

Interviewee: Charisse Murphy
Interviewers: Jessica Pompei and Thu Nguyen
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Abstract

Charisse Lynn Murphy was born in Dorchester, Massachusetts, in 1980. She became a director at YOU, Inc. in Worcester in 2008. When Charisse was small, she grew up as if she were an only child. Her parents separated, and her siblings were much older than she. Those siblings already lived on their own. She was said to have an old soul as she was raised by her mother, who is 40 years older than she. At present, she has her own family with four children, and is working as the director of development at YOU, Inc. In this interview, Charisse shares stories about how her character was shaped, and how she is connected to YOU, Inc., in a professional and personal way. Charisse is a sociable person due in part to her experience of studying and living in two totally different worlds as a child. She talks about her opportunity to work at YOU, Inc., which has provided a great working culture filled with amazing people. During the interview, she also shares about the challenges she faced during high school and college, as well as the challenges she faces in her career and married life.

Quote: Support networks and mentoring are my entire existence. There is no way I could do half the stuff that I do without a support network...And now I...have turned the page and am being a mentor to other young women.

JP: So, first question. [laugh]

CM: Yes.

JP: What is your full name, including both your maiden name, if that is applicable, and married name, if that is also applicable?

CM: My full name is Charisse Lynn Murphy. That is my married name. My maiden name is Beaufort.

JP: What year were you born then?

CM: 1980. That is long time ago? You guys like that. [everybody laughs]

JP: So, obviously, you have married. So, what is the name of your spouse?

CM: His name is Sean --(??) Murphy.

JP: And you mentioned before the interview that you have children. How many do you have again?

CM: We have four.

JP: Okay.

CM: Together.

JP: Okay.

CM: Yeah.

JP: How old are they?

CM: So, my husband had a son when he was in high school, so we have a 27-year-old.

JP: Oh, okay.

CM: Yes. And then we have a 14-year-old, an eight-year-old, and a six-year-old.

JP: Wow.

CM: So, the last three are girls. And then, obviously, [the other] is our son.

JP: And what cultures/ethnicities do you identify with?

CM: I identify with African- American.

JP: And, with your other family not currently...How many siblings do you have, like growing up?

CM: So, I have seven sisters and three brothers. [everyone laughs] Yup. So, I am the only one between my mother and I, oh my mother and I, my mother and father. But then, on either side, there are seven and three.

JP: Wow.

CM: So, I grew up in the house of four, and then I have, I kind of have a step house (___??) my father was, and then I have (___??).

JP: Are you like in the middle of the birth order?

CM: No, I'm the baby. [CM and JP laugh]

JP: What was it like living in the house with that many...

CM: Yeah.

JP: people?

CM: So, I think it was interesting for me because my mother had me when she was 40. And so, my oldest sister and I are 16 years apart between us. And so, growing up in the house like that I kind of like, at that point, I kind of representing an only child as weird as that sounds. Because there is so much age difference between us that my sister at that point... By the time I'm, you know, old enough to understand (___??) dynamic in the house, she had a child, too, in high school. And she had moved out. And then my brother had moved out and got in college. Nope, nope, he had a child, too. Great! So, he got a child, too. And my sister had a child. And so, it was me and brother in the house, and he was a lot older than myself, too, 13 years, and so he was doing his own thing. So, I kind of growing with my mother and I, really... The only time we ever saw everyone was together were like, you know, come over for dinner, (___??), or holidays. For the most part, it is crazier now than I think it was back then growing up.

JP: So, what were your parents like growing up or?

CM: So, I guess my mom was 40 when she had me, which is... Now that I'm having children, like if I had a child at 40, I would be like, "Oh my goodness." Because at that point in your life, you are kind of like oh settled in, I kind of going to get back to do my own thing. So, I feel like I grew up like an... People used to always say that I have an old soul because my mother was so much older. Like so, I was always sounded funny, like I was a kid wearing slippers under my dresses still, like stockings and tights all the time, and I had to eat dinner in a certain way. I think I was raised a little bit different. Part of that was my mother was raised, but I think with her age, maybe, I listened to all jazz, like older music. So, I think I just grew up a little bit different to some of my, some of my friends. But my mom and dad were separated. My dad was still living with us up to a certain point. He was still in and out all the time, and would stay over. But my mom ---I lived with my mom. My dad didn't, so I had a closer relationship with her than my father. And my father's relationship is kind of involved, and it was okay. And then I fell off a little bit, and then, when I graduated college, with my undergrad, he kind of came back around and so to develop our relationship.

JP: So, now we are moving towards questions related to health.

CM: Yeah!

JP: So, how has health issue impacted your life or those in your family?

CM: I mean, I feel like we are pretty fortunate in my family. In my immediate family, we...My mother is 70, how old am I? She will be 79 this year. Oh my gosh. And like she has pink hair for real. Like it is pink, it has been pink for 35 years; [JP laughs] no health problem. She is pretty--- like she is really, really active. Like, she had her first surgery on her back, and she was like, “ I cannot believe I’m this old.” So, she’s – genetically, I feel like we’re pretty fortunate and blessed that we don’t have any health issue and concerns. So, it hasn’t really impacted in my life at all [knocks on the wooden table].

JP: No, that’s good.

CM: Yeah.

JP: And, I guess with that in (__??), since you and your family have lived a relatively healthy life, what have your experiences been in accessing health care?

CM: Yeah.

JP: And affordable health care?

CM: Right. So, growing up like --- my mom is a single mom, she had four of us in the house. She worked two jobs, and we lived in Dorchester, which is a city in the Boston area.

JP: Yeah.

