

COUNTING ON US | SEASON 1 | EPISODE 2

The Power of Relationships

Introduction

[00:00:03] **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? And 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, and directly from those whose mission it is to help them. On today's episode, my conversation with Arthur Pete Lowery and Nick Little about a recent story shared on the podcast. I'm Daniel Treviño, and you're listening to Counting On Us, a show presented by ACH Child and Family Services.

Keya's Journey Recap: Loss, Passion, and Perseverance

[00:01:06] **Daniel Treviño** On our last episode, we shared Keya's story of pursuing her passion for the culinary arts while at ACH's LIFE Project. But getting started on that career path wasn't easy for her. After years of being in foster care, the people she could depend on for emotional support and guidance were slim. And when she first arrived at the LIFE Project, she had just finished dropping out of school from Texas Woman's University. Suffice to say, she felt scared and alone as soon as she arrived at ACH, and it wasn't long before her grandmother, her best friend, died.

Broken Bonds and Family Separation

[00:01:40] **Daniel Treviño** My first guest is 20-year-old Arthur Pete Lowery, who is currently in The LIFE Project. Originally from Gary, Indiana, Arthur and his ten siblings were separated at a young age after a tragic accident led Child Protective Services to remove the children from their parents. Five of the siblings, including Arthur, were taken in by their aunt and moved to Texas. Welcome Arthur to the show. When did you first arrive at ACH?

[00:02:07] **Arthur Lowery** I arrived at ACH when I was 15. I came here when I was 15, going on 16. Then, I came back to stay in extended care at 18.

[00:02:20] **Daniel Treviño** Okay, so when you were here as a teenager, what program were you in?

[00:02:26] **Arthur Lowery** I was actually in the homeless— I don't know what it was called.

[00:02:29] **Daniel Treviño** The Youth Emergency Shelter?

[00:02:30] **Arthur Lowery** Yes, the Youth Emergency Shelter. I was up there for like a week or two and then went back home after that.

[00:02:38] **Daniel Treviño** So who brought you there?

[00:02:41] **Arthur Lowery** My auntie, because I didn't want to live her. She was a lot, a lot back then. We didn't have the best relationship. You know what I'm saying? I feel like it was because of my older siblings that she took out her anger on me. And I just couldn't take it anymore. Because I know I'm a good person. I know I want to do good things. But you can't just keep taking that anger out on me.

[00:03:02] **Arthur Lowery** So I just wanted to go. She put me in here because I was going to go with my mom. My mom, that's who I got taken away from, but she ended up putting me over here for weeks just to give me a little taste of what it would be like to be separated from everybody. I was like, "Whoa!" And I just felt how powerless I was. So many things I didn't know. And then, even when I was here, it broke my heart, mind you; I don't smoke, don't drink, don't go out there trying to have sex at a young age. I was like literally a good kid. The most I do is play computer games and stuff. I literally stay to myself and play basketball. I don't do anything wrong.

[00:03:40] **Arthur Lowery** When I got here, you got to see all these kids from all these different backgrounds and like even some who cut themselves whenever they're depressed. I've never done that. I'm like, "Whoa!" And you see these other kids who are just so impulsive. And I understand their pain, they have nobody. And I realized without my auntie, who else do I really have to depend on? And she's supposed to be there for me. She was raised just like me. She didn't have anybody. Why would you want to repeat the cycle? You supposed to help me become the person that you wished you could have been. You supposed to be the person for me that you wish you had in your life. That's all I wanted from her.

[00:04:25] **Daniel Treviño** When you left, you were about fifteen, so you had three years before you turned eighteen. Did you stay with your aunt, or did you go to foster care?

[00:04:40] **Arthur Lowery** I went to foster care, but when I went back to my auntie, I was scared to go into foster care after seeing those kids. But I realized that I would rather— how do I say it— walk the plank than stay on that ship.

[00:04:56] **Daniel Treviño** To stay with your aunt?

[00:04:57] **Arthur Lowery** Yes, I would rather jump in that water and see what it's like because I knew that me and my little brother cannot stay on board. It was just getting worse and worse. And it was hard. But I had to break those things off. I told my teacher what was happening, and she got me into foster care.

Where Do You Go When You Age Out of Foster Care?

[00:05:12] **Daniel Treviño** So you and your younger brother were placed in foster care for a few years? How did you end up at The LIFE Project?

