

**Title of Session: Youth Portraits**  
**Moderator: BJ Berquist**  
**Guest Speaker: Rebecca Weinstein**  
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BJ: the next discussion is with guest Rebecca Weinstein from Youth Portraits.

RebeccGuest6: Youth Portraits was a radio documentary series produced by ex-offenders in NYC.

BJ: how about if we start the discussion with introductions and then you can tell us more, Rebecca

RebeccGuest6: Great.

BJ: I'm a teacher in Pennsylvania and a helpdesk volunteer for TAPPED IN

RebeccGuest6: I work with young people serving time in NYC. They are all under the age of 16

ElizabethJ: so these kids do their own documentary and they focus towards other teens?

ElizabethJ: Hello Rebecca

BJ looks around the room to see if anyone else would like to introduce themselves

ElizabethJ: My name is Liz. I am a middle school teacher. I teach math

RebeccGuest6: The kids in Youth Portraits (YP) all spent time on Rikers Island. They created radio documentaries about their experiences, with the hopes that young people can learn from their mistakes.

SusanR: I am a K to 8 Occasional Teacher from Ottawa, Ontario and K to 3 Resources co-presenter here at TappedIn.

ElizabethJ: so do they talk to actually teenagers during their radio program?

RebeccGuest6: The stories have these guys going around and creating documentaries about a "pivotal" moment in their lives.

BJ: Rebecca, would you like us to look at the webpage for YP?

RebeccGuest6: For one guy its the first time he is in the same room with his parent's for another its about the "incident" that got his best friend killed and landed him in jail

RebeccGuest6: it's a good idea to look at the website [www.youthportraits.org](http://www.youthportraits.org)

BJ: the stories are very emotional...

RebeccGuest6: you can listen too

RebeccGuest6: The stories are phenomenal, and all the kids who have listened to them respond to them because they are "so real"

BJ: how did you cope with the emotional rollercoasters that the interviewers appeared to experience?

RebeccGuest6: in the classroom or me personally?

LeeP joined the room.

BJ: both

BJ: Sue, we're discussing [www.youthportraits.org](http://www.youthportraits.org)

RebeccGuest6: in the classroom, its important to know where your kids are at-if they can handle this stuff-its pretty difficult. Me personally, these guys are fantastic. Going from being homeless in NYC to a bank robber to jail and then to college, full time jobs and fatherhood-what could be better and more inspirational?

ElizabethJ: wow! this is really good.

SusanR: Thank you BJ. I am experimenting with Safari and TappedIn2

ElizabethJ: kids do need to hear about these stories

RebeccGuest6: However, the study guide has questions that you can use with your students-from anything from gang prevention to community connections to familial responsibilities. All the stuff that young people today struggle with.

BJ: Elizabeth, not only do kids need to hear the stories, Rebecca has a study guide so the kids can make their own stories

RebeccGuest6: It's an incredible tool-kids creating their own stories. Having a microphone in their hand gives them permission to ask any kind of question-the kind that may usually be forbidden, but because its "homework" they can ask it, and get an answer.

ElizabethJ: this sounds great. It's good to have a study guide so they can follow directions and not go on a different route when writing their story

BJ . o O ( the study guide is really extensive )

RebeccGuest6: Where do you teach math?

SusanR: This is fascinating, Rebecca.

SusanR: A neat concept.

ElizabethJ: I teach in Calipatria, California

ElizabethJ: there is a prison outside of the city. and another one heading to San Diego "Centinela"

RebeccGuest6: After the stories aired on NPR, people from all over the country, wanted to use the idea and concepts

of the stories in their classrooms. We got a grant from OSI to create a guide for teachers.

SusanR: We have a detention centre nearby.

ElizabethJ: The kids take a trip to the Calipatria Prison just to show teenagers who are potential to lead in that direction

RebeccGuest6: Does it work?

SusanR: Do they do that at Alcatraz as well?

ElizabethJ: Well, I've been working there at the school this year, so I haven't seen to much of it but the staff have mentioned about those trips

RebeccGuest6: The power of YP stories is that you can take them in any direction you want to-but with teens its hard for them to analyze their own situations, but they sure can do it with others. So you can listen to the stories and have kids talk about the stories, but really they're talking about themselves and the development of their own moral compass

RebeccGuest6: Also, on the website, you can write to the narrators and kids can ask them questions. The narrators are great and love getting emails!

ElizabethJ: this is great but unfortunately I have to leave from this conversation. Thank you again. I'll be looking forward for this program.

ElizabethJ: and the website

ElizabethJ: . thanks again.

ElizabethJ: (waves bye to everyone in the room)

BJ waves bye to Elizabeth

BJ: thanks for joining us

ElizabethJ left the room (signed off).

