**Courageous Change Podcast**

**Episode 5 – Podcast with a Caseworker**

Annie Severson:

Welcome everybody to this month's episode of Courageous Change where we talk about change and transformation. My name is Annie Severson. I'm the director of organization development here at DCYF, and we have a very special guest this month in light of national social worker month or social work month, Alishia AGEE- Cooper. So say hello to the audience.

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

Hi everybody.

Annie Severson:

So today I'm going to just have a conversation with you and I'm so appreciative and amazed by the work that all of our people in the field do. So first of all, I just want to express to you, thank you for everything you do to help keep our kids and our community safer and improve the lives of the families in Washington State. So thanks. It means a lot.

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

It takes a village.

Annie Severson:

It does. So we're just going to dive right into it. I'm curious about, when did you first know that you wanted to be a social worker?

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

I don't think I ever really knew that I wanted to be a social worker. I think that social worker job title came to me as time went on. I think like most people who I know that are social workers, they went through adversity or touched different systems and communities. And so through that they saw people that either enlightened them or gave them hope. And so my experiences that I saw others before me who had a positive influence on my life and I wanted to be able to be that positive influence and create change.

Annie Severson:

Hmm, I love that. And at the end create change, and that's what this podcast is about. And so when I was thinking about social work month and having a social worker on the podcast, there really is a lot of chains that you deal with. And a lot of these kids and families and communities are in transition in so many ways. You also said trying to make a difference, so what's the biggest difference you hope to make in the lives of children, youth, and families that we serve?

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

I think that there are so many, but most of all, I think that our families need to feel heard and listened to. That includes their parents and the children, the foster families that care for them. I think that we work with a population that's unheard or unseen for a lot of different reasons. And I think that the biggest difference that I can make in their life is just being there and listening to them, respecting them as people and not judging them on what they did, but who they are. Right? So people are inherently good and make bad mistakes or hit some hard roads and times. And so my goal and my hope is that I can just listen and be there with them and believe in them and provide hope because hope is free.

Annie Severson:

Hmm, I love that. Great answer. All right, so here's a reflection question. So if you think about a time early in your career when the work you do as a social worker started to click. So a lot of times as a new social worker, there're so many... Oh my gosh, there's just so much that you're dealing with and trying to figure out. You may have felt like you had the paperwork down, your relationship building skills were strong and helpful, you started to feel like you were making a difference, what supports did you receive that helped you most on your journey?

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

So first I want to say never have I felt like I have gotten everything down in this job. Things are, like you said, changing all the time and there are so many different things that we need to do as social workers and with the department and keep in line with our policies that no one I don't think ever feels like they have it. And so that's my experience. I feel like I make a difference every day that I show up to work, every day that I answer the phone, every day that I show up with a good attitude or have a suggestion. Every day I collaborate with our community, that makes a difference. And so it might not always be the difference that we want to see, but I think inevitably if we all work together, great things can happen.

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

The supports that I have is Nancy. She's my boss. She's amazing. She-

Annie Severson:

Shout out to Nancy.

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

She's amazing. She helps me out so much and I would do the world an injustice if I didn't give a shout out to CWTAP. So the Child Welfare Training and Advancement Program definitely helped prepare me to be the worker that I am. But mostly I think that what helps me in my day-to-day work is my colleagues, the peers around me, and especially the ones who think differently than I do-

Annie Severson:

I love that.

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

... because we are able to bounce ideas off each other. They call me on my biases, I call them on theirs. And with that we're able to create change for multiple families and not just get stuck in my one way of thinking. And so that makes the biggest difference in my work. Collaborating with community partners definitely makes a really big difference as well.

Annie Severson:

I love that. I often talk about the paradigm of change where in order to change as individuals, we need others. And in order for our organization to change, we need individuals.

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

Definitely.

Annie Severson:

So I love that point. Okay. So we have just a little bit of time left. I like to do the... I think we like to call it the lightning round. I stole it from another podcast. So I'm going to ask you some questions in quick succession and I would love for you to share what first comes to mind. There's no wrong answer. Are you ready?

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

Yes. Kind of.

Annie Severson:

Name someone who had a big positive influence in your life.

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

Just one?

Annie Severson:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

I feel like there's too many. So I think Kelly Drake definitely made a huge impact in my life. Dr. Renee Brown's books definitely made a huge impact in my life. Don Ruiz's books made a big impact in my life.

Annie Severson:

The Four Agreements. Right?

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

Yeah. All the teachers that have taught me, Mary Curry, who is a child care provider, she helped me when I was going through school and couldn't get my son to daycare. She actually came and picked him up from my house so that way I could get on the bus to go to school. So those people-

Annie Severson:

Great.

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

... top my head.

Annie Severson:

What quality do you admire most in others?

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

Honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness.

Annie Severson:

What quality do people most admire about you?

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

I've heard I'm a leader and I inspire others to change. And so...

Annie Severson:

Awesome. And then one last question. What is the thing you are most hopeful about in the coming year at DCYF?

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

I'm most hopeful. I've been really trying to pioneer getting parent allies to attend our family team decision making meetings. Even when we're not talking about removing kids, it's bringing a community member to the table. And I think that... I'm really hopeful. We've been having talks about getting that started. And so my hope is that within this year that it will actually happen and we'll have parent allies at every FTDM.

Annie Severson:

Yes. I love that. Well, it's time to wrap up this episode of Courageous Change, and thank you for being here, Alishia, and thank you to all of our caseworkers and people in the social work field in this wonderful month where we celebrate you and all the difference you make in the lives of our kids, our families, and our communities. Thank you so much. See you next time. Bye.

Alishia Agee-Cooper:

Bye.