

Tre Maison Dasan Podcast
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Kelly Meehleib: Welcome to the Judicial Council's Center for Families, Children & the Courts podcast series on juvenile law. Joining us today we have Denali Tiller, director and producer of *Tre Maison Dasan*, and Dasan Lopes and Stephanie Moniz who are featured in the film. Welcome.

Denali Tiller: Thank you for having us.

Kelly Meehleib: Denali, I wanted to start with you. Can you tell us about what you set out to do with this film and who was and is your intended audience? The public, policy makers, and/or lawmakers?

Denali Tiller: Yeah, so, when I started the film, I was actually working with a woman who had been formally incarcerated for 17 years. And so, she had two kids and she was pretty much gone for their entire childhood. So, she had been doing some work and outlining the stages of grief and trauma that children go through when a parent goes to prison. So, with this film we're really looking at the child's perspective directly. And so, working collaboratively with Tre, Maison, and Dasan, the three boys, to really share a unique insight and perspective into the criminal justice system from voices and lives that we really don't hear much about.

And, even, you know, people that work with children, whether that's in the courtroom or in child welfare services, they're not seeing everything that happens behind the scenes. And so, I think the power of a film is really that you can really provide that perspective, but also that whole range of experience for people to see, you know, "oh, that this is what the kids that I'm working with are going through when they leave my office."

And so, you know, the audience is pretty broad. We were thinking about how kids can watch the film and see themselves or their peers and build and promote empathy, but also shared experience that, "I'm not the only one with this experience." For lawmakers and policymakers, seeing the effects of those policies on not just the person whose justice involved, but their families and specifically their children. If a person is spending a long time in prison, of course that affects that individual, but they're rippling effects. And, thinking about caregivers the person at home that's having to care for the child, often a grandparent or a family member who, you know -- and then is also incurring even more expenses from the individual who's incarcerated who can't provide a living for their family because they're making three dollars a day or less. Or, you know, some states even working for free. And then, thinking about, on the judicial side, you know, people that are working again directly with these families, to just have that in the back of their head, that they've seen this film and they know, they feel a little bit more deeply connected to the lives of the people that they're affecting through their work.

Kelly Meehleib: And, you found compelling people through which to tell this story. Where and how did you select each of these families?

Denali Tiller: So, I started going to the visiting hours at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections, again researching Joyce's program there that was at the time a parenting class for fathers only. And, the social workers that I was working with had pointed out a few families as being potentially interesting stories for this film. But, really the film is a collaboration with the boys, and so it came down to meeting them and finding children that were interested in participating and had something really unique to share.

So, I actually met -- Maison came up to me in the visiting hours and, if you've seen the film this will come as no surprise, but he said, "I heard you're making a movie and I have a production company and I'm more than happy to help out if you need it." And I was like, "done you're hired." Like, come on board. And then, Tre I met – he and Maison's dads were incarcerated the same facility so they had the same visiting hours. And Tre had actually just gotten in touch with his father again after years. He was 13 when I met him and now he's 18. So, you know, he is kind of the opposite of Maison in a lot of ways and doesn't have the support system at home that Maison has.

And so, for me, it was really important to share three different perspectives, both age wise but also experience wise, situation wise, so that – incarceration doesn't affect one type of person or one type of family. So, I think it was really important to have a have a breadth of experience. And then, about a year after that we were granted access to the women's facility and that's where I met Stephanie first and then through her met Dasan and his family and the rest is history, right?

Kelly Meehleib: Stephanie, we don't often hear from or about incarcerated mothers, it's an important voice as this population is growing and the impact of their incarceration on families is greater than that of the father. Was the impact of incarceration on families something you wanted to address by appearing in the film?

Stephanie Moniz: Yes and no. That wasn't my original thought process when coming on board with Denali. Originally, I thought it was important that the voices of the children are highlighted because, you know, as an adult I can advocate for myself, I think, I can figure out ways to be resourceful and speak up for myself, but who's doing that for the kids? So, at first, I was really reluctant to participate in the film because I know that sometimes documentary films can be a bit exploitative, so, I didn't want to be in that situation. But, seeing how collaborative the process was, and how Dasan took to Denali and how he took to the whole filming process, it's important to really humanize these boys and other children who are dealing with this.

Kelly Meehleib: And, before your incarceration had you thought much about prisons or jails?

Stephanie Moniz: Before incarceration I don't think I understood what a beast this criminal justice system is. I had my ideas of the type of people that go to prison. And, you know, I grew up in a neighborhood where I saw people coming in and out of prison, but I didn't think deeper into it. I didn't think about the systemic factors that go into why people come in and out. So, now I have a completely different perspective.

Kelly Meehleib: And, Dasan, I wanted to talk to you for a minute, can you tell us about your hobbies and interests?

Dasan Lopes: I have a couple of hobbies. Let's see here, I like drawing, video games are pretty fun, dancing I do that too, making stories, and I know there's one more I just can't remember.

Denali Tiller: Theater.

Dasan Lopes: Oh yeah, theater.

Denali Tiller: Dasan, can you tell the audience how old you are?

Dasan Lopes: I am 10 years old, currently.

Kelly Meehleib: Okay, and Dasan, what has it been like for you following the film? Do people recognize you or ask you about the film?

Dasan Lopes: Not that much. Only a couple times somebody has said, "oh, you're Dasan."

Kelly Meehleib: Well, thank you so much for joining us today and talking about the film it was a pleasure having you all on.

Denali Tiller/ Stephanie Moniz/ Dasan Lopes: Thank you.

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