

Inclusive Beginnings: Black Experiences

Speakers:

Kevin McShan (Host of Let's Have this Conversation)

Christopher Rudder (Resource Consultant at the City of Toronto)

Nerissa Hutchinson (IECSS Research Assistant, Child and Youth Practitioner)

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KEVIN MCSHAN: Closing the equity gap for Black families with children with disabilities remains a thorny challenge and one where more conversation and tangible action needs to occur. It's under that lens that I present to you the fourth episode of Inclusive Beginnings, where we look at the treatment of Black children and their experiences in particular when it comes to navigating service delivery. Adding their voices to this conversation will include Christopher Rudder and Nerissa Hutchinson. Rudder currently serves as the only Black resource consultant in the City of Toronto. Meanwhile, Hutchinson serves as a Child and Youth Practitioner and therapist who has a daughter with a disability. Both of them bring a unique and insightful perspective to this critically important topic and our conversation was wide-ranging and comprehensive as it relates to leveling the playing field and making sure that we elevate and emphasize the need for increased attention, more resources, and the need to collaborate to make sure that Black families across the country with children with disabilities have equal access to an inclusive future. Fantastic, Christopher first and foremost I want to thank you for again agreeing to add your voice to this important and noteworthy project and we continue to look at how we can better include individuals with disabilities into societal life and children in particular. So, it's great to see you this afternoon, and thank you so very much for being here.

CHRISTOPHER RUDDER: Awesome, thank you so much for having me.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Chris, I wanted to start our conversation with simply you telling me about yourself and a little bit about your current role and career, and why you're interested in participating in this project and podcast today. So, tell me a little bit about yourself.

CHRISTOPHER RUDDER: Yeah sure so, um I'll start with my side hustles. My passions are travel so, I'm a travel writer and I have two websites that I do. One's called

roadtripontario.ca and it's all about local travel and the other one is Rudderless Travel and it's rudderlesstravel.com. So, those are my passions those are what I like to do. Sometimes this stuff spills into my other work in terms of you know being seen out in the world and stuff like that as a Black individual so, sometimes these things just cross but, that is my passion. Um, and then my full-time job that would be like my side gig, my side hustle and my full-time job is why we are here today. I am a Resource Consultant with the City of Toronto. I am the only male resource consultant in the entire City of Toronto and I am the only Black male resource consultant in the entire City of Toronto. So, that's its own little thing on the side but, what I wanted to do is quickly explain what my role is for those who might not understand. So, a resource consultant. Every licensed childcare centre in the City of Toronto has a resource consultant that's assigned to it and whenever they feel that there's a child that may require additional supports then they reach out to me. Education wise I have my Early Childhood Education diploma and I also have an Early Intervention diploma. So, once I get involved then I work with the teachers to provide some support and assistance in order to have that child or those children included into the regular program. So, some of the things that I do are, I do observations all the time so I'm constantly observing. I write a report every year about that covers all the areas of development from language to fine motor to gross motor to cognitive. Then I have access to additional services and agencies so, behaviour consultant for example, occupational therapist, psych consultation and the City of Toronto does provide childcare support funds, which I'll get into a little bit later, in order to help support the children, whatever goals and strategies they are working on in order to help that child be successful. So, that's in a nutshell. I mean, I do workshops here and there and I do support the families by attending sessions with them like if they're bringing their child to a speech and language session, I could attend that session and then come back to the childcare centre and coach and model those strategies for the staff but it really is a wholistic approach from the families to the childcare centre in order to get that child to where that child should be based on their developmental age as well as their actual age. So, that's in a nutshell my job.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Fabulous and tell me Christopher when we think about how to define inclusive thinking about Black and racialized children with disabilities, what comes to mind for you my friend?

