

JUST WORDS

The Stories of Working People In Our Community

Episode 32-July 19th, 2007

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

There is a stereotype about black fathers, and it isn't a pretty one.

Federal statistics show that 48% of all black children live without their fathers.

The high incarceration rate for black men has something to do with it.

But for Darryl, the six years he served in prison on a narcotics and gun charge was where he learned how important his role as father was.

Before I went in I thought I was the best father in the world because I was bringing toys in for the kids. Kissing and hugging them...I thought I was the best dad in the world. Being taken away from, getting letters from my son...I wrote him saying, Daddy needs you to be the man of the house. I got a response, Daddy, you need to hurry home, I am tired of being the man of the house. He meant that, he raising two little sisters. A lot of times they come see me and it was time for them to go they start crying... and i be like, whoa. It got to the point where i didn't want to tell them to come see me but I wasn't going to be selfish and tell them they couldn't come see me because they wanted to come see their father. So I said, I got to man up and deal with it. I created this situation so I got to deal with it. But that six years that was painful, painful.

After his release, Darryl dedicated his life to his kids. He took a job at McDonalds, even though people mocked him for it, and was able to provide for his children in a legitimate way.

Got a few dollars in the bank, I am satisfied. Now I can go to my kids, my sons sporting events, my daughters cheer leading practice. Give them parties and things of that nature.

It's important to Darryl that his children know he works hard to provide for them—especially once he realized the effect his criminal lifestyle had on his children's way of thinking.

I go to work everyday and that's what it's about. Before I was in, my son was going up his grandmas house so he was like, I don't want to be up here, I be glad when my father come home. And she be like, well your father, what he going to do? Well my father aint gotta work. So used to me not working when I was home, I was thinking, my son ain't going to think nothing about that, but it's wrong. Never did I think my son was thinking like that. And once I found that out, I said wow I knew that's my obligation, I got to change his way of thinking.

Darryl's relationship with his children has never been so good as it is today.

I think me and my son got the best bond a father and son could possible have because he trusts me. He knows I won't fly off the handle, he can tell me anything, he can come to his father. My daughter can call. One time my friend have my phone and my daughter is 8 and she call, and she said, can I talk to my father? Oh he not around. You know what she told him, well my father told him I have a problem I can talk to him anytime, I need to speak to my father now. She wasn't being disrespectful, she just let him know. I need to speak to my father. That's what I love. I have four children. I am not going to see my kids in prison and I am not burying my children. That's my main goal and it's not a game. Not a game.

Drawing upon the lessons of his criminal past as inspiration, Darryl has taken his talent at connecting with young people beyond his own family, and is now employed by a community program where he works with young people.

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We'll hear more about that—next week.

Music: Asheru and Blue Black, *Modd Swing*

Produced by Jessica Phillips. Hosted by Marc Steiner.

Through a grant by the Open Society Institute-Baltimore. Visit them on the web at www.osi-baltimore.org.