



## Episode Transcript

### S1E5: Placement

**Yvette Trujillo** Welcome to The Big View: Ending Poverty in Your Community. My name is Yvette Trujillo, and I am the Chief Integrity Officer at Circles USA and joining me today, as always, is Kamatara Johnson, our Executive Director. Hey there, 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 getting a better understanding, a higher level understanding of the experience of poverty.

So we take that 30,000 foot level view of poverty, and we break it down into these bite sized chunks to help you understand what's actually happening for folks. What are they living through and how you can make a real difference right where you are, right in your community. So this first season of our podcast, we're going to unpack the five stages of moving from surviving to thriving.

After 25 years of work in the anti-poverty arena, Circles USA has seen this pattern over and over again: moving from surviving to thriving involves five key stages. It's /Crisis Intervention, Stabilization, Readiness, Placement, and Advancement. So today we're diving into the fourth stage on the journey to prosperity. And that is Placement.

**KJ** Thanks, Yvette. We, we have been going on a journey. Oh my goodness. So to get to Placement we've been through crisis, so the immediate danger and threat to our lives has been taken care of. And then we've been through stabilization. All right. My routines are in place and I'm stable in the different arenas that are essential for a healthy life.

And then in Readiness, I was able to reconnect with my my dreams or create new ones as I explore and plan for my my future. And in Readiness, I was able to take steps towards professional and personal growth because there's enough space for me to do what I want to do with my life, which is an entirely new position for a lot of people to ever be in.

And so the next step is, okay, so now I've taken all of this into me, this, this training, this learning, this growth, whatever. I've taken it in. Now, how do I get that out into the world? And that's where Placement is really important. So the Placement stage focuses on connecting me with opportunities, and not just in the workforce but also in the community.

How do I use my newly gained skills, my certifications, my confidence, my self value, knowing I have gifts to offer to the world? How do I do that in a meaningful way? So maybe there's a paid internship, or some fresh employment prospects, or civic engagement activities, or just beautiful things that are happening in the community where I can contribute not only my lived experience, but also these new skills and, you know, maybe newfound leadership aspect of myself where I am taking charge of my life and, and I can do this out into the community. So I'm more outward facing and sharing what I have with the world personally and professionally.

**YT** Yeah, definitely. And it becomes that like expanding more and feeling that you have an impact outward, right? Like, and I think a lot of times it it can feel, you know, like I'm sitting in this receptive mode where people are helping me and supporting me, which is beautiful and wonderful and that's what community is about. But there's a stage where I begin to be able to reach back out, where you be able to take, not just not just that you're able to do it, that you have something, but you recognize that you have something of value to share with the world and that you've been doing and building that recognition.

Not that it hasn't always been there, because it's always there. But in this process of moving along through the stages that you've begun to recognize, like what value you have and how much you have to give and share with, with your community, with an employer, in your business... The skill that you have that has value. Like, that is just this really beautiful combination, of qualities and awareness of yourself that you actually turn and shift. It kind of it feels like you're kind of shifting a way out of yourself, right?

Like it's been so internal. And now it's like, I'm going to wow, look at this whole world out here that I get to make better.

**KJ** Wow. And it's such a contribution. So an interesting question for communities to consider is what kind of workplaces do we have for people who are now ready? Do we do we have healthy workplaces that pay, you know, a family sustaining wage, that have good benefits, that have a line of sight, that are, you know, vibrant and meaningful? Do we have really robust employment opportunities in our community?

Do we have a good transportation system in place to help people get where they need and want to go? Or do we, you know, what do we have that helps people to get out there and get connected and placed with awesome employment opportunities and also awesome volunteer opportunities. And just imagine the shift that you know,

someone, someone like me, I've experienced in my life where I was absolutely living hand-to-mouth, you know, the working poor school teacher and had, you know, our first baby.

And then we were just like, nose to the grindstone, just trying to work, get it done, taking on extra gigs, like anything we could to just sort of make it. And then when we turned a corner and didn't have to do that as much, and to think, oh, my child could be in Girl Scouts, we, I could help with Girl Scouts.

Oh, I could be actively part of my child's life and not just have other people raising my children, which was a big experience for my children when they were growing up because I couldn't be present. I was working all the time. And so to have that shift, that opening of like, not only might I be working fewer hours at a better job that is more meaningful and satisfying, and I'm feeling good and all the things... Now I have this opening of like, I could contribute to the community or to my family members lives.

It's just such a different posture. And it's so like in and out, that reciprocity, like mutual reciprocity, is happening now. That's so beautiful and so fulfilling and deepening relationships with my loved ones and my community members, and even having the space to see what's in my community, what what might I want to do, or what are other employers?

