

COMMUNITY JUSTICE NETWORK FOR YOUTH  
STOPPING THE RAIL TO JAIL







# STOPPING THE RAIL TO JAIL

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*The Foundations of a Movement  
Known as the Community Justice  
Network for Youth (CJNY)*

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## ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

The Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY) is a program of the W. Haywood Burns Institute (BI). It is comprised of 140 community-based programs, grassroots organizations, service-providing agencies, residential facilities and advocacy groups in 21 states. This publication outlines the foundation and beliefs that ground CJNY's work. As a support network, the CJNY enhances the capacity of community organizations who collectively share one vision: To promote the availability of effective and culturally-appropriate programming for youth of color and poor communities. The CJNY helps to develop real solutions to replace the "cradle to prison pipeline" created by zero-tolerance policies in schools, a lack of opportunities in poor communities and the failure of public systems.

### **Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY)**

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**Christina "Krea" Gomez** is the former program manager for CJNY. She has spent the last 14 years advocating for women in the justice system, homeless families, queer youth of color, and for employment training programs for youth. She fought to salvage subsidized housing for homeless families and immigrants in San Francisco resulting in the creation of the first-ever local housing subsidies for undocumented families. She also created the Homeless Education Program, which served over 200 homeless children a year providing advocacy, school uniforms and supplies.

**Malachi Garza** sits on the Board of Directors for the Transgender and Intersexed Justice Project and is active in the organizations work serving low-income queer and transgender communities of color who are formally or currently incarcerated within California's prison system. Malachi is a 2005 Kopkind fellow. Before coming to CJNY, Malachi was a leader in community organizing and popular education through School of Unity and Liberation (SOUL), where he directed an international training and internship program, classes and institutes.

**Ophelia Williams** grew up in an underserved community and understands the barriers young people face everyday who are victims of poverty, incarceration and addiction. She has declared her life work to be that of fighting injustice through the impact the BI has on juvenile justice practice throughout jurisdictions across the country.

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## PREFACE

The Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY) is as vital today to the field of juvenile justice as the day it was established in Austin, Texas, in 2000. Juvenile crime rates were in decline, yet arrest and detention rates were on the rise – particularly for youth of color.

CJNY emerged amid a wave of unprecedented “lock ‘em up” policies, as a network through which a new generation of advocates, organizers, service providers, family members and youth leaders could share the common goal of interrupting the cycle of detention and incarceration. In the words of one of our founders, the late John Bess, “CJNY exists to Stop the Rail to Jail.” For the past 10 years, we have unified under this guiding principal.



Despite our progress, today we continue to see our network of members – who time and time again demonstrate success with “at risk” youth – shunted off to the sidelines of the juvenile justice reform movement. Similarly, the media continues to frame the issue of youth detention and incarceration by placing blame on individuals, families and communities, without providing context to the larger set of policy decisions that create neighborhoods without resources or hope for positive youth development.

Our members realize this misleading and deceptive slant has to be countered with analysis that reflects the reality of system failures. Therefore, our work as a network now includes establishing a narrative that the juvenile justice system, through irrational and unproven policies and practices, is responsible for unconscionably high levels of racial and ethnic disparities and recidivism levels.

CJNY’s core mission remains to hold systems accountable. By bringing the communities most directly affected by justice policies to the decision-making table, and providing them the information necessary to fully participate, we can address and change any disparate treatment of our youth.

This publication shares the history of the juvenile justice reform movement from a community perspective, and illustrates some of the community-based approaches that we believe are necessary to hold systems accountable for racial and ethnic disparities.

Together, we are strengthening the movement to end our nation’s addiction to incarceration.

- Tshaka Barrows  
*Program Director*  
*Community Justice Network for Youth*

## I. FOUNDATIONS

**A** movement is fluid. It cuts through time and space. It bends and reshapes and maneuvers through opposition to sustain its momentum toward justice. This is what we call the Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY). It is a movement to “Stop the Rail to Jail” for youth of color and poor children. The first programs of color were invited to join in Texas in 2000 at a convening that would lead to the creation of CJNY. It was a gathering to laugh, cry, demand justice, and take responsibility for underserved youth of color in the juvenile justice system.

The face of juvenile justice had shifted at the turn of the 21st century. The system was no longer filled mostly with poor White children. It was now incarcerating mostly youth of Asian, Latino, Native and African descent. James Bell, at the time an attorney with the Youth Law Center in San Francisco, came to his realization regarding disparities in a moment that he describes this way:

“Sometimes the most seemingly benign moments can be revelatory. In 1999, I was hosting a group of judges and probation officers from Eastern Europe who were visiting the United States to observe juvenile justice practices. I arranged a visit to the Alameda County Juvenile Court to watch the morning judicial calendar. After court, we planned to visit the Alameda County Juvenile Hall.

After observing court and meeting briefly with the juvenile court judge, the group was on its way to juvenile hall when one visitor asked, ‘Now that we have seen the Black court, can we go see the White court?’ This innocent question was a revelation for me. We may have become numb to the injustice of disparities in the U.S., but someone unfamiliar with our system noticed how disproportionate it was. It begged the question for me — how could we have evolved into this new version of Jim Crow without an outcry?”

It was from this seed that the idea of a network of community organizations grew. James was determined to examine the structural underpinnings of the over-representation of young people of color in the juvenile justice system. He had an instinct that the contradictions and flaws within the system could begin to be identified and reformed among the populations of young people who were arrested with low and medium-level charges. That is because both the system had shifted to criminalizing minor and status offenders who could be safely supervised and rehabilitated in the community, and system stakeholders were most willing to consider alternatives for these populations.

