

## **Music**

### **Introduction**

#### **Aisaiah (00:06)**

Welcome to episode four of the ConnectEd podcast, tech for all podcast, cosponsored by the Community Data Clinic. Your guide to unlocking resources and opportunities in East Central Illinois. I'm Aisaiah and alongside me is Harshi, your hosts on this journey. In the next twenty minutes, we're diving into three key aspects that can change the game for you and your community.

First off, we'll show you some cool things happening in our community. Think of it as a bunch of resources, programs, and projects that can make a real difference in your life. Then we've got some amazing stories to share. Real people, just like you, who've had their lives changed by these programs we're talking about. And don't worry, we're not going to leave you hanging. We'll also give you some tips on how you can get in on these opportunities and make them work for you.

In this episode, we're joined by Tabitha Qualls and we'll have the opportunity to learn from her experience and knowledge in healthcare and wellness in Champaign County. Tabitha is currently a case manager at the City of Champaign Township and works directly with the Strides Shelter. In addition, she is a graduate of the Odyssey Project and holds certification in medical assisting and mental health.

#### **Harshi (1:15)**

Okay. Good morning, Tabitha. Thank you so much for being here today with us and joining us for this conversation. It's so great to have you and we'd love for you to start by introducing yourself and your work, as well as sharing any connection you may have with the Community Data Clinic or Champaign County.

#### **Tabitha (1:31)**

So, uh, good morning. It's so great to be here. I'm really, really excited. Really, really nervous, but I know it's going to go really awesome.

So I am, like I said, like kind of how we were talking. I am a transplant from Kankakee County. I know that I was sort of born with a passion for helping people. So when I got here into Champaign County, I knew that I needed to be connected within the community. So I am someone who kind of integrates yourself right away.

I started off just by learning Champaign County and all the resources that it has to offer, and there's so many that I think people don't know about. Um, so my work has been mostly in connecting people with those resources, even if they're the more hidden resources or nuanced ones. There is more often than not something that can help in just about any situation. So I have had a background in healthcare and case management, and I'm really excited to answer more questions.

**Harshi (2:40)**

Yeah, thank you so much for sharing. So far on this podcast, we've covered educational programs, child programming, and social work. For today's episode, we are focusing on housing and employment within the East Central Illinois community. And given your experience at Strides Shelter and in health care, we'd appreciate your insight and expertise.

Can you speak a little bit about the importance of housing and employment, particularly in addressing the diverse needs of the communities that you work with?

**Tabitha (3:08)**

Yeah, absolutely. So both housing and employment to me are like the foundational things that you need to get your life forward. So when I'm working at Strides, especially with my clients one-on-one, the end goal is typically housing, but it isn't always that.

Sometimes it...it's employment first to get you up on your feet, to start generating money, to move forward. I like how one of my clients said that they take everything in strides.

So as far as employment goes, like I said, that's one of those foundational things that you need to get yourself forward. I think, at least in my opinion, especially when you have a disability or multiple disabilities, whether you realize them or not, that can be a barrier to employment. And that's something that I've really encountered.

I think that the conversation on mental health actually needs to be brought into this because those can be barriers to housing and employment. I think that when we look at the amount of depression, trauma, generational trauma, substance use disorders and even when we get into the conversation about psychotic disorders, those are all really difficult conversations to have with someone.

So I think to specifically address this community, I think we need more housing. I think more accessible housing needs to be built, especially for people who have various and diverse needs and disabilities.

One thing that's actually happening with the Champaign County Health Care Consumers is called the Hope Village Project. They are actually going to be building accessible housing for people who have a wide array of needs and I think it's going to be amazing. It's going to be in Urbana and you can check out their website to find out more information. But I think that's going to really address some of the needs that are not being met at this time.

**Harshi (5:21)**

So you touched on the need for accessible housing itself, but I also think that the process of getting to that point of signing a house is also incredibly difficult and could use a lot more, um, improvement in the accessibility of that. Do you have any insight on how that might be made more accessible for our communities?

**Tabitha (5:40)**

Yeah, no. I was talking about literal accessibility, but I think that accessibility for just the housing process is...incredibly difficult for some people and certain populations. I think that the income requirements that many apartment complexes have, where you have to make a certain amount above the rent, like if it's 3-4 times the rent, then it often becomes really difficult for someone who, for example, might be on Social Security Disability, who is on a fixed income. People who are older, they might not be able to even afford or meet the requirements, even if they have the money in their pocket.

