10. Diaspora Ease

**Pauline**

This is a catch up with Ayan Shirwa from Diaspora Blues.

**Ayan**

So this year has been a lot of highs and a lot of lows. I had been studying a full time course. And then I was working casual. And then I was doing radio. So I had a lot on my plate. And I had to finally prioritise what was important, which for me was this course. So what I did is I stepped back from some of the things that I love, which is radio, and I focused on my studies. And that was okay. But for me, working on my mental well being has been the biggest challenge because when you're juggling a number of things, it's kind of hard to find that time to rest and to relax as well.

Because you're constantly just thinking about what's due. And we had weekly assessments. So for me, my main focus became just handing in assessments. And that took up so much of my time, which is sad, because all the things that I enjoy that give me a sense of purpose, that motivate me, things like radio, I couldn't do any more.

So my mental well being, obviously was affected by that. And then thankfully, I made a mental health plan. And I was able to find someone immediately, which is very unusual, because all the stories that you hear about people staying on waitlists for months, and I just got really lucky. And she's been great. And I like to always say, with therapy, don't settle for the first person that you think you have to settle for.

I always think of therapy like a shopping activity. So you choose the best person for you. And it's all about who works for you. And it's not just what can they do for you. It's how do you feel talking to them? Does that make you feel comfortable, because I have found over time when it comes to therapists, it's a big aspect of their work, but they really struggle to listen.

And to also give you space to finish your thought or finish your sentence. I've had therapists cut me off. And it's so frustrating, because then I get distracted. So I really found someone who gets me, who lets me finish my thought, which is amazing. And I hate that I'm finding that amazing, it should be something very standard. But that's been the highlight of my year, just working on my wellbeing while juggling multiple things.

**Pauline**

I've spoken to so many disabled people this year, who have had challenges with landlords, who have had challenges with housemates, who have put them at risk, because of differences of opinion, over things like masking, both at home and in public spaces. And I was wondering how you're going with this.

**Ayan**

Such an important question, Pauline. Thankfully, I haven't had any housing issues, because I live in public housing. And it makes me sad that the public housing stock is so low, because there is nothing more more comforting than knowing that you don't have to worry about the landlord changing their mind. Or checking up on you unexpectedly. I don't have those kinds of issues. I've lived in public housing for a long time and having that security, knowing that if there are issues around the house, I can get support. That's been a huge weight off my shoulders. But I know friends who aren't as lucky and who are going through it.

And I've had people ask me, you're working, your family's working, why are you still on public housing? And I'm thinking, if I were to leave public housing and I were to go into private rental, the chaos and the pain that you're going through, do you want that for me? Do you want me to worry about things changing month to month? And the unpredictability?

So I think with public housing, it gives people, it gives residents that reassurance that you have a place as long as you need. The way Public Housing works is, to be evicted out of public housing, there's a lot of steps that have to happen. So you have that security. So even if, let's say you, as it would be in private rental, you don't get kicked out immediately, there's all these avenues that have to be exhausted.

And kicking people out of public housing, at least for my experience, and things I've heard, it's a last resort kind of thing. So that's been great. But working during the pandemic has been really stressful. I know now that you can go to work while you're sick, where before, if you were sick, you stay at home. And I was working in an industry with families and young people, sick young people.

And it made me really stressed because I wanted to call it and say I can't do it. But then there would be that pressure to go into work. Like you had to be very sick in order not to go and I'm thinking, one, I'm risking my health, two, I'm receiving the half of the clients.

So that was something that weighed heavily on my mind. And the days I was sick, I refuse to go. But I know there were people, either workers who went to work sick. So there's that pressure, too, to act like things are still the same. And because no one is reporting on COVID like they did prior to 2022. I think we've become very careless.

And I think people act like things are normal, and they see you as the issue if you are taking steps to protect yourself and to protect vulnerable community members. Yeah, sometimes I wear a mask, because of, not so much of COVID, but the pollen where I live, there's a lot of pollen and it affects my asthma. And then I wear the mask, and I get weird stares. And I'm thinking of look, I'm trying to look after myself, do you know what I mean? So yeah.

