Hear My Story: Emily Kendall

**Lisa MacVittie** 00:00

I'm the last survivor of the Holocaust in our family.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:04

Behind the words pictures and artifacts in the museum are people whose stories of survival and hope come alive to inspire new generations of upstanders. One by one, these stories stir the soul.

**Al Miller** 00:18

Can there really be hope for us?

**Bella Ouziel** 00:20

See, mine is 40018, my sister was 40017.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:28

Holocaust survivors, their descendants, liberators, champions of justice and courageous upstanders ask only this hear my story so that the lessons they teach will echo for generations,

**Elisha Wiesel** 00:41

I will never meet someone else like my father, but there are many of us who, if we come together, can keep his voice alive.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:48

These stories will change you. They will move you to action, inspiring the best of humanity every day.

**Jackie Congedo** 01:00

I'm Jackie Congedo. In this episode, you'll meet Emily Kendall. Emily is part of the husband and wife duo honored at the 2024 Upstander Awards for their creativity in addressing the issue of housing for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. They bring both professional expertise and heart to the job every day as co-founders of EmpowerMe Living. I sat down with Emily to talk about honoring the humanity of people with disabilities, how she uses the character strength of creativity and her personal connection to both the history we tell in this space and to her work today.

**Jackie Congedo** 01:38

Emily, it is so wonderful to be here with you today, to host you for this conversation in our museum. Thank you for taking time to be here to share your story.

**Emily Kendall** 01:48

Jackie, it's an honor to be here

**Jackie Congedo** 01:50

and you are one half of the incredible dynamic duo you and your husband Mark, who, back in June, received the Upstander award, the Frank Gerson Award for Creativity, and you were nominated because of your work in founding an organization called EmpowerMe Living. And this organization is really personal for you. The mission is close to home. And so I'm wondering if, first, you can just tell me a little bit about EmpowerMe Living, how this story began for you, and what that work is. And then, teaser, I want to talk a little bit about this award and why for you in particular, this is so meaningful. So let's start with EmpowerMe Living. Bring me up to speed. Help you know, take us along the journey of building this organization.

**Emily Kendall** 02:38

Great. So Mark and I started EmpowerMe Living almost two years ago, November of 2022. We have a background in commercial construction and commercial real estate. Mark has spent his entire career in commercial construction management and has built over $375 million worth of commercial construction projects all over the country, and I have been in commercial real estate management. I ran leasing for a student housing company, which was where Mark and I met, and then I moved back home to Cincinnati, and Mark followed me, and I worked for a local grocery anchored shopping center REIT for seven and a half years, and our son, Luke, was born in 2019 and was diagnosed at birth with Down syndrome. And so as Luke has grown up and gotten older, one of the big questions that we always ask ourselves as parents and as a family is, what does a great life for Luke look like, and where will he live when he grows up? Luke will outlive us. So as parents, you need to be prepared for that inevitability. And so we started diving into well, we know construction. We know real estate. We met at the student housing company. Mark built the properties and I leased them up. So we decided to blend our professional expertise driven by our personal passion to really empower people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our communities to be better, more inclusive places by offering a network of housing choices that meet the diverse needs and preferences of individuals with IDD.

**Jackie Congedo** 04:31

Wow. And you know, the award is for creativity, after named after Frank Gerson, an upstander who's featured in our humanity gallery. And the strength of creativity is interesting. You know, some people think about it as, Oh well, you know, you're artistic, or you can sing or paint or draw, but you know, the strength of creativity has a lot to do with sort of being grounded in solving a problem based on your own... using your own assets and talents in a creative way, and based on sort of having the creativity to think about a solution based on your own experience. And so, you know, when I think about Frank's story, right? Frank was a sanitation worker for the city of Cincinnati. His job was to put things in the incinerator. He realizes one day, wow, I'm throwing things away that people in my neighborhood could use. And he just, again, was in a position to help. Took his own natural sort of creative strength and his own natural his own position, and said, How do I get these things that people need in the hands of the people who need them? And fast forward, Frank was the founder of Freestore Foodbank, so I'm thinking about the parallels in your story with Frank's story, and the fact that you know you all didn't set out in your careers in real estate to do this work, but you know you very organically, had experiences in your life and in becoming parents that said, Wait a minute, what happens to these kids where, you know after, after they leave our house, right? And you looked around and it sounds like there weren't a lot of good options.

