

Episode 4: Healing Through Activism with Mike Alcantara

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 the Tovaangar, the Los Angeles basin in Southern Channel Islands. We pay our respects to the Honuukvetam, our ancestors; the 'Ahihirom, our elders; and 'eyoohiinkem, our relatives and relations past, present, and emerging.

I'm crazy excited to introduce my good friend, Mike Alcantara, who since the age of 16 was carceral and system impacted. At 22 years of age, Mike has been on a mission to lead people down different paths. Mike is currently an entrepreneur and activist with 10 years of business development, sales, and marketing experience.

Mike took his knowledge and now has found a way to give back to communities and small businesses. He started from a podcast and now brick and mortar, which provides space for creatives, entrepreneurs, and locals who are in search of better opportunities for themselves.

Mike Alcantara: [00:01:39] Seriously, Susie, Sam, thank you so much for having me.

I really appreciate being on your platform.

Susie Hess: [00:01:44] We're so happy you're here and Sam, do you want to like give a little spiel about how you actually know each other?

Sam Lazalde: [00:01:50] Me and Mike first crossed paths punching on things. We were at my good friend Jose's boxing gym, Superb Boxing, in North Hollywood. Mike's cousin was doing a few projects with the gym owner there.

And Mike just kind of came out. He shared a little bit of his story and we totally connected on that, which is, I mean, doing part why, why we're bringing them on board here to interview him.

Mike Alcantara: [00:02:16] Yeah, no for sure. I think that, you know, it was really meant to be because especially moving to LA, I've been extremely formal.

Right. Cause I'm trying to fix my life, trying to progress, trying to, you know, find the next level of my life, trying to rid myself of negativity. But there's also still a piece of

you that yearns to be close to people who kind of have like, experiences, but it's hard when you're trying to become a professional.

So then going into the boxing gym, and then obviously, you know, I've been in mixed martial arts gyms before, but they were kind of more like just West LA kind of stuff. So like going up to North Hollywood, meeting you guys, like, I was like, okay, these are the type of people I grew up around, felt at home.

And then obviously sharing stories. It was a big moment in my life cause I had people I could relate to in LA now.

Sam Lazalde: [00:03:02] And to give everyone a little bit more context as to that space that we have, I mean, obviously I've shared, you know, I'm I'm formerly system impacted as well, was formerly gang involved.

And I, I now I'm leading our, our initiatives for gang intervention in the San Fernando Valley. So, through my partnership and my friendship there at the gym, I started to bring in young men, young women who, who have been cycling through our program. So it's gang intervention clients. Right.

And so many of, many of the of the young people, of the, of the people who find themselves at the gym. I mean, they're, they're full of like, gang tattoos, prison tattoos. They're, they're all kind of get along with, with that sort of dialogue in there. And so when Mike came through and then kind of just shares or put it out there that he had, he had spent some time in prison and I was like, Oh, wait a minute. Now we have that extra connection. Aside from the arts, aside from a dude being such an awesome guy,

Mike now has started this, this business really for all these startup organizations, all, all local companies that are trying to look to, to, to launch off and he's providing a platform for them. To take off and how he's done it for us as well.

Right. We've tried to take off with this podcast and we started originally just trying to record off of a laptop. Mike puts something up on his personal social media and, and that's when my light bulb went off and I was like, Oh, wait a minute. We can ask Mike for help on this. And, yeah, so now we're, we're a few episodes in thanks to Mike.

Mike Alcantara: [00:04:34] Yeah, I'm seriously. I'm glad to hear that. And thank you guys for reaching out. It really means a lot, because it just validates what I'm doing. Right. My purpose is to help and that's the underlying cause of everything and so whenever it recycles back and it's, I didn't even, you know, you don't think about it, right?

Like, okay, Hey, we're just going to do this podcast. But then talking in this context, it's like, Hey, we're looking for a way to launch something we're trying to do. It's really cool. It's really cool. Yeah.

Sam Lazalde: [00:05:03] That leads me into my first question for you, man, would just kind of loaded. What is your why for doing this work?

Mike Alcantara: [00:05:09] The why is, is real, is very serious to me because the why was burning for, I think about like six years. So moving to LA right away, my first, instinct was survival. Right. I was living out my car for a little bit. I was bouncing from couches. I was doing all of those things just to get a job and then luckily, you know, short, long story short.

I was elevating in all my job positions at the same time as trying to go to school. So I was working three jobs going to two schools. I was going to a trade school for music, sound engineering, and I was going to junior college. So I was like sleeping in parking lots. I was sleeping. Like, I'd go to one job, go to the next, sleep in the parking lot.

