

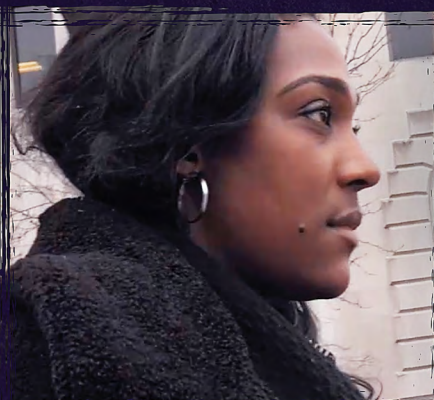
"POWERFUL"
- RogerEbert.com

"ESSENTIAL"
- Third Coast Review

"ASTOUNDING"
- Documentary Drive



WITHOUT HOPE
THERE'S NOTHING



THE ROAD UP

DOCUMENTARY SCREENING GUIDE

Siskel/Jacobs Productions | THEROADUPFILM.COM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE FILM	03
DIRECTORS' NOTE <i>by Greg Jacobs and Jon Siskel</i>	04
A MESSAGE FROM CARA <i>by Kathleen St. Louis Caliento</i>	05
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE	06
PART 1: SCREENING ESSENTIALS	07
Planning Your Virtual Event	08
Planning Your In-person Event	12
Sample Discussion Prompts	17
Corporate Action Steps	23
PART 2: CARA IN CONTEXT	25
Relational Wealth <i>by Maria Kim</i>	27
One Human Being at a Time <i>a Q&A with Mr. Jesse</i>	29
It's Not Just About a Job <i>by Dr. Philip Hong</i>	31
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly <i>by Kristen Robinson</i>	33
Lessons for Life: My Cara Experience <i>a Q&A with Alisa Cadette</i>	36
PART 3: A DEEPER DIVE	37
The Business Case for Leaving No Worker Behind <i>by Jeffrey Korzenik</i>	38
Lessons from a DEI Screening <i>by Andrea O'Leary</i>	40
Workforce Development <i>by Amanda Cage</i>	41
Homelessness <i>by Doug Schenkelberg</i>	42
Living with a Criminal Background <i>by Esther Franco-Payne</i>	43
Mental Health and Substance Use <i>by Mark Ishaug</i>	45
Skills-Based Hiring <i>by Sara Wasserteil and Patti Constantakis</i>	46
ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS	47

ABOUT THE FILM

The Road Up follows four participants in Cara, a Chicago job-training program, as they search for stable employment and a pathway out of poverty. Throughout, they are guided, goaded, and challenged by their impassioned mentor, Mr. Jesse, whose own complicated past compels him to help others find hope in the face of addiction, homelessness, trauma, and the effects of incarceration. Taken together, their stories create a powerful mosaic of the struggles that millions of Americans face every day in a precarious and unforgiving economy—the daunting and often interconnected barriers that prevent so many from joining the economic mainstream. Because when everything behind you is wreckage, and everything in front is an obstacle, how do you find the road up?

The Road Up premiered at the Chicago International Film Festival in October 2020, where it won the Audience Award for Documentary. It went on to win the Spotlight on Inspiration Documentary Award at the St. Louis International Film Festival and the Michael Sullivan Award for Documentary Journalist at the Salem Film Fest, and premiere internationally at the Melbourne Documentary Film Festival. The film’s impact campaign began even before its theatrical premiere in October 2021, with internal screenings at a number of Fortune 500 companies, including Aon, JPM Chase, and McKinsey, as well as other organizations concerned with workforce development and building a more inclusive economy.



“The Road Up screening at Aon created an opportunity for a robust discussion amongst leaders and allies of our Black Professional Network. Through this conversation we were able to use key themes and learnings from the film as catalysts for action around accelerating our Diversity and Inclusion agenda and exploring different ways to break down barriers within our own Aon United culture.”

— Jennifer Dunmore, Global VP - Business Development & Strategy, Aon

DIRECTORS' NOTE

As documentary filmmakers, we view each project through the lens of three primary responsibilities. The first responsibility is to our subjects—how do we tell their stories with honesty, integrity, and complexity? The second is to the audience—how do we craft a film that is entertaining, emotionally compelling, and in some small way alters how they see the world? And the third is to society—how do we put the film to work as a vehicle for positive change?

This screening guide is designed with that third responsibility in mind. Its goal is to help audiences use *The Road Up* as a tool to foster necessary but challenging conversations about the way systemic forces—in particular, race, place, and poverty—constrain opportunity in America. In the process, we hope to call attention to the complex needs of the population Cara serves, sparking changes in corporate hiring practices, workforce development policies, and public attitudes nationwide.

The Road Up is not, explicitly, an “issue film.” Instead, what it captures is the constellation of forces that makes escaping poverty so challenging for so many Americans. Even before COVID-19, a staggering number of workers were trapped in a kind of economic purgatory, unable to find or sustain gainful employment. The pandemic exposed this precarity in the starkest possible terms, throwing millions out of work and driving millions more into poverty. Meanwhile, its disproportionate impact on Black and brown communities, combined with ongoing protests over police violence, forced employers to reckon with the financial, political, and moral consequences of racial inequity.

But what can be done? On the one hand, the challenges we face as a country are the result of huge systemic forces: segregation, mass incarceration, epidemics of addiction, rapid technological change, increasing inequality, a frayed social safety net. On the other hand, none of those issues will be solved by tomorrow morning, and we all still have to get through the day.

This intersection—where the structural meets the personal—has been the central battleground in the debate over social policy in America for more than half a century. It's also the divide that Cara's model so powerfully seeks to bridge, making the case that the first step on the road up isn't simply external—finding a job—it's also internal: finding hope, connection, and community. What some dismiss as “soft skills,” Cara calls “harder skills”: conflict resolution, communication, even the ability to express love and accept it in return. To Cara, these are the essential tools that give their students the resilience they need to persist, and ultimately to thrive, even as the necessary work of pushing for broader social change continues.

By capturing the emotion and complexity of our characters' challenges, we hope *The Road Up* will spur your audience to question their own assumptions about the population Cara serves, and what can and should be done to support them. So thank you for bringing *The Road Up* to your community, and we hope this guide enhances and enriches the experience.

—Greg & Jon

A MESSAGE FROM CARA *by Kathleen St. Louis Caliento*



Kathleen St. Louis Caliento is the President and CEO of Cara Collective.



I remember the first time I had the privilege of viewing *The Road Up*. It was an early screening in 2020; back in a time when I had not even the faintest inkling that, less than two years later, I would be leading the very organization that was helping people like Clarence, Kristen, Tamala, and Alisa (among hundreds of others) lift themselves out of poverty.

There wasn't a dry eye, nor a single tissue left, in that small screening.

The Road Up serves as a powerful reminder that there's a fundamental difference between hearing about the impact of an organization like Cara Collective through reports, website pages, and other means vs. experiencing a mission at work through the level of in-depth, personal exposure that this film affords us.

By doing so, *The Road Up* succeeds in giving faces, names, and stories to poverty and the issues often surrounding it (like addiction, incarceration, systemic inequities, etc.). Further, it serves as a painful reminder of how the road up from poverty is not just one direction – it is up, down, sideways, and backwards. That sometimes the slightest bump (as we see several times in this film) can upset the journey.

This film also helps show us that no one's story is the same; which is also something I have always admired about the way Cara Collective approaches our work. We see the person for who they are, not the past they are overcoming. Because of this approach, the level of resources, trainings, and support afforded to each person, and the journey they embark on, becomes customized to their needs.

If you take anything from this film, I hope it is the understanding that, at the end of the day, we are all human and any one of us could find ourselves at that one instance of misfortune, misstep, or injustice that leaves us knocked off our block and seeking to get back on our pathway out of poverty.

I recognize the incredible responsibility and the incredible honor I have today to lead this community of job seekers, staff, volunteers, corporations, and organizations united in this work. There continues to be an untapped pool of talent waiting to unlock their abilities and demonstrate their worth in the job market. Together, we can be the locksmiths to help ensure they get to do so.

Thank you for your commitment to screening this film, to listening to these stories, to activating your network around the issues surrounding poverty, and for believing in the power of hope, jobs, and opportunity.

As we say at Cara Collective, let's get to work!

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The aim of this guide is to help you put *The Road Up* to work as effectively and efficiently as possible. It's structured to be used both narrowly, to facilitate a focused and meaningful conversation, and more broadly, as a primer on the causes and consequences of poverty. However you choose to use it, we want to help you make the most of your event by providing:

1. A practical blueprint for hosting your screening

2. Options to help you customize the post-film conversation to your organization's particular needs

3. Contextual information about Cara and the issues raised by the film

The guide is divided into three parts. The first part, **SCREENING ESSENTIALS**, is designed for quick and easy reference as you prepare for your event. It includes practical and logistical information to help you plan and host a screening, as well as a general blueprint for a compelling post-film conversation.

The second part, **CARA IN CONTEXT**, is designed to fill in some of the organizational context that the movie itself doesn't provide. It features essays from three of the film's subjects, along with others closely connected to Cara.

And finally, the third part, **A DEEPER DIVE**, is designed to facilitate more issue- and audience-specific conversations, using the film as a lens through which to explore topics like homelessness, workforce development, and the afterlife of incarceration. It includes contextual essays and suggested prompts from subject experts to help structure and inform your discussion. This part of the guide is a living document, which we hope to update with additional resources over time.

While all three sections of the guide are primarily intended for use by screening hosts, discussion facilitators, and panel moderators, we also encourage you to share them with your audience if possible, whether before the event (if you know their email addresses) or after. We have seen that the shared experience of watching the film—the emotions it evokes and the vulnerability it invites—makes viewers more open and receptive to the challenging conversations that follow; equipping them with a common base of information and context can add vital nuance to this process.

This screening guide was made possible by funding from Walmart.org and the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation. It was written and edited by Greg Jacobs and designed by Tony Cooke. Special thanks to all of our essay contributors for their time and expertise; Sara Wasserteil, Shikha Jain, Mark Toriski from Cara for all of their support and assistance; and the No Small Matter impact team for providing the blueprint.



PART 1 SCREENING ESSENTIALS

Whether you plan on hosting your screening virtually or in person, we want to help make the experience as seamless and stress-free as possible, so that you can focus on making it meaningful. That's what this section of the screening guide is for.

It starts with a basic logistical blueprint to help guide you as you organize and execute your event. Following that is a series of sample questions and prompts designed to help you map out your post-film conversation. We encourage you to use these questions as a jumping-off point, something to get the ideas flowing as you think about the film and the direction you'd like the discussion to take. Rounding out this section are ideas for potential calls to action, concrete ways of answering the question "but what can I do?" and inspiring your audience to transform emotions into solutions.



STREAMING AHEAD

PLANNING YOUR VIRTUAL EVENT

There are two models for virtual screening events. The first is best described as “watch together, discuss together.” In this model, audiences livestream the film simultaneously, then join some form of post-film discussion—a live or pre-recorded panel; a moderated Q&A; an open-ended Zoom conversation—immediately afterwards. This model has some advantages, and is the best way to translate the communal experience of a live screening to a virtual context. However, given the length of the film, and the cost and complexity of navigating the different platforms, we have found it to be the less optimal of the two models.

