

## Kevin McShan-Black Experiences and Disabled Childhoods Video Transcript

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Kevin McShan: Alison, it's a real pleasure to be here this evening to talk about this most important topic. You know, Black identity and Black childhood is something that is a timely discussion, certainly with Black History month right here and now. So, as Alison told you, my name is Kevin McShan and when I think about having a Black identity as it comes to having a Black childhood you know, for me unfortunately having my own personal identity and being confident and comfortable with who I was wasn't always something that was readily acknowledged by me or accepted or you know as a child, I struggled with social isolation and finding my own identity and you know- one of the reasons I wanted to become a journalist was because I wanted the opportunity to propel others forward to have a more enriching childhood because you know, for me it wasn't always acceptable for me to engage in every childhood experience. So, I always say that I can either work for my circumstances or I can have my circumstances work for me. You know, I'm now 33 years old and certainly my childhood helped to shape who I am today, and you know, I wanted to share a part of my childhood that I considered to be the turning point in my life you know, it was 1998. It was the second last year of elementary school for me and I was coming back from Thames Valley Children's hospital in London and I remember distinctly this because the physician that was doing all of my surgeries is, was Dr. Tim Carron and he took me and my parents and he put us all in a hospital conference room and he looked me straight in the eye and said 'there's nothing else medically that we can do for you. From a medical perspective and you're probably going to live your life- the rest of your life in a wheelchair and use a walker to get around.' You know, that was the turning point in my childhood because then I had to go back to school and I credit my middle school principal for, it was Dr. Carol Crewley at the time and she looked at me and she said 'yes, you have a disability, but the only restrictions and limitations on your life will be placed- will be placed on your life are (inaudible 3:16) ones, you place on yourself. And, you know, that was really the springboard to really turn around my perspective on how I lived my childhood. You know, the other question we'll explore tonight was the programs and sort of the interventions that you had as a Black child with a disability and you know, the biggest intervention that I had came from my older childhood when I attended what's called the (inaudible 3:56) Gifted Children's Centre here in Windsor-Essex county and it's you know, the children's treatment centre here locally and services over 3,000 individuals and families of children with disabilities and you know, the motto of the centre is 'helping abilities grow' and certainly that was the biggest part of my family's approach and really giving me the confidence and bravado to really explore who I was as a child and really eliminating the barriers toward inclusion. You know, I always lived my life through the saying that inclusion is the gateway to independence, and I always believe that when we bring diverse voices to a discussion and we- then create more diverse perspectives and the way we look at life. So when I look at childhood and being Black and having a disability certainly, you have to overcome the stigma of having a disability and you know, I always tell people that everyone's portrait of success is different and for me that came in the form of communication because you know, I always believe that people deserve a platform to tell their own individual stories and certainly, as children- or if you're a parent of someone with a disability you always want your child with a disability to find their own voice and sense of empowerment and inclusion. As Alison told you that part of my background is helping individuals with disabilities to find and locate employment and you know part of why I'm so passionate about that work is because when you give someone with a disability a job, you also

provide them with a springboard of confidence to explore their passions and deliver their best contributions to society. So, when we look at Black childhood and Black experiences I always encourage people to always allow the exploration of ideas and different perspectives because if you unleash what you're passionate about without limiting beliefs or limiting expectations is when, my friends, you totally experience and explore what it means to you to be fully included in society. You know, one of the main messages that I leave as the motivational speaker and podcaster is bring out the chair of inclusion for individuals with disabilities. So, when we look at Black childhood and Black experiences, my friend, the earlier we can pull out the chair of inclusion and eliminate barriers to access because, you know, for me I always tell people that talent is an equally distributable asset however, access to opportunity is not. So, when we're looking at raising children of any race or background, regardless of the fact of whether you have a disability or not, it's important to always allow them to explore possibilities, free of limiting beliefs or limitations. The way we do that- is I call it the 'three Cs,' I use this for employment and in life. First of all, if you have created the conditions for success, then you have to create the expectation of possibility and then, you're allowed to celebrate your achievement because you know, when we give children with a disability, specifically Black children with a disability, the access to opportunity and the belief that their perspective on the world matters, you open up the floodgates of opportunity. And you also, once you unleash the passion, you allow them to contribute to the greater good for a better tomorrow You know, I always tell people one of my fundamental beliefs as a motivational speaker is that I'm always looking to challenge people, so we reach the heights of their full potential and the way we do that is by access to opportunity. You know, I always say that we're always given a platform as individuals to make an impactful difference is incumbent upon all of us to sort of point the compass in the direction that we want it to be pointed in. So, as I end my remarks tonight, I'm always saying that embracing opportunity means that you're embracing the possibility of differences. Celebrating our differences allows us to celebrate uh, diversity, equity, and inclusion in a whole different way and as parents and uh, professionals in the field of childhood development it is always important to eliminate the blinders of limited potential to make sure that all uh, access to opportunity is granted to all people. So, with that I look forward to tonight's discussion and I hope my remarks leave you with inside perspective and influence to leave the world a better place.