

Jaki Murillo  
December 2017

**Kelly Meehleib:** Welcome to the Judicial Council's Center for Families, Children & the Courts podcast series on Juvenile Law. Today, we are focusing on the youth voice. Oftentimes, the youth's voice gets lost in the system of judges, lawyers, social workers, and advocates, all trying to determine the best interest of the child.

This podcast was intended to present the youth's story of their time in the foster care system. To preserve the integrity of the interview and the youth's voice, content editing was not done. Only editing to smooth the podcast for the ease of the listener was completed.

We are fortunate to have with us today Jaki Murillo. Jaki is a former dual status youth from Los Angeles County. She is working with the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, also known as ARC, and is a busy mom. Welcome, Jaki.

**Jaki Murillo:** Hi. You're welcome.

I'm 26-years-old. I grew up in, in the West LA area. Throughout my journey, my mom moved east side of Los Angeles. I grew up with my brother that's a year and a half older than me, my mom, and my father. By the time I was five, my dad got deported to El Salvador.

My first time being arrested, I was around the age of nine/ten-years-old. I made a threat to my elementary school teacher.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Mhm.

**Jaki Murillo:** I think about it today, and it was due to the fact that no one believed me, you know. And the playground staff, they didn't believe me when I told them that he, kind of, rubbed on me inappropriately. I got on, I went to court and nothing happened to me; I just got on probation.

By the time that I was 12, I violated that probation for running away and not attending school. I was sent to juvenile hall for the first time where I served, like, I was supposed to serve, like, three months and then ended up serving around 13 months in, in a unit called Girls Shoe, which is special handling unit for girls. I wasn't allowed to go to a regular unit which houses 14-year-olds because I was too young.

I was 15. I was like 14 when I got released. And from there, I went to placement and I went to rehab, but I always leave. My mom had gave up custody of me. Like, I don't, I didn't know that it was called being dual status back then. But, she didn't pick me up because she said she had no control over me, which led me to always be on the streets. In, at 15, I took care of like six other kids that weren't mine. And, long story short, I committed a lot of robberies, and I ended up

being tried as an adult due to the fact that I didn't fit the five criterias to get tried as a juvenile. And, I was direct file. I had already been to placements, to camps, and they didn't know what else to do with me. So, I got tried as an adult. And...

**Kelly Meehleib:** And, this is at 15?

**Jaki Murillo:** At 16.

**Kelly Meehleib:** At 16.

**Jaki Murillo:** At 16-years-old. The difference was that I, I was going to two courts; I was going to adult court and juvenile court. My juvenile judge, I don't know how he did it, but he was able to continue to give me a juvenile court date while I was going to my adult court date, so he could, like, keep in touch with what was happening to my adult court dates. And, then, I, I was direct file, which is really different than a finding of fitness. And, I took a deal of six with two strikes.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Okay. You had a juvenile case?

**Jaki Murillo:** From 12.

**Kelly Meehleib:** From 12.

**Jaki Murillo:** To 16.

**Kelly Meehleib:** 12 to 16. And then, they direct filed you?

**Jaki Murillo:** They direct filed me at 16-years-old.

**Kelly Meehleib:** At 16 years. Okay. And, what was that experience like for you? How, how was that?

**Jaki Murillo:** Honestly, like, I didn't understand anything that was happening. Like, I understood more my juvenile, kind of, because I had a really compassionate judge at my juvenile courts.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Mhm.

**Jaki Murillo:** And, it shows, like, when he kept in touch with me through my whole adult court. But, understand anything until I went back to my juvenile court, and he would, kind of, break it down to me.

**Kelly Meehleib:** The judge?

**Jaki Murillo:** Yeah, the juvenile one.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Uh huh.

**Jaki Murillo:** Which isn't even my judge anymore.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Right.

**Jaki Murillo:** And, I didn't understand any of my adult court, I really thought I was, like, going to get life. And, it was just very interesting to me. And, then when I when I heard about all of this, like, I, about actually being dual status youth, I didn't understand everything that had happened to me, and it, like, triggered it now as I'm 26-years-old. Like, I didn't ever really think of it.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Mhm.

**Jaki Murillo:** I just took it as I got time and I have to do my time, and then that's it.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Now, did you have an attorney that would explain things to you? Did, what was your experience like with your attorney?

**Jaki Murillo:** So, my experience is very different because I went in with the idea that everybody was going to suck.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Mhm.

**Jaki Murillo:** You know. My, my judge and everybody. My judge was like informative to me than my attorney. My attorney wasn't really. I had two, a guy and a girl. The first guy that I had for the first few years didn't understand my mom, so he just didn't bother with me.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Mhm.

**Jaki Murillo:** And then, the lady just didn't bother with me because I was just rude.

**Kelly Meehleib:** And, did you feel like you had a voice in the courtroom?

**Jaki Murillo:** So, I didn't feel like it, but I know I had space to.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Okay.

**Jaki Murillo:** So, which is very different with me because my judge is very understanding and very caring. But, I didn't feel like I did because I just was really shut off.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Okay, so though your judge was understanding and caring, is there anything that would have made your courtroom experience better?

**Jaki Murillo:** If my mom was more involved.

**Kelly Meehleib:** If your mom was more involved, okay. And, did you think that your family was engaged in the court process? Did they try, do you know if they tried to involve your mom?

**Jaki Murillo:** In my days, I, my mom was really shut off to them. And they, because they saw that from my mom, they didn't even bother.

**Kelly Meehleib:** And, what would have motivated you to make different choices throughout the process? Is there anything that would have motivated you to make any different choices?

**Jaki Murillo:** If I would have felt like my family was supporting me.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Yeah. Okay. So, what about now? What are you doing now?

**Jaki Murillo:** Today, I'm, what a more-, most excited about is that I mentor two little young girls that come from the east side where I'm from. And, I see them once a week.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Tutoring?

**Jaki Murillo:** No, mentoring.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Mentoring. Oh, okay, okay.

**Jaki Murillo:** Yeah, two young girls. One's pregnant and the other one, I'm grateful that she listened to me, she went back to placement. So, she's in placement now. She's going to school. She's about to graduate. So, I'm very excited about that. I'm a mom of three children. And-

**Kelly Meehleib:** Congratulations.

**Jaki Murillo:** Thank you. And, I'm, like, working to being a mortician.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Nice, nice. So, is there anything that you would like any of our listeners know in particular about the process? Or anything that you wish could have been done better? Or just anything that you want them to know?

**Jaki Murillo:** I know that a lot of people don't want to get personal or they feel like they shouldn't, but I really really would encourage people to ask questions, to, like, really ask questions, and to get to know the kids.

**Kelly Meehleib:** Great. Well, I just want to thank you so much for your time today. Thank you for talking with us. Congratulations on your accomplishments and good luck to you.

**Jaki Murillo:** Thank you.

**Kelly Meehleib:** The Judicial Council's Center for Families, Children & the Courts works with courts throughout the state to improve outcomes for children and families in both the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare systems. For more information, please visit our website at [www.courts.ca.gov](http://www.courts.ca.gov) under Programs for Families and Children.