CM: And, when I...In our street it was like not a great street, wasn’t a great neighborhood at all. We lived in a three-family, kind of apartment host kind of thing. But I, as growing up, I remembered that I never ever felt like my health was in jeopardy. So, my mother always seemed to make a way. I didn’t even know --- I mean as a kid you don’t really understand that, but insurance, or what it’s even looked like or access to health care, I got regular dental, physical visits all the time, anything I needed. So, I didn’t feel like have a difficult time accessing health care for me. I don’t know if it was the same for my mother, but definitely, she makes sure for us that wasn’t a problem. [JP laugh]

JP: Yeah. You mentioned you lived in Dorchester.

CM: Yeah.

JP: And a little bit about the neighborhood. Do you want to talk a little bit more about what was it like growing up there?

CM: Yeah. So, I was born in Boston, grew up on, in the same house, on Quarton Road in Dorchester until I went to college. But my mother enrolled me in a program called the METCO [Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity] program. It’s M-E-T-C-O. And it (__??)for a bunch of thing (____??) education on something. And so, when she found out she was

pregnant with me, she enrolled me in this program. And this program took in city kids from Dorchester, Roxbury areas, suburban areas. And – oh no, city areas. And then bused us out to suburban areas to get education. And so, from first grade, from first to twelfth grade, I went to school in Needham, which is a suburban of Boston, about 35 minutes out. So, for me, I grew up in Dorchester, knowing that it was my home, but I had, I thought like I had two different homes, and they are very different. So, one is like really, really, really urban, on the news every other day. [CM and JP laugh] And we have Needham, this really affluent town. So, growing up for me, I had - I had to wear, I think, two different kind of hats.

JP: Yeah.

CM: And so, it took me (_??) to wake me up at whenever the bus was at 6:30, and my day didn't end until 4:30 or so getting home. And as I got older, I got extra-curricular stuff, so it was even later. So, but I but I think for me, that really shapes who I am. I talk about it all the time because it allowed me to see two different areas, and how (__??) people live, and exciting culture, and meet new people that I probably wouldn't have met in my area where I lived physically. And my mother used to do something when I was younger that it was funny. I saw myself doing with my kids now, kind of. She would take me in a car and drive me around to all like a (__??) town, a (?) of just to see houses and things that did not look like my area. She would secretly – I don't even know, I don't even know how she would call it --- like, "Let's go for a ride," and, I don't know, get ice cream, get a car, and drive around. And I would be like, "Oh my gosh!" (__??) looking at houses and people would be walking their dogs, and riding their bikes, and I would be like, "People do that, like, outside?" So, again, she made it not a big deal that we lived in Dorchester. She knew that it wasn't the safest place. I wasn't allowed to really go out. I didn't have --- like I have a 14-year-old now that goes to the movies, to the malls, and all the stuffs. That wasn't my life, and mainly because I was occupied a lot with education. And then, once I got home, you know, that it wasn't the safest for me to really go out. Yeah.

JP: What was going to high school in like a different area, sort of like, and did you have trouble fitting in at first, like just living in a different – sort of?

CM: Yes.

JP: Yeah.

CM: Yes. [JP laugh] It's funny. We have a 20 year--- whatever year it was --- 20 year reunion in November for Needham. And, it was like just eye-opening for me to go back. So, I went to Needham, like I said, when I left predominantly African-American Hispanic, and home setting, area, neighborhood, to Needham, which was majority, (__??).

JP: Yeah.

CM: And so, I joked around, I probably shouldn't, but I kind of felt like when we were on the bus and getting off of the bus, we felt like we were like Ruby Bridges. I felt like it was that

constant. You know who Ruby Bridges is? She was the first African- American little girl that entered, that went to a mixed school down south.

JP: Oh!

CM: And so, there was a picture of her walking with tiny little socks on. She was probably seven or so. At the time there was great painting that shows, that kind of depicts this whole story. And so, there were probably 30 of us, maybe less. I don't know how many of us can fit on a bus, that would get off this school at Needham. And initially, even at first grade, you're talking about high school, but first grade, you did have a sense of, "I'm very different." So, I looked different. I talked different. I dressed different than all of the other people, and I'm only 35 minutes away. And then when it --- middle school was tough because middle school stinks for everybody, right? I guess. [JP laugh] You don't know who you are, what you are doing. But then in high school, I started to find my own voice in the end. It was difficult to fit in a way, but I didn't let that at all. At that point, I was like, "This is what it is, this is what it is, and here is who I am." And started -- and so at high school, I started a diversity...It wasn't a diversity awareness like they call it now. But it might have been like a Black Student Union, gay straight up line, mixed types of thing. And so, that was my way to feel inclusive in this school, in a place that I didn't really feel included in was to bring some education. So, I started that group. But I remembered checking it a couple of years after I graduated. And I was like, "Oh, it's still going. That's so great!" So, I think high school was tough, but it's tough for everybody. And I don't think it matters where you are and what part of the country, what country you're in. It doesn't matter. I think it's tough to figure it out where you fit in. I think for me it was a little more challenging, but I didn't let that really take control overall.

JP: So, in terms of like later high school, junior senior year, how was it figuring out where you were going to college?

CM: Yeah.

JP: And figuring out sort of that second part of your life?