James knew that the communities in which these young people resided would need to play a major role in any appropriate response to youth in trouble with the law. So as he incubated an idea for an institute that would address Disproportionate Minority Confinement (DMC)<sup>1</sup>, he also identified eight diverse

<sup>1</sup> DMC is “disproportionate minority confinement” in secure detention facilities and “disproportionate minority contact” with the juvenile justice system. DMC occurs when the proportion of youth of color in a community is lower than the proportion of youth of color held in secure detention or involved in the local juvenile justice system.

### Our quest for justice

**“After observing court and meeting briefly with the juvenile court judge, the group was on its way to juvenile hall when one visitor asked, ‘Now that we have seen the Black court, can we go see the White court?’ This innocent question was a revelation for me. We may have become numb to the injustice of disparities in the U.S., but someone unfamiliar with our system noticed how disproportionate it was.”**

*- James Bell*



## CJNY STATEMENT

**Core Purpose:** To protect and improve the lives of youth of color, poor children and their communities by ensuring fairness and equity throughout all public and private youth serving systems. We believe:

1. Children cannot be rehabilitated in cages.
2. All youth deserve to be treated equally and fairly by the systems that serve them.
3. All youth should be heard and included in decision-making processes that impact their lives.
4. To protect and improve the lives of youth of color and poor youth we must engage their communities.
5. Most young people in trouble with the law are best served by alternatives to incarceration.
6. The process of achieving fairness and equity must be intentionally inclusive by convening traditional adversaries and respecting divergent views.
7. When children are provided with sufficient resources, guidance, support, safety, and positive interventions, they can fulfill their potential as contributing members of their communities.
8. A data-driven approach is essential to address systemic issues that involve race.

nonprofits that would help him form a national community network. These nonprofits convened at Alex Haley Farm in Tennessee in 1999 and identified other organizations that could join the network. A year later in Austin, CJNY had grown from an idea into a network of more than 50 organizations in 30 communities in 13 states.

The name Community Justice Network for Youth came out of the gathering in Austin in 2000, providing an identity to bond grassroots advocates, organizers and service providers fighting in isolation for justice and better life outcomes for youth. CJNY would soon become known as a network with a fundamental understanding that community advocates, organizers and service providers of color should be leading efforts to address the problems plaguing youth of color coming into contact with the juvenile justice system.

### A. Ownership

CJNY members drive our collective movement.

Their strength and passion outlasts bureaucracy and sustains our mission to “Stop The Rail To Jail,” a figurative pipeline we use to describe how youth flow directly from schools, foster care, mental health and other failed child-serving systems to juvenile jails. Our members bring their personal experience and knowledge to the table, and we help them understand how to use data and strategy to strengthen their push for a better system that is rooted in rehabilitation and partners with the community.

The initial CJNY convening in 2000 was a pivotal moment in our movement because it was the first national gathering of those working to shut down locked facilities with those working inside locked facilities. They shared a core belief best expressed by CJNY member David Muhammad, “Children have infinite potential for greatness.”

At this convening, traditional adversaries at various ends of the system looked beyond their differences in order to strengthen this new network of like-minded organizers, youth, families, and the communities they represented within it. These 50 original CJNY member organizations made several commitments before departing the convening. They created a mission and values statement (*see CJNY Statement*) that they agreed member organizations joining the network should sign onto. It was also decided that the network would be intentional, only growing through trusted relationships. Today a prospective member group must still be referred by an existing member organization.

At the core of the strategy to maintain a cohesive and streamlined network was the very basic but imperative element of relationship building. It was always vital that the relationships we built with organizations outlast staff turnover and crises.

### B. Culture

At our earliest gatherings, we established a foundation for what would become known as “the CJNY way,” which represents the unspoken traditions that guide how we interact, convene, and move forward as a community. These traditions of spirit, honor, respect and inspiration are integrated in everything we do, and are what sets CJNY apart from other issue-oriented networks.

We evoke spirit and culture into all that we do. At each event that we coordinate and at every meeting we convene, we begin with a ceremonial opening that pays homage to those before us who fought for a more just juvenile justice system and world. We also appreciate those who are fighting for justice today, and honor those who cannot be with us because they are incarcerated, the parents who have to visit their children behind bars, and the youth who have lost their childhood to incarceration.

Many of our members are parents of incarcerated children, or are community members who are the only people providing services for youth in their area. We understand the sacrifice they make by leaving their home and family behind to participate in CJNY events. That is partly why our events are more than conferences and meetings. They are a place of rejuvenation, where members are reminded why they cannot stop holding juvenile and criminal justice systems accountable.

Albino Garcia, founder and executive director of our member group La Plazita Institute, often uses the phrase *La cultura cura*, or “Culture heals.” We understand the importance of practicing the rituals our ancestors and elders called upon in trying times. When we are in another locale, we rely on members from that region to officiate ceremonies and provide us with the spirituality that grounds those native to that region. We often participate in activities that are performed in order to balance energy, and cleanse and bless the space that we share together.



*Circling up at the Southern Regional Conference in 2003*

For example, one of our member groups at a Midwest Regional Conference in 2005 had experienced the killing of a youth by another youth in their community. For guidance on a cultural ceremony that would help ease the pain, we sought wisdom from Frank Blazquez (also known as “Papa Frank”) of our group Youth Struggling for Survival (YSS).

Papa Frank recommended a ceremony where each of us were given a bit of tobacco to represent that which was painful inside. Each person had a moment to share their pain before tossing their tobacco into the fire to release the pain. It was a very emotional experience and all of the participants expressed great appreciation to Frank and YSS.

We always do our best as CJNY staff to be inclusive of all cultures and rituals. We may have someone bless our meals, sing the hymns and songs that guided the work of the freedom riders and student organizers during the Civil Rights movement, or smudge ourselves with sage. For some members, this is the first time they have been exposed to certain aspects of such traditions. With a little context, they embrace and even look forward to these opening ceremonies at CJNY events.

