



## Episode Transcript

### **S1E3: Stabilization**

**Yvette Trujillo** Hi everyone, and 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 I'm joined by Kamatara Johnson, our Executive Director. 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 30,000 foot 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 learned this out of 25 years of work in the anti-poverty arena at Circles USA.

And we've seen a certain pattern show up over and over again. And that is the 5 Stages to Prosperity: Crisis Intervention, Stabilization, Readiness, Placement and Advancement. So today, we're moving on to the second stage, and that is Stabilization. And Stabilization involves building a strong foundation to prevent a return to crisis. We talked a little bit about that last time.

It's about accessing necessary services and resources and establishing a support system.

**Kamatara Johnson** Absolutely. What I appreciate about Stabilization is that I've moved beyond the immediate crisis, but I still require ongoing assistance and support to achieve stability in the various aspects of my life. In fact, like you're saying, that's the difference between being stuck in that relentless loop of crisis intervention and then truly moving past the crisis into stabilization. So is there continued support in the community, a little, little bridge that could help me in the different arenas in my life?

So, imminent threat of danger—gone. Like I don't need the police in this moment, or I don't have to go to the food bank. So maybe instead of food bank, I'm shifting to food stamps, and then I'm trying to work on my exit ramp from needing food stamps. Like, how do I have that graduated exit ramp from these support services?

But I need the support services. But I also I need a bit more space in my life so I can take the next step. So crisis was taking up all my bandwidth. Okay, now I have faced

that, I've got a little more bandwidth, and I'm getting stabilized. So could I work on establishing a foundation of stability in each arena in my life?

Like, okay, my food is now secure, my safety is now secure, my housing is stable, my health could be stable, my employment is stable, my financial security is at least stable enough, like I'm okay financially. And then my relationships with the most important people in my life, like, am I stable? So it's like, okay, I'm starting to get a grip on life.

**YT** Yeah, and I think the big piece for me when I start thinking of stabilization is... you've talked, we've talked about that space. You've got a little bit of spaciousness, you've got some slack, I've heard you call it before. Like there's just, there's just enough so that I'm out of that "dog paddling in the middle of the ocean" image that I had during our last conversation.

To where, okay, I'm not drowning. I'm not... You know, things aren't necessarily great. Things can still be challenging and hard. But I'm not drowning. I'm not drowning. And this stage feels like, you know, it has this combination of hope and fear. Right? Because crisis is just behind you. Crisis has just passed behind you. And that is, you know, something that that would not take a whole lot to get to fall back into.

Right? But there's enough space where it's like, okay, I can, I can take care of this moment and look a little bit into the future, look a little bit into how can, you know, what can I do to help things improve in my life? So that, stabilization definitely isn't the end goal.

**KJ** No.

**YT** But it helps. It helps to have something underneath your feet. That's where the image of stabilize, is like, so helpful. Like, okay, I have something underneath my feet and out from this position I can move forward into a new state. Closer, moving towards that goal of thriving.

**KJ** And I think it takes a while because it's such a different posture than survival mode, crisis mode. To be in stabilization mode, again, I have to make my priorities. Where do I need to shore up the different arenas of my life. What services can I access or what does my community offer? Like, you know, the counseling, the Medicare, the housing assistance, the childcare subsidies, financial literacy?

Like, what do I need in each arena in my life? And so I can kind of balance, like, okay, now I've got my, my little rowboat, but I've got to, you know, plug the holes and balance it and, and get it so I'm not panicking. It's it's it's okay. So, yeah. So like I'm getting or, like you said, standing on solid ground.

Can I regain my footing after this, this crisis and have the breathing space that maybe I could almost row in a new direction? I'm not just trying to... okay. Yeah, that's an interesting, interesting image.

**YT** I get like the... in crisis intervention, right. There are some, there are services, there is support. But then that transition that we talked about, where that handoff could happen, where is this potential for a transition from crisis intervention into stability that at this time when we see our communities don't really have that? And so what do people need, right?

This is the thing that we want to talk about is: What is needed for a person who has moved from crisis into stabilization to access what they need. Right? There's not as much support, community support, built in, and then there's not that handoff necessarily. So what do individuals need in order to access those services, get to... and access and, like, get know what they are and go to... but access them.

