

COUNTING ON US | SEASON 1 | EPISODE 12

## Knowing When to Ask for Help

### Introduction

[00:00:00] **Daniel Treviño** Just a quick reminder: if you haven't listened to the previous episode, make sure you do, since that story will be part of this episode's conversation. All right, enjoy the show.

[00:00:15] **Daniel Treviño** Here on Counting On Us, I get the opportunity to share the stories of those who have found the hope to push forward and overcome the challenges of their lives, like gaining independence, building a family, and healing from trauma. But how universal are their stories, what are the threads that connect them with other ACH clients, and what does ACH's team of caregivers and professionals really want you to take away from their stories? I get help unpacking these questions from the members of the community, ACH serves directly from those whose mission it is to help them.

[00:00:53] **Daniel Treviño** On today's episode, my conversation with Jeremiah Holland and Thad McCaul about a recent story shared on the podcast. I'm Daniel Treviño, and you're listening to Counting On Us, a podcast presented by ACH Child and Family Services.

## Alex's Story Recap: Support Fuels Transformation

[00:01:09] **Daniel Treviño** Previously, in episode eleven, Alex shared her journey from homelessness to financial independence. For years, Alex suffered from housing instability and the burden of taking on the full responsibility of caring for her five younger brothers. So by the time she arrived at ACH's Morris Program, Alex struggled to advocate for herself and setting boundaries with others.

[00:01:42] **Daniel Treviño** The next few years, Alex grew to trust the guidance of ACH's team of caregivers and receive support whenever she experienced a crisis. Thanks to the safety net provided by Morris and later ACH's LIFE Project, Alex was granted the opportunity to learn, grow, and heal.

## A Constant Revolve Door: Housing Instability

[00:02:00] **Daniel Treviño** My first guest is 19-year-old Jeremiah Holland, who never really had a room or bed of his own. Much of his childhood was spent constantly moving from one apartment to the next with his mother. When he was 16, Jeremiah's mother moved them to the south side of Dallas, but the stress of living in a dangerous neighborhood—combined with the constant arguments with his mother—caused him to run away to his grandmother's house in Fort Worth. Over the next year or so, Jeremiah would move four times, bouncing from one family member's house to the next, always sleeping on couches or the floor while doing his best to graduate from high school. Welcome, Jeremiah, to Counting On Us.

[00:02:40] **Jeremiah Holland** How you doing?

[00:02:41] **Daniel Treviño** I'm good, thanks. So what's hard about not having your own room?

[00:02:48] **Jeremiah Holland** Privacy man— no privacy man. Like, you could be on the phone with somebody and there's loud stuff happening in the back room.

[00:02:56] **Daniel Treviño** And you're a teenager.

[00:02:58] **Jeremiah Holland** Right.

[00:02:58] **Daniel Treviño** Like, you need your own space. And I guess during all those times... I don't know. Yeah, it sucks.

[00:03:13] **Jeremiah Holland** But I got used to it, though, because I've been going through it my whole life.

[00:03:19] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, I get that. When I first moved to Austin, I was living in the living room, and I did that for a year just to save money. Then, when I finally moved in with my best friend, I got a door like my own room— I called it "the door"— I was just like, oh my gosh, so happy to have that door. I just appreciated it so much.

[00:03:42] **Jeremiah Holland** Yeah.

[00:03:43] **Daniel Treviño** So anyways, you're like sleeping on couches and stuff. In terms of months, how long were you with your grandma?

[00:03:50] **Jeremiah Holland** Maybe like two or three months

[00:03:53] **Daniel Treviño** Two or three months, and then you moved with your aunt. And how many months were you there?

[00:03:57] **Jeremiah Holland** Maybe like five, six.

[00:04:00] **Daniel Treviño** Okay, not even a year. What was that like?

[00:04:05] **Jeremiah Holland** I mean, it was cool. I was still sleeping on the couch again, but eventually I got kicked out of their house, too. Once I finished school, I was trying to think if I wanted to move in with my cousin or not. Then my other uncle ended up moving in with them, and basically, I got forced out of their house, too.