Then go to work again, then go to school and then sleep and then go to school and then sleep just really hustling and, I did what I did, I needed to do survive. But then as I started to progress, this is where the fire started burning the why, right. Of getting to this, you know, foreshadowing six years previously to all of these things happening is that I started seeing how much opportunity was actually limited.

How many applications I filled out that I had a mark, I was a, I was a felon, how many opportunities that I got the job, but because I marked I was a felon, they didn't want to give it to me. No other reason than me saying I was a felon, you know, so I started not putting I'm a felon and just going for it.

And if they pulled it, they pulled it, but I just pretend I've never committed any crimes. Then I started getting in the door with other companies and, earning my opportunities, getting promoted and, and just really, yeah, like. Like those charts that they say the path to success where it's like a squiggly line bouncing left, or right up and down, like that's literally my life.

So anyone out there who thinks it's like a trajectory, like, Oh, I go to college. Oh, I get a job. I get some experience. And I did. It's not like, it's not that systematic. You really have to like hustle. and so at that point I go down, I'm a felon, I'm uneducated. This is really hard for me. And I mean, not in a sense, like I'm really not trying to sound egotistical.

That I feel like I'm a fairly intelligent guy. And also a guy who can adapt to social circumstances. So meaning I'm able to read a crowd and know how to talk, which

can be an issue for people coming out of prison. Right. Cause they're still holding onto that, that shield. And that shield is like, I'm fucking tough, don't fuck with me.

Right. Like, you know, like I need my respect. Right. So it's like they see something formal come across them and they want a job opportunity, but they're still like, yo, yeah, man, I worked really good. And you know what I'm saying? You know, and it's just like, you have to understand the situation. So with that said, I'm already like, I'm an adaptable guy and this is extremely hard for me.

So that's where the why started burning, like I was like, man, if I ever get to the position where I'm on top of the company, I would change my HR. Like they don't have to write that. Like, have you ever been, I want to take the best employee. Period. And, I know that kind of undermines our educational system.

I think education is important, but I also think that like, for me, I try to do the educational route, but it, I can't sit in class. Like it's a struggle for me. I can learn, but at a point I feel like I have to be constantly stimulated and if I don't have the right environment, then I disconnect very easy.

And so. And again, this is not for everybody. I'm just putting out there. There's, there's all different types of people and we all progress in different ways. So I would rather have an interview process that determines what type of person are you, what are you willing to learn? And are you teachable? Right?

And can you work with multiple people? That's what I care about. And yeah, some education, meaning you can tell by just the simple five minutes talking to someone. Have they received a little bit of education? Are they a student? And I don't mean student like formally, I mean a student of life, like, are you willing to receive information?

Are you willing to improve yourself? I want to find ways to destroy a system that really filters out people with bad circumstances, meaning maybe their family couldn't afford an education. Right. Let's just keep it simple. Not they were in gangs or anything. Maybe their family just couldn't afford it and they try to do it now.

Their family doesn't have money, so they get a job at 18 and now they're working 40 to 60 hours a week. And now he can't go to school and they can't get education. So now they have the glass ceiling, right? They're applying for administrative manager position or account manager position or directors of sales and marketing.

And it's like, no, you need four years or your master's degree. Plus you need this X experience. But the, but this person knows the whole job already. So now it's become systematic. So my why was like, well, I get it because you're validating all

this money you're spending on going to UCLA, right. Going to USC, no disrespect to the Trojans in the room.

I'm just talking, I'm just talking in theory, right, and generalize. And then that's when I was like, I can appreciate that dedication. If you go to a good school and you put through that shows, you know, your educational level, your, your ineptness and all of that, but there's also a group of people who can do that too, that are not getting the opportunity.

So I'm not saying cut off the educated, I'm just saying that I want to look at you all with a blank slate and you have to prove to me that you want this job or you want to excel in life. So that's when it started going, I want to work for startups. So I started working for startups because I wanted to know, how do you build a company from the ground up?

Cause if I ever get into position to do it, now I've worked for corporate. You know, Fortune 500, 100 companies. And now I've worked at startup levels and done all the in between. So when I build my own company, I know how it feels to actually build it with no resources. And I know how to manage it when you do have resources.

So once I connected those, that's when my why became actual, tangible. Now it's, I'm going to give opportunities to everyone out there who's actually really looking for it. And so Locals Only was born, you know, first the podcast, talking with people and figuring out their passions and creative, you know what they're trying to do their nine to five, their hustles other than a nine to five.

