



Episode 13 – “Finding a Lifeline: Maryama’s Story” Transcript

Melissa Turnpaugh:

Welcome to our podcast, I Will Be Your Voice, Stories of Homelessness and Hope. I am your host, Melissa Turnpaugh, youth development coordinator with the Center for Schools and Communities. I want to welcome Maryama Labrane to the podcast. Welcome.

Maryama Labrane:

Thank you for having me, Melissa.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

No problem. So just a little back story for our listeners, Maryama and I met back in 2018, 2019. It would have been 2020, I believe it was right when COVID pandemic.

Maryama Labrane:

Yeah.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

So we actually got to work together on some life skills and goals when I was a life skills counselor at Valley Youth House in Harrisburg, and Maryama had the opportunity to participate in our transitional living program. So I'm excited to have her here today just to talk about her journey in that program, what things that she learned, and where she is today. So Maryama, we'll go ahead and get started. So I just want to thank you for taking the time to be with us today. We thought it'd be super impactful to have a former homeless youth share their experiences and story with us in hopes to raise awareness about youth homelessness. So can we start from the beginning? Can you tell our listeners where you were born and raised, how you came to America, and what transitioned you into homelessness?

Maryama Labrane:

Hi, my name is Maryama. I'm really happy to be invited here to share my story, and I can't wait to share my journey with you guys. I was born and raised in Africa, but I come here when I was 14. I come here with my little brother and I went to high school and middle school here.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

What brought you to America?

Maryama Labrane:

Honestly, we come here just to live because my dad lives here.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

Okay, awesome. And then you were with your dad and your brother, and then you transitioned into homelessness. So how did you end up finding out about Valley Youth House?

Maryama Labrane:

So when I was in high school, I have issue with my family. So due to a family situation, I can no longer live with my family. So when I was in high school, my counselor helped me look for a program. At the time I was in YWCA for women's shelter, but it's not really helping me that much because I still need to get to school. I was at my last year, which is senior year. So I was really struggling getting to the school in the morning, and they tried finding me a program to help me.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

So can you explain just about the transition into the program with Valley Youth House? I know that you said that your counselor told you about it. Was it a quick turnaround that you got in? Just give some details on how you ...

Maryama Labrane:

So when I was in Y women's shelter, at the time it was very hard getting to the school. Because it was so hard getting to the school and I needed to finish the school, it was very important, my counselor put me in contact with a social worker in the school. So she called me in her office. I explained my home living situation to her and how I end up in Y. So me and her sit and she looked for a program for me that is way better than Y, which is Thrive Housing. And it was really an amazing experience for me. So I end up doing everything at the Y with the social worker, and the people at the Y, she got in contact with the Thrive Housing. They come to the school, interview me, ask questions and everything I needed to start the program, and that's how I got into the program.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

Yeah, so some of our listeners may not know what Thrive Housing is. So Valley Youth House, transitional living program and some of the other programs at the Harrisburg office worked with

a program called Thrive Housing that worked with us to house our youth that were in programs. So when Maryama describes about Thrive Housing, that is where she ended up going for a household living situation while she was in our program. So can you actually tell our listeners about that living situation, like that you lived in a house, et cetera?

Maryama Labrane:

So how we work is a house that have a couple rooms, and we all have our own room, but we share the kitchen space and the living room space. Everybody have their own room. So you start paying \$50 a month and then it goes up to \$500. But all the money are being saved until you are ready to leave the program. While you are there, they offer you some help with anything you need help with, cooking classes, they offer you cooking classes and they offer you a lot of things, honestly, to help with your everyday life and to help you just in everywhere you need help with. Like they give you a grocery car and a gas car, and yeah, so many other things.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

Yeah, so when you were in that household, so the first three months you didn't have to pay any rent, which was nice.

Maryama Labrane:

Yes.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

And then we would build up an increment. So Maryama said about how it started at \$50 and then it ended, by the time she was going into her last few months of the program, it was stagnant at \$500. But during that time, did you have to pay rent as well besides just the program putting money into it?

Maryama Labrane:

Yes.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

So yeah, so the money that you had to pay each month was helping you to budget, know what it's like to pay rent, but at the end of all of that, the money that you actually contributed you were able to walk away with in hopes you'd put it on a down payment on a apartment or on a car, etc.

