**System-Impacted Students Supported by**

**The Rising Scholars Program**

Joe Louis Hernandez:

When I came back in 2008, I was introduced to a program that Victor manages, our TRIO-ACEs program. And really that's where somebody believed in me, and somebody taught me about what it was to be in education. And so that's my goal, teaching people how to navigate.

Christina Barsi:

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell. And you're listening to The Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak, by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

Sun Ezzell:

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC from the classroom to completion.

Christina Barsi:

I know I want to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

Speaker 5:

She's a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly Pomona. Psychology major, English major.

Sun Ezzell:

From transforming part-time into full-time.

Speaker 6:

I really like the time that you spend with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

Christina Barsi:

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

Speaker 7:

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

Christina Barsi:

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi Mt. SAC alumni and producer of this podcast.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell, learning assistance faculty and professional learning academy coordinator.

Christina Barsi:

And this is The Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Writer, George Eliot aka Mary Ann Evans once said, "It's never too late to become what you might've been." But what if the only messages you've ever received were ones that left you feeling stuck, and there were systems in place that tried to keep you there. Our host Sun Ezzell talks with Victor M Rojas, the director of the Rising Scholars Program and Joe Louis Hernandez coordinator of the Rising Scholars Program who are doing the amazing work in eliminating those barriers and limiting beliefs by creating support systems to empower formerly incarcerated and system impacted students in their educational paths.

Sun Ezzell:

Well, Victor and Joe, thank you so much for joining me today on The Magic Mountie Podcast to share a little bit about the Rising Scholars Program. I'm so excited that you can join us today. And I was wondering first, if you could just introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about the work that you're doing at Mt. SAC.

Victor Rojas:

So thank you for having us. Once again, my name is Victor Rojas and I serve as director of TRIO programs in our newly created Rising Scholars Program here on campus.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

My name is Joe Louis Hernandez and I'm the coordinator for Rising Scholars. Rising Scholars is a program that we launched in July of 2020 that seeks to serve formerly incarcerated and system-impacted students. And what we mean by system-impacted students is those that are on adult felony probation or some type of supervision that might not have been ever incarcerated, but have experienced being impacted by the criminal justice system.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

I use the term system impacted. A lot of people will use justice involved or justice impacted. I think to use the term, justice involved or justice impacted suggest that there was some justice given, when it's really an injustice system that affects our student population.

Victor Rojas:

So to expand a little bit on what Joe just mentioned, we're looking to foster a college completing atmosphere that leads to increased student success for this population, much like other specialized programs on our campus, which serves foster youth or our guardian scholars, or our honors students or LGBT community. We were looking to address the needs of this particular student population. We really want the campus to recognize that a lot of the students are already our students. They're already among us.

Victor Rojas:

We also want the campus to realize that these students also have a lot to offer. Their lived experience offers them a wealth of knowledge that a lot of times society as a whole doesn't value, but brings a lot of valuable assets to them, i.e. persistence or navigational capital that we know is instrumental to college success.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

Another thing in adding to that is I believe Rising Scholars is in a unique position on campus that we might be one of the only student support services programs that stretch us into non-credit. So we have set four pathways for our students. Those that are looking to complete a high school diploma or a GED, or want to take some non-credit courses. Those that want to get an associate's degree. Those that just want a certificate and a vocation, like welding or heating and air conditioning, or those don't want to transfer.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

Our goal really is, is to begin to engage in like Victor says college competing kind of ideology that really starts with even those that are just doing their high school diploma, and letting them know like, "Okay, cool. You want to get a high school diploma. Did you know, you can enroll in a class and start on your associate's degree?" What is your goal when you're done? Here are your options.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

I think that's one of the things that our main purpose is if nobody ever tells you about your opportunities, then will you ever have the chance to take them? And I think that's what we're doing. We're giving people the knowledge that they need to find success in areas that based on the stigma of society, that you can't do that kind of job, or you should never think about being a community college president because you've been incarcerated or you got to felonies, or you should never think about being a CEO.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

Our idea is like, "Well, why not?" The laws are changing. You paid your debt. So I think that's one of the other things that we do is so we begin in our school of continuing education and we'll stretch to whatever four-year institution that they want to be in.