And then we started marketing local companies, and now we're giving a platform and it's simply because I feel that there needs to be balance in the system. The rich keep getting richer. This is a proven fact. This is not me. Just putting a general statement out there. The middle class is disappearing.

You know, the wage are separating and it's almost impossible to live off \$15 an hour. You literally probably have to work 60 to 80 hours a week. You have to get two jobs. And so I said, well, if I can be college football, which has produced a bunch of stars, then maybe those stars will come back to me. And once I produce a bunch of a community of stars, then us together, figure out how to take back the neighborhoods and get and balance the system.

So you have money that's corporate, right? And now you have money that's been made from the, from the neighborhoods and the community. So now we can fight back.

Susie Hess: [00:12:17] So when you said you would check off no arrest, did you ever get busted for that?

Mike Alcantara: [00:12:23] I'm going to say this. I hope he doesn't mind, but this was funny, cause this was my actual first Fortune 500 company.

I apologize second, but this one was the first one that actually ran my record. So shout out to Matt ANSYS. He's out in Chicago now. He's really a big time guy, but he was big in eBay when eBay acquired StubHub, this was the guy who interviewed me and I marked nothing. And I did all of that stuff.

Check this out. I rolled up and this is before I understood that, like these younger companies were like less formal. Cause I went to the, to the interview in like the best suit you could probably buy. Like straight up, I was shining and everyone else in there was like slacks and like a button up and a tie and like all loose and like, I went through like the ringer. I went through Matt, and then I went through the area manager and then the manager of like the whole California. Then I went through a panel and then I went back to Matt and then, I did all of that and passed with flying colors. And then he gives me a call and he's like, so we ran your record and we see you have something here.

I just want to talk about it, but he was like really asking like, Hey man, I really just want to know who you are. And I was like, look, I was young. I was dumb. I made a dumb decision. I was making lots of dumb decisions. I happen, it happened to catch up to me. And then I, now I'm trying to bounce back from that.

And that's really all it is. And, then he said, cool. I'll give you a call back later. So I'm going a whole day of anxiety. Like I'm just like, man. So then he calls me back. He says, so I kind of hid it that you have record and pushed it through HR and we should, we'll see you on Monday. I got hired and this is like huge, right?

It's like huge opportunity. eBay just acquired StubHub. I'm going to be part of this transition team. I'm going to be handling, like lots. And like just the money that flows through me is like over \$20 million of tickets, you know? So it's like, they're really trusting this guy that first off, when I, when I first got hired, the everyone asks me what school I went to.

I was probably the only--Matt told me--2% of people they've ever hired without an education. And on top of that, I have a record. I was the first in the company with a record unofficially. Yeah. And then that really opened my eyes. Cause he's like, he actually sat down with me day when he's like, I am really giving you your opportunity.

I like I can see from your working experience, I can see he actually called all my like references and was like, I can see, I know he's like, do not fuck this up because this will get you everywhere you want to go, because now you can say you've worked for Reebok and now you can say you've worked for StubHub, eBay, and no one,

everyone's going to want to come calling after this and you won't need that education.

You know that degree,

Sam Lazalde: [00:15:12] I commend you man, for facing that, because I know, I mean, speaking for myself and, and my experiences, even though, you know, here in Los Angeles, they've passed this whole ban, the box initiative. And I don't have to check off any box that says, I'm a felon. I still have like the angst and the trauma that kind of comes up.

When I go to interview, like, I feel like I have to kind of tip toe around it. Right.

Mike Alcantara: [00:15:41] People don't know that that's coming from you and I who have really tried to figure out our life. Right, right it, improve our situation. But imagine the person who's fresh out. Does it have good people around him? And he's more of like, fuck the system, you know, fuck corporate America.

That's his mindset. Now he goes into the interview and he's already defensive. So now you're asking questions, now you're getting personal. Now, he's just like, Why don't you just give me the job, he doesn't get the job. He walks away from that and he's more of like, fuck them. Then he looked internalizes and goes, maybe I need to do better.

See, and that's what the system creates.

Susie Hess: [00:16:17] Yes, absolutely. You know, Unchained Scholars on the last episode, talked about really wanting instead of check the box, you don't even have to check that box, but you could still ask after you're offered to say, if you have a criminal conviction, if you have any type of felony, misdemeanor, you're welcome here.

They hope that is what will be the next step. Not it's just ban the box before the interview. After the interview, they can still ask and do the checks.

Mike Alcantara: [00:16:48] No, it's a thing. It's definitely a filtering system, you know? And it's it's, it sucks. So that's why I am here to change that. And I know there's other people out there doing it, but that's my, why.

