

THE STORY GOES | JAMES E. COOPER JR. | ST. PHILIP'S COLLEGE

MOLLY: Hey, it's Molly Cox with SA2020! Here for The Story Goes, which is this fantastic collaborative partnership between KLRN and SA2020. An opportunity for us to tell you the full story of the things that are happening in our beautiful town of San Antonio. I liked that I just called it a town, as if it's like one stop sign, and there is only 12 people that live here, and all of them will just be on The Story Goes at some point. Um, I'm actually today with James E. Cooper Jr. We are making sure we say the full name because your dad could listen--

JAMES: That's right. [\(0:32\)](#)

MOLLY: (continues) and it's important that we call you your full name, so he knows. James is going to talk a little bit more about the work that he's doing over at St. Philip's College. But before we do that, we want to sort of set it up. The idea of The Story Goes is to unpack these talking points that we keep hearing about our very complex community. The idea that San Antonio is both *and*. We are both the second in the nation for college educated millennial growth, *and* we are the most income segregated city in the United States. Both of those things exist simultaneously. And in San Antonio, which has its own community vision, we also know that we are really expecting our community to step up. We've told ourselves that we will have a collective responsibility for our community's well-being. One of the things that we've said that is very important to us, is that we would have 50% college attainment by the year 2020. Today, we are at about 35% of our community has an Associate's degree or more. In fact, only about 47% of high school students are going on to college after they get out of high school. That's professional certificates, that's Associate's degrees, that's Bachelor's degrees. We also know in our community were we to increase Bachelor's degrees by 1%, about 14,000 degrees, we would see a \$1.4 billion economic return to San Antonio MSA. All of that to say, that if students were only thinking about school, this would be an easy fix. Just get more kids into school. The only challenge is that in our community that is so complex, we know that that's not the only problem. [\(2:13\)](#) In fact, in 2016, Alamo Colleges did a survey of San Antonio College students and Palo Alto College students and found that some of the top barriers to school, just getting to class, were housing, transportation and food insecurity. And Alamo Colleges has been doing some really amazing things, particularly recently under new Chancellor and my friend, and he pays me. I'm just saying, he gives me \$20, Mike Flores, to say nice things about him. (laughs) But just like recently, VIA Transit and Alamo Colleges announced a partnership for free transit rides for any student or faculty or staff of Alamo Colleges. We've seen Alamo Colleges sort of wade into the free tuition conversation. We know that the average Associate degree graduate from Alamo Colleges will see an increase in earnings of \$9,400 each year compared to somebody with just a high school diploma. We know that it's important, and yet we also know that we can't just look at a college and say, "just be career counselors and make sure the students are going into the right classes." There is so much more involved in it. Particularly, in a city like San Antonio. So James, I am so happy that you are here. And you are new to the city.



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(3:31)

JAMES: That is correct.

MOLLY: I, one just want to chat and figure out how you got here. Two, what your thoughts are on San Antonio? And then, sort of what you've been doing the last year at St. Philips.

JAMES: That's fair. So, I am originally from Chicago, Illinois.

MOLLY: Okay, which I've never been to, and I keep being told I am silly for not going.

JAMES: It's a gorgeous city. Very colorful in terms of its cuisine, in terms of its art. The people are amazing. Great young millennial class. They pretty much manage the city extremely well, and it creates a lot of activity. My wife and I, for quite some time, were really looking for some opportunities outside of Chicago to really expand our professional scope, to expand our social scope. (4:17)

MOLLY: I want to know, I think this is a very serious question. Was it because of winters?

JAMES: Yes.

MOLLY: Okay, alright. Just making sure

JAMES: (both laughing) Yes, you would be surprised. I think the last time we were there in 2015, we had about a month in February where we had consistent snowfall. We came across 20-30 inches of snow in a month. It's extremely frustrating. It takes its toll on you. We have about six weeks of summer.

MOLLY: Yeah, no. And then you get here, and it's like a year of summer.

JAMES: A year of summer. (MOLLY laughs) So, Texas became attractive.

MOLLY: Okay.

JAMES: My wife was offered an opportunity to work as an HR manager in Abilene, Texas. We had family in Dallas, so it was only a three-hour drive. So, we said, "let's go take it out—check it out." So, we made that move. We really enjoy—

MOLLY: I can't even imagine a Chicago to Abilene move. I can't even imagine a San Antonio to Abilene move. (5:08)



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JAMES: It was an eye-opening experience for us. We learned a lot about ourselves, about people. We learned a lot about the economy. And so, it was an experience. San Antonio was pretty much too small for us because we were used to the large metropolitan city, having a lot of things to do. One of the challenges as well was that we didn't have a large airport. We had a small airport that had American Airlines, and so it was difficult for family to come down and see us.