[00:04:31] **Daniel Treviño** And your cousin have their own place?

[00:04:34] **Jeremiah Holland** Uh-huh. But my cousin also had a daughter, so I was still sleeping on the couch.

[00:04:39] **Daniel Treviño** I guess during all this time, did no one bring up—or even think about— calling CPS to get you into the system?

[00:04:49] **Jeremiah Holland** No.

[00:04:50] **Daniel Treviño** No— why not?

[00:04:54] **Jeremiah Holland** I guess it was kind of normal to everybody.

[00:05:01] **Daniel Treviño** And again, during all of this moving around, were you in contact with your mother?

[00:05:07] **Jeremiah Holland** No, I had her blocked on everything. Like, my grandmother would try to get me to contact her, but I just didn't want to be involved with her anymore.

[00:05:22] **Daniel Treviño** Okay, what happened next? How do you end up leaving your cousin's place?

[00:05:29] **Jeremiah Holland** So my cousin was working out of town, and eventually it got to a point where she didn't really trust me to be there by myself. I didn't have a key to the house, and then she ended up going out of town for a long period of time—maybe two or three weeks. So I basically had nowhere to go at that point. I was staying with my friend in a dorm at Texas Wesleyan, in a room nobody was using. I stayed there for a while.

[00:06:10] **Daniel Treviño** But she didn't leave you a key.

[00:06:12] **Jeremiah Holland** No.

[00:06:14] **Daniel Treviño** And so she leaves...What did she expect was going to happen? Like, does she not talk to you?

[00:06:22] **Jeremiah Holland** Yeah, she was basically just telling me to find somewhere else to stay—basically.

[00:06:28] **Daniel Treviño** So that was her way of getting you to leave.

[00:06:31] **Jeremiah Holland** Yeah, kind of.

[00:06:32] **Daniel Treviño** But just not really sitting you down and saying, "Okay, what's your plan?"

[00:06:37] **Jeremiah Holland** Right.

[00:06:38] **Daniel Treviño** Huh...and what were your thoughts about that?

[00:06:42] **Jeremiah Holland** I mean, at that point, I was just kind of thinking to myself that I was just going to save—like, stay at the dorm for a little while, save up, and then try to get my own place.

[00:06:56] **Daniel Treviño** When did that situation end?

[00:07:00] **Jeremiah Holland** Oh, when I heard about ACH. Like, I remember I'd play basketball all the time, and there was Arthur—you know, Arthur—I met him at the basketball court. We were talking, and I told him about my situation, and he told me about ACH. So I ended up putting in the application and everything, and I eventually heard back from Mr. Nick.

[00:07:24] **Daniel Treviño** Oh, okay, cool. That's great. Arthur is such a great ambassador for ACH. His story is featured in episode two. And, you know, he also came from an interesting background—he has an interesting story as well.

[00:07:37] **Daniel Treviño** How has that friendship added to your life?

[00:07:42] **Jeremiah Holland** Man, it's been—he's like the greatest person. He always encourages me to do better, stay on top of myself, and make sure I'm doing the right thing.

[00:07:54] **Daniel Treviño** So you share your story with Arthur, and then he tells you about ACH and gives you the application. Then you get accepted and arrive here. What's your first impression?

[00:08:11] **Jeremiah Holland** I was just happy, man. I had another room.

[00:08:15] **Daniel Treviño** With a door.

[00:08:16] **Jeremiah Holland** With a door. And, like, they were telling me about opportunities, how I could save, and giving me a lot of guidance.

## Mentoring Youth for Life Skills

[00:08:26] **Daniel Treviño** Okay, so let's talk about Alex Ramirez's story. I shared her story with you in episode eleven. What challenges of hers did you relate to?

[00:08:41] **Jeremiah Holland** I want to say that the one that connected with me the most was maybe her car situation.

