Solutions to Violence: Creating Safety Without Prisons or Police
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INTRODUCTION

As we continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of 2020’s racial justice uprisings, we have an enormous opportunity to shift our responses to violence in the United States in fundamental ways. Following a massive wave of civil unrest and community organizing, more people are questioning what we have been taught and what is practiced with regard to policing, incarceration, safety, and the way our society responds to violence.

Individually and collectively, we are wrestling with difficult truths about our criminal legal system, which leaves so many of us behind. Some local governments are asking whether they can reduce the budgets of police departments while keeping neighborhoods safe. Crime survivors are envisioning new methods of accountability. Grassroots groups and large nonprofits are working to transform the way society views healing and safety and are seeking inspiration and practical models for responding to harm.

At the same time, regressive responses to recent rises in gun violence across the country threaten to undermine the momentum toward meaningful solutions by reverting to a familiar, nearly exclusive reliance on law enforcement to respond to harm—an approach we have long known does not work and comes at extraordinary cost to people and our communities. In response, Common Justice created this report, Solutions to Violence: Creating Safety Without Prisons or Policing.

Solutions to Violence profiles 18 groups forging new paths to safety and healing that do not rely on the police or incarceration. The report uplifts restorative justice practitioners, community advocates, and other local leaders who are doing the day-to-day work needed to build stronger and healthier communities, help people heal, and hold those who cause harm responsible for their actions. In this report, readers will learn about a number of solutions, including these and many more:

- Restorative Response Baltimore’s Indigenous-based restorative approach to conflict and harm, which aids in community building and conflict resolution;

- The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention’s responses to violence which involve fostering community and hospital collaborations and advocating for systemic change;

- Advance Peace’s work to interrupt gun violence by creating transformational opportunities for young men of color.
Although the project participants represent a range of views and methods, they are all working to create a world where we radically reimagine the way we view harm and the routes we pursue to address it.

The people and groups described in this report are all highly respected in the anti-violence field for their creativity, passion, and impact. We cover a lot of ground in this report, but it is not—and does not intend to be—a comprehensive summary of everyone who is contributing to and creating safety beyond policing and incarceration. Across the country, countless others are doing this work, including many of our partners and teachers, who are generating and implementing long-standing and groundbreaking solutions. We view all of these practitioners and groups as part of our ever-growing network of peers, and we draw inspiration from them.

_Solutions to Violence_ is meant to help strengthen and grow our movement. The interviews here can provide insight into best practices for intervening in violence as it occurs, building viable models for accountability, centering survivors’ needs, and navigating the space between prison abolition and justice reform.

Some readers may want to focus on creating safety beyond policing and prisons but lack models that are culturally relevant to their community. Others may be developing and implementing models themselves and are looking to expand their scope of practice. Still others may be advocating for new policy solutions and need examples of what we are asking legislators to build and fund. However people use this report, our hope is that it serves those who are doing the difficult work of navigating violence, harm, safety, and accountability in ways that embody the principle that no human being is disposable.
Devone Boggan
Founder and CEO, Advance Peace

“Advance Peace interrupts gun violence in American urban neighborhoods by providing transformational opportunities to young men involved in lethal firearm offenses and placing them in a high-touch, personalized fellowship—the Peacemaker Fellowship®.”

—from Advance Peace’s website

INTRODUCTION

Advance Peace is a nonprofit organization that works in Oakland and Richmond, California. The organization considers retaliatory gun violence a grave problem in Black and Brown communities, and works through a racial justice lens to reduce firearm assaults that cause injury or death. Advance Peace aims to champion a solution to gun violence that does not rely on incarceration by working to transform the lives of those responsible for the violence. As DeVone Boggan says, “We do not rely on the tools of law enforcement or mass incarceration to produce healthier, safer, and more just communities.”

Prior to founding Advance Peace in 2016, DeVone served for more than eight years as the neighborhood safety director for the city of Richmond. In this role, he gained experience in reducing firearm assaults and associated injuries and deaths. DeVone relied on a street outreach strategy that hired formerly incarcerated people from impacted communities, something that was considered revolutionary at the time. He says that this role allowed him to gain a new understanding of the root causes of gun violence when he learned that a relatively small number of people were responsible for most of the shootings in Richmond.

DeVone says that although organizations can do great gang prevention and intervention work, when they focus on large groups of people, they may never engage a person who is likely to use a gun to harm someone. DeVone references research that shows that in Richmond, which was once considered the third-most-dangerous U.S. city, fewer than 30 people were responsible for 70 percent of the gun violence. During this time, he also learned that most of the people engaging in gun violence have a lot of unhealed trauma. This knowledge led him to launch Advance Peace.
Since its creation in 2016, Advance Peace’s work has revolved around the Peacemaker Fellowship, a program designed with the understanding that people who engage in gun violence need a legitimate and credible platform to change their lives. DeVone says that every intervention Advance Peace pursues is evidence-based.

One intervention is the Advance Peace Fellowship program, which provides intensive 18-month paid fellowships to young people at the core of gun violence hostilities. Each fellow creates a life map, a tool that helps people develop short, medium, and long-term goals. Advance Peace refers fellows to social service organizations in the cities where they live and beyond, and helps them navigate the services offered.

The organization also gives fellows a “life map milestone allowance,” an opportunity for people to earn up to a thousand dollars a month. Their payment is determined by using the goals that fellows identified in their life maps, and represents a form of partnership between them and Advance Peace. Before COVID-19, fellows also participated in transformative travel, allowing them to relax while breaking out of the everyday scenery of their lives. DeVone points out that vacation often serves as a form of therapy for middle-class people, an opportunity lacking for most Advance Peace fellows, who are typically unemployed or low-income earners. Through their travels, fellows have a chance to meet with community leaders from other localities and develop bonds with one another. By seeing other fellows in a new environment, they are often able to mend broken relationships and work through conflict.

Advance Peace provides technical support to 21 U.S. cities to help them create healthy and safe communities. The organization builds partnerships with the city council in each location; those legislative bodies must commit to funding a portion of the work done in their city. If the partnership effectively reduces gun violence in a city by 50 percent over a five year period or less, the city council is asked to commit to implementing Advance Peace’s strategy for an additional three years.

DeVone says Advance Peace defines violence as “any lethal firearm attempt at someone else’s life.” Although violence is not limited to firearms, the organization focuses on retaliatory firearm assault and associated injuries and deaths. DeVone believes that each instance of gun violence stems from another instance of gun violence, along with broader society not addressing violence effectively: “What we’re seeing in our communities is a reflection of an accumulated effect of not addressing violence, particularly gun violence in urban Black and Brown communities, over a long period of time.” Advance Peace staff engage survivors daily within their work. They have found that most fellows who have participated in gun violence are survivors of gun violence themselves.
CHALLENGES

DeVone says that one of the biggest challenges in Advance Peace’s work is a lack of public understanding about the people the organization serves. Some people also struggle to understand why a city would spend more than $30,000 a year on each fellow’s participation in the program when they believe that those participants should be in jail. DeVone argues that investing in fellows and paying them to participate saves cities money in the long run. This lack of understanding can lead to tension between the organization and law enforcement.

VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Advance Peace is in the process of building out national programs. DeVone envisions a future in which the organization is establishing programs in more cities across the country. Advance Peace is already seeing more organizations use some of its fellowships’ elements in their work. The group is also working toward a future where society will better understand how to best engage the most “dangerous” individuals while reducing mass incarceration. As DeVone says, “Unless we better and more effectively address violent crime, we will never effectively achieve our reduced mass incarceration outcomes.”

With this knowledge, Advance Peace is working to transform the criminal legal system to prevent gun violence and end the community-to-prison pipeline. DeVone thinks it is important for his organization to be remembered as one that understood and opened themselves up to appreciating the importance of people who are responsible for gun violence, who are often also survivors themselves. He says that Advance Peace’s work is about empowering communities of color where gun violence is having a significant impact on people’s ability to thrive in peace. He believes the reduction of gun violence will result. “We know that communities impacted by gun violence have essential expertise,” he says. “These individuals can help us produce safety and help us facilitate the healing in these communities often harmed by a vicious cycle of gun violence.”
DANIELLE SERED
FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COMMON JUSTICE

“Common Justice develops and advances solutions to violence that transform the lives of those harmed and foster racial equity without relying on incarceration. In New York City, we operate the first alternative-to-incarceration and victim-service program in the United States that focuses on violent felonies in the adult courts. Locally and nationally, we leverage the lessons from our direct service to transform the justice system through partnerships, advocacy, and elevating the experience and power of those most impacted.”

-from Common Justice's website

INTRODUCTION

In Brooklyn and the Bronx, Common Justice works with young people (16-26) who commit violent crime and those they harm. To ensure that our local work with survivors serves as a catalyst for broader reform, we operate policy and organizing work, United for Healing Equity. In our communications work, Common Justice is committed to telling the truth about violence—about the people who survive it, the people who cause it, and the strategies that will work to end it.

ADDRESSING VIOLENCE

At Common Justice, violence is seen not only as an interpersonal problem, but also as a structural, historical, and cultural problem. We live in a society in which violence is systematically normalized, particularly against people of color, women, and LGBTQIA+ people. According to Danielle, “while Common Justice is a program that is in many ways based on and dependent on individual agency, it is both dishonest and irresponsible to try to make sense of individual behavior independent of the broader context of structural oppression.”

Nearly all poor communities bear the brunt of policy choices that have nurtured violence. In communities of color, the detrimental impact of these policies is amplified by historical and current racialized injustices. These harms included colonization, continued with slavery and its more proximate counterpart, convict leasing, appear in financial practices such as redlining, and persist today in the criminal legal system and other systems. Those institutions and policies were and are supported by widespread violence rarely met with punishment and often met with the tacit or active sanction of government and police.
Exacerbating the divestment from, harm to, and under-protection of communities of color is a concurrent investment in unevenly applied law enforcement. This means that at strikingly disproportionate rates, communities of color pay for the justice system’s failures.

Structural factors—like poverty, inequity, divestment from social infrastructure, and a criminal legal system that causes further harm—are the most significant drivers of violence, and not only does incarceration fail to interrupt these drivers, it intensifies them. Incarceration fails not only structurally, but also on the individual level, where violence is driven by shame, isolation, exposure to violence, and an inability to meet one’s economic needs—factors that are also the core features of imprisonment. This means that the core national violence prevention strategy relies on a tool that has as its basis the central drivers of violence.

Common Justice engages young adults and those they have harmed. If the harmed parties agree, these cases are diverted into a restorative justice process, or “circle,” that gives participants the power and opportunity to collectively identify and address impacts, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible. In the restorative justice circle, all parties come to terms on agreements other than incarceration to hold the responsible party accountable in ways that are meaningful to the person harmed.

Staff closely monitors responsible parties’ compliance with the agreements—which may include extensive community service, vocational and educational programming, leadership development, and restitution, among other commitments unique to each case—and connects the harmed parties with appropriate support. These agreements replace the lengthy prison sentences that responsible parties would otherwise have served, and the felonies are removed from their records when they complete the program. We work with a broad range of victims of all demographics, but crucial among them are the young men of color currently excluded from most services: a full 70 percent of our harmed parties are men of color.

Central to Common Justice’s model is a violence intervention curriculum, which takes place in hour-long one-on-one sessions over 12 to 15 months. Grounded in an understanding of structural violence, trauma, restorative justice, and the mental health consequences of exposure to violence, the curriculum integrates healing work, social and political education, explorations of anger and harm, and accountability practice into a transformative process that centers participants’ wisdom and supports their evolution and freedom.

At the same time that Common Justice works with those responsible for violence, our staff works extensively with our survivors/harmed parties for as long as they want to work with us to support their recovery by supporting their well-being and goals, inviting their
participation in the circle process, developing safety plans, engaging with them in their healing work, facilitating crime victims’ compensation from the state and restitution from the responsible parties, making referrals to mental and physical health services, and helping meet other needs.

**CHALLENGES**

As Danielle says, “The biggest misconception about applying restorative justice to serious violence is that survivors oppose it. We survivors want to be safe. But that does not always mean we want prison.” For instance, a full 90 percent of survivors who have been given the choice of seeing the person who harmed them incarcerated or seeing them take part in Common Justice have chosen Common Justice. All of these survivors are people who participated in the criminal legal system. They are among the less than half of victims who called the police and are part of the even smaller subgroup who continued their engagement through the grand jury process. They are people who initially chose a path that could lead to prison. They are people who have suffered serious violence—knives to their bodies, guns to their heads, lacerations to their livers, punctured lungs.

