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JEN BAVRY:

Welcome to *From My Perspective*. This is OCALI's Family and Community Outreach Center podcast. In these podcasts you will hear from people with disabilities, their families, friends, co-workers, and neighbors.

You'll hear about everyday life, their passions, their interests, their opinions. You will be inspired. You might laugh or cry. But most importantly, you will better understand what life is like from our perspective.

I am your host, Jen Bavry, Program Director of the OCALI Family and Community Outreach Center. This episode features interviews from the OCALICON 2019 session, "A Better Me, a Better You, Sharing your Self-Care Journey." With the conference room set up like a mini recording studio, my co-host and OCALI colleagues, Julie Short, and Simon Buehrer, and I, invite the participants to join us in sharing stories about their self-care journey.

For some, exploring or starting a new habit to support a healthy self might come easily. For others, the path to self-care may present obstacles and challenges to finding and/or even starting the right practice. Often, it's the inspiration from the experiences of others that offers just the right amount of support needed to take the first or next step on the journey to a better self. During this OCALICON session, six participants honored us by sharing their self-care journey, each offering a unique perspective in how he or she recognizes and approaches self-care. Here is "A Better Me, a Better You," and the self-care stories, as shared during the session.

Welcome, guys. We'll be starting here in about five minutes. But you may have just come in just to listen. And that is perfectly fine.

We are going to see if we can interview anybody, that you just come up, and sit in front of a microphone, and just talk with us. It's very informal, very casual, no pressure. But that's what we're hoping to do, that we can get some people that would be willing to talk with us. Yeah, so we'll wait five minutes and see who else we have come in. And we'll get started. All right, we hope during this session that we can actually-- sorry.

JULIE SHORT:

[INAUDIBLE]

JEN BAVRY: We hope during this session that we can capture just some of your stories. I mean, it could be the simplest thing, that oh, I started reading a book for 10 minutes every night. And that, to me, has been the best thing I can do self-care. Again, we would love to hear from you guys. I know Julie and I both would be happy to continue talking about things that we've done and what we've heard from others, but I think right now, it'd be really great to hear from all of you.

JULIE SHORT: Yeah.

SIMON BUEHRER: I'll be happy to model.

JEN BAVRY: You'd be happy to model?

JULIE SHORT: OK.

SIMON BUEHRER: We can do like a test run.

JEN BAVRY: Would that help you guys if we did a test run so you can-- oh, awesome.

SIMON BUEHRER: Hey!

JEN BAVRY: Come on up here. You get the water.

JULIE SHORT: [INAUDIBLE]

JEN BAVRY: You get the bottle of water.

SIMON BUEHRER: Free bottle of water.

JULIE SHORT: [INAUDIBLE] us.

JEN BAVRY: Yes, so if you could tell us your name and what is your most favorite thing at Thanksgiving dinner?

KAYLEEN: My name is Kayleen. And my favorite thing is pumpkin pie with Cool Whip on top.

JULIE SHORT: Me too.

JEN BAVRY: OK so, as we kind of already started talking with the group about, each person's journey on self-care can be different. And it should be. And it should be unique.

Everyone's, what practices they put in place, their experience should be individualized and

something that's doable for that person. But sometimes for folks, they just need to be inspired by others to start something or continue down that path. So can you share with us what self-care looks like for you and why you feel it's important?

KAYLEEN:

Well, I am a kindergarten through second year multiple disability teacher. And I've been teaching for four years. My first year, I taught kindergarten through third grade, so it's a pretty big span when you're trying to do several different standards for them.

But I didn't do any self-care my first year. And I was completely burnt out, didn't know if this is what was meant for me. But then that, like, four years ago, it was the new thing to do is self-care. And I was like, well, maybe that will ease some of my burnout. But also, you know, being a first-year teacher, that's a whole different realm, so that probably caused a lot.

So my second year, I started by, at lunch, I always worked through lunch, because I have children the same age that I teach. And so my first year, I didn't want to spend extra time at school that would take away family time. So my thought process was, if I worked through lunch, then that would be a half hour less that I would have to spend at school and away from my kids.

Well, my second year, I was like, OK, that's not working at all. And I am very blessed to just live four minutes from my school. So I started just driving home, doing a load of laundry, grabbing a quick bite to eat, turn around and go back.

Well, even though I did housework, it was just a completely different environment, a less stressful environment. And so that right there just, like, I wasn't burnt out. And I've been doing that since then. Just that half-hour break has done wonders.

But then also, another teacher who teaches our ED unit, Emotional Disturbed unit, she mentioned that she takes baths every night. And that's something to me that I love doing, but I just never really took the time to do that. And so I started incorporating that as well.

And those two things really has changed my-- like, that's definitely my self-care. And sometimes I miss it. Sometimes life happens. But as long as I know in my head when I'm really stressed out, OK, well, I'm going to go on my lunch break pretty soon, or I'm going to take a bath tonight, that right there just calms me down.

And then also lately I've been kind of digging into essential oils, which they have, supposedly, like, there is emotional oils that help you. And I'm, like, definitely that skeptic like, I don't know

how that can work and stuff. But there is this oil from Young Living. Also when they were describing it, I'm like, I don't believe that. That's crazy.

But like, when you go into a situation and someone else's emotions are negative, they, like, do have an impact on you. And I was like, that's crazy. Like, no one's emotions can mess with me. Like, if someone's angry, that'll just-- no big deal.

Well, it actually does affect me. And I didn't realize that it did. So sometimes when I'm just almost like what you would say for autistic kids stemming, like, trying to figure out how to get--

AUDIENCE: Self-regulate?

KAYLEEN: Yes, self-regulate, yes-- I'll put that oil on. And then within five minutes, I'm fine. And like it's-- I don't know the science behind that or anything. But to me, that's amazing.

JULIE SHORT: But it made a difference for you.

KAYLEEN: Yes, it definitely did.

JULIE SHORT: And as a result of the things that you shared with us that you were doing and recognizing that you needed those breaks, did you see it make an impact for the kids then? Did you see a difference in the students in your classroom [INAUDIBLE]?

KAYLEEN: Yes, I think so. Definitely I feel like, Monday I come to school and I'm really refreshed, ready to go. And then by Friday, I'm like, oh my gosh, I just need a break. Just give me five minutes. And so now I have those things where I can think, OK, in a half hour, I'm going to take my lunch break, so it'll be fine. And then I can calm down and be ready for the kids.

