

7.1 You Are Not Meant to Do This Alone: The Power of Anti-Ra...

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SPEAKERS

Jasmine Bradshaw

J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:00
You're listening to the First Name Basis Podcast, Season Seven, Episode One: "You are Not Meant to Do This Alone: The Power of Anti-Racist Community"

J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:17
Teaching our children to be inclusive and anti-racist starts with us within the sacred walls of our home. First Name Basis is designed to empower you with the confidence you need to be a leader in your family and a change maker in your community. Together we will wrestle with hard questions and use the answers to create the world we want – a world that reflects our values of inclusion, compassion, and courage. I'm your host, Jasmine Bradshaw, and I am so excited to be on this journey with you.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:53
Hello, First Name Basis fam. I am so glad you are here. And I am so glad to be saying those words because we are kicking off Season Seven today! We've had such an exciting summer with my family, moving from Arizona all the way to Maryland. And now I'm ready to get back into it with all of you.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 01:14
This summer, I feel like I've done a lot of reflecting. And one of the things that I've been reflecting about a lot is how do I make sure that I am engaging in an anti-racist practice that is sustainable. I have been doing this work for over six years now. And I feel like it definitely ebbs and flows – like there are times when I feel like I can go full throttle and do this amazing, you know, activism in the world. But then there are other times where I am so incredibly burnt out.

And I'm like, "Is this even worth it?" Like "and I don't know, it's probably not super inspiring, but it's very candid" like, this is a problem that might not be fixed in my lifetime. And that's kind of a scary thought. And how do I make sure that I'm taking care of myself enough to keep going in this work? Because it is so important that I do so. So with that said, the conversation that we are going to have today is all about community, and the power of community in our lives, and the power of being part of a community that lets us be our full selves. And part of that is really embracing anti-racism and social justice.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 02:30

But of course, before we start, I have some things to tell you. And the most exciting one is that we are opening the doors to Ally Elementary and Ally Elementary Jr. So these are our educational programs for children and families. And Ally Elementary is meant for third graders through seventh or eighth graders, and Ally Elementary Jr is for preschoolers through second graders. And it's really your opportunity to sit down with your children, or your students if you're a teacher, and give them the tools to be the anti-racist allies that our communities so desperately need right now. These programs consist of video lessons and activities that you do alongside the children in your life, whether it be your kids or your students. And they focus on so many different topics that our children need to understand in order to be allies. So Ally Elementary Jr really focuses on Who are you? What are your identity markers? And How do you get your skin tone? What is your ancestry? Where do you come from? And then in Ally Elementary, we focus on What is race? What is racism? And What is your role within this system? How do you make sure that you are sharing your values with others and living your life in an anti-racist way that is going to make change in your community.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 03:53

So if you're interested in that go to firstnamebasis.org/allyelementary, you can read more information, you can hop on the waitlist. Of course, anyone who is on our waitlist will get a coupon code as soon as the doors open. And I'm just really excited to be on this journey together. Again, we've already had a handful of families go through Ally Elementary and Ally Elementary Jr, and it's been so nice to hear their feedback. So the doors open on September 20. And I will leave the link in the show notes so you can check it out and learn more.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 03:56

And I really feel like it was perfect timing that Miranda asked me to share about connection to community at her camp because I'm like, "Okay, who needs to think about this more than the person who just moved across the country and is figuring out how to integrate into and connect with the community around me, the one that I just plopped myself into and really don't know that much about yet!" And one of the biggest reasons that we chose to move, I'm sure you remember this from the episode that we made about our move and the whole decision making process, is because we didn't feel like the community that we were living in was really representative of our values and would give our children the opportunity to be their best selves. And so we really hope that we have found a new place where we can embrace who we are as individuals and who we are as a family. So I feel like this episode is really as much for me as it is for you. Of course, so many of the episodes I feel that way. But this one especially,

you know what I mean. So if you're like me, and you feel like maybe there's something off in the community that you're in, or you're just looking to create a community that better aligns with your values, just know that you're not alone. And I think that this episode will really give you the support that you need to keep going and find that community or create something that is a better fit for you.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 04:26

All right, so let's jump into our topic for today and talk a little bit about how anti-racism is really meant to be done in community. We are not meant to do this work alone. First of all, the work affects us as a community. So it doesn't really make sense to do it by ourselves. But also it's not that sustainable if we're trying to go at it alone. Of course, it's important that we share it with the people around us, our knowledge and what we're learning about race and racism and the things that we want to change, but we really need support. We need support from each other. So sharing it is a way to bring people along on the journey with you so that we're not by ourselves.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 05:06

