



Library podcast

The Impact of Incarceration - Part I: Incarcerated parents and reunification

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[00:00:37] Welcome. Thank you to both of our guests who will introduce in just a moment. I'm Danielle and I work for the Seattle Public Library. This podcast is part of a year long project that a team of the Seattle Public Library has undertaken focused on court involved in formerly incarcerated patrons. The major project the team embarked on was listening to different people and organizations share about their experiences and work in this field as well as some of the challenges facing people when they are involved in the court system or released from prison and along the way. We also heard a lot about the struggles families and communities face as their loved ones are incarcerated. We talked to over 20 organizations and wanted to deepen the conversation between some of our participants and podcast to share these very important stories and issues with a larger audience. Today we'll be having a conversation between Deidre Cunningham and Elise Higley. Thanks as well to the Seattle Public Library Foundation for making this work as well as the other free programs that the library offers possible. First I'd like to introduce our speakers D.J. Cunningham. JT is currently the Incarcerated Parents Project attorney at the Washington defender's Association in Seattle Washington. She formerly served indigent clients for 15 years as a public defender at the defenders association now a division of the King County Department of Public Defense.

[00:01:49] Her other legal experience includes representing children and parents in child welfare proceedings defending indigent adults in Seattle Municipal misdemeanor proceedings and in King County Superior Court felony proceedings and advocating for systemic reforms of the Racial Disparity Project. Deirdre is an alumna of the University of Washington School of Law. She currently serves in a volunteer capacity with the WSB a juvenile law section executive committee the King County Bar Association's juvenile justice task force and as a board member its hallowed ground. A local anti-racist anti-poverty nonprofit advocacy organization. Welcome Elise Haley is advocacy lead for Children's Home Society of Washington and works to ensure the child welfare birth parent perspective is incorporated in

policy practice and system reform efforts. She has former involvement in both the child welfare and criminal justice system and coordinates parent alley work across the state. She is passionate about breaking the cycle for the families coming behind her. She serves on both national state and local advisory boards for child welfare system improvement. Thank you so much for being here today. One question to get you started. Can you share what led you to this work or what you see as the greatest challenges for court involved people specifically for parents.

[00:03:02] Thank you for having me. I think I came to this work really as part of my other professional work with parents that were involved in various court systems and seeing the impact on their families and their children and working with them to try to keep their families together or bring their families back together as a result either of just court involvement or actual imprisonment or incarceration.

[00:03:33] I think what I see is one of the greatest challenges for Court involve people especially parents is keeping those connections maintaining a loving nurturing relationship with the people that matter most to them particularly their children because oftentimes they find themselves in spaces that really don't allow them to do that that don't allow them to have to nurture their children to hold their children to be available when their kids need them.

[00:04:09] And so that is a really difficult I think difficult experience for the clients I've worked with and for parents that I meet and so I think part of my work now is trying to help change that reality and try to take away those barriers one for me.

[00:04:30] At least speaking here I know what it's like to be that woman incarcerated behind bars navigating both you know facing a significant prison sentence over my head while also having given birth to my daughter and having her removed into foster care at the hospital right at birth and so having been navigating both dependency and incarceration at the same time I was terrified fearful very traumatized. The lack of coping skills the lack of success and making positive decisions in my past life led to just this extreme darkness and just engulfed feeling that things were never going to get better. Fortunately I mean for me my faith really came in aboard and when I when I turned my life over to God I I started really seeing these miracles happening while I was incarcerated and I was trying to advocate for myself which is very hard. I mean I think when we're dealing with systems and we're dealing with people the overburden challenges underresourced challenges maybe the lack of understanding or knowledge of of of what's going on for that individual at that moment in their life.