I don't know if I put in here too that, I don't get a break from kids. So my one son goes to school with me. And so the awesome part about that is literally, as my kids are walking out-- my students are walking out the door, my son walks in. So I get absolutely no break from kids. And they're all the same age too. You can't avoid that.

JEN BAVRY: Well first, I want to just say, way to go in recognizing that you needed to do this, you needed to make this change and actually take that break, because it sounds like it definitely has helped you. And it's something you look forward to. And I really like the fact that you said, sometimes I can't always do these things, but I make sure to try to include it as soon as I can. And I think that right there is really important, because sometimes you get discouraged if you're not able

to keep up on a routine, but just knowing that OK, it's OK, today was a day where I'm just not going to get home, or this, or today's not a day where I'm going to be able to take that bath, but I know tomorrow is there.

KAYLEEN: And I feel like I'm so excited to hear what everybody else says, because I feel like there is always room for improvement. Or--

JULIE SHORT: Oh, absolutely

KAYLEEN: --like you guys were saying, some things might work for someone and, some things, you try it. And you're like OK, that didn't work, but what else can you do? Like, I'm excited to hear other options.

JULIE SHORT: Thank you for sharing. We appreciate that.

JEN BAVRY: Well, I have one more quick question then for you. So what words of encouragement would you offer someone else to support them in either starting down that path of self-care or just encouraging them to continue?

KAYLEEN: I would say like, everyone says teacher burnout is real. And it's a lot. And it is. And it's true. But recognize that, OK, maybe you aren't burnt out and maybe you didn't start out burn out. So like, even for me, it took me a while to even recognize that self-care could help. Like, there is room for me to improve, I guess. And so really look at that. And then there is other podcast about it. Like, invest the time to do self-care. Like, know that other people will be affected by you being the best you can be by doing self-care. So I encourage people doing that.

JULIE SHORT: Excellent.

JEN BAVRY: Yeah, that was wonderful. Thank you so much.

KAYLEEN: Thank you.

JEN BAVRY: Yes.

JULIE SHORT: See? That wasn't painful. That's all we're asking.

[APPLAUSE]

JEN BAVRY: Thank you.

JULIE SHORT: Who else?

JEN BAVRY: Yeah, come on up.

JULIE SHORT: Yeah.

JEN BAVRY: Come on.

NICOLE: Yeah, I'd rather look at you when I talk to you.

JEN BAVRY: Yes, make it comfortable. Just make it like we're on a couch. There we go.

SIMON BUEHRER: What'd you have for breakfast?

JEN BAVRY: That's the one you want?

SIMON BUEHRER: [INAUDIBLE] or Thanksgiving dinner.

JULIE SHORT: That was.

JEN BAVRY: Well, I might have more though. There might be other ones [INAUDIBLE] out here. All right, so yeah, if you can tell us your name and your favorite vacation spot.

NICOLE: My name is Nicole. And my favorite vacation spot would probably have to be just the lake that's next to our house. I live in Ottawa, Kansas. And we have a boat and a camper. And so we get to go on vacation whenever we want.

JEN BAVRY: Wow.

JULIE SHORT: Nice.

JEN BAVRY: Can we just go there? That sounds like the perfect place for self-care.

NICOLE: Yes.

JEN BAVRY: Well, welcome. Thank you for joining us. Why don't we start, because I know there is two things that I'm hoping you'll share with us. One is your personal self-care journey.

But it also sounds like where you work, you guys are looking at [INAUDIBLE]-- I mean, you see the importance of self-care and trying to add something in to help support staff and the folks near your group. So yeah, tell us a little bit more about what self-care look like for you? And

why is it important?

NICOLE: I was a special education teacher for, like, 10 years. And then I've been a behavior specialist consultant for the last 10 years. And so I have had a lot of opportunities to notice that I've needed self-care.

I taught mentally handicapped students, functional classrooms for 10 years. And then I was a consultant for a school district across pre-K to 21. So my journey, my first year of teaching, my mentor really honed in that I needed to take my lunch every day.

And she told me that it shouldn't be a choice. And so I thank her for embedding that into my brain. And I didn't believe her. You know, but I'm like, she told me to do it, so I'm just going to do it. And so I'm thankful for that. There is days where I didn't.

And then the last year that I taught, I got moved to a different setting. So I was an emotional disturbed resource teacher. So I worked in a school. And then the resource teachers did the academics. And then I put out the fires and the behaviors, and taught social skills. And so did the prevention--

JEN BAVRY: You had a lot going on, wow.

NICOLE: --and the reaction. I had about 28 kids on my caseload. And I had one para.

JULIE SHORT: Wow.

JEN BAVRY: Wow.

NICOLE: [INAUDIBLE] were pretty stressful.

JULIE SHORT: I would say so.

NICOLE: And that took me out of teaching. I was so stressed out and absolutely had no self-care. And it ruined my career, because I had had enough. And luckily, I found a new path that I am so thankful that I found. And it just fell in my lap. So it was kind of, it had to happen that way to get me to where I'm at now. And it's a way I'm happy.

So anyway, I lacked-- I mean, I worked way more than I'd ever had. So before, my mentor also told me, leave work right when you're supposed to. And don't take work home. And so I embedded self-care for 19 years. And then my 20th year, which was my last year-- after I

consulted I went back to teaching for a year. And my 20th year, I had none. And then it was-- it ruined it.

JEN BAVRY: So self-care definitely is important.

NICOLE: Yes.

JEN BAVRY: And so how were you able, after that 20th year, that 21st year, what changed to help you be able to put self-care back in and start thinking more about self-care?

NICOLE: Well, I knew I didn't want to go back there. But I also knew that a lot of things that cause my burnout was no longer with me. I didn't have a supportive administration. And that's huge. I mean, you know, it's, like, 75% of it. For me it was.

My co-workers and my support system at work was still there, but it wasn't enough. And then I had no self-care for myself. And so that wasn't enough either. But so I now have a very supportive administrator, but I also work from home.

And so I have self-care, like, 90% of my day. So that's huge. But I also am really a workaholic. So I'm really dedicated to getting my work done. And so I still have to make sure that I'm not working all day, because when you're at home, I mean, you can go and do the laundry. And you can go and--

JEN BAVRY: [INAUDIBLE] boundaries.