Victor Rojas:

So one of the things that drives us is we know that there's about, what, 70 million Americans with a criminal background. And at some point our fellow citizens are going to need jobs, right? So for me, it's what are these individuals that have been incarcerated going to do when they come out with the new administration and Washington's plans to focus on infrastructure and job creation? Why not have these individuals get educated via one of our four pathways, as Joe very eloquently pointed out, so that they have ways to support themselves and support their families.

Victor Rojas:

In the long run, and the added bonus would be to reduce recidivism because we know that about 75% of these individuals, if they don't find employment, end up going back to jail or in prison. So we see it as a win-win.

Sun Ezzell:

Can you talk a little bit about how the program started? Where did the idea come from? What's that journey?

Victor Rojas:

Sure. Let me take a stab at that. All credit should be given to our vice president for student services, Dr. Audrey Yamagata-Noji. This idea has been brewing in her thought for a while. And when I came on board about three years ago now, she asked a question in the manager's meeting who was willing to take this effort on? Or something along those lines. And me being the new guy wanting to impress, I'm like, "Sure, I have experiences, a wealth of experience developing and implementing programming back to my Cal State Fullerton days. So I'm like, "Sure, I'll take a stab at it."

Victor Rojas:

One of the things that came along with that is that let's find some funding, because at the time everything was frozen because of the budget, the state budget. So we found some funding through Los Angeles County. Joe and I, we co-wrote a grant that we submitted that was successfully accepted. And that was the beginnings of what we have today.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

For me, it's more personal having been incarcerated and having had kind of an experience at Mt. SAC and knowing what it is to feel a stigma, knowing what it is to not want to ask for help. In 2006, I was on probation and I came to Mt. SAC. And even knowing all that I could be was a drug and alcohol counselor because of my background. So going and really not having anybody to support me, not have anybody to tell me that I belonged, and so I ended up dropping out after two semesters.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

I went back to working at warehouses and I went back to kind of engaging, just living a life that I was tired of. Getting up at 1:00 in the morning and coming home at 6:00 in the afternoon working these really long days. And when I came back in 2008, I was introduced to a program that Victor manages, our TRIO-ACEs program. And really that's where somebody believed in me, and somebody taught me about what it was to be in education. I often tell some of my employers or some of the people that I work with, that they do a better job of onboarding you when you get to prison or to the county jail than we do with our students here at Mt. SAC. And so that's my goal.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

Teaching people how to navigate, right? In one of my first meetings with my counselor, Diana Felix, I was in English 67 in 2012 and she was like, "You're going to write a thesis." And I was like, "What's a thesis?" And she's like, "It's a small book." And I was like, "Lady, I'm only writing 250-word paragraphs. How am I going to write a book?" Then she was talking to me about master's degrees and she was talking about bachelor's degrees and transferring. And I was like, "You're crazy. I'm not even going to get a job."

Joe Louis Hernandez:

Our director at the time, I was working in the library and he was like, "Have you ever thought of being a librarian?" I laughed. I was like, "Someone like me? I'm not going to be a librarian. I got felonies, bro." I think for me, it started in my own experience, right? It started in my educational trajectory and getting a master's degree and writing a thesis, and doing research on formerly incarcerated students, and now being in a PhD program, and even being a coordinator, right? In my previous role as a manager, these students are able to see their trajectory and what they can accomplish if they continue to move forward.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

So in my mind, my idea started in 2012 when I was a Mt. SAC student, and Mt. SAC changed my life basically because they changed my educational trajectory. And really, we tried to start a student club back then in 2014, but it all fell on me and I wanted to transfer. So I had to let it go. And little by little, I've been doing this work. I'm in recovery in the area. So any addict that's coming home or any addict in recovery would come to me to ask me about what do I do when I go to Mt. SAC? And I would lay the game plan for them like, "You go to this place. You go to that place and you get this and you get that."

Joe Louis Hernandez:

So I've been doing the work for a while now, and then it's just been... Now, there's a program. Now, there's a place to come. There's a place to be. I think oftentimes students will tell us like I don't belong here. And I'll be like, "Well, you don't belong on the street, but there you were." I think with Audrey's help, she saw the value in me, and she kind of gave me that confidence to like, "Okay, we can do this kind of stuff." So we began to do the work with former incarcerated students, and just across the state with everything that's going on.

