

Episode 3: Healing Through Activism with Heidi De Leon, Fabiola Quijano, and Genevieve Rimer

Sam Lazalde: [00:00:00] Welcome to Our Stories Matter. I'm Sam Lazalde.

Susie Hess: [00:00:32] And I'm Susie Hess.

Sam Lazalde: [00:00:33] *Our Stories Matter* is hosted by Trauma Informed LA and the amazing music by Torrence Brannon Reese, founding member of the music group Street Corner Renaissance. *Our Stories Matter* at Locals Only acknowledges the Gabrielino and Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar, the Los Angeles basin and Southern Channel Islands. We pay our respects to the Honuukvetam, our ancestors; 'Ahihirom, our elders; and 'eyoohiinkem; our relatives and relations past, present, and emerging.

Susie Hess: [00:01:12] Welcome Unchained Scholars to *Our Stories Matter*. I'm super excited to have you all here. So just to give everyone, all of our listeners, understanding who they are, Unchained Scholars are committed to dismantling the school to prison pipeline through advocacy, diverse community building, and challenging societal norms.

So, I am humbled to be one of the advisors to the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work MSW and DSW candidates who were formerly incarcerated, system impacted, justice impacted, and allies. So, I met Heidi De Leon and Sam, like Sam, Sam, while they both were students at USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, and both had shared that they were formerly incarcerated and had not disclosed that they were formally inside whether to anyone or to many people, especially at USC.

And then when I was talking to Heidi, she had told me that you wish that you had coaching for when you were interviewing for your field placements, which I never even thought of. And then when I was talking to Sam and Sam and I were connecting about other stuff, Sam said, Oh yeah, I never told anyone. You know, whether it was like being placed or anyone at school.

So, it turned out that many students who had a carceral history were struggling with internship interviews. So they either didn't disclose in the interview that they were formerly incarcerated or they would leave the interview and like sort of whisper it, like as they're walking out the door. So those interviews were actually not successful.

So what we did was from what Heidi was suggesting is that we launched a pilot, a trauma-informed interview coaching pilot, and colleague Dr. Melissa Singh and I launched that together. So basically what I do is I work with students who either have a misdemeanor or a felony of how to communicate their lived experience as a strength, which is how I met Fabi.

So, Fabiola. So I, was talking to Fabi about how she could communicate her lived experience as a string. And then I started talking to several students who were formerly incarcerated and I asked, they were like four to five students. Would you all be interested in like a group?

I don't even know what this was going to be, but would you be interested in something and connecting with each other?

And they said, yes. And Fabi's like, yes. And she was like, she were like jumping out of the phone and I'm like, We have to meet, we should have coffee and I didn't even know why or who that's sort of how Unchained Scholars began. So, now one year later they have been on panels presented to faculty. One of the Unchained Scholars, Omar Price, was published in the NASW California December newsletter and website.

And now you're all on our podcast for Trauma Informed LA. And the most powerful quote I think was from a former O.G. Who said, I'm so relieved to come out of the convict closet. And so I'm so happy that you're all here. And I just said, I know Sam, like we're co-hosting together, but Sam is, you know, an Unchained Scholar and I feel like any, you know, anything you can like add to, because I feel like that's why Unchained Scholars really began.

Sam Lazalde: [00:04:23] Yeah, no, for sure. I mean, I'm excited to be a part of it. And, I mean, I think I consider myself a former O.G.

Susie Hess: [00:04:32] So I'll start with Fabiola. So Fabiola Quijano is the chair of Unchained Scholars, which is a student interest group at USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work for students who are formerly incarcerated, system impacted, and allies.

So Fabiola is the first American citizen in her family and first generation to attend college. She grew up in a low-income home in L.A. with a single mom who migrated to the U.S. from El Salvador. Her first language is Spanish, and as a mom to three children ages 26, 22, and 16, Fabiola has an 18 year history of lived experience of substance use, complex traumas, and the life on the streets.

She transformed her life over seven years ago and has made significant positive impacts in her family and the lives of marginalized communities. Fabiola is a MSW candidate at USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work. And as a certified alcohol drug counselor, Fabiola is a resilient, passionate human being for her recovery, has overcome adversity, and strives to stay in gratitude with a humble heart.

She has worked from the inside out to change the narrative and reach out to vulnerable populations. So welcome, Fabi.

