

Dane Zahorsky: Hey there Youth Passageways, family, and those just learning about this work for the first time. Dane here, just a quick note ahead of this first episode of our new podcast. I wanted to take a moment and invite you to contribute to our spring fundraising campaign. We call Making Kin, we're raising funds right now for a series of projects this year, meant to deepen and extend this amazing family of ours from our upcoming gathering and collaboration with the All Nations Center on the Pine Ridge Indian reservation this August to the second annual Passageways Day in October, the vital work of the Cross Cultural Protocols Group or the program you're about to listen to you right now. There are so many wonderful folks that put their time and energy into this network and it wouldn't be possible without you or your support. So if you have a moment dropping our website at www.youthpassageways.org and donate today by clicking on the give to the cause button. There's a bunch of great info there and you can see exactly where your contribution will go in a way to easily reach out with any questions we know there's a lot of worthy causes out there, and we truly thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your help and your part in this multi-generational story. So without further ado, here's our first episode. We hope you enjoy it.

Dane Zahorsky: From Youth Passageways. This is Practicing Community, a podcast about who and how we are together. I'm Dane Zahorsky

Marisa T Byrne : And I'm Marisa Taborga Byrne.

Dane Zahorsky: Welcome all to our first episode before we get started, and in keeping with our values and Youth Passageways tradition, we wanted to open by grounding together. So I'd invite us all wherever we may be to the extent that we can to sit up straight, close your eyes, take a deep breath, and think about the youth in Youth Passageways. Remember that the heart of our community of practice is our service to the young ones. Take a minute to think about young people we each know, where they are, varying degrees of help, that they need, the wisdom and crucial perspective that they have. Our responsibility to make the world more equitable with them and for them and to just let that be center as we have this conversation today among friends and colleagues and as we kick off this new podcast to honor our mission, to support the regeneration of healthy passages for today's youth into mature adulthood. With that, I'll pass this off to Marissa and she introduces herself and our guest as we dive in.

Marisa T Byrne : So with that, I'll go ahead and introduce myself. My name is Marisa Taborga Byrne. I am a current Stewardship Council member and Youth Passageways staff member, and I'm really grateful to be here. I'm located in Seattle, Washington on a surprisingly sunny day. And I've been involved with Youth Passageways for, four years now and I'm involved with working with you through connection with nature and also a holistic sexuality. Great. I am so grateful to be introducing Kruti Parekh, so much love for this beautiful shiny woman originally from New York City, but coming today in a LA and the moment I met this woman, there was just so much, um, so much care and love that emanated from her and does at every encounter and that, that evening she spoke to me about

transformative justice and began this turning of my life, affecting my life in a deeper way. So grateful for this woman. Kruti is a coach for healing and Justice and she's coaching leaders in the healing and justice arenas to improve personal and community outcomes. She has been working synergistically with young people and families and the most marginalized communities in New York City and Los Angeles for over 20 years. Some of her experience includes coach for healing and justice for Youthbuild Charter School of California, Sisterhood Rising Leadership Retreat and adult ally at Youth Justice Coalition and organizing to transform the juvenile and criminal injustice systems. She's also been a director for youth programs, including Youthbuild, Teen Court, and Domestic Violence Accountability. So also a current storage of council member for Youth Passageways. And with that Kruti, we would love to hear from you. So the first question we have for you is, can you just name what transformative justice is, and how, how it became so much a part of, of your work in this world?

Kruti Parekh:

Absolutely. Hello, everybody, so happy to be here with you all today. Thank you Marissa, for the introduction and thank you Dane for opening the way that you do. Because, as soon as you said, you know, think of a young person. He was right there in my mind and I just saw him this last week and I think his story and our story and um, my story, working with young people really is the heart transformative justice for me. Um, so transformative justice for me is the way in which I wanted to grow up in a community that loved each other and respected each other. So for me, transformative justice is not street justice. It's not court justice. It's not about people giving up on people. It's not about locking people up. It's about what you would need in order to build community and if there's a problem within that community, figure solutions out together, that is what transformative justice is to me. A lot of folks may recognize what restorative justices is and restorative justice really does not have two sides. It understands that through a process we can figure out what the truth is of both parties and also understands the concept that actual truth is somewhere in between those two, that there are multiple parties that are responsible when there's an issue. It sort of practices, you know, builds relationships. It strives to be respectful to all. It provides opportunity for equitable dialogue and participatory decision making. It involves all relevant stakeholders. It addresses harms, needs, obligations, and causes of conflict and harm. It encourages all to take responsibility and transformative justice is understanding that there are structures and systems that are in place that are keeping an unjust system active and this looks at how do we shift those relationships, but then also shifts the systems that continue to cause injustices at the same time.