MOLLY: Got it. [\(5:36\)](#)

JAMES: My wife was actually offered an opportunity to work in San Antonio for the Hartford Insurance Agency. So, she's an HR manager there. So, we made our move to San Antonio, April 8 of 2017.

MOLLY: You're coming up on a year!

JAMES: Our one-year anniversary comes up in a couple of weeks.

MOLLY: Okay, alright, well happy anniversary.

JAMES: Thank you. (laughs)

MOLLY: I'm glad that you are here.

JAMES: Appreciate that.

MOLLY: You've been here for a year, and I want to know, you are now at St. Philip's College.

JAMES: That is correct.

MOLLY: Have you always been in academia?

JAMES: Yes, since I've graduated college, I have always been in higher education.

MOLLY: Okay, and always doing the type of work you're doing here?

JAMES: No, no.

MOLLY: I think that's important because you're doing something interesting. St. Philip's College is one of only *three* universities that has the grant that you are currently managing?

JAMES: That is correct. [\(6:30\)](#)

MOLLY: Okay, can you tell me a little bit about that grant?



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JAMES: So, it's one of three colleges in the state of Texas—I'm sorry, I'm sorry in the San Antonio area.

MOLLY: Okay, got it.

JAMES: That is correct. So, the grant is from the Department of Justice managed by the Office on Violence Against Women. In 1994, Senator Joe Biden proposed an act, the Violence Against Women Act, and his act was supported with Bill Clinton under a criminal justice reform bill this was signed into legislation as well. So, from that, this grant has been in place since then.

MOLLY: Oh, wow, okay

JAMES: So, the appropriate title of the grant that we have is: to reduce sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking on college campus programs. (7:10)

MOLLY: Which is clearly a challenge and a dilemma on college campuses across the United States.

JAMES: Yes, absolutely.

MOLLY: Okay, so originally when you applied for this, do you have to have stats? How do you track that even on a college campus? Are people actually coming forward?

JAMES: So, as we know in terms of society, sexual violence and sexual assault are two of the most underreported crimes across the United States. So, you see the exact same thing on college campuses. You do, you are aware of things that students are impacted by. So, students tell stories, and those stories come to our Student Conduct and Title IX offices, and we respond to those. Over the years, well not over the years but since 1994 right, those stories have continuously grown, or we have become more aware. As a society, we began to see information grow. We see more diversity in terms of those information spaces thanks to the internet. Now, we have intimate stories of what's going on and who is being impacted. And so, because of that, in 2016 the Obama Administration released a call to college campuses. I think it was called a "Dear Colleague" letter, and he began to talk about the importance of Title IX and Student Conduct on college campuses. There were no policies put in place, but it brought more attention to these issues. So, from that, we now see major media stories, and now college campuses, well this grant has been around for 20 years now, but I mean we are now seeing more support from community-based organizations. We are now getting support from our community because there is a greater understanding of what domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking is. (8:55)

MOLLY: Well, San Antonio, itself, has a major challenge in family violence, generally. In fact, recently, we know 28 women were killed by a male intimate partner. That's quadrupled over the



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last four years in San Antonio. So, we definitely have become increasingly, we are talking more about it. More specifically, we are looking at what is the solution, and it's not just, as college attainment is not just quick fix. Family violence is not a quick fix either. So, I'm always intrigued when an institution that's set up to do one thing, ends up doing multiple things in order to support the people that they're serving, their community needs. So, the fact that St. Philip's has a very specific grant targeting students, making sure they understand they have rights, and support, and systems in place if they have been involved in violent acts. On a college campus, that's, I just find that to be something, that's not even, that's just one thing that a college student could be going through. Yeah, so you came into academia, this is sort of a new space for you in this family violence, or domestic violence, or violent acts. What were you doing before this? (10:18)

JAMES: So, before this, I had several positions. I worked in higher education. I worked in athletics, as an Athletic Director. I worked as an Academic Advisor, and I worked as an Admission Specialist as well. So, I did some recruiting as well. I spent the majority of my time in higher education in athletics.

MOLLY: Okay, what kind of athletics?

JAMES: Literally, I was a former student athlete. I played football from the age of 8 until 22. So, as an Athletic Director, I managed men's basketball, women's basketball, baseball and cheerleading. As a coach, I have coached women's track and field, men's track and field and football.