Even among these survivors, when another option is offered, the vast majority choose something other than that very incarceration they were initially pursuing. Ninety percent is a stunning number given the story we have been told about what survivors want. And the reality it points to may not be as obvious as it appears. Some certainly choose an alternative process for the reasons we think of first—compassion, forgiveness, the belief that people can change, an experience having caused harm to themselves or having loved someone who did, a desire to be part of transformation. But most are simply more practical. According to Danielle, “Most choose Common Justice because they believe something other than incarceration stands a better chance of meeting their short- and long-term needs for safety and justice, and for ensuring that others won’t experience the same suffering that they did.”

**VIEWS ON POLICING**

Danielle thinks some people who are concerned that defunding the police will lead to a rise in violence fundamentally misunderstand what most policing does: a recent study found that an average of 4 percent of police time was spent addressing violent crime. What’s more, fewer than half of crime survivors call the police in the first place. “That is largely because survivors, based on their lived experience and that of their loved ones, judge that the current system cannot be relied on to bring them safety in the aftermath of harm,” Danielle says.
This means that primary reliance on law enforcement begins with the complete exclusion of a full half of people it is meant to protect—and that’s before we even get to the adverse treatment by police of many survivors of color, immigrant survivors, LGBTQIA+ survivors, survivors with disabilities, and others who experience discrimination, dismissiveness of their pain, baseless cross-complaint arrests, and further violence when they do call for help.

Danielle also points out that involving the police in a case does not by any means guarantee its resolution. Many cities have low homicide clearance rates (typically considered the portion of homicides resolved by arrests), not for lack of resources, but because of the lack of trust that survivors and people who witness harm have in the police, whom they often experience more as an occupying army than as a source of protection. As Danielle describes it: “Safety is not produced primarily by force. Safety is produced by resources, by connection, by equity, and by reciprocal accountability among neighbors.” As she sees it, the vision of a society that does not rely on policing or on prisons as its primary response to harm is not mostly a vision of less, but a vision of more. It is a vision where the space freed up by the staged withdrawal of the criminal legal system is filled instead with what has been available all along but rarely invested in.

In Danielle’s view, “This vision of safety, to be fully realized, includes and requires the redistribution of resources from the criminal penal methods to more productive, reliable measures of producing safety: investments in health care, in education, in housing, in living wages, in violence interrupters and intergenerational interventions that draw on the moral authority of those most respected by their neighbors, in conflict resolution and restorative and transformative justice, and in a social service infrastructure and safety net that “in time will render enforcement not just less dominant, but obsolete.”

**VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

Danielle and her colleagues at Common Justice hope to see the vast expansion of aligned interventions for violence, both alongside and separate from the criminal legal system, all over the country. “We think it’s important that we are remembered as a catalytic contributor to the movement,” she says, “not a builder of empires.”
“Cure Violence is guided by clear understandings that violence is a health issue, that individuals and communities can change for the better, that community partners and strategic partnerships are keys to success, and that rigorous, scientific, professional ways of working are essential for effectiveness. Cure Violence’s mission is to reduce violence globally using disease control and behavior change methods.”

—from the Cure Violence website

INTRODUCTION

Until April 2021, Lori Toscano was the executive director of program innovation at Cure Violence Global, working closely with communities and cities since 2015 to implement health-based violence intervention approaches. She defines her past work at Cure Violence as identifying whether programming fits the local context where it is being implemented, making sure that the correct people are at the table, and making sure that work is community-led and community-driven. Lori says the bulk of her work focused on supporting community sites.

Cure Violence staff provide training and technical assistance to people on the ground so that they’re able to work efficiently and effectively and become members of a large peer-learning network. This network allows them to learn how to navigate challenges and provides a space for them to celebrate successes.

Cure Violence was founded in 1995 by Dr. Gary Slutkin, a medical doctor and epidemiologist who had previously worked at the World Health Organization (WHO) on ending tuberculosis, Ebola, and HIV/AIDS. After traveling the world, he returned home to Chicago, where he identified violence as one of the biggest issues facing his city. He thought about ways that the WHO’s methods for stopping transmission of diseases could be effective in ending violence, and he soon created Cure Violence.

The organization primarily serves community-level practitioners. To start the process, a local government agency or other organization contacts Cure Violence to learn more about its intervention model and determine whether the model is a good fit for them.
If the group agrees to a partnership, Cure Violence staff provide the group training, technical assistance, and access to a peer-learning network with all of the organization’s sites across the country and worldwide.

ADDRESSING VIOLENCE

Lori says that Cure Violence primarily approaches violence as a behavior. She says it’s important to move away from the idea that there are good and bad people, and focus instead on the health and science of violence. She believes that violence is a behavior that is learned and transmitted from one person to another, based on exposure and systemic harm done to communities over a long period.

Cure Violence’s work involves the principle that people are traumatized after witnessing violence—and to prevent and manage that trauma, they must think about violence the way they think about other health issues. Lori emphasizes that trauma is experienced through multiple forms of violence, including violence within the home, media exposure, and state-sanctioned violence. But just as violence can be learned, she and her colleagues believe it can be unlearned.

Cure Violence’s approach includes communities envisioning what safety looks like and leading efforts to build safety. Lori says that resources like healthy food, access to housing, mental and physical health services, and substance use services are important parts of preventing violence. She also says that communities need access to transformative and restorative justice practices because “It’s about thinking about healing, and what it looks like for everyone to have the space and capacity to heal.”

The organization pushes for more systems to be community-led, with a commitment to addressing the root causes of issues. By using the WHO’s methods, Cure Violence focuses on people who are at the highest risk for involvement in violence, then mobilizes communities to change norms that often support violence.

Lori says that Cure Violence values its connections with community-based organizations that focus on frontline work. Staff work with credible messengers, violence interrupters, outreach workers, and city agencies and other organizations. Lori estimates that 90 percent of the Cure Violence staff have been involved in violence in some way during their lives. Staff members include people who have caused harm and those who have been harmed, with many people having had both experiences.

Lori thinks it is important for people closest to the issue of violence to lead the organization’s work, because they are able to connect with others in a positive way,
especially beyond the prison system. She points out that accountability doesn’t always need to lead to incarceration. To be accountable for their violence, people need to focus on unlearning behaviors and identifying different choices they can make in the future. With the Cure Violence model, “creating safer communities doesn’t have to be just the system’s responsibility,” Lori says.

**CHALLENGES**

Although there has been a shift in how violence is viewed and treated, Lori says that many people still respond by thinking first about enforcement and suppression as methods for keeping communities safe. She says that because communities have a fear of being unsafe, it is an uphill battle to get people to think about violence differently. She also says that getting people to invest in funding projects long term is important for community change.

Cure Violence’s qualitative data on the success of its models may help change the minds of people who are skeptical. For example, an independent evaluation found a 63 percent reduction in gun violence after the South Bronx implemented the Cure Violence model. Lori thinks that because Cure Violence tackles violence through a public health lens, people who have experienced violence are passionate about its work.

**VIEWS ON POLICING**

When asked how policing keeps communities safe, Lori argues that the institution of policing isn’t meant to build actual safety. She acknowledges that some instances of violence may not occur because of police presence, but points out that violence interrupters and community health workers also help prevent violence.

Cure Violence focuses on building communities where responses to violence aren’t solely viewed as police’s responsibility. Although the organization doesn’t prioritize reforming or abolishing the police, staff provide data on interventions that stand to succeed as part of efforts to minimize police presence. Cure Violence is committed to partnership and showing others that “there’s a different way, and solutions are available beyond the criminal justice system.”

**VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

Looking ahead, Lori hopes that the way society views and treats violence will change significantly. She hopes more people will continue to recognize violence as a behavior...
that can be learned and unlearned. She also hopes more people will take the steps to heal from trauma that comes from systemic oppression. Cure Violence aims to have more funding within five years; Lori and her colleagues hope that other groups working to end violence without relying on suppression also have access to funding. Lori says research is “showing that it [Cure Violence] actually works, and that it's helping in a way that's different from just relying on carceral systems.”
“In keeping with the principles of restorative justice—which seeks to honor and heal every person affected by crime, even the perpetrators—the Center incites change in individuals from the inside out. Catering to young men with criminal backgrounds, their mothers who are burdened with the grief of their lifestyle choices, and children who have experienced the traumas commonly associated with violence, the Center programs nurture spirit, strive for resolution, and foster healing victim by victim, offender by offender, person by person.”

—from the Center’s website

INTRODUCTION

Lisa Daniels was born and raised in Chicago, where she still resides. After losing her son to gun violence in July 2012, she established the Darren B. Easterling Center for Restorative Practices (the Center). The Center was founded as a behavioral health service organization to serve communities of color in Chicago that have been drastically impacted by experiences with gun violence. Lisa wanted to get to the core of the behavior that society teaches us and which perpetuates violence as a whole. Lisa also holds other leadership roles within and beyond her community, among them serving on the Illinois Prisoner Review Board, a governor-appointed position.

The Center’s creation was part of an effort to end cycles of violence without relying on the criminal legal system. In recent years, the organization has broadened its focus and is planning a new structure for its work. It will continue focusing on encouraging behavioral change, but not as a direct service provider. Instead, the group will work on building projects and services other organizations can use to bring about change in their communities.

ADDRESSING VIOLENCE

Lisa believes that violence is often a result of an individual trying to have their needs met. Through working with people who are incarcerated, Lisa has observed how cycles of violence play out. The people she works with are often survivors of similar types of violence that they inflicted on other people. She also thinks society often overlooks the more subtle forms of violence that aren’t only physical.
To Lisa, safety looks like everyone being able to have their needs met. It also means knowing that if she calls the police, they will respond in the way she needs. She feels safe within her small community of friends, and with the knowledge that her neighbors will look out for her if anything should happen.

The Center prevents violence by helping people identify and address their own trauma, as well as offering opportunities and resources. The organization’s community partners include Northwestern University and the Chicago Board of Education. Through their partnership with Northwestern, the Center is working on an intervention model for women of color who have been impacted by the loss of a loved one through incarceration or gun violence. Through their work with the Chicago Board of Education, the Center has rolled out a program that gives teachers space to process the vicarious trauma they experience due to the work they do with young people who are reeling from the violence they witness and endure on a day-to-day basis.

**CHALLENGES**

Lisa says the hardest part of her work is coming into contact with women who have experienced trauma similar to what she has endured but who don’t “see a way beyond the pain of that experience.” Because of the criminal legal system’s hold on society, Lisa says that many people mistakenly believe that restorative justice does not involve accountability, so they may not see its value in addressing pain and loss.

**VIEWS ON POLICING**

Because police forces are entities that are in place to respond to criminal behavior, Lisa doesn’t view them as contributing to safety. She thinks police would be more effective if they focused more on prevention. She says that the Center is not part of the broader push to defund, reform, or abolish the police, but believes that other systems can better respond to mental health crises.

**VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

Lisa thinks our society’s belief system needs to change from one that is punitive to one that is rooted in restoration. She would like the Center to be remembered as an organization that came forth out of a need to rewrite a narrative for her son, and it “actually ended up being a catalyst for rewriting a narrative for every individual it touched in its tenure.”

*Solutions to Violence: How to Create Safety Without Prisons or Policing*
M ADAMS
CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FREEDOM INC.

“Freedom Inc. engages low- to no-income communities of color in Dane County, Wisconsin. Their mission is to “achieve social justice through coupling direct services with leadership development and community organizing that will bring about social, political, cultural, and economic change resulting in the end of violence against women, gender-non-conforming and transgender folks, and children within communities of color.”

—from Freedom Inc.’s website

INTRODUCTION

Freedom Inc., a nonprofit based in Madison, Wisconsin, does local and national work to end violence against low-income Black and Southeast Asian communities. The organization works primarily with Black, Hmong, and Cambodian women, girls, Queer, Trans, and Intersex people. Its work focuses on interpersonal violence such as sexual assault and sexual violence, but also systemic and institutional expressions of violence such as colonialism, capitalism, and the cis-heteropatriarchy.

M describes three approaches that Freedom Inc. uses to support the people they work with. First, staff provides culturally specific direct services to people who are survivors of gender-based violence, and works directly with people who have been in abusive relationships or have experienced sexual assault, incest, child abuse, or other abuse. Staff helps people mitigate the harm they have experienced and create opportunities to live differently as best as possible.

The second approach involves helping survivors (described above) see the connection between their personal problems and broader social issues. M says that survivors are trained to advocate for themselves and their loved ones. They are also trained on organizing and how to read and interpret policy.