CHRISTOPHER RUDDER: I think, in order to define inclusion when thinking about Black and racialized children we should actually start with a perfect world scenario [laughs]. I think that's the best way to get the ballpark or the bar that we should be setting. So, in a perfect world we actually wouldn't even be talking about this to be honest, right? In a perfect world, you know, if a child needs support then we support the child [laughs]. Whether it's with additional staff, whether there's no waitlist for services, streamlined services, no jumping through paperwork hoops, easy navigation of services for families, equity of services for marginalized and BIPOC, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour communities, no judgment or subconscious bias toward children, families, communities, or the teachers themselves, and no anti-Black racism. So, that's

essentially the bar that we need to set so, the question is where are we? [laughs] So, that's what I think about when I think about inclusion. I like to think about how it should be. These things should be natural we should be just working with children, including them, and it shouldn't be so complicated really, in essence.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Yeah, absolutely and Christopher tell me in your view or your opinion, what needs to happen to foster a more inclusive early childhood education and care system? (inaudible, 8:05-8:08).

CHRISTOPHER RUDDER: Oh gosh I hope we've got some time for this answer. Alright. [laughs] There are many pieces to this, but in a nutshell, let's start with the Early Childhood Educators. So, the ECE profession is a type of profession that takes a special kind of person. It's similar to nurses um, they get into the job because they love children. They know that it doesn't pay well. They know that it's hard work, but they also know that it's rewarding. Um, so I think people in general, society they're finally starting to realize the job is far more than just babysitting. Yet, their pay is generally not good or vastly disproportionate, uh, disproportionate to other professions, and in some cases, there's like a \$10-15 difference between actual ECEs in the profession, like with different agencies. So, we're underpaid on a large scale but then even different daycares have different payment structures. It's important to note that the economy would crumble without childcare. So, we all remember how challenging it was when we had to do meetings for our jobs when the kids were home during the pandemic so you know, that just goes to show you how important childcare is, and when speaking of the pandemic, um, in order for the nurses, doctors, and other healthcare professionals to do their job, they needed to make childcare an essential service. But ECEs are not treated or paid like an essential service. So, ECEs it's a largely female-dominated profession so there's a different argument to that as well. So, that's a different story for a different podcast but, inconsistent staffing really affects children especially when children have needs. This field and profession specifically is seeing a decline in ECEs applying for the job. So, that's a real big problem. We have inconsistent staff and that really affects children. So, I think first we need to pay ECEs better and equitable across the profession. I mean, you need a college degree to be an ECE. So, maybe we don't get paid the same as school teachers given their amount of required education, but we should be not that far behind from them. Given the current economic climate, like nurses like I mentioned, ECEs are also hard to find, and they are leaving the profession. So, we need to pay them properly. The second point is there needs to be more teachers in the classroom. The current ratio is based on typical functioning children. For example, the ratio for a preschool group is one teacher for 8 children. So, the average classroom size accommodates about 16 children. In most cases, there is no question that including children with needs, with typical developing children benefits the child with needs on many levels. We're talking language, special help- uh, self-help skills, fine motor, gross motor, turn-taking et cetera. But it also, it also benefits the typical children as well because it teaches them empathy, compassion, patience, and advocacy. However, depending on the child's needs and/or the number of children with needs in the program

