

Title of Session: Alt/Correctional Ed Forum - A Hard Straight

Moderator: BJ Berquist

Guest Speaker: Goro Toshima

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BJB is very nervous having such a successful filmmaker as a guest!

DonnieN: ok

BJB : hi, David

GoroGst3: hi David

DavidWe hugs Bj

DavidWe: Hi, Goro. Welcome to Tapped In

GoroGst3: thanks for having me...this is pretty interesting

DonnieN: Hi

GoroGst3: hi

DavidWe: Do you speak Japanese, Goro?

GoroGst3: not really. I can understand basic Japanese, and can get around. But not really...can you?

DavidWe . o O (Ko-nichi-wa)

DavidWe: no

DavidWe smiles

GoroGst3: are you an educator?

BJB : I did do my homework and know that Goro's favorite food is broccoli and carrot and tofu stir fry

DavidWe: I help teachers learn more about technology for education - things like Tapped In

GoroGst3: wow! where did you find that?

DavidWe smiles

BjB: good question, Goro...how about starting with introductions, please

DavidWe . o O (is it true?)

BjB winks at Goro...lots of reading.

GoroGst3: that's impressive.

BjB: I teach remedial communication in a male juvenile correctional facility in Pennsylvania

BjB . o O (23rd year doing that)

BjB: Donnie, can you please tell us what you do and where you are located?

DavidWe: I'm David Weksler. I'm a HelpDesk volunteer and I lead a math education and technology discussion here. I'm in New Jersey, close to New York City

BjB wonders if Donnie is shy?!

GoroGst3: I work in doc. film...but lately, I've been working in reality tv to pay the rent. I'm hoping to start another project soon.

DavidWe smiles

BjB: documentaries are just another form of reality, Goro...yes?

DonnieN: I'm Don Newcomb and this is my first year at Pam Lychner State Jail in Humble, Texas

GoroGst3: yup. But reality tv is not even a form of reality.

BjB smiles. Thanks, Don

GraceTR joined the room.

BjB agrees with Goro....was just trying to make you feel better

BjB: Hi, Grace! So glad you could join us

GoroGst3: hi Grace

GraceTR: Hi, sorry I'm late

BjB: we've just done introductions, Grace.

BjB: please tell Goro where you are located and what you teach

GraceTR: O.K., I teach Spanish in Kentucky, high school

GoroGst3: oh. cool. do you do correctional ed. too?

GraceTR: No

BjB: Goro, do you want to start with your motivation for the doc. A Hard Straight?

GoroGst3: ok

BjB: Donnie and Grace, are you at all familiar with A Hard Straight and what it's about?

GraceTR: No, not yet--but I'm sure I'll want to see it.

GoroGst3: basically I'd been wanting to start a project....had finished grad school and was looking for a topic for a film. I was listening to a show on npr called 'This American Life'. and on the show that day was a guy named Joe Loya, who did time and eventually became a writer. His story was fascinating. So, I tracked him down and talked to him. he said the hardest part of doing time was after he got out. And after that, I started thinking about doing a film on parolees....once I started researching and talking to more people, I became convinced that it could make a great film.

DonnieN: I read a sheet about it

DavidWe: very cool

BjB: what do you feel is the most important issue regarding the success or failure of a parolee, Goro?

KaelaAZ joined the room.

BjB: Hi, Kaela. Welcome

DavidWe waves to Kaela

CarolP joined the room.

KaelaAZ: Hi!

BjB: good job, Carol

CarolP: Hello

BjB: I've just asked Goro what do you feel is the most important issue regarding the success or failure of a parolee, Goro?

GoroGst3: well, I can't really say for all parolees...but I know for the three people in the film the main problem was not dealing w. their problems that they had going into prison...Regina had addiction issues, Smiley had gang/violence issues, and Shep had issues with just dealing w/ basic life stuff. going to prison did not help any of the three with the problems they had, and in many ways made it worse...I think it's important to have some awareness about what the individual's problems are and try to address that.

DavidWe nods

GoroGst3: hi Carol

GoroGst3: hi Kaela

BjB: good answer, Goro! I'm not sure you can deal with those issues within the prison setting

CarolP: hello, Goro

GoroGst3: yeah, definitely not with the way the prison system is set up.

BjB: Kaela and Carol, can you please introduced yourselves?

BjB . o O (where you are located and what you teach and what brings you to this discussion)

KaelaAZ: I teach inner city kids in Milwaukee WI

BjB: Don, what is the recidivism rate for your prisons?

BjB: oh, great, Kaela...glad you could join us!

GoroGst3: what do you teach Kaela?

CarolP: I've only been to the Tapped In site a few times, have not seen the movie, but received BJ's email. I teach a juvenile justice system for boys aged 13-18.

BjB . o O (same as I do, Carol)

KaelaAZ: thanks...I struggle daily with at risk kids at the middle grade level

GoroGst3: where do you teach Carol?

CarolP: Florida

CarolP: And struggling daily is an under statement.

BjB: Goro, many of the people in prison start out in the juvenile justice system...

KaelaAZ: it really is!

BjB: and the recidivism rate is abysmal

CarolP: I am told the rate for us is 38%, but we only track for one year.

BjB: . o O (might have something to do with the juvenile mind which is kind of weird)

GoroGst3: yeah, I know that Smiley started out very young...and then it just kind became a way of life

KaelaAZ: not all juvenile minds though

BjB: laughs...of course not, Kaela

BjB: . o O (I was once a teen, you know)

KaelaAZ: as was I!!

GoroGst3: what do you guys teach the kids/teenagers

BjB: Goro, one suggestion made about helping parolees be successful is to intervene earlier and treat the issues like drug abuse, physical abuse, etc...

