

Emily: [00:00:00] Welcome back to stay tuned, supporting transition age youth. This podcast is brought to you by the Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research at UMass Chan Medical School, Department of Psychiatry, and in partnership with our research sponsor, the National Institute for Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research.

I'm your cohost, Emily.

Mei: And I'm your cohost, Mei.

Emily: And today we're joined by Maya Ingram. Maya, would you like to introduce yourself a little bit?

Maya: Hi, thanks so much for having me. Um, so my name's Maya and I'm a research project director, um, at UMass Chan Medical School. I've been in this position for about a year and at UMass full time for about two years.

Um, and I'm excited to be here today.

Emily: Thanks for being here. We're excited to have you.

All right, so we can just jump right in. I know that you're a [00:01:00] research project director at UMass Chan, but you've also shared that you dropped out of college due to mental health. So if you're comfortable, we'd love to let you share your story and talk about how that impacted your school and work experience.

Maya: Yeah, of course. So, um, yes. So I've dealt with having a mental health condition from like middle school age, I would say, um, is sort of when it onset. And, um, that also affected me like it does many other people and going to college. Um, in high school, you know, I was like, okay, I sort of got a handle on this.

Like I got into college. I was like, I'm good to go. This is something that's in the past for me, not going to be an issue again, that was a mistake thinking that way. So, it did of course, come up again in college, because as for many people, you know, you're going away from home, you're in a new place, new people, a lot more on your plate to manage.

Um, and at the time I didn't [00:02:00] really have the skills to manage all of that, that was going on. So, um. Going into school. I originally went to Georgetown University, um, in Washington, D. C. And, um, I think sort of into

like my sophomore year was when things really came to a head and I ended up taking a medical leave of absence for mental health, um, and went back home.

And that was really hard because it's Can be super isolating. It's really hard to tell all of your friends at school that you're leaving. Um, and you sort of have to explain or not explain the reason behind it. And I was back at home living with my parents while all my friends were, you know, still hanging out at school, um, taking classes, having fun, all of that.

So that was a really hard experience for me. Definitely very isolating. But then partway into the medical leave, I found a program, um, [00:03:00] at Boston University Center for Psych Rehab called the NITEO Program. And, um, it's a program specifically for young adults who are in college and have taken a leave due to their mental health.

So it focuses on helping them like build up those skills and you can take like a college class while you're doing it. And it sort of helps prepare them to go back to school. So that was a really great program for me just because I had never. Really talk to or met anybody else who had gone through similar, um, issues that I had gone through.

So it was really great sort of sense of community to be able to meet all these people and to feel like I wasn't alone and having these struggles. Um, so I went to the tail for a semester. Um. And then I did end up going back and returning to Georgetown after a medical leave. Um, but it was also sort of the same thing, like, all right, I've dealt with this, you [00:04:00] know, I'm good to go.

I've done the program like check. Um. And then I went back to school and sort of, you know, took too much on and wasn't really thinking about, like, continuing to practice those skills. Um, and it was like a high stress environment. So then at that point, I think that was like 2017, um, I did end up, like, flunking classes and then I had to drop out, um, or like withdraw from Georgetown and so I ended up going back home again.

That was also really hard, but at this point, I had already had a good, um, like support system sort of set up. So I went back to the NITEO program and that's how I started, um, peer mentoring. Because at the time, um, one of my previous friends who was at the program with me, um, had decided to start a peer mentoring program at Natteo, um, [00:05:00] And I really jumped on that opportunity because I'd always been interested in psychology, um, and eventually wanting to be a therapist.

And NITEO was such a good, um, like, it was a real game changer for me, I felt like. So I wanted to be able to get involved with it and give back to other people who were going through the program. And I think, um, there was sort of like, A special like secret sauce element to the peer mentors coming in because there had sort of been something missing and we wanted to further develop that sense of community and like break the stigma around having a leave of absence.

So. Being able to set up and help set up the peer mentoring program was, um, a really great thing on the, on my path to recovery, because it sort of gave me something to attach to and, like, find value and meaning in, um, and being able to work with other students and, like, give them some [00:06:00] advice and let them know that everything was going to be okay, um, I think it can be really scary when you are sort of, like, you know, Lined up to be on this path that like everybody is supposed to follow.

