

SERIES: Caucus: New Jersey with Steve Adubato
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and Edward
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Announcer: Funding for this edition of CAUCUS: NEW JERSEY has been provided by the Saint Barnabas Health Care System, Wells Fargo Wachovia, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, and by the New Jersey Education Association.

STEVE ADUBATO, host:

Hi, I'm Steve Adubato. You know, an interesting figure, there are 8,000 children right now in New Jersey in foster care. That is down from 11,000 just a couple of years ago. Who is responsible for those children? How do we find foster families? The guest you're about to meet deals with it every single day. She is Kimberly Ricketts, and she is the commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families.

Commissioner, good to see you.

Ms. KIMBERLY RICKETTS (Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Children and Families): Nice to be here.

ADUBATO: By the way, why are we down from 11,000 children in foster care in New Jersey--by the way, throughout this program you'll see a Web site that's going to give you a lot of these answers--why are we down from 11,000 to 8,000?

Ms. RICKETTS: Because we've changed how we do business in New Jersey as far as the Department of Children and Families. We have a new case practice.

ADUBATO: What does that mean, case practice?

Ms. RICKETTS: What that means is how we deal with families. In the past, a lot of folks talked about DYFS as having power over families.

ADUBATO: DYFS is the Division of Youth and Family Services.

Ms. RICKETTS: Division of Youth and Family Services. And we talked about--people talked about having power over families, and now we talk about empowering families. And so our goal is, if there's an issue in a home and we're called in to go in and make sure the kids are safe, our goal is keeping them in the house and providing the family with the supports they need to care appropriately for their children in their home.

ADUBATO: Mm-hmm.

Ms. RICKETTS: And we only remove children from their home if there's imminent danger. And so that's part of the reason why we're able to keep more children at home is because we are working with families in a different way, we're empowering them.

(Graphic on screen)

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ADUBATO: Commissioner, over the years as we've been doing our many public television programs, there have been some horrific cases.

Ms. RICKETTS: Mm-hmm.

ADUBATO: Danica Johnson was one case that I remember in the city of Newark, and so many others. The case of the kids down in South Jersey, it was five children. I think Bruce Jackson was one of the little boys, except he was 19 years of age. He wasn't as young as we thought he was. And it was horrible situations they were in. Media, heavy reporting on those foster families. What are we taking away from that?

Ms. RICKETTS: We've taken away from that a very serious learning experience, and that is, in part, why the governor created a department specifically for children and families.

ADUBATO: That's a big deal.

Ms. RICKETTS: It's a huge deal. And our focus is always kids and families, keeping them safe, providing for services in a most appropriate environment so that both the families and the kids can be strong and successful.

ADUBATO: OK. Who are these children, and how do they wind up in foster care?

Ms. RICKETTS: You know, we receive calls through our hotline, our abuse hotline, and people report what they think are allegations of abuse or neglect. Could be teachers, could be your neighbor, could be a doctor, could be a nurse. And DYFS goes in, Division of Youth and Family Services, our staff goes in and we evaluate the situation. And if a family is unable to care for, for whatever reason, or there is abuse going on, then we will remove the children and place them in a safe, loving foster family until we can...

ADUBATO: Mm-hmm.

Ms. RICKETTS: ...hopefully reunite them with their biological family.

ADUBATO: Is that the goal is to...

Ms. RICKETTS: That is always the first goal.

ADUBATO: ...to--Commissioner, I want to be clear--to reunite the child with their biological family continues to be the primary goal of you and your colleagues?

Ms. RICKETTS: That is always the primary goal where appropriate. And sometimes, unfortunately, it's not appropriate, which is where we rely on our foster families.

ADUBATO: Meaning it's not the best situation for the kid.

Ms. RICKETTS: That's correct.

ADUBATO: And so, therefore, you rely on the foster families. Are there enough foster families right now? By the way, tell folks when they see the Web site, Commissioner, what is that Web site and why is it important to this

in the whole discussion?