NICOLE: Yeah, so that was hard for me to-- because then I was working extra at night, versus during the day, so I really had to set boundaries for myself. But I still, I go on walks. I take my dog for a walk at lunch.

I make sure to go do laundry if I'm starting to not be focused. Instead of continuing to work, I know that I need to check in with myself and think, OK, to get re-focused, I need to go do a thing of laundry and get back to work. I'm just very aware of my self-care, because I had such a horrible last year, that I never wanted to go back there.

JEN BAVRY: Wow, yeah. So tell us a little bit more about, so it sounds like you guys were-- so are you still in a school setting? Are you still-- OK, so--

NICOLE: No.

JEN BAVRY: No? OK.

NICOLE: So I work for the Kansas State Department of Education. And I work for a grant-funded project called TASN, Technical Assistance Support Network. And I work for the project under TASN called ATBS, which is the Autism and Tertiary Behavior Supports team. And we provide technical assistance, which is consultation or coaching, to schools around the state.

And schools can-- we call it our big blue button on our website. And they can, it says, request assistance. And so then we can provide consultation or coaching to teachers for specific students or for programs to help restructure and things like that. So we work from home.

And then we travel to those schools and provide assistance. And then we also do state trainings for [INAUDIBLE] teachers for anybody in the state of Kansas. And so one of my trainings that I'm doing this coming year is on self-care.

SIMON BUEHRER: That's through Lee Stickle, right?

NICOLE: Yes--

SIMON BUEHRER: [INAUDIBLE]

NICOLE: --Lee Stickle is my wonderful boss. She was one of our--

JULIE SHORT: She's awesome.

NICOLE: She was one of the keynotes.

SIMON BUEHRER: She was keynotes yesterday.

JEN BAVRY: [INAUDIBLE] So this training that you're developing, why? Why did it come to be? Why is this something that's important that you feel is important for you to be able to provide?

NICOLE: Sure, yeah. So it was my idea I brought to Lee. And I approached her that this is a need for our state. So my position is to work with the schools that have the most aggression in the whole state.

So thank god I work from home, because I mean, that is just, you know, it's stressful to be in situations like that. So I get to remove myself. And so that's really, I think, been a huge key for my self-care.

But in the schools I'm in, teachers are worn out. And I did their job. You know, I worked in settings like that. I did it for 20 years. So I understand. I understand that. So I can tell. I could see in their faces. I can see in their responses to behavior that--

JULIE SHORT: Excuse me, how it impacts kids?

NICOLE: Absolutely. And it's just this vicious cycle. And I could see it every day.

So I approached her that, I mean, half the teachers in one of my schools are on waivers, an alternative licensing program. They absolutely have no self-care, because they're just trying to survive each day anyway, because they're new, and still learning.

JEN BAVRY: Probably just like 20 years ago or whatever as you were coming into the field, you had a mentor. So you did have somebody that could help support you in thinking about self-care. And so it would be great to offer that to these new employees that are coming in.

NICOLE: Yeah, so in addition to our training, we provide ongoing coaching. So we will, after we have our training, then we will coach them and can go into classrooms and help them. Part of the training is to have an implementation plan. And so we're going to follow up on their data and see how that is going and how they can make changes. Yeah, so it's an ongoing thing.

JULIE SHORT: Thank you, Nicole.

JEN BAVRY: Yeah, thank you very much.

JULIE SHORT: That's good information. And we wish you the best with the training that you're going to be providing soon, because we know it's important.

NICOLE: Thank you.

JEN BAVRY: Definitely. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

My goodness, keeping track of our time here. OK, anybody else like to share? Or even if it's somebody else's story that you heard, if somebody else inspired you, something else that you heard that, and you're like, OK, I really--

SIMON BUEHRER: You can tell somebody else's story.

JEN BAVRY: Yeah, tell someone else's story.

SIMON BUEHRER: You have poetic license.

JULIE SHORT: You know, I think a lot of us, when we think of self-care, some of us might define it as the pampering piece to that, where we'll go get massages, or manicures, or whatever it is that makes us feel good, because we all want that. But then there's a part of us that has that guilt of, well, you know, I shouldn't be going and doing that. I shouldn't be spending money on that. I don't have the time for it.

And we talked in our presentation yesterday about this pyramid effect and how the pampering is like the very top. But if we don't meet those basic needs of the foundational things that we need such as better sleep, taking care of ourselves, drinking enough water, eating food, nutritious food, healthy snacks, and those things, which I think that even Nicole has shared with us that she recognized that she wasn't taking care of herself. And it was affecting her work, her mental well-being. And so those are things that we really have to consider, because although we want to pamper ourselves, and I'm not saying you shouldn't, but there is other things that we have to be sure that we're looking into first.

JEN BAVRY: And that could even be a place where you start, I mean, making sure that every day you're eating a piece of fruit, or every day you are drinking a bottle of water, I think that just making sure that your foundation is strong and focusing on that. And then but I think it is treating yourself occasionally. If you can go get your nails done or something like that, and that brings you such happiness, then make sure you can include that wherever you can, if it's once a month, or if it's every three months, or something like that.

But I think it is important, and just making sure that you think about some of those things. And again, yesterday I shared, and I shared a little bit before we got started. For me, it's also been important to recognize that if I just make one change, one small thing and try to do that one thing every day or every other day, to me it's so much easier to make it part of my routine.

And it kind of comes back to having an opportunity to take a bath or just that kind of stuff. It's knowing that it's there. And I can do it. And it may not be an hour-long bath, which would probably be the best. But still, 10 minutes myself is great, and just having 10 minutes of quiet.

And just that moment to think and relax is enough. It really is enough. And then I can-- that's something I can do every day. I can put in 10 minutes every day to take a walk around the

block, or walk up to the grocery store, and then have a bit of stress at the grocery store, and then walk back, and relieve that stress from the walk.

But it's just, again, it's doable. It's something that's doable. And it works for me. That's the thing too, is it works for me. I think it's always important to find what works for you. So yeah, maybe taking that 10-minute walk is not going to be something that works for you, but maybe instead just taking a pause at your desk and taking a breath or two might be what works for you.

JULIE SHORT: You know, something else that's really effective and helpful for you is really looking into gratitude, trying to maybe send thank you notes or words of encouragement to coworkers or family members. Really taking that time, that's also part of self care, which, there is a lot of research that shows how gratitude can really help support a person's mental well-being. And so that's important as well.