Another thing to look at too is background. Personally, I believe that everyone deserves housing and I believe in housing equality for all. So when I run into the frustrations of having clients who... things that they committed many years ago and they have served their time, they've done their due diligence to the community and to society, they are still encountering those blockades to housing and that can perpetuate homelessness and being underhoused. So you see a lot of couch surfing. You see a lot of homelessness in these areas that there really doesn't need to be.

**Harshi (6:58)**

So since you mentioned that you work at Strides Shelter, for the people you assist on a daily basis, how do you connect them with local services for housing and employment? And how have local organizations supported you in that process?

**Tabitha (7:11)**

So what's really awesome is that for all of our permanent guests, we're able to match them one-to-one with a case manager and we have such an excellent case management team. We, our main goal, like I mentioned earlier, is often to work towards housing for that one particular individual. But oftentimes, like I said, it is employment.

We have wonderful organizations who come in like the public health district. They often connect with resources for...for example, STI testing, accessible healthcare, which is another huge part of getting employment and getting housing eventually...is being able to take care of yourself. So we also have the Champaign County Healthcare consumers. Like I mentioned earlier, they are not only involved with Hope Village, but they're also involved with Strides. So shout out to my friend Shay and Nicole. They are awesome. And we also have Ashley. Their whole team has been really amazing.

**Harshi (8:08)**

Thank you so much for sharing. How can organizations partner with schools, workplaces, and other institutions to improve the availability of these services?

**Tabitha (8:19)**

In my opinion, I believe that's outreach. So when I see these organizations come into our shelter and when I see organizations connecting grassroots on the ground, boots on the ground, they are really able to connect with our guests and also folks in the community.

**Harshi (8:37)**

Yeah, perfect. As in past episodes. We value the insights of our guests and always ask the same question. What initiatives or programs have you seen that have been successful or helpful to the people that you work with? Which do you recommend the most and what advice can you give?

**Tabitha (8:53)**

So I feel like assistance from the community and community organizations are probably the very first things that help the most. It really takes a village. I think that the Housing Authority does a pretty good job of helping people in the community, especially connecting them to housing and other housing resources that people may not think of, like low-cost housing. I think in my opinion, like also rapid rehousing programs are really really, helpful. People who are already employed or already have a source of income are often eligible for those types of programs and they have been connecting people directly into housing...from a homelessness or underhoused situation. So it often helps them to get onto their feet for example, like paying for a certain amount of their lease, um for example like three to six months, um, and they can get on their own...on their own feet, get their own footing.

**Harshi (9:53)**

Thank you.

**Tabitha (9:54)**

So one of those, actually, one of the aspects is actually transportation. So the RPC has a Transportation Assistance Program that helps people with annual bus passes and the buses act as warming centers in the winter and cooling centers in the summer. So that has been really a huge help to a lot of people. We have such an exquisite bus system. Another thing about their Transportation Assistance Program is that they also help with repairing vehicles. I—don't quote me on this. I think it's a little over \$1000 that they can help with for basic repairs to get a vehicle up and running. Sometimes people are sleeping in their vehicles too, especially if they're also working, going back and forth in between work and a place that they are deciding to stay and park their car. That can be a huge, huge help to someone and eventually getting them housed.

**Harshi (10:58)**

So out of these resources, which would you recommend the most and what advice can you give?

**Tabitha (11:05)**

I would say for sure apply to these programs that you see. I post a lot of them and I'm often spreading the word about holistic approaches to your life.

To me, housing, employment...those long-term goals start with just the little building blocks: getting your state ID, getting your driver's license, getting transportation access, getting access to food that's affordable to you. Those little things that we don't think about add up into how someone gets housing.

## **Intermission - Music**

### **Aisaiah (11:41)**

As always, with all of our episodes, we like to take the time to pause and share a couple of resources for our listeners. Already in this episode, our interview guest Tabitha Qualls had shared a resource called Champaign County Health Care Consumers, which is a nonprofit organization focusing on improving healthcare access in Champaign County. It provides assistance with Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security Disability applications. It also has an ongoing project called Hope Village, which focuses on supporting unhoused individuals, also partners with Strides Shelter to advocate for people facing housing instability.

In addition, we want to highlight Champaign Urbana Public Health District. They offer a fantastic variety of programs and services tailored to meet your needs. Whether you're seeking preventative care, nutrition advice, or community resources...even if you're unsure about what you need, it's definitely worth checking them out. There's staff to help guide you through your options and ensure you get the support you deserve.

