

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Welcome to *Inspiring Change* from OCALI, our forum of stories and connections from our ongoing work of inspiring change and promoting access for people with disabilities. I'm Simon Buehrer.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**SARAH BUFFIE:** What does stress mean and how might we start to create some practices to not fix the pandemic-- that's outside of all of our hands-- but some practices to come back to a regulated state. And that's our work and that's what we're being invited to lean into right now.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**SIMON BUEHRER:** OCALI's office is closed on March 18, and we started to work remotely from our homes. Like so many of you, we're trying to sort through and figure all these things out. It's a mountain of change to deal with all at once.

School is suspended, kids are at home. Parents are scrambling to manage work life, home life, school life all under one roof. Workers are trying to juggle remote tasks and conference calls and virtual meetings from a spare bedroom, a kitchen table, the basement. And that's if they're lucky enough to still have a job. Schedules are disrupted, as are routines and habits. There are limits on where we can go and what we can do and the need to adhere to this new practice we're all learning called social distancing.

And we haven't even talked about the impact of the disease itself. People are getting sick and dying. There's a lot of uncertainty, chaos, stress, and anxiety as we all try to work through these sudden, new, unknown, and continuously changing dynamics.

So we're starting a new series of *Inspiring Change* podcast episodes that focus on the impact of all the challenges and difficulties we're rapidly absorbing and experiencing in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. We're calling it "Voices, Visions, and Victories." We start with voices. We need to hear directly from each other. Now more than ever, it's important to share

individual stories and connections to real moments and touch points, professionally, personally, as members of a community.

Besides, it's a really good time to take a walk or sit outside and just... listen. We'll look at different visions. How do we view and see the changes and challenges all of us are experiencing right now? We'll look at the impact on real lives and the structures, programs, and systems that we've developed and implemented to support those lives.

And we'll highlight victories. We need to celebrate and experience and distill ourselves in warm and wondrous moments, while we keep our collective spirits up, and our momentum moving towards better days. In this ongoing series, we're going to reach out to different experts and leaders and families and self-advocates to hear their voices, see their visions, and share in their victories. We start today with my guest Sarah Buffie, founder of Soul Bird Consulting in Cincinnati. Hey, Sarah.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Hey, Simon.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Sarah has extensive knowledge and experience in trauma response care and helps individuals and organizations build empathy and understanding around the effects of trauma. So she's a great person to talk to about our present challenges, and what we can do for ourselves and each other while trying to work through them. Sarah, welcome to OCAL's *Inspiring Change* podcast.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Thanks for having me. It's a real pleasure.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** So, this is such a weighted question right now, I think, for everyone, but how are you?

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Oh. Yeah, just going to go with the easy ones first. I feel really, really blessed and held by my community and by friends and family. And I also have a heaviness to my heart knowing that that's not everyone's experience right now.

So I'm definitely taking every day in stride, but trying to notice and pay attention to what's going well around me, what are the things I can control, and how might I stay whole so I can show up for people who are in a less fortunate situation. So I'm generally-- I'm OK though. Taking it in stride.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Yeah. No, I think that balanced approach is definitely how we have to do it. We are in uncharted waters and some really confusing, disrupting, and frightening times. And the thing

about COVID-19 is that it doesn't matter your age or your race or your ethnicity or your socioeconomic standing. I mean, it's impacting all of us. So I guess as a way of starting things out, can you talk just in general terms about the impacts and effects that this is having on our families and our community and society at large?

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Uh-huh. Yeah. There's a couple of different angles I'm coming at this when we think about how is this affecting society at large. But one thought that I've been having that was really reiterated-- I've got a lot of heroes that I listen to and read and follow. And Bruce Perry talks a lot about how while we're all experiencing stress and chaos right now, a lot of uncertainty in our field, when we're talking to people and helping them understand how trauma, how traumatic experiences affect the brain and body, sometimes that can feel pretty nebulous and pretty out there.

Maybe that's not my experience, or maybe my experience is different than yours, so it's hard to come to a shared language, a shared conversation. But right now, we are having a shared experience. This is a very collective, shared trauma that we're all going through. And while we're having our different experiences through that, we now have a common language for what does the stress mean. When does stress mean, and how might we start to create some practices to not fix the pandemic-- that's outside of all of our hands-- but some practices to come back to a regulated state. And that's our work, and that's what we're being invited to lean into right now.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Yeah. And so talk to us a little bit about that process of finding a regulated state or sketching out time and space to work on that, because I think we're all learning new schedules and new habits and things are sort of in disarray. So can you talk a little bit about that process?