Dane Zahorsky:

Maybe to connect it, for instance, to that young person that you just spoke to when you enter into the work, however your story started, which I'm sure that we'll hear about. There's feedback that happened, there's "I'm learning what it means to be an unjust system" and therefore learning about justice work, but then I'm also doing this justice work and creating new relationships in the context of social justice and transformative justice and so just on a more personal level, like how has doing this work affected the way that you make relationships in the world and how has it affected being a mother?

Kruti Parekh:

I'll start with the first part. Right. So the young person that I thought about as soon as you, you mentioned that, right? Was a young person that I met at a Youthbuild collaborative meeting. He was one of the few young people that were in this meeting where programs that believed in the power of young people were coming together. Adults that are leaders within the work and one of the leaders was smart enough to bring a few younger people with her and so he was a part of my small group. It was the advocacy committee and within that committee, you know, this young person was outspoken. He participated. It was a small group of us, maybe four or five people and I just spoke to him like he had something valuable to say. That was it, like I felt like he had something valuable to say and I engaged him in a way that he felt comfortable and then when it was time to present whatever we were gonna do, I encouraged him to help present, and it was one of the very first times that not only did he feel like an adult was paying attention, but respecting and stepping away, literally creating space where he could step up. And that was a relationship that we started just in that simplistic sort of way. Now it's been three years and the director that had brought him into that meeting knew that he appreciated me as a mentor almost from jump and that when he was struggling in his school, she suggested that he reach out to a mentor and at that time I was doing like a life coach, a course, and I was like, thank you for asking me. Of course I will be your mentor. Um, what do you need from me? And let's start this conversation where it's actually a coaching relationship. And so now I was co-facilitating a transformative justice circle last week and he was there and introduced me as his life coach. That's how relationships begin. When you see people, people appreciate it. When you create space for their leadership, people step up and they step in and when they get nervous and they want to dip out, you just kind of put your hand out there like, no, you're going to continue to be seen and you might need a break. OK, fine. You can take a break, but don't get comfortable being invisible. So young people in communities that I've worked in lived in have been either invisible or they've been criminalized. So I can step into a conversation and talk to them about what does street justice look like and what does court justice look like, which is a framework, thank you Youth Justice Coalition. Right, and Kim McGill specifically. but like just helping to understand that those structures and those systems are operating every single day all the time. They don't take no breaks and that if those systems have not served us, which it's awesome to talk to young people about it in this type of way because they'll analyze it and be like, nope, that didn't work. Nope, that didn't work. And then it's like, OK, well let's create something that could work and that there's all this ancient wisdom that I would say like all of our ancestors had the tools that they had. Let's, let's bring it up let's surface it and let's use the stuff that I think worked at another time.

Dane Zahorsky:

How does it work as a mother?

Kruti Parekh:

My son is nine. If you could check back with me in like 10 years, that would be really cool. You know, I think it's interesting, you know, I, there's so many different philosophies around parenting, non-violent parenting specifically, right. And I've always felt like I'm experimenting with my kid, you know, I think

that his dad intimidates lovingly where they have a very loving relationship, but one look or one sound, he already knows to shape up and he doesn't do that with me. He doesn't shape up so quickly, with me. It requires a lot more dialogue and a lot more patients and I'm trying that. And I think that even when I tried to act tough right or resorted to violent, parenting, it didn't work. It didn't work for me and it definitely didn't work for him. So for me, it looks like loving accountability. That means, you know, if he messes up, I have to call them out on it. If he doesn't want to hear right now, I'll give him a break and we'll talk about it after. But there's no way that he's going to get away with anything, especially if it means he's going to be more responsible because of it, you know, a better human being because of it. And uh, I think transformative justice is helping my son the most.

Marisa T Byrne :

I love that you spoke to this loving accountability and as, as you were speaking about your, this young man that you know, is your life mentee. I guess just that piece about community accountability and what that translates with transformative justice, like that community accountability, the common thread that's really necessary and really what I hear is being seen, really being seen and really being a part of the community, being held in the community, counted as community. I really loved that piece and that's inspiring to me. What for you is the most inspiring piece about transformative justice? What gets your blood boiling a little bit, but in a good way, you know? Where do you feel?

