

Practitioner Spotlight with Javon Lomax

Veronica Agard: [00:00:00] Welcome to the Practitioner Spotlight with Restorative Justice Initiative. In this series, we profile champions and practitioners of restorative justice to learn more about their stories and what sustains them. I'm your host, Veronica Agard. Communications Associate at RJJ.

Veronica Agard: Javon Lomax comes into this work on the shoulders of countless healers before him and as a student of those indigenous teachers who understood that our stories were sacred medicine that could heal ourselves and others. Javon currently serves as the Director of Restorative Practices for We Build the Block, a non profit serving youth who have both been impacted by harm and have harmed others.

Veronica Agard: In addition, he is serving as a Restorative Circle Keeper for two communities in Brooklyn in a program he created called Heal the Village, where he works with communities who have been impacted by trauma to train the. Youth, [00:01:00] adults, and adult healers who claim their rightful role as keepers and create the village that their ancestors dreamed of.

Javon Lomax: Yeah, my name is Javon Lomax. My pronouns I use are he, him, his, and I work for an organization called we build the block. I'm the director of restorative practices and youth development there.

Javon Lomax: We built the block have been doing this work for some time, about five or six years before I had came into the organization. But I was reached out because there was a need for some youth that were in Brownsville that had intersection between violence that was happening in the community and violence that was happening inside of their homes.

Javon Lomax: And so it started with me going out and just doing healing circles in a collaboration with an organization called BIVO, which is for Brownsville In Violence Out, and working with some older young people there and some younger folks who are still in school. It was beautiful. And from there [00:02:00] I ended up saying, Hey, I want to do this.

Javon Lomax: I want this to be a nine to five. I want this to be my every day. Spoke to the executive director, Dana Rackland. She put me on board. I was able to join this team and now I facilitate healing spaces. 3, 4 times a week with youth that are spread across the Brooklyn communities of Sheepshead, Coney Island, Flatbush and Brownsville.

Javon Lomax: So it's been, it's been great to just kind of dive into this, working that way.

Veronica Agard: That's amazing. Especially like, you know. is that? That's always somebody's dream. Like hire me. I already do the things like just me. I love that for you, especially in those neighborhoods, right? Because so much like the school to prison pipeline and the prison industrial complex as well.

Veronica Agard: Like I'm thinking about the work about like the five neighborhoods. Right. So like when you're talking about, and we'll put this in the show notes for folks that are unfamiliar with what we're talking about, [00:03:00] but essentially it's a study that came out that said. That the majority of the population in prisons in like across New York state, if I'm not mistaken, come from five specific neighborhoods in the New York city area, you know, and like so much of the work, like what you just said, it has to start like at the root, right. I feel like you have especially with young people, you have so many opportunities to. Help them pivot and help them self actualize in a way that empowers them or reminds them to make different choices or lets them know that they have different options, right?

Javon Lomax: Right. I just wanted to name that like when you speak about that pivot for me, the reason why these healing circles have been very effective in my facilitation is because that that pivot is brought out by vulnerability.

Javon Lomax: So, you know, when I stand in front of these young people, I stand in front of them and [00:04:00] I often share that I don't look like what I've been through. And so underneath the shirt and the native dress that I might be wearing that day, there's a gun tattooed on my waist because I have to live with the fact that I got these tattoos to resemble a lifestyle that I thought at 16 was going to be the lifestyle I wanted to live, not seeing my life surpassing 25.

Javon Lomax: And so I was a felon from the age of 16. And As a felon, I also was failing at the things that life told me I had to be passing it. So if I'm not doing great at school and I'm not getting the accolades and the love and the acceptance saying, hey, you're doing a great job in all these other areas. But when I'm getting locked up and I'm doing these things in the street, there are people like free, free this guy, free me.

Javon Lomax: I'm getting that love and I'm getting that acceptance. Of course, I want to make the honor roll there. I want to get straight A's there.