The second option is the “watch separately, discuss together” model. In this model, you send your audience an event-specific, password protected link to the film, which they can stream for a set window of time (usually anywhere from 72 hours to ten days). In addition, you send them a link to attend a live, virtual discussion of the film at a particular date and time. While this model lacks some of the communal feel of a synchronous screening, it provides much more flexibility in terms of the timing of the event and the audience’s ability to view the film, and breaks up the experience in a way that helps alleviate online viewing fatigue. To date, we have found this to be the far more popular of the two models, so the guide below is just for the “watch separately, discuss together” model. If you are interested in hosting a screening based on the first model, however, please contact us at info@siskeljacobs.com and we will work with you to make it happen!

4-6 WEEKS OUT **PRE-PLANNING**

Identify your goals. Why did you decide to screen the film? What are your hopes for the event itself? What do you hope comes out of it?

Decide on a format and length. Identifying your goals for the event will help you decide on a format and length. To date, most of our virtual events have been between 45 minutes and an hour, though some have been as short as thirty minutes and as long as 90. The formats have also varied. Here are some of the possibilities:

1. *Moderated film panel + Q&A:* This format typically involves a moderator and 2-4 panelists connected to the film (one or both of the directors; film subjects Jesse Teverbaugh and/or Kristen Robinson; former Cara CEO Maria Kim) and includes 20-30 minutes of conversation followed by audience questions.
2. *Moderated issue expert panel + Q&A:* This format typically involves a moderator and 2-4 issue experts who use the film as a jumping-off point to discuss their particular areas of expertise. This format is especially effective when you're looking to raise awareness or spark dialogue about a specific set of issues or concerns (housing, incarceration, addiction, etc.).
3. *Moderated conversation:* This format typically involves a moderator leading an open-ended discussion with a limited number of participants (usually under thirty people). It can be a great way to provide a smaller community within a larger organization the space to discuss some of the challenging issues raised by the film, or to inspire existing affinity groups to define new commitments (or refine existing ones).

Choose a platform. While Zoom has become the Kleenex of virtual events, your company or organization may use a different platform. In deciding what makes sense for this event, you'll want to take into consideration factors like ease of use, familiarity, and security. Other questions include how and how much you want audience members to be able to participate and ask questions (via chat, virtual or actual raised hands, etc.); whether the format is more of a panelist-driven Q&A or an open-ended conversation; and whether you want to record and post the event afterwards.

Choose a date and time. What works best for your audience—lunchtime? mid-day? early evening? Should it be early in the week or later in the week? Is it a stand-alone activity or part of a larger event? Does it coincide with a holiday, commemoration, or anniversary?

Choose a screening window. A longer screening window is often best for large groups, giving more people more of a chance to watch the movie, while a shorter window can work for smaller, more intimately connected groups. That said, *too long* a window can sometimes give people an excuse to put off watching the film, while *too short* a window can make it difficult for some audience members to find the time. Generally, we tend to think in the following increments: 72 hours, one week, and ten days.

Assign roles and responsibilities. These can include digital design and outreach; marketing and pr; and monitoring questions for the Q&A.

Submit your screening agreement form. This will allow you to receive the password-protected link for your screening. You'll need the following information to complete the form: event name; official name of hosting organization(s); date; location; time; and the event contact (and, if different, the recipient of the screening materials).

3-4 WEEKS OUT **EVENT PREP AND AUDIENCE BUILDING**

Choose a moderator and panelists. Think about who your audience would be most interested in hearing from, and what your budget permits. The luxury of virtual events, of course, is that you can recruit participants from anywhere, without having to worry about travel and logistics. Still, some form of honorarium is generally expected for the participants' time.

Recruit screening partners. Will you be engaging other organizations, companies, or individuals to support the screening and help spread the word?

Decide on a Call to Action (if applicable). Some screenings aim to create a space for conversation, while others are more specifically geared toward advocacy and action. If yours is the latter, consider what the “ask” should be, and prepare any links or documents you may want to incorporate. Calls to action can include contacting legislators, writing letters to the editor, supporting local and national policy efforts, and advocating for change within an organization, in addition to simply expanding the conversation around the film by helping spread the word.

Design and send out your invitation. This can take the form of an email or other digital invitation (Eventbrite, Facebook Invite, Google form, etc.). To help with the design, you can find descriptive language on the film's [website](#), as well as [links](#) to downloadable images, the poster, and the press kit. An embeddable version of the trailer—definitely recommended to give your invitees something to click on and get them emotionally invested right away—can be found [here](#). If you have organizational partners for the screening, be sure to ask them to share their mailing lists. And please don't hesitate to contact us at info@siskeljacobs.com with any questions, or if you need additional resources.

Schedule social media posts. Create a calendar of social media posts to remind people to sign up and get them excited about the event.

1-3 WEEKS OUT **OUTREACH AND EVENT PREP**

Crank up the publicity (if applicable). If your event is public-facing, reach out to media contacts using the [press kit](#) on the website.

Confirm the moderator and panelists. Make sure everyone is on board and aware of the timing and logistical details (including a pre-event tech check, if necessary). It's often helpful to coordinate a pre-screening conversation with the panelists to go over the topics that will be covered during the discussion.

Prepare event content. This can include anything from introductions and opening remarks to panelist biographies to the discussion questions themselves.

3 TO 10 DAYS OUT **FINAL PUSH**

Send out the film! Email the link and password to your invitees. Encourage them to watch the film as soon as they can, and—if applicable—to submit questions to the moderator or chat manager. Because event hosts are responsible for ensuring the digital security of the film, you may also want to include a gentle reminder not to share the link with others or post it to social media. You can safely assume that most invitees will wait until the last minute to watch the film, but it is still useful to nudge them once or twice during the screening window.

Gather resources for the chat. This includes any links to websites, reports, or documents you might want to post in the chat during the event.

Check the tech. Make sure everything is squared away with the technology. Murphy's Law definitely applies to virtual events, so be sure that your moderator and panelists have sufficient connectivity, adequate lighting, and enough quiet to make it work.

EVENT DAY!

Arrive early. It's usually best for the host, moderator, and panelists to log in anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes early, just to make sure there's time to overcome any tech snafus.

Think social. Ask volunteers to livetweet the conversation (#TheRoadUpFilm). Take screen shots to post to social media, and consider pulling and posting short clips (assuming the participants have given their permission).

Enjoy yourself! Planning an event can be stressful, but the conversation itself can be truly powerful. We encourage you, as much as possible, to remain open to the energy and emotions of the moment, and to lean into any surprises that might occur.

FOLLOWING IS A SAMPLE RUNDOWN FOR A LUNCHTIME MODERATED PANEL + Q&A:

11:40 AM	Moderator and panelists sign in
11:50 AM	Invitees receive reminder email and link
12:00-12:02 PM	Invitees arrive; host lets everyone know they're leaving some cushion for stragglers, and (if applicable) that the conversation will be recorded.
12:02-12:07 PM	Host/moderator introduces the event, briefly describing what inspired them to organize it and their goals for the conversation. Host then introduces the panelists.
12:07-12:32 PM	Moderated questions and conversation (<i>25 minutes</i>)
12:32-12:52 PM	Audience-generated Q&A (<i>20 minutes</i>)

12:52-12:55 PM Final remarks from the panelists

12:55-1:00 PM Host/moderator summarizes the conversation, reiterates the call to action (if applicable), and thanks the panelists and attendees for their participation.

Note: With virtual events, we've often found that invitees who attend having only watched part of the film—or none of it at all—are then inspired by the conversation to watch the rest. So as part of the virtual streaming license, we allow hosts to extend the screening window 24-72 hours beyond the event. Needless to say, it's best not to mention that the screening window is being extended until the event itself is well underway!

1-2 DAYS AFTER **FOLLOW-UP**

Think social, pt.2. Compile and post memorable comments or moments from the event.

Thank yous. Send a thank you email/note to the moderator, panelists, and screening partners.

Follow up with your community. Send a follow-up email to attendees (or, more broadly, invitees) with highlights from the event; links/resources related to the film and your call to action; and any additional links/resources that may have been mentioned during the post-film discussion.

“A screening of The Road Up for the Corporate Responsibility team at JPMorgan Chase served as a rich and engaging virtual site visit. Despite our team being distributed across the world, we were able to come together to explore the different elements of Cara’s success—including robust leadership, rigorous programs, and vibrant community—and its participants’ inspiring stories. The Road Up offers tangible insights for our work in pursuit of racial equity and a more just society.”

– Owen Washburn, Vice President, Global Philanthropy, JPMorgan Chase



THE ROAD TO THE ROAD UP

PLANNING YOUR IN-PERSON EVENT

6-8 WEEKS OUT **PRE-PLANNING**

Identify your goals. Why did you decide to host a screening? What are your hopes for the event itself? What do you hope comes out of it?

Choose a date and time. *The Road Up* is ninety minutes long, so it's best to allow around 2-2 ½ hours for the film and discussion.

Secure a venue. With the right equipment, you can host a screening just about anywhere: campus or corporate auditoriums, conference rooms, religious venues, libraries, schools. In fact, *The Road Up's* world premiere was at a drive-in! But to pick the place that's right for *your* event, whether private or public, here are a few factors to keep in mind: size; cost; accessibility; proximity to parking and public transportation; security requirements; and amenities (are the seats comfortable? Is it okay to have refreshments?). The film is available as a digital file, DVD, or DCP (for theatrical use), so you'll want to ensure that the venue either has the right audio/visual equipment, or can accommodate rented equipment. Typically, that means a projector and screen; a computer or DVD player; microphones, if necessary, for the post-film discussion; and a good sound system. And by the way, we can't emphasize that last ingredient enough! Nothing can undercut the impact of a screening more dramatically than inadequate audio, so be sure to keep that front and center when choosing your venue.

Draft an event day agenda. Will there be a reception before or after the event? Introductory remarks? What format will the post-film discussion take, and how long will it be?

Submit your screening agreement form. This will allow you to receive a copy of the film for your screening. You'll need the following information to complete the form: event name; official name of hosting organization(s); date; location; time; and the event contact (and, if different, the recipient of the screening materials).

Recruit screening partners. Will you be engaging other organizations, companies, or individuals to support the screening and help spread the word?

Assign roles and responsibilities. These can include host/emcee; digital outreach; marketing and pr; and event reception.

Recruit a moderator and panelists. Think about who your audience would be most interested in hearing from, and how to frame the conversation from a variety of angles. If the budget and logistics permit, it can be especially effective to include one or both of the filmmakers; one of the subjects from the film (usually Jesse Teverbaugh or Kristen Robinson); and/or Maria Kim, the dynamic former CEO of Cara who now heads the national social enterprise incubator REDF (keep in mind that live, in-person events can also include a virtual panelist, if travel is an issue). Beyond that, consider drawing from the ranks of public officials, businesspeople, academic experts, journalists, non-profit representatives, and advocates/activists. One other powerful option is to include individuals who have experienced some of the challenges depicted in the film. For live panels, we have found that a moderator + three panelists is often the best way to go, but there is definitely no one-size-fits-all formula! And of course, be mindful of the matrix of representations, to ensure that the panel reflects a variety of perspectives and experiences, as well as your unique local context.