And you were sharing earlier about you and Tony, your husband, who would take walks and find time in the day. And quite honestly, my husband Scott and I felt like we didn't even have that opportunity. So we started doing something that was a little different. And we would email each other or text each other like something that would make us laugh or smile, just so we're staying with that connection, because that was part of what we were missing. And we wanted to be sure we had that opportunity to do that, so those little pictures.

You know, I took a selfie of myself in the mirror. And he's like, seriously? But I mean, just to have that connection, to keep going, and the laughter, and it's important to do that. So for us, that was important for us to be able to do. So what about you guys? Does anybody else want to come up and talk with us? Thanks, Tina, for joining us.

JEN BAVRY: If you could tell us your name and your favorite candy bar?

TINA: OK, my name is Tina. And my favorite candy bar is probably a PayDay. I love PayDays. I like the peanuts.

JEN BAVRY: I like PayDays too. Those are [INAUDIBLE].

TINA: They're not good for me, but they're good.

JEN BAVRY: OK, so Tina, yeah, thank you for joining us. Go ahead, Jule, you can start this one.

JULIE SHORT: Sure, so tell us what you do, Tina.

TINA: OK, so I am the parent mentor for Columbus City Schools. And I have to say that my self-care is totally different than most people's, because I know a lot of people don't know, but a lot of people that know me know-- and I don't even know if you know. But 10 years ago, within 10 years ago, we had a house fire. And we lost everything in the house.

So I was so angry and so mad, but the foundation was still there. So probably two days into it when everything was gone, I was walking down the street, down our street, just to see the house. And the fire chief came up to me. And he said, are you Mrs. Walls?

And I was like, what do you need? Because you know, I'm all upset. And he was like, I just want to tell you something. And I'm like, OK. And he said, I know right now your life feels like it's over because you've lost every single thing, he said, but I need to tell you this. And I'm going to put stuff in perspective for you right now.

And I said, OK. And I'm thinking, yeah, sure you are. And he said, 10 minutes, 10 minutes more and your whole family would've been gone. He said, usually with this type of a fire, we're not talking to the people that own the house. We're talking to their family.

So sometimes what I do with self-care is I just sit for 10 minutes, like bring myself, if I'm really stressed, and go 10 minutes and think of all the things that are really good to me, and think, 10 minutes, that's a whole-- it would have been a whole different lifetime. And what I was saying is, I don't know if I'm allowed to say this, but I'm very into my religion the Lord.

So like, I even have a sign my bed that says, He's like, good morning, it's God. I'll be handling all your problems today, so don't worry. And that sign's right there. And I read it every morning. So I think that having that feeling.

And I have an autistic daughter, so that, for her to have to overcome that was huge. And I think that a lot of people, like, when they ask me, how are you always in such a good mood? Or how are you always-- and I'm like, because you don't know how precious life can be unless you live something that is totally beyond your control.

So I think that's what, if I would share anything, I would share that, just take that 10 minutes. And I was telling my friend, I said, 10 minutes is usually all I get him in the tub. I was like, but they know, don't knock on the door unless somebody is bleeding. No, mommy needs 10 minutes. But it's just that 10 minutes to take and go, you know what? I have so much to be

thankful for.

And I worked for the district in another capacity. And I always think to myself, I've seen all types of children. And I really am blessed with what God gave me or how I deal with my life, because there is a lot of people struggle struggling a lot worse than me.

So when I hear people complain, or-- I'm not saying everybody doesn't complain once in a while. But I'm saying if I hear people complain a lot, I just want to tell, like, you don't have cancer. Or you don't have a kid that could die. Or you don't have a kid-- or you're not starving.

And I just try to put life in perspective for them to say, you know what could be out there for you? And your mad because you don't hit the lottery? Or you're mad because you didn't get that extra ticket? You know, I just, I think it's-- you've got to get a grip on life to know. Just be kind. And be the best person you could be each day. That's just how I try to live life.

JULIE SHORT: Yeah, you're very thankful for--

TINA: I am very thankful. I'm very blessed.

JULIE SHORT: Absolutely, absolutely.

JEN BAVRY: And I really-- well, it was a very powerful story. Like, I'm still thinking about, wow, 10 minutes, yeah. It does--

TINA: You're right. You're like, I don't care about-- all that stuff could have been replaced. But your family, your dog even couldn't be replaced.

JEN BAVRY: Right, 10 minutes.

TINA: Yeah, 10 minutes. And I mean, I'm thinking when he said, I can put stuff in perspective for you, I'm like, I just lost everything I have. You can't put anything. And when he did that, I was like, you are so right. I was like, I can replace anything in that house, but I can't replace people. And just, you're just fortunate that you know-- like, I feel like I got a second chance to shine. And so that's why.

And I tell my kids that too. I tell them, you know, you guys don't-- especially when like 60% of some of the clientele that I worked with were medically fragile, so they had different abilities where they didn't have hands, so they had a right with their feet, and stuff like that. So I think that like even when Matt or my son would go to complain, I would-- he would say, my hands

hurt so bad. And I'm like, well at least you have hands. And he's like, whoa, OK. [INAUDIBLE] back up there. But I'm like, you don't-- don't always complain about what you don't have. Be thankful for what you do.

JULIE SHORT: I thought it was interesting, Tina, that you mentioned that 10-minute time frame and the importance of reflection time for you, that you would take that opportunity, whether it be the 10 minutes or whatever time you can do that to just think through some things. Can you tell us why that's so important for you?

TINA: I think the way I used to-- and I still am really hyper. But the way I was to go, go, go, go, go, go, go, go. And then it just felt like I never-- I was just like, I never felt like I gave enough. Or I would get bitter or mad about stuff that was beyond my control.

But then I think, after the fire-- and I had just started the school system. So I started reflecting on the things that mattered the most, your family, your religion, your friends, the things that things that people take for granted everyday, things that-- your life itself. I mean, you know, that movie this morning, it just got me, because I'm thinking to myself, when she hands a kid a book, I just wonder.