Veronica Agard: right,

Javon Lomax: And so for me I had to also understand and do my work and realize, well, what was that rooted in? You know, where was that that [00:05:00] love that I

was looking for? And a lot of that is You know, I had to realize, oh man, that this is something that I spoke about in my first healing circles.

Javon Lomax: There was some sexual harm that I had went through. And how did that play out in my life? Who did I have to speak to about that? Did I tell any of the guys that I was in the streets about that? No. I didn't have the language to even voice what happened to me until I was much older. And so, how many of these young men that's in front of me might be holding on to something that they don't have the language for?

Javon Lomax: And so I just, you know, I think vulnerability is that pivot for me. So here they are. They can sit in front of someone who's an emotionally mature adult, someone who is courageously wearing vulnerability and saying, I went through this, this was my story. And now I'm not only telling you, Hey, this is a safe space.

Javon Lomax: I'm being brave enough to create this safe space by saying, I feel safe with you. And I want you to know that you can feel safe with me. And so by creating that space through vulnerability, that [00:06:00] pivot happens. So they're like, okay, now we can talk about stuff at 16 and 17 that I didn't even have the privilege to speak about until I was 20 in my late 20s.

Javon Lomax: And I think for me, it's just like, it's beautiful to see them doing the work, having a young person in front of me saying, you know, I'm feeling shame in my chest, like, because we talk about what emotions we feel and where is it at in our bodies, and so like, having a 16, 17 year old young man saying I'm wearing some sadness in my heart, it's, I'm, I'm, I'm feeling a little, some, some anger, it's in my shoulders, like, that's been the beautiful growth that I've been able to witness inside the participants, which is, which I love, which I love.

Veronica Agard: The part around having language for things. At an earlier age, right? Or like even what you just said around how they describe where feelings are located in their body, like in like healing and wellness spaces. I hear that being called semantics. It's just a reminder there's so many different combinations of words for things that folks that may have been doing [00:07:00] may not have been doing. have been open to right. But I think especially the core there, like you just said, is you know, modeling that vulnerability and being brave in that and sharing, you know, as much or as little as we need to in order to let folks arrive and let especially young folks arrive and feel safe. And also it's trial and error, right?

Veronica Agard: Like, I. Folks who've listened to this before know that I used to work in schools as a college advisor. and one of the things that I had to do, especially for like black and brown youth and trying to, you know, be like, yeah, so have you thought about, you know, college and you thought about these things, of the vulnerability pieces was gaining their trust because a lot of people had held that role

before me and had left. So then their parents and their families, whenever, you know, myself, like warm. Very approachable would, you know, just kind of be like, Hey, so I need this financial information so that way you don't have to pay for [00:08:00] anything. A lot of the times it was either a, they just didn't think that I was going to make it like for whatever combination of reasons, then also didn't think that I was going to make it or they did not want to be vulnerable with how much income they did or didn't have.

Javon Lomax: Yeah. Nah,

Veronica Agard: having conversations with families around. basically that vulnerability when the parents didn't trust me, it was, Then me to be like, you don't have to come during back to school night.

Veronica Agard: You can come talk to me while so and so is in class. Like we can talk and we can do what we need to do to set them up for success. And then I'll just loop with the student afterwards. And once I started doing that, of course, like, you know, [00:09:00] cause people talk the ripple effect of it meant that after that my job was a little bit easier. But that was because I listened, right.

Javon Lomax: So true. I just wanted to like something you said around, you know, are you going to still be here, students looking and saying, you know Can I even what, can I even dive this deep and speak about some of the stuff that's inside of me or stuff that I'm unsure about those unknown? Because are you going to even be around long enough

Veronica Agard: Yep.

Javon Lomax: help me through that process to support me to walk alongside me as I go on this journey?

