



COUNTING ON US | SEASON 1 | EPISODE 6

New World New Perspective

Introduction

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

[00:00:14] **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.

[00:00:52] **Daniel Treviño** On today's episode, my conversation with Julie Brown and Dr. Wayne Carson 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.

Semi's Story Recap: Finding Strength and Resilience

[00:01:18] **Daniel Treviño** Previously, on Episode Five, we went back thirty years to tell the story of a young girl named Semi, who took on the role as mother for her four younger siblings because their parents were addicted to drugs and alcohol. Upon arrival at ACH, the sibling struggled to adjust to a new way of living—so much so that they all decided to go back with their parents, except for Semi. She made the choice to stay, but with that came the need to build strong relationships with the many caregivers and staff here at ACH. These relationships proved to be vital to her success and well-being throughout her life.

From Childhood Trauma to Finding safety at ACH

[00:01:55] **Daniel Treviño** My first guest is Julie Brown, ACH's Hospitality and Events Manager, who recently celebrated her 15th Work Anniversary here at the agency. However, Julie's history with ACH goes back to 1974, when she and her brother were first admitted into care. At the time, Julie's father was an alcoholic, and her mother struggled financially and with PTSD from past family trauma. With few options and little support, Julie's mother decided to bring the children to ACH. Welcome, Julie, to the show.

[00:02:27] **Julie Brown** Thank you so much. I'm happy to be here.

[00:02:29] **Daniel Treviño** Great! So, at what age did you and your brother first arrive at ACH?

[00:02:36] **Julie Brown** The first time I remember coming to ACH was when I was four. Actually, they wouldn't even accept kiddos until they were five, and I was just shy of turning five. So, I do remember, the first night I was lying in bed—I just was so scared. And it was so dark, lying in that bed alone. I remember specifically, there was a cat crawling in the windowsill outside, and it just... you know, you're just so little, and I just remember thinking, "Where's my family? Where's my family?"

[00:03:15] **Daniel Treviño** How long did you stay in care at ACH?

[00:03:18] **Julie Brown** We stayed in care for a few years, and then we would leave and come back. That happened probably three times until I turned eleven or twelve. I do remember my mom bringing us the first time, and I do vaguely remember feeling sad—like we're going to miss her. We were really fortunate and blessed to have such wonderful house parents who are so loving and caring; it made that transition so much easier. I mean they were just good salt-of-the-earth people—they loved the kids. I remember a couple of years later, when we left and then came back, I was actually excited to return because, with so much dysfunction, being at ACH had become my normal. And honestly, when I look back, I think the emotions get stirred up, but I'm just grateful that we had a place like ACH.

[00:04:36] **Daniel Treviño** Wait, so you're saying that when you went back with your mother that first time...

[00:04:42] **Julie Brown** Yeah.

[00:04:43] **Daniel Treviño** You were more aware— you were older now.

[00:04:45] **Julie Brown** Oh yeah, much more aware.

[00:04:47] **Daniel Treviño** And so, you were able to witness, like you said, the dysfunction.

[00:04:52] **Julie Brown** Yeah.

[00:04:54] **Daniel Treviño** Can you share a little bit about what that was?

Life in Survival Mode: What Children Miss Without Stability

[00:04:58] **Julie Brown** It was just— she was really vocal about, like, “We don’t have the money,” or, you know, struggling financially or not being able to buy groceries, going to the doctor, or having birthday parties. Things like that weren’t even talked about. It was just—

[00:05:23] **Daniel Treviño** Survival mode.

[00:05:24] **Julie Brown** Yeah, it was totally a survival mode thing. So, being at ACH— when you’re getting three meals a day, you have a routine, you’re playing, you’ve got bath time and friend time, you’re going to the dentist and seeing doctors—you’re exposed to this whole new world of what, for me, should be normal. So when you go back into a situation that, to me, was just poverty, you know, it’s just...

[00:05:57] **Daniel Treviño** When you’re in survival mode, what do you miss out on?