BjB: I teach communication.

KaelaAZ: besides "normal school" how to deal and work with other people

CarolP: I teach history, Lang Arts, Reading, Life Skills,...

KaelaAZ: by normal school I meant all subjects

DonnieN: A complete GED program for offenders 17 - to over 50

GoroGst3: life skills and how to deal with other people seem super important.

BjB : Goro, I think the most important contribution correctional educators and alternative educators can make is to serve as a positive role model

BjB : I screened your documentary with my students...

KaelaAZ: Some of my younger kids just never learned appropriate reactions to problems

BjB : and they see it in a completely different way than you or I might see it

GoroGst3: I liked reading their comments.

BjB . o O (Goro is referring to the blog my students have) [Ed. Note:
<http://voicesfromloysville.blogspot.com/>]

GoroGst3: yeah, like how your kids knew about Smiley's violation, whereas most people assume he got in a gang fight.

BjB nods. They also were very impressed with Smiley's art skills

GoroGst3: yeah, he's very talented, in so many ways.

BjB . o O (but, unfortunately, as you probably know, talented artists are a dime a dozen...it takes a lot more to be successful in a community)

KaelaAZ: well so are athletes, and that is the ideal job for my kids

BjB nods sadly.

GoroGst3: yeah, and like people are saying here, I think if he had learned better life skills and knew how to deal better, he'd be able to use that talent more effectively, at least in terms of getting paid for it.

BjB : what do you think Smiley's greatest flaw was?

BjB . o O (and probably still is)

DavidWe doubts it is ever just ONE thing

BjB : for those of you not familiar with the documentary, Smiley was a talented tattoo artist.

GoroGst3: probably his issues with violence. he had a horrible childhood and overcame a lot. But he has a lot of anger inside him. And I think this really had a negative effect on just dealing with everyday life.

BjB : you can look at this site later to learn more about the documentary:
<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/hardstraight/>

BjB agrees with Goro. Carol, do you see this in your students?

BjB : to order the documentary go to <http://www.newday.com/films/ahardstraight.html>

BjB : Goro, when I do the screening at the CEA International Conference, is there any message you want me to give to the participants?

BjB : Grace, do you have at risk students in your classes?

GoroGst3: I can't really think of anything...

BjB . o O (if we can reach at-risk kids and meet their needs, that would put us out of business....what a wonderful thing that would be!)

GoroGst3: thanks for showing it at CEA....I really appreciate it. I think it's a great audience for the film.

BjB : they're a tough crowd...

GoroGst3: is it like people here in the chat room?

BjB : the conference will be a face to face event

BjB . o O (not virtual)

BjB : and probably most participants will be from adult facilities

GoroGst3: I see

BjB : many of the people who are incarcerated...whether juveniles or adults, have survived some horrendous experiences...like Smiley

BjB : I think if I had to experience what many of my students have gone through, I'd be dead

GoroGst3: yeah, I think that's very common...which is the reason early intervention, like you mentioned earlier, is a great idea.

GoroGst3: yeah, I'd be dead too.

BjB : as Kaela mentioned earlier, many are in survival mode...

BjB : education is not a big priority, but it's one of the keys to success

GoroGst3: how is the funding for your education dept?

BjB: we are fortunate in that we have a pretty comprehensive school and funding is good

BjB: one thing to point out is that a large percent of the students, both juvenile and adult, are special needs

BjB . o O (learning disabilities and/or mental health issues)

BjB: Carol, do you find this true in your facility?

BjB wonders if Carol is still awake?

DonnieN joined the room.

GoroGst3: hi Donnie

DonnieN: Eureka

BjB: Goro, I loved your doc and I think it's a wonderful teaching tool for our 'clients'...

BjB cheers for Donnie. I'll send you the transcript so you'll see what you missed, Don...

GoroGst3: thanks...I wish I could be there to see the students watch and hear what they have to say.

DonnieN: thanks

BjB: This is about as close as I can get you, Goro

GraceTR: BJ, you mentioned earlier that one of the most important things you can do is to be a positive role model for your students. Could you explain what you meant by positive role model?

BjB: probably all the things you do already, Grace...talk about your family, don't use foul language, be kind, say please and thank you

GraceTR: And if they are rude and abusive to you?

BjB . o O (much of what 'normal' people take so for granted is missing from these people's lives)

BjB: ahh...good question, Grace...

BjB . o O (that's how they get their ticket to alternative ed)

BjB : in our school, the administration is very supportive of the teaching staff...

BjB : if a student doesn't follow the norms (abuse and rudeness are not tolerated)

BjB : then they are removed from the classroom until they have time to deal with whatever has caused the misbehavior

BjB : I suspect a HUGE problem in public schools is that kids have too much 'power' and are allowed to abuse faculty...and are backed up by enabling parents

GraceTR agrees

BjB : and administration feels helpless because of our litigious society

BjB : and then when you throw in 'special ed' students it's even worse

BjB : wow! our hour has flown by!

GoroGst3 : yeah, that was quick

BjB hugs Goro...thank you sooo much for being a guest speaker.

GraceTR : Yes, thank you Goro, I can't wait to see your film.

GoroGst3 : thanks for having me...and I hope CEA goes well.

GoroGst3 : thanks grace

BjB : I lead an Alt/Correctional Ed discussion each month....check the Tapped In calendar and please do join us again.

DonnieN : Thank you and good night

GraceTR : Thank you too B.J.

GoroGst3 : thanks everybody

BjB : I'll tell you all the details, Goro

GoroGst3 : ok. I can't wait to hear

BjB : Thanks, Don and Carol and Grace for joining the discussion

BjB . o O (thanks, David and Jeff too)