Third, Freedom Inc. runs grassroots campaigns that target the root causes of violence. Examples of previous campaigns include work to ensure housing for Black Queer survivors, closing jails and prisons, defunding the police, and fighting for COVID-19 relief and community gardens. M says, “We focus our energies and efforts and measure our success by the power building of our communities—and less on the specific issue in which we’ve intervened.”
Freedom Inc. defines violence as anything done that seeks to harm, kill, take away, or weaken people’s ability to live and thrive. M says that violence shows up in a variety of ways: “It can be physical. It can be somebody literally beating you or caging you, like police officers and prisons. It can be the kind of daily terror that many women and girls and queer, trans, and intersex folks face because of patriarchy.” She also believes that violence takes place from abuse by partners and neglect from the state, citing Hurricane Katrina and inaction on global warming as examples.

M says Freedom Inc.’s mission is to end all forms of violence; its philosophy is that safety embodies consent culture, ending rape culture, and fighting for reproductive justice and bodily autonomy. She says that safety looks like individuals and collectives having the ability to determine what will happen in their lives, and having access to material resources and to groups working to abolish the structures that prevent people from having those resources. M states that safety must be pan-African and achieved through a global struggle for liberation.

According to M, some violence takes place between people with similar amounts of power, known as horizontal violence. Other violence occurs when one individual has significantly more power than the other: this is vertical violence. M says that when institutional violence exists, along with the creation of a social construct like race, we end up with events like the transatlantic slave trade.

To fight all forms of violence, Freedom Inc. supports a movement led by those who have survived it. Staff help people think of their survivorship as a political identity. Through leadership development, survivors can build campaigns that allow people to fight for specific issues, but also against systems. M emphasizes an intersectional approach, so that campaign members are able to connect various struggles with one another.

Freedom Inc.’s partners include the Movement for Black Lives and the Southeast Asian Freedom Network.

All of Freedom Inc.’s staff members are survivors themselves, and that makes it especially challenging to witness the violence that other people experience. One way they address that is by aiming to create joy and connection in their work. And the organization isn’t trying to end domestic violence within one family, but to abolish it entirely. M says...
“We are up against an empire, and there are forces that seek to destroy our movement, which includes destroying us.”

**VIEWS ON POLICING**

Freedom Inc. doesn't support the idea that policing keeps communities safe, and instead identifies it as a form of violence. Through their work with survivors, staff have learned that many survivors don't believe police are an effective solution for ending sexual violence and are looking for other supportive structures. Freedom Inc. does not fight for police reform, but supports some shifts that organizers can fight for to improve people's lives before police are abolished.

As M says, “We don't focus our energies on training the police. We don't think we can make them better.” Because of the power police hold, Freedom Inc. takes the position that there are no opportunities for relationships with police departments. The group focuses instead on fighting for cuts to the police budget and for community control of the police. Freedom Inc.’s vision is to build power and determine how the system of police will be dismantled, and to make sure that other oppressive systems do not take their place.

**VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

Freedom Inc. has a goal of developing more Black, Brown, female, Trans, and Intersex leaders to lead community campaigns and resistance work. Freedom Inc. seeks to change the culture of criminalization, as well as structures that produce the criminalization of Black youth in particular. The organization plans to launch a new gender justice housing campaign in the months ahead, with hopes of winning community control over land.
FATIMAH LOREN DREIER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE HEALTH ALLIANCE FOR VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

“To heal communities affected by violence, the Health Alliance for Violence Intervention (HAVI) fosters hospital and community collaborations to advance equitable, trauma-informed care and violence intervention and prevention programs.”

—from the HAVI’s website

INTRODUCTION

The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention (HAVI) was founded in 2009 and has grown into a national organization with offices in a number of cities, including Philadelphia, Jersey City, Los Angeles, and Boston. The organization has a diverse staff who live throughout the country. The HAVI is working to build a national network of hospital-based violence intervention programs (HVIPs), which provide services for victims of violent crime while they are recovering from their injuries to reduce the likelihood that they commit gun violence or are victimized in the future.

In 1989, a young Black man in Oakland named Sherman Spears became paralyzed from a gunshot wound. As he recovered in the hospital, he realized that the doctors and nurses treated only his physical wounds and could not address the profound work he needed to do to transform his life. When he was well enough to be discharged, Sherman returned to the hospital to talk with other survivors of violence and offer connection and support, leveraging his credibility in the community.

At the time, Sherman was a participant in the Oakland-based organization Youth ALIVE! In 1994, he launched Caught in the Crossfire, the country’s first HVIP. Other cities soon began replicating the HVIP model to better serve violently injured patients and help them heal and transform their lives. In March 2009, Marla Becker, then the director of Youth ALIVE!, convened 30 medical directors, program directors, board chairs, and clinicians to begin a dialogue about the key components and best practices of successful HVIPs. At the end of the two-day symposium, the National Network of Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs was born, made up of eight programs throughout the country. In 2019, that network became the HAVI.
The HAVI heals cycles of systemic and interpersonal violence through the development of hospital-based violence intervention programs. With the goal of ending violence, the HAVI’s work is grounded in an evidence-based public health approach. At the individual level, the organization works to reduce the factors that put someone at high risk for experiencing or engaging in violence, linking violently injured people to resources such as mental health services, job training, and housing. At the community level, the HAVI connects hospitals with community resources and organizations to foster healthy communities as a whole. At a societal level, the HAVI advocates for greater funding and support for violence intervention programs.

Among the HAVI’s community partners are survivors, community leaders, health care providers, researchers, policymakers, and students. The organization has always collaborated with survivors of violence and aims to amplify their voices and empower them to become leaders in their communities. Survivors of violence and formerly incarcerated people serve on the HAVI’s board, its racial equity task force, and the planning committee for its annual conference.

The HAVI network has grown to support the hundreds of professionals—violence intervention specialists, physicians, nurses, therapists, and researchers—who are affiliated with its member and emerging programs in roughly 85 cities (with 40 member programs and 45 emerging programs) across the country and in the United Kingdom and El Salvador. The HAVI works to shift narratives around community violence and highlight the systemic inequalities that increase the likelihood that a community will be disproportionately affected by violence. The organization also works with its members to advance policy and research that address violence as a public health emergency, and hosts the largest annual conference on violence intervention and prevention in the United States.

**ADDRESSING VIOLENCE**

The HAVI primarily serves boys and men of color, who are disproportionately impacted by violence, and the hundreds of community leaders and health care providers who serve them. The organization defines violence as the accumulation of historic and present-day harms that are further perpetuated by structural, racist, and interpersonal exchanges of harm. The HAVI maintains that violence robs people of their ability to contribute to their communities and recognize the power within themselves to create the change their communities need. The organization acknowledges that intentional and interpersonal acts of harm and injury occur within the context of systemic racism and historical trauma.
As Fatimah shares, from the HAVI's perspective, violence is the result of pervasive structural inequities for people of color, such as a lack of investment in neighborhood infrastructures, poor educational and employment opportunities, substandard housing, and barriers to accessing quality health care. She notes that while our society tends to focus on individual actors in situations of harm, in hospital settings this focus can mean missed opportunities to align with community healers and lead people who have experienced violence to a path where they can thrive long term.

According to the HAVI, safety manifests in different ways. On an individual level, safety looks like access to basic human necessities—food, housing, physical and mental health services, education, and meaningful employment. It also includes connection to social networks and community, collective accountability for addressing harm, and a sense of responsibility to restore wrongdoings.

On a larger scale, the HAVI's organizational work involves advocacy for structural changes that address the root causes of violence, and policies and systemic responses to violence that center racial justice, equity, and healing. During the COVID pandemic, the HAVI’s network has recognized the impact and burden of violence on frontline violence intervention workers, whose commitment involves both a professional and personal mission, as many of them have experienced violence themselves.

CHALLENGES

Fatimah says that one of the hardest parts of the work she and her colleagues do is witnessing the dehumanization of Black people who experience violence: “Too often, the default perspective is to blame Black people who present to emergency rooms with gunshot or stab wounds, instead of seeing them as people who deserve our deepest compassion and the highest quality care because they are bearing the burden of structural racism.” People in the communities where the HAVI works are traumatized by patterns of violence and harm that repeat again and again.

Frontline violence intervention workers bear an enormous burden as healers within the movement, and that pressure can lead to burnout. Many of them also work without the recognition they deserve, and, as Fatimah stresses, “without an adequate, livable wage, and without access to the necessary resources for professional growth and advancement.” The HAVI advocates to make such wages and resources available and fosters an invaluable community of practitioners. By centering people most impacted by violence, the HAVI builds platforms and pathways to empowerment where their voices are heard and equity and healing are centered.
Fatimah says that the history of policing as an institution fuels mass incarceration, and that policing has been a tool to protect white supremacy at the expense and exploitation of Black, Indigenous, and immigrant communities. As Fatimah describes, “Police and prisons do not meaningfully work to restore or repair harms, or even to serve justice, but rather exist to concentrate power toward private industry through the subjugation of the poor and those in society who are most vulnerable.”

From Fatimah’s perspective, police are unnecessarily used in situations that do not require physical force, but call instead for skillful navigation, de-escalation, and health and wellness resources. The HAVI has identified “racist policies and structures” that have led to the normalization of violent policing practices that in turn fuel mass incarceration. The lasting economic, social, and emotional impacts of incarceration can lead to disenfranchisement in communities for generations. She adds that in the HAVI network, “Our violence intervention specialists hold a range of perspectives—including defunding, reforming, and abolition—and we honor those perspectives through deep listening and conversation.”

The HAVI works to ensure that all those involved in the care of people who have experienced trauma understand the context and history of violence. The organization also believes unequivocally in the workforce of violence intervention specialists who are credible messengers, people the HAVI recognizes and supports as healers. Fatimah believes this work at both individual and structural levels can allow for a greater level of humanization and a deeper understanding of the root causes of violence.

Fatimah says that it is critical to engage in a national dialogue about ways to de-center police in responding to trauma in communities of color. She foresees a world where healing responses are adequately resourced and the structural conditions that generate violence are transformed.
IMPACT JUSTICE, CYMONE FULLER
CO-DIRECTOR OF THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROJECT AT IMPACT JUSTICE

Impact Justice was founded in 2015 “to create an organization that would imagine, innovate, and accept absolutely nothing about the status quo of our current justice system.” Its Restorative Justice Project is “the only national technical assistance and training project that partners with communities across the nation to address harm using pre-charge restorative justice diversion programs.”

— from Impact Justice’s website

INTRODUCTION

Cymone Fuller found her way to Impact Justice after spending most of her career working through a number of systems to disrupt the oppression of Black and Brown people. Working in education in her home state of Minnesota, she aimed to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and the disproportionate pushout of Black and Brown kids.

Since then, Cymone’s other workplaces focused on reforming the criminal legal system by building partnerships with actors in that system. Over the years, she became frustrated at the constraints placed on her solution-based work. Cymone said she was amazed at the resources that went toward tinkering with the system instead of giving money to communities to improve outcomes for people there. In her current position, she says she has the space to develop solutions and prioritize moving resources to communities.

Impact Justice is headquartered in Oakland, with offices in Washington, DC, and Los Angeles. A group of people who were working together on changing the criminal legal system decided to start their own organization. Impact Justice’s restorative justice diversion model was developed by sujatha baliga, the founding director of the Restorative Justice Project. The project works with partners across the United States to reduce youth criminalization through pre-charge restorative justice programs.

Relying on a restorative community conferencing model, Impact Justice provides training and technical assistance—such as organizational capacity building, regional convenings for practitioners and restorative justice diversion toolkits—to community organizations and system partners. The organization also evaluates data on the impact of programs; this helps establish the use of such diversion as an evidence-based alternative to criminalization. Impact Justice uses this data as proof that restorative justice works.
Through a restorative justice program to address and prevent instances of harm in Oakland/Alameda County, the founders of Impact Justice saw great outcomes. By bringing the Restorative Justice Project to Impact Justice, the organization focused on expanding and scaling this work in more places.

As co-director, Cymone helps support her team’s culture, through listening to team members' visions for the project and making sure that the work reflects those visions. She is also in charge of fundraising and seeking partners for the team. Project staff interact with people across the nation who hope to bring restorative justice diversion programs to their communities. As Cymone says, “We are impacting the system partners that are often our district attorney’s offices, even just to become familiar with restorative justice and understand the ways they need to shift their practice to make referrals to this program.”