MOLLY: What? So, you went from athletics to, maybe it's not the opposite end of the spectrum, but I feel like it's the opposite end of the spectrum. This idea of well, being different. Not physical, although physical, but also emotional, etc. Talk to me about you, particularly, having this role in St. Philip's College in San Antonio, Texas.

JAMES: So, it's, what I want to use to talk about this is sports. So, let's just use sports as a microcosm of the United States. I can be incorrect, but I am going to use that in terms of how I understand or how I came into this work. In 2013-2014, I became an Athletic Director, right. Prior to this, I had no management of those that identify as female athletes, had no management about it. So, everything that I had known about it was how to motivate and instruct a male, those who identify as a male perform on a football field or a track. So, they way in which I was taught, to communicate and motivate those that identify as men is very *different* from that of those that identify as female. So, at the exact same time I took this role as an Athletic Director, I was also a member of our student conduct board. Throughout that experience, I began to understand the lack of resources that lent themselves to those that identify as female in athletic spaces. And so, even through communication was a major barrier for those that identify as men to communicate to those that identified as young, teenage or early college female. And so, now I'm at this space



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where I have grown to understand how to differentiate my communication style between men and women. The most interesting thing about this is I learned, I was taught to communicate with men, those that identify as males, from the way that I was coached, which was very vulgar, very rash, very aggressive. [\(13:03\)](#)

MOLLY: Should we say locker term banter?

JAMES: That's exactly it. But the thing about it that is most interesting is as I adopted this new practice of communication with women, those that identify as female, in terms of an individual basis, not so much calling them out in large groups, not yelling at them, but truly understanding their thought process. How they see things actually increased my ability to communicate with men. And so that's the most interesting aspect of it. When we look at America in terms of sport, we typically see more males in sport than women, and this is essentially why Title IX was put in place. But what we still don't talk about is what happens or what opportunities are we missing by not having more women managing female sports?

MOLLY: Right, and not to completely go down a rabbit hole of women coaches, but this is why Becky Hammond is such a major deal for the Spurs. It's the fact we've got this woman who is *amazing* at what she does who's now in a space for us to think differently about sports. I will give you that metaphor, the United States is a microcosm, sports is a microcosm, I like it! So, you were doing that work, and then you ended up, so are you coordinating, you're in charge of the grant? How does this then work at St. Philip's? [\(14:26\)](#)

JAMES: So, I'm more of a project manager. The grant within itself has four goals: 1. To educate and train conduct and Title IX officials in regard to survivors and victims of these very violent and intimate crimes. The second was is to train law enforcement, to make sure – Alamo Colleges, we have our own law enforcement—they're up to date in terms conversations, in terms of training of education surrounding survivors and victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Also, we have to create what's called a Coordinated Community Response. So, this is very influential people on a college campus, even in the external community, to help those individuals with what's going on. To make sure that training is being provided in every space of the college campus, make sure that students are being impacted by these crimes on campus. This final piece is creating what is called Primary Prevention Education, so that's bystander individuals. So, that's educating our students on how to support their peers in situations that become very alarming or difficult to students, and then how to respond if they are aware of students that are victims or survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault. [\(15:47\)](#)

MOLLY: James, everything that you just said, first of all the fact that you have these goals laid out. You know exactly where it's going. You know what you're supposed to be doing with this grant. You also know what you should be doing on the college campus. Sounds to me it's a lot about communicating. A lot about just opening a conversation up, and I'm curious as you have



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sort of gone into this work, as you started communicating more. I know you said, when we open the floodgates of, “Hey, this is a safe space. You can come to us.” Clearly, more people will come to talk to you. Have you seen it shift on your college campus? [\(16:20\)](#)

JAMES: So, Molly, this is the most alarming thing. Because of the data and the statistics don’t lend themselves to those that are victims or survivors, we don’t know what a victim or survivor looks like. We don’t know. It’s hard to identify. Once, I stepped foot on St. Philip’s College campus, I began to share with individuals what my role was. Then, having intimate conversations, it became almost overwhelming in terms of how many people grew up in a home, had friends that were victims or survivors, knew of individuals that were victims or survivors, their parents, themselves. It was difficult to take in at first. It’s surprising how many people, once they believe they have someone that they can trust, someone that’s not judging them, someone that believes their stories, that understands what they went through, they open up. But it’s a very difficult place because they are not giving me the right to share their story. They’re not almost willing to come forward and tell their story because they’re fearful in terms of how people will respond to them, how people will not believe their stories. It’s still a very difficult space to walk around campus and see a person and know that they’ve experienced this and not being able to communicate with someone else like, “Hey, let’s be mindful about how we are communicating with people across the board.” [\(17:53\)](#)