And one of the things that I feel like I've seen a lot lately is people saying, "Okay, this is important that we share on social media, but social media is not the only place where we should be having these conversations. We need to be doing anti-racist work out in the community, not just on our phones." And I totally agree, like I could not agree more.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 05:29

And one of the episodes that I want to point you to where we have a conversation about this specifically about, okay, what are the ways that we can show up outside of social media? It is an episode called "Black Lives Matter: How Will You Respond," and it is where I got to interview "New York Times" journalist Veronica Chambers. And she has a book called "Call and Response: The Story of Black Lives Matter." And in her book, she gives so many ideas for how to get involved, of course, in like protests and things like that, but in lots of other venues as well, because she was saying it's really important to recognize that not everybody is going to be a protester, and that's totally okay, but finding your space in the movement is also really important. So I will link that episode in the show notes. It's called "Black Lives Matter: How Will You Respond?" And in it, we really talk about what does it look like to live out anti-racism in your life.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 06:24

So as I've been thinking about anti-racist community and the characteristics of anti-racist community, I was realizing, shouldn't we just call it community? Like, why do we need to label it? Because shouldn't every community be anti-racist? Isn't a true, strong, healthy community a place where the people are striving to be anti-racist? Like, I don't want to have two different groups; I don't want to have a group where I talk to my friends about what's really going on in my life, that includes racism and all of the things that I'm facing in that arena, and then have a

whole separate group of people where I don't talk to them at all about that stuff because I know that they're not going to take me seriously and it's just going to be more of the same issues, right? So shouldn't every community be anti-racist? So if we have the health of the community, and we're working towards really being in community with one another, anti-racism is going to be one of the pillars of that community, right? Because the reality is, the social construct of race touches every part of our society, because it's something that you can see just by looking at someone. So even if you're not talking about race, it's still impacting the situation. So whether you talk about it or not, it's still there. So why don't we all just want to be part of anti-racist communities, so that we can feel accepted, embraced, and feel like everyone has a fair shot.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 07:55

So with all of that said, as I started to look into community in general, not necessarily from the lens of anti-racism, I saw so many characteristics of anti-racism that overlap with the characteristics of a positive community. So that's what we're going to talk about today. And I want to share with you that I actually gave this talk as a part of Grown-Up Summer Camp. So my friend Miranda Anderson from the Live Free Creative Podcast and Live Free Creative Company, she hosts an event called Grown-Up Summer Camp, and it really is what it sounds like. We went to the mountains in Virginia and we slept in bunk beds, and we floated the river, and we went on hikes, and we did ice dyeing, like, it was so much fun. It was just a ton of women who were really invested in themselves and in taking a rest and taking a break away from the chaos of it all. And we talked about connecting to ourselves, connecting to nature and connecting to community. So she invited me to share with the other women at the camp about the power of community and what it looks like to connect with our communities. It was seriously a blast, and she already has summer camp for 2023 on the horizon. It's going to be in Glacier Montana. So I will leave the link for Grown-Up Summer Camp, Miranda Anderson's Grown-Up Summer Camp, in the show notes if you're interested in looking into it, because it was so, so, so fun.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 09:24

All right, so our conversation is going to focus on three things. Number one: how community affects both your mental and physical health; number two: the two main reasons why communities form; and number three: the six characteristics of a positive community. And I do want to note that so much of this episode was inspired and shaped by the work of Dr. Nicole Celestine. She is a behavioral scientist and researcher and she wrote an article called "10 Traits That Make a Positive Community," which, of course, I'll link in the show notes for you. So first, I want you to just take a second and think. Think about what it feels like to be with someone who really gets it. Someone who really gets you, like you don't feel like you have to explain yourself to them, or when you do, you're embraced in a way that they are like, "Yeah, I want to know you and I want to better understand and support you."

J Jasmine Bradshaw 11:54

Let me just give you an example. I feel like when you're asking someone for a favor, the way that you ask them shows so much about your relationship with them. Like if you're asking your BFF you're just gonna be like, "Hey, oh, my gosh, I have this doctor's appointment and it

overlaps with naptime. Could you come over for a sec? Or could I drop off my kiddo at your house?" And it's really not a big deal. But if you're asking somebody who maybe you don't have a super great relationship with, or you don't know them super well, you're like, "Hey, maybe could you, maybe, think about helping me with this doctor's appointment thing?" Right? Like, I feel like that is the difference between being in a community where you are embraced and where your values are represented, and a community where you are trying to be yourself but maybe there are barriers in the way.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 12:45