[00:05:19] **Arthur Lowery** So, I first came to The LIFE Project after I had aged out of care. I was seventeen at the time and I realized I had nowhere else to go. I was going to be living on my own, but I was still a senior in high school and had a full six more months to go. I was already in contact with Mr. Nick and a few other volunteers and mentors here. They had interviewed me and talked to me, and since I had known them for so long— and they had seen me around a lot in most of the programs and events for foster kids—they thought, “Yeah, we should definitely consider him.” After that, I finally came over here.

[00:06:01] **Daniel Treviño** Let's now talk about Keya's story. You had the chance to listen to the last episode, what were your first impressions after hearing her story?

[00:06:14] **Arthur Lowery** I felt that same exact way. When I first came in here, I didn't open up to anybody. I went straight to my room. I was quiet; I didn't understand. I thought, “This is going to be just like foster care all over again. They're going to move me. They're going to separate me. I don't know what's going to happen.”

[00:06:33] **Daniel Treviño** So did you also had a period, when you first arrived, where you were pretty down?

[00:06:37] **Arthur Lowery** Yes.

[00:06:38] **Arthur Lowery** I was broken.

[00:06:38] **Daniel Treviño** Right.

[00:06:39] **Daniel Treviño** And so how long did that period last?

[00:06:42] **Arthur Lowery** It lasted for the first two or three months because, when you first get here, it teaches you how to live on your own. Especially at her age—and even at mine—whenever you're young and you don't wake up to people, that can be difficult.

[00:07:03] **Daniel Treviño** When you don't wake up to people?

[00:07:04] **Arthur Lowery** Like, you don't wake up with a family, a house, or a typical foster care family— there's nothing. I'm thankful for this, because here at ACH you can walk outside your room and see people. But whenever you wake up in that room alone, it teaches you that maybe you need a roommate to help you get through those things. However, at some point in your life, you're going to be by yourself.

[00:07:33] **Daniel Treviño** What was your biggest fear at this time?

[00:07:36] **Arthur Lowery** My biggest fear was being separated from my little brother. I thought I was never going make it.

Redefining Independent Living as a Supportive Experience

[00:07:43] **Daniel Treviño** How have the LIFE mentors or the staff here helped you during those feelings of separation or guided you through that?

[00:07:53] **Arthur Lowery** They were able to talk to me. We would go on events, and they would try to keep a smile on my face, even when I knew they were dealing with their own struggles in their personal lives. Just having somebody who can help you, guide you, talk to you, and relate to you on a personal level— from their life to yours— makes a difference. It's not like therapy; it's not like any of that. It's more like mentorship, more like guidance, and that's what I love. So, I can relate to that part, especially when I hear her story about coming here. I'm just glad— so glad— that I was able to meet all of them, because even now, after two years, they still check on me. They always call me, they always talk to me, even when I see them, we have personal conversations. It's bigger than just business; it's bigger than just their job. They actually love doing it, and that's what I love to see.

[00:08:54] **Daniel Treviño** And what changed for you that got you to start making a change or start making progress?

[00:09:03] **Arthur Lowery** Whenever I finally got to see my little brother again, I saw what he'd been through—how they were moving him from facility to facility—and I wasn't there to protect him. That made me change my whole way of life. I need to be who I need to be. I can't just give up on myself, even if I feel like I've lost things to live for. That doesn't mean I should stop being who I am, because then he'd lose the one person he looks up to—the one person he calls on for help. I may not have someone like me in my life, but he has me in his. So I'm able to be there for him, and that's the biggest thing—that's what changed my whole life: he did. Without him, I would have no drive, no determination. I'd be really lost.

[00:09:57] **Daniel Treviño** What would you want other people to know—whether it's about The LIFE Project or foster care? This is up to you: what do you really want to communicate to the audience right now?

[00:10:12] **Arthur Lowery** I want to communicate this: SILs—any SILs, even The LIFE Project— are not a foster care setting. It's not like you're going to get taken away, switched from house to house, or sent all over the nation. They offer you guidance, counseling, strength, and support—all of that. They are literally who you need. Take advantage of those benefits; go to college for free. Do that— stay in SIL. Don't just go out there and try to do it on your own. Yes, you can do it on your own— I understand that. But you don't need to do it on your own right now. Especially for you 18-year olds; I was 18. You're just ready to get out there and forget about everything, but no— don't rush. Understand, take it step by step: go to a dorm, go to college, then get your apartment. Do exactly that.

