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FROM RAGS TO RICHES

”The journey of a trauma exposed black male”



AGENDA

- **Background and Development**
- **Youth Offending / Cultural Barriers / Systemic Biases**
- **Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Exposure Among African Americans in the U.S. from 1980 to 1999**
- **Imprisonment and the Beginning of Transformation**
- **Reintegration and Initial Challenges**
- **Persona's/Quiet Potential in the recovery process**
- **Recovery as a Path to Healing and Major Changes**

BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

“My childhood was marked by memorable moments”

- **Such as my grandmother reading to me as I crawled around the house and at times rode my mother's dog as if he were my horse. My grandmother was a big part of my upbringing. The love nurturing and care she showed me instilled a heart of compassion within me. It hurt when I let her down. My grandmother like in most families was the glue that held all us together through the dysfunction and chaos we created.**
- **Holidays were always spent at her home and even through arguments that would break out a good time and good food were had.**
- **I recall spending time with my father before he unexpectedly vanished from my life. He would spend the next 20 plus years in the state penitentiary.**
- **As I grew older, my observational skills sharpened, allowing me to notice the changing world around me. Growing up in the 80s during the onset of the crack epidemic, I witnessed my family being affected by its devastating impact.**



BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT CONTINUED

- I remember the loss of my mother, who, despite being physically present, was consumed by her addiction to crack and later faced the fallout from an assault that stripped her of her confidence, leaving her searching for solace. I observed my aunts and uncles succumb to this pervasive struggle that ravaged black communities across America, while my grandmother suffered as she watched her children deteriorate, feeling helpless to intervene.
- The traumatic experiences I encountered as a child were beyond what any child should endure, yet I was far from alone as a black child witnessing the devastation of loved ones, desperately seeking safety, escape, and comfort in the streets where we played. Throughout my childhood, I experienced numerous raids where guns were aimed at me, threats of being separated from my mother, and accusations regarding her raising another delinquent.

Youth Offending / Cultural Barriers / Systemic Biases

Throughout my teenage years, I often found myself navigating the juvenile justice system, facing significant obstacles in accessing mental health and substance use disorder support for the complex trauma I experienced.

- Cultural factors and community perceptions surrounding support and assistance systems.**
- Systemic issues related to cultural awareness and deep-rooted racial obstacles within these support systems, alongside a legacy of distrust in the African American community.**
- Elements such as poverty, substance abuse, and harmful influences from exploitative role models (including drug dealers, pimps, and criminal figures), fueled by generational and historical trauma, all contribute to a survival mindset.**

This context left me and many of my peers with scant hope for a future that extends beyond the cycle of circumstances into which we were born.

Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Exposure and Treatment Among African Americans in the U.S. from 1980 through the 2000's

The lack of detailed data on African American participation in mental health and substance abuse treatment from 1980 to 1999 makes it difficult to provide precise statistics. However, studies indicate that fewer African Americans sought treatment compared to White individuals, due to stigma, access barriers, and cultural factors.

Key points include lower treatment rates for mental health and substance use disorders among African Americans, despite higher incarceration rates for drug-related offenses. Limitations in data collection hinder accurate demographic information, while social factors like stigma, a lack of culturally competent providers, and limited access to affordable healthcare contribute to lower treatment rates. Currently, only 25% of Black adults utilize mental health services, and 13% seek help for substance use.

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. A long, straight row of green trees runs diagonally from the top left towards the bottom center. To the right of the trees is a dark, straight road or path. Further to the right is a vast, flat green field. The lighting suggests a bright day, with shadows cast by the trees.