Okay, so let's get into the effects of community on your mental and physical health. And one of the biggest trends that I found when I was reading about all of this and doing the research for this episode is that healthy communities really lead to healthy people. And one of the quotes that was in the article by Dr. Celestine was a quote by a man named Dr. Mark Hyman, and he said, quote, "The power of community to create health is far greater than any physician, clinic or hospital." End quote. Now, okay, pause, because I do not want you to go and be like, "Oh, yes. Dr. Mark Hyman, he is just so all knowing." No no no. This person is a little bananas. I looked him up and I was reading an article about him and I was like, "Oh, gosh, like, I don't think that this is a person that I necessarily want to be pointing to," like he is a little bit out there. And I don't even necessarily think this quote is true, like "the power of community to create health is greater than a physician, clinic or hospital." I don't know if I even agree with that. But I wanted to use the quote just to show you that we should not be underestimating the power of community and how it can affect us, both mentally and physically.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 14:06

So let's dive into mental health. And I will share an example from my life, and then I also want to tell you about the research that really backs this up. So one of my dearest friends, she just had her third baby about four months ago. And after her second baby, she had really bad postpartum depression. And when I was checking in with her and asking her how she was doing after this third baby, I mentioned the fitness group that she's a part of. Since having her second she joined this fitness group, she's super into it, and I said, "I bet that being in this fitness group is really helping after your baby," and she was like, "Yeah, it definitely is." And I was thinking it's helping because you know, getting your body moving is really good for your mind, too, and all that stuff. And she was like, "No, it's less about the fitness and it's more about the community. It's more about having a support system. I have people who are there for me and someone that I know that I can call at any minute." This is a fitness group, but they're so tightknit that she was like, "These are the people that I needed in my life after my second baby, I really think that this would have helped me, and I feel like it's helped me so much this time around."

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 15:18

And there really is a ton of research about how being plugged into a meaningful community can have a positive effect on your mental health. So in 2017, researchers did a study where they included women who are bisexual. And what they did was they had these women go to a support group with other by women two to three times a week. And before joining the group,

the researchers found that these women were carrying around so much shame and other yucky, nasty ideas about their sexuality that they had absorbed from the terrible way that the world talks about and treats members of the LGBTQ+ community. And they found that after going to the support group, two to three times a week, the weight of that garbage, the weight of that shame, was really reduced, because they were able to be around people who understood what they were going through, and were supportive of them. And they found that these women were better able to manage their depression, and have fewer symptoms of depression, just because they were in a community where they felt supported.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 16:30

There was another study done in 2005, where they found that moms in underresourced communities reported lower symptoms of depression when they were part of a faith-based community. Now, please don't think I'm saying that you need to be part of a faith-based community. I know that that is a very personal thing. And I really don't know how these moms would have been impacted if they were just part of a really positive community that didn't involve faith, but those were the terms of the study, so I did want to share it because I feel like that is really powerful.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 17:04

And one of my favorite things that I learned in doing this research was about an initiative that they have in Australia, it's a campaign called "Act-Belong-Commit." And in Australia they learned about the huge benefits of community on mental health, and they decided that it would be worth it to invest in a program that offers opportunities for people to participate in community. So they have this "Act-Belong-Commit" program, and the whole point of it is to get people to belong and commit to a community in their area. So they have a whole website devoted to tons of different activities. And all you have to do is go on the website, sign up, it's super affordable, and it's stuff for people from all age groups, from kids, adults, grannies, and grandpas — like they just want people to take care of their mental health by being part of a community that is meaningful to them. Isn't that super cool?

J Jasmine Bradshaw 18:03

So when I went on the "Act-Belong-Commit" website, because you know, I did, I was reading through a lot of the different activities and they sounded so fun. They had one that was called "Crafternoons," where it was just people who love to craft, they get together and they craft. So you can either bring a craft that you're working on, or you can do one that they have there, and just get together with other people and chat during the afternoon and have a little snack while you're crafting. On the website it said "tea and biscuits on offer." I thought that was so cute. So you can go, you can do your craft, you can get some tea and biscuits. They also had a walking group, a yarn club, a "Wise Women's exercise group. I think "Wise Women" is code for the grannies of our life. They had Mahjong, they had an animal move-and-sing — that was for the little kiddos — coloring club. And then one of the ones that I was like, "What even is this?" It was the Philatelic Society, which is the study of postage stamps and postal history. Did you even know that that was a thing? It's a stamp club where they all get together, and they show off their stamps, and they talk about postcards and the history of stamps. Like if you are

interested in it, you can find it. If there's a Philatelic Society, I bet there's a club or a group for whatever it is that you care about. One of the other cute ones was called "Charity Chums," and it is a group of people who get together and knit, crochet, or do patch work for various charities. I mean, who doesn't want to be a charity chum? And the last one I'll share with you is "Exergaming," and I just have to read you the quote because I was like, "What?" It says, "Exergaming is a mix of low-impact exercising and games using an Xbox. There are games to suit everyone. It is fun and interactive and requires no previous experience or skill. Ask for a demo." Isn't that amazing? It's \$2, and you can go to Exergaming. So really, whatever, whatever you're into, there are people out there who are into it too and want to do it with you.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 20:14