If you're looking to achieve self-sufficiency and need support, check out the Housing Authority of Champaign's Family Self-Sufficiency Program, which is designed to help heads of households with stable shelter, housing nutrition, transportation, health insurance, and more. Participants work with an FSS coordinator to set and achieve financial goals, supported by a goals-based saving account.

## **End - Intermission**

### **Aisaiah (13:11)**

So given your certifications in mental health, how would you describe the relationship between the mind and the body? This is a little, like, out there, you know, in terms of the questions, but go ahead.

### **Tabitha (13:23)**

Yeah, no, it's not really out there at all because they are deeply interconnected. So when I think of psychology, for example, I think of that direct mind, body connection. Your nervous system is a part of your body, so how you feel eventually translates into how your body is. So, if you're not feeling okay in one way, you're not feeling okay in another. Mental and physical health are so connected, so taking care of both is really going to help.

### **Aisaiah (13:51)**

And just to follow up, what are some practical self-care tips that people can incorporate into their daily lives to improve their well-being?

### **Tabitha (14:00)**

Take care of your body. If you're not eating right, if you're not exercising right, your mental health is going to suffer...um, which can play a huge part in other parts in your life. If you're

not— if you're not feeling good in your mind and you're not in the right headspace, your work is going to suffer. And your...your home life may or may not suffer.

So when...when people ask me like what, what are the top things that you can do, take care of yourself. Take care of yourself first.

**Aisaiah (14:37)**

I yeah, I think you describe it well in terms of just like your mental health permeating into you—or permeates your home or like it goes into your home. So I guess my... my next question is like, what can families do to support each other in maintaining their health?

**Tabitha (14:52)**

Yeah, absolutely. So be patient with one another. Even when I'm talking with my partner and I'm not feeling good, when he is patient with me, I notice that I'm able to be more calm, I'm able to be more at ease, and I'm better able to express myself.

**Aisaiah (15:14)**

How do you, how do you think would be the best way to share this information? I guess like for people who are listening right now, let's say like they have someone in their life or you know, just someone that they think of as they listen to all of these resources and all the feedback that you have. How do you recommend they share it to them or to another person? Yeah, that's a crazy question, but...

**Tabitha (15:33)**

No, it's a great question. So I think word of mouth. So having conversations with your loved ones and giving them all the grace that you can. That honestly has been like the number one tip that has helped me in my own life. Um. When you're talking to other people, also kind of plays the patience part, plays a part in this understanding that the person that you're talking to— they're not made, they might not be in the correct headspace and they might not give you the answers that you're expecting, but be prepared kind of for everything. Expect the unexpected.

**Aisaiah (16:22)**

And, okay, this is like a speed round.

I guess I kind of want to connect like all of these conversations that we've had about, like again, like your work in casework and housing and employment. How would you kind of connect that with mental health and wellness, I guess, just connecting these two things together.

**Tabitha (16:43)**

Yeah. That's a great question because it is all interrelated and I feel like I haven't said that enough, but I also feel like I'm saying it too much.

**Aisaiah (16:52)**

Yeah, you mentioned it. You mentioned it.

**Tabitha (16:54)**

Yeah. So when your physical health suffers, your mental health suffers, and then other areas of your life suffer. So, make sure that you're holistically taking care of yourself so that other areas of your life are not impeded.

It's all interconnected. Yeah. Don't be afraid to seek help. There is no shame in raising your hand and saying, you know what, I'm not totally sure. What can I do to fix this?

Life is nonlinear. We all make mistakes. So when you're walking through it, it's okay to need another resource.

**Aisaiah (17:41)**

Again, thank you for being with us. I think that you have a lot of insights that our...our listeners will be able to use. So again, thank you.

**Tabitha (17:48)**

Thank you.

**Music**

**Conclusion**

**Aisaiah (17:57)**

And that's a wrap for today's episode of the ConnectEd Podcast, cosponsored by the Community Data Clinic. We want to extend our deepest gratitude to all those who have made this episode possible. We sincerely appreciate the invaluable support received from the state of Illinois Broadband READY Program led by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Chancellor's Call to Action Research Program to address racism and social injustice from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the National Center for Supercomputing Applications, Technology Services, and the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

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As always, we appreciate our listeners for tuning in. Be sure to subscribe for future episodes, and feel free to reach out with your feedback and suggestions. As we mentioned in the middle of our midroll, all of our resources that we showed throughout this podcast, will be in the description below. So if that is of interest to you, please take a moment to pause and check that out. Until next time, take care and stay tuned for more engaging discussions on the ConnectED podcast.