Hangout with Eli- podcast interview

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**SPEAKERS**

Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles, Eli

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 00:00

Right. All right. Good morning. Welcome to at the heart Assistive and inclusive technology stories. I'm your host Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles and I'm so excited because I have one of my favorite guests on today, Eli Grabowski, who is a student at Kennebunk High School and I've known Eli for a long time probably since elementary school, working

**Eli** 00:27

Yeah

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 00:27

 with assistive and inclusive technology and Eli is here to talk about different tools and supports, and we're also going to talk about how to do distance learning and do it well what things has helped Eli. During this time, so welcome Eli. We're so glad you're here today.

**Eli** 00:44

Wow.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 00:45

Hello. So talk a little bit we're in three week in our district of distance learning how is it going for you.

**Eli** 00:52

It's going pretty well. Um, I mean, you got to run on your own schedule with this like I know that when we're at school we run on the bell schedule. Um, but you got to really, you know, plant your feet and decide when you're going to do what and what time suits you because I feel like if you don't, then you're lost like you you're like okay wait a second, I had this do we I don't remember that like, and then it kind of bites you in the butt if you don't do that but, I mean, it's nice to wake up late. Sleep in and stay up late, like, I like that routine a lot more than, wake up early go to bed early. So, um, yeah i mean i think it's going pretty good. but yeah.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 01:48

right. So you have access to a Chromebook and your phone for your for your tech kind of tools, and supports. Before we get into kind of that, I would just want to share with the audience that Eli had the great honor of meeting. Author Jonathan Mooney, who has written several books, one of which is called normal sucks, and right before all of COVID hit and the pandemic hit. Jonathan came to our district and spoke to our staff but Eli was able to be a student that was able to attend. Do you want to share a little bit about what that was like for you and what you got out of that.

**Eli** 02:30

Well, I thought it was really cool how, um, you know, a guy like struggled through a lot, much like me. And then, he became a writer, like, of all things like he was like struggling with writing at the beginning of, you know his life, and he got it all together and, you know, became a writer I thought that was pretty cool. Um, I mean he also told a lot of interesting stories that were very cool I thought that was a great thing that the school did, and I think it's very important information that like needs to be spread so I thoughtthat was pretty cool,

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 03:13

MMM. awesome and you got to meet him too so what was that like meeting him.

**Eli** 03:19

Um,I'll tell you what he looks like a writer like it, not like you can if you see him on a tree like okay he's a writer like he's got like the hair and like glasses I don't know what it is but he looks like a writer.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 03:32

Yeah. Did you find that you connected with him.

**Eli** 03:35

Yeah,

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 03:36

learner to learner. Yeah.

**Eli** 03:38

Yeah.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 03:38

Cool. So he talked about in his kind of talk about using assistive technology that's what helps him be a writer and a reader. And he talks about two in particular one is the dictation tools, writing with your voice as you know and the other one is using books in a different format. So let's talk about you for a second because some of those tools are similar to what you've used in your career so let's talk about what's currently in your toolkit that you use to help keep you accessing stuff that's on grade level. And what you need, kind of, that's the other part what you need. Beyond this when we do go back to school and how that's going to help you in the long run. So let's just talk about the tools you have first, what are those.

**Eli** 04:28

So, the tools I mostly use is like the purple puzzle piece, like it helps me read a lot of stuff like online, um, it's, it's like, it just helps a lot if I need to do a quick Google search to just, you know, underline everything and then have like the robot read it to me. Um, and I use that like non stop when I'm working at home, because I don't have like Miss Pitchforth to be like Hey, what is this word say, I can just underline it and have it read to me. Um, and the other one is like voice typing like I use it on my phone when I text, I, I use it like non stop like I don't type, or I don't. Yeah, I don't text I use it like that i would i mean they can be kind of awkward sometimes, but, I mean, what are you going to do is just it is awesome that it's there. So,

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 05:36

Right and it's there for everybody because in our district we have one to one. So every student in our district has these tools, it's not just something that for Eli, but everyone can use them. How does it feel like for you for someone that relies on these tools to access and how does that feel for you knowing that they're available for everybody and what would you suggest to people who aren't sure or confident in trying them or thinking that for them, what would you What advice would you give them.

**Eli** 06:06

Well, I mean, I would just say like, Um, I don't know, I'm different really they, they really do work. And it's changed my life and the way I learn. But it's also changed my schedule because I'm, I like to prepare and, like, without these tools, I didn't know what was coming, am I gonna have to read a long, like, five paragraph, like summary on stem cells or. But, like, it goes a lot faster and it's nice that it's there to back me up. So, yeah,

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 06:58

right. So let's talk about, you said something about the purple puzzle piece so for those that don't know that Read and Write for Google which is put on by texthelp. They have a lot of different studying tools but one of which is text to speech which is the words are appear and it's read to you through a computer or robot as you call the robot voice. But when you do books Eli, what tools are you using when you're accessing books for class.

**Eli** 07:23

So I use Kami sometimes. I also use Bookshare

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 07:28

great How is, how's Bookshare been for you. Oh shares been great. I am I get my, I am using my history book on it right now. And I can just see all the stuff I can pick out what page I want pick out what like topic. I'm on - it's a great organizer. OMM. Yeah, and you're able to have it be read to you with the words highlighted so how does that help you in understand Do you find. How do you find that in terms of understanding what you're reading versus reading it without that. Can you talk a little bit about what that's like for you.

