**Name of Project: R.O.O.T.S of Sunflower County**

**Date of Interview: June 24, 2016**

**Location of Interview: Sunflower, Ms (Sunflower Freedom Project)**

**Name of Interviewer(s): Jawaski Gardner**

**Name of Interviewee(s): Melanie Powell**

**Name of file used for transcription** (audio and/or video file): Audio File (Melanie Powell)

**[0:13] JG:** Are you from Sunflower County?

**[0:15] MP:** No, I’m not from Sunflower County.

**[0:18] JG:** Where did you reside before moving to Sunflower County?

**[0:22] MP:** I resided in Cleveland, Ohio for 22 years before prior to coming to sunflower county but I went to school and spent summers over at the county over, Leflore County.

**[0:36] JG:** What made you come to Sunflower County?

**[0:43] MP:** Actually I decided to move back to Mississippi from Cleveland, Ohio 2 ½ years ago when I saw there was a position open at the Mississippi Center for Justice so I applied for the job and I got it as the Program Manager for the Sunflower County United for Children Collaborative.

**[0:58] JG:** How do you feel uhm about Sunflower County’s crime rate?

**[1:00] MP:** I think just like with any other city or community it needs to be addressed but it also needs to be some preventative measures put in place and alternatives uhm for people to have jobs so that they won’t be crime as they only means of income.

**[1:20] JG:** Do you feel that the lack of jobs and the lack of opportunities is pushing them to do the things that they do.

**[1:35] MP:** I don’t condone crime but I do know that where you have lack of opportunities to jobs or resources you will get what you need the alternative way which is stealing or breaking into somebody else’s home to take what they have because you don’t have.

**[1:55] JG:** Do you think that young black men are more active in these crimes?

**[1:59] MP:** I think you have to look at the demographics. And that is where you have the majority of African American males, especially in Sunflower County, who are unemployed or underemployed. Then they are the target, but in all actuality they might not be the ones committing crimes. Race or gender does not determine who commits a crime. It’s based upon opportunity and access.

**[2:26] JG:** In our education system it was stated that uhm in the newspaper that I

read, that uhm every time a 3rd grader fails a test that they are building more prisons and they see if their failing that that’s how uhm many beds that they have to have in the prison. Do you feel that if they were lack building prisons and start building more jobs opportunities, would that better help the community?

**[2:55] MP:** I think that jobs will always help the community but as a community we have to help ourselves by encouraging our kids to do well in school and encouraging them to move forward so that prisons aren’t built and we have more resources for schools.

**[3:14] JG:** How do you feel about our education system and not only the education systembut uhm the young people as well.

**[3:30] MP:** I think that with the education system here in Sunflower county it needs to be improved. It is a new system because the school districts were consolidated. Uhm I think that unfortunately for the school system here there are not the resources that they require and need. Uhm as youth who are in the school system you all need to become active and engaged in your education and somethings as youth you all can demand. You can’t do well or succeed outside of Indianola if you don’t have access to resources that will make you be able to compete with people globally. So I think that youth need to be actively engaged in their education. What you need in school, what you want in school but also push uhm your parents and your teachers and hold them accountable for giving you a quality education.

**[4:24] JG:** Thank you for your time.