And speaking of Exergaming, let's shift gears into the physical benefits of being in a positive community. I really think you're going to be mindblown when you hear about how much community truly affects our physical health. And it, it just, it really blew me away. So in Iceland, they were trying to find a way to lower the drug and alcohol use in teenagers, they just felt like, "Okay, obviously, teenagers, it's a developmental stage in their lives that they do experimenting, but some of them are getting themselves into issues with it. And so we need to figure out a way to make sure that they have a positive place to go and a positive place to put their energy." So what they did was create these community sports teams. They offered community sports to all the kids in Iceland and said, like, "Hey, join the sports team, it would be so fun, you'd be a great addition to it." And what they found was that they saw a really significant drop in drug and alcohol use among the youth in their country.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 21:22

Being in a positive community can help us stay away from some of the things that we do that can be detrimental to our health, our physical health, but it's not just that, it can literally help us heal when we are injured. I was reading an article by the King's Fund, and it said, quote, "Social support is particularly important in increasing resilience and promoting recovery from illness." End quote. So if you're sick, or if you got surgery, if you have a strong community around you, you can actually recover faster. It goes on to say, quote, "Lack of social networks and support and chronic loneliness produces longterm damage to physiological health, via raised stress hormones, poor immune function, and cardiovascular health. Loneliness also makes it harder to self-regulate behavior and build willpower and resilience over time, leading to engagement in unhealthy behaviors." End quote.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 22:28

And there was a little town in Pennsylvania that perfectly captured the reality of the power of community. So in the 1800s, a group of Italian immigrants settled a town in eastern Pennsylvania called Roseto. Now before I tell you about the Roseto effect, I really want to take a minute and acknowledge the people who stewarded the land before the Italian immigrants. And I have to give a trigger warning because we're going to talk briefly about the violence against Indigenous peoples. But we really need to pause here and understand that these Italian immigrants were only able to settle this land because the original stewards of the land had been kicked off and their land was stolen from them. So the original stewards of this land in

eastern Pennsylvania were the Susquehannock people. And they were basically wiped out because the white colonizers first killed their leaders and then many of their members in their community contracted infectious diseases, like smallpox, which they obviously got from the European colonizers, who then stole their land. Some of the surviving Susquehannock people traveled west to join other tribes, but the core population of the tribe was wiped out by disease, and by violence from the white settlers. I found all of this information using the Native Land website. They also have an app, it's really, really cool. I'll link it in the show notes. All you have to do is put in the zip code of the area that you want to learn about, and then they will tell you who were the Indigenous peoples that originally lived on and stewarded the land. And then from there, I just took the information and I went to Google and read about the Susquehannock people. So go to the Native Land website "I will link that in the show notes" and figure out whose land you're living on.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 24:31

All right. So after the Susquehannock were on this land, the Italian immigrants came and they created this town called Roseto. And in the 1950s the doctors in the town were noticing that in Roseto they had a lot less deaths from heart disease than the average American town. They were looking around like, "Why is this town so special?" I guess, when it comes to these rates of heart disease and dying from heart disease, they really didn't understand it because there was a town literally right down the street from them where people had way higher rates of heart disease and dying of the disease. So the doctors were like, "What is going on in this town?" And they were especially confused because the people in Rosarito they ate fried food, they salami, lots of cheese, I mean, some of them were smokers. They weren't necessarily doing things that would help them avoid getting heart disease. And this continued for decades. And so when the doctors went to study what in the world was going on, they found that the people in this town just didn't have the same outcomes as other American towns. And it was because of the social support in their community. One of the biggest things they found in their research was that people said that they weren't lonely. The people in Rosarito felt like they were members of a community that really took care of one another, and tried their best to be there for each other. The other thing was these families were living intergenerationally. So there was so much support in the home. The parents had support taking care of the kids. If someone were to lose their job or fall on hard times, they wouldn't necessarily be in a huge ordeal because there were so many people around them to help them get back on their feet. And the other reason they talked about was that Roseto had a lot of community-wide celebrations. So they would get together all the time to celebrate one another and just have a great time together. It was that opportunity to connect with each other that really helped their not only their mental health, but their physical health. The doctors believe that since the people who lived in Roseto experienced less loneliness, they were able to have better physical outcomes than the people around them. And it was really interesting because over time, the town became more Americanized. A lot of the kids started moving away for school and then moving out of the community, and then Roseto started to see the same outcomes as everyone else.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 27:16