[00:05:39] And so for me I'm extremely passionate about trying to break that cycle not only for my own individual family contacts but for the families that I know who are sitting who have made certain decisions in their life but to their defense. We often have gone through some really significant pain and how to shape the conversation around we're not horrible people there's just these experiences in our past that you know we think it's not things that I'm ever proud of. But how do you shape that to the fact to where just removing children from these

parents without a lot of support isn't necessarily the answer. We have laws that say otherwise. We have research that says otherwise. So what are we really doing to promote that family unity is what really brought me into this work. Having been a woman who really by the grace of God I was able to reunite with my daughter I had a judge who stopped certain dependency proceedings from moving forward to terminating my rights who said Wait isn't she just up the street at the jail like I need to talk to her. I want to talk to her. I had decisions that professionals made in my life that made a dramatic change for the trajectory of my family. And to be able to be where I'm at today many many many years later seeing the same experiences happening to women and men in our in our community and our state. It's just I'm extremely passionate about trying to move beyond those those challenges and to be a voice in saying hey wait. Like I'm actually a worthy woman someone to invest in that should not be written off in this capacity and beyond that my daughter my child is deserving of being able to be in response with a healthy whole you know healed woman and what are we doing to promote those those connections heavy stuff heavy stuff.

[00:07:34] Yeah.

[00:07:34] And so you know we partners so much in our work. And I'm wondering you know beyond.

[00:07:42] Well maybe we can first tap into some of the challenges that we see incarcerated parents face as it relates to their unity with their children. Right.

[00:07:53] So there's so many layers the first layer I would say is just physical barriers. I think what what I come in contact with the most is people struggling just to have visitation happen when visitation is allowed. And the logistics of having someone in the community support them and bringing their child to see them when they're allowed to have contact visitation oftentimes there. That is a struggle by itself who's going to do that. Who will the jail or the prison approve to bring the child is the other parent OK with the visit is CPS involved with CPS going to approve the visit. Is the court you know that's involved in the visit. So that is a first layer. Yeah. And that's a real barrier. Sometimes there are distances that people have to travel children ride in the same county where their mom or dad is incarcerated. You know if you come from Whitman County to say the women's prison for example you might need to stay overnight. So you've not only driven like the five plus hours to get there then you've got you know that's cost money. People don't have that money.

[00:09:11] There's not sources there's not hotel vouchers and things of that nature to help people. So yeah.

[00:09:18] So what I see is a lot of just logistical barriers and to add to that the this stigma behind incarcerated parents and then if we throw in the stigma behind a parent who is in child welfare and you combine that all into one package I just believe you know we're dealing with people and oftentimes there's there's perceptions we might have of individuals so I feel like

that there's a significant need to educate our community and our public that people change families reunite and actually research says that when we promote those connections between incarcerated parents and their children children growing up in foster care do not experience amazing results right. I mean we're talking about increased likelihood of criminal justice involvement juvenile justice mental health substance abuse homelessness poor educational outcomes. You throw in often those men who are employment those. Yeah those statistics are very parallel also with the statistic statistics behind children of incarcerated parents. So how do we create and leverage resources and support for families to say rather than coming from a lens of well you know what. They put themselves in this situation right. I mean I'm starting to get more forward about. I didn't grow up and say like I want to be a drug addict you know. And there was experiences in my past from from violence and rape and homeless. I mean really intense stuff that I've only even recently been able to talk about. Right. So we're we're at and in the majority of people I know who are incarcerated who have tried to readjust their life have tried to you know make these positive strides there's often this this pain and this trauma in the past and I think if we were to open up our ears and open up our hearts to hear from people and think wow like I am so sorry that that was ever part of your past but I'm willing to work with you to make sure that you know that the things happening to you today are not a result of those actions because that's not your word.

[00:11:14] So what are we doing to promote to make sure I have this child right. I'm going to do everything I possibly can to make sure you get a visit with that with that child because those children no matter what anyone says the majority of them they want to be with their parents. I didn't see my baby girl for the first almost year of her life which is not how it's supposed to be in systems. But I will say you know we can never get that time back right. And then you add these layers of trauma. I mean it took me years to be able to hold a baby. Right. And it's not to say oh please with your past like you know I'm fully accountable I mean I I've made horrendous decisions. But I also have worked extremely hard to turn my life around and to not only do that but to try to break the cycle for people coming behind me right. And we need to promote that.

[00:12:03] Right. I agree.