[00:11:07] **Daniel Treviño** That's great. And for just as a reminder, SIL stands for Supervised Independent Living.

[00:11:13] **Arthur Lowery** Yep.

[00:11:13] **Daniel Treviño** And that's what The LIFE Project is, and it sounds like you're talking to those 18-year-olds who are at the point of deciding whether to completely leave foster care, or to stay in extended foster care and join a Supervised Independent Living Program like The LIFE Project.

[00:11:34] **Arthur Lowery** And yes, I'll say this: whenever people see the word "supervise," they panic—I panicked too. But it's actually supportive. Supportive independent living; we are here to support you. We're not going to force you to do anything, we're not going to watch over your back like a hawk. We are here to support you. You know, Nick Little— that's how he described it to me. I was like, "I get it." Even living in SIL, living in these dorms, it is supportive; you get the freedom you deserve, the freedom that you are given. But you have to make sure you use it correctly. And if you mess up—like, for example, during my free time I tried to drive to Washington, DC over the weekend and got stranded. These are the things you have to look out for. But I told them, and they helped me clean up my mistakes. They said, "This is why you have to be responsible." So yeah, this is a supportive independent setting.

[00:12:40] **Daniel Treviño** That's great, and we're actually going to speak to Nick Little after the break. So, thank you Arthur, for coming to speak with me, and I can't wait to see all the great things that you're going to accomplish.

[00:12:53] **Arthur Lowery** Thank you.

[00:12:54] **Daniel Treviño** We'll be right back.

A Message from Dr. Wayne Carson

[00:12:57] **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, 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 Rush to Escape the System

[00:13:36] **Daniel Treviño** All right so, I'm here with Nick Little, the Transitions Program Manager with The LIFE Project. Welcome to the show.

[00:13:43] **Nick Little** Thank you. Thanks for having me.

[00:13:44] **Daniel Treviño** Of course. Can you introduce yourself? And tell us how you first got here at ACH, and how long you've been with The LIFE Project?

[00:13:56] **Nick Little** Yeah, I've been with ACH— it'll be ten years in November. I first came to Texas, and pretty much as soon as I came here, I saw ACH and found out about The LIFE Project. I was really excited about the idea of working with 18-year-olds coming out of care. Before this, I ran a shelter in Arkansas for seven years, and I saw a lot of 17-year-olds come out of care and just not be ready for adult life.

[00:14:31] **Daniel Treviño** What are the consequences for these young adults who just sign themselves out of foster care at seventeen?

[00:14:40] **Nick Little** A lot of times young adults just want to be done with the system. So that's the focus. The entire focus for them is just, "I want to be on my own. I don't want to have someone telling me what to do, controlling my every move." So, they're not thinking about those negative consequences for which they may not be ready. Often, the system has not prepared them for what does it mean to be an adult or what that involves. Having a system or a program where you can go and actually learn this stuff can be vital and very important. We have a lot of young adults that don't want to do it; they still have the same mindset: "I'm ready to leave the system." But it takes talking to them and explaining that SIL is very different than seventeen and under foster care. In SIL, you have a lot more control and a lot more agency.

[00:15:31] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah that's great that you're mentioning this, because right before the break, I was talking with Arthur. I asked him what he would want other 18-year-olds to know about The LIFE Project, and we were talking about how The LIFE Project is a Supervised Independent Living Program. When he first heard the word "supervised", he said it was a word that brings fear. He actually mentioned you and how, when he first met you, you explained to him that it's really more supportive.

[00:16:06] **Nick Little** Yeah.

[00:16:07] **Daniel Treviño** Can you talk about those conversations?

[00:16: 08] **Nick Little** Yeah, no, I've actually talked with the head of SIL about that. It's like that word "supervised" is a very triggering word for a lot of young adults because it kind of goes across all programs— you know, supervision, supervision, you have to watch the kids *all the time*. But that's not the case in SIL. It's definitely more supportive. For example, there might be days where it's just the young adults in the building, and staff are doing things with other young adults outside of campus. So, they have a lot more freedom in that regard. And that, ultimately, is kind of an "aha" moment for a lot of young adults. It's like, okay, this isn't you breathing down my neck.