Victor Rojas:

I think a big part of it, and Joe didn't directly say it, but he did allude to it is showing our students, particularly Rising Scholars students who have to transition from being inside of jail or involved with the criminal justice system to being out is exposing them to all the endless possibilities. There's the saying, "You don't know what you don't know," and that is very true. Right? So if you don't know that you have the potential to have a vocational career or to transfer to the other side of the hill to Cal Poly Pomona or Berkeley or anywhere, you're not going to set those goals for yourself.

Victor Rojas:

So one of the first things we do as we bring students in, as we onboard them, is we get to know them as individuals, as human beings, and we also get to know their strengths. And I think that's a big part of it. We focus on their strengths and augment their strengths. We also talk about their deficits, right? The things their past, if you will. And we try to not minimize them and not just try to erase them, but also acknowledge them and try to minimize them. Right?

Victor Rojas:

So let's focus on the strength. Let's focus on the wealth that you bring, not only to school, but to society as a whole. And I think that's really also what sets us apart.

Sun Ezzell:

I think I hear you both really speaking to the power of having that personal connection and having maybe just one person who sees something in you that maybe you didn't see yourself or sees a possibility that you hadn't seen before. I think that probably all of us can look back at our educational journeys and there was at least one person who saw something in us, right? And they reached back and helped us along. That's really powerful, I think for everyone to be reminded of. Thank you for sharing that journey. So if students join the Rising Scholars program, can you talk a little bit more about what they can expect?

Joe Louis Hernandez:

I would say they can expect... Some in conversations with my students, they asked me like, "Oh, I can only do this." And I think one of the things that they can expect to support somebody there to help you a lot sometimes the students have these ideas of what they can't do. And I tell them, "Listen, whatever you want to do, I'm here to help you." And along with that, we're going to be having workshops to be able to show you what it is like to be a college student and how to transfer, engage with some of these professional development opportunities.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

They're going to have access to counselors that will help them with their academic plan, that'll help them with that transition. We have a student worker right now that's also formally incarcerated and that is really... She's there to help them navigate. They have me, someone that has been incarcerated and basically has navigated from the bottom of the educational system to the top and I think they have that and everything in between where through the county grant, we're able to offer those on adult felony probation book vouchers.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

We're going to have a summer leadership program where we're developing the curriculum, that'll teach them advocacy, that would teach them the kind of like "Let's work on your strengths," and how to tell your story that also teach them like, okay, how to acknowledge some of their trauma and how to begin to get help from that. We're also in the process of developing a partnership with Project Rebound at Cal Poly Pomona where the students will be able to have that feeling of going to that campus and belonging already, right? Because they'll already get it as a Mt. SAC student.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

We're working with the public defender's office to set up expungements, right? And the community to set up expungements to help clear some of the records. For those that have records, the expungements will help not take it off their record, but in some cases it won't show them. Those are just a few of what we're offering. We're trying to give them the full community college experience.

Victor Rojas:

I guess if I can add something that I would like future students to know about us and what we're creating is that, well, two things. One is that they have a home here and they will always have a place to come to for good and bad. And then the other thing I would want them to know is that they're going to get honest advice from us based on their needs, not based on our desires. Like Joe said, we want every one of our students to become a CEO and multimillionaire, and that'd be great, but let's do it through your strengths.

Victor Rojas:

We're also going to have very candid conversations about, and again, Joel alluded to this about leadership and what that looks like, what it's like to deal with the trauma and heal how to also give back, right? How to be a productive member of society, how to advocate for yourself and for your family, and for your community. I think that's a big part of being a good leader, right, fighting for what you believe in and for which is just. So that's what I would want future students to know.

Sun Ezzell:

Is there something that you would like to ask faculty classified managers to do to support students who are in the Rising Scholars program or to support the program?

Victor Rojas:

Where do I start with this one, right? For me, one thing that I would like folks to realize is that there's a direct correlation. It's not causation. It's a correlation, right? Unemployment and recidivism are directly tied to one another. And a lot of our students as Joe pointed out are affected by the criminal justice system for no fault of their own may not have the skill sets to have a good paying job.