Fabiola Quijano: [00:05:51] Thank you.

Sam Lazalde: [00:05:52] Then we have Heidi. Heidi De Leon is a mom of three, scholar warrior activist, and hope dealer. Heidi is an alumni member of Unchained Scholars. Currently she works at Los Angeles Centers for Alcohol and Drug Abuse as a clinician.

Prior to this, she worked as an addiction treatment program manager in South Los Angeles and has held various roles in addiction treatment over the past 10 years. She earned her MSW from the University of Southern California in August of 2018 and her bachelor's in African Studies from Cal State University Dominguez Hills in May 2016.

Heidi is also Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate...is that how we go? That's where we're going with it. Yeah. Okay. Scholar, member of the NASW Rehabilitation Inclusion Council, and alumni of the NASW USC. Formerly incarcerated and part of the foster system, she focuses on policy and advocacy for reentry, and uses storytelling and activism with the hope of dismantling the school to prison pipeline.

Susie Hess: [00:06:58] And the last Unchained Scholar that we will introduce is Genevieve Rimer, who is a DSW candidate at USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work and the co-chair of Unchained Scholars. The trauma that Genevieve has experienced has primarily resulted from systems that one would think have been created to empower people such as higher education. With the support of some, she rose along the way. She has learned to hurdle through these barriers and rise above the trauma and oppression. And this is a quote from Genevieve: "It is still a journey, but I am further than when I started and hopefully leading the way for other formerly incarcerated social work students." Genna is currently employed at the largest national re-entry employer in the U.S. Her role is to provide employment consulting services to agencies that seek to improve their service delivery and workforce culture. In her prior life, she managed a day reporting center for people returning home from prison. Genna holds a BSW and an MSW and soon will be Dr. Reimer in 2020.

Genevieve Rimer: [00:08:06] a few months. And I think that we forgot two important facts and I don't think I said it, so I'll say it boldly: I am formerly incarcerated and I'm a dog mom.

Susie Hess: [00:08:14] So the first question we wanted to explore with each of you is: What is your why for doing this work?

Fabiola Quijano: [00:08:22] I'm Fabi. The reason why I do what I do is I've lived it. And, and I want to give back to my community, you know, it, wasn't easy getting to, to this place; however, I want to, I do want to change the communities around me. Like every time I see a woman out there, I just see myself in her, you know, and there's hope out there and we don't have to live like that anymore.

You know? So for me, it comes from a place in my heart where I was that woman up there in the street. I was that one getting beat. I was that one, you know, trying to overcome the obstacles and constantly coming to a dead end, you know? And there's hope, there's hope like we got this.

We, we can do this. You know, we don't, against all odds, here we stand, you know, and you know, some are destined for greatness and some it's more like if you're determined and that's where I was, because I was in a place where it's like, I can't, my feet were tired. Like my soles, they were just like, they were aching.

I couldn't take it no more, you know? And, I just, I look back at my life and I said, Oh, I can't, I'm 34 years old. There's no way I got to get out of this. And so little by little, that's where it all began. You know, you start seeking, start asking. And I was determined, you know, so now is, I just want to give back what was so freely given to me, you know, from the predecessors that came before me and every single mentor, every coach that came and guided me through, it's like, now it's about multiplying.

Now it's about reaching out. All over, wherever I can. And I want to change the lives of my children. You know, my three children, they don't have to ever live the life I lived. I mean, my son's, you know, incarcerated right now, my oldest, but I have to stay clean and this is my living amendment. I mean, my living amends.

For my son, Angel, to be able to see that if his mom could do it, he can too. He's going to rise as well. You know, he's not going to, and I believe in him strongly believe in him. So I got to do this for my kids and for myself and every one that's struggling out there.

Susie Hess: [00:10:51] Oh my gosh, Fabi, one, I'm so glad he has you as a mom, and two, you are the shero for so many people, one listening, and two for so many social work students who are now coming out of the convict closet because you all are taking a stand.

Genevieve Rimer: [00:11:08] So, I guess I'll go next. This is Genna. The why for myself doing this work, and I'm going to speak specifically about Unchained Scholars for USC or just the social work field specifically with education overall. So I think the why is, is because when I started out my journey, I'll never forget how much trauma I experienced.