And that's one of the things that I think we need to "I don't know the elephant in the room" that we need to look at and talk about. The dominant culture in America is very individualistic, and that can actually hurt us sometimes. I mean, that's another episode for

another day, the characteristics of white supremacy culture, but thinking about the fact that we are so focused on individualism that it's actually hurting our health, both mentally and physically, can be kind of a wake up call for a lot of us.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 27:48

But the thing is, you don't have to be alone to feel lonely. Do you know what I mean? Like sometimes you can be in a group of people and feel like, "These people do not know me. They don't get me. They don't embrace me, and I feel completely lonely." And honestly, that is why I started First Name Basis. I was reading so much about anti-racism, and I was figuring out what it looks like in my life, and I thought, "Man, I wish I could find a group of people â€” parents and teachers and caregivers â€” who cared about this, too. A group of people who wanted this for the children in their life." And I was looking around, and I didn't see very many people who wanted that in my immediate community that I was in, and so I created First Name Basis. And let me tell you, I have found it, thank goodness. And I'm so grateful because I really feel like I can be myself in this community. I feel like y'all know me, you know who I am, you know who I'm about, and you embrace me, and I'm just so happy about that. I don't feel that loneliness that I once felt.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 28:55

Okay, so now that we have covered the effects, both mental and physical effects, of being in a positive community, let's talk about the two main reasons why communities form. In her article, Dr. Celestine outlined to these two reasons. And these are paraphrases, these aren't direct quotes from her. This is what I got from it. She said the first reason is that people want to connect with others who have similar values, interests, struggles, or beliefs. And the second reason is because people are near each other. That probably describes a lot of the communities that you're in, right? Like it's the people around you, so you're in that community. So I kind of boiled that down to built-in ways that you connect with community and effort-based ways, because the people around you â€” it doesn't really necessarily feel like it takes a whole lot of effort, it's just kind of built in, right? So built-in ways I feel like work, like a place that you just go or experience every day. Some, I'm sure a lot of you, work from home but you know what I mean: the people at work, people at school- or maybe people in your church community, those are all kind of built in communities. Effort-based communities are a book club that you start, or if you start a podcast like First Name Basis to find other people. Or maybe you go to a Bunco group.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 30:16

So Bunco, if you haven't heard of it, it is a super fun, super easy dice game. It's just a game of chance. And there are prizes, and you get together. I mean, you can get together however many times you want, but my Bunco group met once a month, and we played every month. And in order to play Bunco, you need 12 players, because there are three different tables and there are four people at each table. So you need 12 people. So usually groups will form with a set of 12 people and those same 12 people meet every single month in order to play Bunco. And in Mesa where I just moved from, people's families have been there for centuries, and it feels like everybody knows everybody. Like for example, my husband and his grandfather went