I just wonder sometimes how that kid reacts, because you come back, like, whoa I'm sorry. I didn't realize. And there is a lot of times where, see, since my daughter is 23, but she-- a lot of times people don't know until she starts to talk or until she'll say, mommy. And then they're like, wait, something's up with this girl. You know what I'm saying? Because autism sometimes, you can't, unless they're really, really-- like, she's high functioning, so they wouldn't catch it as much to say, oh, there is something going on there.

Anyway, she just had a bad experience at work. And like, I tried to explain to her, you just pray for that person. I said, because people don't-- and I think my son, the experience at work, it was just somebody hurt feelings really bad, a customer. But he was more mad.

And I told him, we have to stay united front. We have to tell her, no, no. We're just going to-- because the thing is, she could get mad and then be mad because she has this.

And but I don't want her to feel that way. I want her to feel like, you know what? If you put your mind to it, you could do anything. I was like, I love [INAUDIBLE].

I love it, because I can always-- you know, or Albert Einstein, or the people who've already had

autism. And I can go back to her and say, look, Allison, see what all these people, Benjamin Franklin, all these people have had some type of an autism. And look what they've accomplished. So don't think just because you have something going on just, because you have a different ability doesn't mean that you're stopped. You're just going to have to do it in a different way.

And like some of the people that call me are like, well yeah, but you know, my kid has a problem now. And now I'll never get this, and this, and this. And I'm like, yes, you're right. The dream is over-- no, the dream is not over, the dream is just different. And they're like, my dreams are over. No, they're just different dreams now.

I mean, you know, my main dream was my daughter first got to school, because she could hardly write, is just to write, I love you mommy. And when she did, it was, like, the best day of my life. You know, she was almost 6 before she did it. But you know, it's the little things that you have to put in perspective in order to be happy. I just, I think that we take advantage of that a lot.

JULIE SHORT: And that is self-care.

TINA: Right, that is self-care.

JEN BAVRY: That is self-care.

JULIE SHORT: Well, thank you.

TINA: You're welcome.

JULIE SHORT: Thanks for sharing that.

TINA: Thank you.

JULIE SHORT: We appreciate that. And I'm glad everything worked out for you.

TINA: It did. It was really good. And we're still in the house. It's the same.

JULIE SHORT: You just had to rebuild.

TINA: It's just had to rebuild, right.

JEN BAVRY: You had to rebuild about everything. So what words of encouragement would you offer others

to support them? You've kind of offered quite a bit already.

TINA: In a world where you can be anything, be kind. That's my main thing. That's what I tell people all the time.

JULIE SHORT: Because you feel good when you're kind to others.

TINA: Because you feel good. And you give someone the smile. Like, always smile. You guys have seen that contagious thing about the smile? I think that's one of the coolest things too, yeah. I mean, don't take it personally. Don't take on them. Just try to pray for them. Or make them-- you know, if you can make somebody happy, then try.

JULIE SHORT: Wonderful.

TINA: Yeah, a couple of things, sorry.

JULIE SHORT: Yeah, no, thank you.

JEN BAVRY: That's perfect. Thank you, Tina.

TINA: You're welcome.

JEN BAVRY: I did [INAUDIBLE].

[APPLAUSE]

JULIE SHORT: So we still have a little bit of time. Anybody else? Oh please, come on up, yeah.

ESTEE: I came in late.

JULIE SHORT: There is that name for earlier. I'm like, where is she at?

ESTEE: There was so many to decide between in this time frame.

JEN BAVRY: Oh, I know. Hi, Estee. Thank you so much for signing up for this one. I know, that's-- there are so many fabulous sessions--

ESTEE: There are so many.

JEN BAVRY: --so much to pick from, that I do appreciate you guys choosing this one.

ESTEE: I think it's a great concept. I mean, what better way to learn about self-care then from those who apply it themselves?

JEN BAVRY: From others, yeah.

JULIE SHORT: That's right. So will you start off and just tell us who you are and maybe tell us your favorite animal [INAUDIBLE]?

ESTEE: Sure. My name is Estee. I have a six-year-old on the spectrum. And I am the help desk coordinator at Milestones Autism Resources. My favorite animal is probably a chinchilla, because I could never have one. And I won't let my kids have one, because they're high maintenance, like me. So that's my favorite animal.

JEN BAVRY: OK, cool.

JULIE SHORT: We'll just start with, what does self-care look like for you?

ESTEE: Self-care for me-- I didn't know what it was up until probably a year ago. My son and I were very co-dependent. And I didn't realize that it was an issue or I was not caring for myself at all until I literally hit rock bottom. I could not go to the store by myself. I would not leave him in anyone else's care, because no one could do it like me. I knew best. I was mom.

JEN BAVRY: Right.

ESTEE: You know, dad couldn't. Grandpa couldn't. Grandma couldn't. He was with me all the time. And it took me my mental health, you know, compromising my own mental health for me to realize that there was really an issue and have-- seek out therapy, and have my therapist tell me, do you realize you're co-dependent on each other? Part of it is you. You're feeding into that.

Once I let go a little bit-- I had quit my job when he was diagnosed. That was it. That's what all of my energy was going to. I gave him everything that I had. And then you know, he started school. He didn't need me anymore. So what was I going to do with my time? What was I going to do?

So I went back to work after not having worked four years full time. And for me, that has been self-care. Like, that's it. Like, I went back to work. That's what I do for me. I feel productive. I feel like I'm giving back to my family. I feel like I'm setting a positive example for all of them,

interacting with other adults. And it's still something that I'm passionate about.

JULIE SHORT: Can you tell me what you do in your job?

ESTEE: Sure, absolutely. So I work at Milestones, which, it's an autism resource center in Cleveland. I'm the help desk coordinator. So families who are looking for resources, whether they just got their diagnosis or they are looking to connect with an occupational therapist wherever they are in the state, we do our best to connect them with evidence-based resources that are vetted by us, make sure that they accept their insurance, hopefully try to find resources that don't have a giant waiting list, and just get them connected with those services, just give back to the community. And I think we're all really tied into it together and help in any way that I can.

JULIE SHORT: So the help desk, you help people--

ESTEE: I help people.

JULIE SHORT: --but it helps you.

ESTEE: It helps me.

JULIE SHORT: Because you get to help those people.

ESTEE: Yeah.

JULIE SHORT: And so that's what self-care looks like for you.

ESTEE: Absolutely, you know, that's my purpose. And I go home feeling great about it at the end of the day.

JEN BAVRY: And that's wonderful, because yeah, again, who would have thought work, work would have been your self-care?