I don't know if you guys experience this, but I was like, all right, you know, I got to graduate high school, go to college, graduate college, you get a job, you work at a job for the rest of your life. And then, you know, you retire all of that. So having a huge interruption, um, was, you know, just sort of mind blowing.

And the fact that like, I hadn't, I thought, okay, that means like life is over, essentially, like you've failed and, you know, you're sort of off the track that you're supposed to be on. So it was really nice to be able to meet these new, um, students who were coming in and let them know, like, Hey, like, I dropped out of school.

Life is still going for me. Like, things are going to be okay. You're here now. You're getting help. Like, it's all. Like, you can choose different paths in life, um, [00:07:00] and you can still move forward and, like, achieve your goals, um, in different ways. It doesn't have to always be on the set path that, um, you think you have to go on.

Wow. Well, yeah,

Emily: that's great that, that you found that program, um, and that it was so helpful. And... Yeah, it sounds like you were able to, you know, give back and do the same for other people. Um, and I know that you've done some other like peer mentor work. Um, so I'm sure that helped, you know, shape where you are today and your current job and everything.

Maya: Yeah, so, um, Once I was back peer mentoring at NITEO, I think that was sort of the start, um, for me to get back to school. So, I knew always that I

wanted to, like, get back to school and be able to graduate and get a degree, um, so that I could get, like, a full time job in the future.

Um, but I started out doing the peer mentoring thing, and then, [00:08:00] um, It was sort of just like through connections and like a bit of networking and I say networking with like quotes around it because it was more just like, you know, some people at new people here at UMass Chan at the Transition Center. And so I got in contact with them and I was able to work.

Part time as a research interviewer for the past study. Um, and since I was at BU, they were, um, like launching at BU. So I helped out with recruiting participants and, um, getting them signed up for the study. And I administered, um, like the surveys and the research interviews. And that was really great to feel.

Some sort of like accomplishment and like I was a part of something as well. And, um, to sort of build up on the part time peer mentoring work I was doing. Um, and as I was sort of like practicing those skills, um, and being in recovery. [00:09:00] So, yeah, so I did the research interviewing thing and then I ended up getting another part time job and I sort of just kept like adding them on until I was at like filling my time.

Um, Um, So I did another part time job helping to launch a program at Georgetown, um, to also help students who are on leaves of absence from Georgetown, um, I worked with a woman who runs, um, it's called the Michael Project, and she had a brother who, Michael, who, um, unfortunately passed away due to, um, his mental health condition at Georgetown.

And so she made it her goal to create this program, um, to help students who were struggling. And so she would give them funding for their leaves of absence, because it's also really hard if you need to take a leave of absence, but you don't necessarily have funding, like you may need somewhere to live.

Um, and so students in the program could, um, [00:10:00] Like sort of apply to do something during their leave. And that could be anything from like, uh, professional development to creating a music album. Um, and the Michael project would give them funds and also support, uh, for that leave. So those are sort of the three things that I eventually added on.

And then once I was like, all right, I've got this under my belt. Um, I started adding on classes. So I went back to school, um, at like Harvard's extension program, and I took a few classes at BU just to sort of build, um, back up my

course list and to sort of practice and like the return to school, um, before I actually started applying back to school, um, so once I had done that for a couple semesters, I applied to a bunch of schools, um, I think like six or eight, You know, one fall, and then the next spring, I got all rejections back from [00:11:00] them.

Um, for my first time applying, that was really hard to hear. Um, most of them didn't really give an explanation. I reached out to everybody asking, like, why, or if there's anything I could do to sort of, like, bolster my application, um, and only one school got back to me, actually, and that was Clark University, um, and they said that they really, like, appreciated my application and thought I was great, but that I just needed to take, like, one more semester of classes, um, so I was able to do that, and then they got back to me after I sent in my transcript from those classes.

Um, and then they accepted me for the next fall. So it's hard when you drop out and you have a mental health condition, there's definitely a lot of stigma and like a lack of understanding out there. And it was. definitely a vulnerable position to be in, putting yourself back out there and trying to get back into school, um, [00:12:00] especially having to like explain like the gap in your education history or like the gaps in your resume if, um, it's been interrupted due to a mental health condition.

