

INFORM•ENCOURAGE•EMPOWER

MAY/JUNE/JULY 2021

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VOICES OF SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVORS

IN THIS ISSUE Counselor's Corner

Healthy Living
3 Benefits of Eating
Seasonally and
Locally

SPOTLIGHT



Mental Health
Awareness

Tawnya Davidson

FINDING MY VOICE



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"DA HOOD TALKS PODCAST"**

**SHAVANNA SPRATT IS A
MOTHER, COMMUNITY ADVOCATE
AND SURVIVOR OF SEXUAL ABUSE**



centered around community empowerment and providing a platform for the voiceless with a mission to engage, educate and be a resource to the community!



Survivors' Story



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Letter from... **The Editor**

Dee Marie

**Chief Editor
President/CEO**

INVEST IN YOU!

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” -Mark 1:35

How often do you get up go to a place where you can be alone and focus on the things you need to do for you? Jesus knew He needed alone time with His Father. Although he had twelve men with Him at all times, and they were at His beck and call, He had to take just a few minutes by Himself for prayer.

These past few months for me have been very liberating. In May, I did something that I never thought I would do. I took a SOLO trip to Clearwater, FL. Yes I went Florida alone! It was the most freeing trip I’ve ever taken. If you have not done so, and you’re in healthy place mentally, I truly suggest you think about doing it. It allowed me to connect with God, and He just loved on me. I connected with His beautiful creation, and had such a peaceful and tranquil experience. The sounds of the ocean, the touch of the waves on my legs, the amazing breeze, and the warmth of the sun was an atmosphere of serenity. It’s a time I will never forget.

Ask yourself, what have you done this year to invest in you? As we continue to heal and head toward wholeness, taking time for you is necessary. Just like on a plane, they tell you to put the oxygen mask on yourself first, because you can’t help anyone else if you’re not breathing yourself. Make time to invest in you and breathe!

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Finding My Voice



Survivor, Tawnya Davidson, with brother DeMarco Davidson. One of her biggest supporters.

SURVIVOR'S STORY

They say everything you need to know you learn in kindergarten. Unfortunately, I learned them the summer before I started kindergarten. Two of my male cousins would hang out at my house all the time and babysit me sometimes. One of them would always tease me and make fun of me for everything I did. Then sometimes he would wait until no one else was around and pull my pants down and mess with me. I always knew it was wrong and it would make me so angry that no matter how much I tried to talk my way out of it or fight him off, I couldn't do anything about it. I always felt so helpless. At some point I told my mom and she told me not to say anything to my dad because he would kill him. Like most children, I didn't want my dad to go to jail so I didn't say anything. At some point, I forgot altogether. There were so many other things going on in the home including my dad's untreated PTSD from Vietnam, his selling and

using drugs and domestic violence. So, it really didn't seem important, especially since my cousin stopped coming around.

Those memories stayed locked away until my senior year in college when I was doing a personal enrichment class. I started having dreams, and pieces of memories started coming back slowly until I had a full picture. I don't remember everything that happened, but I remember enough. I asked my mom if she remembered me telling her. She didn't, but she felt horrible and apologized. Looking back, considering the environment, we were both living in survival mode and she did what she thought was best at the time.

So, what exactly did I learn, you ask? I learned a lot of things, some good, most, not so good. I learned that I would be teased for doing anything that might draw attention to me so I shouldn't do or say anything that might

draw attention to myself, which is something I still struggle with to this day. I know it's silly, but as much as I love music, to this day I will not dance in front of people. I also learned that my feelings really didn't matter and I could not count on anyone, including family. If something was wrong or bothering me, I just kept it to myself. After all, other people had problems too so they didn't really have time for mine. I didn't feel like I had a voice. On the surface, people said they cared, but their actions didn't. I developed a lot of anger and resentment. I became a survivor. My anger fueled me to keep me going and to keep the negative people and situations away from me. I developed a zero-tolerance policy for any type of foolishness. I was always called mean and evil, which only made me angrier because they had no clue what I was dealing with on a daily basis.