### **C. The Organizing Council**

Culture was an important element of how the founders of CJNY selected who would make up an Organizing Council of 11 individuals to move the CJNY agenda forward. Members of the OC



*Drumming opened up the Youth Policy Forum in 2004*

were selected based on the diversity of their budget, program size, race, ethnicity, geography and gender of the communities they served.

The programs represented by the OC members reflected the culture of CJNY. The programs were diverse in their makeup of advocates, organizers, practitioners and service providers. Also, their work was varied. The service, organizing and advocacy ranged from a residential program that contracts with juvenile courts, for example, to an individual who was organizing communities to close a juvenile facility.

This strategic approach created an umbrella of perspectives that is vital when addressing different points in the juvenile justice system. It is important to con-

In their first report, the first two CJNY staff members, Tshaka Barrows and Ophelia Williams, expressed the challenges that member programs were facing finding resources and becoming sustainable.

The OC requested that Tshaka and Ophelia host regional conferences to re-engage the base and facilitate discussions around the next steps for CJNY. That would be their first step on a long-term effort to build a movement that would “Stop the Rail to Jail.”



*The Organizing Council, now the Advisory Council, in 2005*

front a facility that is unjustly and disproportionately locking up youth of color. But it is just as important to provide services to youth in the facility. Both of these approaches represent different strategies, but the groups behind the efforts are able to collaborate under the umbrella of CJNY.

Once James secured funding for his new organization, W. Haywood Burns Institute (BI), he was able to hire two staff members to develop the CJNY. In a year’s time, the network had already lost 15 member organizations that had ceased operation. That reality revealed one of the most difficult challenges of juvenile justice reform – sustainability.

#### CJNY Founding Members:

- Alternative Rehabilitative Communities, Harrisburg, PA
- Barrios Unidos, Santa Cruz, CA
- Girls, Inc., Detroit, MI
- Korean Youth and Community Center, Los Angeles, CA
- Omega Boys Clu, San Francisco, CA
- Southwest Keys, Austin, TX
- The Valley, New York, NY

#### Original O.C. Members:

- Bart Lubow, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD
- Cheryl Graves, the Children and Family Justice Center, Chicago, IL
- Clinton Lacey, Friends of Island Academy, New York, NY
- Jennifer Nelson, Voices of Youth Southwest Key, Austin, TX
- John Bess, The Valley, New York, NY
- Juan Sanchez, Southwest Key, Austin, TX
- Lateefah Simon and Marlene Sanchez, Center for Young Women’s Development, San Francisco, CA
- Otilio Quintero, Barrios Unidos, Santa Cruz, CA
- Roscoe Wilson, the Associated Marine Institute, Tampa, FL
- Tracy Charles-King, Fort Belknap Safe Futures, Harlem, MT

## II. BUILDING A

The power of CJNY has always been rooted with the people, the families and the youth who come together to share their outrage and as Tshaka Barrows puts it, form into a figurative hammer capable of “smashing” a system that tears their communities and families apart. All of those invited to join CJNY were already working in juvenile justice reform, many for quite some time. All expressed feeling alone while on the front lines of the fight to keep children out of cages.

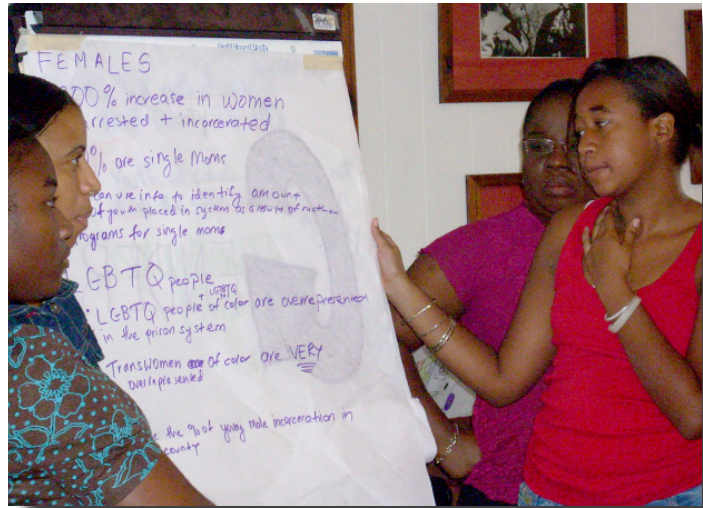
Together, CJNY members became a family of freedom fighters who create spaces to share their love for their communities. This sharing is a source of spiritual, physical and mental rejuvenation. It is this feeling of family that many identify as the one of the most powerful elements of CJNY. One of the most common types of responses we receive from young people who have attended our events is, “I didn’t know that anyone cared about what was happening to us.”

CJNY staff alone cannot further this movement – progress must come directly from the people who are working everyday to “Stop the Rail to Jail” in their local communities. They bring to the collective circle their own principals of valuing family, building a foundation of love and respect, and of honoring and utilizing culture as a guiding force in this work.

### A. The Members

One of the core aspects of the movement is relationships, strategies and conditions. CJNY has always operated from a foundation of relationships as key to our network and our movement. As our network grows, we never lose this value. It is our strength.

CJNY members reflect children who are system-involved. People of Asian, Latino, Native and African descent comprise the majority of the CJNY leadership and membership, along with poor White system-involved children and White advocates. Many of the earliest CJNY members were young adults, parents or grandparents whose knowledge of the system came from personal experience.



These community members are not often recognized or consulted by the system when considering alternative options for youth. We believe our members should be considered the foremost experts because they have repeatedly demonstrated success through their programming and strategies (*For examples see Section VII. Spotlight: CJNY Members*).

CJNY members are powerful models for change in their regions, who are well-equipped to block the expansion of problematic juvenile detention facilities, lead efforts to close down abusive facilities and advocate for proactive legislation. Our network operates as a united front, with members who approach reform of the system from very different entry points, but who are all aligned in the same mission.

