

Blaze The Mic E Shanell Bohannon Transcript

Jaelon:

You are listening to Blaze the Mic, a podcast from the University of Texas at Arlington School of Social Work that explores the real stories of our students and social work professionals. Together, we visit stories about how our students have built bridges, end stigma, and create positive impact affecting entire communities. I'm your host, Jaelon Jackson, and this is Blaze the Mic.

Jaelon:

Welcome to Blaze the Mic. I'm Jaelon Jackson and I'm here today with Shanell Bohannon. Hello. How are you today?

Shanell:

Good. So nice to be here.

Jaelon:

I was glad to have you. So today we'll be talking about resilience in the face of trauma. Okay. Now can you tell me a little bit about, what you, what do you mean when you say resilience in the face of trauma.

Shanell:

Just overcoming, you know, the traumatic things that happen in life. I've had about every trauma that you can think of. And overcoming that, finding a way to find the light through that, is something that I had to figure out on my own. So, the resilience, I just hope to spread that to other people.

Jaelon:

Okay. Yeah. So you are a BSW alumni here?

Shanell:

Yes, I am.

Jaelon:

Okay. And you're, going to go for your MSW?

Shanell:

Yes, I am. I am attempting to go for my MSW. Hopefully I will be in the MSW program by fall of 2026.

Jaelon:

Okay. Are you ready?

Shanell:

Oh, a part of me is ready. Part of me isn't.

Jaelon:

I feel like that is fair. I feel like that is fair. I mean, you know, we all have a little ehh , when it comes to school. So that's okay.

Shanell:

Just a little scared. Just a little scared. I think it's a, I think it's a new journey. It's not what I'm used to. It's. I haven't been, you know, in the master's program before, so it's just, I guess taking that step to start something new is kind of scary.

Jaelon:

Oh, anything new is always scary. New is just the scary word in its own. So what led you to—what led you to look at social work in the beginning?

Shanell:

Okay. So I started out in the pre-med major. Here at UTA, about my first year, second year in, I just got this overwhelming feeling that it wasn't what I was supposed to be doing. It just wasn't my calling. I was very afraid to tell my family because they wanted me to be a doctor. That was always the goal. Since I was seven years old to be a doctor. So one day I was in the bathroom, got up the courage and went downstairs and told my mom that I did not want to be a doctor. She actually, you know, was surprisingly very understanding and said, you know what I think, I think I have to show you something. And she took me to Alliance for Children, the one with the Arlington location, and had me talk to a social worker. That's kind of where my story began. And it came kind of full circle, telling that the, the social worker director there my story and her knowing me from when I was a child. She thought that social work was best for me. And then I enrolled in social work, and that was it.

Jaelon:

Okay. Do you think that, in your journey, like, specifically led you to social work, like, your experiences led you to social work?

Shanell:

I've actually been thinking about that a lot lately. I think what actually led me to social work and to finding out that it wasn't—that pre-med wasn't my way, and social work was my way, actually came from a dream. I actually had a dream when I was in about the seventh grade. Where I was in school and I was walking down a hall and I saw this girl sitting on the floor. And for some reason I knew that she was struggling like I knew that something was wrong. And I sat next to her and I talked to her, and she told me that—at the end of the dream, she told me that she was going to give up, but that she wasn't. Ever since then, I think I've been chasing that reality. Like I want to be that one, to notice someone and say, hey, I know it's hard right now, but I've been there and it gets better.

Jaelon:

So you want to spread light to people?

Shanell:

Yes.

Jaelon:

That's a beautiful thing. That—that's really beautiful. So. Wow. I have—it's actually funny. I have it written here, that pretty much last time we spoke that you said that you wanted to use this degree to help someone. You wanted to make sure that, that you were the person to be able to help the people who aren't getting help.

Shanell:

Exactly.

Jaelon:

That's—that's—that's actually amazing. That's great. So I, remember you also telling me that you actually started the program when you were 15?

Shanell:

Yes, I graduated high school at 15 years old. They pulled me to the counselor's office and said, look, we have no—nothing left to teach you. So you have to graduate. I came straight to UTA because after graduating—my—we actually—I'm the first one to go to college. So my mom was like, well, we're going to go to UTA. I don't want you to go far. So we came up to UTA and actually, the advisor told me that I was too young and that I needed to go to community college until I turned 18, because he didn't want me—it was a male—he didn't want me here in a dorm, because then you had to—I don't know if it's still like that now, but then freshman year, you had to stay on campus. He thought that wasn't for me and that I wasn't ready for that. So I went to TCC for three years, and then I came to UTA.

