

Recording Date: 8/16/23
Recorded in Maine MILL's audio booth
Bruce King

My name is Bruce King. I am 45 years old. I am Mexican American. I am half Mexican from my mother's side. My father comes from, I believe, the French Canadian history here in Lewiston but he grew up in the Bath / Brunswick area. I currently live in Brunswick myself but I work in Lewiston.

I started working in Lewiston about nine years ago. I came to Lewiston because I myself had been incarcerated due to some substance use issues that eventually led to me trafficking and spending three and a half years in federal prison. When I got out I really wanted to help impact that population. So I did some advocacy around trying to change prison policy and found my way to a job as a substance counselor here in Lewiston, working at a MAT facility over in the mill. And after that I went and became a navigator / supervisor / alumni assistant over at Tree Street Youth for several years, and then became a career counselor specifically through Career Concepts working with individuals with barriers to employment: a lot of the asylum seekers, a lot of refugees, a lot of returning citizens, a lot of young people working to get them involved in the job market here in Lewiston.

And from there, I stepped into a role the co-director of Maine Inside Out, which is an organization that started by doing theater with young people in Long Creek Correctional Facility and working on abolition issues with some reach into legislative advocacy. My other hat is as a Commissioner on the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Tribal Populations for the State of Maine.

Maine Inside Out's modality is that we use theater of the oppressed to create community and encourage dialogue using transformative practices as well. And we're statewide, but we came to Lewiston when I came on as director because I had been working in Lewiston for so long. I think that's part of the reason that I came in as a co-director. I really tried to build community and now we have a site here in Lewiston. We've had a presence in Lewiston for many, many years because our young people, unfortunately, disproportionately coming from Lewiston compared to other areas in the State and have disproportionate contact with law enforcement. So recognizing that many of our young people are from this area, and we're returning home to this area, we decided that this is where we wanted to bloom. And so we continue to be statewide but our primary office and community spaces down here in Lewiston next to Forage.

In terms of seeing Lewiston change over time, it's become a totally different place than it was when I was growing up in Bath, Maine. We were afraid of Lewiston. It was a rough place. It was a place that you stayed away from. And it also was an overwhelmingly white place. So as a Mexican American, I didn't feel particularly comfortable coming here. You know, I think what really spoke to me was I wanted to see change. And so I went to where I knew people were struggling. And I knew that a lot of people were struggling here in this community that hopefully I would be able to support in some way, shape or form. And also I identified with those who felt othered, and so working with that community here was a huge opportunity to work with people

who weren't just white, but were of many different backgrounds and also from different countries and spoke different languages. I think it's incredibly positive.

I think my vision for Lewiston is that it continues to grow in its cohesion, that it develops, that it moves through its post- industrial wreckage that occurred with mass deindustrialization, and finds its way into the amazing space that it's becoming--which I think it's already there. Thank you so much I'm really excited to be a part of this community