

Transcript of Interview of Tony Lewis, CSOSA
By Russ Parr, 93.9 WKYS, Russ Parr Morning Show
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RUSS: Hey, listen, ladies and gentlemen, I know its really difficult out there. Especially...you know, I get letters all the time from ex-cons and, you know, you get out of jail, you pay your debt to society and everybody knows what my stance is on this. You pay your debt to society, you should have a right to go to work and put food in your children's mouths...

ALFREDAS: Definitely.

RUSS: Legally. You know, but we're not giving any...any of these guys or these ladies hope because they have this scarlet letter, man, kind of hanging over their heads, man, saying, hey, I did some time...

ALFREDAS: Mm-hmm.

RUSS: You know, I could be a risk if you hire me and I think it's a darn shame. On the line right now I got Tony Lewis who is working very hard with sex offenders...not sex offenders, but ex-offenders that are looking for work and, of course, he's heading up this organization called CSOSA. What exactly does that stand for, man?

TONY: The Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency.

RUSS: Okay. Why did you get involved with this organization and basically you help ex-cons find jobs, right?

TONY: Yes, sir. We're...we're an independent Federal agency with a local mission and we're responsible for the community supervision of about 16,000 D.C. residents. I'm the job developer for the agency so what I specialize in and the VOTEE unit specializes in connecting those individuals to employment opportunities. We see employment as being one of the primary resources to keep people from returning to prison and ultimately that's the mission of our agency—to reduce recidivism and increase public safety. So we definitely have a vested interest in the people that we supervise becoming employed.

RUSS: Gotcha. Now, you know, is your program unique to just like the D.C. area? Are there other programs like this in other cities and states?

TONY: Well, there's definitely transitional employment programs throughout the city, but we have a special program that's actually in conjunction with the D.C. Department of Employment Services so I think a Federal agency connected with a local agency to tackle this particular issue may be unique to D.C. But hopefully this can be kind of groundbreaking and spread to other parts of the country.

RUSS: Yeah, you know, its so frustrating because I, you know, I have ex-cons call me all the time and say, man, I can't find work, I've got this...this scarlet letter on my forehead that says, hey, I did time so...

TONY: Yes, sir.

RUSS: You know, I can't get a...they're not going to hire you. There's no way around that, is there?

TONY: Well, I'm just not going to say...hopefully this program is...is a way around it. It's an opportunity for the business community to connect with us as an agency where we can actually pay an individual's salary for up to six months, an opportunity for them to almost try before they buy. A person can actually show their skill set, increase their skill set and the employer can see these people for who they are and not what it says on the paper and that's kind of our goal and that's the goal of transitional employment as a whole.

RUSS: Right. You know, I was looking at this article in the Washington Post where they say D.C. drug dealer's son has the same name and a different reputation—is you, right?

TONY: Yes, sir. Well, I'm the son.

RUSS: Oh, you're the son.

TONY: Yes, sir. I'm the son.

RUSS: Oh, okay.

TONY: Right, I'm the son. My...my dad, a convicted drug dealer, he has a life sentence. And I took him as an example, especially with his encouragement, to go a different route and to basically reach back out to the community that I grew up in and...and try to...not give back, but try to bring people up and be an example of what can happen. And so we need the business community to connect with people like myself because at the end of the day, Russ, the people that I'm helping are parents themselves.

RUSS: Right.

TONY: And nine times out of ten their children...if they don't start to do things differently and live positive, their children won't turn out like I did. So that's what I'm driven by.

RUSS: Gotcha. Alright. If somebody needs to get information about your program and how they can be helped and benefit by it, how do they do that?

TONY: Okay, they can go to CSOSA, that's C-S-O-S-A dot GOV (www.csosa.gov) or they can contact me directly at 202-369-0775. We're looking for the business community, business owners, small and large businesses, non-profit, private and local government agencies to connect with us to be able to develop some opportunities for individuals that's trying to get their lives back on track.

RUSS: I think this is wonderful what you're doing, man, because it...it definitely gives especially a lot of ex-cons some hope.

TONY: Thank you, sir.

RUSS: There's somebody out there on the forefront fighting for them to get employment so they don't have to be...resort back to their old way of doing things.

TONY: Absolutely.

RUSS: You know what I'm saying? So I really appreciate this, man. And thank you so much, man, for taking the time and talking to us today.

TONY: Thank you more. Have a great day.

RUSS: Alright. You too, sir.

TONY: Alright.

RUSS: Bye.

Russ Parr in the Morning.