**Pauline**

I want to talk about Ubers. And navigating transport at this time, because I'm a wheelchair user, and I don't use Ubers. And I'm also not using taxis at the moment. Prior to the pandemic, I was riding taxis fairly regularly, to be able to access parts of the city that are inaccessible to me via public transport. So yeah, I just had questions about how you're going with that.

**Ayan**

So interesting, with public transport 2020 and 2021. If you were on public transport, and you didn't have a mask on, people would stare at you, and would give you like dirty looks, which you know, that's understandable. Now, if you're masked up, they give you dirty looks. So now it's flipped on its head. And now people are like, why do you still have that mask on? And it's weird. There was a time when I think people were very cautious about where they sat on public transport. I remember, you know, trams weren't as packed and people gave you a lot of space. And if someone were to cough, we'd all look at that person and that person would just be mindful of coughing into the air and making sure to cough into their arms.

Now, all of those little things that they did to be to be mindful of others wellbeing, that's gone right out the window. Trams are back to full capacity. No one wears a mask. And I mean, I feel like, mind you, I'm not a mathematician, but when you get on public transport, it feels like 90% of people aren't wearing a mask. And the only people I ever see wearing masks are old people. So it's like it's gone back to normal, so nothing has happened. People are coughing, people I sneezing. There's no, there's none of that panicked "Oh, I'm sorry".

**Ayan**

Everyone's just like, as if COVID, as if the fear of COVID, all of that was just a dream, it's so weird. With Uber, the Uber drivers don't wear masks anymore. Before they would give you a hard time if you didn't wear your mask properly. You know they'd say make sure it's above nose. Now, they don't wear. I wear because it's just such a small space, and I don't want to get sick.

And I also don't want to get someone else sick. That's a lot of, that's a lot of responsibility. When you think about it. You have someone else's wellbeing in your hands. And it's important that you take care of yourself, so you don't get other people sick. So public transport is back to the way it used to be. My experiences with Uber, no one wears a mask. Yeah, yeah, things aren't looking good Pauline.

**Pauline**

What are some things that enable you to rest, and that bring you joy and all of this?

**Ayan**

For me, it's been my family, and especially my siblings. So I have siblings close to age, we're very close. I don't know where I start and where they end. So having them has been, not just having them physically, but talking to them and, and watching telly with them and laughing about stupid things. That's been, that's been really beautiful. And thankfully, I've always had that.

So even during the pandemic, having my sisters at home was a godsend for me. And I have a great relationship with them as well. So that helps. I think not spending so much time on social media as well. That's been yeah, I've noticed the changes. I'm less anxious, I'm less, you know, finicky. I feel like, I don't have that pressure to know what's going on in the world all the time. I don't worry because when you're on social media sometimes it's that pressure to perform or the pressure to be seen, to be reacting to things and I don't think that's okay.

Some people can do it. I can't, Pauline. I am not built like that. I'm not built to engage with people all the time. And to have my feelings hurt as well. That's not for me. So being off social media has been really great for my wellbeing. I've gone back to walking. I remember during the pandemic, all I did was walk. What I miss about walking during lockdown was there was no one on the road. I basically had the road and the streets all to myself, which was really nice.

That's changed. But going back to walking has been great. alking for me, just brightens up my mood. It clears my head. So walking. I don't think like I can say enough about walking. And it's free. Do you know what I mean? So if you can, if it's something that you can do, definitely do it. And therapy, oh my god therapy, therapy therapy.

And it's interesting because my therapist isn't saying things that I don't already know. It's just nice to have someone who is a soundboard, someone who can echo what you're going through, who can just reaffirm it and go look yeah, that is terrible. Yeah, there is a lot as someone who's objective, who's not really invested. Or isn't thinking about, maybe I shouldn't say that Ayan, because that's hurtful. So it's nice to have someone, someone who can share the load with me in a way. So that's been that's been fantastic for me.

**Voiceover 3**

So here you are, too foreign for home, too foreign for here. Never enough for both. Diaspora Blues.