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# Goldlist draws strength from past turmoil in mentoring at-risk youth

By Peter Small, AdvocateDaily.com



Contributor



Toronto criminal lawyer [Jordana Goldlist](#) is mentoring young women and girls who have experienced gender-based violence, helping them overcome and even draw strength from their adversity.

“You can’t erase what happened,” says Goldlist, principal of [JHG Criminal Law](#). “It’s a terrible experience. But if you dwell on that fact and always live under the burden of being a ‘victim,’ then you don’t ever get to be anything other than a victim.”

Goldlist is leading workshops for The PEACE Project (Peer Education and Connection Through Empowerment), which aims to improve resiliency and promote healthy outcomes for female-identifying youth who have experienced any form of gender-based violence.

The project is run by Covenant House, an organization that helps at-risk, trafficked, and homeless youth.

Goldlist is volunteering as part of her ongoing commitment to disadvantaged young people that began after she overcame homelessness as a teenager, went on to finish high school and university, and established a successful criminal law practice.

“What’s the point of me experiencing that as a teenager and coming through it and living well today if I can’t help other people do that as well?” she asks.

It’s her fourth year with Covenant House. Goldlist started as a youth mentor in the CIBC Rights of Passage program. She then went on to lead workshops with various agencies, which brought her to The PEACE Project.

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“It’s been fantastic,” Goldlist tells [AdvocateDaily.com](#). “It’s a great group of women each time. They are so motivated, so positive, and just trying to do something different with their lives in the face of real adversity.”

Participants come from a variety of backgrounds. Some are struggling, while others are more established in their lives, she says.

“They all come to the group with a different set of facts behind them. It is incredible to see different people connecting through one common theme and trying to help each other and themselves in the process.”

One of Goldlist's PEACE workshops was for refugees fleeing violence in other countries.

“And it was amazing to see the energy of these women who really just wanted a sense of hope and safety and security to build new lives for themselves,” she says.

Goldlist starts each session by introducing herself and outlining her struggles as a street youth.

“I’ve been through group homes and homelessness. I dropped out of high school for three years and struggled to get back into what is ‘regular life,’” she says. “More importantly, I talk about where I am in my life today and how I’ve used the negative experiences in order to advance myself.”

Her theme, Goldlist says, is how to draw transferable skills from major disadvantages. “If you can pull a skill set from what’s ordinarily looked upon as an obstacle, it’s really not an obstacle anymore,” she says.

Goldlist believes even an experience as horrific as gender-based violence can later be turned into an advantage.

“That’s not to say that anyone ever wants to experience gender-based violence,” she says. “But having the strength to persevere in the face of overwhelming adversity is an invaluable life skill.”

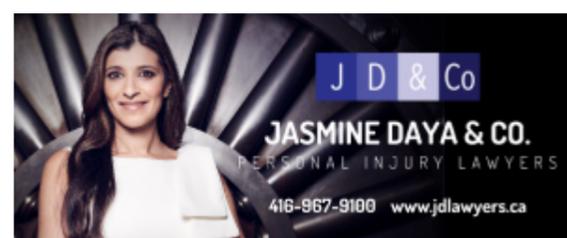
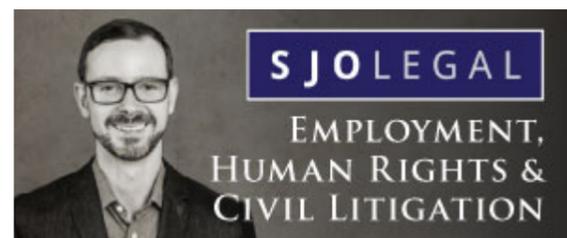
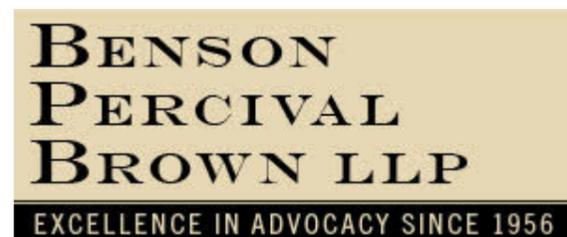
Goldlist has delivered a similar message to young victims of sex trafficking. Nothing they face in the future will likely be as terrifying as being forced to have sex with a stranger, she tells them.

So, in future, when they encounter life’s more mundane challenges, such as job interviews, they can steel themselves with the thought: “Nothing can scare me because I’ve already been through such terror,” Goldlist says.

It’s a frame of mind that can be adopted by anyone who has overcome adversity, she adds. Her struggles as a young person are a far cry from the upbringing experienced by some of her more privileged colleagues, but she made it work.

“For years, I looked at my history as a disadvantage,” Goldlist says. “I’ve lived through so much that ought to have scared me, and I got through it. You swallow the fear and do what you need to do for survival.”

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