[00:12:04] And so I agree that you know and stigma is really it is a huge barrier because it shows up both in the hearts and then the actions of decision makers be that social workers judges or family members quite frankly who should hopefully be seeing that relationship between that child and their parent as the primary reason the primary thing to support and maintain but are often in maybe inserting that bias that comes from that stigma into it and in one example I can think of is this this notion that children really have unconditional love for their parents. They're not thinking about what the crime is or isn't or why this person is or isn't incarcerated. They just want to see their parents. And I think often the adults around them are making those decisions not with that in mind right. And inserting their own opinions and judgments about well what did this mom or dad do and why are they making different decisions instead of really focusing on on the fact that this child just really wants their their mom and dad

and the other piece of that right is that children to then internalize what happens the separation they're not saying the parent the parent going away in a way that adults don't.

[00:13:25] So adults might be blaming the person who they think is making poor choices but the child's blaming themselves oftentimes. Why. Why is my mom or dad not here. I must have done something. They must not love me because they're not here which is of course not at all the case. And so I think we forget to center. We as adults in systems forget to center our behavior and our decisions from the child's perspective. Like this child needs their mom and dad. This child's going to blame themselves because that's what kids do when things aren't right in their world. They'd start asking well what did I do and how do I fix it. And I think we don't do that enough. And then of course these issues get exacerbated and the harm that you know I can't imagine suffering the grief or the loss of not knowing where your parent is and then have adults around you not really being able to wrap around you and give you the support you need because they're not willing to really own up to their role in that separation. And so yeah. So there is.

[00:14:33] Yeah it's intense you know.

[00:14:35] I mean I started thinking about brain science and it's actually happening in those beautiful little brains and that when we prize early connections we can actually have an impact on their life long trajectory of positive outcomes better executive function. Right. All this stuff the more I'm I'm encountering with it I'm just like wow what are we doing to to promote that that unity. Yeah I couldn't agree more. I mean I won't go down the tangent of you know system involvement and and how hard it is to try to advocate for yourself while you're incarcerated.

[00:15:05] You might not be getting as many visits from you know social workers other parties to the case you know attorney. I mean there's there's challenges in and of itself making sure parents are getting court ordered to be able to go in front of the judge which was instrumental in my case because I was able to say hey guess what. Like Please don't fast track me through the system. I'm actually on my way to treatment. I'm not headed to prison right. Which was life changing. And and and so you know there's there's so many additional barriers behind. I was indigent and I didn't have phone numbers of people in my case to call. I didn't know what was going on. I was putting like 60 or 70 kites which are is a way to communicate with the jail while you're incarcerated. I was putting them into the start to the sergeant saying I just had a baby. I'm. I'm. I think she's in foster care like I must be having core like I need to get here and I would never get a response and so we just need to think that there are individuals who really want to participate. And what are we doing to empower them and to reduce systemic barriers especially when we know that when we invest in that cause. Right. Amazing things happen because I don't believe s HB Twelve eighty four would have been passed if if we didn't know these things I would love for you to briefly highlight like why is that so important because it really extends the amount of time before a parent's rights are terminated or incarcerated if they show certain things right.

[00:16:35] And so the Senate the Senate bill that releases highlighting was which was called the Incarcerated Parents bill was passed. Actually it was a 2013 I believe that I know it. And the idea was to provide some guidelines for folks who were incarcerated parents were incarcerated their child welfare involved so they were in some kind of dependency court process with their children their children might be placed with family but might often be placed in foster care if there weren't family that received the child from the court. And so the idea behind it was to sort of slow the process that normally occurs when parents are not physically able to take custody of their children and a dependency case. And when you're incarcerated there are very few instances where you can have your child with you. And in Washington there are two instances but it's a very rare instance. There's a prison nursery program at Purdy. And then there is an opportunity to be on home detention to be released from prison earlier than normal placed on home detention. So you're still incarcerated and then be parenting in your home with. Yes with the community parenting alternative. And so those are just two instances and so pretty much in any other scenario in a jail or prison in Washington. Your you are not parenting your child while you're incarcerated. And so the timelines that have been set out in some of the federal statutes were I think designed to speed up the dependency process because when those when the adoption and safe Families Act was passed there were a lot of children in foster care or children who had not been reunified.