[00:06:01] **Julie Brown** Oh, wow. I think when you’re in survival mode, you miss out on a lot. We missed out on friendships; we missed out on just, I think, being just loved, and on experiencing calm and peace. I think about kids just playing in a park. For me, when I look at my grandchildren now, they’re so carefree, have no worries, and all their needs are met. And like that wasn’t the case for us. So I think she knew—she really knew—that she couldn’t do it. And she wanted to do it. She really wanted to raise us and give us the things that we needed and wanted, but she just couldn’t, emotionally.

[00:06:54] **Daniel Treviño** Well, I mean, on some level she did—because she brought you back.

[00:06:58] **Julie Brown** Yes.

[00:06:59] **Daniel Treviño** Right?

[00:06:59] **Julie Brown** Oh, yeah, I agree.

[00:07:00] **Daniel Treviño** That was multiple times, right?

[00:07:02] **Julie Brown** Right.

[00:07:03] **Daniel Treviño** They did it on their own. It wasn't as if the state was obligating them or anything.

[00:07:07] **Julie Brown** Right, back then, I don't recall CPS being a thing or being involved.

[00:07:12] **Daniel Treviño** Well, let's now talk about the episode I had you listen to, which was Semi's story.

[00:07:19] **Julie Brown** Yes.

[00:07:20] **Daniel Treviño** Now, after listening to her story, what of her challenges stood out to you or you related with?

[00:07:28] **Julie Brown** Oh, I actually love, love, love that story. It's such a beautiful story with a beautiful ending. But I think what struck me was that she was so little—being left for days on end, taking care of her siblings, and she was put in this role without knowing any different. What really hit me, what brought out so much emotion, is that her world was so small. And then, when she got to ACH, it was like her world became so much bigger—her eyes were opened to what a new normal could be, to what she wanted it to be. She was able to reflect back and realize how abnormal her life had been, and I could identify with that so much, because our world was such a small place.

Healing from Trauma: How Safe Spaces Create Hope

[00:08:36] **Daniel Treviño** What I feel is one of the most powerful moments in her story is when she came to ACH with her siblings—she had quite a few siblings—and they all end up going back home except for her. That's because, once she was exposed to this whole other way of living, she felt empowered enough to make a new choice.

[00:09:03] **Julie Brown** Exactly.

[00:09:04] **Daniel Treviño** To stay.

[00:09:05] **Julie Brown** Yes.

[00:09:06] **Daniel Treviño** And I don't know, I think that moment is just so powerful to me. Because obviously, you're choosing not to go back with your parents—like that hurts.

[00:09:19] **Julie Brown** Right, it does hurt. And I know my mom was—well, you know, that second or third time we came in, we were so excited to be back. Now, as a mother myself, I've thought about that moment—when we were just ready to get in that front door and get back to what we probably would have considered our home. You know?

[00:09:43] **Daniel Treviño** Here at ACH?

[00:09:44] **Julie Brown** Yes, at ACH. I'm sure, as a mom, that hurt her heart because she knew she couldn't do for us what they could—and...

[00:09:54] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, I know. Semi talked about how, when she would have visits with her family, she felt like a black sheep.

[00:10:01] **Daniel Treviño** Like the gulf between them was growing.

[00:10:04] **Julie Brown** Right.

[00:10:05] **Daniel Treviño** Did you have a similar experience?

[00:10:07] **Julie Brown** I think, yeah, we did. I could relate in the sense that, when she was saying it, it was almost like—like a, I don't know, a kind of jealousy, or... I don't really know what the word would be, but I'm sure there was—

[00:10:24] **Daniel Treviño** She did call it—she did call it—like a kind of jealousy.

[00:10:28] **Julie Brown** It was like there were some emotions going on—like, you know, you felt like, 'Oh, you can't wait to get back over there.' It was just... I don't know, some animosity or just something going on.

[00:10:39] **Daniel Treviño** Kinda sounds like, if say, your parents were divorced—and, like, your father's other wife, you know what I mean?



[00:10:47] **Julie Brown** Yeah.

[00:10:47] **Daniel Treviño** Like someone who's giving you— providing the needs.

[00:10:49] **Julie Brown** Right.

[00:10:50] **Daniel Treviño** Because that's what ACH was doing.

[00:10:51] **Julie Brown** Right.

[00:10:51] **Daniel Treviño** Giving you the needs.

[00:10:53] **Julie Brown** Yes.

[00:10:53] **Daniel Treviño** That she couldn't.