Maryama Labrane:

Yes, yes.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

Awesome. And so during your time in the transitional living program, so again, it was an 18-month program, what do you think was the most impactful or beneficial thing for you?

Maryama Labrane:

For me is how the workers over there, they really, really care for you and they care about your growth. For me, the cooking class was really everything for me, because I always look forward to it. I love cooking. So to learn how to cook other food other than what you originally know is very helpful, and the way they care about you, show you that they want you to succeed, that itself encouraged you a lot.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

Yeah, so these cooking classes that Maryama is talking about, we used to do them every other week. So I actually ran those over Zoom so that all of our youth could participate no matter where they were located. But during that time they got to choose different recipes they wanted to learn. I'd go shopping, meet those kids, drop them off at their house, and then we'd all hop on Zoom, just have a good time cooking and making different meals. So Maryama, what would you say your favorite meal was that you made during your time?

Maryama Labrane:

I would say the Chinese fried rice. That is my favorite. I still cook it to this day because of that.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

Yeah, awesome. Yeah, and so those programs not only helped you with your life skills but also attending, you got paid to go to each of those.

Maryama Labrane:

Yeah.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

Which was another great way for our youth to earn more income. Because while they're in the program they do have to hold a job and have to be able to budget, and we work on that with them. So when you were in TL program, how do you think some of the programs have shaped you to where you are now?

Maryama Labrane:

It shapes me a lot because it allows me to know that there is people who actually cares for me and want to see me succeed. And there is people that are actually willing to help you no matter your situation, and you don't have to really do anything. They're just there to help you and you don't have to repay for nothing. It's a program that is there to help whoever needed the help for, because they want to see everybody's success.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

Yeah. So after your 18 months, or I should say when your 18 months of the program were approaching and graduation was coming, did you feel you were prepared and ready to be out on your own?

Maryama Labrane:

Yes.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

And why was that?

Maryama Labrane:

Number one, I already know how to pay the bills. By them making me start with \$50 and going up, it helped me know how to pay my rent on time and it helped me with the responsibility of paying a rent. So that prepared me to have my own place. And while I was there I have a couple bills. So that also helped me know how to take care of myself, because I was on my own at the time.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

That's awesome. So once you did graduate, can you tell our listeners what was next for you? What your living situation was, your career field, did you do schooling?

Maryama Labrane:

So I graduated high school, and at the time I got two bedroom. I was living and taking care of my little brother. He was still in high school and I just graduated, and I live with him for a couple years until I started living on my own.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

And then, so what are you doing now as far as your career?

Maryama Labrane:

After graduating high school, I went into a program, it is a CNA program. I paid and took some classes at DC Tech for a couple months and I got my certificate in nurse assistant, which is CNA. And now I'm working in healthcare field, and I've been working in healthcare field for like four years now.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

Yeah, I was going to say you started that when you were in the program with us and have continued with it.

Maryama Labrane:

Yeah.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

You really found your passion there. So what other goals do you have now that you're out of the program? You've been given assistance to move forward in life, you've been graduated out of the program for quite some time. What do you see in your future?

Maryama Labrane:

Honestly, I see a lot for my future. I see that I have a big future, and I can only thank the program for helping me make it right now to this day. I have a lot of plan for my future. It doesn't just end now, it's just continue for me.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

Awesome, yeah. Super proud of you and the work that you put in during those programs and continue. You have just been such a great success story. So if you could give any words of wisdom or advice to a youth who is experiencing homelessness like you did, what would you say and how would you encourage them?

Maryama Labrane:

I would tell you to keep going no matter how hard it gets. And it feel like nobody know how you feel. There is people who actually care about you, and don't give up, because it is going to get really hard and it's going to feel like it doesn't matter any more. But the more you keep pushing, the more you keep going, the end of it is going to be everything you ever dream of.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

That's awesome. Thank you. So with that message, we are going to close our episode of I Will Be Your Voice, Stories of Homelessness and Hope. Thank you, Maryama, for being with us today.

Maryama Labrane:

Thank you for having me.

Melissa Turnpaugh:

So to learn more about the Valley Youth House transitional living program, you can go to valleyyouthhouse.org to their programs page and look for their transitional living program. Thank

you for listening to I Will Be Your Voice, Stories of Homelessness and Hope. We hope you enjoyed this episode. Please check back and tune in again.