**Emily Kendall** 06:16

Jackie, you are so right to receive that honor at the Frank Gerson award for creativity, first of all, it was very humbling and very fitting. And if you look back at the pictures of the event, you see me. I am just sobbing the whole way up to the stage like I'm meeting Deborah Messing I'm just like... tears pouring because of this huge, tremendous honor and poor Mark is like, he's very stoic. Does not show a lot of emotion.

**Jackie Congedo** 06:46

He's the yin to your yang

**Emily Kendall** 06:50

He's kind of mortified that I'm just like, can't compose myself. But what's what I really love about the work of the Holocaust and Humanity Center is this groundedness in the character strengths. And that everybody has these character strengths at... Mark and I have very different character strengths. We are at the polar ends, but the one that overlaps is creativity. And what you said earlier about creativity doesn't mean you can compose music, right? It doesn't always mean that. It's about how you look at problems and come up with solutions. And Mark and I, Mark and I come at that at different angles, but together, we feel like we can create something really impactful that doesn't exist that's so needed, that's very needed. I think part of the reason that it is so needed, we focused a lot as a society on early intervention, health care, early education, and these things did not exist and weren't necessarily a focus even 30 years ago, and now they are. But we also need to make that same kind of investment in adult services, because the outcome of early intervention and health all of these things is that people live longer, right? So we also need to invest and focus in adult services. So again, our focus is on creating a network of options. We're linked together as the owner, operator, landlord, if you will, to build, to build a network of supportive community, but that enables someone. I don't know what Luke will want when he turns 22 right? He might want to live in an accessory dwelling unit on our property, and that would be awesome. He might want to live in a community with his peers. That would also be awesome. He might want to have his own apartment. He we want those options to exist, yeah, for him and his peers.

**Jackie Congedo** 09:04

Wow, and so. So you're... take me back kind of to the moment that you realize this is going to be something that society has to solve for, you know? And you're, you're coming up at it from a very personal standpoint of, this is our son, you know what? What's that going to look like for him? You obviously, I would imagine, did some research and said, well, nothing like this exists right now, or there aren't good options. Walk me through kind of that, the awareness that you know, as you were coming into that awareness, and then how you pivoted to a place of, "Well, I guess it's on us." You know, that's, I think that's the piece that's hard for a lot of people. Well, not hard for, but maybe not as natural it is for you, as free as it has been for you. And Mark like, "Well, then we'll just, we'll just do what needs to be done."

**Emily Kendall** 09:53

We have talked to hundreds of families throughout this process. We've seen several different community options all over the country. And one of the things that struck me is I was sitting the most, probably profoundly, as I was sitting with a mom who is a financial planner with one of the top, most reputable firms in the country, and she has a son that has Down syndrome and autism. She plans for a living, yeah. And when I asked her, "What is your plan?" she said, "My plan is I can't die."

**Jackie Congedo** 10:36

Wow, wow. And if that doesn't say something, I don't know what does, right?

**Emily Kendall** 10:44

So we have been fortunate that we happen to have this expertise, and it's been kind of like a why? Why not us? And I just got back from this incredible conference in Phoenix, Arizona, hosted by an organization called first place Global Leadership Institute. And they are really a champion for issues that face adults with autism and intellectual and developmental disabilities, housing, health care, employment. So they are really picking up the banner where we've made so many advancements in early childhood, they recognized and are stepping into we need to advance solutions for adults. And it was just very reaffirming and reassuring that what we are trying to create is possible, that we need to be creative. There were 100 other people like me and Mark and our team out there trying to solve this. So that was really reassuring. Sometimes, as a parent with a kid with a disability and in doing this work, you can feel very alone, but that was extremely reassuring to know that we are not alone. And I think what we recognized in one of our approaches is bringing along the private sector to come in and address this issue, because the current landscape of government funding and nonprofit isn't moving the needle in the way that it needs to be moved in Ohio alone, and this is an estimate from 2019 so it's a couple years old, and it's probably underestimated, but in Ohio alone, 72,000 adults over the age of 18 with IDD, that's more than the capacity of Paycor Stadium.

