

Resilience Rising: Ep 1

Brief intro music plays.

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Cassandra Otoo: Hi, everyone. I'm Cassandra Otoo Robinson, Program Coordinator for the Juvenile Justice Collaborative Project with Strengthening Chicago's Youth, otherwise known as SCY. We are at the Patrick Magoon Institute for Healthy Communities at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.

Kirstin: And I'm Kirstin Grabski, Operations Specialist with SCY. So, we're here today hoping to create opportunities for youth to talk about changing the narratives around violence and addressing topics like trauma, resilience, and healing. We want this to be a platform for youth and families to share their stories about the barriers they've faced or are facing and how they view possible solutions to the various problems that plague our communities and cities.

Cassandra: Research has shown that youth just don't feel like they have power in communities. Quite frequently, they don't get to tell their stories about what they think will work to prevent violence and other public health issues.

Kirstin: Our youth and communities know that we're dealing with a crisis that has to be addressed, right? It's something that they are experiencing firsthand. I mean, guns are the leading cause of death in children in Illinois and nationally, with black youth being 15 times more likely to die by a firearm than their white counterparts. That's just so alarming.

Cassandra: It's horrific. You know, it really is. But the good news is that we know that violence is preventable. It needs our attention, and it needs to be brought to light. We must create platforms for it to be discussed and hear from those who are most impacted to learn about the possible solutions.

Kirstin: Violence prevention requires this multifaceted approach, and we want to address the trauma, but we also really want to highlight the resilience of communities through this idea of narrative change and storytelling. In some ways, this could even help create a pathway to healing.

Cassandra: Okay, really quickly, Kirstin can we just take, you know, a quick step back and just give a definition of what we mean by narrative change?

Kirstin: The root causes of violence and solutions to preventing it are very often misunderstood. So, it really leads to a lack of investment and support at all levels, but with narrative change, it allows for young people and communities to call out what the problems are by sharing their own lived experiences instead of just being blamed for the problems.

Cassandra: Right. It's a community-centered approach. It reinforces taking back their voices, it shifts the power dynamic back to them and allows them to lead their conversations and report on their own reality. So, I just wanted to clear that up for the audience before moving forward.

Kirstin: We recruited a couple of youth who were interested in participating in this project. We prepared them by providing information on podcasting, trauma informed journalism, and asked them to think about how they might want to talk about things like trauma, and resilience, and healing, and even narrative change, and with who. So, from there, we gave them their equipment, provided whatever support they needed throughout the process, and they had control from there.

Cassandra: We are so excited to share these conversations starting with our first youth, Tamiya Martin. Tamiya is a resident of Chicago and is currently in high school. She developed her own thought-provoking questions and chose to discuss some of these topics with her parents and family friend. So without further ado, let's get into it and take a listen to Tamiya's audio.

Brief transition music plays.

Tamiya Martin (Youth): Hello, I'm Tamiya Martin and I'm with Tammy Martin, founder of Gray Sister 2 Sister and Clara Smith, DCFS. Okay, so we're gonna interview you guys. This podcast is about violence in Chicago and how African Americans are affected in any way, and we want to get to the root of the issues. So, I want to start off with the founder. Have you seen any like, want to say how like, children have been affected by violence? Or, have been, like, surrounded by violence, and how, the effect of how you, like, perceive them, or, how you treat them.

Tammy Martin: Well, yes, it's a lot of children that I come in contact with, and they've been affected by violence. You know, sometimes they're dealing with a lot of depression and struggles, and so I try to especially just, I would address accepting them anyone that comes in, young ladies that come in, young men that feel depressed, need to be part of, or just to share how they feel. We engage in workshops just to see how we can support. So, some of those things pertaining to violence, yes, we do see it.

Tamiya (Youth): Do you think these workshops allow, them, allow you to get into the root cause of violence or the root cause of the person?

Tammy: I think a lot of times with the workshops, we have presenters that'll come with facilitators that'll come and do the workshops. They will you know, address like certain topics on empowerment. And a lot of times when they talk about empowerment, some of the girls may share some of the reasons on why they feel down, or they don't feel happy. And a lot of times we see the result is because of some things that they've dealt with throughout their life growing up.

Tamiya (Youth): Alright, I want to go to the DCFS worker. Do you, have you seen how like children or people who deal with children are affected by violence in any way? If so, how?

Clara Smith: Well, I see it pretty much on a daily basis because a lot of the youth that come into care have been affected by violence, throughout. And now we're getting a population that actually is youth young people that either have been involved in violence, quite a few of them have criminal records, we have gotten them, whereas parents didn't come back to get them because of violent crimes that that they did, and they continue to do them, so when it was time for release that they, didn't come and get them because they felt that they was beyond what they could do.

So, what we are doing as a department, we are trying to focus on trying to find services and interventions for those youth. We do have some agencies that work with youth as mentors. So that's what we try to do is pair them up with someone, that older adult, who has gone through or been involved, like in the criminal justice system or is aware of the community and the different gangs and different violence that they can get into.