So I really appreciated the people at Clark who like the progress that I had made, um, and appreciated that journey for like the growth that it showed instead of, um, sort of judging like, you know, due to stigma. Um, so then I went to Clark and I graduated, um, back in 2021. Um, And since then, I had also been a part of some different advisory boards here at UMass Chan, um, and I started working part time on, um, the Hype on Campus study to help do some qualitative interviews, so I had kept Um, While I was in school, like my connections to, um, the Transitions Center and to the NITEO program, um, and then it just so happened that as I was graduating, there were [00:13:00] some research coordinator positions that opened up.

Um, so I applied here, uh, to be a research coordinator and I really appreciate. The center's, um, pushed to really hire people with mental health conditions specifically, um, because a lot of places, you know, don't do that or don't put value on it, even if they are, um, in the mental health field. And I think that's a really important, um, part of where we work is that we do have the culture of hiring people with mental health conditions and, um, sort of like reducing that stigma so that people can be open about it.

At the places that they work and it helped me to sort of shift the mindset of like, okay, you have this like secret sort of thing that you have to hide and like lie about or, you know, cover up when you're applying to a job and it switched that to be, um, something that I could be proud of. And then I could use.

to show that I had experience in this, [00:14:00] um, situation and in this, uh, like life experience. And it was actually like a good thing, um, to be able to have that experience because it helped me connect better to the people that we work with in our research.

Mei: Yeah, my gosh, you've done a lot of incredible stuff.

And, um, for those who don't know, which is pretty much everyone listening. Maya is my supervisor at UMass Chan. So I didn't know a lot of that. Um, so thank you for sharing and. Yeah, hearing about that program you helped out with at Georgetown, I'm sure was huge, um, considering like you probably could have used that and a ton of other kids could have used that, um, but Well, first of all, I also had like a bit of a non linear, you know, didn't quite, I went to high school, you know, took a semester off before starting college.

I struggled a lot my senior year with my mental health. And I thought everything would be fine. You know, I'm in college. I like [00:15:00] relate so much to that. And then I get to college and I never ended up dropping out of college. But it was because I was so scared to have that gap in my academic career.

And, you know, I was afraid that okay, if I drop out, like, how am I going to get back in? Um, and stigma played a huge, huge role into that. And I feel like that is especially hard for, I feel like there's a lot of people who put a lot of pressure on themselves to be a bit of an overachiever, um, despite having a really tough mental health condition.

And so, you know, There is definitely that internal struggle of I'm having a really hard time right now, but I'm also very afraid for, you know, my future and my personal expectations. And I'm not trying to speak for you, Maya, but I feel like that's what I went through. And, um, it's really inspiring to hear someone's story, um, of where, you know, they did.

Take the time off that they needed, [00:16:00] um, but still are in, you know, such a great position today and were able to build themselves back up.

Maya: Yeah, no, I totally agree with everything you said. Like, it really is sort of those expectations that like we put on ourselves, but also are sort of put on us through like our parents or community or just general society.

And I felt the same way, like I tried as hard as I could, you know, to stay in and to resist it. But, um. At a certain point, I was just, you know, struggling too much and I think it is, it can be dangerous because for some people, you know, if you think that that's the only option is to either, you know, like stay in because life can't really like continue and in the way that you want it to after it really does put people at risk for like harming themselves or for suicide, um, because we have such like rigid, um, perspectives on like how to be successful in life.

And, um, like I [00:17:00] think Michelle talked about this when she was on the podcast, but like having a mental health condition, generally society thinks of it as something that's like super, super disabling. And like, you'll be, um, it's something that you can't be independent while having a mental health condition, which just isn't true.

And it's really hard to see that until you either experience it or. You see somebody else or hear about somebody else's story. So it's always been super important to me, um, since becoming a peer mentor to sort of try to be brave about sharing my story and to not feel like ashamed of it because, um.

Without other people sharing their stories, I never would have thought that, like, I could have a life after dropping out of college, um, and it was actually, I think, like, Amanda Costa, um, did, like, a video with the Transitions Center that they showed at the NITEO program, and I was like, wow, like, you know, she can do that and, like, have a job and, like, [00:18:00] you know, have a career, and I think there's also, like, some people on a podcast that I listened to at the time who talked about having dropped out of college and then they had like a successful podcast.