Javon Lomax: And so I think that's really something so important. When we think about our roles, when we intersect with these young people's lives, like for me, I think about You know just the other day I was witnessing a young person walking with their mother. You know, my wife had just took my daughter to school and I was headed the other way to catch the bus, go to work and I watched another daughter with her mother and the mother was cursing her out.

Javon Lomax: I mean, all the way, this is a six year old girl and I was just [00:10:00] Pouring out, I mean, curse words and curse words and, and you know how much I paid for this and calling her to out her name and, and I was just thinking about like, oh man, you know, this, this young lady is going to be in the same class with my daughter.

Javon Lomax: And, and, and the little girl's quiet and she's just taking it all in. And so what I think about sometimes is, you know, here I am coming at a young person's life and what has been poured into this person's life from from for 17 years.

Veronica Agard: Right.

Javon Lomax: For 17 years. You know, I spoke about this was one of my groups and I was just like, you know, the being poured into you for 17 years and they was like, well, not really 17 because when I was in my mama's belly, none of that really mattered.

Javon Lomax: I don't feel any of that trauma that she went through when she was holding me within the belly or when I was three years old and I was just like, But you do. And

Veronica Agard: Right.

Javon Lomax: I said, I said, but I love that you brought that up. So we're going to [00:11:00] bring some, some research and talk about the body keeps the score. And we're going to talk about some of those things you just named.

Javon Lomax: And so we can have that enlightenment moment. But, but I'm glad that you said that. And so that's a conversation piece. I just think that when you really did. Take into consideration what a young person has been poured, what has been poured into this person's life for 17, 18 years. And here you are. And so if you're trying to pour in love on top of all of this other stuff, how's it going to reach the bottom at the core?

Javon Lomax: You know, even my mama treated me like this. And this is the person that brought me into the world. Even she told me that she wished she never had me. So what do you mean that you're happy to see me? How can I even how can I even, you know, digest the words that you're saying? I'm happy to see you. What's up?

Javon Lomax: You know, I'm glad you came today when my own mother told me, I wish I never had you. So, so these is, these are deep wounds. These are, you know, young people are walking with a lot that's been poured into them. And so we got to think about that. And [00:12:00] when we intersect with these lives and we wonder why it's so hard for them to reach sometimes, you know, we should expect that it's hard for them to reach and be ready to do that work.

Javon Lomax: Cause it's hard work. I, I say it's, it's, it's, it's not hard work. It's hard work. We, we got to dive into their hearts. So yeah, like but I'm glad you brought that up.

Veronica Agard: Yeah, for sure. I think it resonates with a lot of people. Alright, and I used to just kind of throw my hand up. I'll still be here when you change your mind though.

Veronica Agard: Yeah. So whenever you can, like, find a way to, you know,

Veronica Agard: and you're holding space for them, you're walking alongside people. However, you arrive at that or any of the, the J's, if you will, transformative justice, restorative justice, reproductive justice, even, right?

Veronica Agard: Like it's just so interesting to me how that same thread comes up around. have to figure out what we with, what we arrive with before we interact with [00:13:00] anybody else or ideally, right? Because life and, you know, if you find yourself at several intersections. make it so that way it may be easier or harder for you to unpack some of those things. But especially within the school context or anybody who listening to this and works with young people and or is embedded in a school, like really think about that from that perspective of like, if you're trying to invite a young person to do something, That they've never done before, or that might be really challenging or scary for them. Either A, think about how you were at that age, right? Like, I often used to joke, and it's not a joke, that when I applied to CUNY in like 2009, it was a lot easier to get in. I was, you know, I'm pretty smart. I had a high GPA. I consider myself a lazy smart person. I told my [00:14:00] students, I was like, y'all can't do that and get into the same school that I did.

Veronica Agard: The times have changed. People figured out that it was cheaper and better to go to a CUNY than a Columbia, with all due respect. And some of them were like, Okay, I'm not sure what like and like she but she has a job like she's fine. She turned out fine. I'm like, all right, okay, delay if you want to. All right, and I used to just kind of throw my hands up and be like, all right, I'll still be here when you change your mind though, there were students that came back or they had, they had scenarios.