CM: I see kids now, man. I feel like, I feel so bad for you guys. Like I feel like the pressure --- maybe it's for me as an adult, a parent looking in, I'm like, "Oh my goodness." Like I see these kids stressing. And for me, I played basketball. So [I] was able to be recruited by basketball for undergrad in college, which helped. But I wasn't the best student. [CM laughs] I laughed. Just don't tell my daughters these. But I see my daughter is me. [JP laughs] And she's social, and she's doing this on student council. She's in this group and that group, and she dances. And she is beautiful. And then I'm like, "Do you really receive a C-, seriously?" And she was like, "Oh yeah. Sorry!" And she would bring it up like this, but she just doesn't apply herself to do this. And I was like that. So, junior senior, I never going to my guidance counselor. And you start the process of where you would really want to go. And I wouldn't really know. My mother --- none of my family members went to college, so I was the first one to go to college for graduate. So, my mother had no idea about the process or anything. So, I went to the guy at the counselor. I

was really, really dependent on, like I was really depending on what they were going to say, to tell me what I should do. And when I went there, they said, “Oh, I don’t know. You might want to look at like a junior college, or something. I just don’t know if you’re ready, or take a year.” And I remembered going back home and talked to my mother about it. And my mother said something like, “Yeah, if you don’t go to college, you’re going to have a good job.” I was like “Oh, oh no, like absolutely not.” So, I still played basketball in my college. Excuse me, my high school coach said, “You know, I think you are good enough to play in college.” And I was like, “Really?” So, they sent my VHS [video home system] tapes [JP laughs] ... Do you guys know what VHS tapes are? Do you know what VHS tape is?

TN: No.

CM: Oh! You guys should look at it. Google it. So, it’s a tape this big. It’s huge. [CM and JP laugh] It’s like this spot right here.

TN: Okay.

CM: So, you put it in a VCR [video cassette recorder]

TN: Oh.

CM: Which is like a DVD [digital versatile disc] player for big giant tape. Anyway, you press it. And so, it’s huge, big massive thing. So, at the time --- now you can just send a video on your phone or your email or whatever. They sent her big giant VHS tape. And so, she did. My coach came and saw me, recruited me, and said, “She is good enough. [CM laughs] We’ll take her.” And so, the first year--- and I was just... I had like a half loan or whatever, half scholarship. And then as the year progressed, I was able to have a full ride by the time I graduated. So, yeah.

JP: Sorry, which college did you end up going to?

CM: Yup. I went to the University of New Heaven in Connecticut, private school, really good school. And it’s division two to basketball, or division two athletic school.

JP: So, when you first got there, sort of, did you have kind of this plan of what you are going to major in, sort of what your occupation is going to be in the future, or just kind of like all those (___??)?

CM: No, I think I knew. I think I knew. So, I majored in psychology with a minor in criminal justice. The criminal justice came on a little later. University of New Heaven is a big criminal justice school, [it was] known for that. But I took--- I must have taken a class in high school, like a sociology or a psychology class, and it really interested me. And I was like, “I think that’s what I’m going to do.” So, [CM laughs] when I got to college, I wanted to be a criminal [CM laughs], I laugh, a criminal psychologist. Like, I wanted to go in and interview prisoners and figure out [CM and JP laugh] why they did --- I laugh because there is no way I’m going do this right now,

go in and like interview them why they did crimes they did, and really I find it out, figure it out, and help the detectives solve the problems. And then I saw a movie, it scared the crap out of me. I swear I would never do that. So, but yeah. I think I kind of knew. So, I've always taken --- and I did any kind of general studies at the beginning. I started taking general psychology courses and stuff right away.

JP: Yeah.

CM: Yeah.

JP: You mentioned how in high school you were sort of a social person. Did that change in college? (___??) Like, did you focus more on academics or was it more difficult in transitions (___??)?

CM: Yeah. I think it was difficult for a number of reasons. For me, now looking back, I was still extremely social. So, I remembered getting there and being with freshmen, and they were like --- I was like, "Hello!" And I was like --- I was just like that all the time, like that. And I didn't really [feel] --- like I kind of knew I was different, so I just... I just had a weird confidence in me that I was just like, "I don't know. I'm here. Let's just do this." Meet people. I met a lot of people. I was really excited to meet people that were different. I'm always excited to meet people that were different from me and learned from them and just talked with them. "Where are you from? New York? Oh, that's crazy!" So, I think the social piece helped for me. And I had a team. So, I had a basketball team that I played on. We got to know each other before school started, kind of. So, I had some support systems there. I always say I don't know if I would have been the same without that. I still keep in contact. We were still texting last night, with my teammates. So, we are just great friends now. And I think --- so that might have helped. I think being social is great and fine, but having a support system away from home, people that wanted you to succeed and to do good things... I still did not apply myself. At first, I got my transcript the other, a couple years ago when I got back to my master's. I was like, "There is no reason, Charisse, for you to get a C-. (___??)" I have the first semester, I remembered. It was always that first semester, and my coach team wrote to me and was like, "Yeah, this isn't going to fly." And then, I had all this amazingsness when I woke up. But first semester, I think I was away from home. I never partied. I never did any of that stuff in high school. And so, I think I was like, "Oh my, I need pizza!" So, I gained almost like 30 pounds. Like I just was like [CM laughs] --- I don't know (___??) what to do. [JP laughs]

JP: Outside of basketball, were you involved in any other clubs or organizations in college?

CM: So, (___??) just basketball, it was tough for me to do anything else. So, I tried initially joining a kind of similar club like kind of a... It might have even been a Black Student Union or something like that. And then, I just couldn't do it. So, basketball in college was like a year-round, 24-hour thing. It started August and ended in June. Pretty much, so.

JP: Did you face any other, besides academics, in freshman year, did you face any other general challenges then? Social interaction if you had like a job during college, which is difficult to balance, those sorts of things, anything like basketball (___??)?

CM: Right. Right. Yeah. And yeah it was. It was the full, that was the full-time job. And I don't think... I didn't work until, maybe, sophomore year. And even, that was still in the athletic room, like I did the lines for volleyball, which I don't know why they trusted someone to do that. Like, why would they trust me to call --- anyway. So, and you'll get like \$15 a game or something, and so, that was the only job I ever had in college. But it is, it was a hard, a tough thing to balance, like it really was. I think going to school and giving your academics okay, being socially like go on to that party and going out with your girlfriends or whatever... And then, being able to say, "I have to go to bed because I have to wake up at six a.m. for basketball." So, I... It taught me, it really trained me, so, I think adult life skills. I don't know if I would have been formulated by myself (___??) or not be connected to a team. So, yeah. And then, I think it was any challenges that anybody else faces. But again, I had people that would kick me and say, "We all kick each other. You gotta go, you gotta wake up at six a.m. or whatever."