[00:08:47] **Jeremiah Holland** Yeah, I remember her talking about her first time buying a car. And the people were acting like they had a sob story and everything, and she ended up falling for it and got scammed. I kind of had a similar situation buying my first car because I didn't know anything about cars, and being young and on my own, I wasn't used to doing everything by myself. So I ended up buying a car without knowing what I was doing, and they sold me a messed-up car—like the transmission was bad.

[00:09:24] **Daniel Treviño** It was a clunker.

[00:09:25] **Jeremiah Holland** Yeah.

[00:09:26] **Daniel Treviño** How did you first learn about the car?

[00:09:28] **Jeremiah Holland** Online.

[00:09:30] **Daniel Treviño** Okay, and when you are considering it, did you mention that with The LIFE Project Mentors?

[00:09:38] **Jeremiah Holland** Nah.

[00:09:39] **Daniel Treviño** Why not?

[00:09:41] **Jeremiah Holland** I told them that I was going to get a car and that I wanted a cash car and everything. But me, being so used to doing everything on my own, I wasn't open to asking for help. I'm open now, but I wasn't back when I first joined The LIFE Project.

[00:09:53] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, when you first got here... And when you realized that the car was a clunker, what were the thoughts of the LIFE mentors? Like, how did they help guide you during that crisis?

[00:10:09] **Jeremiah Holland** Basically, Mr. Thad told me to sell it and save again, because I bought it for about \$1,700. But when I sold it, I only ended up getting around \$1,000 for it.

[00:10:23] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, when I talk with LIFE Project clients, Mr. Thad always comes up. Can you tell me about that relationship and how he helps you with different things?

[00:10:35] **Jeremiah Holland** He's a great mentor. Recently, he's been helping me with my cooking skills—teaching me how to prepare dishes and healthy meals. That way, I won't have to eat out all the time, because I used to have a big problem with that. So it's helping me save money and be healthier.

[00:10:55] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah. What have you learned? What dishes?

[00:10:57] **Jeremiah Holland** Oh, we cooked some chicken alfredo—some pasta—and he put some vegetables in it. That was probably my favorite one.

## The Power of Asking for Help

[00:11:07] **Daniel Treviño** Can you think of any other moments when The LIFE Project mentors really guided you through a major obstacle or crisis?

[00:11:18] **Jeremiah Holland** I remember I had like a friend that died—like a friend that died back in Dallas. I told Dr. Edna and Mr. Nick, and they were both very supportive.

[00:11:34] **Daniel Treviño** How did that death affect you?

[00:11:38] **Jeremiah Holland** It took a big toll on me because we were really close, and he died from gun violence.

[00:11:45] **Daniel Treviño** I know with Alex, the year she spent being homeless really took a toll on her mental health as well. So by the time CPS got involved and removed her from her family, that trauma triggered her to hurt herself. Did you have a similar experience?

[00:12:02] **Jeremiah Holland** I mean, when I was homeless, I was really depressed. I never got to the point where I wanted to hurt myself, but I was very, very depressed. I just felt stuck. I didn't know how things were going to turn out.

[00:12:19] **Daniel Treviño** Did the counseling and therapy you received at ACH help you?

[00:12:24] **Jeremiah Holland** It helped a lot speaking with Dr. Edna. She teaches me about mental health and the things I can do to keep myself together.

[00:12:36] **Daniel Treviño** Can you give me examples?

[00:12:39] **Jeremiah Holland** When I would meet with her, she would tell me different ways I could cope—other than turning to drugs or anything like that. She suggested things like playing basketball, which I love, and encouraged me to do it more whenever I’m feeling a certain way. Or I could listen to music.

[00:13:02] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, in one of our previous episodes, I was speaking with Dionne Roberson, and she was telling me that when our clients don’t have strong relationships growing up, it really affects the way they cope with life’s challenges and stuff. And it kind of sounds like that’s what was going on. Because it’s all you, right? It’s been all you this whole time. But as much as we want to do everything by ourselves—I understand that—but... we need people.

[00:13:49] **Jeremiah Holland** Right.

[00:13:50] **Daniel Treviño** What’s it been like to have supportive people who, as you said, really want to see you progress?”