it can become challenging. Not just for the teacher but the children with needs and the children without needs so, having another teacher would change the ratio and allow smaller numbers and better support for all. Now, granted as I mentioned off the top. The City of Toronto does provide a little bit of funding, which is called childcare support funds and it allows a teacher to hire additional staff to implement goals and strategies that we all design and work together on in their program but it's very limited. So, having a more permanent type of teacher would be great. When the childcare centre, and this is unfortunate, but when a childcare centre or a room has more children with needs that they can handle, then childcares start requesting families that are registering for child care to bring their children in for the initial interview so the childcare supervisor can get eyes on them and then unfortunately, some centres just do this to avoid having children with needs. But, essentially the point is that they're doing this because they don't want to have more children with needs in their program than they can handle. So, having more teachers would definitely help that. Some other pieces are shorter waitlists and more access to external services. While resources consultants like myself, like I mentioned off the top we have access to behaviour consultants and occupational therapists there is a waitlist. We also have access to speech and language pathologists once upon a time, but we don't have that anymore so that would be good to have. I think better bridging over various education levels it would be great, it would be more holistic- it would be great if we had more holistic communication and relationship with the school board and the childcare. For example, sometimes the child is going between both but the- sometimes the communication isn't going across both so that really creates problems. I think on ECE appreciation day the College of ECEs should have a conference to allow ECEs to learn the latest in child development programs, hear motivational speakers, and learn techniques et cetera. So, when we're talking about childcare specifically um, childcares are all centered around the ECEs. Right? Whether they are dealing with typical children or children with needs, it centres around the ECEs. I'm there to support them but they're there on the front lines doing the work so, we got to start with them first if we want to any kind of changes. If we're not paying them properly, if we're not supporting them then it creates an environment where people are miserable and people don't want to do their job and unfortunately, the children suffer whether it's through programming or through the lack of motivation so, we have to start with the ECEs.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Yeah, absolutely and Christopher tell me how do you think race and disability are interconnected when we talk about childcare and childhood education as well?

CHRISTOPHER RUDDER: Quite honestly, it's like a double-edged sword really. So, let's go back to children with needs for example. Just to recap let's separate them out for one second. So, you've got children with needs and then you've got children that are racialized or marginalized. It's like a double-edged sword so, first your children with needs, you've got underpaid teachers, teachers who are managing several children with various needs and behaviours, you've got no additional staff, long waitlists for services,

no streamlined services, jumping through paperwork hoops. I don't know if you've ever tried to navigate any of these government systems, it's almost impossible. So, there's a general notion that children with needs are too much work. Children with anxiety, behaviour, children with autism or ADHD, they get labeled as behavioural children by some childcares and schools and sometimes that follows them throughout their educational journey. Parents of children with needs are often treated different. For example, I've had several times where children with needs, the parents are asked to pick up their children earlier. Every once in a while depending on the need that can be a legitimate request but often it's because the teachers are overwhelmed. So, I mean that's just dealing with the children with needs side of things. Let's take a look at the Black children specifically, or racialized children. Now you know, in addition to everything I mentioned above, right? We've got some statistics. Statistics state that Black children, specifically Black boys are more likely to be called out, picked on, demitted, or expelled for the exact same behaviour of their white counterparts, right? And to make this worse we're seeing this play out in the policing and the prison system as well, right? This is connected to anti-Black racism playing out in all systems and institutions from the workplace to applying for a loan, a mortgage, credit, or rental property etc., which is also connected to subconscious bias, and leads to inequality of marginalized and BIPOC across all systems and institutions in addition to education so we're talking the health system, banks, prisons, policing. All of this of course is connected to the current and after effects of colonialization and subconscious- and then I wanted to talk specifically about subconscious bias. It's a very dangerous thing because while it can you know, it can be intentional it's often unintentional and typically learned from parents, friends, media, content, etc. So, things like and I'm just giving examples here. Things like Chinese people can't drive but they're all smart. Or, Black people are lazy, but they are good at basketball, rapping, being absent fathers, and being gangsters. So, these subconscious biases you know, they're embedded in our psyche even to the point where we even judge our own peoples. For example, if a Black person is interviewing for a position, they may overlook another Black person because they are thought to be lazy, knowing very well that they went through the same thing when they themselves applied for the same job. We even affect ourselves with these self-conscious biases. So, I could give a little example um, I went into a meeting with a family at a public school and I was meeting- this is called an IPRC meeting. It's just a meeting when the parent and the uh, childcare supervisor, maybe a childcare staff, myself because I'm supporting, and members of a school board we go into a meeting. I showed up to that meeting and you know, I sat beside the supervisor because I'm technically supporting the childcare centre. Now, the parent was white, but her child was mixed. So, when the principal- we're talking this is the vice principal of the school she came into the meeting and the first thing she says to me she said "Oh, it's so good to see fathers attending these meetings. It's so good to have the fathers here they are usually absent." I just thought like what, what is that? Right? Like so I had to kind of like you know, in a nice way kind of tell her off and let her know first of all I'm an educated professional. First of all, there are several fathers that are involved with their children so