to the same high school. Like at graduation they'll call out the names of families who have had the most children attend this high school for the longest time, and they say the name and everybody cheers. And my husband is one of nine. So they had all nine kids go to the same high school and it was the same high school that his grandpa graduated from. And everybody is just, has been there for a really long time, and it's super interconnected. And I grew up about an hour away from my husband in a town where a lot of people were transplants, unless they were Indigenous, of course. And it was a very, like, urban-sprawl type of situation, where my high school had only been around for five years when I went there. I was definitely the first person in my family to go there and then there was my sister. And now we've both moved away and none of our kids will go to that high school. So when we moved to Mesa, after we got married, I was looking around trying to make friends. And I was like, "Wow, this is kind of tricky to break into a friend group, because so many people have known each other like since they were in preschool, they grew up together, or it's just one of those towns where everybody knows everybody, and they've known each other forever." And so I was like, "Okay, what does it look like for me to be part of this community as someone kind of coming in from the outside." And before we had Violet, I was a bridal consultant. So I used to sell wedding dresses, and it was one of my favorite things ever. It was the best job. It was so fun. And the bridal shop where I worked was owned by this couple. They were like my parents' age, and I love them so much. They really took me under their wing. And it was just it was such a wonderful environment. And their daughter had started a Bunco group and she was about my age and one time they needed a sub for their group. So because you need 12 people to play the game, if there is someone in the group who can't go to Bunco that night, they usually call a sub so that someone can come and play in their place so that you have enough people to play the game. So the owner of the bridal shop, her daughter had a Bunco group and she called me and she was like, "Hey, do you want to come play Bunco," and I'd never been. I didn't even know what it was. And at the time, Violet was six weeks old. I had no idea what I was doing. I was so in over my head with being a mom. Like I didn't...I mean, my sister is only four years younger than me, so I don't remember her as a baby. And I really wasn't around babies growing up. So when I had Violet, I was like, holy cannoli, drinking from a firehose. So I went to this Bunco group, and I didn't know hardly anyone. There were a couple of girls there that I knew. And everyone else was total strangers to me, and I just had a baby. It was like really emotional. I went to this Bunco group, and it was fun. Like I played, I had an okay time. And then I went home and my husband was like, "How did it go?" And I was like, "It's...it's fine. I mean, yeah, it was good, but I didn't know anybody." And then a couple of weeks later, the church was having a storytime. And so I took my little six week old, packed her up in the car, and I guess she was probably eight weeks at that point. But we went to the church storytime, and I saw a couple of the girls from the group. And I was like, "Oh, hey!" and they did not recognize me. They didn't know who I was. They couldn't remember me. And I was like, "Oh, man, that, you know, kind of hurt." But then I was invited to go back to Bunco again, and I was like, "Should I go? Like, I'm so anxious about this. I mean, those girls didn't even remember me at the storytime." And my husband basically had to push me out the door, and I'm so glad he did because they invited me to be a permanent member of the group and since then, Bunco has really been my lifeline. Like, I was in this amazing group with 11 other women who were in a similar stage of life as me, they had young kids, we're all figuring it out together. I can't tell you how much I loved and needed this monthly place to go to just take a breath and be like, "Man, motherhood, right? Now let's play Bunco."

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 30:34

And right before I left to come to DC to drive to Maryland, across the country with my family,

they threw me a going away party, and I just sobbed my eyes out, because I love all of these women so much. And it meant so much to me that they would take me in as someone who didn't grow up in the area and didn't know very many people. It was just so nice. So if you are in a Bunco group, I'm so happy for you. If you're not, maybe you should start one. But it doesn't have to be Bunco. I'm just saying, get involved in a community, even if it's hard, the first couple times is not going to feel comfortable right off the bat, but you need a place. You need a place where you can go rest, relax, have fun, laugh, and talk about the things that are going on in your life.

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Jasmine Bradshaw 36:08

Okay, so the last piece of this conversation are the characteristics of a positive community. Now, it's important to note that not all communities are positive. Of course, you already know that right? Like, think of the Proud Boys, they are terribly destructive. And they're not just hurting communities around them, they're hurting themselves. So all communities have consequences. They can be positive, they can be negative, or sometimes they can be neutral consequences, but the consequences are there. And Dr. Celestine says, quote, "Positive communities are groups that inspire their members in ways that promote a sense of self-discovery and group connection, encourage members to express their beliefs and values, and build relationships with others." End quote. Doesn't that sound magical? Doesn't that sound exciting to be in a group in a community like that?

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Jasmine Bradshaw 37:05

So let's talk about what those communities look like. Let's talk about the six characteristics of a positive community. Now I have to say that I adapted this from the work of Dr. Celestine — she had 10 aspects or 10 characteristics, and I narrowed it down to six and kind of molded them into something that felt better for me. But I hope these really resonate with you. So the first characteristic of a positive community is that it's a group of people who share common goals. Now, in some communities, these goals are pretty obvious, like religious communities, activist communities. I mean, I just joined a group on Facebook called "Bissell Crosswave Lovers." I really actually needed this community, I just bought a Bissell Crosswave, and I was having some issues with it, and I couldn't figure anything out on Google. So I went on Facebook, and I found this group. It literally has over 13,000 members and it's just people talking about owning a Bissell Crosswave and how we can make the most of this ridiculously expensive vacuum mop thing that we all have. So sometimes the goals are pretty obvious, and sometimes they're not. Sometimes there are goals that you share, but they're not necessarily something that you've talked about, like when you're raising your children together. Obviously, your goal is that you want to raise well-rounded, great contributing members of society, but maybe that's not something that you talk about with your best friend all the time, even though you are in community with each other, right? Or when you're working on your physical fitness together, like I'm thinking of when you go to a workout class, and you see the same people every week, but they're not necessarily someone that you would hang out with all the time, but you do see them and your common goal is that you are working on moving your body and it's something that makes you feel good. So that's the first characteristic of a positive community, that they share common goals.