Decide on a Call to Action (if applicable). Some screenings aim to create a space for conversation, while others are more specifically geared toward advocacy and action. If yours is the latter, consider what the "ask" should be, and prepare any materials you may want on hand. Calls to action can include contacting legislators, writing letters to the editor, supporting local and national policy efforts, and advocating for change within an organization, in addition to simply expanding the conversation around the film by helping spread the word.

4-6 WEEKS OUT AUDIENCE BUILDING

Design and send out your invitation. This can take the form of an email, a digital signup form (Eventbrite, Facebook Invite, Google form, etc.), a flyer, a poster, a good old-fashioned paper invite, or all of the above! You can find language about the film on the [website](#), as well as [links](#) to downloadable images and a press kit. An embeddable, downloadable version of the trailer can be found [here](#). If you have organizational partners for the screening, be sure to ask them to share their mailing lists. And please don't hesitate to contact us at info@siskeljacobs.com with any questions, or if you need additional resources.

Schedule social media posts. Create a calendar of social media posts to remind people to sign up and get them excited about the event.

Recruit VIP attendees. Reach out personally to local officials, community leaders, organizational heads, and prominent executives.

2-3 WEEKS OUT **OUTREACH AND EVENT PREP**

Crank up the publicity (if applicable). If your event is public-facing, reach out to media contacts using the [press kit](#) on the website.

Confirm speakers/panelists/VIPs. Make sure everyone is on board and aware of the timing and logistical details, including travel to and from the venue. It's often helpful to coordinate a pre-screening conversation with the panelists to go over the topics that will be covered during the discussion.

Prepare event content. This can include anything from introductions and opening remarks to panelist biographies to the discussion questions themselves.

Confirm equipment. Check in with the venue or rental facility to make sure they have (or will have) what you need for the screening.

3-5 DAYS OUT **FINAL PUSH**

Follow up with PR. If applicable, coordinate with press to accommodate their attendance and any requests for interviews.

Print/copy/coordinate handouts. Make sure you have sufficient supplies of anything you are planning to have on hand or distribute at the event: signup sheets, organizational literature, advocacy flyers, merch/swag, etc.

Triple-check with the venue. Have there been any changes to the site (parking, access, construction)? Can you arrive early to test out the equipment? Are there any unexpected costs or personnel needs? Can you get the contact information for the A/V staff?

EVENT DAY!

Arrive early. It's usually best to arrive at the venue at least an hour early. That way, you can make sure the film is playing properly; tables are in place for sign-ups, food/drink (if applicable), and literature and merch; and you're available to greet staff, panelists, and early arrivals.

Think social. Ask volunteers to help livetweet and record short videos with your guests (#TheRoadUpFilm). Take photos and short videos of event highlights to post to social media.

Enjoy yourself! Planning an event can be stressful, but the experience of the screening itself can be truly powerful. We encourage you, as much as possible, to remain open to the energy and emotions of the moment.

FOLLOWING IS A SAMPLE RUNDOWN FOR AN EVENING SCREENING EVENT:

6:00 PM	Arrive at venue
6:00-6:30 PM	Tech-check with venue a/v staff; run through event schedule with volunteers
6:30 PM	Doors open
7:00 PM	Scheduled screening time; audience should be mostly in place, but leave a cushion of time for stragglers
7:10-7:15 PM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin event• Introduce yourself and your organization• Briefly describe why you decided to host a screening of <i>The Road Up</i>, and what your goals for the event are• Share a quick roadmap of the event (i.e. “after the lights come up, stick around for a conversation/Q&A with our amazing panelists...”)• Thank/Introduce any co-hosts, VIPs, or special guests• Thank volunteers, sponsors, venue hosts, etc.• Remind the audience to silence their cell phones!
7:15-8:45 PM	Show the film
8:45-8:50 PM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transition to panel• Turn up the house lights• Arrange seats, microphones, water• Introduce the moderator and/or panelists• Know that there will continue to be shuffling, as some audience members leave and others make their way to and from the bathroom

Note: The closing credits for *The Road Up* are four minutes long. While we love the beautiful song that accompanies them (“Real Midnight” by [Birds of Chicago](#)), and we want everyone who worked on the film to get their well-deserved recognition, we also understand that four minutes is a long time for people to stare at a list of unfamiliar names. So we suggest giving the audience a minute or two to exhale and begin to process their emotions, then raising the house lights and lowering the audio (while keeping the credits rolling) to allow the post-film introductions to begin.

8:50-9:15 PM Panel discussion

9:15-9:25 PM Q&A

9:25-9:30 PM

- Wrap-up and closing remarks
- Call to action
- Final thank yous, announcements, and farewells

1-2 DAYS AFTER **FOLLOW-UP**

Think social, pt.2. Compile and post memorable moments from the event.

Thank yous. Send a thank you email/note to the moderator and panelists, VIP attendees, and screening partners.

Follow up with your community. Send a follow-up email to attendees (or, more broadly, invitees) with highlights from the event; links/resources related to the film and your call to action; and any additional links/resources that may have been mentioned during the post-film discussion.

“In a tightly constructed and essential piece of viewing, a great deal of personality and hope is packed into the documentary The Road Up... In the end, you want to hug everyone involved; hell, I’m ready to make Mr. Jesse Chicago’s next mayor. The Road Up is an inspiration and a powerful chronicle of one man paying it forward exponentially.”

— Steve Prokopy, Third Coast Review

SAMPLE DISCUSSION PROMPTS

When we interview people for our films, our goal is always the same: to get them to express something in a way that surprises both them and us. The same holds true with your post-film discussion—ideally, it will prod your participants to think just a little bit differently about the issues at hand, and articulate their ideas in ways that maybe they haven't before.

Getting there, however, takes preparation and thought, a mental roadmap for the kind of conversation that will enable you to accomplish your screening goals. But where to start? There are so many directions the discussion can go, and so many moments from the film to explore.

To help you with this challenge, we've created the following blueprint, a set of general prompts designed to take your audience from processing the complicated emotions they might be feeling after the film to internalizing whatever call to action you want to leave them with. These prompts can be used "as is", or simply taken as a jumping-off point, a way to get your creative juices flowing. In addition, we've also developed "[scene-by-scene](#)" and "[character-by-character](#)" question lists, in case you want to focus on a particular moment or individual. (Issue-specific questions will be incorporated into the Deeper Dive section of this guide).

Taken together, we hope these options provide you with a useful set of tools for leading your audience through a discussion that is powerful and provocative, and helps lay the groundwork for positive change.

The emotional impact of *The Road Up* can create a vulnerability that leaves audience members more open to their own feelings, and more receptive to the feelings of others. So it's often best to start the conversation by giving your audience time to process and express whatever emotions they might be experiencing. Simple, straightforward questions can be the most effective way to get the conversation going:

1. Jesse often says of his students, "They may not remember what I taught them, but they'll never forget how I made them feel". How did the movie make *you* feel? Talk about some of the emotions you experienced during the film: Sadness? Anger? Guilt? Hope? What did you expect coming in, and did the film confirm or upend your expectations? Was there a film subject that you most connected or identified with? If so, why?

Some audience members may have little or no experience with the challenges the film subjects have faced. Others may have experienced them themselves, or have loved ones who did. Early in the conversation is often a good time to discuss how different backgrounds and life experiences affected how people responded to the film. Be sure to observe where there are predictable divergences and surprising commonalities, as both can be interesting to explore:

1. Were there moments where you recognized yourself or your loved ones in the circumstances of the film subjects? If so, and you are comfortable talking about it, share one of those moments.
 2. If you *didn't* see yourself or a loved one onscreen, how did the film make you feel? Did it challenge or change your assumptions about the population Cara serves? Did it make you feel guilty? How do you think your own background—race, class, ethnicity, education—affected how you responded to the film?
 3. The movie starts with the “mirror exercise”. How did you feel watching other people confront their reflections? Why do you think it was so difficult? Did you think it was effective? How do you think you would respond?
 4. Jesse tells the class ““I am worthy of the best that life has to offer, I don't care how many mistakes I've made.” How do you feel about this quote? How do you think the burden of the past affected the subjects of the film? Think about how personal stresses and traumas affect your ability to work. How does that apply to the population Cara serves?
 5. We see the same shots of Jesse in front of the mirror, getting dressed for work, at the beginning and end of the film. When we first see him, we don't know anything about him; the second time we see him, we've just heard his story. How did your view of Jesse change over the course of the film?
-

Audience members may have come to *The Road Up* with different expectations for what the film would be about and how they would respond. It's often helpful to explore their expectations—and how those expectations may have been confirmed or confounded—before diving deeper into the specific content.

1. At the beginning of the film, Jesse says, “This is not about a job”. Why does Jesse say a job is basically necessary but not sufficient for the people who come to Cara? If it's not about a job, what else is it about?
2. Before the film, what did you think of when you thought of “job training” or “workforce development”? Did *The Road Up* change that perception?
3. Why do you think the class Jesse teaches—the first four weeks of Cara—is called “Transformations”?
4. On the surface, *The Road Up* is about the participants in a Chicago job-training program. But if someone asked you, “what's the movie *really* about”, would your answer be different?

There is a tension in *The Road Up* between systemic forces and individual choices. That tension has been the main fault line in our political debate about social policy for more than half a century (“personal responsibility” vs. “blaming the victim”, etc.). Now that your participants have discussed their own emotions, experiences, and expectations, the groundwork is laid for a more empathetic conversation about some of the potentially polarizing political questions that the film raises:

1. Cara’s approach is to acknowledge the systemic forces but focus on helping the individual. As Jesse puts it, “Poverty and racism, all of those things exist. But if you try to get into it in that macro sense, it’ll drive you crazy. It’ll just be too overwhelming and we’ll get too angry. And so how about we attack it one human being at a time?” Do you agree with this approach? Discuss the political debate between “personal responsibility” and “blaming the victim” through the lens of the film. As a society, do we emphasize one over the other? Did the film affect how you view that debate?
2. What are some of the systemic forces present throughout the film? How do they constrain the choices the subjects make and the opportunities available to them?
3. Race is rarely mentioned explicitly in the film, but the intersection of race, place, and poverty is present in every frame, starting with the fact that 80% of Cara participants are Black. What are some of the structural & historical forces that caused that? Do you think the film should deal more explicitly with the structural consequences of racism? Poverty disproportionately affects people of color, but numerically affects far more people who identify as white. How did you feel about the fact that all of the subjects of the film were people of color? Do you think your response is affected by your own racial background?
4. When Kristen and her mom discuss the challenges facing Black communities, there seems to be a generational divide. Kristen’s mom stresses education and family, implying that there are ways the community can get itself on track and succeed. Kristen counters by saying “systemically, racism is off the chain. Everyone’s locked up. We’re being persecuted. We’re a broken community”—basically, that systemic racism makes any kind of progress impossible. Who do you agree with? Are they both right?

