

LaTonya Smith AWP Final

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SPEAKERS

Paul Zelizer, LaTonya Smith



Paul Zelizer 00:04

Hi, this is Paul Zelizer and welcome to another episode of The aware printers podcast. This podcast is all about the intersection of three things, conscious business, social impact, and awareness practices. Each episode I do a deep dive interview with the thought leader in this intersection. Someone who has market tested experience and has already transformed me many times. Before I introduce today's topic and our guest, if you could do one favor and go over to iTunes or whatever app you're listening to the show and do rating and review it helps tremendously. Today, I'm thrilled to introduce you to Tonya Smith, and our topic is an innovative approach to working with homelessness. The Tonya Smith is the Senior Director of community outreach and engagement with the behavioral science agency in Southern California. She has been in the profession for more than 16 years has a master's degree in human behavior and is currently working on her doctorate in organizational psychology.



01:00

She's the founder of Supportive Housing Network of Los Angeles. Welcome to the show. latonya. Thank you. Thank you so much, Paul. I'm so glad to be here. really grateful to have you here. And I just wanted to like say this is a, this already was a very poignant topic. But we were talking before we hit the record button that somebody who talks a lot

about the issues that are where printers is passionate about Robert Reich, who made the movie inequality for all he's saying, we're about to see more than 20 million evictions in the United States in the next two months, when the bans for our evictions and the combination of those ending and the unemployment insurance running out in the US the extra leverage. When that hits the ground, we're about to see this get a whole lot more poignant, what you do and a lot more relevant. So we're really glad you're here.



LaTonya Smith 01:56

Thank you so much. So we're called the wire printer.



Paul Zelizer 02:00

And we'd like to get to know somebody a little bit by asking about a wellness or an awareness practice that you personally use the Tanya to help you bring your resilience self to this really important, but not always easy work day after day, week after week.



LaTonya Smith 02:16

So that's a good question. What I like to do and I asked you didn't find out how valuable this was until about two years ago is actually exercise. And I know for some people that might sound textbook, but what I get out of that really energizes me so it builds me up mentally. I get all these endorphins going all this energy and not just sweat out like all the guilt cry all the madness, and it rejuvenates me. So for me, it's definitely exercising. And then I do like to take some time to myself have a little cocktail every once in a while. But that's how I manage the stress of



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at all, this work can be very, very exhausting. But that helps to replenish me.



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And you've been at this work for a long time. But one of the things for somebody to understand how you got into this work is that this isn't just something you read in a book. There's some personal experience here. Tell us tell us a little bit about that. You know, as I reflect on what it is that I do out there, like it's important to cover the humanistic part. And in social services, we're often taught that you don't stuff expose or give away a lot of personal information with people that you're working with, unless it's beneficial to them. I

feel like in my work, a lot of times when I'm working with individuals, or even if I'm working with a big collaborative, sometimes you have to express the humanistic part. Because that gets you to build rapport with people that you're trying to help. They're able to trust you more, they open up in that way.



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You can do the work. So for me, again, I've done this for over 16 years, I started at the ground level line staff counselor, case manager, worked my way up to a program manager, director, senior director, and now find founding my own



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program, if you will.



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But what really got me started as I reflect, because I didn't understand this thing, but I understand it now. As I reflect what really got me into this profession and loving this profession, is my experience growing up. So



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initially, I was raised for the first I don't know maybe six, seven years of my life, I was raised in the home with my mother. It was my mom, my sister, my twin sister, and myself. And my mother was very, very poor.



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I can remember days of, you know, not really having enough to eat I can remember



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Days of water being off for our lifespan off being evicted, I can remember going down to the Department of Social Services with my mom to get assistance for her to be able to take care of us. I know a lot of the experiences that I had as a child, were indicative of some experiences that my mother had when she was growing up, you know, a lot of pain,

a lot of hurt a lot of things that she wasn't able to process and get help for as a child or a young adult. So in things my mother and the struggles that she had an even being around the people that she associated with, who also have the same struggles. I can just remember not really thinking that No, I don't want to be like this when I grow up. But I can remember thinking I always wanted more, always wanted more. So my mother has some challenges and because of those challenges, my family



06:00

So I had to go live with our father from about seven years old, eight years old. And from there, we were raised by my father until adulthood. And so I always like to reference it as my sister and I have the best of both worlds. And what I mean by that is, by the time we got with our father, my father was stable. He was college educated, although that came way later, many years later, he was a single father. And he was also a good example of what adulthood and parenthood was. And he was a good example for success for us. So as I became older, and I started to get more into my, my profession, if you will, when I finally decided what it was, my calling was or what it is that I wanted to do, which was to advocate for people. I really started off being this very strong minded, headstrong person. Like I was not the person who was going to give someone many breaks. In fact,



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I worked in a treatment facility, and they call me the warden. And I thought it was funny.