And I was like, that was sort of my backup plan. I was like, you know what, if I don't get back to school, I'll just have a successful podcast and then I'll be totally fine.

Mei: Well, now look at you. You're on a podcast.

Maya: I'm on a podcast.

Emily: Yeah. That's funny too because I know I remember like last summer, um, when we were before May joined before she became the co host, you and I did one episode together.

Um, so people can go and listen to that. Um, but yeah, you've always been so like well spoken and I'm sure if you still wanted to do a podcast. You totally could. Yeah. Um, but yeah, I think that's, that's really great that you were able to be a peer mentor and like, you know, help other people that might also be feeling, you know, the societal pressure or like pressure from parents or [00:19:00] whoever to like, to go race straight through like high school and college and like, I think it's also impressive that, you know, you, you took the leave of absence and you dropped out.

I think you, you had a couple of different breaks and you still were able to, um, to like push through and go back and, and get your degree. That's really impressive. Um, and yeah, I Going back to like, you know, being the peer mentor. Um, I'm sure that helps a lot with what you do now at UMass, um, because I know that you're one of the facilitators of our YAB.

Um, so if you, if you wanted to like talk a little bit more about that and, and the work that you guys do, that'd be great.

Maya: Yeah. So, um, I love the YAB. It's one of my favorite projects that I'm on here at the center. Um, so for people who don't know, the YAB stands for. Um, young adult advisory board. Sometimes I think we say like youth and young adult advisory board.

The name can change [00:20:00] around, but we generally refer to it as the YAB and it's a group of young adults from around age 18 to 30. Um, right now we have about 9 people on the board. Um, but we come together every month for around two hours to review, um, like research projects, um, and to give advice and feedback on all sorts of things.

So anyone at the center and sometimes Groups from outside the center as well can come to the ab and present, um, on anything that they want feedback on. So we've had, um, like recruitment materials. We've had tip sheets. Um, we've had, uh. Lots of different things like advice on strategies around like recruitment, um, videos.

Yeah, lots of things that they can give feedback on. Um, and it's a really important sort of like cornerstone of our [00:21:00] center, um, because it. It's meant to, um, it's meant to be part of our, like, participatory action research,

which is when, um, instead of just, like, conducting research on a community, you actually involve that community in the research, um, from, like, all levels.

So here at the center, like, we hire people who have mental health conditions, who have lived experience with that, and then as well, the YAB. Um, really does inform a lot of the work that we do. Um, they also like may worked with them to, uh, work on a grant application, um, which is a process, but it was really great to have their input on that process.

Um, and I think. Working on the job is really important to me because, um, there was one point when I started to work as a peer mentor and I had was doing like panels and meeting with parents and, uh, you know, teaching some classes, uh, for current [00:22:00] students at NITEO, where I had somebody close to me say like, Oh, like, why are, why, why do they hire you?

Like you're not an expert in anything. You don't have like the qualifications essentially to do this work. So like, why are they looking to you to do it when, you know, you haven't graduated college, like you don't have any work experience, like what makes you qualified to be here? Um, And I think at the time, I probably didn't have a good response.

You know, you always wish that you could have, like, a quick retort. It was not that type of situation. But, like, later, a few hours later, when I was thinking back about it, I did have a response, which was that, um, Having lived experience does really make you an expert, um, and everybody's an expert in their own experience, and even for myself, like, I have experience with a certain, um, number of things related to having a mental health condition, but there's a lot [00:23:00] that I don't have experience in, you know, like I don't have experience in other, um, conditions.

I was never hospitalized. Like, you know, I don't have experience with the justice system. There are a lot of things that I don't know about, but I think it's really important to listen to people who have lived experience and to treat their advice. It's just as important as people who have, you know, spent their whole careers researching on it because no matter what, if you're not a part of that community and you haven't lived that life, no matter how much you research things, I don't think you can ever truly be an expert in the way that somebody is if they've had, if they've lived through it and been through, um, Whatever experience they've been through.