Veronica Agard: I'm thinking of one student who got into a situation and this will segue back to a lot of the work that's happening in schools right now around how we punish students and especially how we punish and push out black and brown kids and especially girls. I'm thinking about the work of girls for gender equity here.

Veronica Agard: This student I'm [00:15:00] thinking of, got suspended for a long time. They, they pushed her out. I kept her on my radar as a college advisor, cause of course there's like benchmarks, right? Did she fill out FAFSA? Did she do this? Did she do this? And I kept her on my radar because she was always kind to me when I used to have to push in the classrooms and she was always good to me.

Veronica Agard: So I tried to be good to her. So when she came back, I didn't have to go looking for her. Came back to me talking about Ms. V. I got to catch up. Like, I know what I need to do. I know I made some choices, I know what I have to do next.

Veronica Agard: Really do. employ people, especially when they're interacting with folks who have made a choice. And it comes with consequences, like, to be kind to that young person when they come back. Because they're already going to have judgment from their peers, and often going to have [00:16:00] it from their teachers and from other administrators in the school. so whenever you can, like, find a way to

Javon Lomax: Show kindness, show empathy.

Javon Lomax: Yeah. And if you can't, if you're finding it difficult for you to show kindness and show empathy, then do that exploration within yourself.

Veronica Agard: right.

Javon Lomax: ask yourself, why is it so hard for me to be kind to this young person? Maybe there's something within you that you gotta deal with.

Javon Lomax: You know, it's, you know, there's something about. just, you know, loving, loving your job, loving what you do. You know, I think about, you know, I have two daughters, six and three. And when I received the call for my six year old, you know, that the teacher was saying, what, you know, I need to speak to y'all about, you know, her in class.

Javon Lomax: And it was like, well, her behavior is good. She's just a lovely student, but [00:17:00] you know, she needs to learn this. She needs to know this and she needs to know this. And I'm just like, it's. A lot of pressure for first graders nowadays, a part of me was just like, man, but you're saying she can't do this. She can't do this.

Javon Lomax: And your language, when you're saying that, I was asking, like, do you say that in front of, in front of my little girl? You know, because there, there's different ways, like empowerment language. You know, I tell my daughter when she, she even, and I'm working with her on a school work at home and she was like, daddy, I don't know how to do this.

Javon Lomax: I can't do this. I'm just like, baby, you're learning it. Like if we just replace can't and I don't know if I'm still learning and our language if we could just empower our young children and and show them that kindness and empathy. But first we got to ask, well, do we love kids? If you don't, if you don't love children, then maybe you shouldn't be in the business or the, the field where you're working with children.

Javon Lomax: Yeah, I think it, for me, it all returns back to love. Like. Do you love people? Do you love Children? You [00:18:00] love youth. You know, youth is an interesting word because the first word and it is you. And so I have to see you. I have to see me and the youth before I can work with the youth. And then if I love myself, then I want the same love that I'm pouring into myself to be poured into them.

Javon Lomax: And so the reason why my kindness and empathy is important It's overflowing for the young people I work with is because I love working with them and I, and I love them. And so I just think that we got to do that, that inner work sometimes and ask ourselves, you know, all right, we, we're in this role.

Javon Lomax: We love teaching, but do we love teaching kids? We love teaching, you know, the young people that we're working with. And if not, then do that work and do that work

Veronica Agard: Right.

Javon Lomax: maybe, maybe leave and come back. Right.

Veronica Agard: Like there's multiple ways arrive at that. This wasn't on my list of questions, but I, it's an emergent [00:19:00] one. Can you talk about how your role and how you show up in the world influences your parenting? Because I feel like not a lot of people are talking about how social justice values impact their parenting.