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And then they kind of changed it and call me the cooking the cookie baking warden. And that was just to give me some give me some balance. And they knew I loved baking. But the point I want to drive home is that as I began to work more and more with the underserved populations, and the populations that really needed our help, I began to see my mother in these people, I began to see family members and people that my mother associated with in the people that I was serving, and for me, it was important to take my education and my experience to help the community and which helped to shape me the music of the community that molded me. So that's basically how I got in this work and stuck with this work.



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Thanks for sharing that. I really appreciate that making a personal connection makes it so much more real.



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As opposed to just Oh, yeah, I just kind of fell into it. Yes. So you had these experiences early on, and that helped you sort of realize that helping people who haven't had access to resources and struggle to meet their needs, there was something really rich there for you something really exciting.



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So what did that look like? Like you started in an agency and you're talking about being a ground level and like, what was it like working on the ground level and starting to move up in the leadership in these kind of organizations? So when I talked about us moving with with my father,



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we left Los Angeles, California. And so that's, of course, where we were born and raised until a certain age my sister and I, and we moved to Atlanta, Georgia, with my father. So after course, finishing high school and going off to college. I decided to Okay, of course it's time to get a job. So I think my first



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My first encounter with social services was working in group homes, right. And I worked and what was considered at the time to be therapeutic group homes. And in these group homes, you had either young boys, ages nine to 13, or you had young girls, right. And they were about the same age or a little older. I first started in the group homes. So I was able to get an array of experience. And in these group homes with children who were award of the juvenile justice system, or who had grew up in



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a community environment, not so much foster care, but I mean, they could have been in foster care at some point and then came out of foster care, but these will go home. So typically, these were children who did not have a regular home or were with their parents

regularly, but they relied on the state or the county to take care of them. So I did that for a couple of years. From there, actually



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transition into being a probation officer. I did that for a little over three years, I actually worked in the jails as a house arrest officer a couple of that. And there what I did was I helped people to actually get out of the jail, to return to the community, and help create a stable environment for them to help them get back on their feet. From there, I went and worked in another jail in Georgia, but this was in the mental health realm. So I returned to the mental health realm from when I was working with children. And in this position, it was all about helping to treat those who will now incarcerated who probably will go on to prison, but right now we're going to help adjust their mental state to you know, to make them more comfortable, and help them to be able to make sound decisions. So from there, I got into teaching a little bit, did that for a little while, but decided this is not my calling. I'm doing this because I need to and I really



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Want to get back to my calling return to a realm of working with children. And then I started experiencing some things that I felt I needed to change. So I then left Atlanta, Georgia returned to California. And that's when everything really took off for me. I got back involved with working with a population that had returned from the criminal justice system, including people who had served 20 years or more in prison to people who were on parole and probation. But these were also people who have suffered from mental health issues, addictions, any co occurring disorder that you can imagine. And so what I did was entrenched myself into my work for that and start giving back to the communities that I served. And from that point off, it just took off into a leadership position because that's what I first begin to manifest into this leadership. And I was able to start



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Working on policies, which I love that will impact not only our staff, but also impact the communities that we serve. So give us a sense, you come back to Los Angeles and you're like on the ground right in a place like Skid Row in Los Angeles, which is known to have a pretty significant homeless population, like, what were you seeing? And what kind of clients were you seeing and what kind of needs are happening there when you came back and started working with homeless again in Los Angeles? So, you know, one thing that I'm very, very proud of is the opportunity to work with people who were or are still on Skid

Row. Because I always feel like if you can help one person or two people on Skid Row, you're doing your job, right? Because that is an area that is so so challenged. And I always ask people, if you don't know about Skid Row, just google it to do a little research and tell me what you think when you come back.