JP: Yeah. So, upon your formal education and get your undergrad degree...

CM: Yeah.

JP: Did you have sort of a specific plan for your career after getting out of college?

CM: Yup. Plans don't work. Plans don't work. [Everyone laughs] So, you can plan all day. I knew, at that point, I knew I was out of the criminal justice prisoners' thing, like I was terrified. I don't even know what movie it was. But there was a movie I watched, terrified. And so, after that, I realized I would want to work with young people and kids. I (___??) an internship with adults with disabilities. And, again, realized, "That's kind of where I would want to be, but not really." And then I did internship with younger kids, and I was like, "Oh, this is it!" So, I believe I [got]internship at the same place I got my first job after I graduated. And it was a, it was called Boys Village in Connecticut. And it was a residential home with young kids that could not go home, like kind of like here with DCF [Department of Children and Families], residential home for kids who can't go home to their biological families because of , just being unsafe and having no place else to go. They would go to residential homes, stay there until hopefully a home opens up, or another secondary plan. And so, I worked there and felt, legit, felt in love with doing the work and have a kid in the house. I remember going to my supervisor when I was 22, or whatever when you graduate. And I was like, "So, how do you, like, how do you adopt?" They were like, "Get out of my office." I was like, "I think I'm ready. Like these kids, like I had a little, a tiny apartment and I think I fell in love with the kids, and I could still remember their names. I just completely fell in love. And it was a nice eye-opening experience for me. It's work at home like that.

JP: Did you ever return to college or any different college to get a master's degree?

CM: I recently got my master's degree. I finished in 2016 and then graduated in 2017 from Northeastern University and got my Master's in Human Services and Leadership. So, I've just kind of finished.

JP: Oh wow. Yeah.

CM: Yeah.

JP: What support networks and mentoring work for you after college?

CM: Yup. Yup. So, I gotta tell you, support networks and mentoring [are] my entire existence. Because there is no way that I could do half the stuff that I could do without a support network. But also, mentoring has already done it. And so, doing things like this is weird for me because I think I have always sort out of people. And then when... Recently, a couple of things have come to me, and I'm like, "That's so weird." I kind of like turn the page to being mentor to other young women and people. But I have... I can remember times that I would record a person's name, face, what they do, and I will be like, "Gotta keep in contact with that person. She or he knows what's going on, and I don't." So, I have to learn from them. So, I did that forever, and I still do. And then, support network. My mother was my biggest supporter. And even though, even growing up, she couldn't come to every game. She probably came to five. I don't even know. But she was always there for me. Not to teach me how to do anything, but because she was like baby (___??) when I was a baby. So, I can remember going to college with fabric softener. That was a funny story. And, you will find out later I did this all the time. I'm sorry. [JP laughs] With fabric softener, and I washed my clothes for months, with just fabric softener. Because I had no clue, I have to wash my own clothes because she never taught me. She just did it for me. But she would always bring me this. Like, she would bring me care packages. She came down every weekend freshman year, every weekend, and drop off things, and fabric softener. And it would always be fabric softener. And I remember going after college like, "Why didn't you bring me like detergent?" Why would my friends just make fun of me and tell me (___??) I'm washing my clothes with, you know, their thing? Anyways. So, support network, I think it was my mom. And as my husband is fantastic and --- which is really supporting each other. So, for me to go back to school with three young girls and get a master's degree and work full time... And at the time, I started my own program, too. In era, it was a ton. And if I didn't have him to shift McDonald's and (___??) for me or helped giving them shower or bath or pick them up, I couldn't have done my master's degree. So, I was relying heavily on that, and I think you can still be a strong person, woman or men, and still say, "I'm -- I have to rely on support networking. I can't do all of this by myself."

JP: When did you meet your husband?

CM: We met in 2008 through a mutual friend. And, I had been married [for a] very, very short period of time and had my daughter who is 14. And he had not been married, but had a son when he was in high school. And so, he was a single dad, I was a single mom. And someone thought we would be great together. When I met him, he was not at all, like you know how you have like

a type of like, “This is my person. This is the people I like.” No, it was completely different. And so, I remembered I’m a questioner. I would be praying, and someone said, “Do I get married (____?) life?” Nope. I’ve been there, done that, and I will never do that again. “And so, when you do, you should probably pray or think specifically about what you want.” And I was like “Okay. Whatever.” I remembered saying, “Just show me someone who I would never ever say “This is, this is, I like him” or whatever.” And so, we met in 2008, and he proposed eight months later. We got married in 2009. [CM and JP laugh] And I was like, “I hope I’m going do it. Like we are doing this?” So, take this year it will be ten years together.

JP: What was your first connection to Worcester, by finding a job or?