So, we try to pair them up so they can let them know that that is not the way to go if they want a better future. So, we try to involve them in a lot of positive things to get 'em away from

violence, letting them know that that is not the way, because there have been youth that was that has been killed due to violence, and which is not a good thing, you know, to have to talk with a parent or be involved in planning a funeral of a youth that's 15, 16 years old due to them stealing someone's car or being part of a gang and doing some violent crimes and everything. So, I could say as far as the department is concerned, we are trying to work as hard as we can to try to assist those youths, so they won't go down that path. But it's on an ongoing basis because some of them come from families that that's all there is, you know, their parents, fathers to mothers to older siblings to relatives, they have been involved in that. So sometimes it becomes a way of life.

Tamiya (Youth): So, I guess this is the question for both of you. Are the majority of them African Americans or a person of color?

Tammy: Yes, the ones that I've encountered, it's been primarily African American.

Clara: Yes, the majority of them are African Americans or of Hispanic descent.

Tamiya (Youth): It that effected how you like, view like people of color or how like society has did them wrong in some way?

Tammy : Yes, I think a lot of times, well, it's the resources that's not being provided. In the communities and then, you know, we take for instance, like we, we know we're dealing with carjackers and things of that nature, then you're looking at, okay, the lack of jobs, so we're not using it as an excuse, but the resources should be in the communities. I think that would also help and parent involvement is very important as well. But a lot of times we know parent involvement is not there. So we just you know, I just see, I don't look at the person and look down or anything. I just see that there's, there's hope and hope that we can just try to see what can we do to help.

Clara: My view hasn't changed because I still look at them as a child that needs that help, that help and guidance and pretty much just trying to do as much as I possibly can because they can be saved and they're at the prime age where anything that they do can affect them. So, it's trying to reach them before they get too far beyond and they end up in the penal system, which is something that we do not want to do. So just trying to find, put forth effort and find the resources and advocate for resources for those youth.

Tamiya (Youth): Okay, So I want to know how, when dealing with like, you know, violence, like every now and then or every day, how has that affected your mental health and how do you deal with it?

Tammy: Me, yes, I think it has affected my mental health as well. I think it affects all of us and on different levels because even with the violence that's taking place now, I just do things differently. I just try to even starting my day, there's going out every day, just being cautious sometimes. I don't want to be overly cautious. So, I do think that it has affected it, but at the same time, it helps me to talk to youth more about how to be cautious, how to always be aware of your surroundings. But I don't let it, I just deal with it and just try to be positive.

Clara: Yeah, I agree. You are overly cautious. And whereas at one time, you know, you didn't really think about your surroundings. You just pretty much went about your day. But now with violence being so prevalent, you are cautious. Which means that you pretty much, you're going about your day, but you're also being aware of your surroundings. Which sometimes can be kind of stressful. Because your day is full with other things and then, you know what I mean, but you also got to make sure that you watch when you're getting in your car and your truck or just, you know what I mean, your personal belongings, making sure that they're hid or even on you, you know, so it does affect your mental health as far as that is concerned.

Tamiya (Youth): So, you two are from the South, right? Has that, is there like a difference in violence from the South, or from Chicago? Because Chicago is more like, you know, enclosed, and the South is more spread out. Like, there's more greenery, the city is, not like, populated and stuff. Is there a difference?

Tammy: Well, I think it used to be, but not now. I mean, even when I would, I travel home. You know, maybe once every three or six or nine months and crime basically is similar. You know as I speak with relatives, it's like the crime is almost the same. You may have rural areas, but the crimes still take place. So, it may not be reported as much as it is within the city limits. But, with the violence and the drug use and all these types of things. I think it's, it's similar. So, I don't think it's a reduction. I think it's increased. In rural areas as well.

Clara: Yeah, I agree, cause I'm from down South, I'm from Mississippi and it used to be a place of what we call a safe haven because you really didn't have a lot of crime. But I go home now and it's just as much. The foundation that we used to have -it's pretty much gone. The older people that used to be the matriarchs of the families have died and now you have a new

generation and quite a few of them come from, you know, Illinois, you know, distant cousins, cousins and all of that. So, the mentality that they had in the larger cities, you know what I mean, it has gravitated. And because it was a safe haven, people started sending their kids, you know what I mean, to keep them safe. But those behaviors went with them. So, it's more now a lot of violence going on than prior.

Tamiya (Youth): Okay. So, how can we, like, I don't want to say heal violence, but how can we prevent it from your perspective and how you dealt with or seen violence?

Tammy: Well, in dealing with it, I think as far as like what we're doing as far as with the organization, providing resources. You know, trying to provide to be a safe haven space where there's a place where young ladies can talk or just get to be engaged in workshops, but not only that, but opportunities for families when we have like maybe volunteer events. Just things where you can come together just to show a positive side of community to show communities can come together and families can engage together and doing things.

And as well as when you have like mom and daughter type relationships - like doing physical wellness activities. So these type of things and just so I say, I think it is hope, but I think when you have resources put in place, where is we get the voice from the youth, what you want to do, tell us what you want to do, how you can, how we can help you. I think that's very important opposed to us just always making decisions, asking you what you would like to do. Or what, you know, whoever, what, what, what we can, what can we do to help you?