Ms. RICKETTS: Well, the Web site is important because it provides you all the details about how to become a foster parent or family.

ADUBATO: Is it njfoster-dot...

Ms. RICKETTS: Njfoster.org.

ADUBATO: Go ahead.

(Graphic on screen)

www.NJFoster.org
For Information On Becoming A Foster Parent In NJ

Ms. RICKETTS: And if you visit that Web site, if you're interested, you want to learn more about becoming a foster parent or a foster family, it lays everything out for you, what the qualifications are, what you would have to go through--the steps, the interviews, the training. It talks about how the children are placed, and you can find everything there. And if you're interested, then there's a number there that you can also call and talk to a foster family recruiter.

ADUBATO: We're doing this program in 2009, right, beginning going into the second quarter.

Ms. RICKETTS: That's right.

ADUBATO: It'll be aired many times after that. The economy has been brutal, as everyone knows. What impact has this--the most serious economic recession that I've seen in my lifetime, and many others, what impact has it had on willingness of adults to become foster parents?

Ms. RICKETTS: Happy to say, so far, we have not seen a decline.

ADUBATO: You've not seen it?

Ms. RICKETTS: Not seen it.

ADUBATO: Why is that?

Ms. RICKETTS: You know, we think in part, you know, when you become a foster parent, you're trained, you go through everything, and you're licensed as a foster parent. We provide training, supports, and part of that is a subsidy as well.

ADUBATO: How much?

Ms. RICKETTS: We don't expect for folks--it depends. There's no set rate, it depends on the number of children...

ADUBATO: On...

Ms. RICKETTS: ...it depends on the needs of the child. So there's a whole host of factors that factor in on what the subsidy is. We don't leave parents out there or families out there just to do this alone; we're a partner.

Children have case workers, the families have a case worker, as well, to help them navigate the system, make sure they're getting all of the benefits.

ADUBATO: Has that changed, Commissioner, or--the whole caseload issue? Explain that to us.

Ms. RICKETTS: Absolutely.

ADUBATO: Because in some of those cases where these children in foster care were just not taken care of, and some terrible things--and some of them died. Many went back and said, 'Wait a minute! That case worker on the state level had way too many cases.' What's changed?

Ms. RICKETTS: It's changed drastically. We've reduced the caseloads. There's not one case worker in the state of New Jersey that has over 30 families, and most often it's well below 30 families.

ADUBATO: What was it? Let's put that in context, because it sounds like a lot, but I don't know--a lot compared to what?

Ms. RICKETTS: You know, I wasn't here when all of those numbers were out there, but I can tell you...

ADUBATO: Was it up to 100?

Ms. RICKETTS: It was well above 30 in some instances. And that's just not the case anymore. We've brought the caseloads down, we've provided training and mentoring and coaches for the case workers, and I go out in the field. I try to go out once a month as a case worker assistant. I'm not the commissioner for the day, I go out as a case worker assistant, and I help them do their job.

ADUBATO: What are you looking for?

Ms. RICKETTS: I want to see what they do every day, I want to understand what barriers there may be to them doing their job the way they know they need to do it. And for me, at the end of the day when I have to make decisions that impact the department as a whole, which in turn impact kids and families in New Jersey, I need to see what's going on on the ground. And I can tell you we have some phenomenal case workers out there who love their job and say to me, 'Now, this is what we're supposed to be doing.' And we can do it because our caseloads are down, we have the training, and we have the services available in the community.

ADUBATO: Like?

Ms. RICKETTS: We provide all types of training for the foster care parents...

ADUBATO: Describe that real quick. A few minutes left. We're going to do a whole panel discussion on this...

Ms. RICKETTS: That's right.

ADUBATO: ...as well, but help us. The training includes what?

Ms. RICKETTS: The training includes hearing from other foster parents, the

training includes understanding and knowing what types of services are available, how you access the benefits. It's soup to nuts. You may already be a parent, but being a foster parent is an even bigger job sometimes because of the issues that the kids may be coming to you with. And so we identify all the resources. We may do behavioral coaching, how to, you know, how do you deal with the child if the child is going to have behavioral issues in the home or acting out.