Kruti Parekh:

Yeah, that's such a good question. Um, I feel like it, it allows people to fully show up. It starts with creating a safe space where people don't have to be worried or shy, like this is not for me. I don't have anything to offer, but I feel like it starts with really just creating a safe space and so I, I call it magic what happens in every circle because there's no way that I can predict what's going to happen and in two situations just last week I work in alternative schools and one was almost the entire school body and there was a young person that just wasn't ready to be in the circle, but he participated. His transformation from the moment I walked in where he's looking at me, kind of like just testing me. Like, who are you? You're a new person in this community. I've never seen you before. What can you offer? To the moment that he stormed out? That did happen, but for the hour and a half that he was there, there was significant transformation. There was significant relief. He said what he needed to say. He didn't want to hear some of what he had to hear, but he heard what he needed to hear and it was a moment of pure accountability that happened in the circle that caused him to say I can't take this anymore, but then even as he's storming out, the words that he chose to use to the circle, it became another layer of accountability for the circle. So that's what's exciting for me. I know for a fact I shift every time I'm facilitating a circle and I am sure people are thinking and shifting and the more detached I am to the result, the more incredible it is, honestly. And I hope that doesn't sound too big. I can give more specific examples, you know.

Marisa T Byrne :

Thank you. For me. I have a little experience of transformative justice in practice. We're talking about all these kind of larger concepts and we've just

kind of dabbled a little bit about circle. So what does it actually look like? What's the format?

Kruti Parekh:

Yeah, so let me give you an example for our site. Like youth leadership is really, really important. There's a committee called the Youth Policy Committee that is basically the student leadership of the school and so someone had called me and was the youth leadership is having a hard time with the director of the program and they want to be able, they want to have a circle with her. And I was like OK. And this person that called me is kind of new to Tj and I was like, well why don't we co-facilitate? I feel like co-facilitating is the best way for folks to start to do it, to think about it but not have all the pressure right, so that there's, there's backup. And so we had already started with basically what it would look like is introducing alters to spaces and really sharing that it is really that for strengthening and when things are difficult or things are difficult to talk about, let's create a space that can strengthen us. And there's articles where young people need to hold onto something while we're in the circle process. They can do that. So I had brought a few of the things that are strengthening for me as a representation and the young people were invited. There were six young people there, there was the director there and there was me and the co-facilitator. So basically three adults, often six young people and it started with if you wanted to bring something to the altar, what did you bring and why? It's everyone is contributing to creating a safe and sacred space. Everyone is participating now. Some people had forgotten but it was kind of cool because what people decided to do was take their phone and offer the phone to the wow about loving accountability, right? Like I don't have to tell you, put your phone away, don't text right now, don't play music. I don't have to think any of that. This is self regulation. Putting it into, into the altar and everybody including the director offered something to the altar. And then I pointed a few things out just in case people wanted to hold onto something and it's important to mention is that one of the teachers had approached me and the co-facilitator and was like do you think that this kid is ready, it's hard for him not to get upset, and he just had an incident the other day, is what he's telling me. I was like, no, absolutely, he needs to be a part of the circle. Right? So the folks that often get left out of the process because of behavior, whatever behavior looks like, I understand that he's absolutely correct this behavior definitely did happen. I trusted that there was going to be a safe space where this person could participate and that I would look out for it just that was a good heads up, but that, that was going to be OK. And so the person did participate.

Kruti Parekh:

Then we had a round of introductions and really just to say what people wanted to get out of the circle. So the issue was about leadership. So then we had a circle where people just shared what their concerns were about the director's leadership. And as people are talking, it became more and more clear that they just really missed the director. The director had gotten so busy that the young people didn't have the same relationship they had previously. They had voiced some concerns and some some other things, and then there was an opportunity for the director to speak. The first time the director spoke, she acknowledged some of what she heard, but she hadn't quite shared what was really going on.

So in the process of the circle, there was more information in terms of how the young people were feeling to the point where the director could really talk about how overwhelmed she was and how much help you really needed and how sometimes people sign up for help but then they're not following through, but there's so many emergencies that are happening just with the young people where if people don't come prepared or don't come to school at all or are what we were calling kind of firecrackers, just have the episode in the middle of school like that just causes additional difficulty.