I don't have to stay at this particular job like I, I am valuable, I could apply to this other job that's better. So it's, it's maybe taking, going from hope into action, really fulfilling the things hoped for.

**YT** Right. I think the big quality that stands out here for me is the like the, the position to be in to take a risk. That before this, risk—I mean risk is always risky. You know, it's like, oh can I do that? But that there's this space, there's this stability in this stage to, to more readily step in to risk.

But I could, I can take the risk of, looking at a new job, looking at a new position, doing different things in my community because there is enough stabilization in your life in other areas, in your finances, in your home, whatever those those, need to be for you, then now I can actually, I can take a little bit of a risk.

I don't have to worry that my whole world is going to collapse if I make a wrong step. There's bandwidth there. Slack for you to take a step in. Oh, that didn't work out quite well enough or quite the way that I wanted and hope to. Okay. It's not going to devastate you.

**KJ** Right.

**YT** It's not devastate you to take a risk. And I think so many folks that don't have a sense of what—And I'll, I'll own this for myself. I know for me, I didn't understand how much of a privilege taking risks in my life has been. It's been an absolute privilege. I'm a risk taker.

I like trying to like adventure. I'll try this. I'll try that. I didn't—

**KJ** [Laughs] That's the opposite of me. I am so risk averse. I have to be encouraged. Like, "It's a low risk, Kamatara. You could just try it for a little, okay?" And then I'll try it. But, continue. I, I hear what you're saying.

**YT** I'm like., "Let's move again! That sounds like fun. Let's try that", you know. Oh, I didn't work out quite the way I wanted it to, but, you know, you just kind of brush yourself off and move on. That's that is a privilege. That is a privilege of a certain degree of stability and support and financial health and emotional health that I can easily...

Well maybe not so easily sometimes, but I can take risks like that. And I did not understand. I did not understand that that was something that was a real privilege that I had just because I grew up in a certain socioeconomic group. And lived in it and moved in it that I didn't get... Oh, not everybody has this ability?

You know, if I thought if I had thought about it, sure. That would have that would have, you know, I would have been able to figure that out. But I never even thought about it. That well, you know, "Why don't you just... It's not working for you there? Why don't you just find a new job?" I've said that before.

**KJ** "Just get a different job!"

**YT** Just find a new job, you know, like, of course you got skills. And of course, you can do things like. No, you know what? If it doesn't work out, I don't have the bandwidth. At the flex for that not to work out.

**KJ** Or the emergency savings fund or the time or the gas. But it is interesting in, in this Placement stage it shows that intentionality. I am going to place myself here in this job or in this community activity and, and then we're going to see how this this works out. And it's interesting to have options, to have choices I've never had before.

And and it is a privilege for me to say, you know, I volunteered with this particular organization and it wasn't exactly my jam. Let me try this, this other one, or I found out that I love to do community musicals, and I had no idea. And I've always wanted to do that. And now I have the space to do that.

And then my children are getting into it, and then they're helping out backstage. And now we're doing this family activity, and we've never had the space for that before, because now I have this amazing job where I don't have to work as many hours, and that family sustaining wage is in place. I have decent benefits, like I'm beyond stable and I have these new skills I'm using that I got in my Readiness phase and I've been placed, like I am placed in my community.

I'm not just like couch surfing, it's not other people's community. I am placed. It is mine. I am home, in a good in all the good ways that you could think of the word

home. Like this is, this is mine and I'm a valuable part of it. That kind of placement is so rich and so meaningful.

**YT** And that really does speak to like the, the at this stage, like the confidence that you have in yourself and the confidence that you have in what you are able to do. That is just this is a beautiful, beautiful, I think I might be shifting, this might be my new favorite, Kamatara.

**KJ** It makes me so emotional. For those of you watching the video, I know, it makes me emotional, but it's like... I want, I wish everyone could feel that deep sense of meaning and belonging and like you are, you are here on purpose. We love you. We value you, and like, you are contributing in ways that only you could do.

Like your whole life has lead up to this moment and your perfect combination of your lived experience and the different things that you've done to develop yourself. Like you're such a gift. I just wish everyone could have that experience, like whether they've had experience with poverty or not. Like, I even think people who who have never experienced poverty, they may not have ever experienced being placed. Like, be here on purpose.

And it's and it's so beautiful and so bountiful in ways we, we couldn't even imagine. To have that, that's where community is really thriving and humming and juicy and delicious and just so beautiful.

**YT** I love that. That's perfect. Kamatara, thank you so much for your passion, your excitement. That's just, that's awesome. Thank you. And thank you for joining us. I hope that you've got some good nuggets that you could take away with you and, and bring to your community and make a difference in so many, in so many lives.

So I hope that you join us next time as we take that last little leap into the last stage, Advancement, and talk about that and hopefully wrap things up a little bit for you. Thanks for joining us.