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yeah. What's most on the forefront of my mind, because the folks that I support and engage with a lot are teachers and parents. And right now, I've been seeing all that stuff go around Facebook, some suggested guides for homeschooling basically, some routines and guides. And one of the things we're always inviting teachers to do, which can sometimes feel really impossible because they have a lot to do already-- they have a lot of work on their hands and they've got standards they have to teach to a curriculum.

But the invitation from the trauma consultants or supports is to build in brain breaks throughout your day. Not just one recess where you get to burn off energy, not just one moment in the calming corner to decompress, but in a pattern rhythmic way, you create-- again, you create

patterns where you can come back to self or you can center. And so that's what I would invite parents to do right now. Take those schedules you're creating, take your family rituals, and yes, engage those longer and more robust physical activities to burn off energy and to connect with one another.

But every hour or so, or every time you shift from one little schooling piece to the next, or even adults who are in their work life trying to work through a lot, to take a break every hour so to recenter to breathe. To fix your gaze on what's outside, not just a screen. To develop some body-based practices. There's lots of chair-based yoga practices that you can tune into and engage with. But to create a pattern of those, to create a ritual can really help.

And then it's about finding what gets you most excited. I think one of the invitations we also have right now is the invitation of time and space. So playing with, what does help me regulate? Is it yoga? Maybe it's not. Is it running? Maybe it's not. But we get to try that out and use our voice just to say, yep, this is working, or no, this isn't working. I want to try something new.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Yeah. That's a great way to think about it, because we have the time to think about things and maybe try several different options. I've definitely noticed more people in our neighborhood walking more. Just that simple practice of getting outside. Is there a concern that maybe in being forced into this sort of shelter in place or quarantining or whatever we want to call it that then you also can shut down inward? When you're in that concentrated existence, it's easy to forget about the world outside and forget about others outside when you're sort of forced to just to live and habituate in your own space all the time.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yes. And as you're sharing that, it makes you think about where maybe we're shutting down the outside, but now who are we left with? All of our voices on the inside. All of these parts of ourselves that we maybe neglect or abandoned or don't pay attention to and that they're easier to tamp down because we're busy, we're on the go, we have our schedules, we have our social lives. But now we get to sit with ourselves. And while that is a gift, it can also be terrifying.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Yeah.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Who am I? What do I love? What do I like? Where are my people, but also, where am I, and how might I start to cultivate that self-love? That relational resilience I've talked about is that space between you and me. How do we create the capacity to be safe in relationship with

others but also with self? So maybe this is a time where we're in a global shift of tuning in versus checking out.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** That's a great way to put it. Because, yeah, it can be sort of unsettling when your identity is as someone who goes into an office every day or who goes to school or who teaches children or who works with people. And then now all of a sudden, that is happening in an entirely different way or maybe not happening at all. And so what-- yeah. What do you do with that?

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Uh-huh. Well, and how do we start to really listen to language? Because I know there's social distancing-- that's what everyone's talking about. But there's been a shift over the past week of people saying, wait, time out. We want to physically distance but socially connect.

So the other end of that spectrum of, oh, wow, this is a time where I might go inward and find out who am I really outside of my valued roles or even devalued roles. How might I still connect socially but with purpose? So now, you have to actively seek out social connection, whether that's phone or Facebook or Zoom or things like that, or a walk where you're six feet apart.

But before, social connection was probably happenstance a lot of time. We maybe have that feeling of being alone in a group, alone in a crowd. I'm around people just because they're there. Now we get to be intentional, and that feels like an opportunity as well.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Yeah. It definitely feels like an opportunity. And maybe there's some irony that we're now using our phones or Facebook as our primary means of being intentional in our connections. I mean, a lot of times when we think of those tools, or maybe think of them as alienating ourselves from each other. When we're sort of idly scrolling or texting and not being fully present.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Yeah. I don't know about you, but my Facebook feed is so positive like it never has been before. And not delusional, not that the people are spiritual bypassing and not paying attention to what's real in front of them. But people are seeking out one another. And I feel like that will be a part of the new normal that we're heading into, where we might start to-- maybe we can't scapegoat technology anymore. We can't just point the finger there and say, that's the demise of our society.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** It's more complicated than that.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** It's more complicated. Yeah. It's more layered. And so when I think about advice or thoughts that I have around how to support someone in making that shift, I do this in the olden days, three weeks ago, I would probably start the same way. I'd invite people to do a people map. Get out some pens and paper and write down who are the people in your life-- who are the close ones that you can sit and stare at and you don't have to have words with? Who are the ones who are a little bit on the margin that, man, you actually don't really know that well, but this could be a great excuse to say, hey, it's COVID-19? Let's connect, right?