Javon Lomax: I would love to talk about that. I mean, one thing I always say is that anyone who truly facilitates restorative practices, restorative circles has their life facilitated by that restorative circle. And so like you start doing the work and then the work starts doing you. And so I've thought about in many ways, like how the talk and peace.

Javon Lomax: You know how I pass around this talking piece when I'm in a circle and I'm saying, You have the power to speak and I have the more important job of listening. How many times did I say that in so many circles? And then now I'm realizing when I'm out in the community, when I'm out with my, my babies at the house and they're speaking, I, I remind myself that now my baby has the power to talk and I have the more important power to listen.

Javon Lomax: And then something I [00:20:00] often say in circus as well is listen and silent have the same letters. So whenever I'm listening, I have to ask myself, well, am I being silent? So when I'm with my, you know, my Children, when I'm out there in the world circles have really, you know, just invigorated this power to just deeply listen to just be there and be silent with people.

Javon Lomax: hold that silence. Another thing is just understanding that, you know, all of those community guidelines that we make up in that space was, you know, the story stayed with the lessons leave. So, you know, that makes me honor consent, honor confidentiality. When someone share something with me in the community, like, Hey, Javon, can I talk to you now?

Javon Lomax: I'm even bringing that guideline on there. I was like, Okay, before you say it, I just want to say I honor this space we have right here and I'm not gonna share nothing outside of this unless you give me permission to do so. But I really want to hear what you got to say. And so I'm bringing these circle values in every conversation that I'm in, you know, especially when someone's like, I really got to tell you something.

Javon Lomax: You know, this is going on. And so, yeah people who are really doing this [00:21:00] work, the work is going to continue to, it's going to do you, it's going to change your life. So, yeah, that's, that's just two ways on how the values just have been crossing over for me.

Veronica Agard: Absolutely. What's something that you would say to someone who is critical of restorative justice? folks that say, Oh, that takes too long. Circles don't do anything. What do you even mean by that? What would you say to them?

Javon Lomax: Huh? I mean, so one, that takes too long. You know, I'm sitting with that because well, when I say they're right, it's true. You know restorative justice circles. A lot of the work is about slowing down. But I, I guess too long. The difference in the perspective that I have is, you know, well, what, what are, what are the complications and what is, what are the problems that we are having now in the school [00:22:00] systems and in any system with moving too fast?

Javon Lomax: And so some of the problems that I see. With, with courts, with having this microwave type system, this one size fits all of moving too fast has led to mass incarceration. Has led to a lot of people being behind bars and not given the, the opportunity to transform. And so, I think there's, there's, there's a beauty in slowing down.

Javon Lomax: I mean, we think about food. You know, you got your microwave dishes, but ain't nothing like home cooking. It ain't nothing like taking the time and someone putting that love into that meal. You know, it was like, Oh man, thank you. Thank you mama. You put your foot in this. You took your time with this meal.

Javon Lomax: So I think there, you know, we have to really just sort of change our perspectives, transform our perspectives on. Is it too long? Is it? Is it too fast? What are what [00:23:00] damage are we really causing by continuing things this way? Is

this working? Are the results that we're having right now with the systems in place with everything in places?

Javon Lomax: Are we okay? With with what we're receiving from, you know, continuing things this way, and if not, if we do want something different, if we do want to, you know, have more love, have more kindness, have more empathy for for the way we show up with our young people and and for the environments that we create for them, then maybe we should slow down and maybe we should have those longer conversations.

Javon Lomax: And so, yes, yes. It does take longer. It does require slowing down, but that doesn't necessarily mean that that's a bad thing all the time.

Veronica Agard: Yes, that's , it's perfect. But also I think, only does that play into this idea of time and , whether something is not long enough, not short enough, somewhere in between, not only does that feed into the prison industrial [00:24:00] complex and mass incarceration, that just feeds into broadly speaking capitalism, right? We wanted everything yesterday and we consume all this information all the time. And then one of my personal beliefs is that something that we have to avoid. Is that the same way that we over consume, products, information, all these things, and then we therefore over harvest and deplete a lot of resources.