Like Susie mentioned, I'm from the systems that were made to assist and to empower people. It was always like, I was never good enough to be a social worker. And the very people that told me I was never good enough are the social workers themselves. You know? So here we are as a field that seeks to empower marginalized populations and, oftentimes, we marginalize people ourselves as social workers. And so I think it's so important because people with lived experience can just offer a valuable component to the work that we're doing and add a sense of realism if you will. That's the reason why I am doing the work that I'm doing, because I think it's too important not to. There are systems that need to be changed. And there's people with lived experiences that can impact and influence these systems to transform. So future people that will want to become social workers, have those doors open for them, and they will not experience the same trauma that we have had to go through.

Heidi De Leon: [00:12:20] This is Heidi and I share the same sentiment as both Fabi and Genna of why we're in this work. What I always tell myself until everyone's free, no one's free. And until the system's changed, nothing's changed. The same thing with the social worker, I had social workers snatching me when I was a kid and, growing up, telling me, Oh, you can't do this and you can't do that.

And don't even try that because now you've been to prison and you can't do these things. And I've never been someone who took no lightly. So, which is why I just kept going. And I'm like, I'm going to find another way. So my why goes with the, until everyone's free, no one's free. And I, and I got to keep doing this work.

I got to keep working on changing policies and changing, helping to change the laws that keep people incarcerated and also living it for our kids because our kids are the next generations and they're going to see us. I took them marching in Sacramento. They're going to live with these memories and know like, You know, my mom was doing this for this, and I got to do this as well.

No matter what career they go into, my kids, they're going to know that they have a part in this work, too, and then their kids, too.

Sam Lazalde: [00:13:34] So, Heidi, since we've got you cornered here, what does it mean to address trauma through, through your activism, through your work?

Heidi De Leon: [00:13:43] For me, you don't really have a choice in addressing trauma through my work.

Whether it's the patients that I'm working or the people that are, I say patients because of my new job, but whether it's the people or the activism, because everyone's affected, whether it's directly or indirectly through trauma, whether it was one trauma or severe complex trauma, working to help change systems that create the trauma.

My biggest example is thinking of friends who were driving along, doing nothing and getting pulled over because they're black, that's traumatic. And then their kids witnessed this whole thing, wondering what's going on? That creates trauma. So, what do we got to do to, to change this? And that's addressing trauma from that side and also having to address trauma with the person that I'm helping and how they deal with it and can keep pushing forward.

Sam Lazalde: [00:14:36] What does this mean for you to, I mean, I see it for me, like in the work that I do, that it's, it's a privilege to have this, this second chance and being able to, to help others address these different issues. Right. This hurt. What does that mean for you to, to have that privilege? To be out here to not be incarcerated, right. To be able to do address that with your kids.

Heidi De Leon: [00:14:59] I'm white. So that's a privilege just having, you know, the white skin walking around with that. And I know I don't have to deal with certain things as other people do, but I look at my kids.

My kids are not white. They will face this. So for me, I don't know if I'm answering your question fully, but it is a privilege and an honor to be able to give and empower others and how they can address the trauma, but also say, yes, you can address the trauma for yourself, but we can take these actions to change policy, to hold the police accountable, to stop the prisons from doing things to people, to stop the jails from taking away our dignity.

Sam Lazalde: [00:15:40] Fabi, what does it mean for you?

Fabiola Quijano: [00:15:45] I always go back to the, you know, hitting every single human being. See, I work with women. So like one of my, one of my biggest thing is every single woman in my program, in our program is, is worthy. You know, the work that I do is like, that's one of my main things is to inspire and motivate and just captivate, like just grab, like, get her, you know, get every single client that walks in through the doors and let them know that they are worthy and don't stop telling them that even, especially, the knuckleheads, you know what I mean? Like, like those are my favorite, you know, it's the ones that, that lack that self esteem. That don't believe in themselves. You know what I mean? Empowering

each woman, every single woman, you know, reaching out to agencies and, and, and, you know, having them come in, you know, through our program.

Sam Lazalde: [00:16:43] What does that do for you?

Fabiola Quijano: [00:16:45] It lets me know that I've done my job. It lets me know if I reach out to at least one woman out of all the 50 that there are, and one woman gets it. I've done my job. And that's all that matters because one will multiply.