BAD CHOICE LEADS TO BIG CHANGE

The criminal history record for Jamor Antawan James includes the following information:

1. Personal Details:

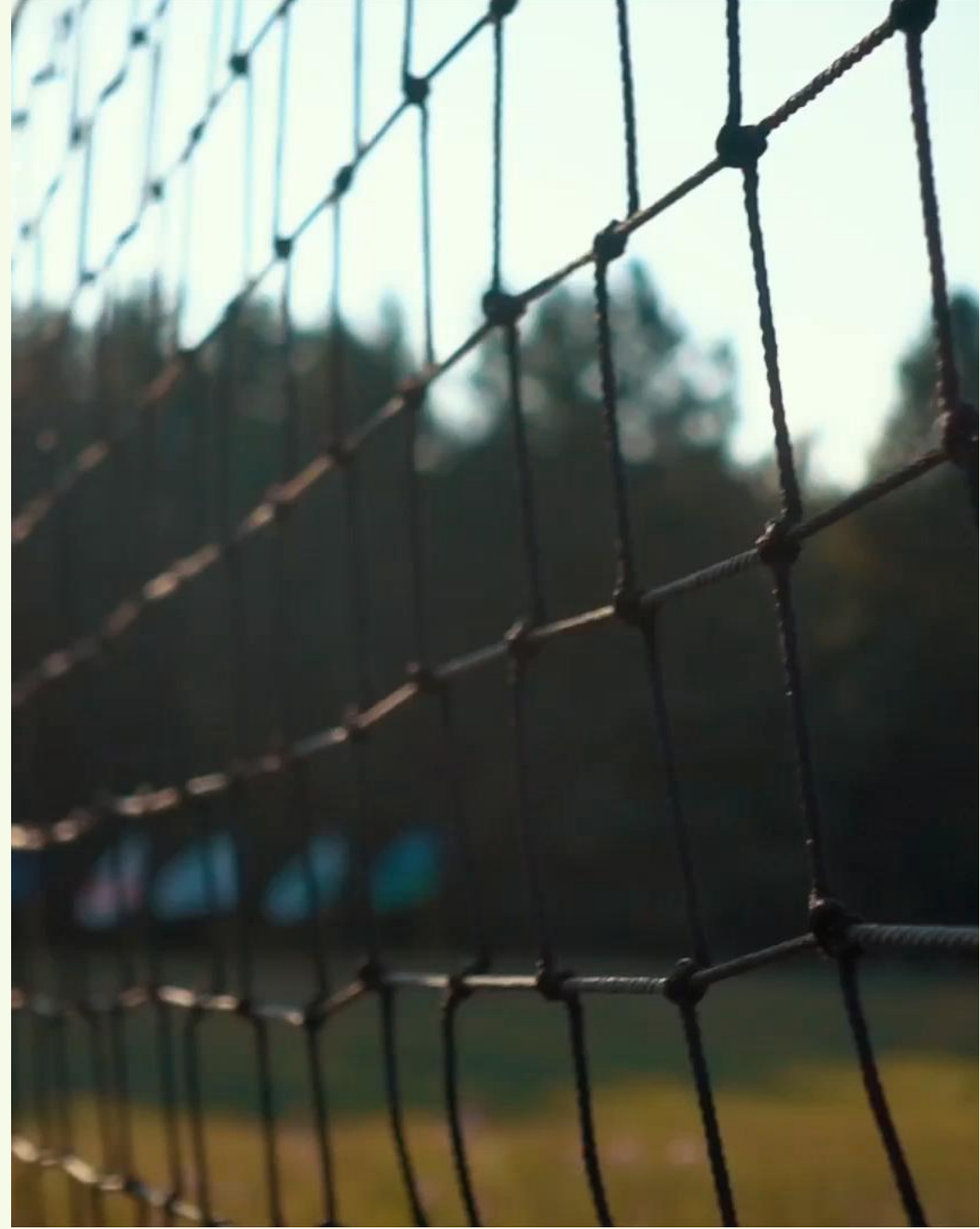
1. Name: Jamor Antawan James
2. Date of Birth: October 24, 1981,
3. Gender: Male
4. Race: Black
5. Height: 6'2"
6. Weight: 186 lbs.
7. Hair Color: Black
8. Eye Color: Brown
9. Place of Birth: Michigan

2. Criminal Incident:

1. Incident Date: February 2, 2000,
2. Arrest Date: February 2, 2000,
3. Charge: Armed Robbery (MCL 750.529)
4. Judicial Segment: Pleaded guilty on May 13, 2000, to 3 to 10 years in the state penitentiary.