Susie Hess: [00:17:02] So everything that you've done, which has been pretty amazing. What, how do you feel that has sort of helped your lived experience?

Mike Alcantara: [00:17:11] I think that you it's very easy to be released, and because of all the odds stacked against you to go back into all of your cycles or even instead of progress, digress, because it's just really that tough. Like I'm lucky I had a home I could go to. Like, there's people who had the streets and they don't know where

they're going and then they're bouncing house house. And then you have to give your parole officer a physical address and you might not be there. It's it's just that type of system. And then on top of that, they have tats all over their face or something and they can't get a job.

Now you're going to get violated for your parole for that. So I think that it takes tremendous amount of strength to go. It's me. It's no one else. It's me. The problem's me, regardless of what the system has done to you, regardless, what the paperwork has done to you, regardless of people around you. And I, it trusts me, I'm saying this, and I know how hard people might be listening and being like, it's not that easy.

You can't just get released and you don't trust me. You can still figure out a way and that's where you're seeing lived experiences. I chose that no matter what, I'm going to do everything right. I may not be perfect, but I'm gonna do everything intentionally. Right. So I left, I left San Diego because everything around me was bad. So I broke that chain and then I moved to LA and I had to start fresh and I could have easily picked people that I can associate with like real fast, like meaning, Oh, people who could drink, people who've been around, or people who have a little bit of an attitude or a rough side to them.

No, I was like, all my friends are going to be straight and narrow. Right? Super square, super like walk the line. These are my friends and I really it's funny. Cause my girl meets, like now I'm able to have all different types of people cause I'm in a good place. Right. But she can tell like, she's like these friends came from like your earlier days in LA.

Cause they're all. And then they're just random. Right. They're random. And it's like, it's, it's just funny. Like I got this guy named Brian Mozzerella, we call him the cheese, but he's just your guy who's probably never done anything wrong in his whole life. And he literally will call me and be like, how's everything or is it okay, buddy? Are you good? Anytime I throw an event or do something, he brings a present. And, but she's like, how the fuck do you know this guy? Cause he just doesn't seem like someone... And I'm like, Brian is like the most loyalist guy and he just comes out of nowhere and he's always like, Hey buddy, how you doing?

And like, right. And then she just laughs. Cause he actually, when I was rapping, he was like at every concert and like I'd even did one in Compton and he came through.

Wait, you were rapping?

Yeah.

Sam Lazalde: [00:19:49] Dude busted.

Mike Alcantara: [00:19:51] No, no, no. It was another life. No, but yeah, I was just, I was just doing music. I was enjoying it.

Susie Hess: [00:19:57] I mean, it's pretty amazing what you have done.

And then even the thought process of, you know, you can do it too. What, how did that even happen? That you got to that point of, I'm going to find new friends, I'm going to move to LA. I'm going to really like make this happen because I think that's the part that is often challenging to rise up and to keep going.

Mike Alcantara: [00:20:19] I think it's honesty. I think if people are really honest with themselves, and it's the hardest thing to do. It really is like something we're defensive in conversations. We're defensive when it comes to criticism, it just naturally who we are beings because we feel like we're doing our best in our own.

And it's, you're you feel like you're doing the best with what you have, right. So it's easy to get into a shell of your own nature. And I think that I was honest. I was like, I looked around, I'm not learning anything new. Nothing's changing around me, every day is the same thing. I go to work. I get off, I go to the homies, we drink, we bullshit, and I try to stay out of trouble, but you know, it's still, it's still the same shit's around. Then on the weekend I just felt unmotivated. Because what else is there to do? Okay. Hang out with my girl. We'll go watch a movie. I'll go to the homeys. We'll drink again. Like that's just literally what it was. And it was just like, I had a job, so my parents were happy. Cause they're like, Oh, you're you're doing something.

But I knew inside I'm not doing nothing, I'm not, there's nothing challenging me. There's nothing elevating me. There's nothing. And I even tried going to school for a second. I'm just like, San Diego has nothing for me now. It's, it's done. And that's where I was really honest. And I was like, Alright, let's go.

I went to LA and immediately, I felt so much energy cause I had nothing. I had no friends. I had no job. I had my car. That's it. And so all of those things that happened to you when you go and prison happened to me all over again. I got to figure this out. I got to survive and I got to just keep fighting and I got to stay mentally tough and I've got to figure it out.

So that's, that's what happens. Right? You move, you don't have anything. Now you become resourceful again. Now you start thinking, now your mind starts opening up. Now you become creative again. Cause you're like, okay. So that's what I did. I was like, okay, I'm going to work this job. But I knew they were like, Oh, you can commit to 20 hours or you can commit to 40.