And as far as getting to them, what kind of time off, what are the resources that are required? What is the support that's needed for individuals who are in stabilization to actually know what they are, get to them, fill out the paperwork? You know, there's so many new resources that are needed and different that that folks might not even be aware of.

So how do you become, become aware of not just the resource, but what's available to support you in getting those resources and that community coming together to help in that stage? Help in this stage of, of of ongoing need is really important.

**KJ** It's a really good question for a community to ask of itself. What do we have in place that smooths the ramp from Crisis Intervention to Stabilization? And then what moves people through Stabilization to to really get into stable routines. So again, is there a graduated exit ramp from those support services or subsidies or things that are happening to kind of bridge the gaps? Like, yeah, how do we smoothly support folks in every stage of the journey, as opposed to people, you know, having to to tackle all different silos?

Or when I think of how many applications people might fill out for all different services and all different offices, and then do I have to take a day off of work which I can't afford, and do I have a car, or do I have to ride the bus to all these different caseworkers and social workers and this person and that person and then, okay, this program, you qualify with this level of income, but then you get \$0.10 more and you're disqualified.

So then I'm hitting the Cliff Effect, and there's just all sorts of traps and pitfalls in the Stabilization arena. So again, this is where the community coming together to assess what's in the community is super helpful. And listening to the people with the lived experience who can say this, this is the service gap that I am experiencing right here, or this is the system barrier.

I can't access this or I can't take off of work to do that, or I can't spend five hours filling out an application on my phone because that's the only internet screen I have.

Or. Yeah, where where are the stumbling blocks that might keep people tripped up in in Stabilization, where they can't make it to being stable, like they're trying to get into their stable routines and just can't make it there.

They might get stuck. So that's an excellent question for a community to think through together and then take action. How do we fix the the holes, the gaps, the barriers, the traps? What's going on? And getting honest about it and then working towards solutions together.

**YT** And I'm I'm thinking about like how those challenges mean. I, I know in my own life, not being in in poverty, experiencing poverty from myself, I, I get stopped sometimes pretty easily by things that come and are big challenges for me in moving forward towards a goal or desire, you know, desired outcome, and how I can get derailed.

**T** And then kind of what that means for me and how I'm thinking and the way that I'm engaging in the world because I feel stopped. Right? And like I'm imagining these are really big, life altering...

**KJ** Oh yeah.

**YT** ...changes and issues that that folks are facing. And there are so many challenges to working through that, to moving forward with that. And how it can be easy to be stopped, to give up, to say, to say, gosh, this is this is really tough... How do I get to access this benefit when I've got kids in daycare, kids in school. When's school out? How do I take time off?

**YT** I don't have the time available. I don't have a car. I have to take public transportation. Like, all of these things just stack up against me, the way that it can feel. And I know one of the things that you've said many times to me, Kamatara, is how how expensive living in poverty is.

**KJ** It is expensive to be poor.

**YT** It is so expensive. And not just in terms of like a financial exchange, but what does it take for me to accomplish one thing versus a person who's experiencing poverty to do the same thing? It takes so much more. And that's that's a big piece that we talk about in Circles is like, really understanding what it takes for our community members that are experiencing poverty to do the everyday things that we just take it for granted! I jump in my car,

I have my car filled with gas because I have the money to fill my car with gas. I go to the grocery store, I go to an appointment. You know, daycare, child care is taken care of. I don't have to worry about that because I've got those things in place. That's part of my safety net and my security that I carry with me all the time.

We don't necessarily recognize that the way that, I move in the world is the same way that someone it should be the same way that someone who's experiencing poverty

moves in the world, and that that's just not true. And so, again, we come back to that idea of compassion and understanding the challenges that exist for folks that are even in this stage of stabilization.

**KJ** Well, and really getting into the lived reality of it, because oftentimes it's not what we see on TV. It's not the stereotypes and myths that are associated with poverty. I mean, poverty can look absolutely like like you and me. Like I was, when my husband and I were first married and were two school teachers, and we were part of the working poor.

And when we had our first child and, and I had to take off of work, which is unpaid maternity leave, and we didn't have two pennies to rub together and the the WIC checks and all the other support that we received was incredibly helpful. It kept us out of crisis. It helped us to be stable. And little by little, I mean a slow grind that took decades upon decades.