It feels like a nice little pass to say, I'm going to be a little bit more vulnerable here than I otherwise might have been. And because the person on the other line is also in this shared experience, your vulnerability might just be met. And we might start to develop a new sense of emotional safety with one another, which we know that relationships, that's how we heal. And we can only build relationships in the context of safety.

So maybe this space that we have through Zoom or through text or through phone, maybe that is creating that bridge between extreme vulnerability, especially based on my past experiences, that tells me-- my body's telling me, don't trust people. But my mind is saying, I'm dying for connection. Maybe this is a bridge here, and we can tiptoe on that in the context of social emotional safety.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** I like what you said there. We can only build relationships in the context of safety. I'm struggling a little with, how do you do that when you're not feeling safe? As a teacher or a care provider or a parent, someone who's scrambling and trying to negotiate these new dynamics and wrestle with technology-based ways of communicating, how do you best prepare yourself for those intentional connections?

**SARAH BUFFIE:** I think my big thought there, again, is not unique to this time, but I think more imperative to pay attention to focus on is the centering the self. If I'm disregulated, if I'm empty, if I'm not full, if I'm on edge, if my thinking brain is offline and I'm in my fear brain, then that's the energy I'm bringing to you. That's the energy I'm bringing out into the world, which is going to impact others in a significant way.

So really, this doesn't feel like the time to focus on ourselves, because most of us want to be there for other people. But we have to be that-- we are our body, ourselves, we are the intervention. So to really find those practices that help us ground, those routines that help us stay connected to the here and now, that's going to be a first step for any group of people.

But I would also-- in talking to a colleague of mine who is now unable to see the 12 young people that she supports, we talked about, gosh, what do a lot of these kiddos have in common? A trauma history. And what a lot of these kiddos have in common-- they love technology. They love their gaming, they love their Pokemon world.

And what's another thing they have in common-- that's one of the external supports that is most often taken away from them based on punishment, consequence, discipline, or a safety hazard. I know that people can be unsafe sometimes, so we have to help them stay safe. But, now we have an opportunity to engage people with their external support that feel safe.

And I told her, I said, I bet so and so would love to join you in a Pokemon gaming group. Every Thursday it's from four to five. That's a meaningful, engaging, productive hour of time spent with someone around their passion, not their label.

So I think we can start for direct service providers, how might you get to know deeper what do the people that you love and care about and work with and for, what do they love? What are they passionate about? What are they gifted at? And how might you help them explore that gift, passion, or interest even in this time of physical distance?

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Yeah.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** We can ideate. We can create art. All of this is about power with others. And now more than ever, it's in our face. If I'm on Zoom and you're over there, I have to engage with you. I can't just sit next to you on a couch and watch TV that you don't care about.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Yeah, yeah.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** That's not an opportunity anymore. So the power with the co-regulation, that co-creating that we can do with folks, even with physical distance, can be really powerful.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** And if we're building that into, like you said, scheduling that on a Thursday or something, so you're building that into a structure and you're also building some anticipation of that as well.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yes. Yes. Mary Vicario my mentor, always talks about when we experience trauma, the capacity to perceive a positive, hopeful future is shut down, because you are constantly vigilant about what's happening. How do I have that thing in the past never happen again? How do I not have a terrible future, right?

So to help people orient towards a positive and possible future, brilliant. Absolutely healing. And you don't have to be a mental health clinician to do that. To have a phone date scheduled out, that's how we help people orient to a positive and possible future, and that's a small step that we can take.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** And I want to go back to what you were saying about starting with the self. And you've touched a little bit on we occupy our bodies in order to best, I think, present my best self to you my family, to you my friend, to my client, I need to start with where I am, or who I am. Are there suggestions or things that you would suggest to help people to-- either daily practices that people can follow or

in-the-moment practices when the stress and tension and everything is ratcheting up? Like I feel like everything's on 11 right now. What was the name of that movie? *Spinal Tap*.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** OK.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** *This is Spinal Tap*. And I feel like we're all at 11 right now. Are there some self practices that we can take to help bring us back to closer to a more moderate volume, so that then we can be fully present and helpful?