I was like, I'm going to commit to 20. So that way I could take a break, go to school and then pick up another job, which was another 20 to 30 hour job. Right. And then I

had another job that was just like, when you come, we'll pay you under the table and you just help out. Cool. So like these were the things I was being creative.

I was creative with time, although it was a lot. I was being, starting to be strategic now, starting to improve my situations. Now I'm learning from other people as well, because in LA, like with all of these opportunities, I was like becoming a student again, versus in San Diego. Like, I didn't feel I needed to challenge myself.

Also, the opportunities are different in San Diego. It's a nine to five town. Here in LA, it's like, everyone's doing something different or someone, you can literally walk a block and there's four different types of businesses. And so that's why I was like, Oh, I want to learn that administrative work. Oh, I want to learn this marketing stuff, you know?

Ooh. I want to learn the sales stuff. Ooh. I want to learn the start up company. Oh, I want to learn technology. Ooh. I want to learn what apps do, you know?

Sam Lazalde: [00:23:23] Mike is passionate.

Mike Alcantara: [00:23:24] Yeah. So that's what I'm saying though. But then now, like that's why my passion is kicking. Cause that's the difference between where I was in San Diego and then moving to LA, I just felt like every day was a cycle and it was repeating itself.

And then here I was like, Oh. Shit. Oh like, Oh, this is cool. This is new. Oh, this is great. And then I'm just immersing myself and now I'm growing. And then now I'm evolving. Now I'm starting to see what do I want for myself? Because first it was survivor mode. Right? When you survive, now, you get cool with everybody.

Now you have your system. Now it's like, Oh, well I'm gonna go play pinochle and build up my fucking, my canteen. Right. Or build my money at like, you just started figuring it out. I just feel like I was honest. And if you're honest, you'll, you'll you'll really want to do.

Sam Lazalde: [00:24:06] Honesty, takes bravery.

Long story short , Mike moved over here from San Diego to LA, met me and just life changed.

Mike Alcantara: [00:24:16] No. I think that was the point of when I finally was able to, like I said, allow people in my life that I felt like I could have drinks with. I could hang out with, and now we can talk about all different types of stuff, like, and.

Yeah, you were meeting me right when I, my, my, career path was now starting to go straight up as far as trajectory, I was in a good place. and, and then now I was

searching for, what do I want to do for the next 10 years? I would tell Sam all the time, like I just had, I'm going to do this. I'm going to do that.

I'm going to do this. Like I was just saying, like, I got all this shit in my head. He was always like, Go do you bro.

Sam Lazalde: [00:24:54] Cool, do that.

Mike Alcantara: [00:24:56] Let's do that. So now that we sit here and talk, it's, it's fun to, he's a milestone in my life. Superb boxing is a milestone in my life. I can look out there and know exactly where I was at in my life, you know, and that's a great point.

And also the people there, it's it's family, like I'm still, David's now part of my team that just recently happened, but that's an evolution of what, how long have we known each other? It's like four or five years.

Sam Lazalde: [00:25:19] A little bit longer.

Mike Alcantara: [00:25:20] Yeah. So in that whole trajectory, you know, I've known David for a long time, but now it's like, we found a way to work together on this platform.

I mean, even right now, like me and Sam were boxing, but here we are podcasting.

Sam Lazalde: [00:25:34] Yeah.

Mike Alcantara: [00:25:34] Like...

Sam Lazalde: [00:25:35] It's a dope thing. So how do you see all of this as being political?

Mike Alcantara: [00:25:40] This is extremely political. I feel that, you know, the laws, reform rehabilitation programs. Although those different things have really, have really not assisted the people who need the assistance.

Sam Lazalde: [00:25:55] Yeah.

Mike Alcantara: [00:25:55] You know, I think that, you know, you, you call it, you know, rehabilitation like going to prison, but there's nothing rehabilitating about it. There really isn't. I went there, I got a job and like, that was more of discipline. Right. Just, you either take that as, okay, I'm going to become disciplined, but, or if you're making license plates or you're doing something right.

You pick up this job, it's not really teaching you anything about the world that you're about to reenter. And then when I got out, like my parole officer was didn't offer

anything like he wasn't like, maybe you should do this, or maybe we should do that. Maybe you should do this to like, figure out your situation.

Like as soon as you're released, there should be a, a checklist of things that I tell Sam to prepare himself for the world. Here's where you go if you need this, here's where you go if you need this, if you need someone to talk to you, this is a number you can call. Here's a group for this, group of reformers, right?