But you know, we could climb our way out of poverty. Now, if I had to do that as a single mother... I had the bounty of being married. But if I had to do that as a single mother on one income... I think I still would be in that exact same boat with all all the holes and only one paddle and, you know, swimming, going around in circles.

So the support that happens from the community is, is essential at the Stabilization phase, but also to have compassion for the person who's having this experience and all the time and energy and effort and, and and the, and it can, it's very humbling to have to ask for that that help and the ways some of the supports are structured can be very punitive or demeaning.

So again, another question for our community is, is how do you distribute the food at the food bank? Is it with dignity? It may be, and maybe not. Or you know, how do people apply for what... Is it excluding a whole bank of people who need this, and it's not getting to them? When I think of the millions of dollars across the nation and funds that have not been distributed to the people who need it, it's absolutely appalling.

That's one of the things that we are working to change in our community, is that the supports and funding and services get to the people who need them. How do we open up that access and how do we gracefully exit people like a graduated exit ramp? As folks are reaching, they're reaching their own sense of stability? "Okay, I got this.

I, I I'm ready. I don't need the food stamps anymore. I rearranged my spending plan. I got that raise and I'm., and I'm past that. So how do I get to that next level?" Yeah. The graduated exit ramp, which oftentimes is not the case for the services we offer to people in need.

**YT** And when you're not, when you're not aware of how it works, When you're not aware of, you know, at this point you're going to lose the support you've been getting, if you're not aware that you need to prepare for that transition, right? And, and what

happens is that you're shocked, right? You're shocked, your system is shocked. Your home is shocked, and you have to try and figure out how to... Like, you have a shaken ground.

**YT** How are you going to get back to a sense of stabilization when something that's been a support and created a sense of security and safety for you is now pulled away? Right? And that is what's so important about coming together in community with folks who understand that, who have an awareness that you're moving in this direction and that's fantastic.

**YT** And we want to help to support you to continue to move in that direction. But there are things that will happen. You will lose benefits if you get a ten cent raise. Right? And the ten cent raise is great. How do you prepare for that? And coming together in community where folks are aware of the systems, are aware of the way things transition.

Now you've got a support system to say, okay, let's think ahead.

**KJ** Right.

**YT** Think ahead about the transitions that are coming.

**KJ** And let's think ahead, not just the the individual who's having the experience, but think ahead, the community. Like for the employer who's shocked that a person won't take a raise or a promotion, clearly is not understanding. Okay, so yes, I'm getting a dollar more an hour, but I'm losing \$600 worth of childcare subsidies. Or I could lose my housing voucher, which means I'm homeless.

So are there are there other ways for employers to support people beyond the cliff? Or could we put that graduated exit ramp for subsidies in place? Or you know what, what are the warm, again, the warm handoffs and and the ebb and flow of this? Like what is the end user experience? "Wow. That just pushed me off the cliff."

So it's, and it's so, it's not just for the individual to figure out, but for the whole community to come together and solve this problem. Because it's not just an individual problem, it's an economic development problem. It's a citizen—like, I want to be a citizen in my community, and I can't do that if I am suddenly, suddenly not housed or I'm suddenly... like, I can't be a contributor in my community.

Like everyone misses out if I get suddenly thrown back into crisis or just "Oh, sorry, just kidding you. Now you don't have a housing voucher or you have no transportation, or you just lost your health care." It's, it's wild. So I do appreciate trying to bring the whole community together and listening to the person with the lived experience so we can find the solutions, to have this work for everyone as people are getting stabilized. That they can own it, take it on.

“Okay. It's mine, I am, I am now stable and I am ready for something more.” There are ways we can do that. Absolutely. There are communities that successfully support people through stabilization. So could we take their lead and make that happen?

**YT** Right. It is, it is a delicate balance, especially at Stabilization. I think that that's one of the most critical stages where where we have to pay attention. We have to bring our compassion and we have to listen, listen into the experience that folks are having and learn as much as we can. All right. Well, thank you again, Kamatara.

This has been a wonderful conversation. We are going to be moving on next time around into the next stage, the third stage, which is Readiness. And we hope that you'll join us for that conversation. We'll see you then.