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So working in an environment,



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such as Skid Row was it was very rewarding. So,



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you know, this area, of course, is not an easy area to work in, and the population is not an easy population to work with. This is where you get the most challenging person. And it's also the place where the people who society doesn't want to work with where they will redirect



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the population here. What I enjoyed most about being in that environment was that the community in which I worked or the agency in which I work, it was understood that the people in this community, the people that sleep outside our front door are the people that we need to be healthy if they're open for the help in that environment. What I also admire is the fact that we provide it with some call wraparound services, and if you're familiar with the social service sector,



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I know that you are call wraparound services is generally create creative for children. But there is a wraparound service approach for people who are on Skid Row. And when I say wraparound services, what I mean is that we're getting people from off the street, or you might get people from



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other interim housing programs for homeless shelters. And we believe, are at that time the goal was to get people how was the first thing you want to do is to get people house right. At first I didn't I didn't understand that approach. But as I continue to work longer and understand the whole dynamics of what we were being asked to do, I got it. And what we were being asked to do was not only just to work on get people house, but we're trying to meet the care of the whole person so that they can stay house and how do you do that? You do that by addressing their mental health issue. So that means if someone is not stable and they need medication,



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We want to help them to get the medication. Or if someone has had some type of traumatic episode, you know, depending on what their treatment plan is, or, you know what their their psychologist, a psychiatrist has deemed necessary with the input of that client or that member, maybe it's just counseling, maybe it's attending groups. You know, did that person have an addiction? Is there a drug addiction? Is there an alcohol addiction? Those are things that we will address, we will address the educational aspects. Does this person want to return to school and get a high school diploma? Does this person have any work experience? If they do, let's get them back to working even if it's just 10 hours a week. You want to address the whole person to stabilize them so that they can maintain housing and that was our goal. Otherwise, if we focus just on getting people how, then there was a great chance that they will fall out of housing as quickly as we got them housing



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All Out means being evicted. You know, because they were doing things that did not keep them safe. Relax is an example not paying your rent because you're taking that money to do other things. And that's what I mean by, um, Fallout. But I also think it's important to adjust the lack of housing. So even with our



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community that we were serving on Skid Row in Los Angeles as a whole. We have a shortage of housing, and we have a short shortage of affordable housing, right. And so when we worked with our members or clients in the community of Skid Row, it always has to be in connection with a project or a



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community living, some type of housing that will pay their rent off what they potentially own, whether that was Social Security,



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whether that was ss, I'm sorry for security or a check that they got from deep, deep



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F or maybe we have some funding opportunities from our housing authority in this area who could help address their homeless issue. Talk a little bit about like in other countries the idea of housing first and then wraparound services like you're describing latonya. That's, that's really common. You know, my daughter was in Germany as an exchange student. And we talked about that she actually spoke with some people worked with housing there. And I know people who do this work in Canada like housing first and then wraparound services is like, not revolutionary, but in the US, it's not as common like talk to us, like what is the norm? And how is this different than what many folks are experiencing when they start to interact interface with social service agencies if they're homeless or in danger of losing their house? I want to be sure I'm I'm clear on the question. Can you



18:00

Yeah, what?



18:01

Why is wraparound services different? Mm hmm. Well, most of what we see in the US? Well, again, I think the wraparound is different because it's trying to address that that person and all of the complexities that come that come with that person. You know, for instance, you might have, let's say you have a woman, okay? Who walks into a place. It doesn't have to be a homeless shelter. It can be the Housing Authority, you know, of Los Angeles or the Housing Authority of San Bernardino.



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And let's say she comes in and



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she has a three children, but the three children aren't with her. The three children may be in placement.



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And what she understands considering whatever she's gone through, is the fact that if she finds housing



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if she finds



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housing, then she has an opportunity to get her children back right. So that case manager who's working with this woman is more than likely is going to go to bat is going to do what amor they have to do in their power, which is my hope to get this woman how so that she can be reunited with her children because we're not just looking at her we're looking at her children and the needs of her children, right, let's take a deeper look of what can potentially happen if she does not get her children back. They can be lost to the system. Anything could happen, right? So that's what their critical thinking piece comes in. But the goal is to get this woman house because number one, she needs to be off the street, but her children's needs to be placed with her. I think that's one of the difference as opposed to another single woman walking in or single man, if you will, walking in and saying hey, you know, I mean how they normally the opportunity. We're going to give that person housing and in my experience