Sam Lazalde: [00:16:58] I love what you said about that one, reaching that one, because in my work, I do gang intervention work and I work with young men, young women, facilitate groups, have like one on one meetings with them. And with ones that we start to see successes with, right, changes in their lives, especially the ones that I like really get close to. They always turn around and ask me like, how, how can I repay you? You know, I'm indebted to you. And my response is always one more, get one more, like do this for one more,

Fabiola Quijano: [00:17:33] Yeah. Like when I get that phone call that, that check-in, you know, hi, miss Fabi, you know, I just want you to know that I'm doing good. You know, everything's going great. You know, I'm, I'm, I'm an outpatient right now.

I'm going three times a week. And, and after a long day, and you hear that voicemail coming from your office and you're like, that's right. That's why we do what we do. And, you know...

Sam Lazalde: [00:18:00] That's our why.

Fabiola Quijano: [00:18:01] Yeah. That's our why.

Genevieve Rimer: [00:18:02] So it's so interesting that Fabi said that when she gets those voicemails or those calls from people that are doing well, but I often reflect on those calls that I get, that I used to get, or those letters that I used to get from jail for the people that I helped that are doing, that have now, are all back in jail that are doing bad. And I think that activism is a preemptive strike to prevent further trauma from happening, right? Because these people are being reincarcerated and they're experiencing that traumatic experience again. Even getting strip searched with, you know, other people or your lack of ability to make decisions. And you're, you know, someone telling you how to act, not only within. Not only the correctional officers or the police officers, but other people telling you what to do, how to do it when to do it, you lose your sense of autonomy. And that in itself is traumatic. Right? And so I feel like the activism that we do is really just a preemptive strike to prevent future trauma from happening.

Susie Hess: [00:19:02] All three of you and Sam always are incredibly humble because also this is what you're doing with Unchained Scholars. Now, I get phone calls, like I'm getting phone calls from students who were formerly incarcerated. I was never getting calls before the three of you like really started this and obviously with the other Unchained Scholars as well, but really coming out with your faces and your voices and the articles.

I mean, this is it. Like you really are doing it.

Genevieve Rimer: [00:19:29] Someone talked about like the convict closet and that trauma, the trauma that you experienced puts you in that closet. You know, and then not only does it put you in that closet, but it keeps you in that closet. So there's something freeing about coming together, talking about experiences and being able to use them as a strength and transform what was once meant to destroy us if you will into something that's powerful and productive.

Susie Hess: [00:19:57] Leading with that, how do each of you see this work as political? So we, even with the podcast, you know, we don't see the podcast as clinical, even though, you know, many of us are, or we're clinicians, but it's really political work. So how do each of you see this as political work, what you're doing?

Heidi De Leon: [00:20:19] The more we talk about it and other people hear, and then they hear, and then they talk about it.

If they're hearing about different bills or different things that are going on, then they know that they can take action as well. And I just think about how I never, I never really, I always hated politics, to be real. It wasn't until, Cut50 and Anti-Recidivism Coalition asked me to go to Sacramento to speak on SB 394, which was pretrial diversion for parents, primary caregivers. And then I really got to see first, like, this is, this is the type of work that I need to be done. Yes, there's the clinical work, but this is also the other work of being vulnerable and sharing my story so that other people don't have to get to where they have to be vulnerable to share their stories.

Cause hopefully they won't have these stories, but going up there and like telling the politicians, if we can change this law, we can change generations. Sometimes it wasn't very great. The politicians didn't want to hear it. They had horror stories that they were sharing back with us of why they shouldn't change the laws.

And that's when it really became more, a lot more real for me of why it is political. And the whole system was set up with politics, setting. I mean, the constitution, it's written in there, slavery is okay as long as they're imprisoned. So, we have to keep working. We have to keep working to change laws, just to stop criminalization and the trauma that it continues to create.

Genevieve Rimer: [00:21:56] So as I was beginning to prepare for this, I started to think about politics. And I think it's so important that I say this really, I grew up in a super conservative, super Republican household. Right. And I was believed in my household that if you commit a crime, then you deserve punishment. And it's almost like you deserve to be banished.

