

ODSC Keynote speech

Hello everyone and welcome to ODSC's Gala my name is Jimel Wright and I am your keynote speaker today. I want to thank you all for having me although I couldn't attend in person.

First I want to explain a few things about myself. I am a hard of hearing, male, born in Jamaica and raised in Illinois and I consider myself Afro-Caribbean. Currently am a graduate student studying social work so I can make a difference in this world.

I have been in the Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault field ever since I took a course at Gallaudet University that allowed me to learn of my privileges as a man and the reality of those who experience Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault. Ever since then I've been inspired to do my part especially after learning that I am a survivor of abuse. I do not do the work that I do for recognition but because I have the ability to make a difference.

Being in this field since 2015 I have learned so much and have had my fair share of different positions as Outreach, support staff, hotline advocate all at ADWAS which I experienced working with Heather your Executive Director briefly (you may be able to find an educational video/skit with us in it as well).

I look forward to continuing what I do and hope to work all of you who strive to make the world a better place.

Beacon of light & fireflies

1. ODSC as a lighthouse for survivors
1. Lighthouse = Hope and security
2. Beacon of light = hope especially in the face of adversity
2. Fireflies - The community, friends, family, advocate, lead survivors to safety
1. Light = ODSC
1. Guidance + intentional
2. Anti-violence
3. Anti-racism
4. Anti-oppression
3. Community how
1. Word of mouth, leading by example, being a friend, lending a place, listening, intervening, planning, creating safety, education, involvement
4. And that's the beauty in the name "Our Deaf Survivors Center" (ODSC)

1. It represents, safety, home, and comfort for all of us

Everyone, at one time or another, needs a beacon of light to guide them through the "fog" and "darkness" of life. The question is in that situation, who is their beacon of light, who is their guidance. How is that guidance provided. This is why this is not only important to deaf survivors but to the deaf community. We all need to be fireflies that lead each other to the beacon of light

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

The importance of supporting each other is critical as one facing oppression, abuse, violence, challenges, obstacles, if another decides to be hands off, then at some point they may face oppression of their own. What is wrong is wrong and we need to stand up for each other.

As deaf people who are considered disabled we will more than likely experience some form of domestic violence or sexual assault due to our vulnerability compared to hearing folks. The reality is that more than half of us have possibly experienced some form of abuse or violence, including myself. The reality is that this is not a fight or journey that we go through alone individually, while each of our individual experiences are different, the need for understanding is the same, The need for support, the need for listening, the need for a beacon of light is the same.

Do not underestimate the power of your voice, your actions, your commitment to making the world a better place, which can mean many things in the eyes of survivors.

No matter who you are, I as a man it took me a long time to understand my place in society, my role, my contribution and how me as a men running on the values of toxic masculinity, how that contributed to the violence that all survivors face. That’s what it takes, self analysis and understanding of who you are, what you can change about yourself and what you can do for your community. It means being vulnerable it means being willing to learn, willing to change, willing to make a difference for the better of our community

Vulnerability

Vulnerability is a lot of things, there are different signs, perspectives thoughts on what vulnerability truly is. Vulnerability, anyone can be vulnerable, but only the strong can choose to be vulnerable. You may be thinking if vulnerable is weak, then how can it be strong? Vulnerability does not mean you are weak, it means that those around you

have a greater chance of taking advantage of you due to who you are, what you represent, or what group you align yourself with. This is not a reflection of you, but a reflection of what someone else has chose to perceive you.

Choosing vulnerability is strength because you choose to be vulnerable by searching for the light even through darkness. Vulnerblity is continuing even though you are exposed, you are weak, you are broken, but through all that you keep going

“Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it’s having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome. Vulnerability is not weakness; it’s our greatest measure of courage.”

Sometimes we have to remind ourselves that you are not where you are because of your own doing, but know that you can make the change in your own life or someone else’s life. Even if you do not see it or know it, your action, your strength, your vulnerability is a beacon of light for many people and often someone who is close by admiring from distance.

“Yes, I am imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn’t change the truth that I am also brave and worthy of love and belonging.”

Vulnerblity is weakness? No it is not, it is many things, it’s time to reframe you thinking and sign usage of vulnerability.

“Vulnerability is not weakness. I define vulnerability as emotional risk, exposure, uncertainty. It fuels our daily lives.”

Worthiness

During the challenges that survivors may face, you may begin to question your worthiness. But stop and ask yourself, what makes you worthy or what makes you not worthy? What is on the checklist, how do you decide you are worthy? Who decides that?

No really who decides that?

“Worthiness doesn’t have prerequisites.”

You are worthy! Remind yourself everyday that you are worthy. Just the small change in mindset can have an affect on your actions and how people perceive you and how you perceive life. Don't just say it, believe it

Worthy now. Not if, not when, we are worthy of belonging now, right this minute. As is.
- Brene Brown

"Nobody Belongs here more than you"

You may value your worthiness based on the amount of regrets you have. You may be too hard on yourself for the decisions you've made. You are not at fault.

Regret

"Regret is a tough but fair teacher. To live without regret is to believe you have nothing to learn, no amends to make, no opportunity to be braver with your life."

Do not let the feelings of regret get you down. You are the one who has to live your life, there is no perfect blueprint on how to live life and you've done an amazing job so far. You are here you exist, you matter.

Courage

"Courage is a heart word. The root of the word courage is *cor*—the Latin word for heart. In one of its earliest forms, the word courage meant 'To speak one's mind by telling all one's heart.' Over time, this definition has changed, and today, we typically associate courage with heroic and brave deeds. But in my opinion, this definition fails to recognize the inner strength and level of commitment required for us to actually speak honestly and openly about who we are and about our experiences—good and bad. Speaking from our hearts is what I think of as 'ordinary courage.'"

"Courage gives us a voice and compassion gives us an ear. Without both, there is no opportunity for empathy and connection."

Show up, be seen, Answer the call to courage. Because you are worth being brave

"What we know matters, but who we are matters more."

That is why we all need to be that beacon of light & fireflies