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Never, it's not a first come first serve, right. And especially with the wraparound services, it's not a first come first serve, it is a most vulnerable, who is the most vulnerable now doesn't mean we're not going to help everybody else we can, but who is the most vulnerable. So there's a tool that we will use, and I know other agencies and housing



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companies do the same thing. There's a tool that we will use. And in this tool, what it does is supposed to provide us with information based off your level of vulnerability. So that means we want to ask invasive questions, and we have to right so we want to ask questions about your mental health status or your history of mental health issues. And we're going to ask about trauma traumatic experiences or domestic violence or if you have children or if you've ever worked, if you completed high school if you didn't, what grade Did you drop out of high school? We're going to ask How long have you been on the street? Do you actually sleep on the street? So with that,



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wraparound services, I think the different approaches that we're working to get everyone how, but we're going to start with the most vulnerable first, because the belief is that they need to come off the street first, and that they need to be housed as soon as possible to stop the cycle. So I think that's one of the most important aspects of the difference in a wraparound service as opposed to a regular housing service with what you're doing with the Supportive Housing Network across Angeles after after 16 years of working in all these different roles, from like on the street to management and senior director currently, when you're thinking about the Supportive Housing Network of Los Angeles, one of the things that really impressed me when we talked about what you're doing latonya is you're thinking beyond, you know, a length of time. That's different than many housing organizations in the US.



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Talk to us a little bit about like, there's a scale and an understanding that somebody's going from being as vulnerable and all the ways you're talking about to, you know, being in a home and being placed and rebuilding their life and, you know, working again, or getting services that they need. That's it, that takes time and



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people don't get the time they need and then they went back on the street, talk to us about that cycle and how you're doing it differently at the supportive housing hour.



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But that is a great question. Um, thank you for bringing that up. Paul. One of the problems



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that we face in working in an agency where we get funding right from the government or the state or what have you, is the time issue. And what I mean by that is, we if you accept someone and into your program, and you know, you're getting these these funding stream, you have to do things so



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They say to do them.



23:02

One of the biggest issues or barriers that we face, were the timeframe that was involved in getting people house. As I mentioned, Los Angeles, California is a place that does not have enough housing. And even the housing that is available is not affordable housing. And then these programs, the staff will be faced with helping the homeless, get rehab and the contract it was such an issue, it would be 90 days and sometimes you can get an extension and then it will be 60 days and, and some sometimes we would do a year, but that was after you found so much paperwork and then your funder granted the extension, but 90 days and six months, especially when we're talking about the extreme, extreme pop and polish nature of the people that we were dealing with is nearly impossible.



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So what supporting has a network of Los Angeles? It's, it's a little different. And what I mean by that is



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our goal is to help. First off, we're going to have, there's different avenues to that. And when I say different avenues to that, my focus is to set up our houses in a certain several different ways. One house will be for men only, of course, and, of course, this will be men who have had experience in the criminal justice system. Another one may be women of domestic violence, women and children and and the list goes on. But when we have



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the people who are in need to come to our home, there's not going to be a limitation placed on that. There's not going to be Oh, you have 30 days or you have 45 days or 60 days that's nearly impossible. First off, when people come to you for help, I don't I don't need that type of stress on people.



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need them to focus on getting better, right? So that's what our goal is, but they can't do that by themselves. They're going to have to do that with help from us. Now, will we be able to provide all of the case management that an intern housing or a shelter can? The answer to that is no. However, we can put people in touch provide linkages with other people who can. For me, the goal is to help house people who can't afford regular rent. And rent in California on average is 12 to 1300. dollars for a one bedroom apartments, probably more than COVID. Right. And so, our goal is to help people get off the street, they house so they can maintain mental stability, physical stability, and have some peace of mind as they're moving forward and trying to get grounded with the other, you know, aspects of their life. We want to help people become



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Whole and healthy human beings. And we want people to connect it to get connected to those services, whether that's meeting with their probation officer, whether that's going to the Social Security Office, whether that's going to Department of Social Services, whatever it is that they need, whatever resources out there, we want to get them connected to build resources, and help them to build to make them physically mentally healthy, so that they can move on. And that can't be done in 30 days, 60 days, or 90 days. Sometimes it's gonna take a year sometime it's going to take 18 months. So that's our goal. I love it's almost like in the investor world, there's conversations about slow money. And when you like rush to try to like you give resources and you expect a quick return does all sorts of weird things to the ability of a company to have impact. This is like a longer term slow money investment in the humans, that they're that when somebody winds up on the street. There's some



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You know, repair and recovery and rebuilding writing a foundation in place and you understand that it's not like, well, you had your 90 days, why isn't everything perfectly? Right?