MOLLY: Which is such a different, I’m assuming it’s not just someone can come to your center and say, “hey, I’ve experienced this, and I just want to talk about it with somebody.” The secondary component that I assume is connecting them to resources in our community? And so is that, are you currently working with Family Violence Prevention Services, the Rape Crisis Center, etc, etc. Like are you working with these organizations to create this coordinated care? [\(18:20\)](#)

JAMES: That’s absolutely right. So, what the grant from the Office of Violence Against Women, they mandate us, it’s required that we have relationships with community partners. We work very closely with the Rape Crisis Center. We have an individual with the name of Ethel, and she works there, and she’s our partner. The Family Justice Center, we have an MOU with, a Memorandum of Understanding, with the Family Justice Center. We have an MOU with the DA’s office. We just recently built a relationship with TAASA, the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault. They are one of the lobbying organizations for victims and survivors of sexual assault. Then, we also have the campus law enforcement as well. They’re on campus, but they’re pseudo our community partners as well because they are the ones that respond to criminal activity based on our college students. So, right now, those are the community partners we have in place. [\(19:10\)](#)

MOLLY: Okay, so I want to sort of shift the conversation. We know that this exists at St. Philip’s. We see that you want to do a coordinated effort. You’ve at least opened up the conversation on



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a college campus, which my brain is like of course! I want to shift to what do we, as a community, need to know about the work that you're doing?

JAMES: So, this is scary. So, let me share with you on how I connect to the work. This is not going to sound appropriate, but we have to begin to humanize the perpetrator. In America, when we look at literature, stories, we, as a society, typically understand things that we relate to, right. So, I shared a story about me being an athlete in contact sports. So, I think it is very important to understand how I identify with the perpetrator. I grew up as a kid, I was not a very aggressive kid. I did not really like physical contact, and so there were times, as a small child, I would be bullied in the neighborhood. My father would say, "Hey, you need to go back and take care of yourself, protect yourself." Sometimes, he would really give me something to defend myself. And so, that was who I was as a small boy. At the same time, I was very gifted athletically, right. And so, I gravitated towards football. (20:37)

MOLLY: Because you didn't want physical touch, so you could just get the ball and run, run, run. Like, (laughs) do not get tackled!

JAMES: It was weird because within that space of football, I felt comfort because I was highly skilled. So, not even being touched because I was fast, athletic and strong. I could still avoid people and be celebrated within that sport. Throughout that time, I, over the years, learned how to identify with the weakness of people, how to target that, how to impact that, how to compete in a very aggressive manner. Because I was fast, because I was strong, I understood that if I ran at someone full force, I had a greater chance of winning, right. And so, through those repeated contact, I developed this identity where now I understand how to physically compete. So, then my identity, what happens to my identity? I start to identify with those aggressive and violent behaviors. I even had a coworker a couple of weeks ago apologize to me. She apologized to me, "James, I apologize if I ever said something to offend you." I said, "you don't have to apologize there's nothing you could probably ever do to offend me." I was shared, so the equity president, told me that's toxic masculinity. I had to share that is so much of who I am because I've learned to respond to negative criticism. I was taught by a coach in sport that you have to operate in this mindset where people cannot intimidate you verbally or physically. You just have to go in and continuously approach the situation until you win, right. Now, here I am, and I think this is important as well, because as I am learning all these things throughout my time in sport, there are no outlets for me. There are no, it's not set in place for myself to have or go to counseling to get away from my mindset of being an athlete. And so now, I am in the workplace. Thanks to people within my life that helped me learn and understand the characteristics I have that are not necessarily glorified by my physical makeup. Or celebrate my physical makeup, but those that are more mental—being able to communicate, being able to understand and listen to people, being able to articulate thoughts. Now, I am able to transition from that frame of thought of understanding or being a part of violent or aggressive behavior, but it still is a part of the fabric of who I am as a person. So, when we hear stories about student athletes or athletes having acts



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of violence or committing acts of violence on college campuses, I understand because, as a student athlete, we operate in this mental space, where if we are approached or triggered, we are going to physically respond. At times, it is difficult for people to step outside of that cognitive mental space. (23:57)

MOLLY: You spoke very specifically about this idea of toxic masculinity, or not being able to translate football into real world. I can totally understand that. That your job on a football field is to hit another person, like that's your job. Then, you walk off the field, and it's like, "Oh, I am not supposed to hit another person when I walk off the field." So, I completely understand the idea of humanizing the perpetrator. The idea of figuring out different ways of communicating and channeling. Martha Palaez, who runs Family Violence Prevention Services, says the same things. We have to understand the perpetrator in order to get to get a more systemic way of fixing where we are at. I am intrigued by the fact that you used "toxic masculinity." There was a commercial that came out--

JAMES: Gillette commercial.