So that's a really important part of the app is that everyone there has had experience with a variety of things we've had. We've had people who were in

foster care who have experience with the justice system, um, people [00:24:00] of color, people from the LGBTQ community. People with mental health conditions. Um, so they bring a variety of perspectives, a variety of experiences, and it's really invaluable, the work that they do, um, to give advice and feedback to our researchers.

Mei: It's, um, it's funny you mentioned how, you know, how valid and how our lived experience does make us an expert, even, you know, if someone may not perceive it that way. Because in our last episode when we had Michelle on, I was Obviously, like, for some context, Emily's in school, and Michelle has her PhD and all these other, um, high degrees, and so I kept on saying, like, I'm sorry I keep on referring to my, like, own experience, but that's, like, all I know, and I know that's not really, you know, I just kept on kind of, like, Um, invalidating [00:25:00] what I was saying, and then she took a second and she like totally dunked on me.

She was like, no, like, that does make you an expert. That's, that's so valid in itself. And, um, so I appreciate hearing that again, because I feel like I tend to forget that, um, everyone's lived experience does bring something very important to the table.

Emily: Yeah. And it's, it's easy to like forget that too, like with yourself, you know, and, um, and like Maya with what that person said to you about, like, you know, what qualifications do you have?

It's like, I don't know, I feel like that's terrible that they said that to you, but I think that's a reality for a lot of people with mental health conditions. I feel the same about like when I came to the center, like it was really, um, you know, one of the things that drew me here was that, um, They prioritize mental health, like lived experience so much, and that they actually want to hire people like young adults with conditions because, you know, it can be really [00:26:00] hard to find that and obviously like we're in this field so it's a little bit easier, you know, for us to find somewhere that's accepting because that's the work that we do.

But yeah, I think it's, it's definitely really important for people just to remember, in general that like. You know, you, you can, you can only do so much research. And like, if you don't have that experience yourself, whether it's with a mental health condition or something else, um, you know, it's really important to listen to people who actually do have that, even if they're not like.

You know, quote unquote, like qualified or whatever. Like, what does that even mean? You know? Um, so yeah, I, I always, um, admire the YAB and I think

that what you guys do is great. Um, and yeah, it's, it's great that you found your way here and that, you know, despite everything, you were able to find a job that, um, you know, you can be yourself in and your lived experiences, like.

Actually valued.

Maya: Yeah, it's really nice to feel like [00:27:00] valued for that experience and not like in spite of it. Um, and I totally agree with what both of you have said. It can be really hard to, like, remember that and to, um, remember that it is valuable. Um, but I think too, it's like, there's all sorts of different Qualifications, you know, like there's traditional qualifications and like, all right, I've had X job for this amount of years, or I have these many, this many degrees, but in lots of different societies, like over the course of history, like, you know, qualifications can mean different things.

Like, you can also just have experience in the way that you've lived or the things that you've been through and like, that's also really valuable to have. Like knowledge, knowledge can be gained in a variety of different ways, not just in the traditional like school or work ways we grow and we learn like every day, just in our daily experiences.

Um, and I [00:28:00] think it's really important to put value on that, despite how our society is sort of like set up to not value it.

I think,

Mei: um, sorry, I'm having trouble talking today. Um, something, one of the, um, one of the features of, was it called the Michael Project? Was that? What it was called one of the features you talked about of the Michael project of how they would give students money to kind of pursue, um, anything is what it sounded like, like, you talked about how, um, they would even give students to pursue, like, creating a music album.

Maya: Yeah, they weren't just given funds to, like, Take a class or like a professional development experience, but to do something that they were interested in to gain experience in like music, you know, we had one student who wanted to like create an album.

And so that was sort of like his [00:29:00] project. And like, that's also valuable to have that experience, even if it's not like directly tied to like your career or like your school, you know, Exactly. You

Mei: got it on the nose.

I feel like more and more people are coming to this understanding that degrees, academic degrees aren't the only thing that matters.

And, um, you know, just a general appreciation of everything that someone could possibly offer, whether that's art or, you know, cooking or, you know, just any sort of endeavor, um, beyond a classic bachelor's degree.