CJNY members exist in rural, urban and suburban regions. As individuals, they are abolitionists and reformers. Some CJNY members contract with probation to offer community-based services, while some CJNY members are too entrenched in campaign work against specific system players to even consider this type of partnership.

But no matter the make-up of the youth they serve, our members share similar battles against the most common reasons for youth detention: Youth of color are mostly detained for school fights; shoplifting; status offenses; crimes of poverty; missing court dates; violating probation; truancy; graffiti, and oth-

er minor offenses for which more affluent and White youth are released to their parents or guardian.

CJNY members are united around a common belief that the juvenile justice system is failing in its core historic purpose: To rehabilitate youth. A cornerstone of CJNY's collective philosophy is that secure detention is over-utilized – particularly for youth of color and poor youth – and that culturally and linguistically appropriate alternatives to detention should be used instead.

Together, our members partner and share best practices that strengthen each group in the network. An example of this is the story of Ruben Austria,



*Shadi Rahimi interviewing Ruben Austria for a Close Spofford Campaign video, on [Youtube.com/cjnytv](https://www.youtube.com/cjnytv). Photo by Yoram Savion.*

founder of the first and only community-based alternative to incarceration program in the Bronx, NY. BronxConnect began with the modest concept of operating a mentoring program for youth who were in trouble with the law, with a goal of interrupting the cycle of recidivism. BronxConnect was initially based within the Urban Youth Alliance International, a faith-based nonprofit, and was sponsored by a network of churches in the Bronx that Ruben utilized to recruit mentors.

With the support of the CJNY network and its resources, Ruben was able to make connections that

helped his organizational work and his personal aspirations. With hard work and community support, BronxConnect grew into a large organization with a significant caseload of youth who would otherwise be sitting in prison. Ruben continued tirelessly with his vision for Stopping the Rail to Jail and recently established a new nonprofit, Community Connections for Youth, which will provide support to nonprofits that are interested in serving as alternatives to detention or incarceration.

CJNY members like Ruben reflect the understanding that returning a youth to the community for treatment is the best response to a system-involved youth. That is because the system, as a mechanical operation, does not utilize love or support in the rehabilitation of a young person. This love for our youth and our communities is one of our greatest strengths, and the basis for our unity.

## **B. Regional and National Conferences**

In order to best serve CJNY members, the Organizing Council initially sectioned the country into four regions to be managed by the first two CJNY staff members. In 2002, the network held a first round of regional conferences in Chicago, IL, New York City, NY, and Santa Cruz, CA (the southern region was in its early stages) in order to begin building important personal relationships between members.

In a round of facilitated discussions, our members shared their struggles and stories of success. The teens, young adults and adults who participated reflected a wealth of knowledge and experience, and discovered the commonalities they shared. This was an important moment for many members. Before CJNY, many community groups operating under a “youth development” or “youth services” umbrella were not considered by the system as juvenile justice experts – even though many were providing alternative to detention programs or re-entry programming.

As a network that places utmost value in community expertise, CJNY challenged community members to redefine their roles as juvenile justice leaders who could hold the system accountable. In return for their investment, CJNY staff showed appreciation by treating members like valued experts – paying for travel, booking hotels and providing meals.

This may seem insignificant, but for many members, especially previously incarcerated youth, these trips were often the first time they had traveled outside of their communities.

During 2002, CJNY staff hosted a National Conference in Oakland, CA. Attendees included southwest and southern organizations from New Mexico to South Carolina. More than 250 people attended, representing nearly 100 member organizations. After another regional meeting in 2003 in Atlanta, GA, CJNY began to gain momentum in southern communities. Conversations during plenaries or workshops often sparked ideas for transformative programming. Among the technical assistance requests that came out of a Western Regional conference in 2004, for example, came a request from the Center for Young Women's Development (CYWD).

CYWD was attempting to shift their focus from health education to juvenile justice intervention. They were seeking funding for their employment and training program, Sisters Rising, from the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department.

In an effort to receive the most funding possible, CYWD wrote their proposal aiming for more than 200 participants in the first year. CJNY staff was asked to provide technical assistance regarding this shift in programming. Our staff knew that 200 would be an unrealistic number of young women to provide counseling, employment, training and life skills in one program year. We encouraged CYWD to examine San Francisco's juvenile probation data in order to determine a realistic number to whom they could effectively provide programming.

After reviewing data on the number of young women in the system for drug possession, medium-level offenses and probation violations, it was determined that instead of serving 200 young women, a more realistic number was 17. CYWD was granted their contract, and to date more than 400 young women have graduated from their program, moving on to become doctors, film makers and organizers who continue to give back to their community.

### **C. Technical Assistance**

As the movement of CJNY continued to grow, staff



*Western Regional Conference, Santa Cruz, CA, 2002*



*Midwest Regional Conference, Chicago, IL, 2003*



*Eastern Regional Conference, New York City, NY, 2003*

strengthened the relationships of CJNY members in part through a database that was created over a two-year period through site visits, interviews and meetings. We continue to use this directory today to keep up with our members. We view requests for assistance; match groups to others in the network they might collaborate with; determine content for conferences; and remain current on logistical considerations including changes in organization staff.

As CJNY staff, we receive a wide diversity of requests. Under the umbrella of trainings, for example, requests range from public speaking to campaign strategy development. We receive requests for non-violent direct action training, for best practices when assisting LGBT2Q (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Two-Spirit, Queer) youth in custody, grant writing and budgeting. Our database allows us to find the most appropriate community organization or community member to partner a group with.

For example, a mother of an incarcerated 13-year-old girl in Ohio recently requested training on engaging system administrators. The content of this training request was both a desire to understand the terms and practices of the local county system, and the emotional and personal aspects of engaging in this work.

The mother told our staff, “When engaging with the system in any way, we are expected to show complete restraint and cooperation, while inside my heart is breaking as I wonder if the probation chief knows the guard that my daughter says abused her. Sometimes

it hurts so bad I can’t even smile in their direction. Let alone concentrate on the data we are reviewing.”

