I'm just looking back and I'm improving so much. But I still have my moments where these kinds of words and labels that I've been put at a young age still linger around. So, I just feel like people should be more kind.

Leigh: I kind of want to point out Mary's on the honor roll at school, FYI.

Felicity: I haven't been at school in so long, I kind of forgot, honor roll is 80 and above?

Leigh: 85 and above, I think.

Mary: And I took seven classes.

Felicity: Wow.

Mary: Yeah, I managed to do it.

Felicity: There was all this judgment passed on you as a kid. I just want to, like, go back in time and, like-

Leigh: Advocate.

Felicity: Yeah. "She's going to grow up, she's going to become a social worker, like you don't even know". But I think there's so many problems that are in the education system, like, I witnessed them as a teacher and stuff, and disability is just, there's so much misunderstanding. And one of the things that I notice a lot, there's this idea that it's static. Like you got this diagnosis at whatever age, you know, some kids get diagnosed at 3-4 years old...

Mary: Yeah, that's the age that I got diagnosed. I was four years old.

Felicity: And for some people it's like, “Oh, OK, diagnosis done, and for the rest of your life till the end of time, you will be whatever the diagnosis”. Where obviously everything's evolving, you know? Education, learning, skills can be learned, but the mentality of some people is that no, it's like this forever, written in stone.

Mary: And people don't realize that you grow out of it with time. It doesn't mean that it doesn't go away, like you grow out of it with time you receive the help and support. I just find when you get a diagnosis, it’s like, “Yep, that's you forever. I'm not gonna help you”.

Felicity: I wonder if you went back to some teacher at Summit who maybe wasn't supportive and you're like, I'm on the honor roll at Dawson. FYI, look at me now.

Mary: Oh yeah, this one teacher- I remember because originally when I was reflecting on my teenage years, I wanted to become a psychologist because I always have the love to help people. Like I just enjoy, you know, helping people and lifting them up, like being a better version of themselves. And I remember talking about it with a few of my best friends when I was in high school, and he went around, he heard me, and then he made an announcement, like you guys, “Because you have a disability and you struggle with certain areas, you're not gonna make it far in life”.

Leigh: Who said that?

Mary: This teacher-

Leigh: Oof.

Mary: It was the same teacher I had an argument with, where I had a strong opinion about Lord of the Rings, because that was his favorite movie. And then I stayed in my opinion, because I noticed that with other students, they always agree to what he's saying. And I'm like, no, I'm not gonna agree with what he’s saying. And I said Lord of the Rings is the boringest movie I ever watched, which is true! It's not like I didn't watch it. I did watch it, you know, and I'm really sorry for those who are Lord of the Rings fans.

Leigh: It's really long.

Mary: It's really long and especially with ADHD as well, I can't sit for three hours watching a movie. So, I said “I'm sorry, it's the boringest movie”. He got mad at me and he started arguing with me. And I'm like, “I'm really sorry. I watched all three parts of these movies, and

I can't sit and watch it. It's not in my interests". like he's really arguing a 14-year-old student. It took one teacher to be like "Hey, you're arguing with a child".

Felicity: And also, can't people have different opinions about a movie of all things?

Mary: And that's what I noticed when I was at that school is that everyone is always agreeing to what the teacher has to say. It's like, no, you should have a freedom of your own opinions. I don't have to agree with you, but I will respect you. But the fact that you are arguing with me, you took it to offense because it's your favorite movie. If you don't like it, I'm like, OK, it's fine, but you don't argue.

Leigh: Yeah, I think like when you're a kid, you often look to adults like, "Oh, they've gotten far". They have a job, they have a house...Like, they must know something, they must be doing something right. But the reality is like, not really. People don't know as much as they think they do. I think a lot of the time. People do know a lot but like, but I think we need to be more careful with who we trust in terms of, telling us about who we are and what we can do.

Mary: Yeah. My whole life, I was told that. I remember the word. There's always that one word that always slides in my head -it's like, "You can't do it. You're not gonna make it far in life because you're diagnosed with A-Z. You're not going to make it far compared to neurotypical people". And I remember him telling everyone that, and I remember telling myself - "Watch me, watch me". Despite that I found out that they didn't follow Westmount's educational policy and then I had to find out when I went to adult ed that I never had a high school diploma, I had a certificate. It wasn't a high school diploma, it was just a certificate like "Oh, I completed the program. Great job, excellent!"

Felicity: Great job! You were present. In attendance of school.

Leigh: Like a sticker.

Mary: And although I felt discouraged, I was like, "You know what? I'm not gonna let this one person affect me, who I am as an individual". So, it took me two years to actually complete my high school diploma. That means I paid for tutoring, I went to Saturday classes, I took summer school. I was not giving up and I graduated at 19. So...

Leigh: Congratulations by the way.

Felicity: Yes, congratulations, congratulations.

Mary: I was like, no, I'm not gonna let no teacher telling me I can't make it far in life.

Felicity: It makes me so sad because teaching and education should be the opposite. “Dream big! Go for your goals and the sky's the limit!” But you mentioned that there's other people in adult ed that had a similar experience to you?

Mary: Yes, I was in a math class, and obviously this is my first time coming to adult ed, and I’m meeting new people because I'm so used to hanging out with other neurodivergent people. I was like, “OK, I'm meeting people from various areas, whether it's they’re immigrants or are just finishing up their high school etc.” and I was having this conversation with this girl and I was like “Oh so what brings you to adult?” It was the first question I asked because you know, people have like different reasons coming to adult ed. So she was telling me “Oh yeah I was went to A-Z school and I was also in a specialized classroom and they told me that I was going to get a high diploma and I was going to finish like within three years in high school. But then I found out that I never had transcript this whole time.” So, I’m sitting there and listening to her, and I was like “Oh, that's interesting because I am going through that same situation too”. So yeah, this is insane, like I feel like people deserve to have careers. I feel like people, especially students with disabilities, deserve to learn things.

Leigh: And choose their own paths in life. I think people should have full control over what kind of education they receive.