why are you generalizing like that and second of all, like why would you assume just because I'm Black, that I have dreads that I must be a father out impregnating people? Like, I'm not even being looked at like an educated person like, I'm just looked at like as another father who just decided to bless us with their presence for this meeting. These kinds of things are dangerous because they just- I even had my City of Toronto badge on like I mean I'm a straight professional right? I mean it's just these subconscious biases so like after I kind of politely told her how I felt from that day on if she saw me in the hallway she's like "Oh, Mr. Rudder how are you doing?" like she was completely different from then on but, these are the kind of things that I'm talking about these subconscious biases that play out for people. So, it's a double-edged sword when it all gets compounded when you mix the issues with anti-Black racism in addition to special needs it's all compounded um yeah so, that's basically in a nutshell how those things interact. It really is a double-edged sword so it's just an extra burden, it's an extra problem, it's an extra issue for the families.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Yeah, absolutely, and Christopher I'm curious to ask you about what do you think needs to happen to foster a more inclusive environment for Black children and families who have a disability.

CHRISTOPHER RUDDER: I know it's hard, but we all need to unlearn our subconscious bias. We all have them, right? Some of them are thought of as to be good but, we all have subconscious biases. So, the first thing we've got to do is we've got to unlearn that. We can't have judgment or subconscious bias towards children, families, communities, religions, or the teachers themselves. So, it's the first thing we have to kind of, we have to remove. We've got to start thinking differently. My father put a whole bunch of subconscious biases on me growing up. Um, you know that Black people will have to work harder and it's true, some of these things are true [laughs] because we still need to work harder but, some of them are just not true. Specifically, with other cultures, right? So, we got to unlearn these things. We need to continue working towards eliminating anti-Black racism. That's a given. That exists everywhere still. There needs to be equity of services for marginalized and BIPOC communities and reduce the waitlist of services. Obviously, we're in a model where if you have money you can pay for the services that you need. But not everyone has the money so therefore you know, it would be helpful to reduce waitlists for services. There needs to be equity in employment for marginalized and BIPOC communities with the same qualifications as white people and absolutely no tokenism because I don't like that. I just want people to be hired are treated the same and be hired because they have the same qualifications. A lot of the parents I work with are working three, four jobs but meanwhile, they have an education, they were just overlooked because of you know, someone else that has a different skin tone applied for the same job. So, that kind of stuff needs to stop and that's directly connected to our subconscious bias. Um, and we need to pay ECEs better. We need to make it an essential service. I mean more teachers in the classroom to support children with extra needs, you know it's always going to be helpful for the children.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Yeah, absolutely and Christopher tell me about some of the broader challenges you still see in the system for Black families with children with disabilities. What are some of the challenges you're still seeing out in the field? What do you think needs to do, needs to happen rather for them to be addressed?