CM: Yeah. It was around the same time that I met my husband, actually. And so, I worked in Pittsburgh at a non-profit called Luk. And I was a (___?) for foster care. And I was ready to grow. There was no place to grow with the agency at the time. And, we were going out for a contract that was based in Worcester at YOU, Inc. The contract was for DYS [Division of Youth Services] program, and I remember helping the agency get the contract, to write it up, and to say what we were going to do. And so, I got a call from someone that said, “Hey, listen. They are looking for a director for this program and we think it would be great.” And I was like, “Yeah. Okay. I don’t know what I’m doing.” I have no idea. And you have to not only be a director, but manage the contract of the program. So, it was the one point over whatever million, maybe two million dollar contract, (___?) contract, manage that plus manage your(___?) steps. So, I went for the interview at YOU, Inc., in 2009. Yeah, man. So, it was August, 2009. We got married in December. So, it was August 2009, I went for the interview with Moe. At the time he was the CEO [Chief Executive Officer] and the founder of YOU, Inc. And, a woman brought them up (___?) from DYS (___?) director, had an interview. And I remembered what really filled my flame to go off for this is Well, I was at Luk. A person there said to me, “Hey, listen. I just want to let you know I’m going to go for this. I just want to be on the table with it. I’m going to put my application on, and they said, “Oh, I don’t think you are really qualified for that. But it’ll be nice experience for you to go to the interview.” And I was like, “Oh, yeah. That would be my job.” So, I got in my car, I prayed about it. I said, “It’s mine, it’s mine.” I said to myself over and over again. I visualized myself accepting the position over and over again. How I was going to say yes? How they would negotiate my salary? And then, when I went in, I interviewed. And then, again, had no director experience or contract experience. And they said, “We’d love to hire you.” [CM and JP laugh] I was like, “For real?” And they were like “Yup.” So, that was my first experience with Worcester, working in Worcester community was at YOU, Inc., back in to 2009 as the director of that program.

JP: Is that what you are still doing now?

CM: No. So, I did that for almost eight years. Left, got my master’s, and then started my own program called emPower Me for young girls. And then, just came back to YOU, Inc., in December as a director of development.

JP: What lead you to, I guess, rejoining YOU, Inc.?

CM: Yeah. So, this is going to sound really cheesy, but YOU, Inc., is one of the best places, human services, non-profit agencies I know of. And I'm not just saying that because I work there. It was --- so Moe was there, who was the founder, the CEO and founded it back in the '70s. One of the most, nicest, genuine people I have ever met in my life. So, I think he has developed a culture in YOU, Inc., that would fit like a family oriented, a fun culture. So, we would do really hard work. So, we --- tough work to work with young kids. So, YOU, Inc., has ton of services. It can be daunting, exhausting, like just a lot of negative things. And I think YOU, Inc., serves as a family to us and employees. And so, Moe did a great job of having that culture in it. I really felt it. And the only reason why I left was because Moe was the one who was pushing me back to my master's. He was one of my great mentors that I stayed in contact with after I left. So, when I went and got my master's, and then I met Chris (__??), who was the current CEO there, who was a phenomenal woman. And I was like really come home. I just felt like YOU, Inc., was home. And so, I don't feel like I have been gone. I felt like I took like a little vacation, and then came back. So, a lot of people do that in YOU, Inc. I just talked with someone who left and came back and like, "I'm back! I'm back!" So, it is just a really great agency. It does both good work, and I think [YOU Inc.] really treats its employees and it values employees who work for the company really well.

JP: How do you find that, like, events in your younger life, growing up, inspired you to work in like youth outreach?

CM: Oh yeah. Definitely. We just had our Gala on Saturday that we have to support our programs. And one of the programs ---I don't know if you guys are familiar with the Up or Down program. It's here at Clark. You guys should look into it. Now that you guys have already passed that in college. So, the Up or Down program is a program that helps for generations college students with kind of a path and paving that path for them to be able to be successful and go on to higher education. And so, on Saturday, we had our Gala that supports that and another program to pick fundraisers. And we had Steve Pemberton come. And Steve is --- he wrote a book called The Chance in the World, and he talked about a story about how he was in the foster care, which was really really tough and really really (__??) of home and how he made it through this Up and Down program to become a great CEO and be exact, writing a book and having a movie (__??) things. So, one of the things he did talk about was being a lighthouse in a young person's life. And it can be in any kind of ways. It can be like a look, or gesture, or pat on the back. And so, I think for me growing up ---it's funny I just thought over the weekend... So, me growing up, I started to think about those people that did those things and the people that didn't. Because I think for me, the people that didn't light up a way for me, my guidance counselor, "Oh you're really not going to make it." A person said. "Oh no, you're not going to get that job," fueled me as well. But I think the people who put their hands on the shoulder, [and said] "You got this!" Or even if it was a look and a smile when getting off the bus as a really different looking kid in that atmosphere. Those are the people that I look back and I didn't really see how it fringe. You really don't. I don't think in a moment give it thought. But I think it's a subconsciousness when you got older you can look back and -- gosh, I'm not older. Sorry. [CM and JP laugh] Or when you can look back and say, "Yeah. That was probably what really shapes

me to want to work with them, the people that I worked with at the camp.” When I came back freshman year of college, I went to camp in Boston, at the camp for disadvantaged young people, and realized that I live in the same neighborhood, but have never ever felt the disadvantage. And never ever, maybe ever since then, and I kind of felt like, “Yeah. This is what I want to do.”

JP: So, in YOU, Inc., what are some of the main programs or initiatives that you have worked on?