ADUBATO: We're talking about kids--excuse me for interrupting, Commissioner. Some of these kids--and some of them have very special needs, and we'll talk about that in a second.

Ms. RICKETTS: They do.

ADUBATO: But also, so many of them have been abused.

Ms. RICKETTS: Some of them have.

ADUBATO: Some of them have been abused. They've dealt with all kinds of psychological, emotional, physical, potentially sexual issues; we don't know. That requires tremendous training, tremendous mentoring, patience, understanding, knowledge, love, all those things. That's a very high bar.

Ms. RICKETTS: It is a very high bar, and I can tell you I've met some of our foster parents, and they are just phenomenal people. They give the love, the support and the caring to those kids that ultimately makes--it makes a huge difference on how those children are going to grow up and be as an adult.

ADUBATO: In the minute we have left, I'm going to do this, because we'll deal with the special needs children, in quotes, and some of the issues they have. The greatest satisfaction you get out of your work is?

Ms. RICKETTS: The success stories that I hear from the case workers when they reunite a family. I met a father who he and his wife lost their children because of substance abuse issues, and they worked with the department, and the mother decided she was done, the father said, 'No way, I want my kids back.' And I met him in the holidays, and he's got all five of his kids, he's had them for the last two years. And he comes to this holiday event every year as a role model for other parents, and talking to foster parents to say, 'Someone good had my kids while I got my act together.' So it's the stories like that that make everything count and all the hard work worth it.

ADUBATO: It reminds you of why you do what you do.

Ms. RICKETTS: It does.

ADUBATO: Well, listen, Commissioner, I appreciate it very much, we appreciate you being here and talking not just about the process on how to become a foster parent, but the struggle that these young men and women face and the opportunities for love and support and families to come together. And again, it's complicated, we know that, and we'll deal with more of the issues in our larger, broader panel discussion, but we thank you for shedding light on an important subject. Thank you, Commissioner.

Ms. RICKETTS: Thank you.

Announcer: If you would like more information on this program or if you'd

like to express an opinion, e-mail us at info@caucusnj.org. And visit us online at caucusnj.org.

ADUBATO: Hi, I'm Steve Adubato. We're talking about foster parenting and adoption. We are thrilled to be joined by Kelli Lane, who is a foster parent, and to actually join us on a different discussion, it was a panel discussion with some other folks, and we wanted to keep you and have a separate in-depth conversation.

First of all, Kelli, tell the folks your story. When did you know you wanted to get into this foster parenting thing? Had to do with your church, right?

Ms. KELLI LANE (Foster Parent): I was teaching Bible school in the--in the summer program. And I was teaching music, and there were two little girls who were so animated and just every day after class would come up and hug and kiss me. And then one day I saw their mother come in, and I thought, 'That's not their biological mother,' you know, because they were African-American and she was white. And someone then later told me the story that they were foster children and that she had just adopted them, and I thought it was such a wonderful story. And I went home and thought, 'Oh, I should do that.' And then I thought, 'Oh, I don't have time.' You know, because...

ADUBATO: It wasn't a good time.

Ms. LANE: Well, you know, my oldest son was--is autistic, and so I was going through a lot with him, you know, getting him set with programs and therapies and stuff like that. And then I also had another child who was having some delays at the time, and I had therapy for him. So I thought, 'I don't--I don't have time for this.' And then a couple weeks later, I was at church and there was a thing in our bulletin that was requesting people to become foster parents, and I did save the brochure.

ADUBATO: It was nagging at you.

Ms. LANE: It was. That's what I said, it was my second seed planted. And then the third seed was two weeks later. I was at--picking my son up from school in the summer program and his teacher came out, and I had known her for three years, my son had been in her class for three years, and she was a beautiful person and she said to me, 'There's a--did Blake tell you about the little girl in our class?' And I said, 'No.' And she went on to tell me that this little girl had been in seven different foster homes in a very short amount of time. She wasn't even in a foster home anymore.