While I didn't speak up for myself, if someone was being mistreated, I would say something about it. Whether it be friends, family or social injustice. I have always been an advocate for anyone being mistreated, especially children. It's no surprise I ended up going to school and earned my degree in Child Development with a minor in Family Studies. I wanted to work in a domestic violence shelter to be a support for the children. I never wanted any child to feel like I felt, alone and that nobody cared.

I worked for the state doing in home interventions and quickly learned that I had to learn how to learn how to do the things I was asking my clients to do. How could I tell them to use their words and effectively communicate with "I statements" when I couldn't even do it myself? Although I didn't know it at the time, but that was the beginning of my healing journey. I

went on to get my Master's in Social Work and ironically, my first job out of graduate school was at the YWCA Women's Sexual Assault Center where I had been an intern doing community education and researching grants. That was the first time I told anyone outside of my immediate family that I had been abused and I was afraid they would rescind the job offer. Instead, they just told me to go to therapy so I wouldn't project my feelings onto my clients.

My therapist once asked me, "Why does that make you angry?" That was the most profound thing I've ever heard! It was the key that unlocked my understanding because I learned that anger is a secondary emotion. What comes out as anger is usually a way to cover up vulnerable feelings like disappointment, hurt, frustration or disrespect. Once I figured that out, I was able to unlearn all of the things from childhood and learn about the real emotions and the

underlying reasons for them. I even started taking an anti-depressant which made a huge difference. When I started working at the YWCA in 2002, they only had one adolescent coming in for counseling. Although I have moved on, one of my greatest career accomplishments has been to expand the program by bringing more adolescents to the program and helping to develop the curriculum for the adolescent sexual abuse survivor's group. I was able to help them recognize their behaviors and emotions, while giving them tools to make positive changes. At the same time, I continued to learn about myself and realized that I had a voice and what I had to say mattered.

Fast forward to 2020 and I was sitting at home like everyone else during the pandemic trying to figure out how to keep myself from going stir crazy. I'd talked about starting a podcast with my friends for years.

When the opportunity presented itself to start one, they weren't able to make the time commitment so my brother, who's my #1 fan, encouraged me to do it by myself. I gave a lot of push back because my first thoughts were, "Who wants to hear what I have to say?" "What do I have to talk about?" I felt like I needed someone else to talk to because I'm not interesting by myself. Then my rational self took over and let me know that I am not the only one who has been through multiple traumas and struggling to find peace and happiness. "To the world you may be one person, but to one person you may be the world"

I don't know who originally said it, but that's the motto I live by. A huge part of my healing journey continues to be helping others heal. Out of that, The T-Side podcast was born. I suppose sitting alone with my thoughts all of these years has paid off. Lol I am able to share my stories from my unique perspective as a trauma survivor as well as a licensed clinical social worker. If what I say can

help normalize and validate one person's feelings then I'm happy.

I still struggle with anxiety and a bit of imposter syndrome, but I'm aware of it and constantly working on it. I find it difficult to articulate how I'm feeling. In fact, writing this article is one of the things I'm doing to step outside of my comfort zone. I feel like I'm just getting started. From a very young age I've always wanted to write a book so stay tuned. My story is still being written. I have always been a survivor, but

now I am working on thriving!

Tawnya graduated with her BS in Child Development from Southeast Missouri State University in 1996 and earned her Masters of Social Work from University of Missouri-St. Louis in 2002. She is now a Licensed Clinical Social Worker.

As a social worker, she has worked in the St. Louis area for over 20 years in a variety of settings including, foster care, schools, hospitals, and her current role as a Behavioral Health Case Manager. In 2019 she completed training to become a birth and postpartum doula. She worked for five years at the YWCA Women's Resource Center as an individual and group therapist for sexual assault survivors. Helped develop and implement the curriculum for adolescent sexual abuse survivors. She also provided community education and facilitated groups at the Medium Security Institution in St. Louis City.

In October 2020 she started her own podcast, The T-Side, to talk about all of her experiences and life lessons in hopes to educate others and to help those who might feel like they're the only ones going through things, not feel so alone and normalize mental health. The podcast can be heard on all major streaming platforms.