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You want to ask us for another 60 days? Wow, I don't know. Okay, me. All right. Me be if you're really good, the paper will give you another Wait, wait, wait you on another 60 day, right? That's how the system is currently set up. And for those of you who don't know, I used to be in community mental health for 15 years, the Tanya and I had that conversation. But listeners if you didn't know that, so I wasn't formally working in a homeless agency, but I was doing various aspects of, you know, mental health groups and treatment with a lot of folks who were in and out of all kinds of facilities. A lot of them were homeless. I'm very familiar with this process. And I remember being like, Well, what do you expect, right when you file for an extension of some various kind and just so much like,



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oh, gosh, just not



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Understanding what the timeline actually worked and how much stress that put on somebody who was in a program yet, right? You're like homeless and now you're in for, but you're 90 days is coming and you know, you've already had trauma and stress in your life. And now you don't know if your whole life's going to be thrown up in the air again, or whether you're going to get an extension, if you get one, like you said it might be 30 days might be 60. That's an incredibly stressful and inefficient way to approach all this. And one of the things I love in what you're doing with Tanya, is there's an understanding of the timeline of what it takes for somebody to rebuild a life and like into these networks. And with that support, then it's actually a fairly good prognosis if you're scaffold, right, but we're not skilled. Yeah, the systems we have. Is that fair to say?



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That that's, that's very much fair to say. And just if I can just add to that, Paul, you can't even imagine that. Well, you can't because you've been missing



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situation. But the amount of stress Not only does that create for the client or the member, the amount of stress that it creates for the staff who actually cares about the person that

they work with, you know, and here they have built this rapport, this trust with this person in here, you come to them this person that they have to leave in two weeks now, they already knew what their timeline was. But of course, they believe in you. So they believe that somehow you can change the policy in the practice. And so what it does is further break down the trust that people have for other people. And, and and then they they think that help doesn't exist or advocacy doesn't exist. It exists. But when we're working in agencies like that it exists within means. You know, it exists as long as documented a certain way in a contract. And so, yes, that's very stressful for the client that was being served and it is, you know, it's not as stressful for the staff because the client is the one who loses



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It's definitely it's hurtful, it's painful. I've been in those situations, and it was never, never okay. And I will tell my staff that we're not going to turn people to the street, what we would do is find another program and then send them to another program with their documentation so people can know they've been doing the work. I love what you're saying there. And when I look at those kind of systems that were I understand the need to pay attention to costs I'm an entrepreneur right if you have more dollars going out than coming in every month, you're not going to exist but the inhumanity of like a recovery from homelessness takes some time and that time isn't built in. So then you're constantly scrambling or you build wonderful rapport in one place and you have to send somebody to some other place where they don't know anybody and re you know, shuffle the life of somebody who's already shuffled more than any human should have to in their lifetime. Like that was part of my



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burnout and part of why I went from health to social entrepreneurship because like, I can't do that 15 years. I value the time you put I burned out. You're stronger human than I am more stubborn or something, but I burned out. Yeah. And that was a big part of it was the inhumanity of the systems and constantly having to work against with just the natural healing time of recovery from some experience that would lead to homelessness and help somebody get the help they need. It was just really hard work really hard and great work. Beautiful work, important work, but it can be really hard. And I love that you're starting with a different sense of agreement. Hey there, this takes you time and we're going to build that into the conversations with the people that are supporting the supportive housing now. I'm really there's a lot of wisdom there and I honor you for that.