As a national network, CJNY is built on such depth of complexities, and potential. By utilizing our database, our staff was able to connect this mother to resources regarding juvenile justice terms and practices. We also connected her to other CJNY members who are mothers of daughters in detention and are engaged in system reform efforts where they interact with system stakeholders.

### **i. Peer-to-Peer Exchanges**

Another key element of our work is collective skill sharing. Our peer-to-peer exchanges are facilitated interactions of resilience and compassion. As people who have had personal experiences with law enforcement and the juvenile justice system, our network is built upon personal understanding and the sharing of expertise.

In meetings and during web or phone exchanges, CJNY members train each other on best practices from a variety of cultures and disciplines in the realms of services, advocacy and organizing. Within the CJNY network are varying levels of involvement in the juvenile justice system – from academics and intellectuals, to people who operate large-scale alternative institutions, to single mothers who organize support groups for mothers whose children are serving life sentences.

Overall, the CJNY network is based upon trusted relationships that our peer exchanges reinforce. The trauma of incarceration is intense, and in relating to one another, the personal lives of members are exposed, and their families’ crises are revealed. These spaces are complicated and pain is often expressed. Thus, our peer exchanges operate within strategic and safe spaces. We provide special attention to supporting and facilitating conversations that create understanding and openness.

Participants in CJNY peer exchanges often leave with increased skill sets and fierce loyalty for each other. To demonstrate, we will share the story of a peer exchange between two southern-based organizations run by and for parents of incarcerated youth.



*Krea Gomez leads a training for CJNY member group Skrappy’s, AZ*



*Peer-to-Peer Exchange of Task Forces in Atlanta, GA, in 2009*

One of these organizations was a multi-racial/ethnic organization comprised of Latinos, African Americans and Whites; while the other was a predominantly African American organization.

Both groups faced similar crossroads in their organizational work. During the peer exchange, an elder, White, working-class parent, who was formally incarcerated as a youth, raised his hand and began with, “I see that ya’ll is all Black.” Anticipation of discomfort filled the room, until he finished his thought, “So I’m wondering where all the White parents at? I mean, they got kids in there, and that’s messed up, they leaving ya’ll to fight by yourselves. Whites gotta step up and join in to fight for all our kids.”

These are the moments, within spaces of trust, that people can speak honestly about the local dynamics and personal struggles they are facing. These are the moments that members recall when they talk about what CJNY means for them – the moments where members build the unity that a movement requires.

#### **D. Task Forces**

For years, advocates on the ground have been demanding “Schools Not Jails,” and “Books Not Bars.” While such demands have led to powerful change, they have not been enough. We believe CJNY members have to become experts on the juvenile justice system itself in order to Stop the Rail to Jail.

As CJNY staff, we have been partnering with staff at

the BI who work directly with system stakeholders, which has deepened our sophistication around the intricacies of the system. This expertise has allowed us to play a vital role in helping our members identify specific agencies that make up their local juvenile justice system, and discuss the various “decision points” in the system where youth are either released or pushed deeper into the system.

In recent years, CJNY staff has unleashed a comprehensive strategy to hold local and state juvenile justice systems accountable for their role in contributing to racial and ethnic disparities. We now encourage those CJNY members who have the capacity to organize on a deeper level to utilize data to inform their demands, and position themselves as experts.

We assist such members in establishing themselves within a region as a local “Racial and Ethnic Disparities Taskforce.” We define these task forces as a local collective of concerned citizens, community members, service providers, advocates, organizers, parents and youth who have made a commitment to hold their system accountable for racial and ethnic disparities. Such collectives convene to hold systems accountable, using their system’s data to build strategies aimed at Stopping the Rail to Jail.

CJNY staff assists task forces by traveling often to provide tactical planning and strategic development. At the same time, we stress the importance of keeping the pace of this work slow and consistent, and strive to reach understanding from all those involved regarding the implementation of the strategy.

In Boston, MA, for example, the group Reflect and Strengthen (R&S) requested training and support from CJNY as they committed organizational resources to strategic system accountability work in their region. In 2008, their efforts took shape as the Massachusetts Juvenile Justice Task Force on Racial Disparities, a collective of community groups, also known as “Da Force.”

Today, this taskforce is pushing for legislation that would require the collection of data by Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Geography and Offense (REGGO), which is the way the BI instructs sites to collect data. The data would be analyzed and presented to the public by each youth-serving agency in order for them to

receive disbursements from the state.

In New York City, the Task Force on Racial Disparities is building a broad strategy to involve youth and families in a struggle to address the fact



*Task Force members Rachel Fazzino, Roselyn Barry, Mallory Hanora, Mariama White-Hammond*

that youth of color make up 98 percent of youth in New York City's juvenile detention population.

Through their research, New York City task force members found that for the past seven years, the former New York State

Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Coordinator had done nothing to address issues in New York City, the largest jurisdiction in the state with the highest levels of racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile justice.

The task force requested a meeting with the former State DMC Coordinator in order to hold him accountable. They challenged him directly regarding his track record and demanded that action be taken. Shortly after that meeting, the coordinator decided to leave his post. A woman with a background in community organizing and development was hired in his place. She is a champion for addressing issues of racial and ethnic disparities in the city and state of New York.



*New York task force members Ruben Austria, Charisa Smith, Kyung "KJ" Ji, Marc Washington*

Today, the New York task force is viewed as an official entity with perceived authority in the area of DMC reform. This has resulted in task force members sitting in meetings with system decision-makers and department heads on a regular basis.

Using their increased access and deepened knowledge of DMC from trainings by CJNY staff, these community members have pushed the city to address its epic DMC crisis. This task force is now a model for other task forces that CJNY is helping to establish across the country.