ADUBATO: Only a few months.

Ms. LANE: Like six, seven months.

ADUBATO: Right.

Ms. LANE: And that she was free for adoption and that she needed a home. And so I said, 'At this point, I'm going to get struck by lightning if I don't do something about this.' But then I drove home with a clear conscience because I thought, 'Well, you know, it's not just me, I'm married, and you know, my husband might not want to do this.' And I went home, talked to my husband, and Matt said, 'Call tomorrow. That little girl deserves a chance just like, you know, every other child.'

ADUBATO: Your husband responded in a very positive way immediately.

Ms. LANE: Immediately.

ADUBATO: Did you expect that reaction from him?

Ms. LANE: I thought he would be a little hesitant just because of what the situation that we were facing at home with our own children. And--but he said to me, you know--and I felt that we've been blessed. I had extra room in my house, I was staying at home, which you don't have to stay at home. I mean, there's plenty of people that work and have foster children, which I think is great. So anyone can do it. And I just decided this is what we were going to do. And so we went ahead. We went on the New Jersey Web site and we--they--someone called us the next day, and we started the process, and then we went through our training. And it was almost immediate, too, my husband and I both looked at each other and we said, 'Whether we get to adopt Angela or not'--she was the door that opened for us so that we could see the need out here for so many children. And we said, 'We're doing the right thing.' And we ended up not being able to adopt this little girl. She was adopted by another family, which was great. And that's how we got started in this whole process. So.

ADUBATO: But you didn't stop there.

Ms. LANE: We didn't. We got two brothers, and we had them for a year and we--they were reunited with their mother.

ADUBATO: What was that like?

Ms. LANE: It was probably one of the hardest days in my life, I have to say. It was--it was very difficult. We--my husband and I drove them to their house with all their belongings. And it's hard because you love them like your--they're your own. I'm sorry, here I go again crying. But they were--I was happy that they were back with their mother. My children were excited because they said, 'They're going to get to go home to their mommy,' and there were other siblings.

ADUBATO: Your own kids said that to you.

Ms. LANE: My own children said that to me. They were excited for them. And so I had to put on the brave face and say, 'I know they get to go home and be with their mom, and so I'm happy for them.' And...

ADUBATO: What were you really feeling on another level?

Ms. LANE: I was--on the other level, there was sadness because, you know, you go--you love these children like they're your own and you never know whether you're going to see them again or, you know, whatever. And we did have a relationship for a while. I told that mother, 'Call me any time--any time of the day, night, you know, whatever.'

ADUBATO: Mm.

Ms. LANE: 'We're here for them if you need us.' And we did, you know, we did help her a couple of times. And so I was glad that I had that relationship. But I have to...

ADUBATO: Do your--excuse me--do your kids ask about them at all?

Ms. LANE: They do.

ADUBATO: They do.

Ms. LANE: They do ask about them. They just want to know why we can't have play dates, you know, and...

ADUBATO: That's a good question.

Ms. LANE: It is, and it's a tough one to answer. And so I always say, 'Well, you know, she's busy,' you know. I wish I knew the answer, because I would love to still have a relationship with them. But I have to say, on the other hand, I think it's a blessing that they were with us because so many people met them--you know, my family, people in our church--and there's not a day that goes by that we don't, you know, say a prayer for those boys and think about them. So even though they touched our lives for only a year...

ADUBATO: Mm.

Ms. LANE: ...they're in so many people's hearts forever.

ADUBATO: Tell everyone watching, because I have a feeling both in the larger discussion we had and here, you're having a big impact on people right now. You're getting them--having them think. Is that part of the reason why you're doing this interview?

Ms. LANE: That's part of the reason why I'm here because, at this point, I have two biological children, I have two foster children in my home, and they will call, you know, for more, you know, to see if I can take anymore children, and honestly, at this point, I...