J Jasmine Bradshaw 39:04

And the second characteristic is that they embrace freedom of expression. They really encourage people to speak their minds and express what's important to them, and they encourage people to be themselves. As I was working on the research for this episode, I was thinking a lot about religious communities and how in some religious communities, people aren't free to be themselves without shame. And that means that that community is not performing in a way that allows everyone to get the positive benefits from the community, and it's really unhealthy. When it comes to freedom of expression. Dr. Celestials article said quote, "Individuals who feel encouraged to give input about an issue and who feel heard when they speak their minds are more likely to feel connected to their community. Further, successful communities recognize the importance of opinions that diverge from the majority, and are open to hearing these. In contrast, dysfunctional communities tend to silence voices that diverge from those espoused by the majority or group leaders." End quote. Let that quote, sit for a minute, because you've probably been in a community like that at some point. You've probably been in a community where the leaders don't let people be who they really are, or where the leaders use their power to shame people, and use their power to control others instead of listening to the voices that are coming from within their community. And I'm not saying that if you are in a community like that, that you must leave immediately. There are probably things you can do, there are probably changes that you can try to make, and I hope you do. But recognizing that it's there is a really important first step.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 40:55

The third characteristic of a positive community is a group that creates time for connection. And this is where I think of my Bunco group, right? Like, we all knew that the first Tuesday of every month, we were going to get together. It's hard to be close with people if you don't actually spend time with them. And one of the things that I learned about was this concept of emotional contagion. Now, I don't love the word because "contagion," pandemic-era, is like giving me you know, lots of tightness in my chest. But this concept of emotional contagion basically means that you are experiencing something with someone, and you are having similar emotions to them as you're experiencing it. So that can be something good or something hard. When you go through something with another person, and you have this emotional contagion, you grow stronger in your connection. And that makes for a better community member that makes for a more tight knit community. And it seriously does not have to be complicated. I shared with y'all a few months ago that I'm into Disney pins, like, I thought it was just like, "Oh, yeah, I'm into Disney pins," but I'm actually like, really into it. And there are people all over. Like, it's like this underground society. It's like the people who collect stamps, right? Like, they get together, they talk about Disney pins, and I am here for it. It doesn't have to be something huge and monumental, it can just be something fun and light-hearted.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 42:31

The fourth characteristic of a positive community is a group that celebrates traditions together. And this is meaning both traditions of the individual members and traditions of the group as a whole. So I'm talking about the fact that the individual members of the community, they bring with them their culture and their traditions, and they want to celebrate that with the other people around them. But then you also will come up with new traditions and celebrations together, right. Like when you have a group of people, you usually find something to celebrate

all together. For example, the women that I lived with in college, we do something called "Roommate Christmas," which is obviously where we celebrate like Christmas with each other when we were in college. But now that we're out of college, we basically have agreed that we want to get together at least once a year and do something fun. And so it doesn't matter if it's in December, or if it's in like July, we still call it Roommate Christmas. And it just means this is a tradition that we have together, where we are going to set aside time to make sure that we see each other and do something that helps us connect. So Roommate Christmas, if you want to steal it, it's really fun. And now we all live in different states, so it'll be interesting to see how we figure out Roommate Christmas this year.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 43:50

The fifth characteristic of a positive community are people who strive for fairness. So you might not have noticed this, but fairness is probably a foundational part of many of your favorite relationships. When people aren't being treated fairly, they really are driven to disconnect from the community. So a lot of your favorite people probably have fairness as one of their core values and so do you. And that's why you connect so well together. And I feel like this is why I do the work that I do, right? When we think about teaching children about justice, one of the first questions that I teach children to ask themselves "and this is something that I talk about in Ally Elementary and in Ally Elementary Jr" is "Is this fair? Is this situation fair?" We need our kids to see if this is not fair, is there something that they can be doing in order to make it more fair? So is this fair and how can I help make it more fair? That is one of the most, in my opinion, one of the most important aspects of a positive community are people who strive for fairness.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 44:57

And the sixth and final characteristic of positive community are people who communicate when there is friction. And the reality is if you are close to someone, you will have friction in your relationship. That means that you're sharing who you are. They're sharing who they are. And sometimes you bump up against each other. Now, this does not mean that you like conflict. I feel like a lot of people are like, "Oh, well, I don't like conflict." Okay, well, I don't like conflict, either. Like, I'm not the kind of person who's going around like, "Hmm, what conflict can I stir up today?" No, I don't like it. But it's important to me, this relationship in this community is important enough to me to face that conflict head on. Because I want us to feel embraced, I want us to be able to have self-expression and be able to strive for fairness together. And in order to do all of those other things we have to communicate when there's friction.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 45:54