[00:13:59] **Jeremiah Holland** It’s been great. I had trouble needing them at first because I was so used to doing things on my own. But eventually I opened up more, and I’ve grown a lot.

[00:14:14] **Daniel Treviño** How have you grown?

[00:14:15] **Jeremiah Holland** As far as taking care of my business—like learning new life skills and saving—I’d say that’s been a big part of it. I used to have a really hard time saving, and they really got onto me about it. It’s all part of just becoming an adult.

[00:14:31] **Daniel Treviño** Is there anything else you would like to communicate with any other youth or just any last thoughts?



[00:14:40] **Jeremiah Holland** I would tell them not to give up and not to be afraid to ask for help. That was a big problem I had, so don't be afraid to reach out—everyone needs help.

[00:14:52] **Daniel Treviño** That's great. All right—thank you, Jeremiah, for speaking with me.

[00:14:57] **Jeremiah Holland** No problem.

[00:14:57] **Daniel Treviño** I can't wait to see what great things you accomplish.

[00:15:01] **Jeremiah Holland** All right, thank you.

[00:15:02] **Daniel Treviño** We'll be right back.

## A Message from Wayne Carson

[00:15:06] **Wayne Carson** Hi, it's Dr. Wayne Carson from ACH Child and Family Services. I hope you're enjoying the podcast. Here at ACH, we know that the community is Counting On Us to get it right. So for over 100 years, ACH has remained true to our mission of protecting children and preserving families. Follow us on social media or visit our website, [ACHservices.org](http://ACHservices.org) to learn more about what we do, how to get involved, or if you'd like to support us. Now back to the show.

## The Toll of Survival Mode on Youth

[00:15:44] **Daniel Treviño** All right, let's continue the conversation. I'm here with Thad McCaul. Welcome to Counting On Us.

[00:15:51] **Thad McCaul** Glad to be here.

[00:15:52] **Daniel Treviño** Great. So, Thad, can you please introduce yourself and tell me more about what you do here at ACH?

[00:16:00] **Thad McCaul** Yes, I'm Thad McCaul. I'm a mentor with The LIFE Project. We assist the program managers with bringing our clients along with their independent plan by providing the necessary connections and rapport for building the relationships that's needed to bring them along. When I say, "Bring them along," I mean helping usher them into independent adult living.

[00:16:32] **Daniel Treviño** What do you feel like is the main goal when you're working with these younger adults?

[00:16:39] **Thad McCaul** Of course, it's about making the connection and meeting them where they are. But the most important part is making that much-needed connection by getting them to trust you, because a lot of our clients come into the program have a lot of trust issues due to the hurt and trauma they have experienced before arriving here.

[00:17:06] **Daniel Treviño** Ok, let's talk about the kinds of issues our clients deal with. So how does housing instability or homelessness affect the development of our clients?

[00:17:21] **Thad McCaul** So it robs them of a lot of their youth, because their focus has been shifted. They go into survival mode. When really during that span of time, the normal way of life for someone their age would be enjoying their high school experience. But now, they have to worry about staying safe. Without having caregivers to keep them safe, they can't focus on those things that kids their age would be doing at that time.

[00:18:02] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, if you're in survival mode, you're concerned for your own safety, right? And so, you take on all of that responsibility.

[00:18:11] **Thad McCaul** Absolutely.

[00:18:11] **Daniel Treviño** And then the child is—almost in some cases—parentified, you know? And like you said, it kind of robs them of their childhood. What's the hardest part about gaining independence for our clients?

[00:18:31] **Thad McCaul** The responsibility piece. Having to be responsible and accountable for their behaviors and actions, and taking on the role of caring for themselves, is a very big part of it. And for many of them, it's challenging because we get a lot of clients who come into the program stuck at an adolescent age—maybe around 12. So here you are, trying to move this 12-year-old mindset toward becoming a complete adult, and you only have about three years to do it. That's a huge hurdle for a lot of the clients who come into The LIFE Project.