ESTEE: I know. I know. Getting out of the house every day, even the car ride to and from by myself-- my day is a lot more busy, but it's good busy. It's productive busy.

JULIE SHORT: It gives you another sense of thinking. You know, it's not like you're just focused on that one thing, that autism and my family. But yet, I can look at other things and help other people. And so it gives you a different direction, because sometimes we get so absorbed into our-- those negative things that are happening in her life, that it's very difficult to see the positive things too.

- JEN BAVRY:** Well, and again, you get to use your experiences and things that you've learned to help others who are just starting out or don't know what direction to go. So you're actually also helping provide self-care to those families that are calling this help desk, giving them some tips on what they can do. So it's wonderful.
- ESTEE:** Absolutely. Yes, I love to be able to share my compassion that I have. And sometimes it's really just another person on the other end of the phone that needs to listen to you for five minutes about what's going on. And I love to be that.
- JULIE SHORT:** That's great that you've got that opportunity with work. But do you have any other opportunities outside of work, some friends or relationships?
- ESTEE:** I do. So it's nice, because I had a hard time leaving my children. So I've developed a little bit of independence. And so have they. So you know, it's great to stop somewhere after work. I don't feel that rush to rush home. And I'm already out of the house anyways. And leaving the house is half the battle. It really is. So once I'm out of the house, it's great to stop for dinner with friends, and get to go out to lunch with friends. And then, you know, I have that extra money to do that. So if I have to set at Target for diapers and I'm there for two hours, so be it.
- JEN BAVRY:** I've heard others have gotten lost at Target. It does seem to be like an oasis.
- ESTEE:** There is a Starbucks in there. It's meant for you to hang out a little awhile.
- JULIE SHORT:** That's good. And you're not feeling guilty about it.
- ESTEE:** I don't. No, I don't. And you know, they also, my kids also get the benefit of me not being home with them all the time, because I have an opportunity to recharge. So just taking that positive spin on it and being a better person for them and for myself, it's been huge. It's been life-changing.
- JEN BAVRY:** Oh my gosh, that's wonderful. Now I'm inspired.
- JULIE SHORT:** So you're, it was what-- I think you said your son was six when you realized this, right?
- ESTEE:** Mhm.
- JULIE SHORT:** Which is a young age.

ESTEE: Yeah.

JULIE SHORT: So for families that are just receiving a new diagnosis of something going on with their child, what advice might you give them to inspire them to reach out there, and do other things, and seek outside help? Or what would you recommend?

ESTEE: I would recommend building the best team that you can. But the team isn't just for your child. It's for you too. Build those support systems.

One of the best, when my son first his diagnosis, the best analogy that I ever heard was, don't go to an empty well for water. So find those wells that are full of water. And go to it. And whenever you need to replenish and recharge, use that.

It's OK to take care of you too. That's a big, big piece of it. They do. And they need you. They need you to be there, and be well, and do the things that you need to do. So that's my best advice. And don't wait.

JULIE SHORT: Don't wait.

ESTEE: Don't wait on it, no. No, just do it today.

JULIE SHORT: Absolutely.

ESTEE: Do it now.

JEN BAVRY: Start right now, yup.

ESTEE: It's a great time.

JULIE SHORT: Good for you.

ESTEE: Thank you.

JULIE SHORT: Good.

You. Viewing.

JEN BAVRY: Well, thank you for joining us.

ESTEE: Of course, yeah.

JEN BAVRY: This was wonderful.

ESTEE: Thank you. I had such a great time.

JEN BAVRY: That's great.

JULIE SHORT: Cool, good. OK, what time we have?

JEN BAVRY: We've got about 15 minutes.

JULIE SHORT: OK, anybody else want to come up? And you can even flip it around. If you want to ask Jen and I questions so we're not putting you on the spot--

JEN BAVRY: Oh, that's interesting.

JULIE SHORT: --you can do that.

JEN BAVRY: There you go.

JULIE SHORT: It's up to you. Or Simon. We'll corner you, Simon. What do you do for self-care?

SIMON BUEHRER: What do I do?

JULIE SHORT: Yes Simon--

JULIE SHORT: Yeah, what do you do, Simon?

JEN BAVRY: --what do you do for self-care? Oh, come on up. Thank you. OK, well, let's get started. All right, your name, and I am going to ask you what's your favorite month?

MICHELLE: Oh my gosh. Man, I mean, I couldn't get, like, candy bar or something? My name is Michelle. And my favorite month is June, because it's summer. And it's my birthday. And it's my anniversary. And I think my husband has, like, a birthday in there somewhere.

JEN BAVRY: That seemed pretty easy to come with.

MICHELLE: But that's a great month. Yeah, it's my very favorite.

JEN BAVRY: Well, thank you for taking this leap here and sharing with us about self-care. So what is your self-care journey look like?

MICHELLE: Well, I'm fairly new to self-care, because I was always the person that thought, like, the more I

do, the better. Like, I have to be doing something all the time or I'm not productive. You know, if I'm not going straight from work, to an activity, to home to cook dinner, to bed-- like, I can't have downtime. I should be doing something in that time.

So for me, it's fairly new. I'm still working through it. But something as simple-- like through my day, I'm very lucky that my husband takes our kids to school in the morning. So like, I love to blare my music in the morning on the way to school. Like, I'm obsessed with the *Hamilton* soundtrack, so I just kind of-- you know, they probably look at me pulling in like, ooh, I don't know about that.

JEN BAVRY: I don't think you're the only one.

MICHELLE: OK, good.

JEN BAVRY: I think you're good.

MICHELLE: No, I get there early though. That way no one sees me.

JEN BAVRY: Are you singing for us?

MICHELLE: No. No, no, see, I'm cutting back on things. I'm learning to say no. But that, and then I have a fantastic, fantastic group of people at my school that, I mean, just, I know that I can go to any of them at any time, and say anything, or do anything, or make a joke that is not even funny, and they will just be there.

So that really gets me through my day, because I know if I'm having a bad morning, I can meet up with them at lunch. Or if I'm having a bad afternoon, I can just pop in and say, just listen to this.

So having that support system at school-- I know that's so cliché, but that's, like, the biggest thing, because I spend more time with them than I do my family sometimes. So they've become part of my family. But a big part of it for me too was I teach.