Felicity: And be told all the options and not just “Oh, you will work in a grocery store”.

Mary: Yeah, that's something that gets me really upset because it's like, I've known a lot of people I went to high school or elementary school with that had full potential. Like I had one kid who was a great artist. Like he did have full on self-portrait of himself, like identical. And he works at a grocery store, a restaurant, as a concierge or a cleaner.

Felicity: It seems that a lot of students who have been labeled X, Y and Z, those are the options that are laid out for them. So, then you might not necessarily explore other options or think “Maybe I could be a graphic designer”, I don't know. But maybe it was just like, nope, grocery store or I don't know what other options they're telling kids, based on these limited definitions.

Mary: Yeah. And like, I went to a similar school where they tried to get you to help you find jobs. But it was those kinds of jobs, restaurant, groceries. And I'm sitting here, I'm like, “That's not me”. And the amount of times I encouraged other classmates, like, “Hey, you're more than just a disability”. And I always point out their strengths. Again, words do affect people, right? So, despite that, they have their strengths, like it still lingers around and it's like there's a cycle to it, that you're having a hard time breaking into.

Leigh: Yeah, I've had a similar experience with career counselors and stuff like that, they'd be like, “Well, it looks like you can't do anything except for take surveys at home and stuff”. I had a counselor actually say that. But otherwise they're like, “You can work at a grocery store” like you said, or like “Can you work in retail and stuff like that?” And it's like, well, you know, I'm not just here for capitalism. We're here for other things.

Mary: Right. Yeah. There's always a stereotype. “I think you should, you deserve to be placed at...” What if you don't like it?

Leigh: Yeah. What if we hate it?

Family support, understanding being a neurodivergent person (overstimulation, understanding concepts, understanding social situations) - 23:40 – 36:37

Felicity: Was your family always supporting you and encouraging you?

Mary: Yes, more specifically my sisters when I was nonverbal at a young age, they were there. They’d help me like say words, because when I started speaking a little bit, I was just naming everything daddy. Like “Daddy, daddy” even like I told my mom daddy and my mom was really upset. It’s mommy! I'm like, “No, daddy!” But that's the only word that I grasped onto. So, when I slowly started to kind of gain more in my vocabulary, that's where my sister comes in becauseI have a big family, so I have like three sisters and three brothers. My three sisters would come and, let's say I'm trying to pronounce a certain word. They will come sit next to me like “We're gonna break these words”. There's one word that I had a hard time pronouncing: dictionary. And a lot of times I got in trouble from teachers because they thought I was calling them a ****. It got to the point I had to point at the book, like, “Hey, this is what I want”. And my sister told me “If there's a long word, break it into three columns. Dic-tion-nary. Say it slowly: dic-tion-nary”. And she would often do a repeat and say, “Once you get comfortable, then say it fast”. And they helped me a lot with that. And they also helped me a lot with scenario base, like kind of like conversations. So, for example, let's say I'm in a situation where somebody asked me, “Oh, do you want a lift?” What do you do in that situation? Because I find that when I was at Summit School, a lot of the people that I went to school with didn't have that kind of tool of like, what to do in a situation where you're feeling like your life is in danger or that you don't feel safe.

Leigh: Like kind of basic safety things.

Mary: Yeah. So, my sister and my mom, like all my family, taught me a lot about safety scenarios and stuff. Because sometimes I'm like, “Yeah, I was in this situation like this and that”. And she's like, “I'm glad that you did it, but maybe you could have worked that differently”. And they break it down to my level, my understanding too, because sometimes my sisters tend to be very straightforward and then sometimes, I'm like, “I don't get it?” But then they break it down to me. And I'm like, oh, that makes sense.

Leigh: It's like, you need more details.

Mary: Yeah, I need more. Well, that's the thing with neurodivergent people. We're very good at contextualizing. We learn better if you contextualize things, if you tell us one thing that's very vague-

Leigh: Vague or too simple things.

Felicity: Too simple things?

Leigh: For example, like when we were learning about neurons and stuff in school, I remember going like “This makes zero sense”. But it was very basic: this is the soma, this is the dendrites, this is the, you know, like the Axon terminals and stuff like that. But there was no... like they're like, “Oh, this electrical signal goes from one side to the other”, but it's like in the very basics. But then if you break it down, there's whole chemicals that like come in and out of the - I forget what the word is anyway. The thing, the tube that goes from the middle. That's cool.

Felicity: I feel like I learned this 20 years ago.

Mary: I think I learned it too, but I forgot. Yeah, but that's something that I was not into. Because I'm into the field of helping people.

Felicity: But once you understood more details of the why? You couldn’t just accept “Oh it just happens”...

Leigh: You could have the chemicals go in and out and they put it in such a way that it allows electricity to pass. And there's a myelin sheath that is kind of like a wire. So, like, it protects it. And helps it go through and stuff. So if there's not enough details, like it doesn't...It’s kind of like we're talking about before. Dressing up to go to work, right. It's like, “OK, but why?” Well, actually, because, you know, it gives a good impression if you dress nice, it makes people feel like you're well put together. You have everything under control. I don't know, whatever it is.

Mary: Power.

Leigh: Yeah. But otherwise, we're just like. “Why can't I wear sweatpants?”

Felicity: Even though we'd like to say, “Oh, we don't judge”,

Mary: People do judge.

Leigh: Yeah. I don't think we trust a doctor in sweatpants.

Felicity: I would be concerned.

Mary: Yeah, me too. I'll be like, wait a minute, “Are you sure you're my doctor?” Like, you're dressed too comfortably.

Felicity: They're wearing some ripped up T-shirt and I’m like-

Mary: That's my cue to leave the clinic. Yeah.

Felicity: So, you were talking about your sisters explaining social stuff to you. You had a really interesting story of when you were at the gym one time. And you got, you know, sensory overload.