**ADDRESSING VIOLENCE**

Cymone believes that many people think about violence in terms of “violent crime” as depicted by the criminal legal system, without taking a step back to understand violence on a deeper level. As she explains, “Violence is the act of asserting force, whether that be physical or power over somebody else or some other people, with the intention to harm them.” In Cymone’s community and the communities she works with, safety is about having a foundational set of needs met, “even just basic needs around housing and adequate nutrition and food and opportunity.” She maintains that safety also looks like connectedness, feeling a part of a community, and having ways to connect with others and knowing that people care for you.

The Restorative Justice Project engages survivors and lets them shape the restorative conversations. Survivors also identify needs to be met by the person who caused harm, in order to make things as right as possible.

Cymone says that using a restorative approach to address incidents of violence and harm is a method for preventing additional harm. The project intervenes when someone is arrested and before the incident moves through the court system. Participants who have experienced the process are able to tell others in their lives about the benefits of their experience with restorative justice, and this also helps reduce violence in the community.

The project aims to reduce violence by addressing its roots. Cymone believes unmet needs drive a large amount of violence, so she and her colleagues are passionate about creating programs that give people the space to feel comfortable and safe enough to say what they need.
impact Justice has a wide range of partners and collaborates with local organizations that work with impacted communities, these include Soul Sisters Leadership Collective in Miami-Dade County, Florida, Youth Arts and Self-Empowerment in Philadelphia, the Raphah Institute in Davidson County, Tennessee, RISE in Contra Costa County, California, Collective Justice in King County, Washington, and Community Works West in San Francisco and Alameda County, California.

**CHALLENGES**

Cymone says that one of the biggest challenges is doing this work “within a society that has not made the strides that would make restorative justice as powerful as it can be.” For example, she says that we need a broad, meaningful commitment to meet people’s basic needs, but we aren’t there yet as a country. This can impact the way harm shows up in communities. She says the people she meets in programs have unmet needs and complex experiences with trauma, coupled with oppression, and that can be overwhelming for one program to hold.

Another challenge is navigating criminal legal systems’ frameworks and protocols. Although partners in these systems refer people to restorative justice diversion, Cymone believes that some of those actors do not fully understand restorative justice core values or recognize the paradigm shift it offers. It is also challenging to measure the success of a restorative justice program, especially in a society that does not value certain people. Cymone says that many people try to assess these programs by using conventional metrics for the criminal legal system. She says that the Restorative Justice Project is trying to figure out the right balance of participation for system and community partners. They do not want to push anyone out, so they are helping people with power and control see and experience the benefits of restorative justice diversion programs.

A common misconception about restorative justice is that “It's the easier route,” Cymone says, “that it lets people off the hook for harm and won't make people significantly safe.” She says that practitioners recognize that it is harder to be truly accountable and do the hard work of making things right after causing someone harm. She adds, “When I say ‘hard,’ I mean hard in the way of doing meaningful things to actually create change. Not to minimize the experience of folks who go through the criminal legal system or become incarcerated; that is also hard, just in a different way.”
Cymone expresses concern that the ways police intervene during instances of violence often cause more harm, sometimes including more violence. She adds, “That's not even to say that they are interrupting violence all the time. There's so much violence happening and so much harm happening that doesn't even make its way to police or isn't prioritized by police.” From her perspective, policing doesn't provide a strategy for reducing violence.

Cymone believes that policing can provide some people psychological safety; because they may be able to call the police and not fear for their lives, they think of police as a resource. But she says more people are coming to grips with the fact that this resource is not available to everyone: “I think folks need to know that there is something that can help them when violence is happening. And I don't think that needs to be the police.” Cymone says that the more successful restorative justice programs become, the more we can reduce the number of police—and these programs can demonstrate that people already have the tools in their community to provide safety and heal harm.

In the years ahead, Cymone would love to see the expansion of restorative justice diversion programs in more places. She believes that as people become more aware of such approaches, they open themselves up to questions about how punitive and isolating our current criminal legal systems are. She thinks of restorative justice as a prime alternative strategy that holds the needs of people who are harmed and the needs of people who have caused harm in an equal way. Cymone would also love to see a shift in resources, with more going toward addressing community needs, as identified by people who have gone through restorative justice processes. She would also like to see a diversification of funding sources, and points out that if most funds are coming from the criminal legal system, that affects the work people engage in.
“We are tired of needless death and loss. We know the solutions to violence and know they live in and belong to the people. We have the relationships and skills to co-create safe, thriving community. This is the right formation at the right time.”

–from Just Peace’s vision statement

**JUST PEACE**

Just Peace is a community-led grassroots coalition based in Chicago’s Back of the Yards neighborhood. The coalition is led by a team of organizers, attorneys, religious leaders, and restorative justice practitioners. Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation (PBMR) serves as the hub of Just Peace’s work, based on its track record in the Back of the Yards community. Since the early 2000s, PBMR has been a fixture in the neighborhood for its service to young people and families impacted by violence and the carceral system. Its work has included direct service, counseling, support in education and job training, facilitation of restorative justice circles, and trauma-informed care.

**INTRODUCTION**

Just Peace’s founding members include Father David Kelly, the executive director of PBMR; Cheryl Graves, the director of the Community Justice for Youth Institute; Pamela Purdie, a restorative justice practitioner and trainer at PBMR; Emmanuel Andre, the co-founder and co-director of Circles and Ciphers; and Kathleen Bankhead, a restorative justice advocate and practitioner. Each one of them brings decades of experience in their respective fields. All are Chicago natives, and they all live in the city. Many of them were introduced to Back of the Yards through their work with Father David and PBMR.
The group arrived at the common understanding that the neighborhood was ripe with opportunity to build something different. Although the founding members were unsure about exactly what they would build, they engaged in conversations that focused on their respective expertise, their shared knowledge of restorative justice principles, and how combining those things could help address many of the issues that were—and are—plaguing the community.

Just Peace grew out of the founding members’ continued work in the community, with the goal of providing an alternative to the criminal legal system. The coalition centers community involvement to develop and sustain its mission. Since its inception, Just Peace has regularly sought and welcomed input from Back of the Yards residents to determine what the community truly needs. The group seeks to counter the inequities and prejudices of the criminal legal system and combat the negative effects of incarceration on people and their communities. Just Peace works beyond the confines of these systems of oppression to imagine alternatives that understand and address the problems of the people.

**ADDRESSING VIOLENCE**

The measures Just Peace takes to address violence in Back of the Yards are both proactive and reactive, based on a firm understanding of what has caused—and continues to cause—instances of violence in the community. This includes a severe lack of access to resources, including housing and employment opportunities, and social services such as counseling and therapeutic treatment. Just Peace plans to draw on the networks of its members to build a system of referral partners to help address these needs. The group’s members know that support in these areas is direct work to reduce violence.

Just Peace also works towards violence reduction through the power of relationship building. With PBMR’s reputation in the community, Just Peace hopes to build a foundational relationship of respect among all members. The coalition will work with credible messengers, formerly incarcerated people, and those directly impacted by violence to provide direct support to youth in the community. These relationships will be less one-on-one than PBMR’s direct service work, and will take a communal approach to supporting young people who are struggling with circumstances that put them at greater risk of experiencing or causing harm. Many of the neighborhood’s credible messengers will serve as violence responders and interrupters, and will be trained to provide adequate responses when called upon.

After violence has occurred, Just Peace encourages the use of restorative justice practices
to bring healing to survivors and the community. These practices will include frequent circle keeping as an immediate response to violence. The founders of Just Peace are individually and collectively immersed in restorative justice work, and part of the coalition’s mission is to provide training to all community members on the methods of circle keeping and restorative justice.

Based on the relationship with the community that serves as a bedrock for the coalition, an individual will be held accountable not only to the person they harmed, but to the neighborhood as a whole. This means that the entire neighborhood will monitor agreements arising from circles. With proper training for all as a baseline of its work, Just Peace believes the community will be well equipped to respond sufficiently in the immediate aftermath of violence.

**CHALLENGES**

Just Peace struggles with a lack of financial resources—partly for their own work, but even more so in the community. The systemic divestment in Back of the Yards, matched by limited employment opportunities and absent or distant social services, means that the neighborhood’s basic material needs are not met. As a result, Just Peace has fewer referral partners than necessary and a far greater range and volume of immediate needs than they are able to meet.

The reality of these systemic inequities makes it difficult for Just Peace to focus its mission as squarely on restorative justice responses to violence as it otherwise might, as it has to continually balance the larger vision of its leaders and members and the urgencies of each arising day. And because the majority of state and philanthropic funding focuses on short-term solutions and particular measurable wins, inadequate investment goes into the kind of long-term relationship-building that is what ultimately will make the community a safe place where everyone can thrive.

**VIEWS ON POLICING**

It is Just Peace’s belief that the current system of policing in Chicago does not serve or protect the community. The coalition cites anecdotal and lived experiences, along with statistics and analysis, to show the shortcomings and failures of policing in Back of the Yards. Just Peace’s members believe that most of these failures are systemic. They know that carceral systems—beginning with the police—are unable to keep communities safe or provide legitimate, productive responses when safety is breached. Fundamentally, they understand that that those who are best suited to respond to violence in a community...
are community members themselves. Just Peace believes that the neighborhood should be responsible for keeping its people safe, and for responding whenever someone crosses the lines created and established by the community.

VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

In the years ahead, Just Peace hopes to operate as a full alternative to the criminal legal system, while providing social support services to the Back of the Yards community. The group wants to have a 24/7 completely community-led violence and crisis response system, and an internal and external referral system to help all community members meet their basic and immediate needs. Just Peace envisions a neighborhood where, whenever conflict occurs—or ideally beforehand—nearly all residents of the area are trained to de-escalate and/or respond otherwise to these situations through restorative justice practices, rather than relying on police and the court system. Just Peace wants to build a self-reliant community to demonstrate the viability for other neighborhoods to do so. Coalition members also want to build a system that is for the community and by the community. Just Peace wants to decentralize the power structures often found in these systems, instead allowing all members of the community to be equal contributors in developing, adapting, correcting, and redirecting the system.
LA CULTURA CURA, ARIEL JIMENEZ
PROGRAM COORDINATOR, LA CULTURA CURA,
NATIONAL COMPADRES NETWORK

“The mission of the National Compadres Network is to strengthen and re-root the capacity of individuals, families, and communities to honor, rebalance, and redevelop the authentic identity, values, traditions, and indigenous practices of Chicano, Latino, Native, Raza, and other communities of color as the path to the honoring of all their relations and lifelong well-being.”

—from La Cultura Cura’s website

INTRODUCTION

The National Compadres Network was founded 32 years ago by 19 Indigenous Latino practitioners who kept seeing each other at conferences they felt didn’t truly represent the needs of their communities. In 1988, they organized a retreat for lawyers, Native American healers, counselors, and practitioners in Jolon, California. The participants practiced vulnerability with one another, and that vulnerability created connection and trust. Through sharing their struggles, the participants acknowledged that they needed a network and group to help people from their identity groups work through trauma, a realization that led to the creation of the National Compadres Network (NCN).

NCN is a training capacity institute that focuses on partnerships with community-based organizations or individuals, and provides training that is trauma-informed and healing-centered. The network works with young women, young men, and parents, and supports communities’ visions of what it is they need to heal.

According to Ariel, the network maintains that the solutions to trauma can be found within “the culture of the community, within the values, the customs, the traditions, the ceremonies that we have within our communities and within our culture.” Ariel primarily works on the Forward Promise Project, which focuses on cultivating healing and growth in communities of color, with an emphasis on boys and young men. Through the project, NCN has been able to partner with anchor organizations to run programs in Denver, San Diego, and San Jose with young men who have been incarcerated, impacted by gangs, have experienced trauma, or some combination. Through circle processes, the network aims to help participants transform their trauma into teachings for the community.
Ari"el defines violence as bringing harm to another person or group of people. He says, “We've seen historical violence, we've seen societal violence, we've seen individual violence.” He believes that violence is not purely physical, but can also be emotional, mental, and spiritual. He identifies a connection between violence and abuse and acknowledges that people can experience abuse from individuals, but also from oppressive systems. Ariel thinks society often focuses on the aftermath of abuse instead of addressing the root causes, including generational trauma.

Ariel believes that violence stems from unresolved trauma. He discussed growing up in a violent home that gave him confusing messages about love and conflict. NCN refers to this type of trauma as “baggage.” According to Ariel, “When we have a problem, we call it baggage because it weighs us down and we carry it with us.”

Among the NCN initiatives that address violence is the Young Women’s Warrior Project, which focuses on adolescent women. Others are the Circle Keeper process, which brings community members together for storytelling and sharing, and El Joven Noble, or “The Noble Youth.” The El Joven Noble program guides young men through a four-phase curriculum that includes lessons on character development and cultivating healthy relationships with family, community members, and romantic partners.

