

JUST WORDS

The Stories of Working People In Our Community

Episode 5: Jacquetta Lyles

Welcome to Just Words—the stories of working people in our community.

Jacquetta Lyles is a day laborer who works at the downtown sports stadium as a cleaner. She is the mother of four children, and lives with her mother and great uncle in a small home on the west side of Baltimore. Without steady work, she is dependent on her mother to help her take care of her children—and knows that without her mother’s help, she would be in a very different place.

The grace of God and my mom is helping me. Usually, they are in school, I usually get home about a half hour after they get out. But when I work evenings, she comes home a little after I leave for work, so she is here for the night. This wasn't here? I guess I would be in some shelter hoping I would get something. I had a place, a little low income place, but they got new management, and they wanted to, from the little \$100 I was paying a month, all of a sudden when they put new carpet in and new food things in, it went up to \$300 a month so I had to come back here. So if this wasn't here I'd be in somebody's shelter and then probably find me a little low income place until they want to remodel or change or renovate. But I am doing what I can. Yeah that question is something I need to think on more too.

How do you maintain a sense of love and joy in a family when the head of the house is so burdened with work and money worries? As we spoke, Jacquetta’s 8 year old daughter Briante played—she’s a happy, bright child who beat cancer when she was 18 months old. Jacquetta refers to her as her miracle baby, and she seems to have been untouched by the concerns that plague her mother.

I talk to her, try to understand. She'll ask me, Ma you get a paycheck? You didn't get that much this time? I do what I can. Every so often, at least once a month, I take them skating. We have alright time, we just sit in the house and play cards and play games.

Do most of the people you work with also have kids, families?

Oh yeah, lot of them have families. They do, and they struggling. But they doing what they gotta do. You just gotta take it, 7 dollars or nothing, you gotta take that job.

You're only right now, basically bringing home...?

Basically...nothing. Bringing nothing home. All told. I mean. \$100 here, \$200. I've just been basically going from doing temp work, doing what I can. I was on Social Service, and that's what kind of put me where I'm at. They wanted me to work, they got me the job, and I was bringing home I could say 2 something a month, from the work they gave me, and they just cut me off totally. But I do as much as I can, anybody call me, I'll go to work. I'll do anything I can to help my mother, cause she help with me. Just keep on keep on keeping on. I just want to get what I deserve, and should be able to, if you can't get on top, kind of maintain.

Music: Odetta, Motherless Child

Produced by Jessica Phillips. Hosted by Marc Steiner.

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