



Episode Transcript

S1E2: Crisis Intervention

Yvette Trujillo Welcome, everybody, to The Big View: Ending Poverty in Your Community. We're so glad that you came back. My name is Yvette Trujillo, and I am the Chief Integrity Officer at Circles USA. And I'm joined by Kamatara. Johnson, who is the Executive Director at Circles. Hi, Kamatara.

Kamatara Johnson Hello, Yvette.

YT So we are with Circles USA and at Circles, our mission is: building community to end poverty through intentional friendships, personal transformation and systemic change led by the people closest to the challenge. And our vision for the future that we want to be living into is: all individuals live in equitable and thriving communities where poverty no longer exists. This podcast is all about gaining a better, higher level understanding of the experience of poverty.

So what we do is we take a 30,000ft view and break it down to bite sized chunks to help you understand what is actually happening for folks and how you can make a real difference right in your community. And we've seen that moving from surviving to thriving involves five key stages: Crisis Intervention, Stabilization, Readiness, Placement, and Advancement. And we talked about all of those kind of at a high level in our first podcast [episode] and the first stage that we're going to be dive deeply into today is Crisis Intervention.

KJ And Crisis Intervention, that first stage, it does involve addressing some immediate crisis or getting some essential support. What do I need right now? So crisis is when the problems are acute, they're immediate. It's potentially life threatening. And I can't do anything except focus on this exact crisis. So it could be, you know, food. It could be shelter.

It could be safety. It could be drug treatment, it could be domestic violence. There is an exact crisis that is happening. So in Crisis Intervention, how do we help individuals and families during emergencies? And oftentimes, there are multiple crises happening at the same time. Maybe one precipitates another or there's a domino effect. So then

it's about prioritizing the interventions and starting with the most life threatening first and just, you know, marching right down the list until I'm no longer in crisis.

Which is why it can be really overwhelming to have this, you know, may feel like a 24 car pileup with everything that's blowing up in my life in this moment. But that's also why I, during Crisis Intervention, if I can somehow get access to the specialized professionals or the organizations that provide immediate help, then I have a much better chance of being able to to face the crisis and to get somehow get through it.

So and, for example, if I'm having a drug relapse, a drug counselor, drug rehab is completely different than, oh, here's this marriage counselor or here's, I'm going to talk to my spiritual community leader, my parish priest or something. No, no, no. If I'm having a drug relapse, I need exactly this expert in drug rehabilitation or if I, you know, if I just got injured in my house, I fell off my roof.

I need 911. I need medical emergency assistance right this very moment. Or this domestic violence situation is exploding. And I'm dialing 911 because I need the police exactly right now so my children and I can be okay. So I appreciate, in Crisis Intervention, somehow having access to the exact specialist who has the skills I need to to help me be okay is amazing.

But it also it asks a lot of questions for me. How do I get that access? You know the 911, as long as there's a phone around, okay, I could maybe do that. But how do I get to that drug rehabilitation program? Or how do I even have access to find the things that might support me in certain crises. Like that can get really difficult and overwhelming.

Or do I have transportation to get to the service? Or do I have to take off time off of work to go do this thing? Or is there a caseworker, an application, like how do I how do I get to that? And if I have multiple crises, are they... do I have to go to all different offices and do all different appli—Like how does it work to get to the things? So I don't know if it's clear in communities how to access the service or what services are available, or if I'm in this crisis, then I contact these people. But I do have to say that in most communities where Circles USA has worked across, you know, the 25 states in the United States right now, we've seen that in Crisis Intervention, that's where communities spend the most money, have the most organizations and government agencies taking care of people.

And that is good and right and appropriate because people need that really specific care. And it does take more money to support someone when they're in crisis. So like, yes, absolutely. But another big question that Crisis Intervention asks is—how do we get people past the crisis and into that stabilization, the next phase? So folks aren't just looping permanently in crisis mode.

If I'm 100% in crisis mode, I can't ever think about my my future. So what support is there for people at the end of the crisis, or the "Now what?" you know, just past the shelter or the domestic violence shelter where I may be with my children or... Like what happens next? I don't just fall right back into it. So that, yeah, there's all sorts of questions to ask about Crisis Intervention.

But I also just want to honor the people who do the crisis intervention work. And it's so, it's so essential. Or we just would be losing even more people than we are currently.

YT Right. And I see, like, you know, when we're talking about moving from surviving to thriving, that Crisis Intervention stage is so clear, like this is survival. And when you are—I don't know why I'm getting an image of someone who's like, stranded in the middle of the ocean, like dog paddling, can't necessarily even swim. Or where are you going to swim to?

It's so far. But like just the survival of just trying to keep your head above water. And when you're at that stage and all you can focus on is keeping your head above water, but surviving through this crisis or this body of of experiences that you're having that are all kind of at this crisis moment. And just that, like, as you said, to see into the future, to imagine something different, to plan for something different.