IMPRISONMENT AND THE BEGINNING OF TRANSFORMATION

- I was sentenced to 3 to 10 years in the state penitentiary and served 5 years and 11 months.
- I obtained my GED and completed multiple therapy groups aimed to help me understand my anger and assaultive nature. Through these groups I addressed passed trauma and learned coping skills
- The most important lesson being that hurt people hurt people.



Reintegration and Initial Challenges

- In 2005, I was released on parole after completing a new initiative called the Michigan Reentry Program.
- After my release, I completed a semester at KVCC and secured employment. I successfully completed my parole on December 20, 2007.
- I ran into difficulty in 2008 after pursuing other job opportunities and being turned away due to my felony conviction.
- Newly married, lost, and depressed, I incarcerated myself in my own home out of fear of reoffending.
- This led to a year-long bout with depression, paranoia, thoughts of committing criminal acts to provide for my family, and drug use.
- After a year of what can be described as mental torture, I found the strength to seek help through my love for my sons. I connected with a psychiatrist, and then a counselor, despite my reservations with the mental health and SUD systems.

PERSONA'S/QUIET POTENTIAL IN THE RECOVERY PROCESS

- Growing up, one of the main coping skills I developed was quiet observance.
- This allowed me to assess people and situations to protect myself and reduce the chances of harm.
- This also left room for me to be misunderstood and prejudged. Along with this protective factor also came a standoffishness that kept people at bay.
- I remember meeting with a psychiatrist for the first time. I had a lot of anger, self-doubt, and no trust for the mental health
- This protective factor has remained with me throughout my recovery and professional career.
- I have learned to manage it, and I now open my mouth and share myself more.
- My work as a peer and presenter has helped me to develop my confidence, share myself, and grow in my personal recovery.

PERSONA'S/QUIET POTENTIAL IN THE RECOVERY PROCESS CONTINUED

- **This protective factor has remained with me throughout my recovery and professional career.**
- **I have learned to manage it, and I now open my mouth and share myself more.**
- **My work as a peer and presenter has helped me to develop my confidence, share myself, and grow in my personal recovery.**
- **It also has helped to show me, and others that there is more to me than meets the eye. My lived experience with quiet potential has helped me to aid others like myself in finding their voice and coming out of their shells while still using the protective factor of observance.**
- **Quietness and standoffishness does not mean a lack of potential for recovery, change, healing and the need for connection. In fact, it is a sign of a need to be seen, understood, and supported to grow outside of ones developed norms.**



Recovery as a Path to Healing and Major Changes

- I spent the next year in counseling before finding my way to recovery through mental health and recovery groups at an organization called InterAct of Michigan.**
- This led to my discovery of the Recovery Institute of Southwest Michigan a year later. I took a class at KVCC called the Principles of Peer Support, and a peer was born. I started my Peer career as a member of a group called the PoWeR Group. I became the coordinator, and I obtained my state certification as a Peer support specialist and took my story of recovery throughout Southwest Michigan.**
- My career evolved, and I moved on to work for ISK (KCMHSAS) as a peer with the Mental Health Recovery Court. I spoke at national conferences, and the state capital, while beginning my college journey to obtain an Associates of Arts degree through KVCC.**



Recovery as a Path to Healing and Major Changes Continued

- **I moved on from MHRC to work for InterAct of Michigan as a Peer on one of their ACT teams. Which was short lived, before returning to the Recovery institute and taking back my mantel as the PoWeR group coordinator.**
- **I advanced quickly to the role of team lead, leading a team of peers in working with the courts, Kalamazoo Library, KPH, coordinating community events and developing a program with WMU's College of Health and Human Services called IPEER (Interprofessional Peer Education and Evidence for Recovery).**
- **I graduated from KVCC in 2017. I moved on to work as a Peer on a housing team at OnPoint (ACCMHS) while working on obtaining my BSW. During my time at ISK, I held multiple positions. I graduated with my BSW in 2021 and later as an ACT clinician upon completing my Masters of Social Work in 2023.**

In conclusion, today I continue to strive towards my goals. Working as a clinical therapist. I provide services using my personal experience and clinical knowledge in the hope that I can make a difference.

**Mr. Jamor James Sr, LLMSW,
CPSS, CPRC**

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THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

We are only
limited by our
lack of vision for
the future we
deserve!



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