## Stuck on Autopilot: Breaking Unhelpful Patterns

[00:19:28] **Daniel Treviño** All right, so let's transition and talk about Alex's story. What stood out to you?

[00:19:36] **Thad McCaul** Her resilience.

[00:19:38] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah.

[00:19:38] **Thad McCaul** Her resilience. And since I've been doing this work, what amazes me is the resilience of so many of the young adults who come into the program. The fact that they're still alive—the fact that they're still getting up and trying—you know? And one of the things I love about this program is that we provide a safety net for them, a place where they're allowed to make mistakes.

[00:20:07] **Daniel Treviño** Yes.

[00:20:07] **Thad McCaul** You know?

[00:20:08] **Daniel Treviño** Yes.

[00:20:08] **Thad McCaul** For them to make the errors, and for us to boost them back up to try again.

[00:20:14] **Daniel Treviño** Yes, I know in Alex's story, she had that safety net during her time in the Morris Program. She had a mental health crisis, and luckily, she had been getting therapy and resources to help her learn how to advocate for herself. So when she was going through that crisis, she was able to ask for help. She even checked herself into the hospital. So what is that like—trying to transition clients to start asking for help?

[00:20:59] **Thad McCaul** That's one of the areas that's still a work in progress because it's hard to—how do I want to say this...

[00:21:08] **Daniel Treviño** It's like a habit that they have or...

[00:21:10] **Thad McCaul** It's a habit, and the word I'm looking for is the one I just used—on autopilot.

[00:21:15] **Daniel Treviño** Oh, yes.

[00:21:18] **Thad McCaul** On autopilot—where this becomes their mode of operation, their norm. So we're trying to disrupt a norm they've become comfortable with, and encourage them by letting them know they no longer have to do it on their own.

[00:21:32] **Daniel Treviño** Yes.

[00:21:33] **Thad McCaul** You have the support around you to help you along your journey. And that's where the connection becomes important—going back to that connection, where they trust you enough to allow you to step in and provide that support.

## True Independence Includes Support

[00:21:51] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah. Another similarity between Jeremiah's and Alex's stories is that they both had to get a car. And I know that, as a LIFE Mentor, you deal with that a lot with our clients.

[00:22:05] **Thad McCaul** A lot, yes.

[00:22:06] **Daniel Treviño** And like Jeremiah, he purchased this car. But just like with Alex, it turned out to be a scam. Again, they decided, "Let me do it on my own." Jeremiah said he brought the car here, and then it stopped running. That's when he came to you and asked, "Okay, what do I do now with this clunker of a car?" Do you remember that?

[00:22:31] **Thad McCaul** Absolutely, I do. We provide a plethora of resources, and we're constantly teaching life skills around how to go about purchasing a car,...

[00:22:45] **Daniel Treviño** Yes.

[00:22:45] **Thad McCaul** ...what that involves, and what it looks like. But even with all of that, what we're battling—like we talked about earlier—is that both Jeremiah and Alex come in on autopilot, used to doing everything on their own. They haven't been able to ask for assistance, so they end up taking these larger risks.

[00:23:11] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, but again, The LIFE Project was here as a safety net. Even talking with Jeremiah, it taught him that when it comes to this situation of buying the car he does need help. He does need help. So I'm like, okay, he got the lesson. And it's kind of confusing because this whole program is about gaining independence. But gaining independence doesn't necessarily mean you have to do it all by yourself.

[00:23:44] **Thad McCaul** Absolutely.

[00:23:45] **Daniel Treviño** And I think that's something that's really hard for us to learn, even as adults. I've been learning this myself through making the podcast—that it's okay to receive help when it's needed.

[00:24:02] **Thad McCaul** Yeah, absolutely. Oh, one thing about Jeremiah, he's very introverted. Let's just say that. And with his personality, he operates under the radar.

[00:24:17] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah.

[00:24:18] **Thad McCaul** But one of my go-to's is playful engagement. So if I can't make a connection one way, that's always my go-to. And I think that's why I was able to break the ice with Jeremiah. In addition to my playful engagement, the cooking skills...