Poverty in America is often depicted as a permanent state. But in fact it's fluid—people are constantly falling into poverty and climbing back out of it, based on countless combinations of circumstance. The film can be a powerful way to get audiences to reassess their assumptions about poverty, and their perceptions of people experiencing it:

1. What are some of the obstacles the film subjects in *The Road Up* faced as they tried to get their lives back on track? What are the barriers to employment they confronted? Are there any that surprised you?
2. Beyond some of the more concrete issues—addiction, debt, housing, having a criminal record—the film highlights other, harder-to-define challenges, like knowing what to say in an interview, or understanding how to deal with a manager at work. Talk about the role “soft skills” play in the film. Cara refers to these as “harder skills”. Why are they so crucial in helping people get and keep a job? Do you think they are underemphasized in how we think about poverty?
3. How did you feel watching Jesse confront Clarence during the “Stimuli/Response” exercise (better known as “the bitch scene”)? Talk about how Clarence responded. Why do you think one of the other members of the class got up to “pay homage” to him afterward? What does this exercise have to do with employment, and did you think it was effective? Talk about how the population Cara serves has little or no safety net, and the dire consequences of a single mistake.
4. *The Road Up* was filmed before the COVID-19 pandemic. Do you think the impact of the pandemic has made the film more urgent or relevant? What do the stories in the film, like Alisa working the overnight shift at a hospital, reveal about the challenges faced by what we now call “essential workers”? What can and should we do as a society to support them?
5. At one point, Kristen says she's tired of having to rely on the State of Illinois “to determine her quality of life.” Talk about the ways the film subjects do not control their own lives – money, transportation, job requirements, etc. How does that compare to your life? What impact would it have on you if so many layers of your life felt out of your control? Kristen says she's “just tired”. What effect do you think the accumulation of stresses has on the film subjects? Talk about the persistence & resilience they have to have just to get to square one.

Cara’s mission includes ending what they call “relational poverty”—the powerful idea that connection and community are as valuable as money when it comes to getting back on track. Once you’ve discussed the film through the lens of the more traditional definition of poverty, take some time to consider this less familiar conception of poverty:

1. Discuss the many roles that having a “deep bench”—family, friends, community—plays in supporting people who are struggling.
2. Relational poverty can become a vicious cycle—the more isolated you become, the harder it is to reach out. Discuss examples of that in the film (Jesse isolating himself from his family; Clarence’s reluctance to ask for help; Tamala’s embarrassment after getting fired). Have you or a loved one been in that kind of cycle?
3. Jesse describes the “Love Exercise” as “one of the most important Cara assignments you will have.” Were you surprised to see a discussion about “love” in a job training program? Why do you think that particular exercise is so important, and why would completing it make a person better prepared to hold a job? How did you feel when Jesse explained it? Did you think of someone you would choose? How difficult would it be to go through with it? Discuss Clarence’s paper about using the Love Exercise to connect with his son. How do you think he did? What point was Jesse trying to make about the importance of communication and vulnerability, especially when it comes to society’s conception of masculinity.
4. How did you feel when Alisa rang the bell signifying she had gotten a job? Why do you think Cara has a ritual like that? What did it mean that everything stopped and everyone came out to congratulate her?

The role of stable housing is a recurring theme throughout *The Road Up*. Kristen faces the possibility of getting kicked out of transitional housing because the state stopped paying its bills. Clarence has to leave his shelter because people are stealing his things. Alisa’s life is reduced to two drawers at a shelter before she finally gets her own place. “Home” is an idea everyone can relate to and talk about:

1. Discuss the ripple effects of housing instability. Why is stable housing so important?
2. We see the giddiness Alisa feels as she moves into her new apartment, and the relief Kristen feels as she moves into hers. Privacy and control over our own space are two things many of us take for granted. What happens when they’re taken away?

Jesse’s approach is often referred to as “tough love.” He insists it’s just “love”, because sometimes drawing the line is the most loving thing you can do. Either way, themes of punishment, forgiveness, understanding, and acceptance run throughout the film:

1. Talk about the line between holding people accountable for their actions and making allowances for challenging circumstances, viewed through specific moments in the film. (Clarence being let go from Cara; Alisa breaking the rules around Dress for Success; etc.)
2. How do Jesse and/or Cara navigate the line between punishment and forgiveness? How is it connected to employment? Did you agree with Jesse’s approach, or were there times he crossed the line?
3. What did you think Jesse’s story was before he revealed how he ended up at Cara? Were you shocked or surprised? Did it change the way you viewed him? Did it change the way you viewed the movie? Why do you think he waits until the last day of Transformations to tell his story? What do you think he wants to communicate to the students? In what ways did Jesse’s personal story encompass the lessons we’ve seen him teach throughout the film?

***The Road Up* ends on a hopeful note. Your discussion should, too! Wrap up the conversation by touching on the theme of hope, including any call to action to you want to leave your audience with.**

1. Jesse says of Cara, “All we’re doing is selling hope. Without hope, there’s nothing”. Discuss the role of hope in the film. Talk about moments of hopelessness vs. moments of hopefulness. Why would something as unquantifiable as “hope” be so important in helping people experiencing poverty get and keep a job?
2. Do you think *The Road Up* is a hopeful movie? Why or why not?
3. What can your audience do to help address the issues captured in the film? Is there a specific call to action or advocacy they should leave with?

“An astounding film on the vital nature of organizations that foster community, connection and self-growth, The Road Up will awe-inspire you.”

– Documentary Drive

CORPORATE ACTION STEPS: HOW TO TAP INTO OVERLOOKED TALENT IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Every screening has its own unique context, circumstances, and audience. But by the end, almost all of them boil down to some variation of the same question: “So now what?” If you’re looking to leave your audience with an answer to that question—a concrete set of policies and practices to advocate for—here’s Cara’s blueprint for creating a more inclusive workforce through corporate recruitment, hiring, and retention policies.

Throughout *The Road Up*, we see countless examples of Cara participants showing skills that are valued in the workplace: Tamala’s dedication; Alisa’s ability to learn and adapt; Clarence and Kristen’s commitment to doing the work, even when the work feels impossible. In each case, they took their experience—often learned from the hardships of daily life rather than the workplace itself—and applied it to finding and keeping a job.

While we have faces to attach to these stories, there are millions like them, who—due to different barriers—are locked out of the workforce. For example, 98% of companies run background checks on prospective candidates, and yet 1 in 3 adults have a criminal record, a majority of whom are Black and Latinx.¹ Similarly, when employers require a four-year degree, they exclude an even broader talent pool, including 68% of Black and 79% of Latinx candidates.² While firms may use background policies or educational requirements as proxies for trust or ability, this isn’t borne out in the data.³ More importantly, it means that they are missing out on a pool of highly committed, often diverse, individuals that could contribute to their bottom line.

Luckily, as firms think about how they can find and keep good employees, there are several steps they can take across the employee lifecycle to find overlooked talent.

1. Recruitment. In the search for talent, it can be common for employers to rely on traditional recruitment methods like their networks, local colleges and universities, trade schools, and online sources like [LinkedIn](#). To broaden their recruitment efforts to include individuals that may not have access to traditional channels, employers can:

- i. Reassess the educational requirements for each job role (i.e., does a janitor require a high school diploma to do the job effectively?)
- ii. Radically reduce criminal background testing and focus more on discrete offenses rather than backgrounds as a whole, or consider shortening the lookback period to less than seven years
- iii. Test job descriptions with workforce development organizations to ensure that the language doesn’t inadvertently exclude certain populations, or use tools like [Skillfull’s job posting generator](#)
- iv. Hire from workforce development organizations that have a strong track record of helping talent find and keep employment
- v. Make job applications mobile-friendly for people who may have limited access to computers
- vi. Provide job-shadowing experiences and internships, like the [Chicago Apprentice Network](#)

1. The Sentencing Project. “Report to the United Nations on Racial Disparities in the U.S. Criminal Justice System.” 2018.

2. Opportunity@Work: <https://opportunityatwork.org/stars/>

3. A 2018 study by the Society of Human Resource Management found that 82% of managers feel that the “quality of hire” for workers with criminal records is equal to or higher than workers without records. Similarly, a 2018 Harvard Business school study found that college graduates filling middle-skill positions cost more to employ, have higher turnover rates, tend to be less engaged, and are no more productive than high-school graduates doing the same job

- 2. Hiring.** Once potential candidates have been identified, another common barrier is hiring practices that unintentionally exclude certain populations. To widen the net of who may advance in the candidate selection process and ultimately obtain a role, employers can:
- i. Use a competency (or skills) based approach to hiring to capture those who may have gained experience outside of the workplace
 - ii. Ensure that hiring processes eliminate opportunities for implicit bias (e.g., setting up structured systems that assess people on competencies to do the job vs. personal opinions)
 - iii. Understand the best way to reach candidates so that people with less internet access do not miss any important communications
- 3. Job Quality and Support.** Once firms find good talent, retaining them is key to reducing turnover costs. Factors that can prevent an employee from staying on the job may include feeling like they aren't set up for success, a lack of team or organizational support, or pay and benefits that do not support their stability or quality of life. To help employees stick and stay, employers can:
- i. Create a structured onboarding process that goes beyond administration to include on-the-job training and 30-60-90 day check-ins to understand what the employee needs to be successful
 - ii. Empower managers to support their teams beyond just production; showing care from the top down can set this example
 - iii. Partner with non-profits that can support individuals in areas that could impact their stability (e.g., transportation, childcare, housing, etc.)
 - iv. Provide basic living standards, such as livable wages, predictable scheduling, and benefits
- 4. Advancement.** [Studies](#) estimate that every time an employee leaves a job, it costs 33% of that employee's wages to find, hire, and train up a replacement. So for employers, maximizing job retention can be a key to minimizing costs. To help retain employees—and create advancement opportunities for those who want to grow—employers can:
- i. Develop career pathways and opportunities for advancement for every role in the company, and ensure that employees know how they can tap into those opportunities
 - ii. Provide a coach or mentor who can encourage the employee and help them with their goals (which helps with retention, too)
 - iii. Support employees interested in learning skills or earning degrees that will enable them to advance in the firm with time and resources
 - iv. Provide professional development opportunities, so that if an employee can't advance within the firm, they can advance elsewhere
 - v. Transition employees to their next opportunity with guidance, dignity, and respect

Finally, if you're doing the good work to shift these practices, shout it from the rooftops! Making public commitments or sharing the changes you're implementing will not only help your brand, but it will give other employers the confidence to do the same. More importantly, it will bring the skills that the Tamalas, Alisas, Kristens, and Clarences of the world have to your company, strengthening your business and your community in the process.

Since The Road Up was filmed, Cara has taken insights from its 10,000+ job seekers and 70+ corporate partners to help companies with tactical shifts they can make to hire, retain, and advance overlooked talent. To learn more or to bring these practices listed above to your firm, email the team at learn@caraplus.org.



PART 2 **CARA IN CONTEXT**

As co-directors of *The Road Up*, the first question we always get is “what inspired you to make this movie?” The answer is that while we find some of our documentary subjects, others find *us*—and this one definitely found us! Back in the fall of 2013, our friend and soon-to-be co-producer Amy Ostrander fell into a conversation with a neighbor about an organization the neighbor had been involved with for the better part of a decade. “It’s called Cara,” he explained, “and it’s an amazing place.” So amazing, in fact, that he always thought it would make a great setting for a documentary. Amy responded that she just happened to know a couple of guys who make documentaries, and that set the ball in motion.

Not long afterwards, we went to see Cara in action. Like all new visitors there, the first thing we experienced was “Motivations”, the exuberant, emotional gathering that kicks off every day at the organization.