**Eli** 08:11

Me reading it.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 08:12

 Yeah.

**Eli** 08:12

Besides reading it to me

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 08:14

right.

**Eli** 08:15

Okay, um, so when I read it, I want I won't get anywhere, it'll take me ages. and two, I won't understand anything, because I think one words one way when it's really another way. And it'll just like mess everything up and then I don't comprehend any of the information, and it's all just, it's not. It's not going through me at all and I'm not learning it. So, like with these tools especially like read and write and Bookshare like having it read to me is very important for me because I wouldn't get any of the information.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 08:59

Right, so you're able to understand what's being read to you when it's on on a device that has it displayed and it's highlighted. So it's like it's like you said I love what you said about it getting into you. When you read it yourself it's not getting into you, but when you have your tools available, it gets into you. And then you're able to show what you know in a different way so how does that feel like to be able to write using your voice, and getting your thoughts and expressions out in that way what's that like versus the other way.

**Eli** 09:34

I would recommend it to like anybody. Like it's, it's definitely something like you can just paste in your room and like really think about things, and the computer will just pick it out. I mean it, it just, I can literally just like lie back in my chair and think about things, and I don't have to do any typing which is like whatever but, um, I don't know, it's just it. I really really like it I it's, it's a nice, it's a nice thing to have.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 10:09

That's awesome. So, you're a sophomore now correct, this is your second year in high school, what would you tell somebody who might learn in a similar way or might need those supports that is reluctant to that doesn't want to use it, they might, they might not want to feel like they're different or they've been told it's cheating What advice would you give somebody that might be younger that might need these tools, what would you tell them.

**Eli** 10:38

Um, I would, I would just tell them, give it a try. I mean, It's helped me. So, if you like. Learn the same way or like, I don't know but yeah I just say give it a try I mean, yeah,

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 11:01

yeah, just give it a try I remember when we first started, you were like, huh. And then when you saw it you were like wait-Okay, so that's been that's been super cool. Have you noticed over time too that it's easier or harder to kind of access things using tech and using your tools,

**Eli** 11:20

I've noticed that it's much easier, like, going through I noticed that a lot of different apps on my phone, have the voice typing part of it. And, yeah, I think that this technology is great, and that it'll continue to be advanced.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 11:44

what would you tell teachers who are giving you materials in paper. How would you advocate for yourself- would you tell them because you can't use paper with tech so what would you tell them about giving you materials or content meaning stuff you need to learn. What would you tell them.

**Eli** 12:05

Um,it depends on. Like what the paper is, if it's like if it's like a quick quiz, I just bring down to the skill center and I have somebody help me read it, but if it's like a really long article I have to read, I'd say like hey do you have this in a PDF or another form, where I could just like read it in class would like my headphones on and listen to it.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 12:41

Right. Um, that's important. So, is it better. Do you think for teachers to post their content online so that you could use the tools first or mix of both or.

**Eli** 12:53

I mean, some teachers like I'm like one of the. Not even 10% of the school so I mean, you kind of forget sometimes but, I mean, I'm fine with just saying like, Hey, do you have this in the PDF form. I. It's understandable I mean

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 13:19

Right.Right. But it's preferable if it's posted online

**Eli** 13:23

right

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 13:23

as opposed to, but if it's not there are some apps that can take the text out and read it to you which is another session for another day. But that will help us so the goal is really for independence- so do you feel that when you're using your tools you're more independent, like you've mentioned a couple times having that resource in the skill center is great. And that's wonderful. But how does that feel to be able to do it on your own, versus accessing skill center.

**Eli** 13:52

Yeah. So that's been one of my goals for a very long time to be independent with these sort of things. So having these tools, really, like, really helped me with it because it's, it's just helped me so much. I mean, I'm really thankful because I wouldn't be here in the classes that I'm taking without them. Yeah.

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 14:20

That's awesome. So thank you bookshare and randian rate for helping EIl with accessiblity. Is there anything else you want to tell like teachers, fellow students or just people out there that are in distance learning right now and these really uncertain times, what would you want people to kind of know or hear.

**Eli** 14:41

Well, this technology like does take time. Um, it's not like you just read something really quickly and like just glance over it like that that's not how I learned but, um, it takes a while to use it takes longer than an average person with like reading abilities or typing abilities. So I think teachers need to be aware of that, that, you know, it's just it's just a longer process using these. But yeah,

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 15:27

right. So you would suggest you taking the time to learn them and use them. Right, yeah, of course, and not -and would you suggest to not even just when we're in distance learning but what happens when we go back to school.

**Eli** 15:43

Um. What do you mean what happens when we go back to school-

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 15:48

So should we still take the time to learn the tools when we go back to school as well.

**Eli** 15:53

Yeah,

**Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles** 15:53

Yeah. Cool. All right, so, so that's a great goal for you to be independent Eli and I love that you said that about being independent and doing things on your own, because that's kind of the goal with these tools is to empower and have you access engage and express in the way that makes sense for you. And I'm just grateful that you took the time to share your story, and that you are accessing content on grade level, using Bookshare and read and write and some tools on your phone. That's it for us and our podcast. Thank you for being here and taking the time to learn to stay safe Well, everyone.