[00:18:37] Some choices got made at the federal level to create basically a timeline where the court has to say file a termination of parental rights petition because we feel like too much time has passed and. And so when you're incarcerated and they're not available on the committee to take custody of your child and work whatever services that the court has asked you to work on those timelines become a real serious barrier to you ever maintaining your relationship because then those termination petitions get filed against those parents and oftentimes especially if your incarceration is going to last past for for a longer period of time than what's now been provided by the court timeline then your rights usually get terminated because you're not physically available in the community. You say I'm available to take care of my child. And so what would the Incarcerated Parents Bill. Twelve eighty four tried to do was say if a parent is actually maintaining a meaningful relationship with their child they have playing a meaningful role in their child's life then they can ask the court to find good cause.

[00:19:49] They can also say because of their incarceration that there's good cause particularly if there's barriers to them accessing the services or other things that they otherwise would be able to do if they weren't incarcerated. So it really allowed for parents to go to court and say give me more time because I'm working on it but I need you to help me with these barriers. I have this relationship with my child. Please keep sending them for visits. This is awesome. And as soon as I'm able to reunify you know we'll be good. And it just kind of gives this ability for the court to say yep that's OK because otherwise what happens is courts are asked to order the department to file a termination petition if there's not a good good cause found and they're monitored for that whether they're in compliance with making those findings which affects the financial funding for the system and so basically though the incarcerated parent's rights bill really was also trying to get people to focus on engaging the parents while they were

incarcerated. So bringing parents to case conferences talking to them about what it is that they need to do to safely reunify with their children including them in case planning meetings like including them and knowing what's happening with their children what is going on medically education well-being making sure that the contact that's being maintained is really supportive for both the parent and the child making sure that those visits are happening.

[00:21:23] And then also making sure that children are living in an environment that's supportive of that relationship and then making plans if that parent really isn't going to be coming back into the community anytime soon making plans that are in the child's best interests but also supporting that parent child relationship and so it really has these very specific rules where parents are supposed to be present by phone by video call are supposed to be engaged by the various professionals right in making sure that they're part of the planning and part of the decision making for their children. It's a very powerful thing. And so yeah I think that that's a step in the right direction. I think we can do some more things. But again I think we've talked about changing between changing hearts minds and attitudes and then giving people sort of this pathway to say here here's the primary way of seeing progress or at least giving an opportunity for transformation to happen to gage parents and allow them to have some decision making some autonomy some inclusion in their child's life not shutting them out not isolating them from the entire process.

[00:22:39] And it's interesting because as you're as you're sharing those things I mean throughout my work I I've heard from from numerous people you know why do we want to help those parents. I think sometimes they don't realize I am one of those parents and you know recognizing that in this work I believe it's really shaping the conversation. Parents are extremely important in this right. We we want to support them we want to embrace them but we say we do this work for children right.

[00:23:04] So being able to articulate and understand that severing the relationship between a child and their parent for their life is critical. I mean we hear youth after youth aging out of the system you know wanting to be with them. I mean they're literally aging out of the system and they're running home to their families right. So what are we doing to help these families heal and make sure we're not impacting that connection.

[00:23:32] And I think about the the service plans. My hope would be that when an individual comes into whether it's a jail or prison and it can be a safe place for them to say like you know. Yeah like I could need some support with whether it's not you know chemical dependency I mean whatever the gamut is and whatever that initial assessment looks like I'm not here to to try to think that piece through but essentially we need to have a platform that enough services are available that when when we're incarcerated it's not a place where we're just our time is gone. I mean that is a lot of time you have to be able to work on self right. I know that programs have made significant differences in people's lives while they have been incarcerated because they started to learn certain things they started to learn that the things that happen to them as they grew up in the system or when they were you know all these

horrendous things. It's not to their own fault and they start to get some healing. I literally just got a phone call a couple of days ago from someone saying you know they're getting locked up in jail and they finally get it like they need help. It's hard for them to stay clean and they're asking everywhere they go. I need help and not getting any answers or any connection to that type of support. So we expect people to come out of jail to come out of prison and re-enter and be it you know this this healthy whole community you know member but being able to do recognizing I needed some support you know I needed people to believe in me.