Mary: My sisters were pressuring me to like, learn to accept yourself and your disability. And for a very long time, I had a hard time accepting it. But then the concept of over stimulation. I didn't know where to identify when I'm overly stimulated. So, one day I went to the gym by myself, and I felt very weird. I was on the Stairmaster and I'm like, “I don't feel good about myself”. I just don't know why. So, then I took out my headphones. There was music, there was people talking, there was like weights putting in and I'm like, I am overly stimulated. Is this what overly stimulation is about? Now I get it. Like, it was my first time actually identifying my sensory overload, because there was so much going on and also like I had that feeling for quite some time. I didn't know what it was until I started to learn more about sensory problems and then being overly stimulated. And then I'm like observing the gym without my headphones and hearing music, people talking and how it feels internally just like “This is what overstimulation feels like”.

Leigh: How does that feel inside your body?

Mary: It feels like something's crawling…up, especially here and behind my ears.

Leigh: So, your chest and neck and kind of-

Mary: I don't know how to explain it, but it’s just-

Leigh: Yeah. I can see your body language. You already look super uncomfortable.

Mary: Going back to the gym concept, I'm like, “Why am I feeling off today?” So that's why I wear big headphones and blast music up because it blocks out people and then also my sensory overload. It's just like breathing.

Felicity: But this was the day that it was kind of a revelation. And that was when your sister, I think she taught you about something like a strategy to manage it or something. You were saying a story about mindfulness.

Mary: I think at 19 was like a rough year for me and like, I was at the point in my life where I wasn't accepting myself. I'm still trying to find who I am. So, then that's when my sister introduced me to yoga.

Felicity: Yoga, right.

Mary: That's where I started enjoying yoga. And then it went from yoga to meditation. So, I still do meditation, and I recently got back into yoga because I took a break from it for quite a bit and just came back into it. It made me feel at ease and like, it does help me a lot with whenever I feel overly stimulated.

Felicity: I love this story because, I don't know if people like the general public understand someone who's neurodivergent who's having sensory overload. There's maybe this assumption that you as the person who is neurodivergent and having sensory overload, that you automatically know how to deal with it. But like anything else, you learned strategies, and also like your sister helped you understand that yeah, you were in sensory overload. Before that you had mentioned that you didn't necessarily recognize that that's what it was.

Mary: No, I didn't recognize it, I was like, “Why do I always feel emotional?” Like every time I'm in public settings, I'm like, “Why am I always crying?” And then even when I was like entering adulthood, I used alcohol as a way to calm down, right? But I didn't know at the time. I was like, “OK, maybe if I drink it, I would be more sociable, because I don't do well in public settings. Why am I feeling like I'm going to cry every time? And I'm not crying because I'm sad or I'm frustrated or angry”.

Leigh: It occurs to me that in school we're not really taught how to self-regulate, that it's a thing, or that it's important.

Mary: Yeah. And I find like a lot of people overly use, “Oh, I'm overly stimulated” without the context of what it is about. Like I hear some friends or family members like “I'm so overly stimulated”. I'm like, “Are you though? What does it feel like?” It's...

Felicity: I've noticed people just generally use a lot of vocabulary that someone with a disability would use. Like people throw around the word bipolar. But you're not bipolar. And this term shouldn't be used because I don't know, you’re feeling hyper, feeling “manic”. The problem is that the meaning of the word is lost, and then people who really are struggling with say, sensory overload or whatever are not taken seriously.

Mary: Like, it's really hard to describe what a sensory overload feels like, but to me, it feels like something's crawling and it's really uncomfortable and I don't feel like myself.

Felicity: The more people learn about themselves, the more everything makes sense.

Mary: Yeah. I'm still learning about myself within, you know, school, therapy. Because I do take therapy once a month and sometimes I talk about certain things and then sometimes my therapist will be like “Oh, it's very common for neurodivergent people.” For example, like texture, there's certain food textures I don't like. Ketchup is one of the things I don't like. And she asked “What are your thoughts on food textures?” So I explained to her about food texture and she's like, “Well, a lot of neurodivergent people have difficulty with tactile and textured foods”. So, I was like, “OK, that makes sense”. And I brought up something about car motions, and apparently the reason why I get car sickness a lot is because I'm actually overly stimulated. There's a term for it which I don't remember, where there's so much going on because of the car maneuvering. And then you have a stressful driver, and then there's music. That's why I tend to get really nauseous. I thought it was just regular car sickness, but I read it in a book that my therapist recommended to me, it's a self-care book for neurodivergent people.

Felicity: You'll have to give me the title.

Mary: Yeah. And it's a really cool tool. Specifically, where in between pages, let's say if you are distracted, there's a doodle page where you just doodle. And then when you get back into it, you get back into your self-care plan. And there was a topic on, I don't remember the term, but it's the reason why people get car sickness especially when they're neurodivergent, because they're actually overstimulated.

Felicity: That is so interesting.

Mary: Quite some time I was in the car and I had to literally put my head down cause I was about to throw up. I was like, I think I'm having car sickness. But then I'm reading it and “I was like, oh, that makes sense”. So, I learn something new about myself every single day. And then flashbacks and all the frustration I lashed out with my mom, and I called her, I'm like “I'm so sorry”.

Felicity: This is the first time I've heard this car sickness story and I know someone who's neurodivergent and has the same issue. But I always wondered like, “Why? We're driving so smoothly”. Well, it’s Montreal, there's potholes, and construction everywhere.

Leigh: There's so much going on.

Felicity: There’s so much going on, and the visual stimulation too. And this person always gets very carsick.

Mary: There's different types of overstimulation. It's not just sound. It could be vision, it could be texture, it can be anything.

Accommodations and accessibility at school - 36:37 – 53:54

Felicity: At Dawson, do you have accommodations?

Mary: Yes, I do. I am entitled to extra time because I have ADHD, so I get an extra hour more than compared to other students.

Leigh: I think it's 33%.