If you are in this situation where you're dog paddling to keep your head above water, nothing else can really be addressed, looked at, thought about... Because you were just thinking about getting through this moment. Do I have enough food for my children? Can I feed myself?

KJ Yeah. Do I have heat in the house, or do I have to somehow use the stove to heat the house—which is incredibly dangerous and and terrifying, but that happens with the choices that, you know, folks are facing in that crisis mode. And thinking about this just helps me to have so much more compassion, because I know oftentimes, you know, a lot of folks will say, "Oh, just get a job or just do this or just do that."

And there's kind of a flippant response to why people, you know, are experiencing poverty. But then when I take a step back and say, wow, this person's experiencing a massive crisis or multiple crises. Okay, we gotta take care of this first. When we think of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, I'm not going to get up to self-actualization if my hair is on fire.

So it does help me to have more compassion and to really consider what does our community offer to support people who are in emergency mode?

YT Yeah, definitely. And, you know, as you said, there are a lot of resources in this stage for people to get connected to. But how do they get connected to that? And I know here in Albuquerque and many other cities across the country, I don't know if this is

everywhere, but we have 311. 311 is a wonderful service. And here it goes to the United Way.

And it's a wonderful service that can connect you to different services to help you through, that those moments in time. Right. And, you know, talking about the compassion of if I, as a parent am going through a crisis, whether it's, you know, what's the income? Am I getting food for my family? And then possibly... my child is now in crisis.

Just, the layers and layers and layers and how challenging that can be for folks, for us to have the care and support to help people, to see them. Yeah. As they're living through and moving through the crisis and getting to the edge of that crisis intervention that then the next like the hand—I'm just seeing a hand come out and like, help.

Okay. So now out of crisis intervention, it's now what? Right? And that's, I think a question that may be asked, but we don't see in, in a lot of our communities like that handoff, that transition where just because you are buoyed and are able to keep your head above the water doesn't mean that now we pull everything away and somehow, miraculously, you're going to be able to to move on and get through to, to thriving in your life because you've had these, these, issues that are in crisis taken care of. Like, that was your floaties.

KJ And now I'm going to just walk away because you're still stranded. And I think we've seen with our, our chapters across the United States that people who are experiencing poverty are experiencing a deep sense of isolation because a lot of their friends and family members and neighbors, they are also going through their own crises. So you can't just call a neighbor, phone a friend, reach out to a family member.

That's not—a safety net is oftentimes not available. So to have the support, not only in Crisis Intervention, but then that now what? Okay, we're, we still need more, as we get to that Stabilization phase, which I'm looking forward to discussing the next time we meet.

YT Yeah. And I just want one additional thought here. Kamatara, is like, right, you're going through this crisis and there's the thing that you're engaging with and the support that you're getting. But all throughout that for so many folks that there is and you know, there's the way that folks are perceived that are in that crisis can be very, like you mentioned.

Right. Like pull yourself up, just go get a job, just go do this. Yeah. Just go whatever. And that, that is not, it's not like there's a barrier necessarily for people to keep that outside. A lot of times that's internalized. That's internalized. And when you internalize ideas like “There's something wrong with me, there's something broken with me, I

should be able to,” you know, “put myself up by my bootstraps, and if I just got a job...”

But in reality, there is deep support and help that's needed and what then becomes an additional challenge is what the beliefs that we're holding about ourselves in the midst of that crisis, in the midst of the challenges that create an even harder process, a harder road to, to walk down, to get out of, to get out of this crisis stage.

KJ I'm so glad you brought that point up, because there is so much shame and blame and stigma associated with being in crisis. Like it's my fault. I did something wrong. I'm a bad person. I deserve this or to be dismissive like, well, other people have it worse, so I I'm fine. It's nothing or I should be able to handle this like that hyper individualism of rugged America.

So it's, or if I admit that I need help, then I'm a failure. So trying to unplug from all of that because life is hard and things happen and we need support. And to help a community to see past that, to see the the individual person or this beautiful family who needs help, like this is someone's daughter, this is someone's son, this is someone's child, this is someone's family.

And and to have that again, we're back to that compassion piece of of truly seeing individuals and truly hearing them and meeting everyone's needs. And to do that with with dignity is is something I think we're all trying to work on, especially in the United States.

YT Yeah, definitely. Definitely. I love that we're ending on compassion, that's a perfect place. Thank you, Kamatara. So, thank you so much for joining us. It's always such an interesting conversation that evolves with Kamatara and I get together to talk about big things, and I hope that you join us next time as we take that deeper dive into the second stage, which is Stabilization.

In the meantime, thanks so much and take care.

KJ Thanks, Yvette.