

Heather Erwin: Hello and welcome. April is Second Chance Month and we are pleased to bring you this limited series podcast in celebration of second chances. My name is Heather Erwin and I'm joined by Joe Williams. We are technical assistance consultants for the American Institutes for Research. AIR works in partnership with the Department of Justice's office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to run the Youth Reentry Training and Technical Assistance Center, which provides support for grantees awarded Federal Second Chance Act funding. Each week this month, we will engage an inspiring OJJDP grantee and clients from their program to reflect on different aspects of youth reentry. We hope you come away from these conversations feeling better educated about and inspired by how youth reentry works and why it's important.

In this week's episode of Reflections on Reentry will feature the wonderful work of Youth MOVE National. Youth MOVE National envisions a future in which young people are valued as empowered leaders, advocates, and designers of communities that are built for all youth to thrive. Youth MOVE National connects, supports and develops youth leadership and advocacy to create positive change. They practice authentic youth engagement through youth-driven decision-making by elevating youth voices of lived experience. Youth MOVE ensures that young people are heard and valued as leaders in the agencies, communities and systems that impact their lives. We're pleased to be joined today by Brittany Wiley and John Dellick from Youth MOVE National.

Joe Williams: Good day to you. My name is Joe Williams and my colleague, Heather, is not able to join us on this podcast, but I have a couple of outstanding representatives of Youth MOVE National that I'm excited about having a conversation with today. John and Brittany, would you introduce yourself to our viewers?

John Dellick: Hi everybody. My name is John Dellick. I am Youth MOVE National treasurer on the board of the directors and a program manager out of the chapter in Youth MOVE Ohio. Thanks for having me here today.

Joe Williams: Thanks for agreeing to talk to us.

Brittany Wiley: Hi everyone, I'm Brittany Wiley. I'm currently a master's student in social work and I'm doing my internship with Youth MOVE National.

Joe Williams: Oh, good to have you Brittany. So John, tell us about how Youth MOVE National encourages peer support and any other promising practices that you want to talk about.

John Dellick: Thank you, Joe. So Youth MOVE National encourages peer support. First and foremost, they have created their own youth peer support curriculum and I just would like to make a distinction between peer support and youth peer support because one of the main differences is when it comes to adult peer support, it just encompasses mental health and substance use disorder. Whereas youth

peer support encompasses all of the youth serving systems from foster care, youth homelessness, mental health, substance use disorder, criminal justice and so on and so forth. And this is one of the main reasons the youth peer support curriculum was created because youth that were originally getting certified in the adult peer support curriculum were realizing that there were many gaps in information that were needed to work more effectively in the field.

Joe Williams:

Yeah, so I'm glad you clarified that. That was a question I had. I'm more familiar with adult peer support in this kind of justice work and I was, I'm sure some of our viewers also were, interested in the difference between adult peer support and youth peer support. So can you just tell us a little bit more about how peer support plays out in youth reentry?

John Dellick:

Yes, that's an excellent question and I have the privilege of actually providing peer support to youth in the reentry. Recently we started a pilot program with the Ohio Department of Youth Services where we work with youth that have 60 to 90 days left before they return to the community and we provide them with leadership and advocacy training that helps them to have basic skills for them to advocate for themselves as well as positive system change once they return to the community. And we tie in peer support with this. I myself have lived experience in the criminal justice system and received peer support services once I returned to the community and it played such a huge role in helping me to get re-acquainted to the way things were. Because after being down for a set amount of time and then coming home, it's amazing how things had changed in my absence.

And I needed help from getting basic things like my social security card, getting a driver's license and my birth certificate before I could even go and apply for jobs. My peer support specialist helped me to navigate all of that and made it really easy. It was a pretty overwhelming experience if I had to do it myself but having someone that actually had the lived experience in the criminal justice system and could sit in my shoes and understand and not only understand but know what it was like to go through what I was going through was very helpful in me returning home and becoming a successful member in the community.

Joe Williams:

Thanks, John for sharing a bit about your background, I also am a person with lived experience at the juvenile level and at the adult level. So is there an age range for youth peer support? Could somebody, an Old Guy like me, be a peer supporter for youth in reentry?

John Dellick:

I would never say no to having you as a peer supporter, Joe, because your lived experience is just as valuable as mine. But one thing that we have seen is that it is easier for youth to relate to youth or youth to relate to younger adults. There is really no set standard across the states right now. But here in Ohio, a youth peer support specialist, the age cuts off at 30. And the main reason for this is, when just getting on the call with you today, I try to make sure I'm in my Sunday's best, have my best attitude. I'm talking correctly and speaking properly

and just want to be as proper and respectful as I can. Just because you're an Old Guy and I want to show you that respect.

But one thing that we've seen with youth peer support is that formality creates a barrier to authenticity. And so for me, like I said, I try to put on my best, but if it was just some other youth on this call, my language might be a little different. I might be a little more relaxed on the call. And that just helps with creating genuine authentic connections more quickly. It's not to say that you and I couldn't create a genuine authentic connection, but due to the time constraints, having that barrier of formality removed really increases the success of peer support services that are being provided.

Joe Williams: Thanks, John. That actually makes a lot of sense. So again, to you John, can you give us a couple of examples of how receiving peer support helped you in your journey?

John Dellick: Absolutely. Like I've already touched upon, there were the examples of my peer support specialist who helped me to get my basic necessities so I could gain meaningful employment. So social security card, driver's license, and birth certificate, which were all fundamental documents that I had to acquire once I returned to my community. But additionally, outside of that kind of support, my peer support specialist helped me with a lot of my emotional and mental support. I am not one that really truly likes to open up and talk about the feelings and thoughts that I have due to how other people may or may not judge me for what I share.