Victor Rojas:

So my argument to folks who may not think this type of program is warranted or valid, is if nothing else, let's help the individual get a good paying job so that they don't end up back in an institution where they're not being productive. I tend to have conversations with friends who sometimes are not like-minded and their argument is, "Why are we spending taxpayer dollars on individuals for them to get an education?" And I'm like, "Well, it costs more for us to keep them in jail than it does for us to give them an education." And that quickly ends that argument.

Victor Rojas:

So for me, how can faculty help by being open to the idea that these students are just like every other student on campus, they're here with a purpose. They have needs, they have struggles. And a lot of times their struggles are greater than most because they have to not only adjust to Mt. SAC, but the outside world establishing relationships with family and society as a whole. So in a lot of ways, the Rising Scholars may have more to deal with and more hurdles to cross than your average student. So that's something that I'd like faculty to recognize and realize.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

I charged faculty and managers and people like that to understand that, like Victor said a little while ago, it's not like all of a sudden in 2021, people from jail and people from prison, all of a sudden, this is like the first year they're coming to school. Well, they've been doing this for years. They've been here. And they're here. Counselors and faculty members have the impact on the student in showing them academically what they can do.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

Sometimes all it takes is somebody to believe in you when you don't believe in yourself. I think that's something key that we can all do, for any student. But for these students in particular that have been told, they're nothing and that are told, like Victor says like, "That's their fault they got locked up." Right? I think just understanding that sometimes these people made a mistake and let's not hold them to that mistake. A lot of my students, when I'm talking to them, they tell me like, "I just want people to know that I'm a good person." And I was like, "Nobody said you're not."

Joe Louis Hernandez:

Whereas I think that's the main thing to show is that these people made a mistake and they paid their debt. They did their time. They did their probation sentence and they're not here at Mt. SAC because they don't want a new way of life, they're here because they want a new way of life. They want something better. They took a new option and that's education, and that's moving on. So to know that these students, at the same time that you might be thinking about of them, they're thinking better for themselves.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

So how can we help engage in alleviating those dots for them. I think that's the key point as faculty and staff, as managers to just believe in these students, to let them know that Mt. SAC is a place that they belong.

Sun Ezzell:

So I think one of the things that we're hoping is that faculty and others who are making connections with students will help to connect those students with programs like Rising Scholars. Do you have any recommendations of good ways for folks to do that in a way that doesn't call out any students, but as welcoming and supportive and encouraging?

Joe Louis Hernandez:

Well, one, they could refer them to our website, pull them in office hours. Some students might not disclose outrightly, but they might disclose during writing assignments or during these office hours, and letting them know that if faculty and staff are aware of our program, where on our website, on the landing page, we do have, it's a square in the middle that says become a Rising Scholar and they can click it, and they can submit a referral for a student and let us know like, "Hey, there there's some assistance for you and there's some help."

Joe Louis Hernandez:

I think knowing that, it was really going to be on a lot of faculty members to kind of create that connection, having them email me at jhernandez222@mtsac.edu. Again, a warm handoff. That'll be another way that they can help connect students with us, and just making sure that the student has the information that they need to succeed in like, "Hey, here's the program. If you choose to go join and be a part of. If you don't, it's okay."

Victor Rojas:

So I would encourage any faculty member who is at all interested in learning more about what we do and how we do it to reach out to myself or to Joe. And not only can we have a meeting to get to know one another and how we can help one another, but also we could go into classrooms and give presentations on our program. We're more than willing and happy to do that. Like Joe said, we take referrals. We do like warm handoffs. We don't believe in just dropping someone off and, "Okay, good luck." We're people persons, and I always tell the staff when people do business. So let's be humane about it and treat everyone nicely.

Victor Rojas:

So I guess what I'm ultimately saying is if they're at all interested and would like to collaborate in any way, just reach out. We're more than happy. We're getting this thing started. We're trying to figure out what works and what doesn't. As Joe kind of alluded, we're a two person team, but growing. We don't have all the answers quite yet, so we welcome new ideas.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you so much. And I'm just wondering, are there any questions I didn't think to ask? Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Victor Rojas:

Joe, I don't know if you feel comfortable, but maybe expanding a little bit more about how it was like to be a student just in case a student is listening to the podcast.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

I can. And I say the thing about faculty, because I stopped going to school in basically in ninth grade or stopped paying attention in eighth grade. I dropped out of high school twice. I dropped out of adult school. I came into Mt. SAC and dropped out. People will tell me like, "Oh, you belong here." And and I tell them like, "Well, look at my record. Not only do I have a criminal record, but I got this educational track record where it was like, I dropped out. I completed high school in home study. So I don't have the greatest educational trajectory or experience."