Part pep rally, part confessional, *Motivations* is designed to inspire everyone in the room—no matter where they are in their journey—with the hope that it just might be possible “to make today a great day”, the animating creed of the organization’s late founder, Tom Owens. It certainly worked on us. By the end of that first visit, we were sold, and over the next two years, as we got to know the students and staff at Cara, and had the privilege of hearing their stories, our conviction that this would, in fact, be a powerful setting for a documentary only deepened.

But it’s no accident that we use the word “setting” rather than “subject.” From the start, we knew we wanted to make a film about the people who come through Cara, not a film about Cara itself. Fortunately for us, the organization’s leadership felt the same way, only more so. They were adamant that *The Road Up* not serve as a “commercial for Cara”, and repeatedly made it clear that the only credible documentary would be an honest one. In the four years from the start of shooting to the completion of the film, they never once interfered or intervened, a trust that in turn allowed us to tell a more powerful, more complex story.

As a consequence, however, a lot of interesting, valuable questions about Cara—its mission, its pedagogy, its outcomes—are left unanswered in the film. In this section of the screening guide, we wanted to take the opportunity to fill in some of that missing context. What follows is a series of reflections from five individuals closely connected to the organization, along with their own suggested discussion questions. We hope these essays round out your understanding of Cara, add depth to your response to the film, and help shape how you approach your event.

Please note that the essays included throughout this guide reflect the views and opinions of the individual authors.

Cara Collective seeks to fuel a courageous national movement to eradicate relational and financial poverty. Through our four entities—Cara, Cleanslate, Cara Connects, and Cara Plus—we engage job seekers, employers, and other organizations across the country to break the cycle of poverty through the power and purpose of employment. Since 1991, we’ve helped more than 7,300 people get placed into more than 11,500 jobs and get started on their path to real and lasting success.

Cara participants by the numbers:

1. Educational attainment: 61% high school diploma; 15% GED; 24% less than 12th grade
2. Conviction history: 48% none; 8% misdemeanor only; 44% felony
3. Race/ethnicity: 82% Black/African-American; 4% white; 11% Hispanic; 3% other



Cara outcomes by the numbers:

1. Since 1991, Cara has placed more than 7,300 people in over 11,500 jobs.
2. The average hourly wage for those placements is \$15.77.
3. Cara’s placements have a 70% one-year, same-firm retention rate, twenty points higher than the national average.
4. 68% of Cara graduates live in permanent housing after a year on the job, versus 38% upon inception.
5. Cara returns \$5.97 back to society for every dollar invested.

Relational Wealth: The Meaning of Cara's Mission *by Maria Kim*



Maria Kim started at Cara in 2005 and served as President and CEO from 2014-2021. She is currently the President of [REDE](#), a venture philanthropy that invests exclusively in social enterprises that employ and empower people overcoming barriers to work.

On occasion, I play a game with my friends called “What’s your number?” On a scale of one to ten, we each shout out or share our number, where ten means “this day could not get any better”, and one represents the pits.

Last week I was at a four.

“Oh, that’s not happening on my watch,” one of my friends replied.

Now don’t get me wrong—she wasn’t trying to invalidate my feelings. She was trying to say that we’re in this together, that she’s going to be there for me to lean on, to laugh with, to breathe with, to help me—over time—boost from a four on up.

She was, in that moment and throughout my life, being quintessential “Cara”, the Old Irish word for “friend”.

Cara’s founder, Tom Owens, came up with that name for this mission because he firmly believed that what separates those who experience deep poverty from those who don’t is the lack of a bench—the lack of connected Caras—to support them in critical times of need, to believe in them or hold them up when they don’t have the will or the way to do it themselves.

It’s through that lens that we, as an organization, began to look at the notion of “relational poverty” (or conversely, the building of relational richness) and its effect on our country. In our work, we often reflect on how financial poverty can devastate families and communities. But what if the poverty of esteem, the poverty of relationships, or the poverty of community is just as important? The tension between the two—relational poverty can beget financial poverty, and vice versa—is why we so specifically call out both in our vision statement: *to fuel a courageous national movement to eradicate relational and financial poverty.*

Here’s how we see it:

When people suffer from relational poverty, they have less shelter from the storm when the noise of life steps in—like a layoff, an illness, a bout with addiction, a chronic wave of domestic violence, or a mistake. And while you can build the requisite workplace competencies or vocational skills to sustainably reenter the workforce, if you don’t concurrently build the depth of relationships (by healing past relationships or proactively building new ones), you risk the sustainability of that reentry over time. So when life’s next shoe drops—which it inevitably will—it’s easier to fall back into a cycle of poverty from which it becomes increasingly difficult to escape. Put simply, if we don’t solve for *both* financial and relational poverty, then we may not *sustainably* solve for either.

That’s why Cara is not just about a job, but about the transformation of self. And it’s not just about aspiration or occupation, but about the deepest truth of who you are. If you can see yourself in a new light and allow others to see that too, and if we can help you tap into structures and systems that crave your strength and will be richer for it, then it’s not just relational poverty that doesn’t stand a chance, but financial poverty too.

Take Alisa from *The Road Up*, who went from:

- feeling like she didn’t have enough to brag on in an interview to being employed in a healthcare setting where patients and colleagues rely on her, her service, her care, and her talent;
- living in a homeless shelter, sleeping on a bunk bed with two shelves to her name, to living in her own apartment, giggling at the joy of having space that is entirely, uniquely, and lovingly her own; and

- being without her family for a painful and protracted period of time to having her girls holding on to her for dear life, each clinging to one of mom's legs with a love and a life that is weighty and soaring all at the same time.

In these moments, Alisa is feeling the power of relational richness – a kind of helium that gives flight to dreams and to a growing and blooming sense of possibility.

So as you watch *The Road Up*, I encourage you to think about how this theme of relational richness runs throughout the film, and how it does—or doesn't—affect the way you view the many issues the movie raises. As a starting point, here are some of the questions this lens has inspired me to ask:

1. Seeing Clarence in pain at various points in his journey was difficult for all of us. At one point, he says to Jesse: "It's hard." to which Jesse responds, "It's hard as hell. But if we know that, who in the hell would want to do it by their damn self?" Why does Clarence feel so alone, and what makes it hard for him to lean on others when he's hit a rough patch?
2. Despite what her manager may have said, what did Tamala *hear* that made her feel she was being fired as opposed to being on her final warning? If you were the manager in this circumstance, what might you have done to ensure that your expectations were clearly understood?
3. So many positions are secured through the power of networking, a practice that in and of itself exacerbates the inherent inequities that traverse the hiring process. Often the overlooked talent served by organizations like Cara lack a (relationally rich) network and therefore face a higher bar to get access to jobs. What can employers do to better level this playing field?
4. You see crying, laughing, yelling, and everything in between inside the classroom—not exactly what you might imagine is the norm for a "job training program." Why do you think Cara adopts a model like this and what does this type of personal discovery have to do with getting people back to work?

I hope these questions make for robust conversations around the three big themes that I see in the film: the inequities that create urban poverty, the human condition of people experiencing it, and the opportunity we all have as institutions and individuals to help people galvanize out of it.

Thanks for watching, and most importantly, thanks for processing. Together, we can build a more inclusive economy. Let's get to work.

One Human Being at a Time: The Theory and Pedagogy of Transformations *A Q&A with Mr. Jesse*



Jesse Teverbaugh is the Director of Student and Alumni Affairs at Cara.



What is Transformations?

Transformations is the social and emotional learning curriculum that has become Cara's signature training. It's a four-week program that goes beyond the common skills that other workforce development programs focus on (interview skills, resume building, etc.) and instead focuses on building things like love, forgiveness, and self-confidence—the things in

our personal lives that intertwine with our professional lives and can create challenges that impact our success.

Explain the theory behind making Transformations Cara's signature training?

Very early on in the lifespan of Cara, the thought was that people just needed employment and then everything would work out from there. But as we continued to track individuals after they got jobs, there were still problems in their personal lives that were impacting their ability to stand out on the job. And so that's how we had the thought that maybe we were neglecting a piece of the puzzle.

As humans, we're more than a paycheck. So we started taking this holistic approach, addressing the human being from the inside out, as opposed to the outside in. We started doing a deeper dive into an individual's personal life. Somebody who's just been released from being incarcerated, or someone who has never had a job before, or doesn't have a high school diploma...that's traumatizing. How can you expect someone to transform their life if they don't have the skills to?

Transformation starts in the mind. It starts with our belief system. When participants come in with a certain belief system, thinking the world operates a certain way, they're going to continue to get those results. But when we begin to change our ways of thinking about ourselves and our environment, then we can start transforming.

Describe the 4-week structure of Transformations and explain why it's laid out that way.

Nobody's walking in the door exposing their challenges, their secrets, right off the bat. People aren't that forthcoming. That's just not how the human psyche works. So how do you create a curriculum that gives people the comfort level to start revealing their true selves? It was a slow process that didn't happen overnight.

At the core of what we do is changing behaviors. When you think about recovery, it's 21 days to break a habit. That's the concept. So the first seven days is just based on detoxing, to get that chemical or whatever out of you. And it's the same idea with our four-week curriculum. That first week, that's just detox. You're introduced to motivations; you get to be inspired; you talk about things and get in the middle of that circle; you're expected to dress professionally. So you're out of that old behavior, that old toxic way that you've been used to. And that's built on building trust.

Once I've gotten some of that toxic stuff out of you, now I can start giving you some notions about what's possible—can you actually turn your life around? And we do that by community building. Participants see people ringing the bell, getting jobs. They see people getting their own interviews. They go to the clothing room and get dressed up and they just even look different. And they start saying “wow, if they did it, maybe

it's possible that I can do it as well." And so now they're starting to be more open-minded to the suggestions that previously sounded like "these people crazy—that stuff don't work for people like me."

So the first week is building trust. The second week is what's possible. Week three, you start seeing a paradigm shift. Now those bad habits are starting to switch over. Because now they've started to get some of the residuals of making good decisions and good choices, and being rewarded for things and affirmed for things. And they can actually visualize it and see a change, not to mention that their loved ones and friends, when they leave here and go back to the community they're from, are saying, "Wow, you look good! There's something different about you." And they start noticing those changes within themselves. And they begin to like the changes.

Week four is built on healing and forgiving, letting go of some of that anger and pain and anxiety, wherever it came from. It could be from just having a job for 25, 30 years, and being let go. It could be somebody who's been in a 30, 40-year marriage, and here it is that my marriage broke up, my children are grown and gone, and I've lost my identity. And so that week is rooted in healing and being able to forgive and let some of that baggage go.

What additional lesson do you wish had been included in the film and why?

The Student Commitment—when they're formulating what they will commit to do for one another. That's a powerful class in itself, how we come together to help one another so that we truly don't fall.

List 5 questions you'd like the audience to think about/talk about after the film.

1. Who do you identify with in this film and why?
2. What myth about poverty or homelessness was dispelled by this film?
3. What moment made you the most uncomfortable and why?
4. If I asked you to do the love exercise, to identify someone and put your hands on their face, who in your life do you think needs to be told that you love them?
5. And then the second part to the previous question, why have you not told them already?