Our other emerging task forces have been established in Chicago, IL; Tucson, AZ; and New Orleans, LA. All of these groups are "mapping" their systems (See *Graph 1*) and working to inform their communities in order to build a base of people prepared to hold their local juvenile justice system accountable.



*New Orleans: Bridgette Butler, Wesley Ware, Shana Turner, Ernest Johnson*

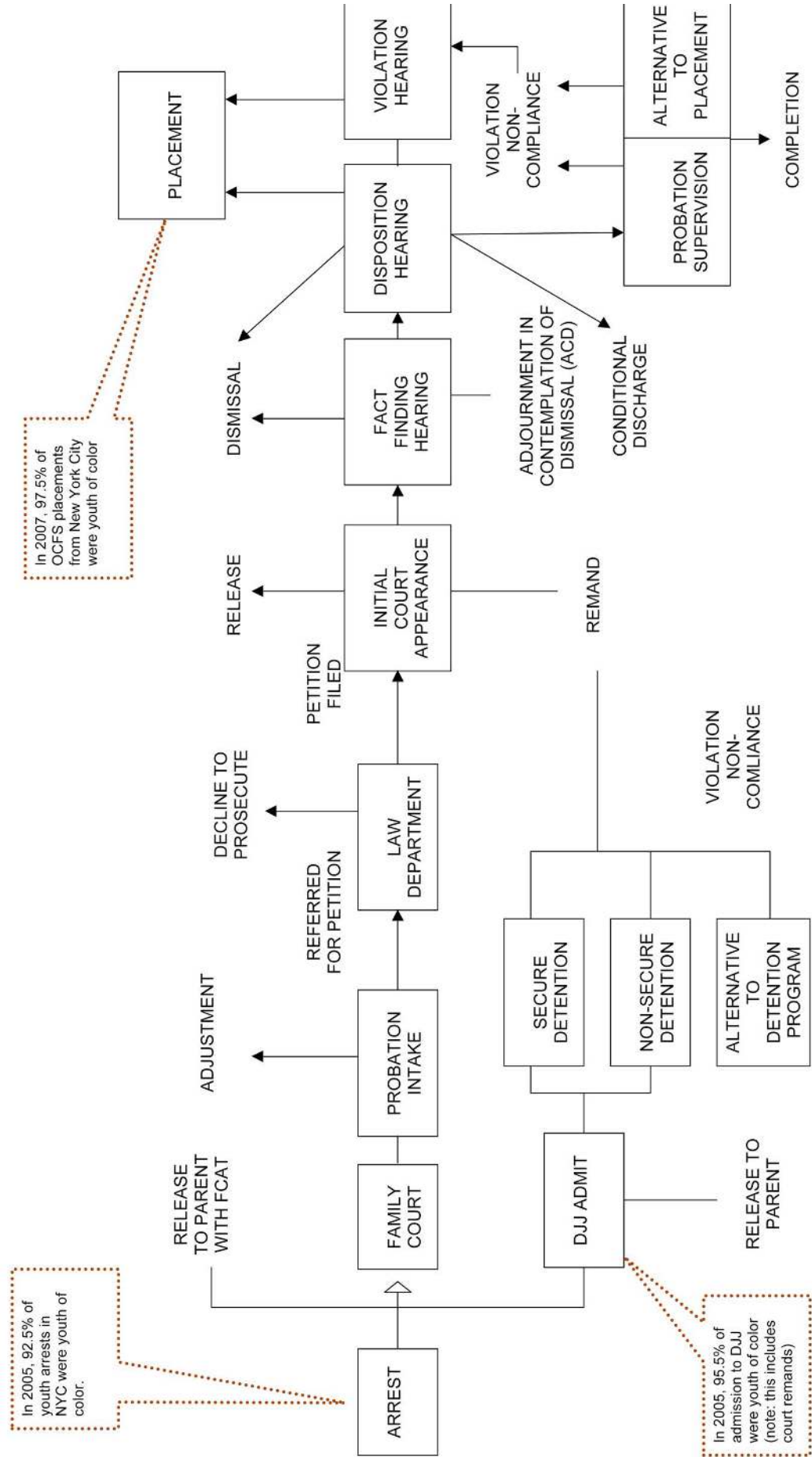


*Arizona: Anna Harper, Myriah Sierra, Kathy Wooldridge, Jonathan Peck, Armando Sotelo*



*Chicago: Mathilda de Dios, Cheryl Graves, Edith Crigler, Ryan Hollon, Jonathan Peck*

**Graph 1. System Mapping**



### III. TOOLS FOR A BETTER FIGHT

People often asked us how a staff of three (which is now four) is able to maintain a network of more than 1340 member organizations in 23 states. The work we have outlined thus far provides a glimpse of what we do. In order to maintain contact with the CJNY network, we also embark on annual road shows, hold trainings, and provide curriculum including a toolkit that walks members through the process of holding their local system accountable.

#### A. Road Shows

For our road shows, we select areas from our regions (see *CJNY Member Map page 25*) to visit in order to build relationships and understand the level of urgency for reform in that community; local trends in juvenile justice; what alternatives are being offered to young people in the region; and provide technical assistance and training, and learn how to best serve the organizations and individuals. Information gathered during our road shows is invaluable.

##### i. “Reflections from the Road,” Malachi Garza, Technical Assistance Manager

Christina “Krea” Gomez and I traveled to the southeast in the spring of 2010 to visit CJNY member organizations. What an amazing trip! My relationships were strengthened, my political analysis was deepened, and the feeling of CJNY familial love we received was absolute. It was tiring to drive long stretches and conduct four trainings and five site visits in six days, but the connections I made trumped all difficulties. That nourishment sustains me now.

This trip was a beautiful experience. When Krea and I were stranded due to a re-routed plane and a rock slide, we were afforded the experience of “taking the long way.” We drove through communities small and large, entire mountain ranges, lush forests, thick groves of beautiful trees, and communities that are ground zero for ecological battles.