CM: Yeah. So, initially, when I was the director of the DYS program, the whole, the purpose of that program...So DYS stands for Department of Youth Services. And I always have to say that because we were so used to using it as an acronym and when we (__??) to so service people ask, “Oh what does that mean?” So, it is not DCF where kids are kind of in neglect, in a neglectful situation or taken out of homes, which it can happen to young people as well. DYS are kids that are involved in the court system. So, they could have, like, stolen something. They could have been in a gang, or hurt someone, or whatever, domestic violence. And then, they would go to court, and the court says, “You’re going to be (__??) out of the state and be a custody of (__??) that(__??) case workers.” And, that case worker is going to be with you, make sure you don’t kind of reoffend.” So, with YOU, Inc., that program, our programs were designed to make sure that they did not reoffend, or do whatever we could, and to --- in doing that, make sure they have the support systems and places to do so. So, it’s easy to say to young person living in a (__??) area or not the most --- the greatest situation, to say to them, “Okay, don’t go steal again.” And then, I (__??) I need to put food on my table, so you could tell me whatever you want. So, our jobs were to say, “Alright, don’t go steal again. Let’s go get your high set or your GED [General Education Diploma], and then we’ll go and take you over to get some jobs.” So, that was our programs at YOU Inc. So, we --- it was made sure that they have the system for them to support. So, in that, I remembered getting there and trying to figure out how to do that creatively. And I really like challenges. So, I made myself, like, doing these crazy things. So, a couple of things that I did was --- we did an art gallery. I realized that some youth I got to talking to them, they would be like, “Uhhh, you are not even listening to what I’m saying, but you’re a really good artist, like goodness.” And so, what I did was, we did an art gallery, a state where I could do an art gallery. We set up our conference room to look like an art gallery and had youth put their artwork in it. And so, that was a really cool project that I initiated that we did to have. And I think it was like youth voices or (__??) voices or something, I never heard of the name. But they were able to design the gallery, put their artwork on the gallery and that people come and walk around in the gallery with like fancy music on and grab a little cheese and whatever. So, it was nice. So, we did that. I played basketball, so I knew that was something that came easily for me. So, for years, I just (__??) basketball tournament, and we had over 200 youth come each year, which is massive right here in Worcester. But we had --- it was a nice place to have all DYS youth from the state come and play the tournament against each other. It was a huge undertaking. And again, I couldn’t have done it without my support system. My staffs were like amazing. But as I soon as I say I want to do it, I had everybody right behind me saying like, “Alright, let’s go!” So, we did that with art gallery. I mean we did tons of just little initiatives that I think really help, hopefully, support youth. We did a field day. I was just talking about this with someone the other day how the young people that we used to work with, some working related, or affiliated with

gangs, and just did some really bad things on paper. And staffs and I say like, “Hey, I would want to do a field day, like they are so kids.” And I was like, “Yeah, let’s do it!” And I remembered going and people were like, “This is not going to fly. Nobody wants to come out here and play with balls and pool noodles or whatever.” And, we had kids show up from all over the places with (___??) tattoos, tattoos on their faces, and playing with pool noodles and big giant balls because they are 15 and 16- year-olds. So, I remembered using that story to say, “These are just still kids. I’m not going to let their experience dictate who they are. Just like in my experience, the way I came from to dictate who I was going to be. And it’s unfair for us to take that away from them. And I’m going to give that opportunities to be young people, too. So, we did a ton of things to really, hopefully expose them to think that maybe they didn’t see, because I think that my mother driving me around to all different houses and seeing things that I couldn’t see every day. Those kinds of things --- like I took a --- we did theatre shows, Celtic trips, and, just because I was like – I mean like I went to the Celtics. And for my kids, it’s nothing. I mean it’s something, but like [CM makes some noise] Celtics! They have fun. These kids’ eyes are this big, want (___??) a T-shirt, you would have thought, he was like, “I could die right now. I gotta done it all.” So, just exposing them, I think... So, I try to do as much as I could to get creative with how to do that for them.

JP: How has, you know, working with kids in your job sort of impacted how you raise your own children?

CM: Yup, it has like completely, the poor things. So, like there are times that my daughter will be like, “Okay mama, you’re a social worker today.” [laughs] But I really think it framed how I talk to my kids and what I do to them. I remember, like all of my kids at one point had a chart, like you’re from a residential facility and you have a chart that says like whatever, you’re, you’re good for the day or hmm... I don’t know, “You brush your teeth and you get a sticker or whatever.” So, I had charts for all my kids at some point, like, you’re getting on my nerves, you don’t have enough stickers, we’re not going to Chuck E. Cheese, or whatever it is. And so like, it’s stuff like that or it’s stuff where I can have real conversations with them and say, “You don’t know how good you have it right now. I want you to know how fortunate you are.” And because of that my kids and I do a lot of community service work and I try to make sure that that they go through pantry stock, the food pantry. When I do my program work, they come with me and help me do things and talk with other people, so I think that it has framed my lenses. So I have my experience growing up, I can see other kids where they’ve grown up and then within that you take my values, my husband values, kind of put them together and kind of just get this mesh of how you raise someone. So, I try to do that, I try to keep them involved and try to let them see what I do too as much as I can, and talk to them about that. I think I had some girls through my Empower Me program in November, and my daughter and her friend who were the first Empower Me girls in my group, came out to help me during the graduation and did stuff. And the girls were standing up and talking about how important it was for them, and how it was in their life. And my daughter, I look over and my 14- year old was like crying, and I was like, “Oh my gosh.” And she was like, [crying voice] “Mom you really do, do good work.” And I was like, “Oh thanks.” [laughs]. So, yeah, I think that it has framed, it has to, and I haven’t really had the

ability to really ever turn it off. I mean I've learned to turn it off, so it doesn't affect, negatively affect (____??), but I think it does affect like all your experiences do so.

JP: Yeah... Has your mom been present with her grandchildren?

CM: Yeah.

JP: And how --- I'm just thinking about how proud she must be of you and all of the work you do?

CM: Yeah, yeah, no, she is. She is very proud of me. She just watched our kids while we were at the Gala on Saturday [laughs]. Yeah, she's, you know, great. I think I'm fortunate again to still have her in our lives in this capacity. She's 79 and she can still, you know, babysit my kids and keep doing her pink hair and she [both CM and JP laugh], she makes them cookies and you know, whatever. So, it is good, I think it's nice for her, it's weird when she does say how proud she is all the time, like if a new article comes out or something, or she's proud of not just me but like everybody that's connected to her. She's so, "Oh I'm so proud of you, " like and I can, I can see that now that I'm a mom, and I mean I'm not where she is obviously and I haven't had that experience, but I get really proud of my kids when they like, share their snack with their friends. Or like I get a note that says, "She was really kind to someone today," or whatever so I can see where that comes from. Yeah, but my mom is pretty proud, and it is nice for her to see, you know, my successes. And we never really, we never really talked about that and every now and again she's like, "I'm sorry I couldn't get to so many games," or "I'm sorry I couldn't do this," and I'm like, "I'm fine! Look what happened, we're good, like it's all good." So yeah, I think she's pretty proud and we have a really good relationship and it's, it's nice. We try to have breakfast every now and again and she comes over for dinner, and so yeah.