RebeccGuest6: you can download the stories, printed and audio files as well as the study guide

BJ: that's a big help for classrooms that are not online

RebeccGuest6: Since mine are not, that was important to me. BJ nods.

RebeccGuest6: It was also important that every question illicit a response and not a yes/no answer. The questions should provoke real discussion in classrooms

SusanR nods

JeffC is reading the stories at YouthPortraits...

BJ: Rebecca, did you have the kids come up with a list of questions that they could discuss?

SusanR: I am quite taken with Angie's story.

RebeccGuest6: young people really respond to Ariel and Andre's story. Yovani's provokes intense debate.

RebeccGuest6: Angie is the only one who didn't spend time in prison, but is trying to get herself back together.

Bernard actually breaks down and cries during his piece- it's quite captivating.

RebeccGuest6: in what ways are you taken with Angie?

SusanR: Sharing her difficult times. I think its therapy for her as well.

RebeccGuest6: I wrote the guide based on discussions that I wanted to have with young people. They are designed to provoke discussion about real things. There are a lot of different types of questions because different kids respond to different kids

BJ: it's interesting to observe kids taking ownership for their behavior

RebeccGuest6: All the narrators say that the whole exercise was extremely therapeutic-difficult but yielded great results.

SusanR: I can see that!

RebeccGuest6: I usually ask what people expect to hear and what they don't want to hear prior to listening. All of them say they don't want to hear someone who blames other people-none of these narrators do-they all take responsibility and that means a lot to young people who need to think about their own actions

BJ agrees

BJ: Rebecca, you mention there is a CD available?

RebeccGuest6: I don't know if you can hear the audio pieces on your computers, but the narrators all edited their own stories and added the music. On average they had 20 hours of tape each, and cut it down to a 10 minutes story.

BJ: wow...lots of editing. They really did a fantastic job.

RebeccGuest6: Yes, if you send me an email to me that includes your mailing address, I will send one out to you next week. My email: [rweinst3@nycboe.net](mailto:rweinst3@nycboe.net). Since I have very few left (I've given out over 500 so far) please tell your friends and colleagues to download it.

SusanR: This is meaningful for these youths. Were they involved in creating the web site?

RebeccGuest6: They had the concept. The most important thing for them is to get their message and story out to people who work with kids who need it the most.

RebeccGuest6: I can send a hard copy of the CD and study guide. However, I need mailing addresses-so you'll have to email me [rweinst3@nycboe.net](mailto:rweinst3@nycboe.net)

SusanR: I will pass the youth portraits site onto our secondary and guidance teachers.

BJ: Jeff, did you have any questions or comments?

BJ wonders if Jeff is still reading stories

RebeccGuest6: Great-like I said, I don't have many left-but I can send one to your school and you can share it. for the past year I've traveled around New York City and State getting these out to folks-

SusanR: I think it is a wonderful idea, Rebecca for both troubled students and the youth who want to share their experiences.

SusanR: Thanks again! This is truly a unique use of the web.

RebeccGuest6: I'm glad you liked it. They're incredible stories

BJ cheers for Rebecca. Thank you for being brave and joining the discussion in TAPPED IN.

RebeccGuest6: thank you for the opportunity and being so patient with my complete lack of understanding how these forums work!

BJ: You did great, Rebecca!

SusanR: How long did it take to get this project underway, Rebecca?

RebeccGuest6: It was originally planned for three months. Which turned into 8-then they aired. It took a year to get the study guide done.

SusanR: Impressive. Will you add additional portraits..thus involving more youths?

SusanR: Will this idea be spreading across the country?

BJ: Rebecca, did I tell you about [www.createnow.org](http://www.createnow.org)?

RebeccGuest6: I will not be involved in something like this-onto other projects now (bringing libraries into all detention facilities in nyc-). However, Sound Portraits, the radio production company involved in the project will be doing story kiosks all across the country coming in the fall. go to [www.soundportraits.org](http://www.soundportraits.org) to learn more about them.

RebeccGuest6: no, what's create now?

BJ: CreateNow is a program in California that matches at risk children and adolescents in juvenile facilities with artists, film makers, musicians

RebeccGuest6: neat!

BJ: kind of a mentor program.

BJ: take a look at [www.createnow.org](http://www.createnow.org)

RebeccGuest6: i will-

BJ: I'd like to thank you again for joining us for this discussion, Rebecca. I'll send you a copy of the transcript once I get it edited.

RebeccGuest6: I'll get in touch with them-looks great

RebeccGuest6: thank you. bye bye

BJ: Jill Gurr is the contact person for CreateNow

SusanR: Thank you both for sharing! Goodnight!