[00:25:05] I needed pathways for success. I needed someone to tell me that you know you're worthy of a great life and and you know I was hand walked into college and what that meant for me you know big shout out to the post prison education program. Love that program you know. And it's even though I wasn't personally through it but I've seen how it's changed you know people's lives and I know education did for me. And so my hope is that I get it. You know we're where we're dealing. It's underresourced. But I just believe that when we have an individual exit out of prison and we give them 40 dollars and a bus ticket and the clothes that they came in and we said don't re offend what are you talking about. I'm gonna go use drugs maybe right or I'm going to try but I'm facing so many obstacles. It almost feels like what's the point right. If it's hard for me to find housing if it's hard for me to find employment if it's hard for me to just deal with people's facial expressions when they learn my history I mean there's a lot of judgment and stigma and so my hope is that we can create more of these programs and more of these pathways for when an individual who is incarcerate.

[00:26:14] See we need our parents who are also navigating foster care to be able to have access to quality services because in order for me to reunite I need to say I've completed X Y and Z and I'm making progress in these areas. Right. And and if I'm behind bars that's a great amount of time to be working on this stuff. And and then you take it one step further. How do we make sure that when we're released from jail or we're released from prison I know where to go I've already had some wrap around support and it's none of none of the issues our community faces I'm trying to blame on prisons and jails. I really want to make that clear. But my hope as an advocate is to say that when we increase these opportunities when we increase these programs and when we know that individuals who are ready to change have access to stuff I mean that's that is powerful that is breaking the cycle and that is that is mobilizing a community to say we believe in you and we want to do everything we possibly can you know for you to succeed because I can't tell you how many times I was just up the street released from jail pregnant and I hadn't.

[00:27:21] Where where am I going to go I'm homeless. I didn't know where to go. I didn't know where the supports were the support and so I just think that that's an important piece for for our community to recognize for our families and and you know ways to be able to leverage resources to ensure that that people have that access and especially when we're talking about incarcerated parents and the services maintaining contacts with their children ensuring that there's quality visitation is one to voice that piece. And I just I agree.

[00:27:53] I think for some folks the incarceration is isolating them from their community like they may have some support that they're not able to maintain that connection and then for others it's an opportunity for them to build maybe a healthier network. If the network that they came in with friends family or whomever is not going to help them be successful or be a safe parent in particular. And so those are opportunities. You know and one one would hope we do have some programs that have been pretty successful at helping people transition out of incarceration like you know like passage point YWCA here in King County. But there needs to be more obviously programs really focused on helping people parents in particular reunify with their kids when they get out.

[00:28:47] And I just you know I mean I was a member of passage point I got connected when I was with Department of Corrections and it was before the facility was open I was one of their offsite clients.

[00:28:56] And you know I was able to get housing through there learn things by budgeting what are you talking about budgeting. I mean it was like how to how to you know how to set goals and how.

[00:29:09] You know I mean I was navigating when I when I was released I was navigating 50 to 60 hours of services a week. And that was for the dose records DLC municipal probation child protective services you know intensive outpatient everything that goes with it plus visitation being on a bus limited money surviving off top ramen. Right. Trying to tell myself my life is going to be different. I mean we got to think about what the no one was talking to anyone right. I was taking your ways for five different places. No one was sharing that information.

[00:29:41] So I'm showing up all over the place doing your ways which isn't always the most comfortable experience. I mean let's just keep it real. Right. So at one point do we like coordinate around people and provide this wraparound support.

[00:29:54] So I needed some you know I needed I needed programming to be able to you know help help teach me a couple of different things how to deal with disappointments in a way that was going to be healthy and not the old way I used to manage you know the pain.