CHRISTOPHER RUDDER: Yeah, so everything that I talked about previously for sure. Um, everything I talked about from ECEs to subconscious bias to marginalization. All of these things need to be changed um, even little by little even just each of us start removing our subconscious bias you know and just get out of that funk. Right? Start with the small things we are able to change you know from a grassroots level but, eventually, the big change is going to have to come from the top because as we discussed, it's not just one person or institution. All of them affect each other to create challenges for Black children. Marginalized people in general tend to live in areas often underserved by services. So, if you take a look at services so we've got like services and institutions or systems rather so, these are basically all the areas that the government control when you really think about it. So, we've got education. Education goes from daycare, to school, to high school, to the choice of a college. I mean, if you are you know, from a marginalized community or you didn't apply for a college just because- or you didn't get into a specific college or school because of subconscious bias then that puts you at a disadvantage. If you're a child and you're getting kicked out of school and childcare from the education level, I mean that sets you up for a really bad road as you get older. We have a lot of concerns with guns and drugs and crime and things like that, so we need the children to be in school. When we talk about banking institutions. I mean we're talking about loans and mortgages um, there's been stories that I've heard of Black people, marginalized people you know, BIPOC getting turned down for loans, for mortgages, you know you want to go look at a house and people don't even want to show it to you. These are very real things that exist right now that are still happening so, I mean these are things we have to change. These are higher up in the food chain there. We've got policing. Policing is another thing I feel that we need to have a healthier relationship with police. We've got a bunch of people spewing about defund the police and this and that and should we have police in schools and those kinds of conversations and those are all conversations for another podcast and I personally will just leave it at, we as Black people have to have a better relationship with police. So, we need to stop having the subconscious bias towards them as that they all hate Black people and police need to have a subconscious bias change in terms of how they view Black people in terms of all Black people are crimes, all Black people are drug dealers, um, the minute they see Black people I'm going to pull them over, that kind of stuff. All that needs to change. We have to have a healthier relationship with the police, there's no question about that. The prison system. We need to start asking why we have more Black and Indigenous people in the prison system. That could be directly connected to education, directly connected to banking, directly connected to policing, and you've got to look at the healthcare system. As I've said before, if you have money, you can get whatever services you want. The rest are on long waitlists. I could give you an example, this is very real. During the pandemic, when they started providing

vaccines in pharmacies in the Rosedale area every pharmacy in that area had access to vaccination shots but, then you go to areas like Jane and Finch it was like one pharmacy for an entire like area. It's just like never equitable so, I mean the healthcare system you know, it needs to be more equitable and again, you need to pay nurses better. Um, and you know, we also have an unhealthy relationship as Black people specifically, an unhealthy relationship with the healthcare system just based on the past. Um, Black people and Indigenous people specifically have unhealthy relationship with healthcare. So, we started talking about getting vaccination shots, Black people were like I don't know about that, Indigenous people were like oh, I don't know about that like we don't trust. So, we need to have a healthcare system that it's connected to our history and (inaudible, 29:04) but we need to have a healthier relationship with the healthcare system. Um, and careers it's very simple. I mean we are always overlooked for jobs that we have the exact same qualifications for, for white people. That has to change because we need to have good jobs. Like parents and families can't be working three or four jobs when they have skills when they you know, if they're a lawyer if they're doing these things. They went to school they happened to get into the college and now they actually have a law degree but now they can't find a job as a lawyer so I mean these things are all connected to each other. All the systems they need to change they need to be updated and that's the bigger picture is all the systems need to be changed. That's, what we have to do um, because all of these systems directly and indirectly affect one another.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Absolutely and Christopher, as I wind down with you this afternoon, I'm curious to ask you if you had a final message you wanted to share or anything else you wanted to share with people about the importance of this project specifically, or any final thoughts on building equity and equality for children and families uh, Black families with disabilities. What are your final thoughts on the whole subject matter, my friend?

CHRISTOPHER RUDDER: I think um, I think for me I think um, as a person in this profession I think especially as a Black male in this profession, I always believe that its really important to you know if you can see me, you can be me. I think that's extremely important so the more that Black youth and Black kids can see me in a profession that's respected and not outside dealing drugs or doing crime or something like the more that people can see that then it gives them an option. I believe that's almost like a secondary calling for me is that, is that when people see me out there it just shows a lot. It shows that you know, Black males are good with kids. They can make good father figures; they can do other jobs other than what our subconscious bias tells us that they are supposed to be doing. Um, that they don't have to be basketball players, they don't have to be rappers um, they can be educated and have other jobs um, a respected job and I think that it really is our job and I know it's a lot of work but we as Black people, myself, yourself, it's really important that we make time to give back in these kinds of conversations because it's up to us to help move the needle forward. I mean we've been dealing with this stuff for years now I mean um, and we're getting- we're having success but it's ever so slow. So, we need to continue to move this forward and that