Graduates of El Joven Noble join advanced circles where they learn about gender and cultural identity. After the second phase, they attend NCN’s Jaguar retreat, which focuses on leadership development. Ariel says that this comes third because young people need to have a foundation, and that some programs set up youth for leadership too early, without doing that groundwork. During the Jaguar retreat, people engage in a youth participatory action research project, diving into the community, identifying issues they want to highlight and address, and creating a plan of action.

As a national training institute, NCN works in 14 states and 40 cities. In Santa Clara County, where Ariel works, the network partners with probation departments and local agencies that help reintegrate previously incarcerated youth into the community. NCN also partners with mental health agencies throughout California and the nation, and with the Coachella Valley Unified School District, which is integrating healing center approaches into its curriculum from kindergarten through high school.

Although NCN staff are informed about trauma and healing, they do not consider themselves experts on all communities. They work to determine how their models can fit
into their partners’ daily work.

Survivors of violence are integrated into all aspects of NCN’s work. Some of the organization's partners in Oakland have a circle for male survivors of sexual assault. Ariel says that the network has held circles with youth who are homeless and students at De Anza College (in Cupertino, California) who were navigating trauma after their release from prison. When working with survivors, Ariel stresses the importance of not forcing people to tackle trauma they’re not ready to address.

Ariel says that visions of safety vary according to the person being asked. Although some people see the presence of policing as safety, Ariel says he views safety as the presence of a full community where people can live together with healthy models to handle trauma. He pictures safety for communities as a place where “gifts balance out our baggage.” NCN describes safety as people having the freedom to be genuine and authentic without the fear that their true selves are viewed as a threat to others. Ariel says that in today’s society, “Sometimes how we appear is more threatening to other people than the actual gun.”

**CHALLENGES**

Ariel says that dealing with bureaucratic systems while working with people who are healing is the biggest barrier to his work. “Certain systems have a checklist they need to meet, and when we’re talking about our youth who are formerly incarcerated and are on probation, if they violate [their conditions of probation] again, it’s back to square one.” He calls this a cycle of violence. NCN staff support people when they’re doing well and when they’re not. Unfortunately, most systems are not trauma-informed or healing centered, and that can create conflict with NCN’s work.

Another difficulty is that people often want NCN's work to be narrowly focused. Ariel recalls that a funder once awarded the network a grant but wanted the work to focus only on a certain age range and gender. Although he thinks it is important to target services, he points out that when someone engages in work to heal, all community members benefit.

Ariel says that many people misunderstand NCN's work and think of healing as a magic pill, instead of something that takes long-term investment and effort. He points out that 11 weeks of trauma-informed work with young men can improve their lives, but it can't undo decades of the generational trauma people carry with them. He says the root of this misconception is a Western ideology that emphasizes a quick fix for complex issues.
NCN has maintained its partnership with the Salinas Police Department in Monterey County, California, to make policing practices more trauma-informed and healing-centered. Although many people believe that police presence alone reduces violence, Ariel does not, because he thinks violence is a result of unresolved trauma. “I think violence happens because of us being so limited in resources that we’re merely surviving,” he says, “and because we’re in survival mode, we might cause harm to other people in order for us to just live.” He points out that his community has more police officers than counselors, and he questions what kind of message that sends to young people.

In the years ahead, Ariel believes that NCN will still be engaging in healing-centered work. He says that the organization isn’t prescriptive, so the plan is to continue listening to the needs of the community members they work with, while adding the network’s own traditions and tools. As for how he wants his work to be remembered personally, Ariel would like the word “sacred” to come to mind. He wants to know that he inspired people to embrace their authenticity, even when they feared judgment from others.
Dr. Dorothy Johnson-Speight
Founder and National Executive Director,
Mothers in Charge Inc.

“Mothers in Charge Inc. advocates for families affected by violence and provides counseling and grief support services for families when a loved one has been murdered. The organization also collaborates with elected officials, community leaders, and other community and faith-based organizations on legislation and solutions to support safe neighborhoods and communities for children and families.”

—from the Mothers in Charge website

**Introduction**

In 2001, Dr. Dorothy Johnson-Speight lost her 24-year-old son, Khaaliq Jabbar Johnson, when he was shot to death over a parking space. Two years later, Dr. Dorothy worked with other grieving mothers to co-create Mothers in Charge, a national organization with headquarters in Philadelphia. The nonprofit also has chapters in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Kansas City, and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

When Dr. Dorothy cofounded Mothers in Charge, she knew that she didn’t want its work to focus solely on grief support. She wanted the organization to allow people to develop a deeper understanding of their trauma and grief, so that they might make a difference in their communities.

Early on, Mothers in Charge talked with young people in schools about bullying, violence, and conflict resolution. Dr. Dorothy drew on her relationships with educators to create a curriculum and learn about students’ needs. As she says, “When we looked into it a little bit closer, we saw that a lot of these children had lost a loved one to violence. They were angry, they were hurting, and they often didn't have a voice.” Dr. Dorothy said that kids are often forgotten when a family loses a loved one, but they also experience complex grief.

Mothers in Charge began helping young people understand what grief is by working through healing from the death of a pet. Using a common experience, the group helped youth understand that grief could have an impact on their behavior, and gave them strategies to avoid acting out.

After working in schools, Mothers in Charge went into prisons and collaborated with faith-based communities. Dr. Dorothy says that through this work, she “realized that
incarceration was impacting our community so much more than any other community.” By
talking with parents, Dr. Dorothy became more aware of the isolation children face when a
parent is incarcerated. She explains that this can lead to children participating in harmful
activities to fill a void, but that some of those activities may help meet a person or family’s
financial needs. Mothers in Charge also began working with incarcerated mothers, in part
by helping secure their release from jail and prison so they could return home to their
families. Through the experience, Dr. Dorothy “found some of the most amazing people,
who were oftentimes in there due to the color of their skin.” Many of the people Mothers in
Charge employs come to the work because of their personal experience. The organization
strives to hire people who were formerly incarcerated and bring a deep understanding of
the work.

ADDRESSING VIOLENCE

Dr. Dorothy believes that violence can be seen and expressed in many ways, and says
emotional and verbal violence are often overlooked. “We have some women who were
juvenile lifers, or who did an extended period of time [in prison]—and oftentimes it was
because of emotional and physical violence they experienced.” She says that for some,
vioence was the only option to protect their own lives.

Dr. Dorothy thought it was important to work in schools as well. She says she saw a surge
in violence among young people after things opened up somewhat during the COVID-19
pandemic, and that violence often takes place in communities of color because of the lack
of jobs and economic stability.

Because violence has so many facets and symptoms, it can be difficult for Mothers in
Charge to tackle them all. If more communities had access to social workers and therapists,
Dr. Dorothy thinks a lot of violence could be prevented.

She believes that violence also stems from people exposed to trauma who are not
engaged in healing. By asking people what happened to them, she has learned that past
trauma is often a driving force that causes people to commit violence, because it sticks with
them for a long time. To Dr. Dorothy, safety is not feeling at risk for harm: “We’re taught to
believe that safety means the police are going to keep us safe—or they’re going to end up
preventing us from being harmed. But we know that a lot of times that harm comes to us
from the police.”

In certain parts of the country, now and at many points in recent history, conflict has been
handled through community-based mediation. Dr. Dorothy would like to bring that
back in places where it has diminished, and she reflects about the ways that the pain people have experienced as a result of the “crack epidemic” and mass incarceration have had an impact on community connection.

The Center’s partners include local community churches, Common Justice, the Equal Justice Initiative, and Fund Peace. Dr. Dorothy says that these partnerships have contributed to the organization’s strength since its earliest years. She believes that the most important way Mothers in Charge reaches survivors is through education, because many people do not know what it is like to experience the death of a child due to violence. The organization also strives to create spaces for survivors to gather together to facilitate healing.

**CHALLENGES**

Dr. Dorothy says that the hardest part of her work is the pain at the center of it: seeing women live through grief and loss. She finds that in tending to that loss, it can be difficult for people to understand complicated grief. As she says, “Understand that it’s not something you get over. Every day you’re learning to live with the challenge of living and living through it. Oftentimes, people who haven’t been impacted think, ‘Okay, it's been six months now; you should be better. Let’s get over it.’” But Dr. Dorothy stresses that there’s no time frame for when people need support, and that those who haven’t experienced the violent death of a loved one often don’t know what it is like.

Dr. Dorothy says that another challenge is dealing with the political aspects of making change. When it comes to harm like mass incarceration, some people in power are benefiting. So dealing with people’s resistance to change is a core part of her work. She says that being consistent is key to overcoming these challenges.

**VIEWS ON POLICING**

Dr. Dorothy says that she has good relationships with certain police officers, even though they are committed to different work. She believes that education about different cultures and mental illness is a crucial component of reform. She names a recent police shooting in Philadelphia as a situation that could have been avoided if police had known how to interact with someone going through a mental health crisis. When police officers know nothing about trauma or the community they interact with, they may become violent toward community members. When police are educated, Dr. Dorothy believes that they have the ability to help keep communities safe.
After the murder of George Floyd, Dr. Dorothy saw several police departments engaging with community members. She considers this progress. She believes that some funding for police should be allocated to other services needed in the community, such as social work. “There are professionals and other people and organizations in the community who have the knowledge, the sensitivity, the education, the commitment, and the dedication to do a lot of the things police are called to do.”

**VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

Dr. Dorothy pictures a future where people committed to addressing violence work more on prevention and less on responses to harm that has already occurred. She wants to be “more proactive and less reactive,” and to “assess the needs and challenges in our communities so we can get ahead of the issues and prevent violence before it happens.” Funding for prevention work is limited, but Dr. Dorothy believes it is critical to creating lasting community safety. Over time, she wants to see less law enforcement response and more community involvement, “especially by and for the people who are most impacted—who understand better than any of the other folks at the table what is needed.”
KELLI ROBINSON  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OUR SISTERS’ HOUSE

“Our Sisters’ House was founded in 1995 to fill a gap in services for girls of color who were adjudicated in the juvenile system. Today the organization continues to fill in a gap in services for African American women and children who have been impacted and victimized by domestic violence. OSH has five programs that address juvenile family violence, children who have witnessed violence, a support group for African American women who are survivors of domestic violence, and advocacy programs that assist women fleeing their abusers.”

—from the website of Our Sisters’ House

INTRODUCTION

Our Sisters’ House sprang from the passion of Kelli’s mother, Bettye Blakeney, and her aunt, Sharon Manier, for helping Black girls. When Bettye worked at a juvenile court, she saw what happened to Black teenage girls and was inspired to act. She created a group home that started as an eight-bed facility, providing case management and substance use counseling. Our Sisters’ House also provided residents with education on “life skills,” to help keep them out of the juvenile justice system.

As Kelli explains, “In 2003, the state decided that they no longer wanted to have group homes in the community.” She remembers the day the state’s rehabilitation administration split the girls into two groups, shackled them, and took them to different facilities. That was the end of the group home.

After that traumatic closure, Our Sisters’ Home shifted its focus. In 2017, the small nonprofit in Tacoma, Washington, branched off into culturally specific domestic violence, intervention, and prevention services for Black women in their community. The organization provides legal support for domestic violence survivors and crime survivors, and provides activities that help teens learn how to have healthy relationships with themselves and others.

ADDRESSING VIOLENCE

Kelli defines violence as “an act of evil against someone defenseless.” She describes violence as terror, demeaning, hurtful, and harmful. In one week, she saw two Black clients who had been strangled or choked, including a pregnant client. Another client’s abuser destroyed her car windows so that she couldn’t go to work.
Given the violence and harm Our Sisters’ House staff sees, their work requires extraordinary coordination. Sometimes clients aren’t fleeing the harm in their lives because they need help meeting their basic needs. When that happens, the organization provides diapers, wipes, and self-care packages. When clients are fleeing, Our Sisters’ House provides motel rooms and gift cards to a local grocery store.

The organization works to provide crisis intervention and safety planning in a nonjudgmental environment. Kelli says Our Sisters’ House does a lot of follow-up, because they know that clients often end up back with their abuser. Staff try to guide clients safely toward self-sufficiency. Through a culturally specific support group, clients have a safe place to vent and talk. Many of them do not understand domestic violence and may not know their rights.

Our Sisters’ House also provides mental health counseling, and has shifted to online and private options via phone for safety during the pandemic. Through one-on-one advocacy-based counseling, staff help clients understand that their situations aren’t normal. Once that groundwork is laid, participants join support groups. After that, they move into one-on-one therapy and are offered four one-hour sessions. Kelli stresses the importance of having a comfortable and relaxing office so that clients and their children feel welcome; to that end, the organization provides food and toys.