Joe Louis Hernandez:

As a student, you're writing in English and they're asking you to write about vacations and write about happy moments and write about this and write about that, that you remember vividly. I remember one of my first English assignments, how it impacted me is Sydney Bartman. She asked us to write about a vacation or a happy moment in our lives. I didn't know or something you could describe vividly.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

So I wrote about the first time that I went tagging. And instead of not even acknowledging it or just leaving it, I told a beautiful story that I may need to work on my grammar, which I still do today. But she told me that I knew how to write. I think that fear of, of maybe I'm not ready. I started and learned 49 for math and making it to statistics, right?

Joe Louis Hernandez:

Seeing this long road of English and math, and then thinking I'm never going to do that, that's something that most of our students go through. And on top of that now, I had, well, I can't tell them at the career center that I don't have job history experience because I've been locked up, because I don't have good jobs. When people are talking about, even as a professional. I was talking to one of my bosses at one time and she was like, "Have you ever been on probation?" And I was like, "Yeah, of course. I've been on probation. I've been on adult felony probation and I've been on summary probation."

Joe Louis Hernandez:

She was like, "No, no, no, no." She's like, "I mean, academic probation, or progress probation." I think some of our students get these terms or these feelings the first time I came to Mt. SAC. I didn't want to talk to anybody because everybody looked like those people that sat across from me that were trying to give me time because we have this professional attribute. We have this professional dress that we have for our employees.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

So I was like, "Yeah, I don't want to talk to nobody. I didn't want to disclose... I was in drug and alcohol classes. So it was safe to disclosing those classes. But early on, I didn't want to tell other people, or even the students sometimes, they would be like, we would talk and I would tell them, and they'd be like, "Cool. Come on, let's smoke a joint or let's do this, let's do that." I'm like, "No, I don't live like that no more."

Joe Louis Hernandez:

So it becomes, now you have it with students and you're afraid to tell faculty members or they'll be like, "Well, didn't you learn this in high school? Or you should have learned this there." I'm like, "I never went. I think that's like the key component of sometimes we don't want to disclose. and when we do, then we get labeled or people change the way that they see us." I've gotten to be a little bit oblivious to some of the things that happen just because I've had to ignore them.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

But I think for our students, that is something that is consistently on their mind. I'll say it again. They consistently tell me like I just want them to know that I'm a good person. And I told them, "Listen, I'm just trying to do more good than I did that. And I'm kind of winning right now. So let me help you." And it's just that stigma that is more internalized than anything, right? That stigma that oftentimes you could get this good job, right? In community college, Diana was telling me about it, you can work at a community college and I'd be like, "No lady. I got felonies. I'm not going to get a good job. I'm not."

Joe Louis Hernandez:

Look at me, I got a good job. Someone believed in me and here I am. I think these experiences of this self-doubt is ever persistent, right? Everybody talks about imposter syndrome and they talk about because I'm a person of color, and I'm like, "I don't have imposter syndrome because I'm a person of color. It's there. I have imposter syndrome because I've been to jail." People have told me like, "You're no good. You're just going to come back. You're just going to hang yourself. You're not going to have anything or make anything of yourself." I think that these are the conversations that our students have heard based not just on the color of their skin, but also the experiences in their life.

Victor Rojas:

So I asked Joe if he was okay with sharing it because there's power in the lived experience and students hearing Joe's story. Because unlike Joe, I don't have that lived experience. I can talk to student about being on academic probation. I can speak to a student about failing organic chemistry twice. Not proud of it, but it happened, right? But I want students to hear firsthand that there might be triggers. There might be things that trigger them, might bring that trauma back to the forefront. But Joe is a shining example of what's possible. And I'm blessed as the director of the program to have him here because he has more passion in a pinky than all of us combined for this student population.