Maya: Yeah, especially because, like, those things are becoming more and more inaccessible, like, getting a degree is, like, more expensive than ever at this point, and getting a job is really hard, um, in this day and age, so it's like, there's a lot else that we should put value on, because not everybody's going to go down that same [00:30:00] path anymore, and it's not as accessible for everyone, um, to go down that same path.

Mei: That's another really good point.

Um, but I feel like, you know, referring back to my own lived experience and how tough it was to kind of keep going sometimes. You did so much. You did so, so much. And, you know, you talked about how when you reapplied to schools, you applied to like eight and they were all rejections. Like, how did you keep yourself going and keep yourself motivated?

Maya: Yeah, that's a really good question. It was definitely really hard when I got all those rejections back. I was like crying. I was so upset. Like it was rough. Um, I think. For me to keep myself going, um, I was motivated to sort of like be, get back to independence, you know, [00:31:00] like living at home isn't always fun.

And like all my friends had jobs who are my same age, they had jobs and had, um, funds and like money to be able to travel and like do things, you know, some people were buying houses, which seems like impossible nowadays, but, so I think it was really like. Sort of what we were talking about before, like how it's so scary.

And you're like, all right, well, I can't possibly like break from this path that I'm on because like nothing else exists besides like going to school, finishing school, getting a job, you know, checking off all the boxes that you're supposed to check off in your life. So once I was sort of like, not intentionally, but once I broke through those barriers and that box that I was put in and I made it and I was like, okay.

Like. Everything's okay. Like, my life isn't what I thought it was gonna be at this point, but I was alive, and like, I was happy, happier than I had been when I was [00:32:00] in school, so it sort of just, like, clicked for me, and I was like, you know what, no matter what, like, Even if bad things happen, I can keep going because I had sort of already gotten through what I feel like was the lowest point in my life.

And even though it was such a low point and it was a really hard thing to go through everything since then, like if I could go back, I would still do it all over again because, um, without that, like I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have met my fiance. Um, so I wouldn't have this job. Like, you know, I wouldn't have. Met the people who I know in my life now, um, and once you go through something that's really, really hard, um, and I sort of made a decision at that point that I wasn't going to let anything else, like, really keep me down and that I would keep going even if I messed up or, like, Flunked out again. I was like, I'm just going to keep going and I'm going to keep trying because that's all that really matters.

[00:33:00] Not really if you're successful, but if you keep trying. So I think that's what helped me work through, um, when I got all those rejections and it's hard because I was, I think something that I'm, that I was scared of the most was failure. So, yeah. Actually failing like if you're scared of failure, and then you actually fail, you realize that it's not that scary anymore.

Um, so I was like, all right, well, I already flunked out of college. So getting 8 rejections is like, not that bad in the grand scheme of things. It's not that bad. And I was still able to go and, like, reach out to all of them, which I never would have done beforehand, because I would have been too afraid for them to say, like, all right, here's exactly why you were rejected, you know, all these reasons.

Nobody actually got back to me with reasons why I was rejected, um, except for Clark. So it wasn't, it wasn't as bad as flunking out of college. And that's sort of what I would tell myself is like, all right, you've already been through that. You can, you know, keep going through anything [00:34:00] else.

Emily: Yeah, that's really inspiring.

Um, I really like what you said about failure and, you know, like, you've already flunked out and like, what are these eight rejections? Like, you've already been through the worst. Um, and yeah, I feel like hopefully someone listening who

might be in a similar position is gonna hear that and be like, oh, yeah, like, maybe I won't.

Take the traditional path or, you know, what's sort of expected for people just like the cookie cutter sort of path. But, I mean, look, you still got to where you are today and you're happy and you have a good job with a fiancée and like, um. Yeah, I think it's just really, it speaks to how like everybody's path can be individual and like you don't have to go through exactly what society like says you're supposed to do.

Um, so yeah, thank you. Thank you for sharing your story.

Maya: Yeah, of course. I just think it's so important to, like, remember to take care of yourself over [00:35:00] anything else, um, especially if you're, like, holding yourself to high standards, like, it's always worth it to go in the direction where, like, you're going to be able to take care of yourself in the best way, so if something's, like, really stressful or just exacerbating, like, a mental health condition that you have, um, there's always going to be an out, there's always another option, and there's You can always make it through.