I'm in my eighth year of being an intervention specialist. So that has its own stresses and craziness. And then I coach high school volleyball. I sit on three committees. And I'm involved with Special Olympics, so--

JEN BAVRY: So yeah, you're not busy at all.

MICHELLE: Well, and, I mean, I really have had to, like, decide what's most important. And that was a hard decision, because everything is important to me. I mean, I don't want to say no to anything, but I really had to look at what can I cut back on to make sure I'm OK.

JEN BAVRY: And that's wonderful that you recognize that, because sometimes that's the hardest thing to do first, is just trying to figure out, where can you say no, and recognize, and giving yourself permission to say no, because that, giving permission, can be [INAUDIBLE].

MICHELLE: And that's hard. I mean, because like I said, I feel like, and I think we all do, like we could be doing more. We could always do more for our kiddos. We could always do more for our family. We could always-- sure, I'll take on an extra responsibility, an extra duty at school. But I mean, at some point, you have to recognize that you have to step back. And it's hard. It's really hard. But I'm getting there.

JULIE SHORT: And I have to ask you, have you ever felt like on your downtime you don't know what to do with yourself?

MICHELLE: Yes, I do. And I'm still struggling with that. Because I feel like as I've started cutting things out, I'm at home more. And I have two young-- I mean, they're 9 and 11, but they're young.

And I feel like when we're just sitting at home, I almost feel guilty, like, what should I be doing? I mean, there are no dishes to wash. There is no laundry. But I just feel like I shouldn't be just sitting here. I should be doing something productive.

So I'm still learning to work through that, as I say no to things. Like, OK, we can just sit here and watch TV. This is really weird, but we're going to do it. But yeah, it really is a big struggle to just to just learn to take that time for yourself.

JULIE SHORT: And when you do have that time for yourself, what does it do for you, like, mentally, and physically? And how do you feel?

MICHELLE: When I got past that little hump feeling like I'm not being productive, or I'm being lazy, or whatever, I mean, it was like I was a whole new person. I mean, I was invigorated. Even if I just sat for a half hour on the couch with my feet up and just didn't do anything, then I would get up. And I'm like, oh my gosh, I have energy to do anything else, because my mind was better. You know, I felt more rested, like even just that little space of time.

JULIE SHORT: Absolutely.

JULIE SHORT: So teachers are busy here. You are exceptionally busy. I mean, there is a lot going on. And you have a lot on your plate. What advice might you give someone, an educator, maybe one small simple step to take for them to make a change in their journey with self-care? What advice might you give them?

MICHELLE: I will admit, I do not live by this advice. I think it's fantastic advice. And I would love to be able to implement it for myself. I'm just not there yet.

JULIE SHORT: That's OK.

MICHELLE: But I read something one time that said, do one small thing today. And then tomorrow, do two small things, kind of like what you were talking about earlier. If you're talking exercise, walk one lap around the track today. Tomorrow, do two. Drink one glass of water. Tomorrow, drink two, you know, just always taking those small steps to improve. Even if you maintain, don't go backwards. Let yourself keep moving forward, so just taking those little steps every day.

JEN BAVRY: And I know, and to add to that, I know I've heard, it's also just focus on today. Don't worry about what you're going to do tomorrow. Focus on today. And if you can check the box that you did it today, reward yourself for doing that.

MICHELLE: Just get through today sometimes.

JEN BAVRY: And then the next day, you say, OK, today I'm going to do this. And that's all I'm focusing on. Because I think it is-- you start thinking about all these things you need to do going forward. And then you lose track of that moment of what am I going to do right now.

MICHELLE: Yeah, and that's-- I mean, I struggle with anxiety. And I've had to learn. I mean, that's, like, a teacher with anxiety who does all the things, that was a horrible combination of things. So I actually have started making a list. I'm a list maker in my anxiety. And I write down the things that need to be done right now, the things that can be done sometime this week, and the things that are just on the horizon that need done.

And so then I can just focus on, like, you know, and I have to-- that makes me have to mentally prioritize those things and say, you know, that doesn't have to be done right the second. It's OK. That can be done later this week. But today, these things are non-negotiable. They have to be taken care of. And it gives me that priority in my mind that I don't have to tackle that whole list today.

JULIE SHORT: Yeah, you know, someone once told me-- and I thought this was great advice-- we often make to do lists, things we have to get done. But you should look at making those accomplishment lists. What is it in my day that I accomplished today that went really well? And list those things instead of a to do list sometimes.

JEN BAVRY: You know, I actually had a neighbor who did that. She would just, instead of creating her to do list, at the end of the day, she'd write down everything she did. And she'd check it off. It was her way of saying, look at all I accomplished, instead of putting that list together first thing of the morning, she did it at the end. And she was able to quickly go and mark them all. So yeah, I like that.

JULIE SHORT: Thank you, Michelle.

JEN BAVRY: Yes, thank you for sharing.

JULIE SHORT: You did awesome.

MICHELLE: Thanks.

JULIE SHORT: My goodness, you're a pro.

MICHELLE: I can't take on anything else though, guys. I'm learning to say no. So I can't--

JEN BAVRY: OK, well I have one more question for you though.

MICHELLE: OK.

JEN BAVRY: Any words of encouragement that you'd like to share?

MICHELLE: Just you know, I know everyone who works in education knows that we are making such a difference every single day. But that's the hard thing, too. That's the hardest part. Like, just know that what you do makes a difference, but at the end of the day, leave it there and go home. Like, go home to your-- I know it carries over. I know we're all guilty of that, myself included. Like, you know, but at the end of the day, just know that you did what you could do. And pick it back up tomorrow. But when you go home, just focus on that.

JULIE SHORT: Focus on you. Yeah, excellent. Thank you.

JEN BAVRY: Wonderful. Thank you.

JULIE SHORT: Thank you. Good job.

[APPLAUSE]

We just have a few more minutes.

JEN BAVRY: I want to give them to do evaluations too.

JULIE SHORT: Yeah. David, I'm glad you could join us.

DAVID: I know. I was trying to bounce between multiple workshops.

JULIE SHORT: Oh, I know. It's hard to choose things.

DAVID: There were so many to choose from. [INAUDIBLE]

JULIE SHORT: Yeah. We're talking about self-care, David. Is there anything you'd like to share with us?