**Jackie Congedo** 12:43

My gosh

**Emily Kendall** 12:44

Paycor Stadium has a capacity of about 65,000 seats. Half of those adults live at home with a caregiver that is 50 or older.

**Jackie Congedo** 12:55

Wow.

**Emily Kendall** 12:56

So imagine half the seats of Paycor Stadium falling into the river. That's those are the numbers that we're talking about. Yeah, and what's been working today is not going to solve unless we really come together to collaborate. And that's one of the important things of our mission, is to bring people together and collaborate in community.

**Jackie Congedo** 13:19

So what does it look like in Cincinnati, the work that you're doing, I mean, I know you are... You have a couple of projects where you're actually building this housing, and you're convening the tables for the private and public and sort of nonprofit sectors together to solve for some of these things. Tell me a little bit about what the work looks like for you now.

**Emily Kendall** 13:37

Great. So we just closed on our first property in Anderson Township.

**Jackie Congedo** 13:42

Congratulations.

**Emily Kendall** 13:43

you know the market so well. I mean, you you really have a good purview to support that

**Emily Kendall** 13:43

Thank you. I'm very proud to say that Anderson Township is a welcoming and supportive community. Great. We had to from the planning department to the Board of Trustees and to the zoning department. We had to request a zoning modification. We're taking an office building. Yeah, we're turning into a mixed use property, so the first floor will remain office, where our office is, and then we have a community space, and the top floor will be 10 neuro inclusive apartments, a studio and one bedroom for adults with IDD. And it's in a beautiful location within Anderson Township, right next to the Historical Society near Turpin High School, some really nice like neighborhood restaurants, but the zoning board we had to request a modification to the use of the building. They unanimously approved our plan. Wow, and that was really reassuring in a big vote of confidence. So we're starting with our first in Anderson Township. We have what's called a micro home concept. And a Micro Home is a four to 800 square foot one or two bedroom home, yeah, yes, bigger than a tiny home. So this is a standalone, standalone, not an apartment, but imagine plucking a one or two bedroom apartment out of the city, out of a stacked building, and making it its own house. They will be universally designed permanent structures, slab on grade, in order to allow people for easy, easy entry. And we don't... we want to create lasting solutions so people can age in place. And our vision for these micro homes is they can be used as accessory dwelling units, yeah, which the city of Cincinnati. Thank you very much. City just approved, yes, oh my gosh, in October of 2023 so about a year ago, they approved an ordinance that allows accessory dwelling units on a primary residence within the city of Cincinnati. There are some restrictions, and I highly encourage people to look up the code, and we can help if you want to have a an adu built in on your property. So we think this is a great this is a great potential solution. And then we also envision these micro homes as clusters, yeah, in in, you know, one or two acres we can fit, creating some community. Yes, creating some community. So that's, that's an option. And then we're looking at some more, you know, mixed use master plan, type of communities throughout the region. And then our goal is to grow and scale nationally. The student housing company that Mark and I worked for had 44 properties at colleges and universities all over the country, everywhere from so

**Emily Kendall** 13:53

We do. But the other big initiative that we're working on is, and we're very excited about it, and it is in partnership with the First Place Global Leadership Institute is we're kicking off this month. We've got our first meeting about it on Thursday, a housing market analysis for Greater Cincinnati, Southwest Ohio. And this is really groundbreaking, because we're going to go out and collect data directly from adults with IDD and their families about their housing needs and preferences. First Place has done a lot of research on federal housing policy, state by state housing policy, and one of the things that they identified is that there are a lot of shortcomings, and one of the reasons for those shortcomings is because of lack of data, and I quoted those stats about the number of adults living in Ohio, and I said these are from 2019 and they're probably an underestimate nationwide. States know about and or serve about 22% of the total IDD population, so

**Jackie Congedo** 17:39

many people who are not having their needs met, right?

**Emily Kendall** 17:43

So how do we come together, but make sure that we are grounded in hearing directly from the people that it impacts? I like to say that we are in Cincinnati, home of the consumer goods, marketing capital, marketing capital of the world. There is not a bottle of Tide that doesn't go on a shelf that hasn't been tested, to get that bottle to move off the shelf as fast as possible. Yeah, we need to be grounded in data and research that comes directly from the people that are impacted by these needs. So we are very excited to kick off that project. You can go to our website to learn more about it, but that's a huge, huge initiative that we're really excited about, and that will convene. Part of the process is we'll get the data, and then we convene community leaders and collaborators, and we've had a ton of support from the Cincinnati community. So in the first quarter of 2025 we will have a workshop where leaders and family members and adult self advocates come together and look at the results, and we get together and say, All right, what are the solutions that we're going to recommend that we advance to solve these issues?