Mary: And I usually sign up in an exam room because I know myself, I can't do my exam in front of other people. I don't have issues with any other classmates. It's just the paper flipping and then pencil writing, and people chit chatting, it actually affects my ability to remember. And like, I'm very studious. I will remember word to word, but if there's one slight sound, I can't do my exam. So I always book my exam room prior to the start of the exam. And then they also require noise cancellation headphones. They also offer me if I'm having a fidgety movement, I can just walk around for a couple of minutes.

Leigh: Yeah, actually in our program we almost have no exams. We maybe have one a year.

Mary: Yeah, and it's open book sometimes, depending which professor. But yeah, other than that, it's very rare. A lot of our program is very self-reflection, right? And I am a very self-reflective person. So, sometimes if I say something or I did something the other day, I'm like,

“Hmm. I know I did the right thing. Maybe I should have done it better or maybe I should have never said that, I over shared too much?” But another accommodation I get is note taking cause of my dyspraxia. I'm still trying to understand it, which is basically kind of like dyslexia but with body movements. My brain cannot process the way that I write. So, if I'm in a classroom and if I have a person who's more of an auditory teacher, it takes longer for my brain to process what I'm going to write. That's why I'm entitled to a keyboard. That way if I'm going to write notes on the computer, it's more faster for me to type. And also, if I'm dealing with more than one classes, I kind of do want someone to write my notes for me to see if there's information that I'm missing. And that's been actually really helpful.

Felicity: Dyspraxia is one of the disabilities that I feel is lesser known. I had two students when I was teaching over at different times who had dyspraxia, and no one could quite explain to me what it was except they needed to use a computer. But now the way you just explained it to me...

Mary: My brain processes information at a slower pace, like, I'm a gradual learner, I'm not a slow, slow learner. I'm a gradual learner and I gradually learn. But how my brain works is that I receive the information, but it takes longer to process whether I'm about to say something or whether I'm writing.

Leigh: So Mary, I wanted to ask you. Concerning accommodations, I've heard some students talking about their accommodations and they're pretty happy with them. They think they fit them well. and they don't really have any complaints. But other students find that sometimes they don't fit very well. And if they kind of ask for something different or you know, need something different, then they're met with often some inflexibility. Or maybe there's like a lack of creativity when it comes to accommodations or something like that. I wanted to know what your experience with that has been.

Mary: At the beginning, it was OK because I was like, “OK, I'm getting the things I really need help with”. But it got to the point where, let's say if I ask a question on a software or a device that I think it would be beneficial for me, it was more like, “Oh, no, I don't think you're able to have it”. Why can I not have it? It's like I'm coming out to you because I need support. And if I wanted this, for example, there's this type of pen. It's kind of like a read or write software where you press the word on the text, and it reads for you through the pen. I think I wanted it.

Felicity: Is this like a pen on a tablet?

Mary: Yeah, it's a pen on a tablet thing. And I'm sure I do want this because when I read just like nothing, no sound or anything, like I doze off when I read. So if I have that read and write concept where it's audible and I'm reading at the same time-

Felicity: Like a screen reader basically.

Mary: Yeah. So, I did ask one time. I'm like, “Hey, I really am interested in getting that type of tablet pen”. And she was just asking to go, “Why do you need it? It's going to be more challenging”. Like I do need it because this is what I struggle with when it comes to, you know, doing my assignments. I love to read, but I'm really having a challenging time comprehending and I need some extra focus and support. And they were very hesitant. So, like it was at the beginning, it was good in the sense of like, “OK, you're actually listening to me, what I want”, but now if I'm coming up to you and I'm asking you like, “Hey, I really want this”. And it's not like I'm coming like, you know, charging at them, like, “Hey, I really want this now!” I’m looking into it and like, I think this would be beneficial because of da, da, da. There's a bit of hesitance. I don’t know if it’s because it's budgeted. Like I don't know how many, like how much tablet pens they have for the students. I think it's budgeting or...I don't know.

Leigh: I think there's a lot of things that it is a budget issue, but I think there's a lot of things that can be fixed without money. Do you know what I mean? Like maybe we can bring up the cafeteria for a second.

Mary: Oh my goodness.

Leigh: I want to know what your impression was with that, because that didn't cost any money to address.

Felicity: What's the cafeteria story?

Mary: Leigh and I one day were going to the cafeteria because we needed coffee, because we had, I don't know what class it is, I think it was a very long class, and we were both tired.

Felicity: I don't think there's a reason to need coffee. You just love coffee.

Mary: Yeah, we just love coffee. And, you know, it's like a soothing thing.

Mary: And I didn't notice until Leigh brought it up, like, “Have you noticed something different about this layout, the cafeteria?” And I’m like, kind of, but it's not clicking. They were like “It's not accessible for wheelchairs”. So I looked and I'm like “Oh no, this is not OK. How can they have access to go to the cafeteria?” So, the accessibility center did an oral presentation

in our program talking about accessibility and stuff. So, I brought up the whole cafeteria situation. She's like, “Yeah, we've been noticing that”. And they claimed that they were trying to bring it up. What got to me the most was like, “Oh, they're allowed, they can have access, but they have to go through the back”.

Felicity: Like, you're in a wheelchair. You want to go buy something at the cafeteria, please go through the back door.

Leigh: So, we did a thing in class where we used a wheelchair to see how accessible Dawson was like, not to actually get a realistic picture, just to get some kind of idea of how accessible the school was. And so, the entrance and the exits to the cafeteria, the main cafeteria where people buy food, you could not get in with a wheelchair.

Mary: Yeah, because how the entry is, I don't know what to call, but it's like, you know.

Felicity: The turnstile?

Mary: Yeah, the turnstile thing so I’m like “How can someone in a wheelchair or cane go through it?”

Felicity: And there wasn't another entrance like in the metro, there’s that thing you can pull open.

Leigh: There was a gate.

Mary: So, the original layout it used to be like just spread open so anyone could go through it, but they changed the layout recently and they removed the partitions. And I'm just like “How can someone with mobility issues have access to it?” So, what struck me the most is when the special technician was like, oh, they do have access for them to go in, but they have to go through a circle and go through the back. And I was like, “Don't you think it's segregation?”