Whatever. Oh, here's TILA where you can go and you can talk to some people, some professionals, whatever, if you're not, unable to find a job, here's the transition process. Dadada. The inmate, besides me, they're struggling just to figure out where they're going to sleep if they don't have that support system for them to pull all these resources.

Sam Lazalde: [00:27:11] I mean, hell it's even an issue, like getting picked up from the prison you're being released from.

Mike Alcantara: [00:27:17] They give you money and they only give you enough money to probably hop on a bus and maybe have one meal. So then already right away. You're probably like if you're like one of those real hard dudes, you're probably thinking like I'm gonna jack some fool so I can add some extra money.

Right. I was in Corcoran, so I was in the middle of fucking nowhere, sorry for my cussing. And I'm just in the middle of nowhere. Right. And I'm like, how the hell would I get home? And they were like, well, there's a bus that comes down the street and then you take the bus and then you find the train system.

And again, for me, I'm like, I could probably figure that out. For another person, they'll be like, Man, this was a little fucking tough. And then they end up in the neighborhood, right. That in Corcoran, or they end up in Central Valley or they end up in Fresno somewhere, and then they find the nearest connect.

Cause they're probably like, yo, I want to smoke something or drink.

Sam Lazalde: [00:28:01] I mean, we've got to remember, we're talking about institutionalized homeys.

Mike Alcantara: [00:28:04] Yeah, right.

Sam Lazalde: [00:28:05] This is all they've known is programmed time.

Mike Alcantara: [00:28:08] Yeah.

Sam Lazalde: [00:28:08] And suddenly there's no programs.

Susie Hess: [00:28:10] Heidi De Leon, who was one of the Unchained Scholars on our last episode. Her, she talks about the importance of getting rid of parole officers, probation officers, and having case managers, because that's what you're saying is like, what are all the resources and supports when you get out?

And then when you were talking about like needing a place to sleep when you got out, and I think about women being released at one, two, three, four in the morning and the risk of sexual assault, where do they go?

Mike Alcantara: [00:28:38] That's why it's extremely political. It's like, besides the work I'm doing for the community, I want to further and further my platform to the point where everything I am doing can get a spotlight. So besides this, we're helping small businesses. Once we evolve and it actually starts working now, it's like, okay, we're helping the community. We're giving jobs to the community. We're giving jobs to everyone who really wants to correct here. Now we raise that level up. Now we become political.

Sam Lazalde: [00:29:06] What's interesting is I'm hearing all this and I kind of see it as a way to circumvent politics.

Mike Alcantara: [00:29:11] Yeah.

Sam Lazalde: [00:29:11] To work around it.

Mike Alcantara: [00:29:13] Yeah. You have to.

Susie Hess: [00:29:14] You have to.

Mike Alcantara: [00:29:14] Because the system it's, it's stuck. The process of submitting a motion for a motion to become whatever the next stage. Look, I'm not a political person, but you submit the motion or you submit whatever you want.

Then it gets a vote right. Then from a vote two, it becomes, okay. And then after that, now it hits the political circle. Meaning who's going to get the funding right. Or. Who's going to be your source of funding, that whole process alone. You have to know people, you have to know how to get the money. You know what I need, I'll do that.

And I'm more like F that, I know how to make money. Okay. So I'm going to go make money, and then I'm going to take everyone with me. I'm going to teach you how to make money. Then, so once we're all making money, now we have leverage. Now we don't need to pass a law because we bought the neighborhood. So once we buy the neighborhood, you can't tell us things so we're going to tell you, hey, you know, those potholes that are all lined up on seventh street. Yeah. We need those fixed, bro. Like for real. Oh yeah. Yeah. Like that, that, that liquor store, that's actually a

drug store in the back that's really fucking this community up, like, y'all need to go do something about that or those abandoned houses that are whatever, why don't we use them for something else, but now we're a voice.

Sam Lazalde: [00:30:24] Yeah.

Mike Alcantara: [00:30:25] Because we have our own money, we have our own things and they can't take that from us.

Susie Hess: [00:30:29] I mean, what you're saying, I love for many reasons, but one, I think you're absolutely right. We can't rely on systems that are broken. And I think a lot of, you know, the reform. You know, I understand, and the systems are still broken.

So I think it really is important for communities to rise up so that we don't have to rely on all of the systems. Which actually sort of goes to, I guess you sort of answered my next question is, you know, how you see this as a community healing. I see what you're doing as community healing in a huge way, because you're empowering communities to rise up and not wait for a system to be dismantled.