The route Krea and I drove led us through South



*History curriculum training at Beloved Community Center in Greensborough*

Carolina, Tennessee, North Carolina, and through the Appalachian Mountains. Along the road we were blessed to visit with movement elders, and organizations like the Highlander Research and Education Center, Advocates for Youth and Justice, The Beloved Community Center and Spirit House.

The route Krea and I drove led us thought South Carolina, Tennessee, North Carolina, and through the Appalachian Mountains. Along the way we were blessed to visit with movement elders Suzanne Pharr and Renee Delapp, and organizations like Highlander Research and Education Center (Highlander), Advocates for Youth and Justice, The Beloved Community Center (Beloved) and Spirit House. Faith, determination and the legacy of the civil rights struggle are tangible in the fabric of the South as well as within the region’s organizations.

##### a. Highlander: New Market, TN

I was first introduced to Highlander through my work at the School of Unity and Liberation in Oakland, CA, which is also an education and training center. Highlander has been a powerful social justice organization since the 1960’s, providing a space for community organizers, activists and community members to gather and learn.

Lending support to the Highlander “Seeds of Fire” youth camp has been among the most enjoyable as-

pects of our CJNY summer schedule. By providing trainings on juvenile justice at Highlander, we have been able to expand our membership, thus our level of support, to organizations throughout the South.

Krea and I were hosted by Elandria Williams, a longtime CJNY supporter and part of the Highlander Education Team. Our trip was scheduled during a period when programming was not active, but we had the pleasure of meeting with staff members for extensive conversations, and were taken on a site visit of the breath-taking landscape.

We learned about Highlanders' current work and discussed components of CJNY's system accountability strategy that might be applicable to its constituents. Highlander keeps a comprehensive library of political education materials, books and videos. We were able to purchase valuable training resources to share with the CJNY membership.

#### **b. Beloved: Greensborough, N.C.**

In Greensborough we feasted on a homemade dinner while settling in for the night with our host, CJNY member Erica Mayo. This personal connection provided the opportunity to learn more about the organization that Erica is founding, Advocates for Youth and Justice (AFYJ), which is focused on re-entry services; specifically "Know Your Rights" education and mentoring programs for youth returning home from secure detention facilities.

As a former staff of Beloved, Erica hosted our morn-

ing visit to the Beloved Community Center. After a tour of the Beloved Food Bank and Community Garden, Beloved staff shared their community building and organizing tactics regarding changing the harsh treatment of black and brown youth by the county's police gang unit. Beloved staff taught communities about the North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act and engaged these community members in the process of demanding change from local political players. Beloved staff also taught these communities about agreements between police departments in eight North Carolina counties and the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Beloved has built long-lasting and strong multi-racial coalitions through this work and roots their analysis in a macro context that links Black and Latino experiences. After learning about Beloved's work, sharing CJNY curriculum, and brainstorming action steps, I left Greensborough thinking about sharing these lessons in a place of prickly pear jam and never ending sun – Tucson, Arizona, which I frequently visit in large part to attend Tucson Task Force meetings..

Black and brown communities in the state of Arizona are experiencing an intense spike in state sanctioned racial profiling and criminalization. Community groups have been seeking for ways to build multi-racial alliances. Clearly, building Latino and Black coalitions are as essential in the southeast as they are in the southwest, and increasingly important.

In Tennessee and North Carolina, we held "Training for Trainers" sessions on our juvenile justice history curriculum and our "Shanice Through the System" exercise (which we will discuss in the next section). These sessions involve training on the sharing of content, facilitation, tailoring and integrating curriculum into existing programs.

Much of the dialogue with our Southern hosts centered around land and subsistence. Our hosts and friends spoke about growing food and feeding poor communities from backyard gardens that supplied a community-supported bakery (CSB) with at-cost fresh food. Surrounded by fierce freedom fighters, food cultivation and distribution, my mind began to imagine more than a rooftop garden with raised beds, something I had considered as an urban resident of an apartment complex in Oakland.



*The Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee*

Throughout the trip, and well afterward, I was inspired to expand my beliefs about what is possible.

### A. History Curriculum

Throughout the years, CJNY members have requested copies of a lecture shared by BI Executive Director and Founder James Bell on the history of the juvenile justice system. Many of our members viewed this speech as a tool that could be used to assist their community members in demanding accountability of their local system.

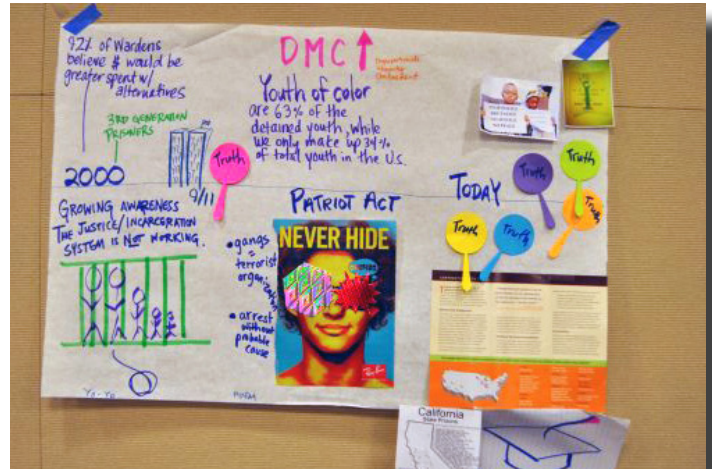
As CJNY staff, we decided to invest substantial resources in developing the history curriculum tool, along with other curriculum that would help our members in their work on the ground. We decided to begin with the history of the juvenile justice system, which was first shared in the form of essays, historical documents and a speech by James at a CJNY Youth Policy Forum in 2004.

The forum examined how institutions are used as a means of social control. Its attendees included formerly incarcerated youth and adults, juvenile justice experts, parents, advocates and organizers. Most agreed that the historical information provided was an unknown element necessary to understanding today's juvenile justice system today.