Hosted by Tawnya D

The T-Side Podcast

Let's Talk:

- Total Health
- Life Lessons
- Music

Her mind is a 24 hour soundtrack so every lesson has a theme song

Listen on:



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www.thetsidepodcast.com

THE COUNSELOR'S CORNER



Andrea Jackson, CIT , contributor

Supervised by: Jean Moretto, PhD, LPC

Andrea completed her Master of Arts degree in Professional Counseling May 2017 from Lindenwood University. Andrea believes that a primary means of change lies in developing a strong therapeutic and collaborative relationship. She utilizes a strengths based approach in working with clients to develop a unique fit to their personal needs and draws from several modalities including, but not limited to, cognitive behavioral therapy and solution based work.

Andrea has worked with clients of all ages and has dealt extensively with depression, anxiety, sexual abuse and behavioral issues. When requested by the client, Andrea finds that seeking God authentically in session results in healing and can lead to life forming changes.

Andrea is a member and also on the board at Moving4ward Ministries, a 501c3 organization created to provide the community of St. Louis and St. Charles counties of Missouri, a place where adult survivors of sexual abuse ages 18 and older, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, can feel safe sharing experiences that has caused lasting effects on professional resources so healing can begin. Andrea is Youth Mental Health First Aid Certified. Andrea is also a member of the International Honor Society of Counseling Professionals, Chi Sigma Iota.



GRIEF



There is no right or wrong way to grieve, but there are healthy ways to deal with the grieving process.

Grief is a natural response to loss. It's the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. Often, the pain of loss can feel overwhelming. You may experience all kinds of difficult and unexpected emotions, from shock or anger to disbelief, guilt, and profound sadness. The pain of grief can also disrupt your physical health, making it difficult to sleep, eat, or even think straight. These are normal reactions to loss—and the more significant the loss, the more intense your grief will be.

Coping with the loss of someone or something you love is one of life's biggest challenges. You may associate grieving with the death of a loved one—which is often the cause of the most intense type of grief—but any loss can cause grief, including but not limited to:

1. Divorce or a relationship breakup
2. Loss of a job
3. Loss of financial stability
4. Retirement
5. Death of a pet
6. A loved ones serious illness
7. A miscarriage
8. Loss of a friendship
9. Selling the family home

Even subtle losses in life can trigger a sense of grief. For example, you might grieve after moving away from home, graduating from college, or changing jobs. Whatever your loss, it's personal to you, so don't feel ashamed about how you feel, or believe that it's somehow only appropriate to grieve for certain things. If the person, animal, relationship, or situation was significant to you, it's normal to grieve the loss you're experiencing. Whatever the cause of your grief, though, there are healthy ways to cope with the pain that, in time, can ease your sadness and help you come to terms with your loss, find new meaning, and eventually move on with your life.

Grieving is a highly individual experience; there's no right or wrong way to grieve. How you grieve depends on many factors, including your personality and coping style, your life experience, your faith, and how significant the loss was to you. Inevitably, the grieving process takes time. Healing happens gradually; it can't be forced or hurried—and there is no "normal" timetable for grieving. Some people start to feel better in weeks or months. For others, the grieving process is measured in years. Whatever your grief experience, it's important to be patient with yourself and allow the process to naturally unfold.

There is no right or wrong time to get counseling for grief. Some people start to feel like life is "back to normal" (or at least a "new normal") relatively quickly. Other people take a long time to grieve. It's okay to grieve in your own time. However, if you begin to feel like you will never be able to move on, then you might want to seek grief counseling.

TRUST THE PROCESS!

TIPS, SAFETY, FACTS

Sexual abuse

- *Definition - Sexual abuse is the involvement of people in sexual activities which they do not understand, have not given consent to or which violate the sexual taboos of the individual, family customs or usual practices.*
- *It can include the involvement of people in sexual activities where one party is in a position of trust, power or authority.*
- *Including rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the vulnerable adult has not consented, could not consent or was pressured into consenting.*

Information about Child Sexual Abuse

Facts:

- ❖ Sexual abuse is very common.
- ❖ When a child is sexually abused, it's usually by someone they know and trust.
- ❖ It's very common for the abuser to threaten to harm the child if the child tells about the abuse.
- ❖ Children disclose abuse in small pieces. Your child may tell you more details about the abuse over days, weeks and months.
- ❖ Children and teenagers who have been abused are more likely to have depression or use drugs and alcohol.
- ❖ Getting counseling for yourself and for your child is very important for your child's health now and in the future.