Mike Alcantara: [00:31:07] This fight's being fought on so many fronts, right? You have, for example, AOC, she was a bartender. Now she's a voice for the people, right? We need all of those political fronts, right. But then on the reverse side, we need entrepreneurs to come up and create opportunities. And that will be where you're fighting.

You know, you can't take your a castle for one side and you can't rely on one system. You know, most of the greatest generals used a multiple systems, whether it's a battering ramp, whether it's the flame thrower rock that they threw across. Right. And then sending their troops up first and then behind that, people on horses, like it's all strategic. So it's the same thing. You're do, you know, this is just ages and ages of war just manifested in different ways. So now it's like, okay, so what I'm going to do is there's all this political front, there's people trying to change the system that way. Right? Well, what I'm going to do is I'm going to reinvigorate the streets and find ways to empower them so a hundred years from now, I have created a lineage of entrepreneurs, of community members, who now have influence within the people and the money and the power while the political side is being fought. So hopefully more AOCs come into power. Right? Look at what is it that this is the first time the most women in history that are sitting in chairs.

Right? I don't know what the proper term is. I'm sorry. I'm not political, but the most women in the Democratic Party. Right? All of that in any political history, right. And the most culturally diverse Democratic Party. So as that continue involves, once we get the streets backs, now we've pulled the carpet under from underneath the

powers that be right, because now we have that leverage and now you can't just take it away from us.

You didn't buy our communities, we bought it. So you can't out muscle us. You can't gentrify us. You can't kick us out of our neighborhoods. You can't take our culture away because there was a bunch of Mikes that came in and then figured out how to help the community by making them entrepreneurs.

Susie Hess: [00:33:12] I love it.

One, I love who you are. And I think, I think that is a huge part of systems were really made for exactly what they're doing.

Mike Alcantara: [00:33:23] Yeah.

Susie Hess: [00:33:24] So I think, I mean, looking back, it's exactly how the country began. So what you're doing is really dismantling with communities rising up.

Mike Alcantara: [00:33:32] For sure, you have to be creative, the system, you can attack it, head on.

Sam Lazalde: [00:33:35] This, this is how we bring a healing to the community. But how has this work been healing for you?

Mike Alcantara: [00:33:43] I think this is the biggest thing for anyone who's been through trauma. I think the more that you help others, the more you help yourself.

Sam Lazalde: [00:33:51] Yeah.

Mike Alcantara: [00:33:52] Because I think it's very hard for anyone. Oh, you know, you've dealt with traumatic experiences in your, kind of like in your head, you're in your emotions and you're in a negative state, because you're coping right.

And there's different ways to cope. And I feel that the fastest way and the most productive way to cope is to help others. And so when you start helping others, you start becoming a better person. Right? And you start looking at things outside of yourself. Then now you can look back at yourself and go, okay, now that I've kind of got my feet under me, I'm doing some positive things.

Now you're reevaluating your situation. And it's kind of like, You know, something that I learned in, in fighting and mixed martial arts, you can become a black belt, right, by being a student, but you don't really become a black belt until you start teaching other students. So I look at that as the same model.

It's like, you can't really help yourself until you become a teacher. Like really examine because when you start teaching others, then you start seeing the flaws in yourself

and you're able to teach yourself through other's experiences. How this has helped me is now that I have come outside of myself, I'm able to now become more fluid in my own emotions and my own decision making and also in my own perspectives. I'm able to call on others and go, Sam, what do you think about this? How many times have I called you up and I'm like, dude, I want to fucking check somebody, but I know it's the wrong thing to do, but I feel like he crossed the line, but I'm trying to be the better versus--

Sam Lazalde: [00:35:21] Yeah.

Mike Alcantara: [00:35:21] And I'm, and then I'm like, I don't know what to do, man. And now I feel soft. Like I straight up called Sam and I'm like, I feel soft.

Sam Lazalde: [00:35:26] I had to do some gang intervention for Mike.

Mike Alcantara: [00:35:28] Like I'm a grown ass man trying to do different things to do better things. And now I feel soft and you know, Sam just broke it down to me and I wouldn't be able to do that if I wasn't helping others, because I would be afraid to reach out to them. I'd be afraid to tell Sam like this is how it's making me feel.

Susie Hess: [00:35:43] Final question, but it's like two parts.

Mike Alcantara: [00:35:45] Sure!

Susie Hess: [00:35:45] So one, you know, what are some action steps that listeners can begin to take for two reasons?

One, if they wanted to like connect with you, Locals Only, or just in terms of like their own passion and sort of moving forward with activism as their healing strategy.