Leigh: Yeah, so when I tried to enter through the front in a wheelchair, an employee ran up to me and told me I had to go through the back. The problem was, first of all there was a gate that they could open there, but they had not opened the sliding glass doors fully. And they wanted you to use the back if you were in a wheelchair. When I complained in class about it and I said, “Listen, it was really humiliating. I was in a wheelchair trying to get into the cafeteria and I was being told to enter through the back”. So, somebody from the accessibility office went, “Well, that's your experience, not everybody else feels like that”. And I'm like, “How come we're not doing anything about these things?” And they basically told me there was too much red tape.

Mary: I just feel like the person's response was very dismissive because she wasn't hearing what you're feeling. You're an individual that is actually experiencing these issues.

Felicity: And also, you can't access this cafeteria, and you're the only one to go in the back, how is that not demeaning? And forcing people to make all this extra effort. How come all the other students can just easily access the cafeteria, but you have to take all this other time?

Mary: I brought up the whole, you know, segregation between blacks and whites. You want a black person to go to the back to enter the cafeteria and they can't go through the front. Don't you find that like segregation right there and ableism? So, when I said that to one of the techs, she didn't know how to respond. Like, “Oh, I hadn't thought about it until you bring it up” and I'm like, you should have think of it prior to it. We were getting like really frustrated that every time we go to cafeteria, we were getting constantly angry. I was like, “You know what, we're going to speak to somebody”. So, we went, and we asked around, like who do we need to contact with in regards to the cafeteria not being wheelchair accessible. It was a process. We had to go through one office to the other, and get an e-mail through the facility management, and then we collectively wrote our part. And then obviously we got it proofread before we sent it. And then they did something about it. They partially did something about it. They removed the exit part, but didn't remove the entry part.

Leigh: They agreed to open the sliding doors in the front more. But they did remove all the turnstiles from the exit. It kind of is now an implicit indication that you should be going through the back. You know what I mean? Because you have to if you're in a wheelchair, and you have to reach over to open the gate. It may or may not be difficult for you...So, it's just much easier to just go in through the back.

Mary: It's a little frustrating.

Felicity: Wait, just so I understand, they removed the turnstiles...

Leigh: They removed the turnstiles in the exit, so the back door where they said you have to go in through the back? That's where they removed the turnstiles.

Felicity: But they're still in the front.

Mary: Yeah. I actually brought it up to the head of the accessibility center, I'm like, “Why is that not removed?” And she was telling they have this particular door that people with wheelchairs can just open. I understand that because I know like some people with wheelchairs or canes have ways to enter a room, but at the same time, what if the person in

the wheelchair has more fine motor skills who aren't able to grasp onto the door handle? Like this is the amount of questions I'm just trying to ask them.

Leigh: Why not just do it?

Felicity: Are they worried too many students are gonna rush into the cafeteria?

Leigh: Yeah. I think that was the logic.

Felicity: Like this is how they manage crowd control?

Leigh: But I mean, we're supposed to be adults at this point. Do you know what I'm saying? I think it's a good lesson, though, for people listening that, you know, complaining can get you places. Keep trying.

Felicity: Did anyone else notice that the cafeteria was not accessible?

Leigh: Yeah, Yeah. We were told to take a certain route. And so, we noticed that most of the bathrooms are also not very...they don't have a button to help you open the door or anything like that. Sometimes, even the ones that have the buttons, they don't work.

Felicity: We've gotten complaints from other universities and cegeps about this, and then the order to repair them is put in and they're never repaired.

Mary: That's the thing. When the head was like, “Oh, we could have automatic doors for people with physical disabilities”, I'm like, “What if there's a technical difficulty, what if there's a defect?”

Felicity: Maybe there's different solutions, but find a solution instead of shutting down and always using these other solutions like, “Oh, well, there's this one back door somewhere”. Like, I don't know.

Leigh: Yeah I think it's also important to note that we're talking about the entrances, and we're talking about one specific need. We're not talking about what is actually like in the cafeteria, like how easy it is to reach things, you know what I mean? Is somebody ready to help you out, can you get things that are good for your body there, like you know, all these like little things that. I can't even think of everything, but we're just talking about the entrances. So, like, what is everything else like?

Mary: Yeah. And I still go check the cafeteria, see if there's any changes and, you know, nothing has been changed with the entry.

Leigh: They've gone back to, like, not really opening it properly. I walk by every day.

Mary: Me too. The first thing I go in when I go to Dawson is the cafeteria. I'm like OK, let's see-

Leigh: Like. Is it open?

Mary: Yeah. Guess we have to write another letter.

Felicity: Have you noticed other issues with accessibility at Dawson?

Mary: The elevators hasn't been work functioning properly.

Leigh: The elevators is a whole thing.

Mary: I've noticed that a lot. They haven't been functioning properly.

Felicity: So, the elevator is not working. So, you can't go to class if you're in a wheelchair basically.

Leigh: There are regular elevators that are really slow and sometimes they're not functioning. But there's also an accessible elevator, like you have to have a key, specifically for people with disabilities. And often, the maintenance people will be using the same elevator. I've seen multiple times somebody in a wheelchair waiting for the elevator, and then somebody with a big trolley of garbage will pass in front of them and then they have to wait for the next elevator. And this is somebody who's just trying to get to class. The whole point of the school is for students to be there. This person is trying to get where they're going.

Mary: I know janitors have to go use that elevator because they have access to it. But I notice a lot recently that there are people that don't have, well I wouldn't say don't have a disability, but just random people just go into these elevators there.

Leigh: I mean, there's also a specific maintenance elevator just down the hall from this elevator.

Mary: I've noticed that too. And I'm like why are you taking this? People have made complaints about that, and I've heard they've not been listened to. I think it goes to show that you have to be on their cases.

Leigh: Yeah, you gotta speak up. But people are tired.

Mary: And I understand some people don't want to complain because they're going to be viewed as “Oh, you're just nagging. You're just complaining”. Like no, this is an issue and I'm getting frustrated because you're not listening to these issues and what I'm feeling.