"The Road Up breathes new life into what it takes to overcome deep-seated challenges largely because Teverbaugh is so good at his job. But so are these filmmakers. The care Teverbaugh brings to his work, and they to theirs, comes through in every frame."

— Erin Trahan, WBUR Boston

It's Not Just About a Job: *The Road Up* and the Importance of Employment Hope *by Philip Young P. Hong, Ph.D.*



Dr. Philip Young P. Hong is a community-based poverty and workforce development researcher who holds positions as Professor and Associate Dean for Research in the School of Social Work at Loyola University Chicago.

Cara Staff: *What brings you here my friend?*

Cara Student: *I'm here to get a job. I was told that this is the best place to get me a job. Not just any job. I mean a good Job. I've been gone too long and I'm a bit rusty. Kinda nervous about trying out again.*

Cara Staff: *So you ready for it?*

Cara Student: *Of course I'm ready! Why do you think I'm here? I've been ready all my life...I'm ready to finally ring that bell. Show people what I got.*

Cara Staff: *No, are you really, really ready to put up with it? Face the truth? Transform yourself and your situation with the power of hope?*

Cara Student: *I don't know what you're talking about, but I'll know for sure when I get that job and prove everybody wrong. I'm giving this another chance for them to see me for who I am. I got a lot to offer ... and I gotta get that money to pay for my family's needs. I'm gonna tough it out. I'm gonna give it a try.*

Cara Staff: *Love that spirit, but we can't use the word "try". We just gotta do it. We have to believe in the fire that you have inside. It's that hope we need to get it done—to do it.*

As we see in this vignette, success in workforce development is about the process of moving forward despite the odds that one might face along the way.¹ This process—the transformation of perceived barriers into employment hope—is called “psychological self-sufficiency” (PSS).² Cara offers a holistic system of care and support that allows PSS to be activated and invigorated for its participants as they march forward, overcoming the negative thoughts, beliefs, and patterns of behaviors that limit their power of hope.

About a decade ago, my colleagues and I collected survey data from Cara and other human service organizations in Chicago.³ The data showed that Cara's high success rate in employment and retention had been achieved by investing in people and their individualized capacity to move forward with hope, despite the barriers and obstacles that came their way. Success, it turned out, lay in the process itself, not simply in the end goal of getting a job.⁴ Or, to put it another way, employment without the PSS process wasn't sustainable.

“Employment hope” consists of five elements: self-worth; self-perceived capability; futuristic self-motivation; utilization of skills and resources; and goal orientation.⁵ You might want “your” job right away as you come into Cara, but placement is not the issue. You have to undertake the intrinsic process of becoming job ready.⁶ Hope has to be connected to the purpose, the existential meaning—the why—of your journey, which you have to identify for yourself. In other words, to turn wishful thinking into active hope, you have to point the needle toward your North Star. The power of hope then takes over from there, as you no longer have to steer in the dark to avoid getting capsized; strong winds or storms may come, but so will the courage and wisdom to

stay above the waters. That's how Cara helps you not just reach your employment goal, but thrive beyond it.

When you are invested in yourself, others want to invest in you too. You are creating the value within, and the value gets noticed in the marketplace. Employers react by becoming more invested in their employees because of these core qualities, which they see as indispensable to their company's success. They also invest in an inclusive culture of employee growth and advancement in order to be better partners to Cara. This cycle of transformation takes place with many Cara students, scaffolded by a system of care, support, and development—in partnership with employers—that continues long after students leave and enter the world of work.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you instill hope in yourself to strive towards a goal? What do you do when you are unable to activate your hope because you feel depleted?
2. When do you fall or run into obstacles? Are you distracted by them? Do they talk you out of your path?
3. Do others or situations outside of yourself give you hope to keep pursuing your goal, or do you tend to find hope within yourself as your source of power? Or, do you need both to stay focused on your goal?
4. What does your goal look like? What does your hope look like? How does your hope stand strong against the barriers and obstacles you face along the path toward reaching your goal?
5. How does it feel when you are empowered with hope to reach the goal?
6. How is your PSS process similar to or different from the processes you might imagine to have been taken by Cara students in reaching their goals?

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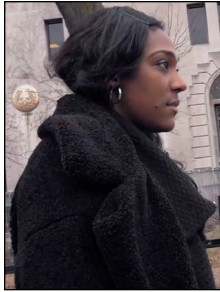
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The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly: A Participant's POV *By Kristen Robinson*



Kristen Robinson is an arts educator and entrepreneur residing in Cleveland, Ohio. She is currently developing her teaching philosophy, the “transformative indigenous imagination”, connecting women, technology, and nature for a harmonious and successful future.

Kristen can be reached at www.kristenrobinson.space

THE GOOD:

I never was sold on Cara, but I'll give it a “rockstar award” for helping restore my professional roots, teaching me the job-search process, helping me network, and providing me with resources and an AMAZING closet (for real: Italian hand-

knit tights and gently worn Prada shoes; it's such a vibe and was one of the things Alisa and I bonded over every day!) Transformations also introduced me to Jon and Greg and this amazing journey with the documentary, and catalyzed my teaching evolution.

I started the program in January of 2016 after my name had been reduced to a number. I had not looked in a mirror, listened to music, or used a cell phone for half a year. I had been “humbled,” yet I wasn't mentally ready to accept the idea that just because I had a background, I might end up cleaning the streets of Chicago to get a work reference, even though I already had a resumé that was pretty rad, IMHO (when I first went to orientation, Cara told me I'd probably end up in Cleanslate to rectify a “gap” in my work history). At this point I had gone months without my precious tinctures, skin products, hair, technology, social media, and wardrobe. But I needed work, and the statute in Illinois had changed: if anyone with a background completed a certified workforce program, you could get your record expunged or sealed (in my case, with the help of a non-profit called Cabrini Green Legal Aid). I had a really great friend and a really great mother who both told me I could always choose not to go through with Cara if it didn't work out, and so I gave it a shot. I actually thought about dropping out after looking at the Cara handbook, which started off with something about how being one minute late more than three times would get you 86'd from the whole operation. And thinking about “Business Corporate” attire literally made me gag. But I stayed, got my certificate, and completed my year of employment.

My Cara class was like this wildly well-dressed, reformed dysfunctional family that understood each other—and probably had enough therapy to get us to the 11th dimension, which meant we accomplished BIG things. We looked good. We helped each other. And we got jobs. Transformations was me in rare form. I knew I would probably never do anything like it again, so I did my best to be a genuinely good person. I grew exponentially in spirit in this environment. I was kind. I became patient and learned to “look with new eyes”. It inspired me to work on a project with a longtime friend and creative director who was blown away by the change they saw in me. I realized that there were SO many other things I was capable of doing and SO many people who were willing to work with me, and it was magical. I didn't have to worry about the fact that I couldn't afford proper hair extensions and that everything was off the rack and mostly not new. It seriously didn't matter. I just wanted to get it. I asked questions. I wanted to help THE WORLD and everyone in it, then throw a party.

Cara's energy helped bring me back to life in a way, and I have to give them that. Clennetta was such a G with numbers. I had never met anyone as meticulous in my life. She showed me how to manage my money again, and I actually hit goals. Lynnette hired me and gave me my first legit job in years. My contract, through LISC Chicago, was with Cara's Financial Opportunity Center on the South Side, where I got to help increase wealth in marginalized neighborhoods (by ridiculous numbers) and have an impact on community development. I was multi during the time I was at Cara: I taught literacy and was a board member for Literacy Chicago; I had a show on Q4, an online community radio station; I started a book; I blogged; I volunteered; I joined AmeriCorps; I knit pants and scarves and a joined a tech group at the

Chamber of Commerce, where I advocated for digital equity and literacy throughout the city; I traveled; I learned how to be on time and reliable in a “corporate way,” which I’d never had an interest in before... and it actually felt good! It still bored me insane and made me gag, but it was cool that I knew I could do it. I manifested my strengths in arts management and turned myself into an arts education teacher and entrepreneur, which remains the cornerstone of my mission even today.

THE BAD AND THE UGLY:

In the end, as much as I respected the process, I thought the film went exactly the way I didn’t want them to go: it was a Cara promotion. The worst part about the experience was that it captured me in the most physically, mentally, and financially vulnerable time of my life. I had gained a ton of weight—I didn’t even know my size. I had a limited number of friends, and the process of getting to know me was emotional and intense at times; it’s hard being black and gifted, and successful change is a detox process. There were times that listening to other people in Transformations literally made me want to fall on the floor in slow motion. Staff still judged us. I remember one time during our lunch break, I had an allergic reaction to something I ate. Although I had been two years sober by that point, the whole situation was treated with side-eyes and whispers by staff about how long I was in the restroom, and my drug history was even told to the paramedics (who were jerks and treated me like high hell—no pun intended—the whole ride to Northwestern; I’m STILL paying that bill). One really awesome staff member hated on my snakeskin boots one day and said they broke dress code. I almost quit, until Jesse stepped in and had my six.

Cara’s South Side Campus was a Financial Opportunity Center focused on helping people in the community with personal/social work items, digital and financial literacy, job search and employment. From what I could tell, the staff—most of whom were just as educated and competent as the ones Downtown—were compensated less, including me. I got a rockstar award for my work after writing an intensely well-researched proposal to extend my position into a permanent one—I had hit and surpassed my contractual goals by over 60%—and I got happy face stickers and gold stars all day. But Cara’s culture never equated money with that. I mean, how much is a “you’re awesome” check worth anyway? Cut it out. Recognition does not equal economic stability.

In the Netflix series *Lupin*, the hero, Assane Diop, corrects the love of his life when she tells them there are two types of men, knights and barbarians. Knights, she tells him, try to save you; barbarians take you for everything. To this, Assane adds a third archetype: the gentleman who cares deeply about what matters, but is often misperceived as not giving a shit. Throughout my journey, I feel like the only way I’ve survived is as that third type. I never let go of who I was. I wish I could say it was hope, but in my experience, “hope” is a word that sells at a high price while low-key suggesting to play fair all the time. Most oppressively wealthy people will never use the word hope or play fair (one of the main reasons Cara exists). So I just use the word “fortitude” instead.

6 THINGS:

1. What is your brightest emotional intelligence or superpower? When was the last time you used it? Start a conversation with someone this week about it.
2. *Kintsugi* is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with lacquered gold, silver, or platinum, resulting in a brilliant new piece of art made from the broken pieces. Consider the struggles in your life that you have made into *kintsugi*...
3. Keeping it real—what is your “stereotype”? Do you think others perceive this the same way? Why or why not? Do you “look like ” your stereotype?

4. Do you consider “standing in your truth” as a liberating or a toxic statement? Why?
5. What paradigm shifts in your life have evolved you into a new person, if ever? How did this change your perception of the environment and the people around you?
6. Do you take the same routine every day? Considering the previous questions, how many different people have you been in your life? Were they all necessary? How many more/what perspectives do you need to actualize your passion and purpose?

“I was floored with The Road Up. It’s inspiring, heart-breaking, and triumphant. It is one of the best documentaries of 2020.”

— Kevin Wozniak, kevflix.com

Lessons for Life: My Cara Experience *A Q&A with Alisa Cadette*



Alisa Cadette lives outside of Chicago and works as a Certified Nursing Assistant.