Kruti Parekh:

Then there was a round of people really accepting their responsibility and so different people accepted responsibility, including the director and then we had around of next steps in terms of what should happen and for me, I think that that is the most important, probably part of the circle or maybe the second most important part of the circle. The first part really would be creating a safe environment, but the second most important part is having folks really clear about what next steps are. There were ideas that had come forward. There was people that stepped up to do certain things. There were other folks that were supposed to follow up on other things, so just being very, very clear about that. Then we did a close out circle of just appreciation and as folks were appreciating each other, the same young person that the teacher had said, are you sure you want him in felt so comfortable that he just basically shared his story. Now for the rest of the community. They hadn't heard his story because he had been closed off. He was not opening. He was not going to be in that vulnerable place, but the circle had created an opportunity where he could be vulnerable and he ended up sharing his story and now as a facilitator I'm like, oh shoot, we don't have time because ideally if we had more time there would have been a support round for him and then we would have closed out in a good way. And for me in that moment there was affirmation to him and his story. There was breath, you know, like taking a deep breath on the things that you want to remember and the exhale releasing whatever you don't want to hold onto. You know, there was a fire in the middle of our base. We can put it into the fire by all of these representation that when it's challenging, when it's hard, we have some tools to be able to use. It also happened to be my birthday, so I felt like it was a good segue, so I was like: it's my birthday today and there's really no place I would have rather been than right over here and I have some delicious chocolate cake that somebody made for me that I brought and so I want you all to take care of yourselves after the circle and break bread. Right? Eat some cake together. And so hard, really hard, and you could stay in that emotion and being able to shift and eat and experience and people are kinesthetically experiencing things all the time, like giving young people especially additional tools to use to get the help that they need.

Dane Zahorsky:

Something that sometimes feels allusive, especially to folks that are coming into this work is understanding in its simplest core components. What does the process look like from start to finish? Sometimes people feel like it's so complex that they can't get into it when actually it's pretty simple. Although hard. So I was wondering if you'd go into that a little.

Kruti Parekh:

For me it's introduction. Part of the introduction is what is this process? You know, and let's say the school setting. Right, so let's say two kids got into a fight, the introduction would be, you know, in other schools they may have picked out, you may have been, uh, expelled from the school or suspended from the school. In this school we use something called transformative justice because we want people to have an opportunity to talk to each other. We believe that people can and figure out the solutions collectively. And so then to what do we need kind of community agreements. So again, creating a safe space where they would be around of what do you need. And often times it's something like if one person is talking, don't let somebody else talk. So community guidelines as the first question, the second question sometimes is usually like a check in, how are you feeling today? An introduction if people don't know each other. The third question would be what happened, right? So it allows everyone to have an opportunity to just share what happened from their own perspectives. And it's always the first person experience first. So there was a witness that would be secondary if there was somebody that hurts something, right? That would be tertiary. So the people that are closest to the incident would go first and they there would be a commitment that the other person is not going to interrupt. If you start to feel there's gaps around what people's experiences have been, it's useful to be like put yourself in the other person's shoes and tell me what happened from the other person's perspective and allow people to have the time to really step into it and share it, and then they would be around the owning up to it.

Kruti Parekh:

Right? Accepting responsibility. So it allows people an opportunity to accept their responsibility and then it allows people to figure out what does repairing that harm look like, how can we move forward and moving forward is as an individual, I might want this, this and this, and another individual might want three totally opposite things. But as a community we have to decide what we agree on. And so sometimes that requires a little bit more time and usually there's a close out question and appreciations are usually simple so that people can appreciate each other before they have to move forward. So in a situation where there's two students fighting, for example, at the end of the circle at least is we're going to go to school together and we're going to treat each other like co-workers, we may not be friends, we may not become best friends, but we can coexist in the same space, would be kind of bare minimum, but usually in that process they'll hear something about each other that they didn't think of prior. So that's kind of bare bones. If it's two people that are fighting and say their neighborhood related. Often you know, gang members, if you include an opening circle about a friend that they've lost now the circle just got deeper now already we're talking about pain in the past to trying and prevent pain in the present or bringing people into the circle like peace builders from neighborhoods where they can actually give a different perspective.

Marisa T Byrne :

Also oftentimes there's one or two kind of holders of the circle, facilitators, and then something I've seen is that it's very much unlike our criminal justice system where two cops are against one person, it's each individual can have support in the circle. Is that a thing as well?

Kruti Parekh:

Yeah Absolutely, So young people can actually bring a support, whether it's another student, a parent, a teacher, a coach, whoever, and ideally each person has a person, so one of the best circles that I've learned from was probably the hardest and the most dysfunctional was something that we rushed into and the person that was the most volatile didn't have a support person in the circle. And if that person had a support person and they had had a chance to actually come up with their own sort of understanding, it probably would've gone so much better. Don't rush it. The most important people have to be there. It is important to do it timely because I've also seen that happen with too much time has passed and then there's just, you know, additional resentment and anger and build up and misunderstanding and assumptions, but rushing it without the right people being their big mistake.