Victor Rojas:

I'm just enjoying the ride, because ultimately I know we're doing good work, and like Joe said, I'm winning more than losing right now, but there's a lot of work to be done. So if there's any students listening, and I hope they are, come search us out.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

You see my quote, right? Rock bottom will teach you lessons and mountaintops never will. I try to stay true to who I am. So I went from the hood to being hooded, right? I'm on the way to earning my next hood as a doctoral student. So really letting students know, we're here to support you. It's about building a community. It's about building a network in the streets. And we run around with people that are with it. And I think in higher education, you got to find people that are with it yourself. And finding the Victor's, the Diana Felix's, the Audrey's, these people that believe in students relentlessly. They have this belief in students.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

Diana has believed in me relentlessly. I was nominated for student of distinction and I didn't get it. And I was kind of down on myself and then Audrey kind of picked me up and she was like, "Don't worry about it. It's not about these awards." I think that really stuck with me that for me it's not about these awards, the award that I get. And I think Victor gets the same way because I see it in him is the service that we give to our students, for someone to tell us like I came from other institutions and one of my students emailed me the other day and she's like, "I'm about to graduate."

Joe Louis Hernandez:

I was talking to another student today in the morning and she told me, "I got my first acceptance letter." I can care less if I get a national award. I got awards from organizations and for the stuff that I do, but my awards come, and this is for the students in your success. And then to know that, that this is not going to be easy on you, right? I'm going to challenge you, but I'm going to support you, right? I'm going to support you, and if you're ready to ride, then so is Rising Scholars.

Victor Rojas:

Yeah. It's about the rewards, not the awards, because there's nothing more rewarding than having someone come, and that had no educational aspirations. And being accepted into a Stanford or Berkeley or UCLA, that's what puts a smile on my face and gives me fulfillment and joy. At the end of the day, that's what it's all about. It's about the students and their successes.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you both so much. I was wondering before we wrap up, Joe, would you be willing to share a little bit about your master's work and your PhD work?

Joe Louis Hernandez:

Yeah. I'm always up to sharing. Victor knows that I can speak for days. So if your listeners are interested, they can look me up. My thesis is titled, You're About to Witness the Strength of Street Knowledge. Just in the title tells you pretty much what I do. I look at the knowledge that we got from selling drugs, from being in prison or being in jail, growing up in gangs. And my argument is that there is knowledge and that there is skill that these students already possess. They just need to learn how to readapt them.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

There's a reason I'm able to read the politics in the room when I'm sitting at president's cabinet when I was at my other institution, and when I'm sitting in the presidents and the vice presidents' meetings because you get to see... You already have kind of a keen sense, right? There's hustle that students have that they used on the streets. I'll give you an example. In my other institution, the student was afraid to talk to people. And I told the students, "Well, when you were on dope..." When she was on drugs, I was like, "You weren't afraid to talk to anybody." She was like, "Well, yeah. That's different. I needed stuff."

Joe Louis Hernandez:

I was like, "Well, you need stuff here too." It's called information. You need that scholarship information. You need to find out what EOPS can offer you. And I was like, "So everybody in this building has [inaudible 00:34:13]." So that's what I do in my research is showing this perspective of, it's not like, "Oh, these poor people that have been locked up." These people, yes, they have been locked up, but what are they already know and how can we amplify it? How do we engage with that? And that's really what I centered to do with a lot of my work. I like to call myself a streetwise scholar in really engaging in street, being the knowledge that I learned.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

And as we talk about each other, scholars are those that have this practice and they have this great understanding. So that's why I call myself a streetwise scholar, and I let my students know that this is what they are with it. This is the possibilities. So that's what I do in my research is really developing this anti-deficit lens on students that have experienced incarceration or have conviction history.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you so much. That's so fantastic. Thank you for sharing your educational journey with us, a little piece of your educational journey with us and congratulations on your master's degree and your PhD work. And I look forward to learning more about your work as you continue. I wanted to thank both of you for joining us on The Magic Mountie Podcast today to share about the Rising Scholars program and for the phenomenal work that you're doing to support students.

Victor Rojas:

Well, thank you once again for having us.

Joe Louis Hernandez:

Yes, thank you for having us.

Christina Barsi:

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