Kelli says that safety often looks different for many of her clients and is dependent upon their needs. To some clients, safety is moving to more secure housing, to others it means living with family members, and to others it is leaving the state. Technology affects survivors’ safety, so staff work to help clients turn off tracking devices on their phone and take other precautions. Our Sisters’ House staff provides risk assessment to many clients to help tailor a plan for each individual.

The organization’s community partners include Pierce County Juvenile Court, Crystal Judson Family Justice Center, the Washington Department of Social & Health Services, and local small businesses and schools. Through a partnership with Mt. Tahoma Seventh-Day Adventist, a Black church in Tacoma, Our Sisters’ House provides support groups for church members.

**CHALLENGES**

Kelli says that the hardest part of her work is hearing clients’ stories and not always being able to help. Before COVID-19, the organization did not always have resources for emergency financial assistance. This meant that staff often referred clients to other organizations and crossed their fingers that they would get the assistance they needed.
Kelli says that the lack of shelters in her city is another challenge. Many clients don’t want to leave the area because their kids are in local schools.

But even with these challenges, Kelli is optimistic because she says the African-American community has rallied behind Our Sister’s House. With the growing movement for racial justice, the organization has been able to secure funding they might not have otherwise, because more people are passionate about this work.

**VIEWS ON POLICING**

Kelli recalls a time when Our Sisters’ House had issues with a stalker, and the police made staff feel as if they were responsible for the abuse. Through this experience and others, staff members found themselves better able to empathize with clients, who often feel unheard when they contact the police. Because there is no dedicated domestic violence unit within the Tacoma Police Department, Our Sisters’ House reached out in efforts to collaborate but was often ignored.

Kelli doesn’t think society is at a point where clients would feel safe if the police were immediately defunded, but she does believe police are often out of touch with the community’s needs. “So are we ready to defund? No, but there is some real needed change with the police.” Kelli believes that officers need to be better trained in community policing.

**VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

In the future, Kelli sees Our Sisters’ House taking on more case management and therapeutic roles to help clients with their mental health. She sees restorative justice as a big piece of the organization’s work in the years ahead, aiming to help clients and families who are experiencing trauma and domestic violence.

Kelli also envisions expanding the organization’s legal advocacy; only one legal advocate is on staff now. And once the program expands, Our Sisters’ House will likely need to hire an attorney. Kelli would like the agency to be remembered as one that cares—and goes above and beyond to provide excellent trauma-informed and culturally specific services. “You know that if you call [us], you will get help. You will not be turned away. You will not be treated like you didn’t matter, that it didn’t count.”
Project LETS provides political education about responding to mental health crises without the state. Stefanie and their colleagues view state involvement as a means to further harm, control, and even kill community members. Stefanie discusses violence and harm as a spectrum that includes interpersonal harm and structural harm. Because such a wide range of violence exists, they point out the need to create a wide variety of solutions. They also recognize that survivors of harm, whether due to interpersonal or institutional abuse, tend to be broadly targeted: mentally ill and disabled folks are often pathologized and painted as more violent than others. Psychiatric diagnoses can exacerbate harm toward mentally ill people, because many of these diagnoses are conflated with violent predispositions.

Stefanie and her colleagues understand their work as creating a safer future and adapting...
to the moment at hand. In March 2021, Project LETS started a mutual-aid, rapid-response network for disabled folks in Rhode Island and a trauma healing fund for Black folks. The organization also runs a rapid-response line that responds to people in crisis.

Project LETS is committed to not working with police, and to fighting back against certain mental health training that Stefanie believes teaches people to function as police and surveil members in their community. She argues that not enough people are trained to provide healing support. Instead, they learn to pass the crisis on to other institutions and end up deepening the harm toward that individual.

As Stefanie explains, the ways in which police and mental health professionals respond to mental health crises are widely accepted and considered to be the best approach. When state involvement is seen as the only option, it becomes even more difficult to challenge—or to recognize violence. Some of the organization’s community partners are the Alliance to Mobilize Our Resistance, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, and HEARD DC.

**CHALLENGES**

Stefanie says that one of the greatest challenges for Project LETS is escaping the “urgency and productivity culture” that capitalism promotes. Stefanie and their colleagues strive to foster an environment where people feel comfortable dropping out or taking breaks, but they also know that the work will often fall to someone else. The organization focuses on learning how to create an anti-ableist practice within a workplace.

Project LETS is committed to abolition of the prison industrial complex, a goal that Stefanie explains is also tied to disability justice: “Too many people don’t recognize that group homes, nursing facilities, and psych wards are all part of the carceral state and need to be abolished.” Stefanie and her colleagues have received pushback for supporting this position.

Although Stefanie believes that lived experience can inform and greatly impact this work, they don’t think it should be honored above all else. Lived experience does not look the same for everyone; a wide variety of identities and experiences fall under the umbrella of psychiatric disability. Stefanie says that having money for community-based solutions is an important goal for Project LETS, but that other creative solutions to harm are necessary.

**VIEWS ON POLICING**

In Stefanie’s opinion, policing does not keep communities safe. While they identify
instances when someone may have lived longer because an officer responded to a crisis, they find it more likely that their community members will be targeted and killed by police. Project LETS believes that many police killings happen in moments when someone most needs healing care and support, regardless of whether they are armed. Stefanie says, “We have seen police shoot young, autistic, white boys and adults who are experiencing a mood swing or bipolar disorder, people who have guns on them or knives on them, and people who have nothing on them.”

Stefanie identifies the idea of “compliance” as ableist, because some people will never be able to comply with police orders due to disability. For policing to rid itself of violence, Stefanie and their colleagues believe that police should abolish themselves. They say, “Police remove people deemed to be threats or risks to themselves or others, but we know that this is motivated by a range of identity-based factors, like sex, race, class, gender, and sexuality.”

Stefanie and her team members think it’s important to recognize that their work cannot be separated from the push for defunding and abolishing the police. Stefanie stresses that people should not discuss those who are incarcerated without thinking about disabled incarcerated people, especially given that incarceration often creates disability. “As a disability justice–informed and –led organization, we really prioritize cross-movement solidarity.”

**VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

Stefanie and their colleagues hope that Project LETS will operate as a sustainable rapid and crisis response service in the future. The organization wants to have 24/7 completely peer-led mobile crisis response programs, and has received funding to provide them throughout Rhode Island. The staff envisions a world where people observe someone having a mental health crisis and immediately call Project LETS instead of 911. The organization would also like to show people other ways to address mental health issues, given that team members have found people who had run away, de-escalated people who had weapons, and intervened with others who were attempting suicide or experiencing panic attacks.

Stefanie says that Project LETS is searching for a house to buy, so that they can design their first peer respite crisis center. The center will be the organization’s first community-based home, allowing people in spiritual, emotional, and/or psychiatric distress to stay for up to two weeks at no cost “instead of being incarcerated inside facilities.”
She says she would like Project LETS staff to be remembered as part of the lineage of disabled organizers who have been expanding from disability rights to disability justice, and as an organization that works to bridge mental health spaces and disability spaces. “I’d like to be remembered as someone who took the small steps—and that we fought back and believed our community members were worth fighting for,” Stefanie says.
“Raphah Institute represents a chance to confront the root causes of societal harm, take a uniquely crafted approach, and see transformative healing for all.”

— from the Raphah Institute’s website

INTRODUCTION

Travis Claybrooks was born and raised in Nashville. Because he was brought up in a relatively conservative Christian home, he spent a lot of his life in the church. As an attendee of private church school, he describes his upbringing as “fairly insular.”

In 1997, Travis made the decision to become a police officer. He says the transition into the role was “a culture shock.” As someone who had little experience in neighborhoods with high levels of crime or violence, Travis rapidly experienced disenchantment with his new role. He felt shocked and upset that his somewhat sheltered upbringing did not prepare him for the realities of policing in predominantly low-income urban communities.

It didn’t take him long as an officer to recognize that the social issues our society was trying to solve through policing were not really related to traditional concepts of crime. Travis made the connection that crime wasn’t primarily the result of individual pathology. Instead, he believes that crime is related to housing insecurity, poverty, shame, and isolation.

Travis says that at the time, he didn’t really have the framework to fully understand the complex challenges people face; he just knew that policing and courts weren’t the solution. Figuring out the solution became the primary driver of his work for the next 20 years, and led to him founding the Raphah Institute. Travis wanted to find ways to live more meaningfully in the world while becoming closer to the real issues and challenges that members of his community were facing.

Raphah is a Hebrew word meaning “to heal.” The organization’s stated mission is this: “We help communities to heal from social harm by confronting and solving its root causes.” Travis says that Raphah is not a single-service organization, but a platform providing opportunities and programming that get to the core of social harms such as violence.
From Travis’s perspective, violence is anything that “violates humanity, human dignity, personal sense of self, and the person’s existence in the world.” Although many people think of violence as mostly physical, Travis maintains that other forms of violence harm our minds, social relationships, and psyches. In his view, violence comes from poverty and people’s inability to meet their economic needs. From there, “violence begets violence.”

Raphah’s flagship program is restorative justice diversion, which helps people who have caused harm and people who have been harmed to find transformation and healing. Through Raphah’s work, Travis realized that these groups of people often overlap.

Raphah defines restorative justice as accounting for harm as it moves through the community in a way that does not create more harm in the process. The organization responds to instances of harm and works to create structures to account for them. Raphah’s philosophy is that when harm happens, the entire community is impacted, because harm is not stationary. People who have been harmed often have the propensity to cause harm. As he elaborates, “the impact and the effects of harm create a cascade of violence.” The institute’s work also involves determining and addressing what drives the parties involved in harm to moments of conflict.

Raphah works on pre-prosecution cases that come from juvenile court, and focuses only on cases that are deemed felonies. Travis says he thinks of restorative justice through the perspective of the program’s youth participants who have caused and experienced harm—and of the people who have been harmed. He and his colleagues think beyond the harm that occurs in the moment when a crime happens; they also think about the ways that harm-doers have been victimized throughout their lives, and about how a person who has been harmed might go on to cause harm if it is not addressed. By asking both parties what they need, Raphah’s goal is to end cycles of violence. Travis says it is important for the institute’s responses to be flexible and not prescriptive.

**CHALLENGES**

When identifying some of the challenges his organization faces, Travis says that scaling is often difficult. This means that although people support Raphah’s work, they may find it too difficult to replicate in other places. Travis says he also finds it challenging to communicate effectively about restorative justice with people who are accustomed to criminal legal responses. Because restorative justice does not emphasize punishment, “many people do not view [it] as an acceptable alternative to our current process in the
He says that too many people are attached to violent punishment as a response to violence. Some fear that restorative justice does not center the needs of those who have been harmed, only those who have harmed others. He also says that people tend to conflate mediation with restorative justice. Mediation is typically a form of conflict management involving parties who have equal power. But restorative justice addresses harm where the power between the parties has not been equal. It is a process that helps equalize the power dynamic between the person harmed and the person who caused the harm. Then both parties can have their needs addressed, repair what was broken, and transform in such a way that they cause no further harm.

VIEWS ON POLICING

As a former police officer, Travis believes that policing needs to be “reframed.” He recognizes the cumulative effect of the institution, along with the wide variation in thinking and intentions among individual officers. He believes that instead of working reactively, police should reframe their industry to focus on other ways to produce safety, such as actively ending poverty and creating prosocial opportunities for community members.

Travis acknowledges that our current model of policing won’t go away overnight. He maintains that his community is not ready for abolishing the police, because insufficient structures are in place to handle violence and other harm. In the meantime, as those structures are developed, Travis thinks policing should focus on supporting citizens in helpful ways that “produce safety, maintain justice, and give tranquility.”

VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Travis identifies as a visionary. Looking to the future, he hopes that every court case is deemed eligible for a restorative justice option. He also hopes to build partnerships with other jurisdictions in Tennessee. Travis would like Raphah Institute to be remembered as a group that deeply changed the community and was a good partner, collaborator, and designer. He says he just wants to be remembered as someone who guided people and pointed them toward a more healing and transformative direction.
MIGUEL CAMBRAY
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC INITIATIVES & PARTNERSHIPS, READI CHICAGO

“READI Chicago is based on the belief that helping people heal from trauma and develop skills that create pathways to safety and opportunity has the potential to save lives now, and to create greater opportunity and safety over the long-term. Investment in communities and local organizations is built into READI. The program is administered by Heartland Alliance and delivered through six community-based organizations, in order to leverage pre-existing community ties and relationships while building local capacity.”