means making time to do things like this, like being a guest on a podcast or you know, maybe people might have questions. Like, maybe a white person might have a question like, don't get frustrated. Just answer just talk to them you know; we have to make ourselves available. I'm not saying that we need to do it twenty-four-seven because it does get tiring but, we do need to make ourselves available and do our best to move things forward. I think that's our responsibility. If you want to see change you need to be the change. Right? The last thing I will say is to people that are in hiring positions um, you know, try to remove the subconscious bias and try to just hire people based on their skills. You know, you want your workforce to be diverse, but you don't want it to be diverse because of tokenism. You want it to be diverse because people actually have the skills. People that are all different cultures have the skills for the job, so you know, look at their skills and make your work environments diverse that way. So, just take the time, take a second to look at people's work skills and try to hire that Black person instead. If you already have that white person if there are a lot of white people there, hire that Black person if they have the skills. Don't do it because you need to have one. Do it because they actually have the skills. I think lastly in terms of the news you know, we're hearing all this crime and violence and things like that, I think we as Black people have to have a better relationship with the police. I think that's really important. It's even hard for me, like sometimes when I'm driving I get nervous maybe that a police car is behind me I feel like oh they're going to pull me over and I have to kind of like self-talk myself into saying you know what you have your drivers license, you own your car, like don't worry about it you're not doing anything wrong but, I'm just saying this is how we feel sometimes so, we got to try to get past that and start you know, being-we need to do our part, the police needs to do their part, we definitely have to have a better relationship with the police. So, those are just some of the things that I think are important to me that I feel that I would definitely want to end with.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Well, Christopher I want to commend you for the good work that you do and advocating on behalf of Black families and children with disabilities. It's an ongoing discussion that needs all of our attention and I want to thank you for engaging in conversation with me this afternoon on this most important topic. It's always great to see you and thanks so much for being here.

CHRISTOPHER RUDDER: Honestly, thank you. Thank you so much for having me and anytime you want to have more discussions, you let me know. I'm here.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Tell me, Nerissa, why is it important for you to be involved in this project at large?

NERISSA HUTCHINSON: Um, for me being involved with this project and what this project is doing, having a child with a disability, she's autistic, and having to navigate a lot of these systems, I want to be- to have a voice and also a support for other families that are navigating the same systems and just get a bit understanding as to what we're experiencing. It's so important. It's a system that is so um, difficult and challenging at times to navigate and to understand. So, for me, I feel it was very important to be a part

of this in support of my daughter and other individuals and families who are also going through the same thing as I am.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Absolutely and Nerissa tell me, how do you define the word inclusion? When we think about inclusive thinking for Black and racialized children, what comes to mind when you think about the disability angle as well?

NERISSA HUTCHINSON: The word inclusive. Um, for me it means being included, being a part of, being accepted, being- things are easy. That for me, that's what it means. As a Black individual, with a Black child navigating the system and you know, I can't speak for everyone but basically, from hearing from other individuals, it's not as inclusive as we would like it to be. There are barriers. Um, and these barriers are very difficult to maneuver and to understand and it's very frustrating because working with and hearing from other families in a similar boat as I am, you just get exhausted. You get tired, you quit. You need the support, you need the help, but it's not always as inclusive as we would want it to be or as it's made out to be. So, I think- I believe that it's very important that we work to break down these barriers in support of Black and racialized families and to getting access to these supports and services.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Yeah. So, Nerissa building on that point, tell me what do you think needs to happen to foster a more inclusive early childhood education and care system? What do you think are the steps that need to be taken in that regard?