[00:10:55] **Julie Brown** Right.

[00:10:55] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, I'm sure that's hurtful.

[00:10:59] **Julie Brown** Right

[00:11:00] **Daniel Treviño** What do you wish more people knew about children in foster care?

[00:11:06] **Julie Brown** There's just so much—when I think about child abuse, neglect, family trauma—all of those things are still happening today. There's so much of it still going on, and kids need to be saved. Families need to be saved; they need to be loved, cared for, and given the chance to experience safety, hope, and love—which is one of the things we talk about here, and certainly something we experience. I just wish there were more people who were aware of agencies like ours and who would reach out to help kids and families through these times, and to hear these stories of overcoming the things they experienced as children. And I love her story, and the fact that she ended up getting adopted by her original house parents—how beautiful is that? Even as an adult, she still needed and wanted that relationship, that mother and father figure. It's so emotional, so powerful, and I just hope I have the opportunity to meet them one day because it's a beautiful story.

[00:12:23] **Daniel Treviño** Well, thank you so much, Julie. I'll just say—you really did make it. You did it. Congratulations!

[00:12:29] **Julie Brown** Thank you. Thank you so much. I appreciate you.

[00:12:31] **Daniel Treviño** Alright, take care.

[00:12:32] **Julie Brown** Thanks.

[00:12:33] **Daniel Treviño** We'll be right back.

A Message from Wayne Carson

[00:12:36] **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.

ACH: A Home for Children in Need

[00:13:14] **Daniel Treviño** All right, let's continue the conversation. I'm here with Dr. Wayne Carson, CEO at ACH. Welcome to Counting On Us.

[00:13:22] **Wayne Carson** Thank you. Glad to be here.

[00:13:24] **Daniel Treviño** So, how many years have you been CEO at ACH?

[00:13:29] **Wayne Carson** I have been CEO for almost 23 years now. I started as CEO in June of 2000, and before that, I had been with ACH for about 11 years. I actually started out as a House Parent working with our teenage boys, then became a Caseworker, and took on various other roles. I left ACH for about three years to work for a consulting firm, and then I've been back as CEO since June of 2000.

[00:13:56] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, that's what I was getting at—even though you're the CEO now, you started way back. Do you know what year that was?

[00:14:05] **Wayne Carson** It was 1987.

[00:14:07] **Daniel Treviño** '87 okay... and what was ACH like at that point?

[00:14:15] **Wayne Carson** In 1987, ACH was a program for kids who couldn't live with their families. We had 64 beds—half for boys and half for girls. Our four buildings were divided into those for older children (middle and high school) and those for younger children (elementary school). Our vision was to be the new family for these children. They came to us because their families couldn't care for them, and it was our job to be their family as much as we could. Many kids stayed with us for a long period and grew up with us. Of course, that vision has expanded over the years, but that's what we were in 1987.

[00:15:06] **Daniel Treviño** And at that point, you were more in direct care role.

[00:15:10] **Wayne Carson** I actually was a youth care worker. I worked the two-to-eleven shift, so I would come in when kids were getting home from school. We would cook dinner, have snacks, do homework, and go out to the playground to play—lots of great hockey games, wiffle ball, hide and seek, tag. It was fun. We had kids who certainly needed some extra attention. They needed to learn how to manage their anger, express themselves, identify their feelings, and learn how to trust adults.

How Strong Relationships Transform Lives

[00:15:47] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, and during this time period, this is when you actually met Semi. We just shared her story in our previous episode. When I was speaking to Semi, she told me that you were the first person from ACH that she met. Do you remember meeting her?

[00:16:09] **Wayne Carson** I do. My job when Semi came was to handle the intake process. So, I was responsible for interviewing kids and families whenever we had an opening, getting an idea of their circumstances, figuring out how we could help, and gathering the information needed for children to be admitted. So yes, I do remember—when you meet Semi, you don't forget her. She stands out wherever she is, and it's interesting because there were a lot of adults at ACH who cared for Semi and took care of her. But, as the intake person and the first one she met, I've had a lot of kids tell me, "You know, you're the one—the first person I ever met." And so I do remember that for sure.

