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National Center on Advancing
Person-Centered Practices and Systems

Culture & Person-Centered Practices **Patsy Starke – “Patsy’s Purpose”**

SPEAKERS

Patsy Starke

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Hi, my name is, actually, it's Willow Starke. I go...but it's Willow Patricia. So, I go by Patsy. My pronouns are she, and her and other female pronouns. I'm a 62, year-old trans woman who didn't begin medical transition until I was 56 and since then it's been a whole new world for me.

I never had to worry about how I was perceived in the general community like out and about and now that's a big part of my life is knowing that... that I'm evolving and that there's parts of me that are still very masculine, that have been affected by years of testosterone. And, but I want to make it perfectly clear that, I'm very happy with where I'm at in life, or maybe I'll say satisfied. It's a challenge every day to live in this world.

Our culture does... still has a lot of issues with transgender people, especially, it seems like trans women get a lot of focus about, you know, judgment. Being transgender has formed my thoughts, my passions, how I feel about people and how I relate to the world at this point in my life.

I am a registered nurse. I believe that I have a, not only a professional obligation, but a moral obligation to meet people where they're at, not where I want them to be. I guess the term for that would be holistic nursing care but it's very deep because you don't just look at the person and where they're from and whether they're African American, Hispanic, or white, or whatever. That's, you know, maybe a part of it but every individual has their own experience, their own story.

So, person-centered care to me is trying to hear the other person's story and not make assumptions about that person. You know, and to really quiet my judgmental mind and to really listen hard, which is very difficult to do. But it's vital to be able to...to be allowed into a person's life. To provide care, you have to develop a relationship.



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You know when I see people for the first time, and I haven't talked to them, or when I walk into a family's house or home or a patient's home, my mind gets flooded with all kinds of thoughts and I practice the art of quieting my mind and focusing on the people I take care of. So, I have always liked person-centered care. I've always valued it. I don't think that in healthcare, we talk about it enough or we really work hard to see the patient.

You know, nobody comes out and says, "Oh, I think you're weird because you wear women's clothes," or... but you can see things like the look on people's faces and it's always been part of my assessment to see how an individual reacts to me, like views me like, and you look for all kinds of keys like facial expressions, or smiles.

I know that I, especially coming out as transgender, I have to advocate for myself. There is a condition in our society called ageism and you know, even if you're not a trans woman who's over 60 or you know, 65 or... you're still looked at as older and certain expectations of what older looks like. To make this journey, you have to expect a lot of loss. I lost my job. I still haven't been back to work. I'm on disability now. You know, I became...I left the white male privilege. I don't know, people...there's all kinds of terms for it but I just never had to worry about it.

That's why I didn't transition early in life but all of a sudden, you're in this LGBTQ culture. And it's kind of ironic because I had avoided that group of people for most of my life and then I come to them and say, "Well, I'm transgender. Will you let me in to your community? Can I be part of that?" And really, I never felt more a part of a community. I mean, and I'm like...in the groups that I travel with, I'm the only trans woman, you know, they respect me. They welcome me. I feel more and more comfortable in this group.

Even during COVID, my LGBTQ community, we were there for each other and we, you know, and you think about the history of what people my age have been through... Through HIV in the 80s, or the 70s and 80s, losing friends, fearing catching it and being sick or you know, and I lived through all that because, I mean, we all need somebody. I feel like at this point my life that I want to take care of LGBTQ people because of how culture has affected us, how a lot of us end up alone and isolated.



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And you know, I think about trans women a lot because, you know, if I ended up in a nursing home, who's going to take care of my feminine needs? Are they going to come in and paint my fingernails? Like they would for an older cis woman or are they going to come in and fuss with my hair and makeup, and make me feel pretty, you know, even if I am impaired, I would want to be treated like that and I would expect to like, to have night gowns and, you know, feminine things around me [like] flower sheets. And, but, you know, and I feel responsibility to do that for other people.

When I worked in hospice for like 18 years, I would meet patients and they were struggling with dying and end-of-life issues. I knew that, that I wasn't far behind. And I don't want to sound morbid or... but I knew that this is life, and you know that I was as vulnerable as anybody else to being that patient in the bed. And it's like well, how would I want people to take care of me? How am I going to take care of these people?

I'm able to love. That's like my gift, like empathy, acceptance, and all that like I can love people for who they are. I don't know how to explain that but it's what keeps me going and you know, I'm grateful for that gift because I don't know how I could have got through life if I couldn't do that. One of the hardest and most important things in my transition through life has been the ability to accept where I'm at. I believe I'm important but I'm important because of other people because I was given this ability to care for people.

I'm grateful for my life and while I still can, I work with SAGE and it's an advocacy... it's one of the oldest grassroots organizations in the country and they advocate for LGBTQ elderly. I found them... I haven't been very active yet. I haven't been challenged to do anything but I'm trying to find my way through all that which to me might be a way to be helpful in my community. It's not - and I say my community, but LGBTQ is everybody's community. I mean, we're everywhere so...trans women are just more beautiful in that group so, anyway...