NERISSA HUTCHINSON: I believe the steps that need to be taken first and foremost is the parents need to be included. I think- I also believe that the parent's input on these systems are very, very important along with the individuals having to navigate these systems. Sometimes, from my own experience, these systems are set up without the parent or the individual with that said disability being included or even being a part of the decision so, you're going into these systems or into this so-called inclusivity you're having to now work at getting an understanding as to what your needs are because the system is set up and you are having to navigate the system that may or may not be designed for you or for your child.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Yeah, absolutely and Nerissa tell me, how do you think race and disability are interconnected when we talk about early childhood care and education? How do you think those two things are interconnected?

NERISSA HUTCHINSON: Um, wow. Um, race [laughs]. It's interconnected because for one thing, I find being a racialized individual or racialized family, that's an extra barrier that you're having to deal with. The system is not- it's another layer you have to deal with. It's a disability, you're racialized, the intersectionality of all of that makes you kind of invisible and so, it's having to fight and having to work at being visible, to be seen, having a voice, speaking up and it's exhausting. It's tiring um, and so it's race and disability is very challenging. It's a lot more work has to be done. It has to be inclusive it has to be culturally relevant and also having an understanding where we're seen and where others like us are at the forefront as support and guide. So, it's race and disability

is a very challenging issue because it's another intersectionality as a racialized person that you have to deal with among other things.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Yeah, absolutely and you know, Black children with disabilities face unique challenges more than-

NERISSA HUTCHINSON: Yes.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Than their non-Black counterparts. So, tell me, what do you think needs to happen specifically for Black children to feel more inclusive as it relates to living as fully inclusive societal life as a Black child with a disability? What do you think needs to happen then?

NERISSA HUTCHINSON: First and foremost, we have to be seen, be heard, be understood. The system has to be culturally relevant and inclusive and in a lot of cases it's not. So, you're having to adapt to the system that is not designed for you. Again you- for me, from my own experience is having to and I'm breathing out but it's having to, I feel for me it's explaining yourself over and over and over again about your needs. Being there's that lack of trust. Are you telling the truth? It's like, as Black individuals we present differently. So, when we present ourselves with a disability, it's not at the same level as our white counterparts in how we are perceived and how we're seen and so therefore, in a lot of cases in my own experience because of how my daughter presented herself, how I presented myself we were not believed. We- it took a long time to get access to services and access to care because of how we present and so, it's very important that there's a deeper understanding working with racialized families, how they present, how they deal with um, disabilities, how trauma intersects with that and how we- it's very important that we have culturally relevant care and understanding of what our needs are and what and how and what we need really. Also, we need more representation because I think, and most importantly education. We need education.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Yeah, and so, building on that point Nerissa, I'm also curious to get your definition of equality and equity for Black families. What do you think the new definition of that is?

NERISSA HUTCHINSON: You know, I- treated fairly? I find that it's- equity is used a lot without a framework. Or, without an understanding of what that actually means. Um, and I think it has to be defined, it has to be explained, it has to be relevant, and it has to be culturally relevant because it's used a lot, but I don't think it's clearly understood what that is supposed to mean and the impact that has on racialized families.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Yeah, absolutely, and Nerissa out of personal curiosity because I'll share just a little bit about myself. So, I as you know was born with Cerebral Palsy and you know, getting out sometimes from a social perspective isn't the easiest if I don't have support staff available. So, I'm curious to get your thoughts on the value of building what I call social capital for children with disabilities and how important is it for

parents and their other support system allies to build a sense of social capital around children with disabilities in order to grow. So, how big do you think that is?

