

Vivie Satorsky: Hello. My name Vivie Satorsky and I'm a coach with the Corrections and Community Engagement Technical Assistance Center at the American Institutes for Research funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. I wanted to welcome you to this prerecorded youth interview during Second Chance Month of 2023. The participant today has chosen a pseudonym for his own privacy, but has been a participant in Second Chance grant-funded programming. On behalf of the American Institutes for Research and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, we appreciate their participation and discussion because we believe in the importance of youth's voice.

Moderating today's event will be Joshua Calarino from Youth MOVE National. Joshua Calarino is an enthusiastic youth advocate working for change in the mental health system in Florida and nationally. His previous professional experiences include serving as a lead peer, peer evaluator, and certified recovery peer specialist, as well as an executive team member with Youth MOVE Miami and serving as the board president for Youth MOVE National. He is very passionate about youth voice and systems change. He has been a leader in his community and nationally. He hopes to help those with passion for positive change to be leaders in those changes. I'm going to turn the conversation over to Joshua and our youth participant.

Joshua Calarino: Hello everyone. As was said, my name is Josh Calarino and I am going to be speaking to A. First off, A, thank you for being here. We really appreciate that. To go ahead and start us off, I'm going to begin with just some introductory questions that we can go ahead and get to know you. With that being said, what is one thing you would like us to know about you?

A: That everything that I've done doesn't define me. That doesn't make me who I am. I think that a lot of people put connotations on me for past experiences that I've done and stuff like that. I just want people to know that just because people make mistakes doesn't mean that people don't have something to give, something to offer.

Joshua Calarino: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you for sharing that. To follow up, what has been that you are doing or even have done recently that you're proud of?

A: I'm in school right now. At a certain point, I did have really good grades. I had straight As, but right now, I got one C, but everything else is As and Bs. I'm in school right now to be a dentist.

Joshua Calarino: That's amazing. Nice hear to that. If you could change just any rule, what would it be?

A: Rule as in what?

Joshua Calarino: Rule as in just any rule, could be potentially the law, could be a rule within the juvenile justice system. Just anything that you would consider a rule.

A: A rule that I'd change is all these people getting locked up for drug charges that are in there for weed, in there for 15 years, people like that. That's something I've always seen the injustice and the unfairness sometimes in the justice system that I wish I could change.

Joshua Calarino: Great. Thanks for sharing once more. This will be the last of our introductory questions here. It is, if you could promise any service or even any support to a youth who is returning home, what would it be?

A: Honestly, that's something I think about all the time. If I could offer a service, it would be just someone to be there, like a mentor or something like that, because I know that's what... A lot of us don't have a support system. That's why we all get into what we get into. It's like a lot of us don't got a mom that care what we do, or a father that care what we do. A lot of us don't got someone to tell us or give us a role model. A lot of us don't got role models to look up to because all the people that we look up to got guns. All the people that we look up to is out here in the streets [inaudible 00:04:37]. I feel like we need more role models and more people that people can look up to instead of the people that we look up to right now.

Joshua Calarino: Got it. Yeah. Essentially embedding a role model to support once they get out. Awesome. Okay. Today we're going to be talking about reentry. We're defining reentry here as young people returning to their communities following confinement under community supervision. It includes the support that you have received both in the facility and out of the facility. With that being where we're working from, the question one asked now is, what has been the most helpful to you while you were in placement?

A: Honestly, staff speaking to me. Just that communication with staff. When you're locked up and you were a young minded person, you a young minded man, or anybody, individual, female, we in a traumatic experience regardless. We got in there from living a traumatic experience, no matter what we can say. No matter what we want to say, it was a traumatic experience what got us locked up because we got arrested. It's the communication with staff and being able to just speak to you and ask you about your day, stuff that we don't hear on a daily basis.

Joshua Calarino: Got it. Staff who truly care about the wellbeing for the youth that are in the system. Got it. My next question is, what is something you feel now versus when you were in out-of-home placement?

A: Something that I learned now is that jail, or DYS, or anything like that, it's all a plot to keep you down, in my opinion. Don't me wrong, I understand why the justice system is in place. I understand that. But think about it like this. We not grown men. Obviously, some of the people there but have been locked up for a while, so some of them are 18, 19, 21. You feel me? I spent my 18th birthday in DY, you feel me? But some of us are grown men. But you got to understand, we're growing up in a confined area. Mind you, we're growing up and not normally. I didn't have a childhood. My childhood was spent in DY with... Well, I'm losing social skills. I'm

losing my motivation in life because all I know is confinement. When you sit there and you put yourself in a jail setting, you put yourself in the DY setting, and you're putting a young 14-year-old boy, a 13-year-old boy, now he's in gladiator school, trying to defend himself when he need to be defended.

Joshua Calarino: Let's dive a little deeper into that. What, if any, are some of the difficulties you have had engaging with people that have been working with you in this process?

A: I mean, I could tell you my caseworker. When I first met her, I hated her. Everybody in the staff, situations, I hated all the staff for a really long time. It's because I had the bad connotation. I had this bad thought of staff, that all the staff was bad, you feel me? But my caseworker, she was like... She showed me love for a fact. Wait, what's the question again? I lost my train of thought. I apologize.

Joshua Calarino: No, no worries at all. What were some difficulties you have had engagement with people that have been working with you?

A: Oh, exactly. Look. Me, when I first met her, I didn't trust no staff.

Joshua Calarino: Again, to continue on here, what helped you maintain contact with your family and other people in your life?

A: Well, personally, it is not as easiest for me because me and my mom don't speak anymore. None of my family really speak to me at all. I don't really stay in contact much with my family at all.