What to do if your child tells you more about the abuse:

- ❖ Do not punish them! Your child isn't at fault.
- ❖ Listen to what he or she tells you.
- ❖ Let your child tell you; DO NOT repeatedly ask them about the abuse.
- ❖ Be supportive but don't put words in his or her mouth.
- ❖ Write down what he or she tells you and tell a Department of Children and Families worker and the police department.
- ❖ Reassure your child, and thank them for telling you.

Some children who have been abused have these reactions:

- ❖ Sadness or depression
- ❖ Anger
- ❖ Anxiety or nervousness
- ❖ Difficulty concentrating at school and a drop in grades
- ❖ Nightmares
- ❖ "Taking back" what he or she said about the abuse so things are "normal" again
- ❖ Sexualized behaviors like frequent masturbation, kissing or touching other children, looking at pornography
- ❖ Acting "baby-like" with bedwetting, thumb-sucking, talking like baby

Some books that may be helpful:

- ❖ We Are Not Alone: A Guidebook For Helping Professionals and Parents Supporting Adolescent Victims Of Sexual Abuse - by Jade Christine Angelica, MD
- ❖ Children Changed by Trauma: A Healing Guide - by Debra Whiting Alexander
- ❖ When Your Child Has Been Molested: A Parent's Guide to Healing and Recovery: Putting the Pieces Back Together - by Kathryn Hagans and Joyce Case



Healthy Living



Delisa Richardson is an Integrative Wellness and Life Coach, Certified Personal Trainer, and host of The Wellness Walk with Delisa Richardson podcast. Delisa focuses on educating, engaging, and helping women find balance in their Mental, Emotional, Physical and Spiritual health. She works to empower those who are living with chronic illness find the best fitness & movement methods for them so that they can not only survive but thrive in the face of illness.

Delisa has over 25 years in the Wellness industry. Delisa has received certifications from the Integrative Wellness Academy, The American Council on Exercise, Leslie Sansone Walk from Home, The Personal Training Certification Institute, Zumba Inc, and the American Heart Association.

As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and domestic violence, she is a fierce advocate working to end the stigma of speaking out and empowering those in toxic and dangerous relationships to seek out help. Delisa became an advocate for Inflammatory Bowel Disease awareness after being diagnosed with Ulcerative Colitis in 2004.

She is a wife, mother to 3 boys and Gigi to a grandson and granddaughter.

Contact Delisa by email at delisa@DelisaRichardson.com or via Instagram at Delisa Richardson Wellness.

Delisa Richardson

Produce Is Up and Poppin': 3 Benefits of Eating Seasonally & Locally

June is Bustin' Out All Over (to quote Rogers & Hammerstein's musical Carousel) with a bevy of fresh produce that you need to take advantage of. Eating locally and seasonally is one of the most important things you can do for your health and your community. This area is blessed with many exceptional farmers' markets; from Theis Farm, Soulard, Kirkwood, and Tower Grove Park to the Ferguson Market, the Vine Street Market in O'Fallon IL and Eckert's Farms in Belleville and Millstadt IL, just to name a few. Paying a visit to one of these popular outdoor markets will be a blessing to your body and soul. Walking in the open air, feeling the breeze and the warmth from the sun on your body while taking in the vibrant colors of flowers and produce fresh from the farm is sure to lift your spirits and delight your tastebuds.

What does it mean to eat seasonally? Eating seasonally means you purchase and consume produce that has recently been harvested. For example, at the time of this article strawberries are in season. Some farms in the area invite visitors to come out and pick your own berries for purchase. You can most definitely tell the difference between a strawberry from the grocery store and one you just picked or purchased from the farmers' market.

There are 3 important benefits to this way of eating:

1. It Just Tastes Better

Food eaten in its season is super flavorful, fresher, and more nutritious due to the shortened time from harvest to table. Studies have shown fruits and

vegetables that ripen naturally have more nutrition than fruits on a store shelf. This is primarily because fruits sent to grocery stores are harvested early in a pre-ripened condition to account for shipping (some items come in from extreme distances). Once in the stores some produce may still need to ripen in your home before eating. We can ditch the brown paper bag "ripening" trick when we eat in season.