[00:30:07] I mean we had we're talking about a situation where foster parents are told at birth like this is your baby mom is never going to change right there. Their heart was broke and probably you know when my daughter we turned to me and they they told me I have a relationship with them today that all they heard was horrendous things about me. They were absolutely terrified when my daughter came into my care and and then here I am as the mom where the first time I laid eyes on her a year after giving birth she likes smiles holds out her arm and I'm like there is there is nothing that's going to get my way about reuniting with this child and I'm grateful for that for that perseverance that I had through you know people saying you know your child should be adopted out and I'm a huge partner with child welfare. I really consider myself that. But it's about recognizing I don't believe that we're going to ever

experience positive change for people if we're not willing to point out some of the shortcomings and really put our actions behind our words to say you know what. We're going to ensure that people of color are not going to be more likely to enter the criminal justice juvenile justice child welfare systems. I mean are we have we have children of color lingering much greater likelihood of lingering in the system for you know years and aging out. I mean you start looking into the data and you're just like what is going on here with this proportionality and. And so my my hope is that we can we can put some transparency and some understanding behind that really in my opinion the urgency behind supporting our families to be the best that they can be.

[00:31:44] You know and creating that is creating the access points so those opportunities again the opportunities for transformation right. People need to have the ability to stay in the community and make change before they're in the system right. Or at least as the systems encountering them we could be diverting families into those networks that should be in our community anyway. Right. And again those. So this is not my job. But again those things come from trying to influence those decision makers who make policy to maybe take resources that we're spending in other ways like on incarceration and putting it into community based services for the reasons that you just very articulately said I can't repeat it any better because to be perfectly blunt the system is what we're talking about.

[00:32:42] Having been an attorney and in criminal courts contexts and in dependency courts they're not designed to fix the things they're not designed to help people heal right. I mean healing is fundamentally necessary to navigate those systems successfully. But the systems are not designed to promote healing. Right in that punitive piece. And so we really have to have that community the community that I'm talking about are the people who want to see everyone succeed. They want to see all this that all boats rising. You know that's what I'm talking about because really therapeutic interventions healing interventions are what are going to help people make better choices for themselves and their families help them be safe for themselves and their children.

[00:33:39] Not a court slash corrections officer slash lawyers slash judge telling them do these sex sex things and now your life's going to be fine. That the system the systems that we're relying on right now particularly related to incarceration are not designed to help folks feel empowered may see their own autonomy see the power they already have their gifts their strides and then make good decisions like that's not how that system is designed and so I just think if we are more honest about that and stop relying on it for those things when that's not what it's there for and really reinvest in the things we know that do promote healing I think we will have better outcomes.

[00:34:24] And you know what I can't help but think of when you say that what is is is peer to peer work right. What a great time to segway into how critical that pieces because when someone has been in someone else's shoes it says you know what I understand. Like I've been there you know. But we can use this as an opportunity for growth. You are worthy. You

know if I can do it you can do it to being able to model that change why do we why do we have peer mentors and you know substance abuse mental health I mean to be really interesting. Child welfare in my opinion has been you know a little slower to really infuse it but we have some phenomenal work going on across the nation actually in our local community. You know the parents appearance program I help manage that across Washington state. We also have programs in Arizona and this connects parents like myself with parents currently involved in. When I was first hired for that work literally the day after my case was closed. You know my boss said I just I looked at her and I said you know what. If you hire me I want you to know my dream is to get this program that we are inner we are interfacing with families right at court. I mean imagine what that hallway feels like. You found out your children had been removed or about to be removed. You're terrified you're scared.

[00:35:38] The court paperwork is saying really bad stuff right. Some of it true some of it not. But and and you know I'm not really reading a lot of strings about myself. You know a lot of good stuff. I mean it's a scary place. And so you have this interaction at the parents or parents program or we are loving on these families and we're you know we're helping to embrace their accountability and their empowerment in their knowledge because when you're in dependency as a parent it feels like you're in the twilight zone. You could be sitting in court. Right. And you're hearing what we want what we want you're a bad parent not getting your kid back. Right. And so we want to make sure that we capture these families and we say you know what. Like I get it like I've been there but you're worthy of support and get them connected to that piece. And and I had told my boss so this program you know it's my dream to have it be when when a parent is incarcerated you know. And because I remember trying to simultaneously navigate both of those systems and I've just you know so grateful to this community and King County jail and we were able to get that program in. And you know we're seeing success in in Spokane as well. We have some of that mentor work going on in Purdy but we want to see it continue to grow.