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yeah, beautiful. What I love about this first is, I think one of the misinterpretations of regulation or regulation practices is, wait till you're at an 11 to bring yourself down to a 4. And that's what we want to avoid. We want to create practices so that we're not shooting up and coming down, but we've got more of a flow, more of a vibration where we're a little bit more steady.

So the first thing I would think about is without awareness, we don't have choices. So the first thing to do is start paying attention. How do I know when I'm in distress? Am I listening to my body? Right?

When I have that ache in my neck, am I just taking Tylenol and pushing through, or am I taking a moment to say, hi, pain in my neck. I see you there.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Welcome back.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** I see you. Welcome back. You have something for me, and you're welcome here. And can I breathe into you in this moment? All of this is easier said than done, but it's a practice. It's not going to be perfect.



If the kid is screaming in the other room, do I meet them in distress? Do I come up to that? Or do I take a moment with the screaming child and say, oh, there's a scream. I see you. I'm here.

This is the self talk I might say to myself before I walk into the next room and start to show up for somebody who's having a hard time. So I can be that anchor. So I can be that grounding and co-regulate versus meet someone else in the height of their distress with my distress.

So a lot of-- there's just so many things. Breathing, of course, we talk about it but we don't do it enough. Just dropping our breath down to our abdominal area and having to exhale longer than the inhale. Just that as a practice helps us recalibrate, get our reasoned minds back online.

I think a little bit more involved if you're a nature person. Literally digging a little hole and put your feet in and covering up and just feeling the ground. You can do this with your family too. You can do this with your pets around. You can engage the earth. That's one thing that right here right now is not slipping underneath us. There's so much chaos around us, but there's gravity that can bring us back down to the here and now. So being on the ground, in the ground can be really helpful and grounding.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** And literally grounding. I love that.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Literally. Yeah. Literally.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** And so, you said, when you were talking about breathing, I mean, I think we hear that all the time. And I think for a lot of us, we instinctually know that. But it's that whole difference between knowing something and then doing it, right? And remembering to do it. And so I think that's maybe part of it is you're saying that we need to cultivate these practices and these habits when we're not in those traumatic or highly-charged moments. And this just becomes like a daily thing that we're always doing.

And maybe checking in with ourselves when we're not at an 11. But just to say, OK, where am I right now? OK. I'm in this chair. I feel where I'm at.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yes.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** I know where I'm at. That kind of thing.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yes. And I want to elaborate-- I'm a big language person. And the word "knowing," I really have been playing with a lot lately because when we use the word "knowing," what we typically think unconsciously is what our thinking brains know. What I know intellectually, what I know right cognitively--

**SIMON BUEHRER:** That's what we usually think. Yeah.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yeah. Yeah. What I'm trying to shift to is, one, what does our body know? And what our body knows will trump whatever our thinking brain knows in a state of distress. Because the thinking brain goes offline. So what our body knows is now in the forefront.

So if we can create a body knowingness of regulation, that's then what gets to be online when our thinking brains go off. That knowingness this gets to be cultivated, and that's what we get to leave with.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** OK. So help me unpack that a little, Sarah. How do we know what our bodies know?

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Well, OK. How do we know what our bodies know?

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Are you saying that it's like it's recognizing our shoulders are scrunched up and our neck is stiff and maybe we have a twitch? Is that is that what you're talking about, that the body manifests these things in some way?

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Well, yeah. I'll talk around it a little bit differently.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** OK.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** A couple of things I would name-- one, how do we know what our body knows? We got to ask it. We gotta develop a conversation with ourselves. And that probably feels weird or silly or really vague to a lot of people.

But when I'm sitting at a desk-- actually, right now, I'm sitting, and my left shoulder is aching a little bit. And I'm just going to move it around a little bit, and I'm going to notice that that's there and wonder to myself, does it have a message for me? And right now, all it does-- the message for me is, I just need to lean back. My energy is leaning towards you, Simon. I'm out in this conversation. Like, whoa, let me just let me come back and just be a little bit more present.