[00:17:03] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, and in the episode, Semi talked about when she first arrived—that transition—and how it was such a cultural shock: the day-to-day routines, the family dinners—it was all very foreign to her. She was coming from a situation where her mother and stepfather were addicted to drugs and alcohol, which put her in the role of a mother to her four younger siblings. So, as staff, how do you work with these children to help them adjust their way of being?

[00:17:49] **Wayne Carson** Yeah, I think one of the core values we have at ACH is that relationships get results. You know, just giving Semi advice or telling her she doesn't have to do something anymore is meaningless without a relationship with someone she trusts, believes in, and knows has wisdom and her best interests at heart. That's one of the beauties of having kids live with us—we can address day-to-day issues as they arise, coach and guide them, and see how things turn out. If something doesn't work, we try something else. It's an ongoing process, and to Semi's benefit, she allowed that to happen. She let herself develop relationships with people she trusted and allowed herself to let go a little bit.

[00:18:42] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, there was a difference between her journey and that of her younger siblings. Eventually, all of them went back with their family, but Semi didn't. What are your thoughts on that—on that moment and her story?

[00:19:00] **Wayne Carson** I'll never forget that day. With Semi, it was a process—there were times when they left, then came back, and left again. I think the whole family, including Semi, gave being a family with their mom several tries, but it just wasn't working. The day their mom came to pick them up again and Semi said, "I'm not going," is a day I'll never forget. I can't imagine being her age and having to say no to your mother, but she knew that the opportunity to do what she wanted with her life—to continue cheerleading, drama, friendships, and her path to graduate from Paschal High School—would have been jeopardized by leaving. She was able to look into the future and say, "This is a very difficult choice, but I'm going to make it because I think it's best for me." And she did everything she could to make it work, but it just wasn't working. There are not many teenagers who can make that decision, but she did—and she capitalized on it.

The Perspective Change That Positive Experiences Create

[00:20:34] **Daniel Treviño** Yeah, and going back to what you mentioned about how relationships get results—that's part of the process of changing your perspective, especially with the people you meet here.

[00:20:49] **Wayne Carson** Right.

[00:20:49] **Daniel Treviño** At ACH, and in Semi's case, she had the direct care staff, like people like you, but also her house parents. In this case, it was Jeanette and Joe Willis that she met here.

[00:21:01] **Wayne Carson** Yep.

[00:21:01] **Daniel Treviño** From your experience, can you talk more about the kind of results that strong relationships create?

[00:21:13] **Wayne Carson** In my experience, much of that happens when kids have new experiences because of the relationships they build with you—through both experience and observation. For example, when I was a house parent, kids would sometimes say, “I can tell you’re really mad at me today, but why aren’t you yelling at me?” Or, “I know I had a bad day, but you’re still coming in to say good night and trying to end the day on a good note.” That kind of genuine curiosity—wondering why you’re acting differently than what they’re used to—can be transformative. It helps kids gain perspective and realize that maybe what they experienced at home wasn’t normal, or that other families do things differently. And then, when they start to feel important, to believe that someone cares about them, or to feel lovable—that’s magic. That’s what heals trauma and gives people hope for the future. That’s what makes our work meaningful: ACH provides a platform for that to happen, and then it does.

[00:22:21] **Daniel Treviño** What do you think we can take away from Semi’s and Julie’s story?

[00:22:28] **Wayne Carson** One thing we can learn from both of these amazing women is how children truly change at a fundamental level when they feel safe, loved, and believed in. Both of them, I think, are able to do things that many people without their experiences could not, because they have developed confidence and resilience. They didn’t let the tough circumstances they faced early in life define them. Instead, they rose above those challenges and became better people because of them. It may sound as if we’re saying all that happened was okay, but I’m not saying that at all. What I mean is that those experiences didn’t ruin their lives; in fact, they helped shape them into the remarkable women they are today. That’s to their credit—and ACH may deserve a little credit for that as well.

[00:23:28] **Daniel Treviño** All right, Wayne—well, thank you so much for all the great work you do here, and take care.

[00:23:24] **Wayne Carson** Thank you.



Closing Credits

[00:23:38] **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 new ones every two weeks. And if you enjoyed the show, please share, rate, 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 you can 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 Julie Brown and Dr. Wayne Carson. Mixing by Panoramic Sound. Thanks for listening!