Veronica Agard: I'm often invested in making sure that we do not do that to each other. because all of the systems and all the isms reflect us, right? So it's very easy to go down this slippery slope of putting undue pressure on like our loved ones, our families, our chosen kin. Colleagues, people that we interact with in the world in the name of, you know, getting something done quicker and especially I feel like this is, this might be a stereotype of New York, you know, like a New York minute, like, it has [00:25:00] to go fast, the stereotype of us is that we're always in a rush.

Veronica Agard: But yeah, one of the things that I also to uplift in this conversation is something that was brought up during the reimagining safety panel. that you were a part of at our sixth citywide roundtable when we're thinking about reimagining safety and you brought up how your young folks say to stay dangerous a means of communicating that that's how they imagine safety. Can you talk a little bit about that here?

Javon Lomax: Yeah, no, absolutely. So many things are coming up in this conversation. I'm in this room with these young people and it's kind of natural when they leave me. I'm like, all right, y'all be safe, get home, stay safe. And so when this young person told me, Well, you stay dangerous.

Javon Lomax: No, I'm gonna stay dangerous. And he left me. It wasn't the first time I heard it. I've heard it in hip hop. I've heard it in the culture of music. This is attitude

of stay [00:26:00] dangerous. But I, I slowed down at that moment. I really reflected on like, what does that mean? And so for me my perspective of what I understood stay dangerous to mean was that wow, young people really see safety.

Javon Lomax: as a privilege. You know, when they think about when their environments around them will be safe, when they think about peace and tranquility, they see the pathway to that is being rich. So a lot of times when I'm working with my young men and I asked him, What do you want to talk about today? If they were to pick the topic, they would say money.

Javon Lomax: We can talk about getting that money. And so if you were to say, well, y'all want to talk about safe environments? Nah, I just want to get rich because if I was rich, then I'd have that safe environment. I want to get my mother away from this. I want my mom when she's walking with me, my grandmother, I don't want to have to worry [00:27:00] about someone, you know, trying to harm me.

Javon Lomax: And I don't see any escape outside of this unless I'm dangerous, unless I have something on me that makes someone think twice unless I put out the harm so people don't see me as the prey. I had to take on this role as someone who's dangerous so someone won't cause me harm. And so there's this, this, this attitude, this perspective that to be safe, that I'm not safe in my body.

Javon Lomax: That's not something that is a birthright for me. Safety comes to me with my presence of danger and it's through the danger that I received the safety. And so that to me was just, Just something I had to really just weigh on and, and understand and realize that, you know, so many elements to that. And, and, and that's in the way that they dress.

Javon Lomax: You know, when they wear these, these ski masks and the Scully and they walk outside [00:28:00] and the police are like, oh man, watch them. They have, they mask on, watch them. And you know, for them that, that, that dress, even the way they dress. It's their protection. That's safety for them. You know, for one, I'm watching out for the people who I consider as my opposition, the people that who want to do me harm.

Javon Lomax: So they don't identify my face, but also through these harmful tactics from police, as far as gang policing seeing me on a certain community street and automatically positioning me as someone who's involved in the gang. I know that the police are looking to arrest me and incarcerate my body. And I know that someone may want to do harm to my body because I'm from a certain area.

Javon Lomax: And so I wear this for my safety. And so there's just so many different elements that when we think about, you know, who do we see as someone who's a survivor? Who do we see as someone? Who is a victim. Like these words are, you

know, [00:29:00] stripped in the language of restorative justice because there's a huge gray area.

Javon Lomax: You know, that's why I use a lot of times people who have caused harm and people have been harmed because we all fall in that category. And my young people, the first thing you learn about them, if you, if you sit an hour with them is they have survived so much. So, Yeah, they they've caused harm, but they're also a survivor.