Leigh: I don't know. I don't know what else to say about that. It's just, it's a very frustrating situation.

Mary: You want to be known to be more accessible, but then yet there's these issues that are implemented in it and you're not doing anything about it. There's no solution to it. We're offering solutions, but it's like you don't want to take it.

Leigh: You don't want to take it. It's like “Just remove the things”. It doesn't cost any money. Anyway.

Felicity: I think, yeah, we need to do an episode just on...there's so many stories!

Leigh: The tell-all episode.

Mary: There’s so many, there’s so many!

Future plans - 53:54 – 1:00

Felicity: So, you mentioned you're almost finished your studies. What are your plans after you graduate?

Mary: My plans after I graduate, I wanted to still work in my field that I'm studying for a year. And then I wanted to register to McGill University to get my bachelor's degree in social work. I wanted to explore more of the field of social services and then just again get the feeling of it and then go to university, McGill because my mom went to McGill. And I feel like going there is so important to me because I don't want to be a show off, but like I'm going to be the first child that actually went to university.

Felicity: In your family?

Mary: In my family, Cause most of my siblings did went to cegep, except they didn't pursue education further.

Leigh: I think it's OK to show off.

Felicity: Yeah, you know what? Yes!

Mary: I mean coming from a big family, it's like, OK-

Leigh: It's hard work and you're doing it.

Felicity: And it's kind of cool because if you're the first, then it sets a precedent for everyone else. Like “Look, I did it”, it sort of sets a path for your family, anyways, in my family, it’s a similar situation.

Mary: Plus, my mom went to McGill, and I don't know, like I remember the story...I remember my mom was...maybe I'm telling the story inaccurately, but I do remember my mom went to school when she was pregnant with me, and she was telling me that a lot of times she was looked down upon because she's a parent. So she used to tell me that like, you know, a professor told “You should stay home to your kids. You don't deserve to get education”. And, what she did was she's like, “Oh, yeah? Really?” She swore she's like “Kiss my ass”, you know, and she graduated before I was born. It's early childhood she did.

Felicity: She was studying early childhood education?

Mary: Yeah.

Felicity: Ok, she’s a teacher.

Mary: Yeah, and it's interesting because my dad also went to McGill, and my dad was telling me that when I was born, they took me to their classroom when I was just born because they had a course.

Felicity: Oh, you grew up-

Leigh: And made it out there, now you’re going back.

Mary: Yeah. And so, I was just born and I'm like, “Was I crying?” Because usually when you're newborn, like you're out of the womb, you're stressed, you're just crying. “No, no, no, you are up wide awake. You were listening to the professor”, and she looked at me like “I knew right there that you're gonna go to the university”.

Felicity: I wonder if you could get credit from that time.

Mary: I wonder too. Also, my neurologist is a professor now at McGill, so, I would really hope that the minute I get accepted to McGill, I go see her and be like, “Hey, I don't know if you remember me, but I used to be your patient and the Montreal children’s”. She had me until I was about 18. So, I actually did a little stalking to find out where she is because I wanted to talk to her because there was certain important documentation... Because I was like past

18, I was wondering if she could still take me in. And I found out she was a professor at McGill University.

Leigh: You look like you're really proud of your progress.

Mary: I am, because for a very long time it was really hard to. And I'm still learning about myself. There are moments where I'm like, “Oh, I just wish I don't have a disability”. But I just have to realize, this is who I am. I’m born this way. And just looking back into it, I am so proud of myself pushing through and not letting people affect me. There are moments especially in my family, like my mom's been always supportive. But at the beginning when she found out I had these diagnoses and stuff, she listened a lot to the doctors. My mom and I still have these conversations. "It's not like I didn't want to believe, it was just the doctors told me this and this and I believed them, and I should have not believed them. I should have really understood you, and what your talents are”. We do butt heads sometimes, but I think it's a matter of fact that we're both alike. She has her moments where she feels like she is questioning my capability - and it’s like “Mother, I know you're worried, but like, I'm fine. I'll let you know when I'm struggling”. There's sometimes words, things that could come off as belittling sometimes, which is, you know, some other thing that I'm like-

Felicity: Because she's also your mother, and it’s complicated.

Mary: When I told her that I really want to pursue higher education, she was worried. She was like, “I don't think you're gonna do it”. Obviously, it was emotional for me because it was like “Mom, like I need you to support me”. But she was just worried because when I was at Summit, I’d usually get meltdowns a lot if I don't understand a certain topic or a question, I’d cry. I'm like, “I really don't understand it”. So, she was worried about that, which I get.

Felicity: She was like trying to be protective, but in a way-

Mary: Yeah. For a very long time I had that resentment towards her. But then, you know, when we'd still have those conversations around that topic and she's like, “It was just because people are telling me this about you and I end up believing in it and I shouldn't have”. And she apologized and you know, and she still supports me. Every time I have a conversation with her, we talk about my day and stuff because I call more frequently and like, “Hey, how is she doing?” And she's like, “You know what Mary, I'm very proud of you. I'm so proud of you, like you're excelling. And I can't believe I believed those doctors. I shouldn't have believed those doctors.”

Early school experiences, having a code of ethics in social work and teaching

1:00 – 1:14

Leigh: I wonder if now is a good time to circle back to the earlier school experience. You said that school was hell for you. What made it hell?

Mary: I think it's the environment that I was in, especially teachers. I had really bad histories with teachers. They didn't give themselves the time to understand me and my challenges. A lot of times I got yelled at for something that I couldn't grasp on. I had this one, I think she was a “stagiaire”, and one of the things I struggled with the most when I started to learn how to speak was reading and writing. It took longer for me to actually grasp on to read. And at 10 years old, I had a Leapfrog, which was a cool device.

Felicity: What's a Leapfrog?

Leigh: Like a book of some sort, but it's interactive.