In the movie, you write “I will make it a great night for you” on the whiteboard in one of your patient’s rooms, which is a version of Cara’s slogan “Make it a great day.” Why did you write that, and can you talk about some of the lessons you took away from your time at Cara?

I wrote “make it a great night” because when I was at Cara in Mr. Jesse’s class, he used to say these words to us. Also “think outside the box.” Mr. Jesse showed me that there’s hope for me and others, but without a support system, you’re doomed.

Cara is motivational in ways that are life-changing, but only if you’re ready. It taught me that we all have issues, but we still have to get back up and look for the things that make us happy—our children, family, money, working, praying, and having a relationship with god. It taught me there’s a lot of bad people in the world, but as long as you’re a better person, you can help and teach others. Meanwhile, we all need love and a listening ear, and sometimes we need to look within ourselves, and the world will be in a better place.

Lastly, Mr. Jesse is an angel. His presence, his walk, his talk and what he’s been through is an amazing life lesson story of a powerful man. How he taught the class is mind-blowing. At times I would go and vent out to him and he would always give me good, rewarding advice. One time he told me to eat a carrot, eat celery, your body is used to something in your mouth, because I told him I couldn’t stop thinking about smoking marijuana, LOL!

Talk about the jobs that you had while you were at Cara. Was that a helpful experience?

I got through two internships with Cara. One was working as a receptionist at the Cara front desk, greeting everyone coming in, checking them in, taking their coats, making them feel cozy. Then I went to Old St. Patrick’s Church as a receptionist as well, greeting people, getting mail and assisting the father of the church. Both experiences were helpful—they opened my eyes to the possibilities of working in a new way.

Are there things that Mr. Jesse said or lessons that he taught that have stayed with you? If so, can you talk about some of them?

I learned that if I would have stuck it out at Cara and AA meetings that I could be a lot farther, happier, wiser. But I slacked off at Cara, and Mr. Jesse always said to me, “if you’re gonna do something go do it, don’t lie about it.” And it taught me that we all fall, but we have to get back up, and that addicts have something to live for—ourselves and others who love us. I think about those quotes from Cara and Mr. Jesse a lot and try to express them to others, to motivate them. That’s what it’s all about!

List three questions you’d like the audience to think about:

1. Do you want to see a Part Two?
2. Do you know anyone in these situations?
3. What was your favorite part of the movie?



PART 3 **A DEEPER DIVE**

This part of the guide is geared toward screenings focused on specific issues or audiences, and is designed to facilitate a more directed exploration of *The Road Up*. Individually, each essay addresses a different issue or audience through the lens of the film, offering context and questions to get the conversation going. Taken together, they provide a kind of primer on the causes and consequences of poverty, and how it impacts an individual's ability to get and keep a job. We are truly grateful to our all-star team of contributors for their willingness to engage more deeply with the film, and we hope their ideas and expertise help augment your own!

The Road Up :

The Business Case for Leaving No Worker Behind *By Jeffrey Korzenik*



Jeffrey Korzenik is the author of [*Untapped Talent: How Second Chance Hiring Works for Your Business and the Community*](#)

Most audiences categorize the struggles portrayed in *The Road Up* as “social problems,” but these struggles also reflect an enormous economic challenge for the country. The growth potential of any economy is defined by two factors: workforce growth and productivity growth. For decades, we have enjoyed the economic benefits of women joining the labor force and the demographic waves of new

workers created by the Baby Boom and the Millennial generations. Unfortunately, those advantages are now behind us, and prospects for U.S. growth are limited – this is more than just a pocketbook issue; economic mobility, income inequality and even societal stability are enhanced in more robust economies.

We all have a vested interest in the success of the participants in *Cara* and those enrolled in thousands of similar workforce development initiatives around the country. To prosper in the face of limited population growth, we must find pathways for those who have been marginalized to become productive and contributing citizens. As *The Road Up* illustrates, this is neither a simple nor an easy journey. For example, 19 million people in America have a felony conviction, one of the most significant barriers to gainful employment, and millions more have misdemeanor convictions, a lesser but still significant obstacle. Their potential, however, is enormous. Even if we accept that not everyone from the group with criminal records is ready for employment, the economic benefits can be measured in the hundreds of billions of dollars: the contributions of millions more employed; smaller outlays of government aid; and lowered recidivism that reduces the costs of crime and the expenses of the judicial system.

Pioneering business executives around the country have proven that, done right, giving a second chance to those in need is a path to loyal, engaged—and profitable—employees. That profit incentive must be there for these practices to become widespread enough to make a difference. The silver lining of an economy where workforce growth can no longer be taken for granted is that the talents and investment of the business community will be directed toward supporting the infrastructure and training to help marginalized workers succeed. While corporations may be motivated by profit, if they succeed in creating opportunities and second chances, the benefits go far beyond a financial bottom line, and extend to building a stronger, safer, and more just country.

Discussion Questions:

1. Jesse teaches that there is a difference between “what you did” and “who you are.” Do you believe this? Is “what you did” ever a reflection of “who you are”?
2. In sharing the stack of *Cara* students who have been terminated, it is clear that hiring people from this program is no guarantee of success. If you were an employer, how could you better the odds? Where does the responsibility lay: the employer? the employee? *Cara*?
3. Tamala mistook a warning for a termination. Clarence was ultimately terminated for being sixteen minutes late. Alisa completely ignored the question posed in her mock interview. From whom did you learn the basic skills of interviewing and working?
4. Addiction and drug/alcohol abuse clearly played a role in throwing people off track. What policy implications does this have for our country?

5. Jesse talks about acquiring a job not being sufficient. Why is that?
6. What is the role of hope in rebuilding a life?

“The Road Up is a truly amazing documentary that manages to inspire without glossing over the harsh realities of life. Perfectly paced editing, beautiful cinematography, and a handful of deeply emotional personal stories come together to drive the central theme of the film home, which is that people on the fringes of society aren’t bad, they don’t have to be defined by their worst moments, and, most importantly, that you can do your part to help the ones that want to be helped. In a world where big change often seems perpetually out of reach, that’s a pretty good place to start. 5 stars (out of 5).”

— Christopher Lewis, MXDWN.com

The Road Up : Lessons from a DEI Screening *By Andrea O'Leary*



Andrea O'Leary is the Senior Director of Culture & Change at Aon and Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors at Cara Collective.

When I first had the privilege of watching *The Road Up*, I felt the rawness and realness of trying to find your way back. It is messy, complicated, emotional, and challenging. But mostly, it's powerful. Life throws a lot at people, and the cards aren't always stacked in your favor. But the film showed the journey of fighters and people who are taking their lives back, and there is power in that!

With the various story lines and experiences in the film, I knew it would speak to a wide audience. None of the individuals' paths were the same, and the challenges they experienced showed the multitude of systemic and societal blockers that exist to make the road up seem almost impossible. I knew the film would be a great way to start conversations because it wasn't political or promotional or propaganda, it was just people. People living their lives and sharing their experiences and their journeys with us. At the very heart of conversations, both inside and outside of organizations, are people wanting to hear, listen, and connect with each other, and the film does that beautifully.

What made screening the film virtually within my organization so effective was that it gave people the freedom to experience the film on their own initially, letting them feel in the moment, and then individually reflect before we had any discussions as a larger group. We didn't want to lead people towards a certain perspective or point of view, but rather wanted them to develop their own perspective. In the group discussions, it quickly became apparent that everyone got something different from the film. Hearing the many interpretations of the film, the various meanings people took from it, and the emotional connections people made led to effortlessly riveting discussions about the characters, the work, the societal issues, and the solutions. *The Road Up* truly gave my organization the opportunity to have a conversation about the realness of poverty without the pressure of 'sides' or politics. Instead, we just talked about people. In an organization, there is comfort in that, which allowed for more openness and less desire for the need to be right.

As a result of the discussion on the film, my organization has been more open and willing to have real and vulnerable conversations about race, inequity, poverty, and bias. *The Road Up* allowed us to lower our waterlines and start a conversation of meaning and change not just for our own organization, but for society as well.

Discussion Questions:

1. What were your initial feelings or reactions after seeing the film?
2. Which individual did you find yourself most drawn to? Why do you think that was?
3. What was your biggest "a-ha!" moment while watching the film?
4. What did you learn about yourself as a result of watching the film?
5. What is one thing we can do individually and one thing we can do collectively as an organization to help eradicate poverty and get people back to work?

The Road Up : Workforce Development *By Amanda Cage*



Amanda Cage is the President and CEO of the [National Fund for Workforce Solutions](#).

Our economy is unforgiving and our labor market relentless. Across the income spectrum, workers express anxiety about their ability to build financial stability and security. In order to succeed at a job, one often needs training and education, social skills, and networks. What happens if you have a life-altering event that disrupts this foundation? What if you never had this foundation to begin with?

We experience an economy that is profoundly unequal. Massive structural changes over the last 30 years, including globalization and automation, have created a precarious situation for the two-thirds of American workers who lack a college degree. We continue to see massive gaps in income and wealth between white workers and workers of color at every level of education. Study after study points to ongoing racial discrimination in hiring, pay, and promotion. Human resource departments continue to employ credit and criminal background checks that automatically disqualify many would-be employees.

The Road Up shows, in intimate detail, what it takes to rebuild lives. Whatever happened before, we meet people at the moment they are willing to do the hard work to get their lives right. The first marker of progress—almost always—is getting a job. It's a prerequisite for securing housing, getting back custody of kids, getting clean and staying sober. It's the first brick for building a new foundation, and yet, almost everything is stacked against you. How do you make progress when the road up is so steep?

Discussion Questions:

1. We often talk about “the dignity of work.” How do we define this?
2. Most of the students at Cara enter an entry-level job. What do these jobs look like (wages, schedules, working conditions)? How does one move into stability while working a low wage, entry-level job?
3. It's clear that many of the people in Cara's program experienced trauma. How does this show up in the workplace? What does a [trauma-informed workplace](#) look like?
4. In addition to the personal barriers, what are the systemic barriers that prevented people from working? What are the limitations of personal grit in the face of societal obstacles?
5. A key to Cara is Transformations. What happens when you've gone through a profound change but those around you (family, neighborhoods, workplace, etc.) haven't?

The Road Up : Homelessness *By Doug Schenkelberg*



Doug Schenkelberg is the Executive Director at the [Chicago Coalition for the Homeless](#).

In Chicago alone, [over 58,000 people are impacted by homelessness](#). These are people living on the streets, in shelters, and doubled-up. *The Road Up* provides insight on how homelessness is both a cause and result of other hardships in a person's life. It also demonstrates that permanent housing and supports are the most effective tool for ending homelessness.

Take the situation with Clarence. When in the office with Jesse, learning that he is being let go from both Cleanslate and Cara, he shared how he left the homeless shelter he was staying in because his belongings were being stolen. From that form of homelessness, he went on to experience doubled-up homelessness with his sister, who then had issues with her landlord and was put out. Because he was “couch surfing,” Clarence had to leave as well. Doubled-up homelessness makes up the vast majority (70%) of people experiencing homelessness in Chicago. While some assume being doubled-up is a more stable form of housing, Clarence's story illustrates that is not the case.