Jaelon:

Okay. So what was your experience at UTA like?

Shanell:

This was my first home, actually.

Jaelon:

Okay.

Shanell:

This is my first place that I've actually felt safe. They were the first people who, I guess, saw past—I guess, what I look like, and then actually saw my disability, because I have lupus. They gave me accommodations. They asked me for help. They gave me everything I needed to succeed. I only had one counselor that said that I was slightly above average. But at the end of the day, you know, she was just advising. But other than that, this was—this was my first home.

Jaelon:

That's beautiful. That is very beautiful. So, what do you do now?

Shanell:

Right now? I decided to stay off work because I do have a daughter. She's six years old, so, I'm trying to get her settled in everything and work on myself mentally. Because the thing with social work is, I've been working in social work for six years—with CPS, disability—with disability, as well as in the school system. And through all of that, I walked into a lot of children that had similar stories to mine, and it brought up trauma that I don't think I've actually dealt with. So I took the time off home, working on my mental health, working on my own trauma so that I can come back and be the warrior I was meant to be.

Jaelon:

Okay. Yeah. So what—what do you think about when you—when you think about therapy? Like, what exactly am I asking? More of—what is the first thing that comes to your head when you think about therapy?

Shanell:

For me, therapy is kind of a guide. It's—I—in some ways, I'm going to a social worker and I'm a social worker. So in some ways, I'm trained for it. But it's harder to guide yourself when you're trying to navigate through that—that pain. So, for me, it's just someone—when I get stuck, when I can't figure out how to get past this certain feeling or how to understand this certain thing—she's able to break it down for me in a way that I can figure it out myself.

Jaelon:

And that's great, because it's always—you know, you may know something.

Shanell:

Yeah.

Jaelon:

And it's just like, however, like, whenever your friends tell you, you need to take your own advice.

Shanell:

Yeah.

Jaelon:

It's a little bit harder to take your own advice because you're not really able to listen to yourself. But when other people tell you, it's like, okay, wow, I see. Yeah, that's—I like that. That's very interesting.

Jaelon:

So you also have a—you're also—you also have a—are you—wait. Okay. So are you currently getting the bachelor's in public relations or do you have it already?

Shanell:

I'm currently. Currently.

Jaelon:

Okay. Okay. So what—what would you like to do with that, or would you like to use them together?

Shanell:

I would like to use them together. I would like to speak to people. Because one thing—with being a social worker and working in social work—I've noticed that trauma-informed care is not as taught as I feel like it should be. And it's kind of clinical. It's—it's not really much of an—an example-type of thing. And although not every true story is the same, the things that you go through when you have trauma and how you deal with things—it's—it's permanently affected. It affects you in every aspect—whether you're in the hospital, whether you're at school, or system you're in. I would really like to build a platform to be able to talk to people about trauma and about how trauma affects people, and better ways to come up with systems and procedures to deal with people with trauma—children and adults included.

Jaelon:

Okay. And how do you think that, you know, you were able to succeed, you know, with the—stacked against you?

Shanell:

I've never had the—odds stacked for me. I think—I think that I know that I am able to make it regardless. I know that I'm resilient. I know that I'm resourceful. And I know that—I guess one thing about the trauma that I have been through and going through it alone and not having that person—you know, that I wanted to become for someone else—I know that whatever I put my mind to, I'm going to succeed.

Jaelon:

And that's the mindset to have—and that's the mindset to have. You know, if you have that mindset, you can't be beat.

Shanell:

And my faith, and my faith of course. It carries me all the way.

Jaelon:

So, you know, when it comes to being, you know, a public speaker—

Shanell:

Yes.

Jaelon:

How do you—how do you navigate being like a public—like—okay. Because it's like you have both these degrees and you have both of these different skill sets. When you combine these two to become a public speaker to trauma and—child-informed care. You know what—what goal—what is your number one goal that you would like to achieve more than anything with both of these?

Shanell:

I have three.

Jaelon:

Okay. Go for three.