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That's great. Thank you. So a question about we have a lot entrepreneurs and business owners



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So part of helping somebody kind of find their way into a more settled life after having a homeless experience is finding meaningful work and work that can work with somebody and their needs as they're rebuilding a life. What would you say to somebody who is a business owner who's like, well, maybe one way I could help us to hire somebody who could really use the job? What would I say to someone who's that I'm



32:27

somebody who owns a business, and they're like, okay, I want to help. And I'm thinking of hiring somebody who's had homeless experience, what would it what would an employer or supervisor want to know about somebody who's been homeless and is getting Oh, oh, my God. Paul, thank you for asking that question. Let me just start by saying this. And my current agency where I work we actually have an Employment Initiative. That initiative is actually sponsored through the Department of Mental Health and well



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Angeles, California. And what we're doing is focusing on people who have had traumatic experiences, mental health experiences or you know, issues and homelessness. And, and so, also part of that initiative is educating the community, including of the inclusive of like, Walmart or Target or other places who are open to hiring people who are homeless. So our job is to is to go out and educate agencies on what they can expect, how we can support the people that we are placing in, in their agencies or in their companies. You know, of course, when people are looking for homeless and looking for jobs, you know, I haven't read an application yet. That fact if you're homeless, right, however, one part of our job



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We have we call them a personal service coordinator, or sometimes they're called case managers. And what they do is they they build relationships with, again, it can be the hiring person at Walmart or security agency. And building this relationship, of course,

within the client does is agreed to a release of information. But the release is just so much right, we're not going to share everything just so much a part of that will talk about challenges that they had, and it will mention being homeless. And so with that, of course, you know, red flags or concerns come up on the hiring persons part. They want to make sure that, you know, this person will be able to come to work every day, they want to make sure that this person is responsible and these persons this person is responsive. And a lot of that has to do with allows him this, surrounded by homelessness like everybody thinks, I shouldn't say everybody, but there's a great deal of people



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Who thinks that every person homeless



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has suffered. In addition, you know, whether it's drugs, or alcohol or drugs or every person that homeless may have mental health concerns, and although some of that is actually very true and valid, it does not stand true for every person. So our responsibility is to speak with people who are agreeing to hire our community or our members that we work with. And let them know we're going to guide we're going to guide our member in this. So that means we're going to have soft skill training with them. We want to, we're going to practice hard skills. We're going to practice on how to engage with people we're going to practice on what to do if you get overstimulated or overwhelmed, act to take a break or to step back and reflect, use the tools that you've learned to calm yourself down, right. So fortunately, we're in a position where we have created



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these type of relationships with hiring



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And agencies who are open to learning this from us hiring our population and given them a chance.



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I'm not sure if this is a practice of bigger agencies. I do know that you know, bigger

agencies will hire



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people who were associated with the criminal justice system. I know that they hire people with special needs.



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The homeless part is a little tricky, because in an interview, you know, you can't ask a question about someone being homeless, right? People don't typically go into an interview bringing that up again, unless they come from a special program with within an agency. But I will say to a program manager or you know, a manager at a store or an agency who was interested in hiring someone who is homeless, for the most part, that's not different from hiring anyone else, everyone.



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Need a leg up, everyone needs to be given an opportunity. Because with, with one small opportunity come more opportunities, right? And then that person can not only provide for themselves, but provide for their families and other people. I don't know that a hiring manager can tell if anyone is homeless. However, if they're willing to just adjust a little bit, and to hire people who they think are homeless, I think it will make a world of difference. I don't think that there's a specific approach to that, unless they understand that the person who was homeless who was coming to them does have some mental health challenges. That will be the only way I think there might be some specific challenges that that person might need to be trained in. And when I say that person, I mean the hiring manager.



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Thanks for sharing the strategies and I just want to say to our community as an impact oriented community, you want to talk about some folks who could really use our help and now as part of the reason I'm so



38:00

grateful you're here, the tonyan said, Yes, your experience both in the housing part but in

the helping people find employment who's, you know, have had some struggles there, you want to talk about something that would help somebody get their life together is to be in an employment situation with people who are doing meaningful work with an empathetic and caring and supportive. Why that's a game changer, game changer. So



38:26

it really is. So wherever your listeners, please, if you need a little help about how you might have some positive impact here, the Tanya and her team and what they're up to please just take notice and think about that even if you've never thought about that before. So



38:44

go ahead. Another thought. I'm sorry. Well, yeah, I was just gonna ask the actors and there's this task force and I'm also on in my agency, and this is Task Force. What we're actually looking to do is again, to go out and train small agencies in our community.