Um, it might take a little bit, you know, it might take a few more rejections, but if you keep going, I feel like this is a cliché, but things do get better.

Mei: I feel like it's a cliché for a reason. And, um. I I admire your tenacity so much, and I just, I feel like this is such big sister advice I've been listening to because, you know, although I'm nowhere near where I was, I'm not rock bottom or anything with my mental health, but there's still ups and downs and I'm still figuring out [00:36:00] my next steps and sometimes it feels like I don't want to stray from the linear path that I've managed to keep myself on no matter, you know, how tough it was.

Um, but it's, it's nice to hear that it will be okay even if, um, even if I stray from the current path I'm

Maya: on. Yeah, a hundred percent. Like, one of my number one, like, sort of, like, phrases that I say to myself is that progress isn't always linear. Because... Like sometimes, like I would tell my story at different panels or things and people would be like, oh, wow, like, you know, you like came from this point and then now you're like here and everything's great and everything's fine, but it's like, I still deal with my mental health condition all the time and I have to constantly remind myself not to get back into that mindset that led me to flunking out and taking a medical leave because it's only when I, [00:37:00]

Assume or when I think like, all right, I'm good. Like, everything's fine and I'm never going to struggle again. And that's when you're not sort of watching and you're not thinking about it. You're not taking care of yourself. That's when things can start to be hard again. And I think for a lot of people, like a mental health condition is a lifelong thing.

Like, um. Mental health conditions, psychiatric conditions can be considered a disability. And for a lot of people, it's something that they're going to deal with for their whole life. So I think it's super important to remember that progress isn't always linear and. Like I took a medical leave and went to a whole program, thought I was great.

And then immediately after I flunked out, like, so it's like, you know, you go through ups and downs. Um, but it's important to always remember that, like, you have to zoom out to see like the overall trajectory. And so even if you feel like, all right, I'm going through a rough patch now, even though I had been doing really great, like overall in the [00:38:00] course of your life, things are still moving forward.

Um, and I think that's also a really important thing to try to remember. Because you're always going to come up against like difficulties or you'll have like a flare up of symptoms and to sometimes it can just like you can get out of practice if things are going really well, and you don't actually have that many challenges to like face when a challenge does come up, you're going to be out of practice and dealing with it.

So, um, definitely for anybody out there who has a mental health condition, um, Just like, you know, stay in therapy, like keep practicing your tools and skills and different strategies. Um, it's important to like do regular maintenance, you know, for yourself and your mental well being. Yeah,

Emily: I think that should be the title of the episode.

Progress isn't linear. Progress isn't

Mei: linear. I'm writing that down.

Maya: Wrapped it up in a nice little

Emily: bow. Love it. Yeah, that was great. Thank you so much. I feel [00:39:00] like, you know, I mean, we could keep going, but I feel like you've

said so much and that was, it was really great to hear your story and how far you've come.

And it is a good reminder that there's always going to be ups and downs. But, I mean, we've all made it through really tough things and like look at where we are, So I think anybody who's listening, if they're like going through a rough patch, then it's just a good reminder to know that like, they're not alone and that it's okay if things do get worse before they get better.

Mei: Thanks again, Maya, for taking the time out of your day to share your story.

I can definitely say for myself, that was an incredibly uplifting 40 minutes of chatting with you.

Maya: Thank you both so much for having me. I've been a big fan of the podcast, so I'm really excited that I can make my return as a guest, um, but I'm really happy and excited about all the work that you guys have been doing on this podcast.

So happy to be a part of it.

Emily: Yeah, we're really glad to have you.

Mei: It all [00:40:00] comes full circle, you know. Um, also, uh, let us know if you like these shorter podcasts. Um, we have comments now available on Spotify, so feel free to leave a comment.

Emily: Yes, and this episode is also being recorded for YouTube, so if you're listening on Spotify, then you can go find the video version. And if you're watching the video version, then...

Mei: Hello!

Emily: I hope you like it!

Mei: if you would like to contact us, you can email us at staytuned@umassmed.edu and check out the transitions ACR website at umassmed.edu/transitions-ACR. Thanks for being here and be sure to stay tuned for next time.