**Jackie Congedo** 18:54

Wow, wow. Yeah, it's, it really is. You know, we talk in the museum about people meeting their moment, upstanders who meet their moment, and it's just like hearing about the fact that you've been preparing your whole life to be able to meet this moment, you know? I mean, you didn't even in a way that probably never occurred to you until you know now, but the fact that you have this experience that you've built the skills and the network and the awareness around you know how to work in this space, and then, you know, and then there's a moment of need, right? That's that's like the the common story of an upstander is there's there's strength, there's preparation that I don't even know they're preparing for, and then there's a need. And the difference is the choice that you make to lean in or not, and the fact that you and Mark have so powerfully leaned into this is really inspiring. It's really inspiring.

**Emily Kendall** 19:52

Well, thank you. I want to say that one of the things that I love about your mission is that anyone is an upstander. Yes, I want to emphasize that for listeners. I am. I am just a middle aged mom from Cincinnati, Ohio, right, right. That's most of the time I'm trying to get three children out the door and get my cup of coffee in and enjoy it before it gets cold, right?

**Jackie Congedo** 20:25

Yep, yep.

**Emily Kendall** 20:25

But that's the beauty that this power is within all of us. All of us have this ability. Luke, my son, has this ability, and I say that he teaches us more than we teach him, and I wouldn't be doing this if it wasn't for him. So he is. His name means light. The name Luke means light, and that is very much what he is.

**Jackie Congedo** 20:51

Wow

**Emily Kendall** 20:52

There's my light that keeps me going.

**Jackie Congedo** 20:53

Oh, my goodness. Well, quite clearly, and he's doing a good job, because you are, you are rolling right along. Um, there's been a lot of research done. I'm thinking about our friends at the VIA Institute on Character, and in particular Ryan Niemiec, who has done a lot of research around strengths in people with disabilities. It's like abilities within disabilities, essentially strengths within disabilities. And it it so powerfully connects to what you were sharing about your son. What do you feel like his strengths are? What has he taught you?

**Emily Kendall** 21:25

Gosh, in a world where we are constantly seeking, you know, presence and focus and you know, there's all these apps - Betterhelp and Calm and the meditating, and we're all seeking for this... like Luke inherently already has that

**Jackie Congedo** 21:46

Wow.

**Emily Kendall** 21:46

Luke lives his life in the present moment. That's not to say that he does not have his emotions and feelings. Worse, he has them and he moves forward. I would say that one of his strengths is definitely gratitude.

**Jackie Congedo** 21:59

Yeah, yeah. Well, that's what allows you to live in the present.

**Emily Kendall** 22:03

Yes, it is gratitude. And he is not too worried about tomorrow or not worried about, Yeah, yesterday. He's like, we're here right now. He has a tremendous amount of patience. He has a little sister that can be quite a lot to deal with. And he he just, you know, she was having her meltdown the other night, and he just, like, is like, all right. Grace

**Jackie Congedo** 22:30

elder, see now He's 2019, right? Five, okay, yeah, she is two.

**Emily Kendall** 22:34

And he just is like, all right. Sometimes we'll go over and pat her, and I have to walk out of the room, you know, the feeling right, okay? And he is very resilient. Luke has been hospitalized quite frequently. He has some gastrointestinal issues, and we can end up in the hospital if he gets any type of gastrointestinal virus. It just impacts him very differently, and we need to go beyond IV fluids until that stabilizes. And Luke, He you can really tell that he makes the best of being there. Sometimes we are there for four days, sometimes we are there for 11 days. But he, he signs thank you to his nurses. After they've done procedures or drawn blood, he'll flash him, and I love you. And then he's like, he sits back. He's like, I get unlimited screen time, and I don't have to deal with my two sisters, and I just get to be silver lining, Silver Linings like, and but then he is resilient, and yeah, the next day after being discharged from the hospital, he is back in school, and his teachers say you wouldn't even know that he'd been through what he'd just been through. Wow, like I know, because he's ready to move on and move forward. He has such, such resilience. Wow, he's taught me so many things.