Mary: It's an interactive book. It teaches kids under 5, like 5 or over to learn how to read and it says out the word. I was 10 years old. I remember as a kid, I used to feel embarrassed because what kind of 10-year-old would have a kiddy Leapfrog? But until one friend was like, “Oh, I really like this”. I really had a hard time with spelling tests. I hate doing tests because it was just something I just couldn't grasp, and I feel like it's because they didn't took the time to just get to know me or what kind of methods that I'm usually easily to learn. So, I remember...and I haven't told my mom and my siblings about that. I think I told one of my siblings about this. Basically, I'm trying to spell this big, mind you, it’s a very long, maybe like 12 letter word, I couldn't, you know, get it, I couldn't spell it. And this stagiaire was screaming at me and she called me stupid. Like, “Are you stupid? You should know this by now”. And I started crying, crying, crying because she was really interrogating me. And it got to the point where luckily there's this one French teacher, he was so supportive. He saw, and he was like “That's enough, she's having a hard time let her breathe”. So luckily that French teacher made a complaint about that stagiaire, and I haven’t seen her ever since when I was there, but like, she made my life a living hell. And it got to the point where I didn't want to speak out in the classroom to participate because I didn't want to be yelled at.

Felicity: Yeah, no one wants to be yelled at.

Mary: But that French teacher has been so supportive. He passed away recently during the pandemic, he had cancer. So, when I found out I was really upset because I just, like people

that are nice to me. You're not nice to me, like why do I want to continue on communicating with you? And I feel like that's how it should be maybe in my world.

Felicity: Especially in a learning environment.

Leigh: Like, that's the whole job.

Felicity: With fear and threatening and punishment, how are people going to learn? How are students going to learn in that kind of environment? And it should be an environment where you're allowed to make mistakes and learn from them and evolve.

Leigh: And it sounds like the whole purpose of this school is to be specifically supportive of the individual. And it sounds like that's not what they're doing at all.

Mary: Yeah. It's like it's just the fear of just making mistakes. And for a very long time I was like, "OK, I want to say something" that I end up like, hurting someone's feelings or it's wrong. So that's why I always tend to suppress a lot what I'm feeling and what I think. And then I went to Summit School and I noticed that a lot of these kids that are in the classroom was agreeing to everybody. I was like, "No, no, no". It gave me the opportunity to like, let me just speak from my own opinion, you know? And I'm still gradually gaining more of a better, healthier relationship with professors now. Because before I was so afraid to talk to them.

Leigh: So it's still affecting you.

Mary: Yeah, it still lingers.

Felicity: Teachers need to be aware, especially in higher levels, that some students are coming with these experiences and to be aware there could be a reaction to teachers based on these negative experiences. And to try to correct, be positive, but to be mindful that people could be hesitant.

Mary: I work in a daycare and like, working with kids, I'm trying to prevent from learning that behavior that I received from other teachers. You know, just talking to the kids in a way that like, OK, it's calming but also, you're explaining to them instead of lecturing them for something that's very minor.

Felicity: Because they're kids and they're learning. Like, you're not born knowing everything.

Mary: Yeah, exactly, and I feel like with my school experiences, the reason why I explained that it was hell, is I didn't feel like being treated well. I felt like I've been treated very poorly. I'm here just to learn, not to get lectured for something that I couldn't grasp onto it right away.

Leigh: We were talking a lot about, you know, the treatment of you and other students in your classroom, especially when you were younger. And people who are becoming social workers have to follow a code of ethics, which include respect for the dignity of the client and respect for the client's right to self-determination. And those are really important things that as professionals we would have to follow once we're social workers, but teachers don't necessarily have a code of ethics that they have to follow that would require them to respect the dignity of children and respect their right to self-determination. What do you think of that?

Mary: I feel like it's really important that professors and teachers do create ethical ethics. So that way, especially the field that we're working in, if you're doing like a multidisciplinary team. We should have the same values and beliefs.

Leight: Also importantly, it provides a framework for, you know, the way we behave, but also for people to make complaints and to ensure people are treating people correctly.

Mary: Exactly. And I've seen that a lot with some professors who don't treat their students correctly. This is not it. You should respect everyone regardless, and I feel like it also has to do with power too. Like if you're the teacher and you're the student, it's like, “OK, I can tell you whatever I want because I have this power over you”.

Leigh: I think there's also a sense that if a teacher doesn't know how to teach a child in a way other than how they've learned to teach, it can cause frustration and maybe they can take it out on the child or on the class in general. Or just kind of ignore the fact that there's other ways of doing things, and I'm wondering what you think about that.

Mary: I think what's really important, especially working in a helping field, is to really reflect on yourself a lot. Because sometimes you could be frustrated at a student because you don't understand what the student’s going through. But also too, you have to ask yourself what is going on in your life that you feel the need to project on it. Because I feel like with some teachers that lash out on students, or get frustrated, there's a bit of projection. They could be overly worked, burnout is happening. Or they just don't have enough tools to work with students, specifically students with disabilities. And there are some courses, too, but you have to go miles away to get that training.

Felicity: I feel like having a code of ethics or guiding values for teachers so that when a teacher is out of line or has lost their way, you go back to the basics. Yeah, “This is the code of ethics, these are the values. Like you're out here, let's bring it back over here”. And it's easier to sort of focus on what's going on.Back to what is the most important thing in your work.

Mary: Yeah, just taking a step back and reflect on yourself. Like, “What is my purpose of teaching? What is my purpose of working with kids?” Right? And sometimes we tend to lose ourselves. Also, it's OK to go back and relearn things because maybe there's some teaching methods that you were taught a few years ago, and it's no longer-

Felicity: And society is always changing.

Leigh: We learn new things.

Mary: There's nothing wrong with going back to a course to be like, “You know what? I'm gonna unlearn certain things I was taught years ago and then relearn it and in a newer technique”. It's all about unlearning, relearning. And also listen to yourself too. “I'm burned out because I feel like there's this pressure and like, OK, I have to get this done, I have to get this done. Everything has to be perfect, perfect, perfect”.