39:00

Talk to them about hiring our population. And again, our population are people who have suffered from traumatic experience mental health issues and homelessness. Our goal is to educate, educate our community, about this population to make them more comfortable. But if there are people who are entrepreneurs, and you know, they want to help, you know, I think that they should reach out to their social service agencies and say, Hey, you know, I'm looking to do this, I'm looking to be more innovative, and I'm looking to help more. This is the population that I'm willing to serve, or I can serve at this time, you know, maybe they start with one or two people, because there will be some challenges. But if they're able to work through those challenges with with this, this person who is coming to them, please understand that the agency that they're reaching out, they're just not going to put their client out by themselves. They're going to set them up with a case manager or



40:00

personal service coordinator who's going to advocate for them, and help them and teach them the ropes. So it's definitely want to be a win win situation for everybody involved. It's an innovative approach. It sure is part of the reason I'm so excited to have you here. So talk to us about Supportive Housing Network of Los Angeles, where are you in that process? What kind of some of your next steps and if a listener wanted to somehow

support what you're up to what would that look like?



40:30

Thank you for their question, Paul. And net right now what we're doing is we aren't let me just say this, I'm registered with the state. You know, this is something that I was just very, very passionate about. I just thought about it day and night. I still think about it about a day and night.



40:50

And then Cova hit hit Of course, but then of course there's ways to work around and through that as well. We are in the progress right now. is looking for



41:00

A home we actually had a beautiful home, but the home fell through, and not for reasons of our own, but the house fell through. So now we're looking for another home so we can go ahead and get it off the ground and get people in. A lot of how this program will be ran will be, again, I have tons of experience in residential living is filled with my fiance. He has a whole background of social services. He's in a study and work in a hospital. So we have a couple we have a lot of experience together. The difference is how we plan to run our program is not like an agency. This will be ran like a home, it is a home. And so when I refer to when I'm talking about the community, I would serve you know, it's not the, you know, the program or the residential site. It's your home. That's how



42:00

We'll be introduced. And so right now the goal is to find another home, it will, the first one will be in a place where it's needed the most. So more than likely it will be the inner city. That is my hope. Because again, we need people off the street, and we need to be able to offer people an affordable price. So let's say that I'm offering let's say that \$600 and I'm just throwing this out there is the cost right? To be able to live in this place, month to month. If I have someone say, Hey, I only have \$300 and I really need to get off the street, guess what we're doing it, we're doing it you know, and we're also working to find supplements for this from Pete for people so that they can get off the street. So again, right now we're focused on finding the perfect place. And then from that will continue to build to build because I've been in the profession for for a while. I do have some



43:00

contacts who want to help us with getting our population together, right. And so right now, if people are interested in knowing more, or want to help, they can contact me at L. Smith.



43:13

th be one that's p as in Paul, h as in heaven, D as in donut, the number one@gmail.com. So that is my direct. That's my email address. And I'm always I'm checking my email. And we'll put that in the show notes if anybody wants to reach out so so right now it's a you're looking for home he had something but it felt through an inner city home in the Los Angeles or the Southern California area, so that you can offer these services and have that housing first with the wraparound approach built into that in a patient, supportive, nurturing environment that's very understanding of the trauma and the addiction levels and what tends to continue



44:00

to people, when health issues, all the ways these come together when there is a homeless situation, they can be present, you know, get people resources for all this



44:12

correct? Yes. When you're thinking about this time you mentioned COVID, like how is working with the homeless similar in this time? And how is it different? What are you seeing? What are the unique aspects of people who are homeless in this time? latonya?



44:32

Well, I'll say this, my role from when I was at on Skid Row is definitely different than the role that I have now.



44:41

And what I see now is that, unfortunately, there hasn't been a lot to change, which again, is why I'm doing what I'm doing.



44:51

The difference is that, of course, we still, you know, back then I did direct service. I don't do direct service anymore. I actually over



45:00

Receive a program that actually go out and deliver the service. However,



45:06

you would think that there would be some type of change, but there isn't, you know, our situation or our homeless situation here in LA is not decreasing substantially. And with cobit, you know, it probably makes it even harder because we're not able to take people out and view apartments, you know that that's part of the role of for case manager or personal service coordinator to take their, their clients out to look at apartments, if they're at that level where they can look at apartments, right.