[00:24:39] **Daniel Treviño** Chicken alfredo? He mentioned that.

[00:24:40] **Thad McCaul** Yeah, I had some cooking sessions with him, where I showed him how to maneuver in the kitchen and explained the advantages of being able to cook meals—how it can save money and how it's healthier to eat that way.

[00:25:00] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah.

[00:25:00] **Thad McCaul** So he embraced that idea and we've gotten together and cooked some meals.

[00:25:05] **Daniel Treviño** One-on-one, right?

[00:25:06] **Thad McCaul** Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I do a lot of one-on-ones with the clients because that's the way to really start forming that relationship. And what it does is prove to them how invested you are and how much you value them. And I think that's one of the key things our clients need to know—that we value them and that they matter.

## Success is Not a Linear Path

[00:25:33] **Daniel Treviño** What do you think is going to be required for these young adults to be successful in this next chapter in their life?

[00:25:43] **Thad McCaul** Well, it's left up to them, and a lot of their success may very well be retroactive. We've even had clients come back who had previously gone through the program that struggled. But they have come back and finally a bell rang in their head—maybe they struggled for few years, but now they get it.

[00:26:14] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, this journey isn't linear.

[00:26:16] **Thad McCaul** Yes.

[00:26:17] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah. Like you said, there's ups, there's downs, and sometimes you do a loop around.

[00:26:22] **Thad McCaul** Yeah.

[00:26:23] **Daniel Treviño** But at least... maybe the best you can hope for is that this experience will linger in their hearts and minds. So, like you said, if they reach a point where they want to come back and visit, it can bring up those lessons and connections—and maybe they'll make a new choice.

[00:26:46] **Thad McCaul** Yes, absolutely.

[00:26:48] **Daniel Treviño** Is there anything else you would like to share regarding the podcasts or maybe foster care in general?

[00:26:58] **Thad McCaul** I would like to add that it's a great work. I really enjoy what I'm doing, and it's so rewarding to be around people who have adopted the same sentiments and are on the same page when it comes to the services being provided here in this organization.

[00:27:20] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, we all believe in the mission of protecting children and preserving families.

[00:27:25] **Thad McCaul** Yes, the mission. Absolutely.

[00:27:27] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah.

[00:27:27] **Thad McCaul** And the core values of what we do.

[00:27:31] **Daniel Treviño** That's awesome. Well, thank you, Mr. Thad...

[00:27:35] **Thad McCaul** My pleasure!

[00:27:35] **Daniel Treviño** for speaking with me today. And I really appreciate all the great work that you do here.

[00:27:40] **Thad McCaul** Thank you.

[00:27:41] **Daniel Treviño** And yeah, take care.

[00:27:44] **Thad McCaul** Thank you—do the same, Daniel.

## Closing Credits

[00:27:47] **Daniel Treviño** Well, that's it for this season of Counting On Us. Please don't forget to share, rate, and write a review—it makes a huge difference. I want to thank all of my guests who had the courage, trust, and willingness to share their stories with me and our ACH family. Your resilience in the face of adversity has demonstrated the power of the human spirit to overcome, grow, and heal. It has truly been an honor to share your inspiring stories.

[00:28:17] **Daniel Treviño** I would also like to thank all ACH team members who contributed to this podcast and to the betterment of the lives of all of our clients. Thank you.

[00:28:27] **Daniel Treviño** And finally, I would like to thank you for taking the time to listen to this podcast and for recognizing that providing safety, hope, and love to children and families is necessary if we want our community to thrive. Follow us on social media for future stories and announcements.

[00:28:45] **Daniel Treviño** If you would like to support ACH in its mission to protect children and preserve families, then you can donate now at [ACHservices.org/Donate](https://www.ACHservices.org/Donate) or you could find the link in the show notes. Counting On Us is a podcast presented by ACH Child and Family Services, written, edited, and produced by Daniel Treviño. Special thanks to Jeremiah Howard and Thad McCaul. Mixing by Panoramic Sound. Thanks for listening!