**Jackie Congedo** 23:56

Yeah, I was gonna ask you about you know, there's so many misconceptions out there about people with disabilities or who have different abilities, varying abilities. What's the most common misconception you encounter in this space? And you know, just in sharing your story, I mean, just in sharing Luke story, you're you're addressing those misconceptions, right? You're helping to educate. I'm just curious, you know, what do you see in terms of, you know, the way people might think about this differently than you do having a front row seat to it,

**Emily Kendall** 24:31

I think people have a tendency to presume incompetence instead of assume competence. Luke has limited verbal skills, and so one of the things that I worry about is people will not assume that he is competent. Yeah, yeah. He understands everything you are saying to him, and he can receive. On to you in sign language, and he has a communication device. It's just, can we slow down and pay attention to what people are really telling us? I've been doing some research and listening about, you know, kids in general today, and why kids are more anxious, and more kids are being diagnosed with ADHD, and more kids are being diagnosed with anxiety and depression. And I think, I think one of the things that I have come to realize is that we don't let kids be kids as as much anymore. Yeah, yeah. And so how like solving, fixing, solving, fixing, solving, fixing.

**Jackie Congedo** 25:54

Maybe people are just people, and they don't need to be solved or fixed,

**Emily Kendall** 25:58

yes, and a lot of our systems are deficits, yeah, based, yes, that's right. A lot of our systems are deficits based, so as opposed to strengths based, correct. And so I was very excited to come back from this conference. A woman there spoke. She's an organization called Proof positive, and it is grounded in the character strength, oh my gosh. And flipping the script to do a more strengths based approach, approach, wow. Right at some of the things. And look, I get it. We We want Luke to be successful, and there are things that he's going to need to know to navigate this world. But I think sometimes the world can do a better job, yeah, of of meeting in the middle and coming towards this way instead of Luke always having to go that way.

**Jackie Congedo** 26:51

Yeah, and the opportunity that we have to learn from each other, right? That, yes, that to your point, I mean, because you're listening, because you're watching, you're doing what you're doing, like the the reason that you are changing the world in this way is because of your son and the way he's inspired you. I mean, that's that's more powerful than a lot of people who you know don't have the same set of challenges are are navigating like, I feel like he's already made this incredible difference in the world just because of who he is, yes, which is really awesome. I'm so excited to see what becomes of this work, and we're excited to partner with you and see what we can do to resource, resource you and be with you as you walk this journey.

**Emily Kendall** 27:34

I think one of the big things, one of my big takeaways, and I wrote it down in my notebook, was, when I get back to Cincinnati, I'm going to reach out to the team here, because I think the work on the character strengths can be as we develop programs for our community that also impact the broader community, this is all tied together. There's a lot that we can do with those characters?

**Jackie Congedo** 28:00

Yeah, totally. It's just a different way of thinking. It's a different way of thinking about, you know, coming at things from a place of strength and opportunity and positivity, instead of saying, what are the, what's the problem we're trying to solve for and I think, I think, you know, along the lines with, you know, Ryan Niemiec's research and what VIA has done on in this topic. It's this is why there's a lot that we can learn from the field of disabilities about how to leverage strengths in our day to day lives. So it's really special. I'm I'm excited for you, with you. I want to pivot from the contemporary to you know some of the history, and it occurs to me that you are this was obviously a meaningful award for you. Tissues and all as you were receiving the award and emotional about it, and when I had a chance to talk with you afterwards, it occurred to me that there might be another reason, in addition to the fact that you have this personal connection with your child. You have a personal connection to the history with your grandfather. So I wonder if you would just sort of take me through that story, and maybe we can talk a little bit about what's on the table here in front of us.

**Emily Kendall** 29:13

I'd love that. Thank you. I did not get to know my maternal grandfather. He passed away before I was born, but he was in the Army in World War II. Instead of going to college, he got sent, sent to fight in World War II, and he was a prisoner of war. He was captured and in a German prison camp for two weeks. Luckily, this was towards the end of the war, and so I have in front of us here today with me, the original telegram that my great grandparents were set sent letting them know that my grandfather had been returned to military custody. We can't find the copy of the telegram saying he's missing, taken. He's been taken. He's missing. But we do have the copy of this telegram. And my grandfather grew up in Norwood, so not that far from here. He served. He served in World War II, came back, went to college, went to law school, had eight kids. He was a member of the Ohio House of Representatives.