MOLLY: (continues) Gillette commercial was *so good!* And then, there was a giant backlash. Like, not all men are toxic masculinity. I was like, oooh, me think you doth protest too much. Like if you immediately take that back and are offended or triggered, as you used, it speaks more about you than it does necessarily about the other person or what you might be offended.

JAMES: That's true. (25:07)

MOLLY: So, I say to you, I get it. We are in with the understanding perpetrator. We humanize that person, so we know who that person is. What else do we need to know about your work? (25:21)

JAMES: Um, so as you talked about, my role on a college campus, right. For an athlete, we talk about resources. So, at St. Philip's College and Alamo Colleges, Mike Flores has put out a charge to bring advocacy centers to all five campuses. Those advocacy centers are going to address core competencies to help us understand the needs of our students: food insecurity, housing, transportation, mental health. We also live in a space where the military is here. One thing that happens, and this is just an intimate story, not necessarily on all campuses, but how many students do we have that live at home with those that may be suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder? And then, what does that look like in terms of how we communicate with students, and then how that student then communicates with their peers? And then, as we begin to talk about poverty, we also have to talk about healthcare. So, if we have individuals growing up in poverty, how accessible is health care for those individuals? If health care is not accessible, mental health is not as accessible. As we begin to want to address domestic violence and sexual assault, as we begin to want to humanize violent and aggressive behavior that are not necessarily



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predicated specifically towards men, there are women in today's society that identify with violent and aggressive behaviors. And so, what we have to begin to do is get into intimate spaces with students, our students at Alamo Colleges, to really understand who they are cognitively, what their goals are, we can provide the most resources for those individuals. So, I think that's the space that we have, and the power behind the students at Alamo Colleges. [\(27:12\)](#)

MOLLY: I want to make sure we put a bow tie, and a call to action. What I hear you say specifically is, if we stay in our spaces of just, this is the thing I am working on, and we don't think about how they are interconnected in some capacity, that if we don't start asking, "What do our students need?" or "What does the community we serve need from us?", and then pivot to make that occur, that we miss out on getting people where they need to be. So if your job at a college is to help a student get through college and succeed in life, so we can reach our goal of 50% college attainment and see a \$1.4 billion economic return to our community, etc., etc., etc., then we are missing our calling and what we are really doing.

JAMES: That is 100% correct. [\(27:59\)](#)

MOLLY: So, I guess it feels overwhelming to think, "how do I support one student who may need 55 things surrounding them because San Antonio is such a complex community with complex people who live in it?" So, what is the thing that I can do as a person listening that says, "I'm ready. I can jump in. I can put my toes in the water and create a ripple." What's that thing?

JAMES: Volunteer. Volunteer at the organization. In the SA2020 Impact Report, there is a number to increase the number of individuals that volunteer. This is highly important. We have a lot of grassroots organizations that are addressing the needs in the immediate community. Identify an organization that you see some value in-- arts, domestic violence, right, agriculture—and spend time with that organization, address that one need. That will essentially help reduce acts of violence. It will address poverty. It will talk about or promote food insecurities by just being able to provide more resources to people based on the extra time that you have. [\(29:17\)](#)

MOLLY: I love that. That's perfect. In fact, you can read more about everything you heard today on the podcast at klrn.org/thestorygoes. We will have links to places you can volunteer. Obviously, make sure you know more about the work that's happening over at St. Philip's College, across the board at Alamo Colleges. I think that there are some fantastic things that you have done in the short time that you've been here. You are now a member of the San Antonio community.

JAMES: Thank you. [\(29:50\)](#)

MOLLY: We are not letting you go back to Chicago. It will continue to stay warmer here. That's all I'm saying.



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JAMES: I believe that.

MOLLY: I'm glad that you're here. Thank you so much for joining us. We, of course, will be back with another podcast. This is number three. We are three deep. That's what we've got so far. So, of course, anything that you have to come back to us with any suggestions or comments, we will gladly welcome them. Again, it's klrn.org/thestorygoes. James, seriously, thank you so much for doing this. And thank you for the work that you're doing. And I apparently owe Mike Flores another \$20 because I talked nicely about him. I hope he talks nicely about me as well. That's why I pay him. That's The Story Goes for today. (30:36)



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