DAVID: So as far as self-care goes, one of the things that's important to take into consideration is personal hygiene and making sure that you are relatively free of body odor and bad breath. It's good to do a self-check in the morning, have a list of things you need to do, such as deodorant, hop and do a shower. Did I brush adequately? Did I use a tongue scraper to remove bacteria on the surface on my tongue? Did I use the Listerine this morning?

Take a look at the mirror. Did I forget something? Did I forget to comb my hair? Did I forget to shave? So just take a look and see, if you're not happy with how you prepare today, there is a good chance people may be making comments about you behind their back. So just look at yourself and see, what do I need to do? Do I smell OK? Those kind of things [INAUDIBLE].

JULIE SHORT: Are there some supports, David, that you have had in your experience where that you maybe had to rely on for that support for self-care that you've used, maybe like a visual schedule, or a list, or anything? How did you do it?

DAVID: Not so much for those things, but I have used self-help books from the bookstore on dating advice and interpreting different language and body cues. Sometimes we'll be given nonverbal signals in a romantic situation. And it's up for us to decode them properly. It can be easy to misread those as flirting when they're intended to be anything but flirting.

So it's oftentimes easy to misinterpret flirting signals. And all those books helped to decode that into ways we can understand, and trying to decipher what someone's body language

really means. Are we being set up for a potential date? Or is just platonic and nothing more than friendship? So that's what I needed a little bit more training in. And some of these self-help books out there achieved that.

JULIE SHORT: Can I ask you a question? I'm wondering if there is something that helps you relax that takes away the anxiety. Is there something that you do, an activity that you do that helps you self-regulate?

DAVID: I love the smell of lavender oil, so having that handy is great. Massage is great too. So every now and then, we'll schedule a professional massage. Or even having a friend do it helps relax. And it's a destressor, and just being able to relax in a comfortable position and being away from an environment where there's a lot of unpleasant sounds. But those are the few things that come to mind in terms of distressing.

JULIE SHORT: Very good.

DAVID: And that's probably a reason why you'll see people with autism and Asperger syndrome carrying around yearbooks, magazines, calendars. Some of the images contained in those things help to relax a person. And when they stare at certain pictures in their yearbooks or magazines, that is a way for them to escape reality and for them to be at peace and feel calm.

JULIE SHORT: Sure.

JEN BAVRY: That's a wonderful point. Thank you for sharing that.

DAVID: You're welcome.

JEN BAVRY: Anything else you'd like to tell us about how self-care-- what self-care is for you?

DAVID: Well, part of self-care is learning how to live independently and having the right supports in place. And one of things that was helpful in self-care was being able to make gradual transitions. So for example, when I went from high school to college, I lived at home for the first year of college and then went to a dorm for the second year. That helped ease the transition a bit. And the college was local.

There are so many things on self-care that it's really hard to enumerate all of them. So being able to have control over how you appear, your clothing, your hygiene, and also take note of your finances. Make sure you're not spending beyond your means. Know how to balance your

bank account. And be aware of what your credit is, and what you're spending, and how much is coming in, and what's going out, and not to overspend. So don't take those things for granted.

SIMON BUEHRER: Can I ask a question? So David, you and your wife, Lindsay, have been here several times now to Columbus. But I don't know what the distance is. I think you fly, correct, from Virginia?

DAVID: Yeah, the flying is more practical, because it is a direct flight. And if we were staying for an extended period of time, driving definitely makes more sense. But since we're here for just a few days-- and it's a lot more comfortable to take a one hour and 15 minute plane ride rather than being in the car for seven hours.

SIMON BUEHRER: For so long, yeah.

DAVID: And the price was similar to if we had driven and perhaps stayed at a hotel overnight versus flying. The flights were about \$150 round trip. So it was very, very reasonable to do that.

SIMON BUEHRER: That's great. That's really great.

DAVID: But if there was connections involved, then you start thinking, is it practical to fly? Or is it practical to drive? But we have the option of a direct flight here.

SIMON BUEHRER: Sure. What I was going to ask you is, are there certain practices being away from home that help you and/or Lindsay with your self-care. So you're out of your traditional routine. You're out of your environment. You know, this place itself can be a pretty sensory assaulting place. You know, it's a bit cavernous. It's loud. It's noisy. It's confusing. People get lost. Are there things that you do when you're in environments like that to kind of help you find your center?

DAVID: Yes. When we travel-- that's a wonderful question, by the way. And I'm glad you asked it. When I travel, I like to take my Tempur-Pedic pillow with me, because I don't know what kind of pillow I'm going to have at the place I'm staying at. It could--

JULIE SHORT: You're so right about that.

DAVID: --be a thin and lumpy pillow and not provide adequate neck support. So I travel with a pillow that I invested over \$100 in. So I'm sure that I'm going to have proper head and neck support. And I always bring additional toiletries with me that I'm pretty sure would not be easily obtained at a hotel concierge or bed and breakfast that we attend to.

And having my noisemaker at night is also quite essential. And I don't know what kind of white noise or other type of soothing sounds I could get from just the hotel alone. So I bring my iPad with me that has a white noise app on it. I also have a machine that produces a white noise sound too. So those are my travel essentials and help me feel like I'm more at home and assure myself a better night's rest.

SIMON BUEHRER: Good, yeah.

DAVID: And then when coming into a venue like this, just seeing people I know is making me feel-- makes me feel more at home and more comfortable. If I'm in a world with everybody I don't know, then it's a little more challenging. But building on those relationships I've developed in the past and seeing them again is one of the real pleasures of attending conferences like this.

JEN BAVRY: Those are some great tips that you just shared. Thank you so much.

DAVID: Oh, you're very welcome. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak about this.

SIMON BUEHRER: Thanks, David

JULIE SHORT: Thank you.

JEN BAVRY: Thank you, David.

[APPLAUSE]

Yeah, we are right on time here. Thank you, guys, all for joining us. Hopefully you are walking away with some additional things to think about to help support you in your self-care journey.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

SIMON BUEHRER: Thanks, everybody.

JULIE SHORT: Have a safe evening. [INAUDIBLE]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

JEN BAVRY: Thank you for listening to this episode of *From My Perspective*. By sharing these stories, experiences, and perspectives, I hope you are inspired to take the first step to start a new habit or the next step as you continue on your own self-care journey. If you would like to learn

more about OCALI and its resources, please visit OCALI.org.