

JUST WORDS

The Stories of Working People In Our Community

Episode 12: Ray Cook

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

In previous episodes of this program, we've heard a lot about fear—fear of being uninsured, of being unable to make ends meet, of living in communities where homicides and violence are rampant.

Today we will hear about love, and its power to transform the lives of boys and girls locked in inner city communities

Ray Cooke is an ex-con who runs a program called On Our Shoulders in West Baltimore

He says that we have to love the hell out of these kids—that we have to love the hell that is in them out of them—that we have to hold on to these kids, past the pain.

And sometimes I've literally had to hold an angry child who is ready to tear something up. He's crying, he's angry, and I just got to hold him so tight with all my might until he stops crying. And then they start- No one ever held them enough to let them get past all that anger so the love can get by, they just let them "Go on!" And the anger is pushed to the street, to another individual. But if you can just hold on just a little longer and hold them a little longer, And when you see that smile that you have never seen before, that is one of the most rewarding things you can ever do. I feel that the whole thing with these kids is a lack of love, period, a lack of love, whether its hood love...and that's one of my themes, hood love, because you gotta love them in the hood where they are, and then bring them out of that.

But how do you bring kids out of that? What is the situation on the streets? Later, Ray spoke about love being in short supply in the hood.

And in the streets now, you can't be weak in the streets, no kind. You can't show no kind of weakness, you can't act no kind of weakness, and if you can't show no signs of weakness then you can't show love. Cause love is a sign of weakness.. You don't tell another brother you love them. You say, you my homie, I'm down with you. You don't see that in the community, and what I am finding is, because of the lack of love, because of the lack of knowing who you are, because if you don't know who you are you can't love yourself. And so you've got a lot of misguided young people on the street.

He's not just talking about young boys going into the drug trade—he's talking about young girls taking their own particular path of horror.

You'd be surprised how many young women , and the first thing they give you little hints of offering their body, because that is their only bargaining chip, and they are so used to using their body. To then be rejected, from men like ourselves, but in a good way. And we reject them and say, Baby you don't have to do that with me, I am going to love you anyway, I am going to do what I said I was going to do and you don't have to give up anything. You beautiful, sister, we don't want you to be rejected like that. Baby, you don't have to do that. And when you start showing them that real love. That's why I say, hugging kids; they need to feel a hug from a real man. And there is nothing more powerful than a black mans hug on another young black male. That love is passed through, physical love. You can talk about love, but if you don't show it to these kids, they will never know the meaning of it.

Music: Talib Kweli, *Get By*

Produced by Jessica Phillips. Hosted by Marc Steiner.

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