Clara: I think that the family, starting at home. And pretty much as they say, it take a village to raise a kid, a child. And when I was growing up, that's what it did. If the neighbors saw you doing something, then they, took action right there. They corrected you. And when you got to your parent, and they told them what you did, you know, I mean, the parent went right along with them and you got another correction.

Whereas now, it's like, parents do not allow others to assist them in raising their children. And I think we need to go back to that. You know, if someone older to see your child doing something that they should be able to, and even in the schools, be able to correct your child because a child needs consistency in order for them to change. And so it's going to have to start with the family, the school, and the community.

Tamiya (Youth): Alright, thank you for your time.

Brief transition music plays.

Tamiya (Youth): Hello, I'm Tamiya Martin, I'm here with my dad. He's lived in Chicago for basically his whole life. So, I want to ask him a question. Have you lived long in Chicago enough to, see the Ida B. Wells Project?

Mr. Martin: Yes.

Tamiya (Youth): What was the state of the Ida B. Wells Projects at that time?

Mr. Martin: Actually, I worked with a guy that lived there. And in the beginning, it was a nice place. They was really happy to get there. But as it changed over the years it became a haven for gangs.

Tamiya (Youth): How did that, like, affect you in any way?

Mr. Martin: I, I avoided them. You know, I didn't, if I didn't have a reason to be over in that area, I wouldn't go that way. it, it didn't affect me because we lived in the area where The projects and gangs were all around us, and within my area, I knew a lot of the people that were gangbangers, so I wasn't scared or anything, so it didn't affect me, it was just a part of life.

Tamiya (Youth): So, since living in Chicago, has violence changed over time, or just evolved to be like, smarter?

Mr. Martin: I wouldn't say smarter, but it has evolved into different things, it was A lot of things that go on today, they didn't do back in, they, they wasn't, you know, carjacking and doing things and shooting the police is, is a lot of things that's going on. It's, like rampant. There's no control, no leaders. It's, it's just, crazy. It's hard to understand what are they doing and why and what the reasons are.

Tamiya (Youth): Okay. So, has violence, like, affected your mental health in any way? If so, how?

Mr. Martin: Yes, the violence affected me. I'm more cautious. I worry a lot about my, my daughter and my wife and other people I know. So, the violence is, you know, everything. If I don't see them or hear from them, I'm like, okay, are they okay? You know, so, I'm, I'm on the edge a lot.

Tamiya (Youth): Okay. Since you lived in Chicago for most of your life, how do you think crime should be minimized?

Mr. Martin: Like, when, I was growing up, they had field houses outside the schools, and they had an adult that would be there to hand out different types of equipment so the kids can have something to do. Now they don't have that. You know, they're on the street and they don't have anything any, any programs for them. That's developed by the city to help them have some, some people to follow besides gangs and people on the street. Something positive to do. They had Little League and basketball tournaments, you know, for afterschool. But none of that's around anymore. So, they had more things to keep their mind occupied besides being out on the street and selling drugs. They had summer jobs and all that. And I don't have any of that anymore, you know. So, if they had better opportunities, they would be able to do, do better.

Transition music begins playing.

Tamiya (Youth): Alright, thank you for your time.

Transition music ends.

Kirstin: What a powerful way to share stories. One of my favorite parts was when Tamiya was talking about how it might affect one's perspective, right? On how they might view people who are African American or of Hispanic descent and acknowledging, you know, is it about how society might have done them wrong in some way, I think was how she referenced it. And I find that really interesting, because I think that Tamiya is making the connection, right, between how youth and how certain communities are disproportionately affected by the systems that are failing them. I don't know that she, doesn't necessarily come right out and call it that but she's making that connection. And to me that's very clear. And I, I just love that she made that connection.

Cassandra: I totally agree Kirstin. I, I, I appreciated her first of all, formulating the right questions that evoke the comments that were made on this podcast, right? Her making the connections between race, her making the connection between environment, and community, and the way that she posed the questions to pull out the elements that were discussed in the podcast were, I think, brilliant on her behalf. But, another point that really just, left me with a positive outlook on this whole conversation was Tamiya's mom basically saying it takes a village. It, it really does take a village. We can't blame parents; we can't blame the youth. It really takes

a village to pitch in and be, you know, pushing forward to find out the resolutions to some of the violence.

Kirstin: Yeah. I think that's great. You know, and as we wrap up our very first episode – it's so clear that stories can be extremely powerful and sharing them can kind of help shape that path to healing. And those connections are so important, whether it's within the community, resources, or environment, it just can't be overlooked.

Cassandra: Yeah, uh, it's those connections that really give us the strength and support needed to navigate life. I think, you know, by sharing narratives we get to highlight the resilience and the courage within the communities. Which in itself is narrative change.

Kirstin: Yeah. And it also helps to highlight the need for things like systemic change and advocate for a more equitable Chicago. So, let's keep lifting each other up, sharing the positive things happening in communities, especially around youth voice. And until next time, I'm Kirstin.

Cassandra: And I'm Cassandra. Thanks for listening folks.

Brief closing music plays.