So when we ask, when we can get curious without attachment to an answer, curiosity for

curiosity's sake, we can start to develop more of a relationship with self. And in that relationship, we'll find all kinds of answers, all kinds of threads to follow. The other piece to this, this question of, how do I know what my body knows, if we look at our survival strategies.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** OK.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** So we know that trauma is stored in the body. It's not stored in our thinking brain, and can just talk about it make it OK. Traumatic experiences get stuck in the here and now part of our brain and they manifest physically. And what they do is when we are in a state of distress, when we enter in a state of panic or fear, our thinking brain, which is in control of logic, rationale, reason, that goes offline because our brain doesn't care about logic. It cares about survival.

And what comes online are our survival strategies. And these can be really safe survival strategies-- flocking to safe people. A lot of what we're seeing now on social media is a safe flock. Everyone's in fear, and they're flocking towards social connection. It's beautiful, right? That's the first thing we'll do when our thinking brain goes offline.

If we can't flock, we flee. We run away. We escape. Whether we're running underneath our blanket and not getting out of bed or we're literally going on a run because we have a lot of energy, we can't be in the house anymore, right?

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Yeah.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** If we can't flee, we fight. If we can't fight, we freeze. We feel stuck in place. And if freezing doesn't keep us safe, doesn't ward off danger, we submit. We dissociate. We check out.

So all of these things are, one, outside of our conscious control, when we go immediately into that stress response. And they are all survival strategies that have worked-- if we're alive right now, they have worked to keep us alive. And what we don't do enough in our society is honor our survival strategies. We want to shame them. We want to blame them. We want to change them.

I shouldn't do this. I shouldn't do that. I shouldn't run away. I shouldn't scream, right? Before we can shift our survival strategies to more safer ways of being, we have to honor what they've done to keep us alive. Then we can start to shift more pro-social ways of being.

So how do I know what my body knows? What do I do in states of distress? Do I run? Do I yell? Do I cry? Do I deflect?

Does my stomach tighten, and I get really anxious? Oh, thank you anxiety. Thanks for showing up for me right now. I see you. I'm going to ask you to sit next to me instead of *be me* right now.

I need the parts of me that are calm and strong and present. I need those here right now. But you're here too. I gotcha. It's OK. So creating this dialogue with self, this kind of curiosity and compassion with self, that will translate to curiosity and compassion with others when that's our own narrative, our own monologue.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Yeah. So you're saying that you can then use that same view when dealing with-- or working with others, when relating to others.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yes.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** And so in order to be able to do that, I'm guessing that you really need to have that reflection. Well, you can't have that reflection in a time of crisis or in a time of trauma, right? It has to come when you're not in that fight or flight or freeze mode. Is that right?

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Well--

**SIMON BUEHRER:** It's more of a reflection after the fact?

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yeah. I'd say both and. I say now, for me, cultivating a practice, I'm much more aware. I still have my fight-- I still have-- my thinking brain still goes offline. I still go on to my survival strategies, but the gap between offline and awareness is shrinking.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** OK. OK.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** So that's what's-- so might we use activated moments as an invitation.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Mm-hmm.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Oh. Wow, I just screamed at my kid. Oh. There it was. Like, wow. That came out. That was very real for me in that moment. OK. OK.

Thank you, voice, for coming out and being present. I need you. I need my voice. Honoring and then how might I respond next time? So it's not that I can't respond. How do we shift from reaction to response?

And the more-- so even in the traumatic moments, even in the chaos-- so I'm talking about me, you, care providers, teachers, et cetera, who have a lot of supporting capacity to play with these concepts. If a child is having a meltdown, I'm not going to talk with them in that moment about awareness and choices and all this nonsense. I'm talking to you about it.

But what I would do is ground and reflect back, wow, you're having a big feeling. This is so stressful. We miss our friends, and everything's unknown. Might we offer reflection? Give kids or young people language that they don't have the words for right now? They don't have the words for it because their thinking brain's offline, and that's where language is housed, right?

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Right. Right.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** We can reflect that back. We can start to give language and names to all these big feelings and sensations and emotions that are rising up and have no place to go.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Yeah.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Right. We can reflect them. We can appreciate them. We can appreciate and honor that lived experience. And we can get curious together. What might we do together now? What might feel safe right now, right here as we're together?