Joshua Calarino: Understood. What relationships then have been most important to supporting you in this process?

A: What relationship has been the most what?

Joshua Calarino: Important to supporting you?

A: Honestly, my caseworker. She's been everything to me. She's more like a mother to me than my own mom's been to me. She always checks up on me and I love her to death. At the end of the day, she's a person that takes me to my appointments. She's a person that helps me, guide me in the path that I need to be.

Joshua Calarino: Yeah, they can understand that. It sounds like you mentioned before that there was some times where you had difficulty trusting staff and it was difficult to do that. But with your caseworker, at least now, it's not like that. Could you maybe walk us through what that looked like and what makes your caseworker so different and so helpful to you?

A: Definitely. She personally, when I first met her, she saw that I had a lot of anger. She let me be able to take it out in a healthy way. She saw that I was hurt. She saw that I was going through a lot. She saw that I wasn't trying to act out because of her. She gave me the time that I needed. That's a lot of things that a lot of the staff

don't... That they don't see. A lot of staff don't understand that. They don't have the patience that certain people need. Because we high-risk youth, you got to understand where we're coming from, experiences, where we're getting shot at. We're coming from experiences where we're fighting.

We're coming from experiences where we have bad home lives. We're coming from all these experiences. When we're in a confides space, thinking about all our mess-ups, thinking about all the things that we could have did better, all the things we could have did better. We were angry. We're angry. She gave me the time to process everything. Even though it was hard to work with at first, she gave me the time to be able to get comfortable. She gave me the time to build the trust with her before she even was trying to get me in place. When I first met her, I was like, "I don't want to talk to you. I don't want to talk to you." She came every week, every week trying to talk to me. I kept on denying. I kept on denying. She was like, "Hey. At the end of the day, you might not want to speak to me, but I'm going to try and until you do." For me, ever since then, it's been history.

Joshua Calarino: Got it. It sounds like the caseworker coming at you with that compassion and continuing to do so, being patient, allowing you to be comfortable, getting that rapport built, all of that helped you to finally get to that good relationship you have now.

A: Exactly.

Joshua Calarino: Got it. With that, it could be the caseworker, but maybe something else, maybe both. I don't know. But what has been most helpful in terms of support or even what program has been more helpful that has been available to you as you are preparing to leave confinement?

A: Wait, when I'm preparing me to leave confinement?

Joshua Calarino: If you were or are leading confinement?

A: Well, no, I'm not in confinement right now. I'm currently in a program. Well, the programs that were helping me was my caseworking team. Also, I'm in a program right now called RILEY, which is an amazing program, which they gave me my own apartment. You have to work. They were giving me little steps that I had to do before I could even get the apartment, before I could even... When I came home, because I had no place to stay. I had no place to stay and my mom didn't want to speak to me. My mom wanted me out of her house. They ended up finding me a place to stay. They helped me file my taxes, they helped me do everything. Anything that I need, RILEY's there to help me.

Joshua Calarino: Got it. Yeah. Thank you. Is RILEY an acronym or is it... Does it mean something?

A: I think it's an acronym but I don't know what it stands for.

Joshua Calarino: Yeah, no worries at all. RILEY, it's the program that has been very, very helpful to

you?

A: Yeah.

Joshua Calarino: Got it. What do you wish was available to you that has not been as you've been preparing to leave or have left confinement?

A: Honestly, what I wish was available was more on-spot jobs. I wish that they gave people more, because I feel like that's also been a struggle for a lot of youth, high-risk youth, that it's the money. It's like a lot of us need money, and a lot of us need job experience, and a lot of us don't have places to go to work, because we feel like if we go to work, anything could happen. Because I can't go get a job from in my city, because you never know what could happen or who can see me. I feel like there should be more jobs that RILEY could find, or not rally, DYS could find for youth, for when they come out, that, "Here, sign this application, we can get you to work."

Joshua Calarino: Understood. Yeah. Just more support around finding work.

A: Yeah.

Joshua Calarino: Got it. What would you want to tell another young person at the start of their journey in out-of-home placement? What advice would you give them?

A: That your name in the streets don't get you nowhere. No matter how many people you done did bad to, no matter who you trying to impress, no matter... No matter the excitement you get at... Your name in the streets won't get you a credit score, won't get you a car, won't get you an apartment, won't get you nowhere in life. After a certain point, after you're 18, you get no more sympathy. Once you're 18 and you're facing calendar numbers because you want to be doing all types of [inaudible 00:15:49] in the streets and stuff like that, it's okay. It's okay. It's okay to mess up right now, but it is going to be a rude awakening if you want to keep on.

Joshua Calarino: This is the last question we'll go through today. This one is just, let's say, a bonus question. If there were just a message, any message you wanted to send to anyone, could be the world, could be the caseworkers, anything like that, if there was just something you wanted to tell them, what would you say?

A: Oh, I just want to give... What's it called? The only thing I want to say is that people that work in DYS or anybody that helps kids, highest-risk youth, or high-risk youth at all in general, that's God's work. A lot of us don't get the support we need. A lot of us don't have the opportunities we need. It's just like when anybody gives us a time of day, it means a lot. Even if your work, the person and your client doesn't show it, I know that they're grateful because I'm grateful every single day for my caseworker, my RILEY team, anybody in my life that's supporting me, because I never had a support system to begin with. I'm just super grateful for them. That's the only thing I want to say. I hope that they hear that.

Joshua Calarino: Thank you very much for the time. We really appreciate what you have shared with us today.

A: [inaudible 00:17:24].

Joshua Calarino: We look forward to being able to use this to make a better system.

A: Absolutely. Absolutely.