—from READI Chicago’s website

INTRODUCTION

Miguel Cambray co-designs and co-curates the anti-violence initiative READI Chicago. He develops the concepts, assessment measures, data points, and implementation strategies for adult learning theories, to help people who are at highest risk of being impacted by gun violence. He helps them connect with cognitive behavioral therapy practitioners and participate in skill-based development so they can prepare for unsubsidized employment. Miguel joined the program a month before it launched in September 2017.

The one-year program provides cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), transitional jobs, and wraparound support services to participants, helping them chart a different path as it helps reduce violence in Chicago neighborhoods with the highest rates of gun violence.

The city of Chicago created the program with the goal of addressing a spike in gun violence that occurred in 2015 and 2016. The crisis propelled city government and the philanthropy community to work together to address pervasive gun violence in targeted neighborhoods, identified through data from the University of Chicago Crime Lab.

The city had previously tried alternative youth programs, summer camps, adult and youth employment programs, and evening programming, but had minimal success. Miguel says that Chicago’s government officials decided to focus on three areas of impact: police accountability; developing an outreach collective and establishing professional standards of outreach workers; and creating READI Chicago.

The Crime Lab identified 6,000 people who were most closely associated with the city’s violence, through victimization reports, arrest reports, and records of incarceration reports. READI Chicago set out with the goal of engaging about 1,250 people in a span
of three years, to provide preparation for realistic job opportunities and cognitive behavioral therapy. The program works in the North Lawndale, Inglewood, Austin, and West Garfield neighborhoods. Miguel thinks of READI Chicago as unique in that it serves only people who have been identified through research.

**ADDRESSING VIOLENCE**

READI Chicago defines its work specifically in terms of gun violence: the program is designed to work with those at greatest risk of perpetuating gun violence or being victims of it. Miguel says the data that informs READI Chicago’s work is incredibly important. People who are deemed “highest risk” are entered into an analytical database. Those who are in the 86th percentile or higher are READI’s target participants.

“On average, our guys have about 17 to 18 arrests,” Miguel explains. “They’re facing about five felony arrests related to gun violence and assaults, and we have over 240 individuals who have been shot one or more times.” Most of the participants have experienced victimization such as physical assault, battery assault, or gun violence assault, with the majority also having experienced physical violence before the age of 18.

READI Chicago’s program is based on getting folks to engage in CBT learning. The model is 12 months, with participants having a baseline goal of attaining or achieving 200 hours of CBT and workplace learning. Participants work with the program from 9 to 5, Monday through Friday, and participate in professional development and on-the-job learning.

The trauma of gun violence reverberates throughout people’s lives. Miguel and his colleagues have seen CBT help participants disrupt the impulse of reacting violently to situations. When people have deeply rooted trauma or serious mental health challenges, READI Chicago tries to support them with wraparound services and referrals to meet their needs related to housing, physical and mental health, legal issues, and barriers to economic growth.

Miguel believes that violence is driven by poverty. He says, “We’re experiencing the consequences of disinvestment in specific neighborhoods and groups of people.” He adds that this has affected Chicago’s Black and Latino residents the most, whether through the “war on drugs,” the “war on poverty,” public housing, unemployment rates, or low education rates. The READI Chicago model addresses emotional safety, environmental safety, and personal safety, given that all three are factors in a person’s defense mechanisms and survival instincts.
CHALLENGES

Miguel says one of his biggest challenges is getting the world to understand that READI does not work with a “throwaway population.” He points out that many people with a criminal record are unable to pursue certain jobs, and this limits the type of work they can do. The program serves people from roughly ages 18 to 32 who are figuring out how to survive, parent, and find housing despite background checks that often limit their options. Participants have many stressors and typically need to navigate them to avoid being incarcerated again.

Miguel says, “It's really hard to help folks understand that some policies continue to marginalize this population and force some back into illicit activities just to survive.” He says part of his job is helping people within a range of systems and organizations understand that their policies can be a hindrance to READI’s participants and others who are like them. During the course of a year it can be difficult to help people unlearn the high-risk decisions they made for most of their lives, based on their circumstances. This makes Miguel wish he had more time with some participants.

One misconception about the program’s work is the belief that it is more cost-effective for the government to incarcerate people. READI Chicago’s commitment to research and providing data to back up its work demonstrates that the opposite is true.

VIEWS ON POLICING

Miguel’s perspective is that in some ways police do not keep neighborhoods safer and that they sometimes drive violence. He thinks their methods can instigate conflict between groups of people, and that the typical policing model in the United States is based on hierarchies and whiteness. He also points to the fact that policing generates revenue and job opportunities to people in power. But he doesn't think it is realistic to expect a world without policing now. He believes that some good examples of community policing exist, but says they're not large enough to handle safety, violence, and crime broadly.

VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

READI Chicago has shown that its work is reducing violence: participants are surviving at higher rates than similar people who are not in the program. The organization has maintained a high retention and engagement rate for a program that lasts 12 months. Miguel says that READI Chicago is normalizing the need for CBT, and proving to other
institutions that solutions to violence need to be therapeutic and should address each individual’s economic needs.

In the years ahead, Miguel hopes other programs designed for the population READI Chicago serves can change their approach by drawing from the lessons he and his colleagues have learned. He also envisions a future where violence is treated as seriously as other public health crises that primarily impact white communities. As he concludes, “I hope READI Chicago is remembered as the initiative that was crazy enough to go find 1,200 guys on the street and give them therapy and jobs when no one else was thinking about things that way.”
JASON DAVIS
COFOUNDER, REIMAGINING JUSTICE

Reimagining Justice is a nonprofit that “advocates for creating healing-centered justice responses, justice reinvestment in communities to create safe havens for youth, educational support for the socio-emotional needs of children, and culturally appropriate mental health programs.”

— from Reimagining Justice’s website

INTRODUCTION

Located in Paterson, New Jersey, Reimagining Justice engages in transformative mentoring throughout the country by speaking with youth and other community stakeholders to help them learn the empathy and understanding needed to navigate conflict in healthy ways, as well as to help youth heal from the mental and physical impacts of gun violence. Reimagining Justice recognizes how trauma and violence can become normalized within communities, for example, when people internalize toxic masculinity and through other processes that may not be obvious on the surface.

In 2005, Jason and his partner, Dr. Liza Chowdhury, founded Reimagining Justice. Although the organization does not have a physical location, its staff work in and around the city of Paterson, an area facing considerable violence and lacking the resources and support to deal with such harm.

Their first collaboration was with Newark’s Eastside High School, which was experiencing gang violence and issues with student retention. Reimagining Justice fought against the school-to-prison pipeline by advocating for students at risk of expulsion. After doing unpaid work for a year, the organization received a grant through Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) federal funding, which is distributed by each state. This grant allowed the organization to build up a robust program in Paterson, helping survivors learn how to access victims’ compensation funds and services. Reimagining Justice helps participants use funding to move out of the neighborhood where instances of violence have occurred, along with securing other supports for their healing.

APPROACHES TO VIOLENCE

Reimagining Justice defines violence as “any harmful act that impacts someone and the community around them.” The organization maintains that violence can impact people
physically, mentally, and spiritually. Reimagining Justice believes that violence travels in ways that are similar to a virus or disease. If the emotional impacts of a violent act are not treated, the impacts of that violence can be experienced long afterward. Jason believes that violence stems from multiple social issues that impact individuals and communities, and is aggravated by a culture that upholds violent mindsets.

Reimagining Justice's community partners are based mainly in Paterson, including a local food bank and hospital, along with occasional collaboration with police. Staff engage survivors of violence through conversation. As Jason says, “I pretty much become a surrogate parent for them.” He adds that because other agencies and systems have let down so many of the organization’s participants, they often aren't ready to trust new people.

CHALLENGES

For Jason, who grew up around a lot of violence and joined a gang at a young age, the risk of being re-traumatized is one of the hardest parts of the work. He has learned to address this trauma through a strong commitment to self-care and by setting clear boundaries. Through learning from other organizations and peers and recognizing the importance of healing from his own trauma, Jason is able to show up to his work focused and committed.

He believes that one common misconception is that the only people able to meaningfully engage in work to end violence must be people who have experienced certain forms of violence and/or incarceration. Although he understands and respects the importance of people with lived experience, he also believes that academics and credible messengers can work together to find solutions to improve communities.

“I don’t want to do it by myself,” Jason says. “I don’t want to be a part of a program where the only people who are good at this work are those who’ve been shot before, if you were a gang member, or if you’ve been in jail 1,000 times—in order to be effective. I don't think that's true. I think it's a myth.” Through a partnership with a professor at Rutgers University, staff members at Reimagining Justice were able to co-teach a class on gang outreach.

VIEWS ON POLICING

Jason says that when police do their jobs well, they can help prevent and reduce crime. He has been able to interact with members of police departments throughout the country that are using innovative methods to keep people safe. As someone who was involved in a
many other communities. He says he believes that many community members desire police presence but dislike how the police interact with them.

And though Jason doesn’t support abolishing the police, he thinks their budgets should be cut, with money reallocated for other services. Jason believes that many police officers have secondary trauma from the things they’ve witnessed on the job. “It makes your viewpoint screwed and tainted. Then everyone becomes a criminal.”

**VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

Jason wants Reimagining Justice to train people across the country to understand how they can help end violence. He wants Reimagining Justice to partner with credible messengers. He says it is important for people who are working to end violence in a specific area to integrate into the community and provide its members with concrete, empathetic solutions to their problems.

Jason says he would like Reimagining Justice’s work to be remembered as a stepping-stone that allowed people to take ownership of their lives and start healing, rather than just coping with their trauma. The organization recognizes the long, difficult history of violence and trauma caused by racial injustice and government failures throughout the United States. Jason says, “I want my work to show that we finally started addressing some of the things that were done to us as a people. No blaming, no pointing fingers—just addressing it, so that I don’t start growing all these symptoms of behaviors that are going to affect a whole other set of people later on in life.”
“Restorative Response Baltimore is a conflict resolution and community building organization that provides ways for people to collectively and effectively prevent and resolve conflicts and incidents ranging from bullying to auto theft to assault.”

-from the Restorative Response Baltimore’s website

INTRODUCTION

In 2000, Restorative Response Baltimore (RRB) was founded by Dr. Lauren Abramson as the Community Conferencing Center, based on the model of restorative justice practitioner Howard Zehr. The center drew from a westernized model of restorative justice, one that brings together people affected by a conflict and a neutral facilitator to try to reach a resolution.

Since then, RRB has aimed to practice a restorative justice more rooted in Indigenous models, with facilitators and participants invested in the community differently. Part of the RRB philosophy contends that it isn’t possible for invested facilitators to be neutral, because every person in a white supremacist society brings their biases to the process.

The staff of RRB want to ensure that everyone affected by a violent incident has a voice in resolving the issues at hand and ensuring that something similar doesn’t happen again. The organization’s model gives people the tools to cultivate a culture in which restorative justice is possible. As Larell, the executive director of RRB says, “Restorative justice is not just something you do. It is who you are.”

Restorative Response Baltimore actively supports community-building efforts. The team facilitates dialogue circles within communities and organizations to foster support, connections, and resources. Staff also facilitate reactive responses to cultivate an environment for healing, accountability, and support. Through “co-powering” with the community, RRB works to provide a structure where everyone involved in and affected by harm can determine what is needed to repair the harm and provide support so that similar
harm never recurs.

The organization’s staff facilitate processes that do not rely on professionals or the justice system to bring about deeper healing and restoration. It also provides facilitator training to people in the community, and proactive restorative practices training to communities, schools, and organizations. These trainings emphasize the importance of the individual that will be delivering restorative processes. Barb Sherrod, the restorative practices program director at RRB, says that many restorative justice programs focus exclusively on the behavior of youth. By contrast, RRB works with adult leaders and pushes them to develop self-awareness.

**ADDRESSING VIOLENCE**

The RRB approach considers violence “any intentional or unintentional word or action that can cause someone physical, mental, or emotional harm.” This can happen on an interpersonal and also institutional level. Barb and Larell believe harm is driven by white supremacy and fear. As Barb says, “It’s rooted in a fear of a threat of existence.”

The organization’s work stresses that community safety involves food security, housing for everyone, and an educational system that reaches every child. RRB staff envision a community where everyone knows one another and has established a common level of trust and sense of values. This can provide a space for accountability and support at the same time, especially in instances when harm does occur. Barb believes that when harm takes place, the dignity and humanity of every person must be valued.