ADUBATO: The state will call and say, 'Hey'...

Ms. LANE: The state.

ADUBATO: ...'you're really good at this.'

Ms. LANE: Exactly. Well, I have more room. But, unfortunately, I feel that I'm at my limit, you know, for everyone to get the attention they need, the, you know, the therapies that we...

ADUBATO: You don't want--excuse me for interrupting--you don't want--you don't believe that parents should be taking on too many children if in fact it begins to impact adversely their ability to give these children what they need.

Ms. LANE: Exactly. And that's one of the reasons why, independently, I had gone out and was going to different churches and trying to talk to groups of people with--not even around DYFS's back or the, you know...

ADUBATO: The Division of Youth and Family Services.

Ms. LANE: Division of Youth and--yeah. I wasn't going behind their back, they knew that I was doing this. Because I really felt a strong, you know--I just really felt that this...

ADUBATO: What were you saying?

Ms. LANE: I was just telling people that they really need good homes and anyone can do it. I swore I couldn't do it. I thought, you know, 'I'm too busy, I have, you know, I have a son with special needs' and this kind of stuff. But you know--you know, if you have love in your heart and you can, you know, give a little extra time--I mean children are time and energy, but you know what, you get up every day and you make a difference in someone's life. And I just think it's a wonderful thing. And I think people sometimes question whether they can do it, and I'm--I want to tell people that I think they can do it.

ADUBATO: One of the ways they can do it is making it clear with the training is--real quick, the training that you had...

Ms. LANE: Mm-hmm.

ADUBATO: ...included?

Ms. LANE: Well, I went through the regular training, and I also did the special home service provider training, which was more like medical issues.

ADUBATO: Because one of the children had special medical needs.

Ms. LANE: The little girl that we were trying to adopt did. And then the baby that we just got did have special needs also, and we got her...

ADUBATO: So the training is extensive?

Ms. LANE: It's a weeklong, eight hours a day, and it was, you know, kind of intensive, but it's not--listen, I don't have a nurse--my sister's a nurse, I don't have a nursing background, I don't have anything like that. A lot of it's just common sense and just getting the books, learning it, obviously learning CPR, that kind of stuff.

ADUBATO: You're going through the adoption process right now?

Ms. LANE: Yes. We're working on that.

ADUBATO: How you handling that?

Ms. LANE: Great. It's--you know what? It's--it takes a long time, you know, and as the lawyer told me the other day, it's never done until the last, you know, ink is dry.

ADUBATO: That's right.

Ms. LANE: So you know, we're hoping everything's going to work out well, but you never know, so.

ADUBATO: Without me prying too much...

Ms. LANE: Mm-hmm.

ADUBATO: ...I feel like Oprah--you and your husband...

Ms. LANE: Mm-hmm.

ADUBATO: ...brought you closer?

Ms. LANE: It has. We've become more of a team. I have to say my husband has even said that he's done more with the foster children than he even did with our other children.

ADUBATO: Really?

Ms. LANE: At the time, he used to work on Wall Street in the city, so he was obviously gone more. Now he works locally in Red Bank, which is close to our home in Middletown. So he's definitely hands-on and he's there for me and he's there for the kids, and he just--he loves them, he really does.

ADUBATO: What's it done for your kids, this whole experience?

Ms. LANE: My kids have learned that life is just not about yourself, and you have to give back and that--my son told me the other day that he's going to have 69 children, and I said, 'Sixty-nine? That's an awful lot,' and he--and I said, 'Does your wife know you're going to have 69 children?' He goes, 'No, they're all going to be orphans. I want to take in children that don't have homes.' And it's great because I just feel like I'm teaching my kids good lessons early on about--my kids don't judge people on color, because we've had both white...

ADUBATO: Right.

Ms. LANE: ...African-American, we have, you know, we have everything. And so my kids love people for who they are, what's inside, and they're great, they...

ADUBATO: You feel blessed, don't you?