**Jackie Congedo** 30:27

Wow.

**Emily Kendall** 30:28

And then Unfortunately, he died pretty young, at 54 so I didn't get to hear a lot of these stories firsthand. And from what my mom and my aunts and uncles say, he didn't really talk about it. Yeah, just came home and moved on. I also have a copy of a letter that he wrote to his parents upon his return to military custody. And it's really interesting how he's he, you know? He says, Well, this has all been sorted out, yep, now that things have been straightened out. And, you know, just letting them know, and we are showing them that I am okay, you know, and it's just kind of this, like, I want you to know that I'm okay, and I'm not gonna go into too much about what I've been through, because I will spare you from that.

**Jackie Congedo** 31:20

Yeah, yeah, it's so you know, when you're holding something like this in your hands, you can imagine him writing it, you know, on the really thin parchment. Yes, you know what he found or that he had. And you know, talking about the best part of my return to the camp, or to the company, I'm sorry, to the company, was the stack of mail I received that must have been 50, 60, letters to answer. So all you know, people back home who were sending letters worried for two weeks and maybe even a backlog before all of this Yes, and how that fueled him, you can tell sense of connection and purpose, yes. Well, I mean, the apples you and your son and your family do not fall far from the tree. What So tell me, you know, as you're thinking about, sort of the full circle aspects of this history the future, like you're the link in between, right from your grandfather to your son, and this, this the fact that you are, you're an upstander in such a powerful way. And it occurs to me now that maybe it's not just that you've been preparing for this, but that actually like this is, this is some this is like your inheritance in some ways, right?

**Emily Kendall** 32:33

Well, thank you. That is a big... Those are big shoes to fill and and step in. And I, again, I really just consider that I am just a person that is called to do this right? And I think my grandfather, from what I understand, like, felt the same way, felt the same way, like, this is what I have to do, and I'm gonna go do it. And I've been thinking about my my mom and her parents and my dad and his family, and again, they're just normal everyday people, but part of the legacy that they've left me is not my parents, Especially that they take really good care of people. They've always been committed both of my parents to taking really good care of people, being good and being good and loyal friends. My mom was a physical therapist, and she was so dedicated to her patients and took good care of them. And I think, I think we all have that within us to just take good care of each other, and I think that's part of the legacy. Yeah, my grandfather didn't necessarily. He did not ask. He did not ask for this, right? He He thought he go to college, but nope, you're gonna go fight in a war. And I can't imagine how that shaped his his life. But then sometimes it feels like he was just like, Well, that happened. I did that, and now I've got to come home and move forward. This is the next chapter, yeah, this is the next chapter. And so it is. It is very powerful and very humbling to just process all of this.

**Jackie Congedo** 34:35

Yeah, was this still part of what was running through your head as tears were coming down your face? I mean, tell me about that moment. Oh, for sure.

**Emily Kendall** 34:44

And, you know, I was just thinking again about my parents who could not, who could not be with us. My mom passed away about two months later from Parkinson's - an eight year battle with Parkinson's Parkinsonian dementia. And so my sister got to be there, and I think I was thinking about this, and my my grandmother, my maternal grandmother, and then my parents, and how they worked so hard. I uh, to make sure that I was set up to have opportunities like this, right? I think that's, that's what I and missing my mom and and making sure that she knew that she she did a good job and she recognized that her job was to take good care of people and pass that on.