[00:36:48] We want to ensure especially if you're navigating both systems that you will have access to you know that individual that speaks your language that's been where you're at and is providing you that strength base compassion not saying there's not some professional or some some really powerful social workers that are doing great stuff and great attorneys. It's not to undermine that work but there's something about I can talk to a parent a certain way that no one else can get away with. Right. And really calling them on stuff and like you know we're in this together. And so you know empowering again I just want to really you know big thank you to our state legislature that that program was written into state law and I believe that it's these types of decisions where we're saying you know what.

[00:37:34] Yes we want to support our foster parents. Yes we want to you know have certain things but we also need to ensure that we're doing everything possible to break the cycle for these parents and children because the law says reunification should be the primary plan and the majority of not should be is right in the majority of cases. And so we have to make sure that our actions are in alignment with that thinking. And so I just want to really kind of voice that that

if there are you know any parent advocates listening to this podcast or any individuals in the community her and support of that work I just want to say thank you because I see the difference it makes in the lives of children and families on a daily basis. And it's just an honor to work alongside so many others who are saying you know what we're here for you and we're gonna figure this out.

[00:38:22] And along that lease and working with the Washington State Personnel Committee has really supported me in helping put out the word to all of the parent allies statewide be they in the parents for parents program which works directly in the child welfare system or be they parent allies working in other providers working for sometimes for service providers in the communities peer support to help develop outreach for parents across the state in various incarceration settings so and specifically looking forward to working with them because there was quite a few who wanted to commit to really figuring out how to engage parents who were incarcerated wherever their local parent committee was functioning. And so you know I have a lot of hope for that because we've seen at work in specifically in the child welfare system and parents who even when they're not child welfare involved need to be able engage with people because there's that level of isolation that. And you were more articulate about this release but that level of isolation and just feeling despair. And so I will say I I think they're dealers of hope and I think we have to get them connected with parents who are not not right now. Always hearing the strengths the positives that you know that you can take those steps forward that it will result in positive change that to stay hopeful and so that's critical. And and I'm really excited because I know we have already worked on it together but we're going to continue working on it and hopefully have a more. I think a stronger more intentional approach statewide for parents wherever they happen to be. So that's kind of exciting. You know it's unfolding and in progress but it's pretty exciting.

[00:40:25] I know our time is probably coming to a close but you know what that was making me think of with the Washington State parent committee which I'm able to staff and part of my role at Children's Home Society of Washington and the importance of individuals that have been formally involved in these systems and elevating their voice in policy and practice. And you know in the last six years we our voice has helped pass I believe at 16 legislative items and budget reform efforts which is critical right. I mean focuses on you know disproportionality child welfare improvements a whole bunch of stuff because you know when when when lawmakers and decision makers are coming together and making decisions on behalf of children and families I'm a firm believer that the consumer voice has to be in that process when we're on advisory boards. We need to have formerly incarcerated people or formally involved. The systems we're trying to advocate for and the systems we're trying to improve those folks need to be at the table because I believe that it helps think through unintended consequences and really saves a lot of money down the road. It's very hard work to fund. So I've shameless plug before we close. Anyone is interested in having a further conversation of how to really mobilize this community and do some phenomenal things in partnering on that work. Please reach out at least vaguely. I'm more than happy nap conversation because I see the impact and I know that that you know we have two women here that are very passionate about trying



to move the needle forward but weren't we as much support as possible in this realm and to say you know what. We want a partner and we want to commit on making our community stronger for children and families I believe is a cause worth investing about thank you so much for an incredible conversation.

[00:42:07] You too. That was really really powerful. We really appreciate your time and also appreciate your amazing advocacy work for this community.

[00:42:15] Thank you for having us. Thank you

[00:42:21] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.