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And then it's also-- it's not so individual in that moment.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yeah. Beautiful. Yes. Healing happens in relationships. That's the moment. And we get-- we have so many of those moments. So many missed moments sometimes. But now, they're in our face. What are we going to do? What's our choice?

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Yeah.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Do we lean in? Do we run away? Do we have grace for ourselves and compassion if we do run away? Right. It's really about how do we create more spaciousness with this present moment versus more constriction.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh. And I think just from having talked to you for the last 30 minutes or so, I have a better understanding of-- I was going to ask you about the Soul Bird Consulting tag line. But, I think it's becoming really clear. I mean, the tag line is, "Trauma is real. Together we can heal."

And so I think when I reflect on what you've been saying, I think "together" is an important part

of the statement. That it is about connections-- family, caregivers, friends, that support network.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yes.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Sarah, not to diminish the connections that we can make when we're not physically present with each other, but what about the challenges for those who aren't online? That's a different scenario, right? I think a lot of us are privileged with having the resources to be able to do this, but not all of us *do*. And so what can we need to do in those situations, especially with social distancing, quarantine, and self isolation?

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yeah. It's a really heavy and beautiful question, because that's what we need to be talking about more. For me, that question reminds me about when I'm coaching people who support folks one-on-one and the barrier is money.

There's no money, there's no funding. We can't just go have cups of coffee with everybody. That costs money. And so that feels like a very physical, a very tangible barrier.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Yeah.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** And that forces us to get creative. How might we share space with one another with meaning and purpose and passion outside of money? So I have the same question as this post here. How might we share space with one another outside of technology?

So for folks who are living maybe with a group of people and they're not connected to this virtual world, I want to think about play. I want to think about art. I want to think about music.

We know-- we have a sense of intellectual knowing when it comes to neuroscience and seeing inside of the brain and understanding more of what's going on. That the vagus nerve-- which we could go on about. I won't take us too far down the rabbit hole, but the vagus nerve connected from the base of our brain there, up into our face muscles, but then down to every other organ of our body, that vagus nerve is constantly sending messages of safety or connection or distress, watching out for danger, et cetera. And if your vagus nerve is constantly on high alert, it creates a low vagal tone where you have high rates of depression and body-based illnesses and diabetes, et cetera.

If you have a strong vagal tone, one that's toned up and working properly, kicking on the inflammation center when it needs to be and telling it to turn off when it's back to safety. If you

have that strong vagus nerve, you have lower rates of those things-- depression, diabetes, et cetera. The ways to strengthen the vagus nerve are through dancing, singing, humming, laughing. It's through play.

And so if we know this scientifically, how do we pull threads of that and look at our days, look at our routines, and incorporate more engagement around our physical surroundings? So I'd be really curious-- if I'm-- most of us are trying to watch what we're eating and trying to get food and not go to the grocery store a whole lot. But if you look in your fridge, and you have a couple condiments that have been in there for years and you can't even use them during COVID-19, that bad--

**SIMON BUEHRER:** That's bad.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yeah. What's it look like to set up five plates and play Pictionary with ketchup? I don't know. I don't know, but these are the things that if I were with a family or with a group and we were ideating together, that's where I would orient them. How might you use art and play and music and dance to get into your bodies and to be here in this moment with one another?

I don't have a concrete plan because I think each person, a group, or household is unique and different and has their own skill sets. But those are the themes I would think about with a group of people, with a family.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** I just had a flash when you were talking there that how great would it be if we wrote prescriptions for dancing, singing, playing with ketchup?

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Absolutely.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** I would love to have those prescriptions.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Come to Soul Bird. We'll prescribe it all.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** That's so awesome. That's so great. Taking us down a slightly different path, what about people with developmental or intellectual disabilities? I mean, there was a story on NPR just this morning about how to talk about COVID-19 with someone who has autism. Do you have any thoughts about communicating with people who maybe communicate, quote unquote, differently or who might have some communication challenges of their own?

**SARAH BUFFIE:** You know, I'd love to hear that story if you could send me that link--

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Absolutely.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** I'm curious about that perspective. I think about something I learned years ago. When we think about universal precautions, that I think that is in the context of like, wear gloves if someone gets hurt because we want to worry about blood-borne pathogens. We want to always be aware maybe something dangerous could happen, so let's have universal precaution.