You know, like you're a criminal, you're a convict. You made a terrible mistake. And it wasn't until I became incarcerated, that the face of the convict began to change in my family's eyes. Right. So, yes, my family is still conservative, but I believe they have a completely different viewpoint on people that have become incarcerated because of their personal experiences working within the criminal justice system. And so now, instead of an idea within my family of lock them up and throw away the key, which is, which is a pretty common conservative

viewpoint, they believe in rehabilitation. They believe in second chances. They believe in reentry. And I think that's true, a lot of the work and a lot of the advocacy and activism that I've done, that they're able to kind of see people with criminal convictions through a new lens.

Fabiola Quijano: [00:23:07] I strongly believe that that a woman does not belong in, in, in the prison system. She does not belong in jail. You know, jails were built for, for men. I'm not saying men belong there. I'm not saying that. What I'm saying is like, you know, just like the rise of, you know, 700% rise right now of women being incarcerated.

Like I strongly do believe that women, should be offered that rehabilitation, you know, kinda gotta go back with my son, you know, he's. He's he's in there. He hasn't been sentenced and he's about to have two years, two years in, you know. Not okay. You know, I'm not being offered any services, not, no, no education while in there, you know, and going to come out, maybe if, so January 16th you'll have a court hearing and may or may not get released, who knows, but if he does what.

You know, you got to go to the probation department and do an orientation like, but there's no set plan, you know? So, I strongly do believe that, rehabilitation is important and, the services that, that, that are offered like therapy, psychotherapy. You know, case management, SUD treatment, like all of that is important and it's like the whole bio-psycho-social, like in spiritual, has to be addressed, and be, you know, women being treated, human beings.

Let's just use the word human beings, you know, human beings being treated with dignity and respect, is very, very important. You know, they're not criminals. Okay. They, there are justice involved. You know, yes, there's. You know, the behaviors and the patterns and whoopity whoop, and, but that's, well yeah, but that's where we step in, you know, because you know, each one teach one, right.

Because I know, you know, we, you know, we know each other, you know, we do know each other, we know our moves, we know what we do. We know the manipulation and the, you know, strategies that we are, we do because we're highly intelligent, you know, but with that being said, you know, treating every human being with dignity and respect is very, very important

Sam Lazalde: [00:25:21] in addressing trauma.

What is this like for you guys in doing this for the patients that you work with for the, the clients that you're working with. Right. But what's, what's that like for your healing?

Fabiola Quijano: [00:25:38] I'd say like for my healing...

Sam Lazalde: [00:25:40] I mean, at least for me, you know, the, the, the reason I'm in the work that I'm in, right. And gang intervention work, because that's, that's what I know. That's what my family came from. I, and you know, through incarceration, through hospital stays, through violence and drug use.

And, um, all of those things like. I've been able to, to, to navigate that. Right. And, and get past that, come out the other side. And for me, it's, it's super healing to be able to come back and show everyone, Hey, look, here's, here's this map. Here's where all the holes are. Here's where there's the traps. And there's a way to get to the other side.

Right. And it's empowering for me to be able to do that right. To, to be able to, to ensure, or at least give someone kind of that plan, you know, for, for a way out, for a way through change, right? You're addressing trauma for these, for these women that you're working with. What does that do for you?

Fabiola Quijano: [00:26:54] It is gratifying.

Every time a woman walks into the program, whether she's a repeat or not, or a new woman, you know, or, but especially those that are repeats. I look into their eyes and I let them know welcome home. And we actually have this big wall it's called the wall of worth, you know, at the program. And every woman has stamped it with a message of recovery.

And there's this big one that says you are worthy, you know, giving them the blueprint is very important and we do baby steps. All the time, even when they're pissed off or angry or shouting. And that right there lets me know there's brokenness, but seeing the transformation in every single woman, like, especially because I currently work at the program where I walked in broken, you know, I walked in there.

So, so broken. I didn't believe who--I didn't even have the voice that I have right now, as I'm listening to myself. Like I walked in there with a mean mug, you know, thinking that I, you know, I was. I was hard, you know, but deep down inside, I was a little broken little girl, you know, with all this, this fake, it was all false, you know, facade, and little by little.

And so every time I see a woman walk in there and, you know, she comes in with all of that stuff, you know, the hardness it's like, I smile. And I always draw this thing, especially when I sit down one on one with, with a young lady, I, I, I do this drawing and I do a circle and in the middle I put a little stick figure and we start addressing the little girl inside, you know, and what's the root what's causing all of this.