Javon Lomax: They also have been harmed in so many ways that we couldn't even imagine. And so I give credit to them that they even show up to school in the first place. You know, wow, you're even here. You came to this program. That's amazing. You know, you, you, you, you've been through and persevered so much and you still showed up.

Javon Lomax: And so, yeah, there's, there's this, you know, I pray and I want for them every day that they have that safety, that one day they can just you know, walk outside and not feel that danger. And that's that's something I have to walk and hold heavy on my heart every time I leave.

Veronica Agard: Yeah, it's powerful, right? Because it helps us [00:30:00] to understand for some, especially given all of the power dynamics in the world and how folks are racialized, how people are perceived, right? Or safety for, especially for a young person in the city. And we're working towards it not being that way, right? Like the work that you do, the work that RJJ does so many other people the world doing this work to make sure that We're really investing in healing and we're moving away from punishment, but there's also this in between space of this liminal space of like, okay, well, we're not there quite yet. We're working towards that. But in the meantime, between time, how can I honor that young person? So I'm going to segue a little bit.

Veronica Agard: Can you tell us about a time you faced a challenge or an obstacle in doing this work? And then can you tell us how you worked through it?

Javon Lomax: [00:31:00] Yeah, Well, before I answer that question, I really want to want to share this because, you know, my call into anybody who's in the city is I understand that when we walk outside that door, it's hard to imagine us belonging to every human that exists in New York City. That's very hard to see all of these different people walking around us.

Javon Lomax: as our community, as someone that belongs to me. But I just want to, you know, challenge that and call people out to love because, you know, there was an example that I've seen. There was, you know, I took my daughter's trick or treating and I was just like, slowed down and I looked at, I said, wow, everyone in this

neighborhood made an intention and went somewhere to have a bucket and have candy so every kid could have something in case they knocked on the door.

Javon Lomax: And so I've seen all of these different, you know, You know, strangers interacting with one another and receiving something. And I was just like, wow, this is beautiful. And so for me, that inspired me. I said, you know what? Let me, let me stop three Uber eats for this month. Take a hundred [00:32:00] dollars and ones because I've had so many people in the city that always asked me for a dollar.

Javon Lomax: I don't have anything. And I thought about like the kids who would have went to a house and said, yo, can I have a candy? I was like, I don't have anything. But there was a special intention that neighbors took for each other because they knew there would be somebody that would ask. And so, I sometimes, even for my own personal life, reimagine my belonging by saying, Hey, you know, here's a dollar.

Javon Lomax: And so, something so beautiful for me is like when I go to the city, now I'm looking for those people who are asking. I'm making space. When I see a young person, there's a group of them about to walk in the door hey, after y'all, you know, opening the door, making space for our young people.

Javon Lomax: Maybe, maybe while they were going throughout the day, people ignored them. People didn't create space. Open the door for them. You know, you know, there's there's attitude to where we have adapted this new york attitude of, you know, not being the person that just looks out for the people around us and communicates and thinks and walks out [00:33:00] your day with intention to look after The people around you.

Javon Lomax: But I think that that's the beauty of this city. You're surrounded by so many people and that doesn't have to be overwhelming. Sometimes you can create an intention and you can have that on your mind that how do I want to show up in the world? But to pivot to answer your question about obstacles there was one time, you know, a lot of the stuff that we do, we work with a young person over the course of a year and we help them towards the end of our cohort to have a job.

Javon Lomax: And so there was a young man who was going through street homelessness. And he still managed to get his diploma through our support. But through the street homelessness and the impact of carrying a knife with him everywhere he goes, this, this knife was almost you know, he had that knife the same way we walk out and have our cell phone.

Javon Lomax: So you'd go outside and be like, I don't have my cell phone and be like, I gotta go back. That was the knife to him. And, you know, there was [00:34:00] a part where it was challenging because I was just like, yo brother, you gotta go in

this this job and you can't, you can't bring that with you. And he was just like, nah, what do you mean?