JP: That's awesome. So, in terms of your work, obviously you work in Worcester, so how have you seen Worcester change as you've been working here?

CM: Yeah, so I think for me the(____??) program it was a little different for me because I felt isolated isn't the best word to use, but I was like isolated in that program doing that program's work. And so, this new job that I have I'm really in the community on a different level in talking to donors and funders and going to more events. And so, I don't think I have seen a change in Worcester. I hear a lot of talk about change in Worcester, but I don't think I've really had a chance to experience it yet. I do hear a lot of positive things that are coming up the pipeline or things that need to be changed and what Worcester looks like and what it looked like before. With my personal experience I think was so wrapped up in my program years ago, that I didn't really understand the Worcester community the way that I do now. I mean, there's still a ton that I'm learning, and because I have a fake it till you make it, depending on what I'm doing, at the Gala I actually had a cheat sheet. I had a book, a binder with people's faces and their names next to it. I (____??) their faces of who these people were, and I'd be like, "Okay. Hi Mr. Sull---," like I had no clue who any of these people were, so that was the only way I could do it. So, I still, I think am learning Worcester and I have heard about some big changes and positive things.

JP: So, do you think there are any challenges that Worcester faces that like YOU, Inc., is working to fix and sort of change?

CM: I think that YOU, Inc., does a really nice job of trying to stay ahead of the curve, so that the programs that we have are innovative programs. The programs are making a difference, that we are complying with whatever we need to comply with and, and that we're really serving the needs of the community. So, as the community changes in Worcester, YOU, Inc., I do know this much, tries to make sure we shape and change our programs to fit that. The most recent thing, and again I just started back in December as much as I like to call it home, I was away for a little bit. I just had a meeting a couple weeks ago with the diversity inclusion equity or something group that we're trying to change the name of, but we just had that meeting and part of the meeting is to take a look at our staff and how diverse we are as a staff. And does that kind of mirror who we're working with in the community? And, so, if we are surveying a population of Vietnamese, a huge community, are all our workers that go out to the home white? Like do we need to find someone that resonates with that community, not to say someone who's white couldn't, but can we somehow figure that out? Or, you know, whatever youth we're serving, LGBTQ youth, like do our paperwork and admissions paperwork give them the freedom to identify the way they want to identify? So, as a diversity group, we're really working on that. And one of the things we came up with is how you can not only do that internally with some of our administrative staff, paperwork, and staff, and how do we take it outside into the community and show the Worcester community the commitment that YOU, Inc., has to diversity, equity, inclusion, and other things? And so really, one of the things we try to work with is doing some YWCA work which is the stand against racism that happens in April. So, we're going try to start to do some of that. I did it when I was here with DYS, but we're really going to try to figure out how to make in impact in the community as it relates to those things.

JP: Yeah, no, that sounds amazing. It sounds like your organization has just this very wide scope of...

CM: Yeah it does

JP: things it, yeah.

CM: Yeah, we have around 42, 52 programs, over 600 staff. We have stuff here in Worcester Gardner, Southbridge, we're all over the place. We do a ton of work, different kinds of work, yeah.

JP: Yeah, that's amazing. Sort of, so we're moving into the conclusion kind of questions but um, in general how do you feel about the choices you've made in your life and do you have any regrets or anything like that? Kind of a heavy question, [laughs] but yeah.

CM: So, I gotta be honest, I don't have regrets ever. I always talk to people. I don't remember who I was talking to, but I was talking to someone about this a little bit ago. I think it was over

the weekend and they were asking me about my group Empower Me and, “Oh my goodness, how did you start that program and group?” And I just said, “I saw me, and I thought that it made sense and I did.” And I think I have that all the time, I don’t like the I should or I could’ve done that. Or if I had the right circumstances, I would have done---no. It’s either you do it, or you’re not going to do it. And you’re going to succeed at it or you’re going to fail at it and kind of move on. And, so, as it relates to that kind of question, I think that’s really how I do things. Like taking a job of a director and contract manager like no clue, no clue, but I feel like I can do it, so I’m just going to go for it. What are they going to say, “No?” And I’m going to walk away and go, “Alright, whatever”. So professionally that’s kind of like how I try to live. And I think personally again, so I had my child right out of college, and I got married right out of college, and it didn’t last long. And I remember there was a good amount of time, I mean for me a good amount of time, maybe a year or a couple months, where I’m like, “This was the worst decision you could have ever made in your life. What were you thinking?” And now look at all this stuff you have to do, you know? Your child and this and that and your--- but very, very quickly I pulled myself right out of that and was like, “No, look what you have, and this is only a learning experience.” So, it took some prayer and some meditation and some slapping myself to say, “Wake up. It’s just a situation, not a big deal. Now this is yours, you have to own it and figure it out.” And so yeah, I really, I don’t. I try my best not to have regrets. Like this, “Would you like to be interviewed?” Like, “Yes, sure.” I don’t want to say no, I won’t say no to just about anything. But no, I don’t want to ever, anything to ever happen where I say I should have told this person yes or I should (___??) someone. You know? I just do it.

JP: Yeah, so it seems a lot that you, your religion, you said you were Christian, that that has a lot to do with your positive outlook and how that’s impacted sort of how you figure out how to pick yourself up after...