What's your future gonna be like, what do you want to do? And, and once she starts seeing that on paper, then she can start believing in herself. Especially I love that saying. You know, she believed she could. So she did, you know, that's, I love that saying because every single time that a woman just, you know, does one little thing outside of her norm, that's growth.

Heidi De Leon: [00:29:10] For me, the healing through activism.

I'm just happy that there is healing in this because this activism can be traumatizing. Going back to when I sat in a room, talking to people who don't agree with the work and they don't want to change laws and they don't want to see people get out and they don't want second chances and understanding, looking at them and understanding with compassion of why they think, you know, and what they're thinking and, and, and being compassionate in that part.

I'm happy that I've been able to share my story because for a long time, I couldn't share it because as a woman and as a mother, that's like the worst, the worst, you know, you don't do that. You're you need to stay home and you need to do all these different things and work a job or, or just stay home and, you know, be pregnant.

But that was never my thing. And coming out, being able to find slowly like one mentor at a time. I'm really lucky. I started working at LA Centers for Alcohol and Drug Abuse because I worked with a friend who was a former criminal defense lawyer. And I hope he would be okay with me sharing. But I'm not putting his name out there, but he used to be a criminal defense lawyer.

And then now he's helping to run the program because in addiction programs, it's one of the more forgiving places. But I always ran up against the wall with how am I going to keep moving forward and get an MSW to get my license? Because you can't get a license. The healing really does come when I'm able to that selfish part of, you know, the self gratification of sharing and being able to say, like, I've done this. I know my path is different from everyone's. I know my path is different from each person I interact, but there's a path and you can do it and we'll help you get there. Our program will help you, or, you know, at Homeboys, we'll help you. I know what worked for me, but let's find out what's going to work for you and let's, let's help you get there.

And I love it. I love it when I'm walking and then I haven't seen, you know, one of the homies or one of the guys for one of the homies for a year. Or two, when I'm like, Hey, what you've been doing? He's like, Oh, and they, um, they start out with, I'm sorry, I had just been working. I'm like, don't be sorry. I'm happy.

You're working. And you're taking care of your family and you're just out there. Living. And you're coming to check in whether you come in every two years or whatever, but I'm happy to see that, you know, a couple years ago we were able to help you

Genevieve Rimer: [00:31:41] My healing through activism, I think is kind of interesting because I believe that my journey has gone through multiple different stages.

And I think right now at this point in my life, I'm okay with disclosure. I'm okay with people knowing about my past. And I actually got my record expunged and sometimes I wish I can go and take that expungement back. Just because like, I felt like I needed to get my record expunged because I needed to become this certain person without a criminal conviction.

But now through all of this, through the healing that I've done, I'm okay with the mistakes that I made in my past. Granted, I've hurt many people and I will, and I wish I would have never hurt the people or myself and the way that I did. But through that hurt and through that pain, I've learned, I've grown.

I've made amends. And I really feel like, like through this whole process, I've become who I am and now I'm able to be an activist for others. And I'm also at the point in my life where if you don't like me because of my past, then that's okay. I don't need you in my life. And I'm not going to be ashamed of who I was because it's made me who I am.

And I'm pretty, pretty proud now of who I am today. And it hasn't happened coincidentally, it's happened with a lot of sacrifice, dedication work, and not compromising. And so I think like that's really how I have obtained this level of healing. I'm still working on it. Believe me, I'm still working on it, but like, I feel like I'm a lot further off than where I began.

Fabiola Quijano: [00:33:16] I'm with you on that, Genna, you know, this doesn't come easy, this healing process, you know, it's not just like, Oh, here's your certificate of completion. It's not, it's definitely that 12 week course.

Genevieve Rimer: [00:33:28] Congratulate. No, no, no. Yeah, no, it's, it's definitely a lifetime. It's, it's forever, you know, it's continuous healing, you know, I'm seven and a half years clean.

So that early recovery for me was all that stuff that I said that I was going to take to take to the grave. Well, guess what? All that's not in the grave anymore. It's you know what I mean? It's out there.

I want to comment on that. And it actually reminds me of a conversation that you and I and a colleague of mine had the other day.