45:37

We're not seeing a lot of money come down the pipe for housing at some point. I hope that there is, but I will say this, there are some shelters, more shelter coming online. That will bring people off the street. Now, will this be temporary or long term? That's my question, and I don't know. I know and long



46:00

Beach there have been some shelters called Project key. However, these shelters are short short term there to get people off the street for now. But again, you pack at a certain number. And I'm not sure when that's going to turn into a long term process where those folks who are in the shelter will eventually become how I would definitely like to see some more long term or interim how these shelters



46:27

come online so that we can begin to get people off the street. It is starting to happen in some respects, but it's not happening quick enough. So unfortunately, to answer your question, Paul, I don't know that there is a big shift. I you know, I would like to believe that

there is but there is not and things are happening, but they're happening slow pace.



46:51

So you've been at this a long time, the tonyan as you're thinking about the work now going into starting an innovative



47:00

program and being there for the long haul and doing it in a really innovative way. When you look ahead, and when you think about health, you know, being scuffle with homeless folks in these times. What's on your mind going into this unprecedented time of COVID and economic crisis and civil unrest? Like, is it just like the same old, same old? Or are you thinking about the work a little bit differently now?



47:29

Now, I think I'm motivated more than ever now. My boss will tell you tell you this, and I go into everything this way. I'm here for the people. I'm here to advocate for the people who cannot advocate for themselves. And I'm more motivated than ever because I think that people need us. Now more than ever, you know, the ways that we even relate to the people that we're helping. It has to be different right now. We don't necessarily want it to be but



48:00

has to be not only for our state but also for the people that we serve. Right. So before you know we will hug people, we put our people in our cars, drive them to their appointments, whether it's the doctor's appointment or even to the grocery store to get groceries, it doesn't matter, whatever we're doing to advocate for them. We drive them in our vehicles, you know, we can't do that anymore. We can't hug them. When we go to see them. We have to stand outside or if they're already living outside, we have to be so many feet away from them. You know, that saddens me because I don't want them to lose once again, that humanistic part of it. You know, they need to know that we're real, that we're here for them that we support them and that we really care about them because we do cobit has changed the way we we relate to people.



48:51

Some of our, the people that we serve have phones that were we're able to call them but a great deal of them don't. So again, we have to show up



49:00

But again, the way that we interact has changed tremendously. And I think COVID has a lot to do with that.



49:09

But it makes me much more motivated to help people, we just have to come up with more innovative ways to do that, since we can't always give them the humanistic part of it. And so right now, what we're doing is coming up with innovative ways, you know, for those people who have phones, we're trying to get them on his own call, we're trying to get them to FaceTime with us, you know, those type of things. We're trying to make these communities where we're all on a call together, so that we can continue to help them support. We're doing the same thing with our employment piece. And I'm sharing this all with you.



49:44

Just to add value to the fact that even as I transitioned into the porter Housing Network of LA, what I'm learning in my current position and these innovative practices, these are things that I'm going to continue continue to do



50:00

So attorney and lava you're doing I could hang out and talk to you all day. But I don't want to do that to you. And I also don't want to do that to our listeners, if there was something you were hoping we'd get to, and our topic today and innovative approaches to working with homelessness and we haven't touched on it, or if there's something that you'd like to leave our listeners with, as we bring this interview to a close, what would that be?



50:25

You know, I think what I would say is, be a person of service, just be a person of service. When I'm asked what I do, my response is I serve with my community, right? I just think that I heard I don't know who coined this. I heard surely I read Shirley Chisholm coined this, but I've also heard other people say this, that service is the price we pay for place on this earth. Be about service. However, that unfolds for you, however that manifests for you is going to be different for all of us. Be



51:00

A person about service. I will drive that home.



51:04

All the time you thank you so much for the work you do and for sharing it on the show today. Thank you, Paul, I really appreciate this opportunity to be here. Thank you so much. So, again, we'll put the ton in his email and also some of her social media accounts that people can get a sense of what she's up to. And some of the other resources we mentioned on the show. I do want to say we are now publishing an episode every Tuesday and Thursday. So if you've got an idea for a topic or a specific guest that you'd like to hear, please go to a word printers comm and click on our contact page and tell us your idea. We love having listener ideas. For now I just want to say thank you for the good work you do. Please take really good care of yourself in these very point in time. Thank you for all the positive impact that you're having.