[00:16:49] **Nick Little** I think about Arthur because, the first time we met, he came with his PAL worker and the PAL supervisor. They wanted to talk about the program and introduce Arthur to me. We met out on the front porch of The Rees-Jones Building, and he was just a ball of energy. And if you ever meet Arthur, you'll know that he is 100% nonstop all the time. He talked about everything he wanted to do—all his goals, everything he hoped to accomplish, and his desire to get his own apartment. He had so many ideas about what he wanted to do.

When Crisis Hits: How Supervised Independent Living Helps

[00:17:26] **Daniel Treviño** What I feel like his story shares with Keya's is that, as soon as they arrive here, it's not simply, "Alright, let's start meeting our goals. Let's start finding the job." Instead, they're coming in with significant mental and emotional distress based on their circumstances. Can you talk about how common that is, and what that period is like for many of the young adults that come to The LIFE Project?

[00:17:55] **Nick Little** Yeah, I think that's a common thing that gets overlooked. In general, when people talk about SIL, they assume everyone comes in and just hits the ground running—meeting every goal there and adjusting well to the program. But that's rarely the case. A lot of times, as you mentioned, emotional baggage or past traumas resurface, and it happens quite frequently. It's something that we really try to address with them: How do you process through this? How do you talk about it? We focus on helping them understand these experiences are common.

[00:18:37] **Daniel Treviño** And of course, you know, things happen while they're in LIFE, and in Keya's case, her grandmother died. I'd like to hear your reaction to that moment, especially since she went to Stephanie Henry, the LIFE mentor at that time. Could you share your thoughts on that moment in her story?

[00:19:04] **Nick Little** Yeah, it's really hard to watch our young adults go through these things, even though we know it's a part of life. In the grand scheme of things, when situations like this happen, it's good that they have a place like this— somewhere they can turn to, someone they can go for support. When I heard about it from Stephanie, there was obviously that hurt, but I was so happy that she was willing to come to staff and not keep it inside. That can really do a number on someone, especially if you already have mental health issues. Taking on that burden on alone just doesn't bode well for your long-term success.

How Strong Relationships and Mentorship Shape Success

[00:19:52] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, I think relationships are kind of a—not so secret—ingredient that we all need in order to achieve our goals. In Keya’s story, for example, she had not only the support here at The LIFE Project, but once she entered the internship at the Fort Worx culinary program, she also had teachers and mentors in her field. What do you think we can learn from Arthur’s and Keya’s stories?

[00:20:29] **Nick Little** I think, with their stories in particular—and in the grander scheme of things, as you said earlier—the importance of relationships stands out. It’s very easy to think that just providing opportunities is enough for our young adults or for kids in foster care. But a lot of times, they need supportive figures to help them make sense of things and to let them know that some of what they’re experiencing is normal. It’s not just about providing opportunities. For example, when it comes to school, foster kids may have their education paid for, but without supportive people around—even with some of the internships we offer in the program—it doesn’t always feel like a grand opportunity to them.

[00:21:23] **Nick Little** You know, a key component that I always discuss with our partners is mentorship. I don’t want to do an internship with someone just to give them a job, because a lot of times our young adults need more than just an opportunity. We always want to ensure they have a fair chance at success, and mentorship is a big part of that. We’ve seen many of our young adults really struggle if they don’t have someone they can talk to—someone who can simply be present and in the moment with them.

[00:21:56] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah and to witness them while they’re achieving these goals.

[00:22:02] **Nick Little** Yeah.

[00:22:02] **Daniel Treviño** I think that is so powerful. When I was able to be at Keya's graduation, Stephanie was there, along with other members of her support system at ACH. It really made me realize how significant it is just to witness these young people achieve something, especially since many of them don't have their families as part of the picture. So again, I think it's those relationships and supports that really give them the boost or motivation to continue.

[00:22:38] **Nick Little** Yeah. It's a journey.

[00:22:40] **Daniel Treviño** Yes, totally. It's a journey. Well, that's awesome, Nick. Thank you so much for all the work you do here, and thanks for speaking to me today.

[00:22:48] **Nick Little** No, thank you.

Closing Credits

[00:22:53] **Daniel Treviño** That's all for today. But make sure you like and subscribe so you don't miss the next two episodes we release every two weeks. And if you enjoyed the show, please share and write a review; it makes a huge difference. Also, if you feel inspired and would like to support ACH in its mission to protect children and preserve families, you can donate now at [ACHservices.org/Donate](https://www.achservices.org/Donate) or 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 Arthur Pete Lowery and Nick Little. Mixing by Panoramic Sound. Thanks for listening.