Susie, oftentimes. We may ask people to share their story with others as professionals. Right? So we're like here, we have this meeting with probation coming in. They're only one month out, right. Come and share your story of success. But I think it's so important that as professionals that understand trauma that we take a deeper look into what we're asking that person to do. I mean, I've been home now for what? Let's see, what are we 2020. So I've been home for since 2006 or seven. I'm terrible at math. That's why I'm a social worker and I still feel like I'm unpacking layers of trauma. Right. And so here we here at least myself, in my early stages of my career, I would often ask people to go and talk about themselves, but really it was self-serving because I wanted them to talk about the success and the impact of my program on them.

And so here I am asking them to go into present about this traumatic experience that they've just encountered. Right. For, for, basically for some self gratification or for my program's gratification. So just to throw that out there, I think it's so important that we really take a deeper look or we take, we take a couple of seconds to think about what we're asking someone to talk about, and then even further, take a second look, to think if they're ready for it.

Susie Hess: [00:35:18] I love that you brought that up. And our very first episode, Alexis Rhone talked about healing before storytelling. And obviously there's no such thing as we're healed, you know, like the 12 week course; however, to be in your healing vortex, I think is what I was saying in the phone call, versus your trauma vortex before you tell your story, because one, we don't want to retraumatize the person telling the story, or the listeners. And so that's why our podcast is focused on healing centered engagement because we didn't want the trauma story to be the focus. We wanted the healing journeys to be the focus. And what another piece is, what you're all doing and what we're hoping from this podcast as well is community healing. That and Monique Morris.

I love her quote that I wrote down. Healing happens in community, not in isolation. And, you know, the intention of our, of the podcast is hearing how you're all like healing, how you're just going through it. So I'm curious from each of you, how do you see this as community healing? And, you know, for me, like just personally, you know, talk therapy, didn't work personally, for me, activism worked for me.

My history is intimate partner violence, and I worked in the field for like 18 years. And that was my purpose. I thought, well, this was my why. This is why I went through all of that to be where I am today. So, and then I started thinking, wait, I'm feeling healed just by being with other people who've experienced something similar, not necessarily even in any formal way, but like in this way, hearing you all talk, it's like, Oh, well, if she can do that, I could certainly go through what I'm going through. What are each of your thoughts about community healing?

Genevieve Rimer: [00:37:06] So with Unchained Scholars, I think it's really, well we are, so as far as I know, the first and only social work student group, if you will, throughout the United States. So, for those listening that run universities or are involved in other universities and around the United States, maybe this would be a good opportunity to get some activism out there. But I feel like it's really a place where we can actually just come together and speak the same language and be ourselves. You know so often in class, it's like, I've gotta be careful. Can't tell people I'm formerly incarcerated because they're going to go with the stigma and then I'm going to go with the consequences, you know?

So like, I feel like now with the group, we can actually come together and, and talk and be with each other and, and, and just be genuine and authentic and a safe space where we know that we're not going to be judged. And although the reentry community or community, I guess society overall is beginning to shift their views, there are still so many collateral consequences that are on paper, not to mention the internal biases that people have against people that have been formerly incarcerated,

Heidi De Leon: [00:38:17] Especially when it comes to the community healing part. A lot of universities are centered in communities. I mean, we look at USC and USC is right there in the downtown LA.

And you go outside of the wall or the, the fence of USC and you've got tents. Yes. Yeah. You got the privilege. You got tents, you got everything there, everybody there. and we're all. We're all right there. And there's so much that we can do right in our one, our small community. And outside of the communities that when I think about the healing and the is to be able to have these talks in the small settings with different community, because when communities come together, working together to make change, that's where the voices can get heard. And if you get enough people within the community who will go to the council meetings, will go to the board of supervisors, will support the different actions that we want to make changes, that's healing in itself. And you see a lot of people who will step up and after something has happened in the community and come together and that's.

Going out reaching to the community, getting the kids, the youth, because it's not just the adults. I always want to bring in the youth because the youth have a voice. And you know, if

they're not 18, they're going to be 18 one day. And they're going to be able to use that voice and voting, not being able to vote, you know, having had certain criminal charges put on you, taking away all the voting rights, that takes away the voice of the community. When you're putting a lot of people, specifically Black and Brown people, incarcerating them, putting them on probation. If you're on parole, you can't vote. So, taking away that voice. So some of the work in going and educating and empowering so that we can get that vote back to people and letting people know that are sitting in jail right now like, you can vote. You're not in the community, but the community is now sitting in Twin Towers and, or Men's Central Jail. They're still able to vote. They're not convicted yet. So that part of the community healing is, is huge for me being able to, to go back and empower and share because a lot of people don't know.