And when it comes to people, especially people who are living with devalued labels, where society is isn't focused on their gifts, their passions, and their interests all the time. Maybe in theory they are, but what we're focused on limitation. How might we start to lean into universal intelligence, assuming intelligence and assuming interest, assuming curiosity?

People are going to communicate in all kinds of different ways. And if we don't understand-- if I don't understand that, that's my problem, and I need to get more curious. And how do I start to listen deeper to people?

So I would I would be curious and asking this question to folks, what are people's curiosities about what's happening right now? Is it nice-- most people with developmental disabilities or cognitive disabilities are in a world where they're told, you can go to this day program or that day program, or you can push carts at Kroger or push carts at Home Depot. You can have this job coaching that-- we're so limited, unfortunately, in our ability to think about big full lives or people.

We think about what are services we can offer, and there's so much heartbreak in that to me. And might this be an opportunity to regroup and look at how does it feel not to be shuffled to and from day program all day every day right now? What have the past three weeks looked like?

Did you get to spend more time with family? Did you get to go on walks and connect and have silence and solace and peace? I don't know. That's maybe a total delusion for me, and families are going to hear this and say, Sarah, if you come to my house, you'll see what it's really like.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Bring your prescription pad.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Exactly. exactly. Exactly. But I do get really curious. Instead of taking this time to create another service or another system, particularly for someone with a label, might there be something that they're trying to teach me that I can start to learn? So I don't actually have a



direct thought or a direct answer to that big question, but those are some curiosities I have floating around.

I do want to add one more thing to it in that frame, where so many people with disabilities, they might have busy lives, where they're structured. Do they have meaningful lives?

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Fulfilling, yep.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yeah. Fulfilling in purpose. And so that's what I might look at. Where might we create purpose in this moment of peril?

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Well, and it should be an extension, right? Like that's what we should be doing anyway. So it's-

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Exactly. exactly.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** How do we contain the--

**SARAH BUFFIE:** It's like the washing hands. We should all be washing our freaking hands.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** This is not new.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** This should have been-- no. This is not new, right? It's very similar. We should always be centering purpose and passion and fulfillment. This is a big kick in the buns from the universe, right?

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Right.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Let's get back to that business.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Yeah. How do we do it given-- I mean, for any situation, like given the changing circumstances. This is just a continuation down the path. Maybe it's a fork in the path, but we're still going down the same path really.

Sarah, we're calling this podcast series "Voices, visions, and victories." And so, we've heard your voice. I definitely have a good sense of your vision. What's your victory right now?

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Oh.

**SIMON BUEHRER:** Or victories if it's plural.

**SARAH BUFFIE:** Yeah. Yeah. You know, I think I think my victory is everything that I've been thinking about and learning and talking about and sharing and growing with other people is so present right now. and I feel like I'm walking a path that I would be proud of, even outside of these tough times. And I feel like the ability to show up for people and whatever that looks like is a real gift, and it's an honor and privilege.

I also on a very practical victory, we have been playing with puppets more with Soul Bird, and we've shared a couple videos with DODD, and we're going to be creating more content and really putting our-- walking the walk when it comes to play. It's not just a thought I have. It's a practice that I'm building.

So just watch out for more engagement from our end to unite people around silliness and fun and laughter. Get that dopamine flying during these tough times.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**SIMON BUEHRER:** That was Sarah Buffie of Soul Bird Consulting in Cincinnati, Ohio. To learn more about her practice or to connect with Sarah or her team, you can visit [SoulBirdConsulting.info](http://SoulBirdConsulting.info). Again, that's Soul Bird Consulting-- all one word-- .info. I-N-F as in Frank--O as in orange.

You can also find them on Facebook, where you can check out some of their new puppet videos, which as Sarah was saying, help unite people around silliness and fun.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

You're listening to *Inspiring Change*, our forum of stories and connections from our ongoing work of inspiring change and promoting access for people with disabilities. Subscribe to *Inspiring Change* wherever you get your podcasts. And if you or someone needs an accessible version of this podcast, visit [OCALI.org/podcasts](http://OCALI.org/podcasts) and click on the link to *Inspiring Change*. Thanks again for listening to *Inspiring Change*. Because the need for change is everywhere, and inspiration can come from anywhere. I'm Simon Buehrer. See you soon.

[MUSIC PLAYING]