Felicity: With the code of ethics and social work, how is that? Is there a set of questions that as a social worker, if ever you're questioning or if ever you feel lost that it brings you back?

Leigh: Well, there's literally a document, it's a documented code of ethics that you learn, and you review and it gets changed every once in a while.

Mary: And when I think of like respecting the dignity of the client, it's, I think of more of the client's perspective. It's like there's certain areas that they have their own perspective, views or beliefs about certain topics that you may or may not agree with. But what's really important is you listen to the client and what their perspectives are. And really respect them. Like you don't have to agree, but you have to really-

Felicity: Respect their experience as they are telling you.

Mary: And try not to change the client. So you're there to guide them and make them excel, but you're not trying to tell them, “OK, this is what you should be. This is who you are”. We're going to stay who you are, where we can maneuver and kind of like find ways to get to that goal.

Leigh: Yeah, because I think with these codes of ethics, they often reflect laws as well. For example, in your case when you're talking about how you ended up finding out that you didn't graduate from high school, you had some kind of certificate that was like, not really usable. If there were a code of ethics talking about self-determination, that would violate that code of ethics. But in reality, that's actually a protected right of a person in the Canadian Charter of Rights. And so, it's just kind of taken from you. Like it seems at no point you were given the

right to choose to graduate high school until you took it. Do you know what I mean? And it shouldn't have to be that way.

Mary: Exactly. And I had to find out on my own. There was like, my family members being there to guide me but the school that I was in, they didn't suggest anything. They're just like, “Oh she's gonna get support”. That's it. And for a very long time, within my high school experience, it's like, “Why am I doing these topics where I'm more able to grasp on a lot easier? Why is everything easy for me?” Like, I'm up for a challenge, even if it's really hard. Because usually when you are at a journey, usually there's obstacles, right?

Felicity: Yeah, this idea in certain specialized classes that just build up the students' confidence so that they feel like they're achieving. But then there's this idea like, yeah, the class work is easier.

Mary: Yeah. It's like, why?

Felicity: Why can't this child, why can't this person face a challenge?

Mary: I was like, “Oh my God. What are you protecting us from?” I feel like you're protecting something, but it's like, you don't need to protect it. Because I know, like there are some that do have a challenging time to identify their struggles. And then there's some who don't have a hard time identifying their struggles, but like those who don't have a hard time identifying their struggles will let you know, “Hey, this is an area I'm struggling, I need support.”

Felicity: But yeah, maybe the code of ethics and teaching-

Mary: Would be helpful.

Felicity: Recenter the whole system, everyone will become balanced.

Mary: I think it’s important that everyone should reflect.

Leigh: I think we should definitely be holding our caregivers and our teachers and-

Felicity: Our politicians.

Leigh: Politicians to some sort of code of ethics, standard, reasonable expectations of behavior. You know what I mean? Yeah, anyway.

Mary: Yeah, it's really important that teachers should have somewhat. And maybe if they're understanding like “What is my code of ethics? What is my way of teaching, what is my views and teaching?” Because maybe your views of teaching is different than another teacher’s

views. So, like, you know, really sitting down with a bunch of teachers, like, “Tell me your view of teaching”. And then what you think should we implement in that of code ethics so that they can all agree to it and then stick to it?

Self-care - 1:14 – 1:18

Felicity: I think we could keep talking about this, but I kind of want to conclude with my favorite self-care question. What do you do for self-care? Like what do you do outside of school and work to take care of yourself and to have fun?

Mary: So other than meditation, I do a lot of fitness work. I go to the gym a lot. I do weightlifting, I do my hair. I feel like hair is something that makes you feel better, especially when I'm like in a day where I'm just feeling like not myself, or I'm really sad about something. I just do my hair. I like to read, and what influenced me to read more was this one teacher because for a very long time, like I was afraid to speak up because you know, the amount of PTSD I had from, well, trauma that I had with teachers that one teacher really supported me into like getting better at reading. So since then, reading is something I really enjoy doing and it's very therapeutic for me.

Felicity: What are you reading right now?

Mary: I'm reading this book called *Everyone in My Family Had Murdered Someone*. I know this is quite odd, but it's basically about this author that talks about his family members who committed a crime. But it wasn't intentional, it was like there was such a situation which led to murder.

Felicity: So, it's a murder mystery.

Mary: I like mystery. I think it also fits my personality too, because I've been told a lot, like, “Oh, you're very mysterious”. And like, do you want to get to know me? Really? Like you want to get to know that side of me? I like to keep it mysterious.

Felicity: And you mentioned you do yoga, meditation. Do you do other sports?

Mary: So,I know there is a stigma behind it, but I do pole dancing. I enjoy it a lot. I've been doing it for three years.

Felicity: Oh cool! It’s a very athletic activity.

Mary: It's a lot of core and upper body muscle. There is a stigma behind it because when there's pole dancing people are like "Oh, are you becoming a stripper?" And it's like no, it's an exercise for me and I just feel like I can be more expressive with what I'm feeling. And it helps me move through my feelings and helps with my sensory too, and my self-esteem.

Leigh: It sounds like it helps you move through a lot of things.

Mary: Exactly, I use that a lot throughout my mid-terms, I'm like "Ok, let's go on that pole, whip my hair back and forth!"

Felicity: Well, it was so great talking today, I'm having so much fun! I feel like we could keep talking for hours, but I think we'll save some topics for another time. Thank you so much for coming, Mary. And thank you Leigh for being my co-host. This is so much fun!

Leigh: Yeah! Thank you. This is fun!

Mary: No problem. I really like talking and having these conversations, I mean this is the field I want to get into, especially working in schools, I feel like it's really important to have these topics and what can we improve.

Leigh: But also, being heard, I feel like it's definitely very important

Mary: Yeah, especially with the type of clientele I want to go for, especially with neurodivergent, students with disabilities, I really want to hear them. I just want to be the voice for them and also for them to vocalize their experiences, So, we can just spread awareness to issues or things that need to be improved.

Outro blues guitar music - 1:18