Ms. LANE: I do. I feel really blessed. I do.

ADUBATO: Well, we feel very fortunate to have met you.

Ms. LANE: Mm.

ADUBATO: And you never know how your producers as they go out and try to find people who they're going to get in here, and I've been doing this for about 20 years...

Ms. LANE: Mm-hmm.

ADUBATO: ...and very rarely do you meet someone who has the kind of impact that you know that many years later you're still going to remember them.

Ms. LANE: Mm.

ADUBATO: Not just on me, more importantly on the people watching. Kelli, we want to thank you.

Ms. LANE: Thank you.

ADUBATO: You've done a tremendous public service.

Ms. LANE: Thank you.

ADUBATO: Good job.

Ms. LANE: Thanks.

Announcer: Don't miss Steve Adubato and co-host Rafael Pi Roman each week on "Inside Trenton," Saturdays at 8:30 AM on Thirteen, and Sundays at 7:30 AM on NJN Public Television.

ADUBATO: Welcome back. We're talking about the foster care system not only in the state of New Jersey and the metropolitan area, but across the country. Right now there are 8,000 children under the age of 18 in foster care. One of them is with us here in the studio. He is Ed.

Good to see you, Ed.

EDWARD (Foster Child): Good to see you, too.

ADUBATO: You're 16 years of age.

EDWARD: Yes.

ADUBATO: You've been in foster care for six years?

EDWARD: Right.

ADUBATO: How many different families are we talking about?

EDWARD: A lot.

ADUBATO: A lot.

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: More than three?

EDWARD: Way more.

ADUBATO: Way more.

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: More than six?

EDWARD: A little bit over that.

ADUBATO: Yeah. You have a brother, Fabian?

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: Thirteen.

EDWARD: Right.

ADUBATO: Going to turn 13. He's about three years younger than you?

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: How often do you see him?

EDWARD: Occasionally.

ADUBATO: You were telling me that you go to your grandma's house.

EDWARD: Yeah, we went to go visit her a couple of times.

ADUBATO: Yeah. Tell us something special about Fabian.

EDWARD: He likes to fight.

ADUBATO: He likes to fight.

EDWARD: He do. He's a wrestling guy. He likes to box and multiple things. He still thinks he can beat me, but...

ADUBATO: Can he?

EDWARD: No.

ADUBATO: OK. What are you into?

EDWARD: Music. Media.

ADUBATO: Music's your thing.

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: Tell me about that.

EDWARD: I write and produce music. It's the best thing I think I could do.

ADUBATO: You have a studio in your basement.

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: When did you know that music was your love?

EDWARD: 2004.

ADUBATO: What happened?

EDWARD: A kid came to me, was like, 'I want to start a group.' I was like, 'Why come to me?' He was like, 'Because I know you know the dictionary well.' I was like, 'I do?' He was like, 'Yeah.'

ADUBATO: So you could write.

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: So you write, you produce, you sing?

EDWARD: No, I rap.

ADUBATO: You rap.

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: You know, there are a lot of things I'm not going to talk to you about that really have to do with how you wound up being in foster care. It's not relevant right now. What is important, Ed, is that you share with our audience some of the biggest things that you've taken away--you've taken away from this experience. You were--you had some troubles for a fair amount of time, right?

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: Got into trouble.

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: School.

EDWARD: School, you know, home issues, fighting with my brother.

ADUBATO: Right. You say that you want to share with our audience a couple things about what you've learned in foster care. The biggest is?

EDWARD: Take responsibility.

ADUBATO: What does that mean?

EDWARD: To stop--if you make a mistake, to get--take the blame. It's OK. It's OK to put it on yourself, and you'll learn from it.

ADUBATO: Wait a minute, you were 10 years old when you went into foster care, you going to take that on at 10?

EDWARD: No, not at a young age. It's going to take a while to realize that you want to take responsibility for some of the things that you did.

ADUBATO: Well, but being in foster care isn't on you.