Dane Zahorsky:

Speaking of not rushing it, one of the biggest questions that comes up in this network, is kind of this crux where does this process of rites of passage and building communities like where does that meet with this social justice lens and to what extent do they feed each other and often one of the struggles that we face is the emergent needs and ongoing needs of our young people and ourselves are often in response to a crisis. Whether that be immediate crisis like physical harm or long-term crisis because of long standing structures of inequality and so rites of passage often take this lens of generational change. You really accept this is potentially and most likely going to change that I won't see in my lifetime. So I just wonder in your experience and kind of as you've been practicing this where has transformative justice and social justice informed an understanding of how to build better communities and, and how to build relationships from that generational lens while acknowledging that, you know, the needs are also urgent and immediate. How do you navigate, how do you walk that line?

Kruti Parekh:

I think it's about having consciousness of what's happening externally and apply that internally. So for example, the best training was on the ground where Youth Justice Coalition leaders knew that they needed to have a school because so many schools were pushing out the young people and as mentors we were pushing them back into schools that we're pushing them out, right? So the young people were like, we need a school and YJC understands us. So we need a school. And from the moment that I started, that conversation happened, six months later we started a school. We knew enough, but we didn't have policies in place. Many people that have started programs would be looking at us like, what on earth? What are you thinking? That first year I was like, we are definitely nuts, but what we decided was that we were going to create everything together, so having young people who had been systemically pushed out of other schools, multiple schools, one kid I remember pushed out of ten schools, issue after issue after issue, where we just knew that based on what was happening in society and community wise in the traditional school system, zero tolerance was the policy. So we knew internally that zero tolerance couldn't be the policy and so we started to research. Right? Like what were the policies that were actually healthy and respectful and useful and so we actually adopted and created a policy that reflected our social consciousness. So we

were trying to do something that was healthy, respectful, loving, caring, and that we did not give up on our young people and for me when I think of transformative justice. A young person makes a mistake and it's here and you try and create as much space between the time that they made a mistake to the time you give up on them. You try and create as wide a net as possible and then use your creativity to fill in the blanks and use the young person that's at the center of it to create the options and so the best thing to really say is that if you understand that young people have been systemically pushed out of schools and then they land up in the street and there's greater stop and frisk by the police and that if they're going to get caught in the juvenile or criminal justice track. When a judge is deciding their fate, and they're a young person of color, chances are they're gonna get more extreme sentences.

Kruti Parekh:

The decision to have a young person not stay in your school has incredibly violent consequences, so you're going to try a lot harder to have this person stay in your school versus give up on them. So I feel like it informs what you do because the first couple of years I think I was so frustrated with marijuana because young people wanted to get high off of the money that they were making actually coming to school. Right. And it was like policy after policy, after policy. I was getting more and more frustrated and I realized that it wasn't about my frustration, right? It was about the relationship with the young person and so even for me who got it from a social justice standpoint, the one on one relationships and choices that people were making, were making it really challenging for me, but the relationship has to be more important than let's say the marijuana for example, or the behavior. Then it's understanding what's going on. And every single body who has a story. So as soon as you stop and actually be in circle, it's an opportunity for people to share their stories and then comes the magic of people coming up with solutions based on what their reality is.

Marisa T Byrne :

So I hear a little bit about some of the threads of focusing on relationship and focusing on just the good, the beauty, the wholesome part of an individual continuing to just like hold that piece. Right? And then also being confronted with behaviors and let downs. And so it feels like it's, it's not an easy road per se. I hear there's hardship and I hear it's not just, Oh, this is the way, and it's just going to solve all the problems and you learn along the way, so it's just starting out a circle. It's a good try and then the next time will be better. The next time will be even more just wholesome, I guess is the word. What are some hardships that we should really look out for? What are the things that as people who want to hold this work, we should know along the way that's really keystones to be wary of?