2. You Are Supporting Your Community

Buying locally and eating seasonally helps support local farmers. The money that you spend stays in the community and helps to stimulate the local economy.

3. You Know Where and How the Food Was Grown

One of the biggest benefits to visiting a local market is the opportunity to speak directly to the farmers or vendors. You can ask about the farming practices; how the produce is grown, what if any pesticides are used, how is it harvested and stored, etc. This gives you power as a consumer. Now that you know just a few of the benefits of eating seasonally and locally, plan a trip to one of the outdoor markets or farms in the area. Call or check websites to see the latest COVID-19 requirements before heading out. Below is a list of popular produce that is fresh this month:

VEGETABLES IN SEASON JUNE

Arugula,
Asparagus
Beets
Broccoli

Cabbage
Carrots
Cauliflower
Celery
Collard greens
Cucumbers
Eggplant
Garlic
Green beans
Kale
Lettuce
Mushrooms
Mustard greens
Okra
Onions
Peas
New potatoes
Radishes
Scallions
Shallots
Spinach
Spring onions
Tomatillos
Tomatoes
Turnips
Zucchini

FRUITS IN SEASON JUNE

Apples
Apricots
Blackberries
Blueberries
Cherries
Melons
Nectarine
Peaches
Plums
Raspberries
Rhubarb
Strawberries
Watermelon

Delisa Richardson



Bible Verses for *Mental Health*

Matthew 11:28-30

Philippians 4:13

Romans 12:2

1 Peter 5:7

Philippians 4:6-7

2 Timothy 1:7

Romans 15:13

1 John 4:8

Romans 8:28

2 Timothy 3:16-17

1 Peter 5:10

Philippians 1:6

Psalms 34:17

Hebrews 12:1

Philippians 4:8

Ephesians 5:18

Romans 8:18

1 Peter 3:14

Isaiah 35:4

Isaiah 40:31

Isaiah 41:10

Joshua 1:9

Psalms 34:4

Psalms 94:19

Romans 8:38-39

Proverbs 3:5-6

Jeremiah 17:7-8

John 14:27

2 Thessalonians 3:16

Proverbs 12:25

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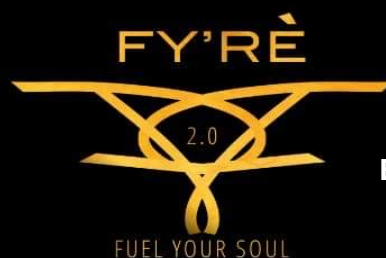
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SPOTLIGHT



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1 in 5 Americans
HAS A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION

12.8 MILLION ADULTS LIVE WITH A SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS

48.1 MILLION ADULTS
LIVE WITH
ANXIETY DISORDERS

Anxiety disorders are conditions characterized by feelings of persistent, excessive fear or worry in situations that are not threatening.

17.1 MILLION ADULTS
LIVE WITH
MAJOR DEPRESSION

Depression is a condition that is characterized by changes in mood, sleep, appetite, concentration and energy.

10 MILLION ADULTS
LIVE WITH
ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a condition that is characterized by inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity.

9.1 MILLION ADULTS
LIVE WITH
POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a condition that is characterized by changes in sleep, thinking, and mood, and can include symptoms such as intrusive memories, hypervigilance and outbursts of anger.

7.1 MILLION ADULTS
LIVE WITH
BIPOLAR DISORDER

Bipolar disorder is a condition that is characterized by dramatic shifts in mood and energy, such as periods of mania and depression, and can also include symptoms of psychosis, such as delusions.

3.5 MILLION ADULTS
LIVE WITH
BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a condition characterized by difficulty regulating emotions and instability in behavior, self-image and functioning, impulsive actions and unstable relationships.

1.6 MILLION ADULTS
LIVE WITH
SCHIZOPHRENIA

Schizophrenia is a condition characterized by an interruption of a person's thought processes, perceptions and emotional responses. Symptoms may include psychosis, delusions, hallucinations, reduced emotional expressiveness and disorganized thinking.

Discover more at
nami.org/policy.

inform
encourage
empower

VOSAS MAGAZINE

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