Through its invested facilitator model, Restorative Response Baltimore is able to address harm in meaningful ways. The facilitators help guide people toward an understanding of why harm occurred in the first place. Through direct and succinct questions, they help create environments where everyone can potentially thrive.

RRB’s staff members give people tools to promote self-awareness and cultivate socio-emotional intelligence. As Larell says, “We know that no one is neutral, and we want people to understand that we are all interconnected.”

In addition to providing tools to prevent violence, the organization has a goal of ensuring that those tools reflect people’s needs. Staff members strive to practice what they preach, embodying restoration both in the workplace and beyond. They believe that this requires consistent, intentional practice that develops over years.

Among RRB’s community partners is a local restorative practice organization, along with
New Song Academy, Collective Climb, and local churches. The organization also gets referrals from the Baltimore City Police Department and the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services, though all of their processes are voluntary.

**CHALLENGES**

Larell says the hardest part of her job is making sure to engage in self-reflection so that she’s living in a way that aligns with her work and her values. She’s learning the value of not trying to be a perfectionist, acknowledging that “you’re going to hurt people,” but sharing that “the goal is not to create new harms.” This means that people need the space to mess up, but also to learn from their mistakes so they can avoid repeating them in the future. She also wants to ensure that her position is not rooted in oppression or hierarchical positioning. Restorative Response Baltimore has taken steps to flatten its hierarchy, and tries to maintain structure in a circular rather than vertical way.

Another challenge for Larell is trying to get people to believe that restorative justice works. She says she tries to explain its benefits without sounding like a “salesperson,” but that people struggle to see the holistic vision of her organization’s approach. Not only does RRB work to end interpersonal harm, but a goal is to help people realize how much oppressive systems in our lives affect conflict among people. Some community members find it challenging to understand restorative justice as a framework rooted in Indigenous practices instead of solely within institutions.

As Barb says, “It’s a challenge getting folks to see that this process isn’t just for the person who’s been harmed. We have to consider the person who’s been harmed and their community too, because we don’t want to just resolve what’s happening. We also want to create a community where people say, ‘These are the values we’re relying on, and these are the boundaries we’re going to set moving forward.’” Barb and Larell stress that their work is community-centered because they want to create the conditions that allow people to take meaningful accountability.

**VIEWS ON POLICING**

RRB dialogue circles provide spaces for people to work through violence without the police. Restorative Response Baltimore supports abolition and believes that prisons have always been built to house Black people. Larell believes that the roots of policing are rotten, and as the world moves toward abolition, defunding the police is a first step. She and others on the team recognize how policing alienates community members and therefore creates an environment in which harm is bound to continue. Larell quotes the
renowned Black feminist poet Audre Lorde: “The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.” She reflects: “If someone is not starting with how they live, who they are, and what they believe, they will not be able to truly foster a restorative environment.”

VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Barb says RRB is working on a plan that supports parents. The goal is to compensate parents who attend the trainings the organization develops. Many of the participants will be Black, Brown, and/or undocumented parents.
“SNUG Albany is a violence intervention program which utilizes a public health approach to reduce shootings and killings in the communities disproportionately affected. It is an evidence-based practice patterned on the highly effective Chicago Cure Violence Model.”

—from SNUG Albany’s website

INTRODUCTION

Originally from Buffalo, New York, Jerome Brown started working with SNUG in 2015 as a volunteer after hearing about the program from a cousin. Before that, his peers called him “the mayor,” and he knew a bit about de-escalation situations because of his job as a security guard. He identifies gun violence as an issue that has shaped much of his life. When Jerome was five, his father was killed during an armed robbery. After Jerome’s imprisonment for gang violence, he saw SNUG as an opportunity to give back to his community. Through volunteering he discovered that he loved the values of people in the program and that he now had access to a strong mentorship network.

Jerome eventually took a part-time position as a violence interrupter. Seeing his work ethic and leadership, his supervisors promoted him to outreach worker supervisor. When a job opened at SNUG Albany as a program manager, Jerome applied, got the job, and relocated to Albany, New York.

Inspired by the CURE Violence Model that originated in Chicago, SNUG works to reduce homicides and shootings within the community. Jerome says, “We work with the highest-risk individuals, who may be at risk of being shot or may be the shooter.”

SNUG Albany relies on credible messengers, typically community-based outreach workers. Jerome says that many people doing this work “once upon a time wreaked havoc on the community, so it’s very important for the community to see them giving back.” Because youth often hear stories about the messengers or witnessed them in the past, when they were engaged in violence in their community, Jerome thinks it has a significant impact for them to see how these people have changed.

SNUG outreach workers have a caseload of 6 to 10 people they work with through six face-to-face visits a month. Participation is voluntary, and staff often see participants more than their probation officers do.
SNUG focuses on face-to-face engagement because staff consider it the most effective way to reach those who are deemed “high risk.” Participants create a life plan, or “blueprint,” which guides their work in the program. Building relationships with participants may happen slowly, sometimes taking the course of a year. SNUG Albany also hosts community and participant events once a month, such as attending a sports game or going bowling.

**ADDRESSING VIOLENCE**

Jerome believes that violence stems from a lack of communication. He has learned that many misunderstandings do not get resolved because the people involved are too stubborn to communicate with each other. Jerome says that when SNUG does mediation, for many people it is the first time anyone has intervened positively in their lives, though they have typically experienced negative influences, such as someone adding more fuel to a conflict.

SNUG also identifies trauma as a significant driver of violence. If someone close to a participant is shot or killed, staff consider that individual “high risk,” even if that was not previously true. The impact of trauma can have immediate and long-lasting consequences for people who experience it and can contribute to cycles of violence.

For SNUG staff, it is important to make sure that the solutions to violence do not create more violence. Jerome says the first step to maintaining safety in a community is identifying that there is a problem with violence. He believes the second step is to “interrupt the transmission of these negative thoughts and negative feelings.”

SNUG Albany identifies the Albany Medical Center as one of its main partners. “We have a social worker who works at the hospital and calls us when there is any type of penetrating trauma,” Jerome says. Other partners include the City of Albany, Urban Grief, Bridging the Gap, the Office of Victim Services, and SNUG’s partner organization, Trinity Alliance; SNUG also works with the Albany Police Department in limited ways.

**CHALLENGES**

Jerome says the hardest part of his work is getting an individual to understand that they can change, and that they can live according to their own standards and not someone else’s. Many people Jerome and his staff encounter feel hopeless about the future, and confronting that hopelessness can be one of the toughest parts of their jobs. He says he can relate, because it took him roughly 20 years before deciding to change his life. Jerome also says that insufficient funding keeps SNUG from achieving its greatest impact.
One of the common misconceptions SNUG Albany works to combat is the pervasive idea that all young people of color are bad. Through volunteer activities with Trinity Alliance, staff have been able to build connections between youth and other community members who may have prejudged them. Jerome says that many young people want to do good work, but many structural barriers get in their way.

**VIEWS ON POLICING**

Jerome believes that police help keep his community safe, but only to a certain extent—and that they shouldn’t be the only option. He says police should be doing more to help prevent conflict from escalating to the point of violence. Jerome points out that many police departments across the country are adopting community-based solutions to harm, but until these models are widespread, he considers this an uphill battle.

“A lot of people still look at the police as a threat, because we still have Black men dying at the hands of police at a rate that is uneasy for all of us to accept,” Jerome says. He also identifies money as a major issue in policing, and takes issue with the idea of police departments buying military-style weapons and machinery. He thinks shifting that money from police departments to more community services would be an effective way to help end community violence.

**VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

Jerome says that the COVID pandemic has highlighted the importance of SNUG’s work. Because so many state services shut down or were limited, it affected some of the progress with young people who participate in the program. He believes more people are learning about SNUG and that the program will grow. Probation officers and others are noticing SNUG’s work and asking for tips on youth engagement, which shows how powerful this work is.

Jerome hopes that in the future people will come automatically to SNUG after experiencing an assault or other trauma. Many people know only about the program’s reactive work after shootings, but SNUG can also help people create responses to prevent violence, and he envisions this work growing and helping more people. He would like SNUG to be remembered as a meaningful contributor to the community.
KARENA MONTAG
FOUNDING CO-DIRECTOR, STRONGHOLD COLLECTIVE

“STRONGHOLD Collective works at the intersection of racial and restorative justice to support and co-create accountable communities of belonging. STRONGHOLD embodies a trauma-healing, restorative, and transformative justice framework to address, account for, and transform the harms of white supremacy and racism.”

—from STRONGHOLD’s website

INTRODUCTION

Karena Montag and Claire Whitmer founded STRONGHOLD in the San Francisco Bay area in 2019. Both grew deeply disillusioned with the culture at the nonprofits they worked for, which, as they saw it, did not live up to the values the groups publicly extolled. In addition, they saw disheartening examples of white supremacy in these spaces. By working together to facilitate in-prison restorative justice programs, Karena says that she and Claire were able to connect and learn from “numerous exquisite teachers beyond the wall.”

As a multiracial organization rooted in the values of prison abolition and liberation, STRONGHOLD uses restorative practices to address, account for, and transform the harms of white supremacy and racism. Karena says that STRONGHOLD is committed to serving a “multiracial and intersectional demographic” of organizers, restorative justice practitioners, community members, and people who have been impacted by the criminal legal system. STRONGHOLD has a well-regarded public training program and also serves organizations and collectives seeking to embed a culture of restorative and racial justice in their practices.

ADDRESSING VIOLENCE

Karena defines violence as “anything that trespasses upon an individual’s or community's self-determination, dignity, and safety.” She believes that white supremacy violates the agency, safety, and dignity of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). She identifies this violence as psychological, emotional, physical, and structural. For Karena, safety in the community looks like people doing the slow work of building accountable relationships. Although she knows that her organization cannot promise anyone a form of safety that implies the absence of harm, she believes that safety is generated through the experience of moving through harm with accountability, dignity, and care.
Karena believes that violence stems from the traumatic myths of separation and safety that society has inherited through legacies of conquest, colonization, patriarchy, and white supremacy. She maintains that by internalizing these myths, we disrupt our deepest wisdom about how to offer care and love to each other, along with engendering violence in our relationships with ourselves, each other, and the earth.

STRONGHOLD helps prevent violence by creating environments where people can be in “right relationship” with others and hold people accountable. The group’s community partners include California Youth Connection, Roots Community Health Center, The Pachamama Alliance, The Safe Return Project, Child Advocates, Brown University, and Boundless Freedom Project.

CHALLENGES

Karena says the hardest parts of STRONGHOLD’s work involve confronting and navigating the ubiquitous impacts of white supremacy and systemic harm. She believes that the collective trauma of these systems are often so entrenched and calcified in people’s bodies, beliefs, and cultures that they end up defended and protected instead of open and ready to be held accountable. STRONGHOLD’s philosophy maintains that racialized capitalism is the largest structural barrier to the organization’s work. To navigate this, the group has created a robust fund that allows them to make their programming readily available to BIPOC through scholarships. Although Karena considers restorative practices “generative,” she says the biggest misconception about STRONGHOLD’s work is that “restorative practice is the ‘easy’ way.”

VIEWS ON POLICING

STRONGHOLD’s position organizationally is that policing is not a source of community safety and doesn’t have a role in reducing violence. As Karena says, “Our community is inclusive of folks for whom policing is a threat to their very safety and aliveness.” Although STRONGHOLD’s work does not directly address defunding the police, the culture and practical application of the organization’s work is rooted in abolitionism. Its work allows for people to be held accountable—and not punished—for the harm they have caused, while maintaining belonging and connection. Through collective practice, Karena and her colleagues strive for a world in which the work of keeping each other safe is returned to the people and not left to the police.
Looking ahead, Karena hopes that STRONGHOLD’s work remains rigorous and that its community continues to be chosen family. She also hopes that its work brings about internal, interpersonal, and systemic transformation. Karena adds that she would like STRONGHOLD to be remembered as offering “brave, skillful, and embodied facilitation” that supported and co-created accountable communities of belonging rooted in radical love.
ABOUT COMMON JUSTICE

Common Justice develops and advances solutions to violence that transform the lives of those harmed and foster racial equity without relying on incarceration.

In New York City, we operate the first alternative-to-incarceration and victim-service program in the United States that focuses on violent felonies in the adult courts. Locally and nationally, we leverage the lessons from our direct services to transform the justice system through partnerships, advocacy, and elevating the experiences and power of those most impacted.

Rigorous and hopeful, we build practical strategies to hold people accountable for harm, break cycles of violence, and secure safety, healing, and justice for survivors and their communities.

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