Kruti Parekh:

Such a good question. I think that 90 percent of transformative justice is building relationships and building community, right? It's circles of just your funniest childhood memory. What's your favorite ice cream flavor and why? Tell us what your best friend would tell us about you. Just Fun, simple stuff to even more complicated stuff like, you know, share your greatest fear or tell us a time when you were judged. Tell us a time when you were discriminated against. I

mean, it could just be anything, but it's where people are sharing their stories and that's 90 percent of the work and I feel like even in spaces where there's, you know, restorative justice or transformative justice when a young person here's, they're calling me in for a circle, it could sound like the same thing that they've heard around like, oh shoot, you're getting called to the principal's office. A huge part of the learning to relearn. Um, and that's a quote from Henry Sandoval, a young person that I used to work with and he would say you have to learn to relearn. And so even young people that feel like they're getting into trouble, how you handle it the way that you're talking to them, and then the result of the circle will help them be engaged in a process that's very, very different than traditional schools or the traditional system. And that's the ultimate goal. And I feel like don't be unrealistic about how quick that transformation is going to happen. That will take a lifetime for it to fully happen. So even insights that I'm a part of that now we've been talking about this for years, the place that I go back to the most is the place that one wants to practice it the most authentically and that's because the problems keep coming and the challenges keep coming.

Kruti Parekh:

So for me it's a matter of like just practice and if you're practicing it, you know, do it together, right? Have co-facilitators in the very beginning so that you're training each other up, you're preparing together, you're in the process together and then you're taking the time to debrief together because it's in our debrief that we learn what not to do and what to do better and that's really critical. And the other thing that I would bring in is your knowledge of what's going on outside because it's impacting people on the inside. So for example, if two young women of color are fighting, I want to know how sexism is playing out in this situation. I want to know is there a shared experience that we could talk about that is creating this dynamic right here? So just thinking about the linkages so that at the end of the circle you've gotten to the root cause. That's the point is that we don't have to engage superficially we can get deeper and deeper. The goal is to try and get to the roots of what the conflict was in order to be able to build community stronger. 90% of transformative justice is community building. Then it's a safety net for when there is a problem that there's enough support for that problem to not only be solved, but that it actually strengthens community. That it's not something that we avoid or that we run away from, but that we welcome because we know after we go through this together we're going to be stronger.

Dane Zahorsky:

So that actually brings up a living question in our network, and various other communities and I can't say how wonderful it was to kind of hear that concept of you have to practice it, because that's the whole idea behind why we're coming together is acknowledging that there is no right way, you know, try to do it with the best intentions that we have and learn as we go and you know, one of the things that sticks out, it's this idea that you can bring a young person into circle, even in young person that is in conflict with another young person or an adult or whoever and you can lead to maybe not closure, um, but some sort of transformation and they can have that experience and then go back to a context or a home where that's not the reality. Right. What does it look like to

one of these schools that you work with to practice this culture and acknowledge that, that culture may not exist outside of that school. How were those relationships being tended in and outside of safe space?

Kruti Parekh:

Really good question. It's interesting how maybe the most rewarding moment was walking into the Youth Justice Coalition and in one of the classrooms there was a group of young people that had a circle that I was about to go in and they're like, no sorry, we're having a TJ circle right now. There was no adult that was facilitating. They were facilitating their own circle. And that for me just meant what we were practicing. They were practicing on their own and that's just the beginning so that the different types of things that are happening for them outside, they have some visualization of what that could possibly mean. And there have been countless times people have brought issues about what's going on outside where we have helped to facilitate or we have helped to think through what could be possible. I feel like that's the best that we can do is give people the imagination of what could be different. And one young person who had been in a few different TJ circles, she had a little girl and I think she was two at the time and I remember her saying, you know, she was raising another issue with me and I was like, you know, that sounds like a TJ circle was needed. And she started cracking up. She's like, I knew you'd say that. And then she was the one that said, imagine when my daughter is older, she can not think of this as the first option, not blank, blank, blank. Which was her kind of go to. And I feel like the conversations that I've had around street justice is, you know, when there's conflict, we curse each other out, we punch each other out, we leave each other, and people can really relate to that, whether it's on the street or in their house or in there someplace close. They could totally relate to that and they already know the consequences of that, the consequences of that is not good. When you start to introduce an idea that's different, that has other consequences, people really hear it. I feel like people have been probably thinking about it, but we all don't live in that world. We also have to be really mindful of other people may not be ready, but what would it look like to ask them? They actually might say yes.

Dane Zahorsky:

I feel that that's a really relevant place to also acknowledge that here's this way of being, whether that be circle or whether that'd be the larger processes of transformative practice. It gets people excited. I know. I remember the first time that I was in a circle and you walk away going, wow, there's this whole other world that's possible. Or those young people that experienced that same catharsis really in in your circles and now are doing it themselves. So there's a difference between an elder or an adult that's hosting a circle for young folks and young folks holding circle for other young folks both valid but different and so really being mindful that these ideas have a lot of power and can do damage when not held with. So how is TJ scalable? What does it look like to bring circles into more places while not doing more damage?