And one of the big things that I felt when I was returning home was a lot of shame. I had some baggage in my past and there were people that I hurt and things that I had to do to right my wrongs, and that's a big load to bear as a young person. And more than the shame, I wanted to stuff it down, but having that peer support specialist that had been there and was able to understand that, they created a safe space for me to authentically share my thoughts and feelings that otherwise I had just stuffed down and never wanted to share with anybody and just honestly kept me sick. And upon sharing that, it really helped me on my own recovery journey.

Joe Williams: Thanks for that. So now I'm going to flip that question. Can you give an example of how you support youth as a peer support person?

John Dellick: Yes. I had peer support modeled to me in a way that I believe it should be provided and that was by staying in touch, checking in. And so that's exactly what I do with the young men that I'm working with that are now re-entering the community. While I meet with them, I provide them my phone number and ways that they can get a hold of me. And there have been on a couple of occasions when the young men return to the community that they either have a cell phone already or they have someone that provides it to them when they get released.

And so I usually get their number around that time and as soon as the day they're getting released, I'm calling them and checking in and saying, "Yo, here's my number, I'm here for you and let me know if there's anything I could do to support you." And it doesn't always have to be over phone calls. There are times we just text back and forth and it's just me letting them know that I am there and they have a shoulder to lean on, just like my peer support specialist gave me a shoulder to lean on.

Joe Williams: Thank you, John. Brittany, do you have anything to offer about what John just shared?

Brittany Wiley: Yeah, I just want to echo and bring into perspective how important having youth peer support services like this is. When you think about becoming an adult and becoming someone who's beneficial or functioning within society, we think about all the things like getting a license, making sure you have a social security card, figuring out finances, figuring out where to live. That's already hard enough and then think about you're reentering into society where you're not getting those "social norms". Something like peer support really helps with finding and maintaining housing. What does applying for and doing interviews look like? How do we maintain your mental health and all those things. And I just want to echo how important it is to these youth that there's people like John who've had that experience, but also who are giving them those services and just how important peer support is. And so yeah, I just want to echo that.

Joe Williams: Thanks, Brittany. Now you have a different type of lived experience in that you were a child who both of your parents were incarcerated. So what would you like us to know about the importance of peer support for kids with incarcerated parents?

Brittany Wiley: Yeah, I would love to see something like this formatted for children who have incarcerated parents. I think about my experience, I became the adult, the young adult for my siblings, and when they came out of prison, I had to go back into that child role. But it's hard to go from being this sole provider, making sure that your family's okay being the "parent" to being forced to be back to becoming a child again. And I think something like peer support can really help a child like me navigate those spaces and navigate what it's like to help their parents if they need to. And I would just love to see something like that developed because it's a very isolating experience seeing a child of incarcerated parents where you have to figure out the whole world and then some. And on top of that, if you have siblings like I did, I have five younger siblings just taking care of them in the midst of that, I would love to see some type of support within peer support that focuses on that.

Joe Williams: Thank you, Brittany. April is Second Chance Month. Is there anything else that either of you would like to share about second chances for young people coming out of incarceration and transitioning back to the community?

Brittany Wiley:

When I think about Second Chance Month, and I think about Michelle Alexander came out with The New Jim Crow book and in it she talks about people who come out of prison or are treated as second class citizens. And I would like for that stigma to be erased and to be understood that oftentimes we put people who have been incarcerated in this box, that box is unnecessary because they've spent the time and they've "paid for their crime", whatever that may be. And so how do we as a society actually look at these individuals and say, "You are receiving your second chance", or whatever, but also give them the freedom to be human and to actually still make mistakes and to live full lives without that background and that heaviness of their past.

Joe Williams:

Thank you. John, anything?

John Dellick:

I really agree with everything that Brittany said, especially as it comes to allowing people to make mistakes. Reflecting on my own experience, I was given a second chance and then a third chance and then a fourth chance as a young adult. And I think especially as it applies to youth and young adults with lived experience in the criminal justice system, that's the perspective we need to have because I was not able to figure it all out on my second chance. I remember getting out of jail, I had 30 days out and then 30 days later I'm back literally in the same cell that I had just left a month ago. And it took a long time for me to learn, but that was really why peer support was so influential in my own journey because before that, I didn't have that support. I didn't have someone that could show me the ropes and give me the guidance.

And then upon receiving peer support, I was able to capitalize on that last chance that I had and were able to see the benefits of that. I'm able to be a son to my mom and dad today, I'm able to be a big brother to my sister. I'm able to contribute in my local community and I do my best to be of service to anyone that needs some help, especially if they're going through similar circumstances that I've been through. And so we all deserve a second chance and especially the youth and young adults that are currently incarcerated because I feel like a lot of people write them off and that is the wrong thing to do.

Joe Williams:

Thanks for sharing that. And also Youth MOVE National is a valued partner with AIR and the Youth Reentry Technical Assistance Center. And I understand that Youth MOVE National also offers training and certification for peer support.

John Dellick:

That is correct.

Joe Williams:

Okay. And we'll share a link so people could get more information about your training and certification program after the podcast. So I want to thank both of you for joining me for this very important conversation. And I'm sure that our viewers learned a lot and are encouraged. And again, the link will be provided if our viewers want to learn more about the great work of Youth MOVE National. So thanks for joining us.

John Dellick: Thank you, Joe.

Brittany Wiley: Thank you.

Heather Erwin: Thank you for joining us during this Second Chance Month to talk about youth reentry. We'd also like to sincerely thank our guests for sharing their insights and experiences with us today and for the wonderful work they continue to do. We hope you'll join us for the remaining podcasts in the series. Follow these links if you'd like more information on the Second Chance Act and programs funded by it, and for some more history and background on Second Chance Month, AIR, and how the Department of Justice enables important work supporting reentry success. We'll see you next time.