NERISSA HUTCHINSON: That is big because as a family you carry the burden a lot of burden and um, you know um, your child in the moment but also in the future and you're constantly looking ahead of what your child's needs are. You know? They're in elementary school, then they move on to high school. As they grow, there's different care and supports that are needed and in a lot of cases, a lot of that falls on the parents to provide that and to have to pay for those services and so, it's very stressful and you're child grows up and they're moving from high school to college or university or moving into a job and then, the supports that they get when they are younger, a lot of that stops and my biggest issue is disability doesn't end at 18, you know [laughs]? It's- and whose idea was it that we cap um, that we put a cap on these things I mean in fact in most cases there's more support that's needed and there's more- it becomes more because your child is older and as a parent, you're not- you're now an adult they're now able to take care of themselves but a child with a disability it may not be that simple and so now, a lot of the burden goes on to the families and a lot of the cost goes on to the families. So, um, you're now having to pick that up and a lot more supports may also be needed for your child. So, a lot of the burden goes on to the family so it's very, very important things are not capped or the mentality around disability and aging we need- there's a better understanding. That needs to change.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Yeah absolutely and Nerissa I have a few a couple of questions left for you and the first one has to do with we talked earlier about the value of collaboration and really putting together an early sort of list of resources for families to tap into but, I'm curious if you had any extended thoughts on the value of collaboration and really the importance of sharing resources and communicating amongst the community. How big do you think that is?

NERISSA HUTCHINSON: First and foremost, it's very, very important that when we're sharing resources, they are relevant. When you're sharing resources, it's geared toward your needs. So, you as the parent is not left to okay let me go through this one, let me go through that one, which is what I had to do to find care. The community should be geared towards your needs and the needs of the families, not just here's a list of resources, congratulations go figure it out. It becomes so much more stress and work for you to have to- community should mean relevant community care, not just community care or support but it's not relevant it's not geared toward you. It's like giving an individual information about one disability but that family's need doesn't match. So, you're still left with nothing or having to try to figure it out.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Yeah, absolutely and you know, Nerissa my final question for you this afternoon has to do with what brings you the most hope when we talk about the future of inclusive education for Black and racialized children. We talked a lot about the challenge- challenges rather that are presented but I'm curious about what brings you the biggest amount of hope moving forward?

NERISSA HUTCHINSON: You know, what's given me the greatest amount of hope is finding organizations that are like Black organizations, that are dealing with disabilities and these organizations are working hard at making it easier. For example, I'll give an example of an organization, The Black Parent Support Group. You know, I was frustrated I did not know where to turn and one day I'm reading the newspaper saw this organization and went oh my god, here's a Black organization I must contact them. Being a part of that community, listening to other families, realizing that I am not alone and that other Black and racialized families are experiencing the same thing as I was going through and am going through and it was that sense of relief. Okay, so it's not just me. I'm not alone but, not only that the group works very hard at ensuring that the supports, the resources, the services, the community, the connection. The connection is so important. Where we can come together, share ideas, share stories, listen it's- they're a support system. That gives me hope. That is my hope.

KEVIN MCSHAN: Absolutely, well Nerissa, I want to thank you for participating in this podcasting series on this most important project as we look toward the future of inclusive education for Black children with disabilities and I want to thank you for your first-hand account and for joining me this afternoon. It's most appreciated.

NERISSA HUTCHINSON: Thank you very much, Kevin. I really appreciate it and thank you so much for creating this platform for us to share our stories.

KEVIN MCSHAN: In the fifth and final episode of Inclusive Beginnings we will take a deeper dive and a closer look at where this project is going, where it's been, and where it hopes to make it's most tangible impact moving forward into the future by sitting down and having a conversation with Kathryn Underwood, the Project Director at large and Negin Zarifian who will also add her voice to this important conversation. Zarifian serves as a professional learning consultant for Affiliated Services for Children and Youth, who will provide a front line perspective on what she's seeing out in the field as she attempts to close the gap of inequality for Black and racialized families with children with disabilities. There's plenty of comprehensive and quality information and conversation in our final episode in this series which, you cannot afford to miss. I'm Kevin McShan and I'll see you next time.

END OF TRANSCRIPT (52:45)