CM: Yeah, it really does. I think, so that, so those are my beliefs and as a Christian I believe that I think that if people --- like no matter what you believe, there ---if you believe that there’s something higher than you, I think that that kind of helps put things into perspective. When you can think about your campus and be like we look like ants, like we’re these tiny little people doing these things and like I think about that all the time. Like this is so weird in the grand scheme of the world that Charisse is just like (___??) walking around. But I believe that there is something higher than me, and I believe that every single person --- and this is how I do my work that I do --- has a purpose and that their purpose is their purpose, or their journey, or whatever. But yeah, I think that being a Christian really has helped frame that for me. I think understanding that there’s something higher than myself, understanding that there’s a bigger purpose in whatever mistake I made or whatever current situation I’m in that day, minute, hour that that doesn’t last forever, you know? I think that really has shaped, I mean there’s a scripture that I use all the time that I know my daughter uses and it’s, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” And you could, and those are the words that are in The Bible. People could use those, and I can do all things, like that strengthens me, like what is that? For me it’s Christ. And for you it could be, you know, something else, but when you really feel that you can do all things it really can change your perspective.

JP: So how have you sort of defined success in your life and has that changed from when you were younger to, sort of, now?

CM: Oh yeah. Yeah, I mean I think that it, of course, I think changes from when you were younger. And, and again, I feel like I'm older when I say these things like this. You guys with social media and everything, like you can't even think about your own success when people just throw it at your face like, "This is what success looks like." And it's a lovely photoshopped picture of, you know... So, I think as a kid, I thought success meant money and a good job and a great family life and, you know, whatever. So, I think that maybe some more superficial stuff, if that makes sense. And, so, I think that as I got older, success to me, I think just now, it's really just doing something that I'm okay with. Like if I can lay down at night and sleep and rest and be like, "Hey that was a pretty good day," even if I was like a complete lunatic with my kids all day. Like, "Please just eat your dinner," or "I'm so tired," or whatever. I'm not my best, but you know I love you guys and whatever I say or even (____ ??) I'm like, "Hey, success, all good." You know? [Laughs] Like for me success is being able to be okay with myself and I think I'm a very honest person and you really get what you get with me. And sometimes good or bad like, "Honey, that shirt is horrible, sorry." And you'll be like, "Really?" and I'll be like, "I know I was just --- I was trying to, this is my opinion." So, like sometimes it's good and sometimes it's bad, but I think for me I'm very honest and real and if I ever feel like I offended someone or like I did something that wasn't the best of my character, I immediately go to that person and if it's come to my own awareness. So, I just define success as like if I can sleep at night, if I feel like I'm making a difference, if I'm fulfilling whatever purpose it is of mine which I don't think I'll ever really know. I still say things like, "When I grow up, I want to be..." because I have no idea. I think it just kind of evolves and happens, so yeah. I think success is making sure that you're fulfilling, I think, what I'm supposed to be doing at the time, if that makes sense.

JP: Yeah, that makes sense. With that in mind do you see, well I know you said it's difficult to understand what the future holds, and plans change and everything, but do you have any sort of plans or ideas of what your future will look like?

CM: Yeah. I mean we have plans of like, we're really busy so I tell my husband all the time, "I want to have like those rocking chairs on a porch down south with like goats or something or some farm."(laughs) I just want to relax when I get older so... This is all being silly, and this is what I want the future to hold for us, like my husband and I watching our kids walk down the aisle and giving them to great people, hopefully, who love and support them and then we can rest. And like drink lemonade or something, so I think that it's more family and personal, but it is a professional goal of mine. I think I do have some professional goals. I'm working on a book, I'm doing other things and so I think like those things, yeah? But again, if they happen, great, if they don't happen. But if I could say the future and what it looks like, it's more family and relational than it is professional and work.

JP: And I guess just one sort of last, final question- so based on your, like, experience what would you... what advice would you give to woman, women of today and future generations?

CM: Wow.

JP: [Laughs] Yeah, kind of a loaded question.

CM: I...I this, again (____??) I really think it's really important, as something that I try to teach my girls, is to be yourself and love yourself and that those things are not easy. And I didn't, so I wasn't so... I mean, I like say to my middle schooler, I always come back with, "Just so you know, I wasn't--- I was awkward and I felt weird and I felt like I couldn't do things. Of course, and it's just how we are as people and the way outside circumstances sometimes make us feel. But I think it's really important, feed yourself good things. And so, my, my two little ones, their elementary school has this thing called, be a bucket filler, not a bucket dipper, so you're supposed to give good things --- like be like [motions to Thu] Thu, right? I'd be like 'Thu, I love your glasses,' and I'm filling your bucket. But if I say, "Jess, you know what, I hate that shirt," I'm dipping in the bucket [JP laughs]. So, they have a big thing at school that says, which I love your shirt by the way, this big thing at their school that says, fill other people's buckets. And so, I noticed that my little one was having like, "I don't like my hair it's too straight." And I said, "You know you fill other people's buckets which are good. I hear that you do that a lot, but you gotta fill your own bucket." And they were like [makes explosion noise] what? What does that even mean? And I was like, "You gotta fill your own bucket, you gotta tell yourself, I look good today." Or tell yourself, "I can do good on this test." And, so, I think that's something everyone struggles with and I think women, in particular, a little more. But I think that when you start to fill your own bucket, it becomes full and I feel like I have the ability to fill your buckets because mine is overflowing in a way. So, I think that's my advice, to really be yourself, love yourself, fill your own bucket, and just do whatever you want, like really, do whatever you want. Like if you fail good, you gotta figure out what you did wrong (laughs) and what you need to change but, you know.

JP: So those were all the questions. And thank you so much!

CM: Yeah, thank you! You guys did a really good job. A really nice job.