And when they first feel like, Oh, I can't do this because of that, they'll stop. But hearing our stories and hearing the work that we've done gives them that hope. Yeah, we got to take people with us, take a few people, take a few kids and go do the work with them. In that work, they're learning how to be a community activist, they're learning how to do the grassroots work, and then they can go and each one teach one.

Susie Hess: [00:40:58] I love that. And you know, who's going to be on, in a few episodes is Hugo. So Hugo Gonzalez is an organizer at Initiate Justice which is all about getting the vote back. So Fabi.

Fabiola Quijano: [00:41:11] To me, the way I see community healing is, is giving back to your communities. One addict, helping another, reaching out to agencies that are going to help bring in more resources for individuals.

There's such a lack in housing in San Diego County housing for women, you know, women and children, you know, there's housing. There's, there's some housing there, sober livings, but what's the next step, you know?

Susie Hess: [00:41:38] Yeah, absolutely. And you know, I think all of this is community healing. You know, hearing what your, every time all of you speak, you know, I'm feeling my own, you know, emotions of my own journey.

And I'm wondering, which is where we were sort of going to, if listeners wanted right now to get whether it's to support Unchained Scholars, to get involved with the vote, you know, how can people get involved? What could they do? I mean, anything at all that you guys can suggest that they want to get a hold of you with regarding Unchained Scholars and how they can get involved.

Fabiola Quijano: [00:42:11] UnchainedScholars.USC@gmail.com

Heidi De Leon: [00:42:17] Well, I would say the time done movement. If you want to get on that, just go look up #TimeDone, or text time done to seven, three to four or five. Again, that's seven three, two, four, five, just text time done. It's a national movement to remove the 48,000 barriers, collateral consequences that face families and people who've been incarcerated.

Another one, I post a lot on my Instagram, which is @felon2phd. So you can follow anything that's on there. Look up hashtags like end mass incarceration as well, and, and get involved. If there's something local, like Anti-Recidivism Coalition. If you've been incarcerated, you can go there and become a member.

I'm a member there. If you want to look up Initiate Justice, they're another one. The Community Coalition.

Genevieve Rimer: [00:43:10] If you're a social worker, you believe in the dignity and worth of a person and you believe in equality for all. And if you have some sort of bias that is preventing or prohibiting a fellow social worker with a, with a criminal conviction from either working at your agency or you supervising them or whatever it may be, I strongly urge you to check your practices.

And then not only that, but if you work for an agency that has these barriers in place and they call themselves a social service agency that's comprised of social workers, I would also take a step back and look at where I'm working. It takes boldness and it takes bravery to say, Oh, the hiring practices that you have are wrong.

And as a social worker, that believes in second chances, I believe in providing opportunities for formerly incarcerated social workers. Encourage them through boldness to take a look at their practices.

Susie Hess: [00:44:08] I feel so grateful that we've met. And so appreciate you for just your inspiration and really being heroes for so many people who are listening.

Genevieve Rimer: [00:44:19] As are you to us.

You know, I always, I like to talk about how you didn't have any experience or history working with formerly incarcerated people. And now I consider you an expert, you know, and I don't say that lightly. I'm pretty tough. I'm a pretty tough critic, you know, especially when it comes to people that are serving this population.

And so I feel like, you know, here you were just a few years ago, never with any expertise, if you will, helping formerly incarcerated people. And now it feels like it's your heartbeat, you know? So, on behalf of us, thank you so much. The impact and the, and the footprints that you leave on our heart, you'll never know.

So thank you.

Fabiola Quijano: [00:45:04] What you've done for Unchained Scholars and for me, you gave me that boost. You motivated me. You empowered me to believe just a little bit more, you know what I mean? And guided me through that interview, you know, that I was so afraid of, and you're just an amazing, you're like an angel you truly, truly are.

And we appreciate you. I appreciate you. Thank you.

Sam Lazalde: [00:45:33] *Our Stories Matter* is brought to you by Trauma Informed LA, whose mission is to foster resilient communities that promote healing and wellbeing through

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