**Jackie Congedo** 35:42

Yeah, yeah. Well, that's, that's the ripple effect of kindness, of care for humanity, right? It's like, it's really powerful to think about the fact that every action that we take or don't take has those implications down the line. And you know, your grand grandfather's service in World War II, certainly, I'm sure, shaped the way your mom was raised, which shaped the way she, you know, thought about, you know, creating a sense of that care and responsibility in you and so but you know, when he got the letter saying you're going off to war, he didn't know all of that was coming down the line. He just said, this is what I have to do, and I'm going to go do it. I think, you know, many of our survivors have similar sort of perspective around different stages of their lives. And, you know, I'm thinking about Werner Coppel, one of our, one of our really, most core survivors in our work, in our mission, who spoke with 1000s of students, was really the first survivor to share his story publicly. His quote, you know, which is prominently featured in the museum, is, "I arrived in Union Terminal with a wife, a baby, and a suitcase, and that started the second part of my life," right? Like, okay, and now I'm gonna go and be an American and build a life. And, you know, raise a family. And so, you know, I just think both in the way that your grandfather, you know, stepped up in this moment, in the way that you stepped up in this moment, none of these things were things that you planned for. And yet you've not just sort of assumed that, but you have done it with such grace and purpose and with that outlook that you know this is all for the greater good. It's so it's just really cool to witness. It's really cool to witness and to celebrate.

**Emily Kendall** 37:39

Well, thank you guys. You guys, but you are a galvanizer to bring all of this forth and all of these stories for this museum and its work, I got chills when you're talking about Werner Coppel and his story. And very similarly to my grandfather, like, Okay, I lived through that and now forward and just that this place exists, that it exists where it does in this moment in time in particular, yeah, is very powerful and meaningful. But I think one of the the through points is that these are everyday, ordinary people, yep, yep. That recognized how capable, just like Frank Gerson, an everyday, ordinary person, who is this? How to question, why am I throwing this away, right? I can do something different. It's, it's really, I think that simple, simple.

**Jackie Congedo** 39:00

Yeah, yeah, I think you're right. People think about it in the scope of like, well, how do I solve these giant problems? Or, you know, in your case, what you know, you don't start from a place of, like, what does it look like to reinvent the map of housing options for people, you know, with with different, you know, developmental and other disabilities. You just said, Wait a minute. I've been trying to figure out what this trajectory I'm, you know, I'm trying to plan for my son and, like, I can get to 18, and then I don't really know what happens. So let's try and see if I can figure that out. And then, you know, evolves this. So it's, I think it is about trying to stay grounded in what's the next choice, what's the next choice, what's the next opportunity, what's the one thing I can do? Because the one thing becomes two things, becomes three things, becomes other people who are acting in different ways because of the way that you've act. And there's so many stories in the museum about this, you know, I mean, just about every story of survival. Um. And you know, there were upstanders along the way. Up standers, it wasn't one person, right? Hardly ever. Was it one person who just outright saved someone. It was many small acts of upstanding and creativity that that it took. And so, you know, yeah, so it took every one of them, though, these families, so many of them wouldn't be here if it, if it weren't for many people doing their small piece.

**Emily Kendall** 40:26

And I think that's so powerful. Again, it's many of us together in the sum of great the sum of greatness is made up of small things. Yeah. And what you said about your... my business coach, the great Deni Tato has this quote from Joseph Campbell, and I think it's very powerful to share in this context, it goes something like, if you see your path laid out for you, 1234567, you're looking at someone else's path. Your path is created in the moment of next action,

**Jackie Congedo** 41:06

Yeah. So true.

**Emily Kendall** 41:07

And so sometimes I feel like I don't have all the answers. That's the point. Luckily, I have Mark, and he's very talented and has many strengths that compliment me, yeah, yeah. But I go back to that and remember, you're not supposed to have a dance, right? And my path is created in in the next action. So who is someone else that I can reach out to and bring along on this journey? And it's been tremendous. We have so many tremendous and incredible self advocates, families, organizations here in Cincinnati, and one of the things that I think about a lot is that we've had so many people come before us, yeah, that have paved the way. That's right for me and Mark to do the work that we are doing.

**Jackie Congedo** 41:55

Yep, that's right. That's right. So it's about what you're doing and on forward, but also all the small acts that came before you. Yes, and now this is your moment, right? So Well, thank you for anything else you want to share.

**Emily Kendall** 42:10

And Jackie, I just wanted to again, thank you and your team, not only for putting on a beautiful series of events for upstander month, incredible. I highly encourage everybody to get involved next year, when that comes around, I am honored to serve and be a part of this organization, and honored to have this conversation today.

**Jackie Congedo** 42:34

Thank you. The pleasure is ours. We're so grateful for all you and Mark are doing. And your son, he gets credit too. So yeah, stay tuned. We're excited to follow your progress.

**Emily Kendall** 42:45

Thank you so much.

**Jackie Congedo** 42:46

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