Kristen's story points to other key issues. She, like many Cara participants, was involved with the justice system. Because of a mixture of formal (laws and rules that automatically eliminate people with criminal records from being eligible for certain housing and work) and informal (assumptions and prejudices about people that have been justice-involved) barriers to housing, this population experiences very high levels of homelessness. One study shows that [one in four people that were involved with the Cook County jail system were also involved in the homeless services system](#).

Kristen's story also demonstrates the central role of government in housing. When government funding was cut for the shelter where she was staying, she was told she would need to start contributing money she didn't have in order to continue staying there. Government fails to provide enough financial support to meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness in the best of times, and fluctuations in that funding due to budget deficits make an already tenuous situation all the more unstable. Her story illustrates how legislators' decisions about budgets have a real impact on people's lives.

Finally, Alisa's story shows what being permanently housed can mean. After both finding work as a CNA and getting her apartment (“*My own place.*”), she had the stability in her life that allowed her to be reunited with her children. As you see throughout *The Road Up*, being in a temporary shelter, while an important step, is not the same as being permanently housed.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is something you learned about homelessness from *The Road Up*?
2. Have you or someone you know had an experience with homelessness? How did it happen? What did it mean for their or your life?
3. Have you thought about “doubled-up” homelessness before? What are some other reasons you think this form of homelessness can create instability for people experiencing it?
4. *The Road Up* shows the clear connections between housing stability and stable work. How do you think homelessness impacts other issues, like health or education?
5. The documentary demonstrates how government budgets and policy decisions impact homelessness. What do you think legislators and other policy-makers need to know to better address homelessness?

The Road Up : Living with a Criminal Background By Esther Franco-Payne



Esther Franco-Payne is the immediate past executive director of [Cabrini Green Legal Aid](#).

A PERSON IS NOT THEIR CRIMINAL RECORD, and having a criminal record does not make up the totality of an individual. It is often the result of a moment in time, survival, a crisis situation, past traumas, a poor or misguided choice, a mistake, and sometimes a matter of negative fate. Regardless of the circumstances that led one to commit a crime or get caught up in the system, the fact of the matter is that

they will spend the rest of their natural lives paying for it, enduring both the immediate and long-term consequences of their actions. These consequences are evident in the countless barriers that impact one's ability to access employment, education, and housing following incarceration or even a brief encounter with the criminal legal system. Once that criminal record is created and made visible, it becomes a significant obstacle in allowing one to achieve positive outcomes and move forward with their life.

As we all know, the United States has the highest incarceration rates in the world. There are over 70 million Americans with a criminal record—nearly four million people touched by the system in Illinois alone. However, these startling numbers have not yet demonstrated enough shock value to disrupt the status quo and create the transformative changes that are necessary. Likewise, despite the fact that research has found employment to be the single most important influence on reducing recidivism, 92% of employers still use a criminal history report to dictate their hiring decisions. And most of those employers deny someone employment based on their criminal backgrounds.

So, what do second chances look like? And how does one navigate the system when trying to put the pieces of their life back together without the proper supports, legal ability, and opportunities following incarceration?

A key strategy of Cabrini Green Legal Aid (CGLA) is to partner with community-based organizations – including workforce development, housing, educational institutions, and others – to support individuals with criminal records, provide relief to advance the client's goals, and achieve collective impact with their organizational partners. *The Road Up* is a clear demonstration of the power of the partnership between Cara and CGLA to support Cara's program participants. In Kristen's story, we see the impact of her criminal background on her ability to access gainful employment and housing. Time after time, she is denied, despite the personal progress she is making to overcome her past. This documentary illustrates and humanizes the systemic barriers one faces following incarceration. It is not until her record is fully cleared that Kristen can actualize her full potential and be FULLY FREE!

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the devastating impacts of a criminal record? How can we better understand the negative impacts of the criminal legal system on individuals, families, and communities?
2. What should reentry supports look like for someone who has a criminal background and/or is returning to society from incarceration?
3. In *The Road Up*, Clarence “fell through the cracks” and will no longer have the supports to help him navigate access to employment, housing, and other needs with his criminal background. How can the ecosystem of supports for formerly incarcerated individuals be better aligned and work together to ensure that people do not fall through the cracks?
4. Legal services must be part of the menu of services available to assist people in achieving positive outcomes. Criminal Records Relief aimed at eliminating the collateral consequences of a criminal

background is essential to ensuring one has access to education, employment, and housing. How can legal aid providers and workforce development join forces in an intentional way to advance positive outcomes for people with criminal records?

5. What do we need to break the silos and shift the narrative about people impacted by the criminal legal system?

“Timeless...After watching The Road Up, you will be changed and forever grateful to have been introduced to Jesse Teverbaugh...He’s a man who will easily be one of the most memorable human beings that I’ll encounter all year in my film viewing... The Road Up wound up blindsiding me with its real look at ups and downs of community, connection, and love in the face of adversity.”

– David J. Fowlie, Keeping It Reel

The Road Up : Mental Health and Substance Use *By Mark Ishaug*



Mark Ishaug is the CEO of [Thresholds](#), one of the oldest and largest providers of mental health and substance use treatment in Illinois, serving more than 8,000 clients each year.

Recovery from mental health and substance use conditions is a process—a process that is individual and complex. Here at Thresholds, we believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to live an independent, healthy life. Our approach requires meeting clients where they are—out in their communities. This community-based approach helps to lessen the social exclusion that is often present in the lives

of people living with mental health and substance use conditions.

Because recovery is a process of finding and living a satisfying and meaningful life, as one defines it for oneself, employment is often a critical component of successful recovery. Modern, evidence-based models of employment seek meaningful, competitive jobs, and Thresholds' programs support clients throughout the process. Work adds meaning, self-determination, community engagement, and hope for our clients.

The Road Up showcases the powerful role of stable employment in one's life, and how difficult it can be to overcome the interconnected challenges that stand in the way of getting a job. Lack of access to healthcare and affordable housing, systemic racism and inequity, training and technology, and gaps in the social safety net work together to keep so many in our communities from living the full, meaningful lives that they deserve.

The work continues, and we are grateful for the partnership of organizations like Cara Collective and so many more that are fighting for change alongside each other. Together, we can create the home, health, and hope that we all deserve.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does *The Road Up* show us about how mental health and substance use conditions can interfere with one's life and goals?
2. Have you or someone you know had an experience with a mental illness or substance use condition? What did it mean for their life?
3. What role has steady employment (or lack of employment) played in your own mental health and sense of wellbeing? What role did it play in your family life growing up?
4. *The Road Up* shows us that the barriers people face in regaining employment are diverse and unique to each individual. How does this affect the support that each person needs? What similarities are there in the barriers that each person faces?
5. Part of how employment affects our mental wellbeing is a feeling of social inclusion and interconnectedness. In what ways do social connections with family, neighborhood, and friends affect you or your family's mental wellbeing?
6. In the film, Mr. Jesse talks powerfully and poignantly about the "power of love." I talk a lot about "leading with love in the workplace". How do you feel about bringing the concept of "love" into work and the workplace?

The Road Up : Skills-Based Hiring *By Sara Wasserteil and Patti Constantakis*



Sara Wasserteil (l) is the Managing Director of [Cara Collective](#).

Patti Constantakis (r) is the Director of Corporate Philanthropy at [Walmart.org](#).

Recently, I was chatting with a colleague when he slipped in a comment that stuck with me: “I get to do this work.” It implied both subtly and oh-so-loudly that it was both a choice and a privilege to do what we do, and it resonated deeply.

Much of what I do at Cara Collective is help businesses view

talent in new ways. Oftentimes, this means helping them imagine that someone who may have held a job in a seemingly unrelated industry has the skills to pivot into theirs. In those moments, I think of people like Tameka, who leveraged her natural relationship-building skills from her role as a developmental disability aide into a customer service job at a top bank. While some people might ask what home health care has to do with banking, I’d say, “she was detail-oriented and had a customer service mindset”—skills that enabled her to thrive in both roles. I also think of Leona, who didn’t develop her skills in the workplace at all, but rather in the home. Leona was a mother of five and a homemaker for many years. But by lifting up her ability to multi-task and her passion for cleaning, she was able to show her transferable skills by putting “The Johnson Household ” on her résumé to showcase her work, helping her land a role at a premier property management company.

People like Tameka and Leona are why I am so passionate about skills-based hiring: hiring people for the skills that they bring, versus the background that they do or don’t have. In a society where two-thirds of people lack a Bachelor’s degree and one-third have a criminal record, skills-based hiring is especially important, because it enables employers to tap into the talents of tens of millions of additional individuals who are so often locked out of economic opportunity.

It’s also why companies like Walmart are investing so heavily in skills-based hiring. “We see skills-based hiring and upward mobility as key drivers of equity,” says Patti Constantakis, Director of Corporate Philanthropy at [Walmart.org](#). “Once you recognize that individuals can acquire skills and competencies in different ways, you can create multiple pathways to jobs.”

If you’re looking for ways to do this, [Skillful](#) can be a great place to start—it has tools to help companies identify competencies needed for open roles, templates for skills-based job postings, and detailed guidance for how to screen candidates based on skills. The best part is, when we use skills-based hiring, everyone wins: employers find extraordinary talent, and individuals have the opportunity to find power, purpose, and growth through gainful employment.

Discussion Questions:

1. When you hire for a role, what are the things you often look for?
2. When you think about the capabilities you need for your job, how did you acquire them? How many of them are soft skills that could be transferable, versus skills that you obtained through higher education or specific industry expertise?
3. When you create a job description, what do you base it on?
4. What are some of the risks of only looking for specific work or education experience?
5. What do we need to do to make sure we aren’t excluding qualified talent that may have gained their experience in non-traditional ways?

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Greg Jacobs & Jon Siskel are the co-directors of *The Road Up* and the founders of [Siskel/Jacobs Productions](#), a Chicago-based media production company that seeks to tell compelling stories with integrity, complexity, emotion, and humor.

Prior to *The Road Up*, Jon & Greg co-directed (with Danny Alpert) *No Small Matter*, the first feature documentary to explore the power and potential impact of early childhood education. Completed in late 2018, *No Small Matter* has helped move the needle on the issue at a national scale, through over 1400 screenings and an ambitious impact campaign.

In 2010, Greg and Jon produced and directed the documentary feature *Louder Than a Bomb*, which follows four Chicago-area high school poetry teams as they prepare to compete in the world's largest youth slam. The winner of 17 festival prizes, along with the Humanitas Prize for documentaries, the film had its world television premiere on the Oprah Winfrey Network as an official selection of the "OWN Documentary Club". Since then, *Louder Than a Bomb* has become a staple in middle- and high school classrooms around the country, and has helped seed LTAB-style slams in fifteen cities and counting.

In 2008, SJP produced the landmark History Channel special *102 Minutes That Changed America*, which won three Primetime Emmys, including Outstanding Nonfiction Special, and has since aired in more than 150 countries. SJP has also produced documentaries for public television, Discovery, and the National Geographic Channel, including *Witness: Katrina*, which won a News and Documentary Emmy for Outstanding Historical Programming.

Greg is a 2016-2017 New America Fellow and the author of *Getting Around Brown*, a history of school desegregation in his hometown of Columbus, Ohio. Jon is the former board president of Free Spirit Media, a Chicago youth media organization.

Siskel/Jacobs Productions

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