EDWARD: Kind of it is for me with my situation.

ADUBATO: Really?

EDWARD: Yeah. Because I was getting in trouble with my grandma, she kicked me out. I ended up at my mom's, and I knew that was trouble from day one.

ADUBATO: So you're saying you being, and don't be offended by this expression, you being bounced around, being moved is partly on you?

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: So if there's someone watching right now that wants to understand foster care--forget about the foster care system, I'm talking about the human side of it--they look at you, 16 years old, got a lot of potential in music and I'm sure academically as well down the road, you're going to work hard.

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: Why is it that a 16-year-old--I mean you're from Camden originally, right?

EDWARD: Right.

ADUBATO: Whether you're from Camden or Newark, Jersey City, I mean I grew up in a city as well. But I'm curious, why do you think it is so tough for so many to imagine taking in a 16-year-old kid, not a man, a kid turning into a man, hopefully soon, into their home?

EDWARD: Well, because a lot of foster kids get stereotyped.

ADUBATO: Like what?

EDWARD: Like, you know, they're "troublemakers." If they have a history of being bounced around a lot, they get labeled as troublemakers. It's all different type of--types of names for them, but most of the ones are troublemakers. And during your teen years, you know, this is when you want to explore certain things. So it's kind of difficult for a parent, you know, to take you in and trust you at that.

ADUBATO: Can you understand that?

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: Yeah, but--and I want to go back to something, you don't actually believe that--you see, I'm torn here, because we cannot talk about and will not talk about the circumstance and condition under which you wound up foster care, but at 10 years of age you don't actually believe that it was your fault that you were in the foster care system?

EDWARD: Partially.

ADUBATO: I don't want to argue with you on the air. You were 10 years old.

EDWARD: Right.

ADUBATO: OK. Do you accept and understand that while you're taking responsibility for your actions right now, causing trouble with your grandmother and school, I get that, and I have a 16-year-old son, I'd be proud for him to say, 'It's on me.' Be proud of some people on Wall Street and Washington did that right now. But you do understand at 10, it's not on you.

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: That things happen around you. How do you separate stuff that happened to you as a little, little kid, and then say, 'All right, I'm not 10 years old anymore, now it's on me'?

EDWARD: Well, you sit there and you think about it and you pinpoint things that you could have stopped from happening and then what you couldn't stop. I could have stopped me from moving in with my mom.

ADUBATO: You could have.

EDWARD: Yeah. But...

ADUBATO: What couldn't you have stopped, without sharing anything you don't want to share?

EDWARD: Them and their drinking.

ADUBATO: Circumstances, things that happened, that's beyond you.

EDWARD: Right.

ADUBATO: But you know what's on you. What would you say to any other 16-year-old kid out there right--in foster care, getting adopted, not in foster care, not getting adopted, just any 16-year-old, what would you say, including mine?

EDWARD: Follow your dreams.

ADUBATO: And your music is your dream?

EDWARD: Music and digital media, multiple things.

ADUBATO: And why is your brother, Fabian, your inspiration?

EDWARD: Because I see how he could, you know, he deals with it, and he's young, he barely knows anybody from the family, so it's like...

ADUBATO: Meaning he deals with foster--being a foster child?

EDWARD: Yeah. And he loves it.

ADUBATO: He loves it?

EDWARD: Yeah. And I'm like, 'Well, you barely know your family, and like, how can you keep going and not sit there and think about it all the time?' He's like, 'Just go. Go day by day.'

ADUBATO: So he has inspired you?

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: You want to have a family one day?

EDWARD: Yeah.

ADUBATO: A big one?

EDWARD: No.

ADUBATO: No.

EDWARD: Not at all. I come from a big family, and I think I'll have a small one.

ADUBATO: You going to be a good father?

EDWARD: Of course.

ADUBATO: I'm confident you will too. Hey, most importantly, everyone here at public television wishes you the best, and we have a feeling you're going to make a meaningful contribution. You're a good young man. Thank you, Ed.

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