Kruti Parekh:

I think it starts with a community agreement. What's the most important thing to us? You know, what do we need from each other and to do it on the front end where there isn't conflict, you're planning, you're being honest about when

there is conflict, this is how we're going to handle it. I feel like those agreements go a really, really long way. I mean, I think that one of the core values is that you, truly believe that someone else has something to offer. Right? And I mean there's an age old heart ache around the ego, right? I just recently quoted this, but like Kendrick Lamar, has a song out and he's like, "superhero, you looking for a hero, look in the mirror and there's your hero." We don't need somebody else to come in and save us. Right? Or Save the day. Um, that's it. Whether you blame it on ego or colonization or whatever, right? I mean, you have to be OK with the fact that somebody else is going to have a great idea, you know, and maybe that needs to be on the community agreement. And I feel like that sometimes can be it's own circle. If there's a leader that feels like they have all the answers and are the end all, be all.

Dane Zahorsky:

The segue into acknowledging that, you know, part of the reason of hosting these conversations is to also center it from a place of care and self care in specific. Really acknowledging that not even just talking about rites of passage, but now we're talking about transformative justice. And I can only imagine that doing that work on a daily basis takes a huge emotional toll and requires an intense amount of input. And so maybe from the individual level, what does Kruti Parekh and you know, what have you learned that you need to sustain yourself, but in your experience, these people that have dedicated themselves to this work, what are the needs that need to be met in order to really not only survive doing this, but to mirror that transformative practice? What does it look like to thrive doing this work?

Kruti Parekh:

Recently there was a request. There had been sort of an issue, with a leader of an organization. And there was one person that was trying to bring all the parties together and she called and was like, this is what's going on. It's getting worse can you help? And I was like. And I realized that she was kind of in the middle of it. She didn't need to play the role of a facilitator. Like when people have carried so much or have been containers for so much, it's to recognize that first I need help. And then second you actually need a break, right? Because you've been kind of holding it for so long. And then the next thing I did was really just start thinking about the community that we're attempting to bring together and asked two people to support me and one was definitely would bring in the cultural element and the healing element that would be appropriate for the group who's going to be there. And the other person was a fierce like youth advocate that also really knew TJ well. And they both said yes to me. Amazing. I love it when people say yes to me, right? They both said yes. And then it was a matter of preparation where it's like we just got our beautiful brains together and like, Hey, what do you think? How do you think we should handle it? And as facilitators who don't know too much of what's going on, for us it became a matter of how do we make sure that the space is safe first and foremost. And so we created a space that we used 75% of the first meeting just to make sure that it was a safe space where people could share. And then the second time we used 25% for the community building piece and we had 75% of it to go deep into what was going on and we got a lot of resolution.

Kruti Parekh:

The lessons in there was don't do this alone. Call your backup or train your backup if you feel like you don't have backup. Start with a group of people and take care of each other. So one person, you know, had brought sage and was just asking folks if they wanted to get cleansed before they engaged in the process. They had the right to say yes, they had the right to say no. There were other things in the altar that was just like for cleansing for. And that's like, you know, we don't talk about that, but to be a container in conflict is energy sucking. So what is going to replenish your energy? And being really mindful of it. And I remember my body before walking into that space, I was dealing with some other stuff. But having the sage there was perfect for me. And then me and my co facilitator had already made plans to go out after the circle, being with people that you're comfortable with and you're going to have fun with, you know, gave us a chance to kind of like debrief and decompress at the same time and I was good the next day. But I know two of the other folks that were there felt super drained, right? They hadn't built in the self care until that process, where they can get recharged. And then especially, a lot of the folks that love to do this work are empaths, right? Which means that they are sensitive to other people's energy. And so really knowing who you are, knowing how you are, what you absorb, what do you use for protection? And there's so many beautiful ways that people protect. You know, I have my own kind of ideas around it. I've figured out a few things that actually help. So they tend to be spiritual practices, like that people do just to be able to strengthen in that way so that they don't get depleted. I think maybe just one thing that I would share is there was a period of my life that I was studying energy work and one of my teachers really just created a visualization for me around light and if you can imagine yourself in this shell of light where anything that comes at you, you're energetically protected and putting like an affirmation or a mantra attached to it. It has helped me in so many ways, but I just really encourage folks to find what strengthens you and understand that when there is conflict, there's a lot of energy stuff happening and the more mindful you become of it, the better you can protect yourself. Before and after.