Shanell:

I have three. I have—one, I would like—my goal is to be on TED Talk.

Jaelon:

Okay.

Shanell:

And to give one TED Talk—at least one TED Talk in my—in my career. I would also like to go from schools to schools to talk to children. To remind them that they are resilient. And I think, just speak life into them.

Jaelon:

Okay.

Shanell:

Yes. And, the last one—oh, I haven't told anyone this before, but I would like to build a facility for people—from the age of 17 to 23. And that comes from my mother and my father. I feel like they are—are people like me. They're supposed to be—chain breakers. They're supposed to break generational curses. And I feel—because they didn't have the resources and because they didn't have anyone, it perpetuated the cycle. So I would like to build a facility for people who don't have family and don't have anyone. Instead of them going to the pavement, the streets, whatever you want to call it, to be able to come to the facility and be able to get the care that they need.

Shanell:

That's financial assistance. Money management. Therapy. Anything in that one facility—and a live-in facility.

Jaelon:

Okay.

Shanell:

That's the dream.

Jaelon:

That is—that's a dream. Big goals. But any goal that you draw out, you can achieve it.

Shanell:

Definitely, I'm working.

Jaelon:

You are. You are. So my final question is, what—what do you think of when you hear resilience?

Shanell:

You know, this is a tough one. And this is—this is a conversation that I am actually having in therapy multiple times. To understand that resilience—the word resilience—for me, because my whole life I've been that. If you say, "Shanell, what is Shanell—how do you describe Shanell?" Everyone that has met me, everyone that knows me since I was a little kid have been—"She's very resilient." It got to a point to where I feel like it was a negative thing. Like people were saying, "Oh, she can take more pain because she was resilient. It's okay to do whatever because she is resilient. She'll live." So I—I'm trying to change—what I feel—resilience—that it's actually a strength. That it actually is something that I should be very proud of.

Shanell:

Instead of something that I feel like—I feel like it brought me shame, I guess, at first. But now I'm trying to change—change it for myself so I can change it for other people.

Jaelon:

Okay. Okay. That is beautiful. That really is—wow. I've never heard—I've never heard anybody, like—like, see resilience that way. And I think this—I think it's pretty cool that, like, you know, that, you know, that's the way you saw it. But you want to, you know, reclaim it and change it into something else.

Shanell:

Yeah.

Jaelon:

That's—that's a beautiful thing. Well—I don't think I have anything else. Do you have anything else that you would like to add that I didn't ask? Anything that you would like to tell our viewers?

Shanell:

Sure. Okay. I'm actually very nervous what I'm doing. This is something that I probably wouldn't have reached out to—not to do if—a year—a year ago. But I'm walking on faith this year. And I'm trying to—I'm trying to grow. And the things that scare you, the things that make you sweat and make you nervous, make you shake—I'm trying to do all those things.

Because I do want to grow. I do want to get out of the—box I feel like I've been in and experience. In social work—at first it was for—it was a sense for me to, I guess, like I said, be who I needed when I was little. And then six years going in, I realize no matter how many people I helped—you know, I've helped a lot of people—but it's not going to change my past.

And understanding that it—it won't change what I went through. But to be there for other people and to be a social worker and to not only be there for the children, not only be there for families, not only be there to improve the school system, but also be there for other social workers. To remind them what was the reason why we decided to become social workers.

What were we fighting for? That we're the advocates. That we're—that we're, you know, that bridge for some people to understand what they wouldn't understand without us is important. Social work is very, very important.

And I like to see the new social workers that are coming out when I'm at work, and the interns that come in—it is amazing. Even from UTA. They come usually from UTA. What UTA is producing. So I'm glad to be a part of it, but that's all I got.

Jaelon:

Well, this has been *Blaze the Mic* with Jaelon Jackson and Shanell Bohannon.

Shanell:

Yes.

Jaelon:

Make sure y'all stay safe and see you next time.

Thank you for supporting this episode of *Blaze the Mic*. This production was brought to you by the University of Texas at Arlington School of Social Work's Communications and Marketing Office. If you liked this episode and would like to learn more about the University of Texas at Arlington and its top ranked School of Social Work programs, please visit us at uta.edu/ssw, or you can follow us on social media at [utasocialwork](https://www.facebook.com/utasocialwork). Thanks again, until next time, this is Jaelon Jackson signing off.