Javon Lomax: I'm not going in there. What if I see, what if my ops are in there? What if somebody wants to do me harm? And so, you know, it goes back to that safety question. He felt that, here I am, I'm going in this place, you're not with me. The world is dangerous. I can be killed. And, and even though I've done this work, I'm about to walk into this new environment, this place, this job, but what, what if there's danger there?

Javon Lomax: So that, that, that, that trauma, that traumatic experiences that have happened through his life, what he witnessed was just all in his body. And you know, me and him really sat for 30 minutes, just a conversation and just listening to him until he finally decided to leave that knife with me. And, and what I thought was so powerful is after he got off work, I picked him up and, you know, when I was dropping him off in the area where he was going to be dropped [00:35:00] off, he left out the car and I was just like, Hey brother, you forgot your knife.

Javon Lomax: And he was just like, Oh, oh man. And it was so wild to him that he forgot it. And I was just like, you felt safe. And so there was this pivotal moment. I think that, you know, is something so transformative to, you know, sometimes when I'm doing these budget meetings and they're thinking about, Hey, what's the qualitative data?

Javon Lomax: What's the quantitative data that you can give us on your program works to me. Those moments are the ones that I don't know how to put it on your budget sheet. I don't know how to tell you that I have a young man. I don't know how to tell you that a young person who carried a knife every day, the same way you carry your cell phone now feels safe to go to this place of business and work because he now has a different hope.

Javon Lomax: He has a different outlook for the world and he sees it as a place where he can thrive and he can exist instead of a place that wants to kill him and take him out of. And so [00:36:00] like, that's the stuff that's hard to explain. But yeah, that was a challenge, but we pushed through and it's a celebration now.

Veronica Agard: absolutely. This is going to be the last question. What's something that's sustaining you in doing this work and showing up for everyone?

Javon Lomax: Well, you know, I used to get asked the question sometimes of like what, you know, how are you brought into restorative justice? How did you come to this work? And a lot of times I often say that this was a calling. And I answered it. And so, like the sustaining what's gonna sustain me in this work is that this is this is my life journey.

Javon Lomax: You know, I truly say that I don't have to do this. I get to do this. I get to be with these young people. I get to do this work. I get the whole space. So there's there's not a day where I don't bring the interactions that I've had with people. And in the way my life has crossed [00:37:00] journeys with their life with me, you know, I see these people these beautiful souls that I've had the pleasure of just sharing and holding space as just in a deeper connection to me.

Javon Lomax: And so, you know, the same connection that I feel and I walk out that door every day to the people that I meet in the city is the same way that I, that I'm excited that. I just was, you know, given this position to be able to be in these young people's lives, to be in any community's lives and to bring some space of healing.

Javon Lomax: And so yeah it's sustaining for me to just be a part of this work to continue to just be in these lives and and to just, you know, pour that love inside myself and just radiate that hours. And so I think more connection. I'm looking forward to just collaborating with more people. I love meeting the other healers and the other people who resonate with the stuff that I'm saying.

Javon Lomax: And they're like, yes, those are my brothers and sisters that I haven't met yet. And so that's what I'm looking [00:38:00] for to, you know, continuing to help me sustain. I want to meet you. Let's let's talk together. Let's think about ways we can broaden this word and continue to expand and continue to, you know, change people's thinkings and perspectives so we can, you know, approach whatever we're doing in a different way.

Javon Lomax: So that's what's going to continue to sustain me growing my network and growing the connections I have with people.

Veronica Agard: I really appreciate your time. I really think that folks are going to get a lot out of this.

Veronica Agard: That concludes The Practitioner Spotlight, brought to you by Restorative Justice Initiative. If you enjoyed this conversation and want to see more of it, reach out to us at veronica@restorativejustice.nyc. Again, that's veronica@restorativejustice.nyc. Signing off until next time, take care.