Marisa T Byrne :

What I'm realizing or what I've heard is just this idea of dealing with conflict. That's what transformative justice helps hold conflict and conflict is a part of us all the time. Whether it's the last cup of coffee gone, whether it's dirty dishes, whether it's accidents on the road, and what I hear in dealing with that conflict is 1. bring your allies. Surround yourself with people that can hold that with you and can help you. 2. Set up things in a good way so that you're able to deal with that conflict so that you're able to hold that and not bow out, hide or go too hard, go too fast to rough or extreme. 3. Protect yourself, protect ourselves as practitioners, as people just walking every day like hold ourselves with care. Prepare ourselves as we are in this world with that container and 4. Build on love, are some of the main things that I've heard you saying is there anything else that how transformative justice can really help us with our world view and our day to day dealings with people?

Kruti Parekh:

We just think about what we experienced growing up and whether we were satisfied with that or not and what would have made the difference. I think that

helps. Or if folks can imagine, you know, the person that they care deeply about that struggled the most. Right. And what would have helped them. I feel like it gives us so much capacity to create what we as a group need and therefore hopefully are creating.

Marisa T Byrne : This is actually something that helped me in my workings with with a loved one to start repairing some harm that was caused years ago and I found this model and other models really, really empowering. So I have written a blog about transformative justice, my own experience about it and have included a bunch of resources and really want to name Generation Five, Saves The Kids, and Youth Justice Coalition (YJC). They have so many great resources out there. This blog can be found at www.youthpassageways.org and it has books and websites and partners. Youth Passageways partners that are doing this work, so a really powerful container that I can absolutely attest to anytime anybody's interested in these conversations and the resources they can find them on the Practicing Community page on the YPW website. I think that's what I have to say about that. Did I get it? Everything Dane?

Dane Zahorsky: Yeah. Just want to say that if you feel like there's something really burning in you about the next topic. You know we're an email away. You can email Marisa at marisat@youthpassageways.org or me at dane@youthpassageways.org with any questions that you would want to see with the next topic as well as just resources that you have and that's the idea that we are a community of practice and what comprises that community are individuals all with their own stories, all with their own knowledge, all with their own skill sets. Um, but we were just informed by these relationships. As Kruti has so eloquently reaffirmed over over again. So we're learning you know, what this space will be and what it offers and really acknowledging it's about connecting as individuals. And I just, uh, I want to take a minute and you know, as we move into later topics later things, this doesn't always have to be part of it, but I want to acknowledge both of you, uh, in this moment before we transition and that, you know, you are someone who has been involved with Youth Passageways and has decided to step into this space of first guest. You know, and, and that can be what it. Yeah, it just applauding and acknowledging the willingness there to step in, to practice, to be with and to talk with the folks that are doing this work and to try to compile even a ram shot version of what are the boundaries that can, we can have some sort of perimeter and say here's at least some of what we know is going on that is connected to our network and that is, that is a drop in a very large ocean, but it's a starting place and as we, you know, continue to be in this together. We invite you to share if you find it useful and for folks that you think might and I'll give it back to you and Marissa.

Marisa T Byrne : Great. Well, you know, thank you for holding this space and being part of this conversation and affecting the hundreds of lives that you have affected and maybe thousands and millions just with the ripple effect. I mean, as somebody who's life has been greatly touched. Thank you for taking time to help us deepen in this work.

Kruti Parekh: Thank you both so much for asking

Marisa T Byrne : Yes, and thank you Dane. Co-host holding down the Youth Passageway, staff director role. Really shout out for just how you, how you're holding space to making this work possible.

Dane Zahorsky: Before we transition to kind of the final thoughts, just wanting there to be an open space, if there's anything still alive or burning or that you feel should really be brought in Kruti, making a space for that.

Kruti Parekh: I think maybe the only thing that I would add is just true gratitude to Marisa. There was a conversation that we had many years ago and you are living the example of transformative justice and the depth of it and sharing your journey. And I feel like if I have exposed the young people to like opening it up, right? Imagining what could be different. You have done that exponentially for me, so really appreciate it. So that other people can just imagine what transformative justice looks like and feels like.

Marisa T Byrne : Whew, on that vulnerable note. (laughter) I want to speak to Martin Luther King Jr. reading a quote by him saying "Law and order exists for the purpose of establishing justice. And when they fail in this purpose, they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress." Let us unleash the water and free those dams!

Kruti Parekh: Perfect quote to use.

Dane Zahorsky: That feels like actually a great place to say farewell for now as we move forward, man. What a great start. Thank you all. Good evening.

Marisa T Byrne : So much love.