Mike Alcantara: [00:36:05] So the first action step that I think is you really need to identify causes that you want to immerse yourself in. And it's really, it's, it's really simple.

It sounds, and I don't want to paint it as if it's like all green pastures, but it's like, if you're sitting there and you're like, well, how do I become Mike? Or how do I become a Sam? Or how do I become a Susie? Well, we did that because we made a decision and we went and we started paving a path.

There's no path to that. There's no one who can tell you certain things, but they're all the consistent message from all of them was like, we got to figure out where you're going and go and just start going and then start walking the trail. And the trail is going to take you on sideways and the trail might be not be complete.

And then you're going to have to walk over through brush. Right. And then, then you find the trail again. It's literally what it is. So I'm just saying, if you're out there in

your life, I want to be an artist. I want to be an entrepreneur. I want to be this. Okay. We'll pick something small. Okay. I want to be entrepreneur.

Okay. Well, test yourself. I'm going to go sell strawberries. Okay. So it's the first thing you do. I'm going to go hit a corner, put a sign up: \$5 strawberries, come get it. Then I'm going to use whatever available platforms are on there. I'm going to Instagram. And then I'm gonna start telling my friends I'm selling strawberries, come do it.

Right. That's just one thing. Those are that's the trail you're walking. Oh, I want to get in the community and I want to be an activist. Okay. Pick up one thing to do, what can you do? Okay. There's a big brother program maybe, or there's a talking to other people, right. Or community outreach, but I don't talk well, well start with someone small.

Okay. Friend. You're going through stuff. Hey, how you doing? Just want to talk, just want to get into your mind. And then you practice with your friends and your family, right? Cause there's probably damage within your own family that you could reach out and start learning and talking. Those are the most difficult conversations.

The people closest to you. So figure out a way to talk to them. Then you can go and start talking to others. Then you might be able to stand in front of a crowd of a hundred and talk to them. Even if you're indecisive, find something and just start going towards it. And eventually you're going to start evolving to the point where you're like, okay, maybe I don't want to do psychology work, but maybe I want to do kind of just like homeless support work.

Right. And then you start, okay, well now let me pivot my foot here and let me talk to these people. And then you start meeting people and it starts pushing you forward. So find a cause, immerse yourself. And I really mean it. Like you jump off with no bungee cord. And you just go. And once you start falling, then you start figuring the rest out because as you fall, like when you don't do any parachute, you're going to start depending on yourself.

So if you're looking to get involved, email us, hello@localonly.com. Hit the website. All of our contacts us is on there or just, you know what I said, follow us or go to our Instagram and just send a message. We're always willing to work. I had an artist come from Long Beach just yesterday, drive all the way, doesn't know anything about us, just knows that our movement is about helping people come here and sat right in front of me was like, I think I have great music. Let me listen to it. I was like, this is great. I want to find a way to get it out. Can you help me? Here's an, I just laid out a small plan for him, so we're, you know, we're here to help.

Susie Hess: [00:39:13] Amazing. Well, I so appreciate your passion and I appreciate you sharing your heartbeat and being so real and letting us see you.

Sam Lazalde: [00:39:25] Mike, my G, thank you, bro.

Mike Alcantara: [00:39:28] Yeah, no, thank you. Bottom of my heart, I've been working with these people for now for a couple months, and I think this is very important, what you're doing.

I think people need to talk about their experiences and sharing them, which we have been doing as a community, but we got to find more ways to get it out there, whether it's podcasts, whether it's social media, digital marketing, press. All of those stuff or, you know, finding different organizations that were creating.

What you guys are doing is extremely important. People are dealing with a lot. Mental health is real, mental health is a condition and it needs to be treated. It's just like anything. Your car needs a tune up. Your body needs a tuneup. You need to exercise. You need relaxation. You also need your brain to have some mental therapy.

You need to talk to someone, you need to fix the traumas that are in there.

Sam Lazalde: [00:40:42] Welcome to *Our Stories Matter*. I'm Sam Lazalde.

Susie Hess: [00:40:45] And I'm Susie Hess.

Sam Lazalde: [00:40:47] *Our Stories Matter*, hosted by Trauma Informed LA and the amazing music by Torrence Brannon Reese, founding member of the music group, a Street Corner Renaissance. *Our Stories Matter* at Locals Only acknowledges the Gabrielino and Tongva peoples.

As the traditional land caretakers of the Tovaangar, the Los Angeles basin and Southern Channel Islands, we pay our respects to the Honuukvetam, our ancestors, the 'Ahihirom, our elders, and 'eyoohiinkem, our relatives and relations past, present, and emerging.