There's a researcher named Sam Kaner, and he is an expert on participatory decision making. And he coined this phrase, the "groan zone." And what he says is, in order to create lasting change, communities really have to go through the groan zone. And they call it this because there's usually conflict involved. But if that conflict is navigated respectfully, then the community members can really build trust and move forward with their vision together. So if you're really in community with people, you're going to have a groan zone. And you're going to go through this groan zone and you're going to have to face, "Okay, is it worth it to me to go

through this groan zone with these people to get to where we really want to be? Because this community is too important to me to let any of this garbage fester," right. So we have to talk about it when things come up, we've got to set aside time to get on the same page and talk about the friction that is coming up in our communities.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 46:56

All right, so those are the six characteristics of positive community. And we have talked about so much in this episode, I've learned so much, and I love learning it with you. We first talked about how community affects both your mental and your physical health. Then we went over the two main reasons why communities form. And then, last, we talked about the six characteristics of a positive community. And I know it might not seem like it, because we've all spent so much time apart. But we are actually living in a really exciting time for community. If you're like me, you probably felt like 2020 gave you a chance to really hone in on your values and what you want that to look like in your everyday life, inside and outside of your home. And there are just so many ways for us to take those values with us as we go out into the world and connect with other people. And it's so much easier to connect with other people because of social media. And I think we need a good mix. I think we need a good mix of people that we can call up when we just want to go to Target and we don't want to go alone, and people who might not even live in the same state that we're in, but understand what we're going through when our social identities are similar to each other and we are struggling because of the systems, the oppressive systems, that we're living under.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 48:17

But the thing is, I kind of want those people to be the same, if that makes sense. Like I want my friend who goes with me on a Target run to also be a friend that I can talk to about the heaviness that racism is creating in my life. And I really have found that through this First Name Basis community, I work with two of the most amazing women on the planet "Kiersten and Whitney work on the team here at First Name Basis, and they are, first of all, brilliant and so good at what they do. But also, there are some of my best friends, they're moms, we're going through this mom thing together, we're figuring out this anti-racism things together. We're sending our kids off to school together like we are really in it. And I can talk to them about these things that are going on in my life, the really hard, heavy racism issues. And I would love to go to Target with them if we lived in the same state. I would love to hop in the car and go grab a smoothie together and go shopping and enjoy. Like it is so powerful when you find people who embrace who you are and have really similar values to you. So I hope that you will see that a good community is an anti-racist community. We don't need our anti-racist communities to be like siloed off to the side somewhere. We need them to be integrated into every community because a healthy community is one that focuses on justice for everyone. And that means being anti-racist together.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 49:56

All right, y'all, I hope that you felt inspired by In this episode, I hope that you'll go out and find some people to connect with or really try to make the change in the communities that you're already in. And don't forget, enrollment for Ally Elementary and Ally Elementary Jr will open on

September 20. So go to firstnamebasis.org/allyelementary to learn more. And I will put both of those links in the show notes for both Ally Elementary and Ally Elementary Jr. I mean, it's basically the same link. Ally Elementary Jr is firstnamebasis.org/allyelementaryjr. And if you want to learn more, but you want to do it through listening to a podcast "because you know, that's how I like to learn about things" I've actually made two episodes about both of the programs. The first is Season Four, Episode 10. It's called "The memory That I Can't Shake: The Why Behind Ally Elementary," and the other is Season Five, Episode 16, and it's called "Age Appropriate Anti-Racism," and in that episode, I talk all about why it's important that we start with talking about fairness and identity and who our kiddos are in terms of our preschoolers to our second graders. And then when they get older, we can start to really dig into the heavy issues and how they can be part of the change. So listen to both of those episodes. I will put them both linked in the show notes and I will talk to you so soon. I love you so much.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 51:24

My friends, thank you for being here. I hope you can feel how much I believe in you and how deeply I know that when we work together, we can make real change in our communities. Any of the books, podcasts, or articles that I reference will be linked in the show notes. If you are looking for more detailed notes, be sure to head over to our Patreon community. On our Patreon site I provide all of the outlines that I use to make the episodes and everything is linked there so you don't have to take furious notes while you are listening. And don't forget to join us over on Instagram [@firstname.basis](https://www.instagram.com/firstname.basis). If you're interested in partnering with First Name Basis or doing some kind of collaboration, please email us at hello@firstnamebasis.org. All right, have a great week my friends and I will talk to you again soon.