By 2007, CJNY staff had contracted with our member program School of Unity and Liberation (SOUL) to have Malachi Larrabee-Garza develop a curriculum on the history of the juvenile justice system. Malachi helped create a 120-page interactive education workbook, *Youth and the U.S. Justice System*, which helps people answer the question, "Why do racial disparities exist? The curriculum traces developments in the juvenile justice system from the 1500's to today, and allows people to identify the core issues that lead to racial and ethnic disparities.

To date, more than 250 organizations have ordered this curriculum, and more than 100 of these organizations have been trained in its content by CJNY staff. Its impact can be best measured in anecdote.

For example, during a training at the Highlander Education Center, one young woman exclaimed, "This is the why! This is the why!" When asked



*Interactive sharing of the History Curriculum*



*Young people sharing sections of History Curriculum*

to explain her statement she continued, "I always knew in my gut the way the system is is not an accident, not 'Just the way it is.' It's not that Blacks are more bad. Look at this chart! Look at White and Black youth crime rates and then these arrest rates. I get it. This helps me explain why I see 12 police cars around my way every day but no police uptown where the White kids sell whatever kinda drugs you can imagine."

The curriculum has armed the CJNY network with a powerful and applicable historical analysis of the development of juvenile justice systems, disproportionate minority contact and reform efforts.

### B. Shanice Through the System

Our staff next created an interactive exercise to assist

members in understanding the inner-workings of the system. It is called “Shanice Through The System.”

This multiple choice, interactive exercise leads participants through the varying “doors of detention” – from arrest to incarceration. Participants gain understanding of the inner-workings of the juvenile justice system, including how youth are processed and terminology specific to juvenile justice systems.

People who participate in this exercise often share personal stories that illuminate the experience of the juvenile justice system, and can identify young spokespeople for organizations. CJNY members also say this tool helps them better explain system accountability work to their communities.

One of our members wrote in an evaluation form after experiencing this particular workshop: “Now I understand what a detention hearing is and that I should take off work and go. It doesn’t seem fair, but when my child was arrested, I was given a slip of paper with a date. I wasn’t even sure how that date related to if he could come home or not.”

### **C. System Accountability Toolkit (S.A.T)**

The S.A.T is a product that was published as the history curriculum was being developed. It provides an outline of the steps that CJNY members should take to demand transparency of the operations of their local juvenile justice systems, and the reduction of the number of youth who are system-involved.

While CJNY members are experts on the experiences of people who are system-involved, many struggle to understand the functions of their local system. Community members avoid accessing important reform tables for reasons ranging from confusing operations of the system to personal trauma experience being incarcerated. It is important for CJNY members to be trained regarding how to deal with these dynamics, and how to best maneuver their local juvenile justice system.

In sparsely populated rural areas with smaller juvenile justice systems, for example, personal relationships with system stakeholders can greatly assist reform work. By contrast, CJNY member groups in densely populated urban areas often spend months



*Shanice Through the System exercise*

working to identify who to contact in order to receive information. Such dynamics present the need for assistance from our staff, along with localized research, to help organizations and individuals craft the best approach for reform.

The S.A.T toolkit, titled “Upset the Set Up,” is written in English and Spanish and is accompanied by bilingual DVD’s. The toolkit outlines how to identify what decisions are being made at what point in the system, who makes those decisions, and various options for community response at each point.

To test and perfect the draft toolkit, our staff selected two sites – New York City, which is densely populated and had the highest rates of DMC in the country, and Los Angeles, which has a massive geographical area, gang activity and limited capacity among the CJNY organizations. We called these experimental sites where we tested our models “demo sites,” or demonstration sites. We will explain what this work entailed further below.

### **D. Demonstration (“Demo”) Site Work**

The system accountability work we will detail for Los Angeles and New York “demo sites” represent the reality of the battle to Stop the Rail to Jail.

The main objective of our effort in these sites was to help CJNY members lead the local system accountability strategy. This required the organizations’ full

understanding of BI and CJNY methodology. And, we found, it also required a delicate balance between our knowledge and our members' understanding of how their local juvenile justice system functioned. It became evident early on that many CJNY members were operating based upon assumptions rather than facts. This is a common problem. The language spoken by the juvenile system and the community often creates barriers. System stakeholders tend to use terminology, acronyms and lingo that is only familiar to those who work professionally in the field.

Furthermore, the reform process can be slow, and system stakeholders who agree to work with community on reform often express frustration including: Grassroots organizers do not understand the

time sharpening their knowledge of the system, and the strategies to hold the system accountable.

This collaborative of community groups faced frustrating obstacles when meeting with system stakeholders, because of a lack of understanding. The scheduling of meetings with system stakeholders became the focus of the group's efforts. Once these meetings occurred, members were present and engaged, asked lots of questions and answered questions. Yet, members did not feel that they were having a desired impact. A collective decision led to waiting to continue the effort. All of these lessons were important for our staff and the CJNY members who participated in LA demo site, and lead to the successes achieved by our task forces.

Subsequently, in New York City our staff spent significant time educating our members on the inner-workings of the juvenile justice system, in order to ensure they were not holding onto assumptions that would cloud the system accountability process. The New York demo site dedicated several monthly meetings to knowledge transfer discussions about the local juvenile justice system and the dangers of assumptions. Because of this strategic adjustment, the demo site work in New York City thrived in a way that would not have been possible without the lessons learned from the Los Angeles demo site.

After completing the hard work of system mapping, and developing their own strategies to address racial and ethnic disparities, the New York demo site members decided it would be most strategic and effective to establish themselves as the New York City Task Force on Racial Disparities (TFRD), which we explained the effectiveness of in Section II: Building a Movement. The task forces represent our most comprehensive strategy to hold local and state juvenile justice systems accountable for their role in contributing to racial and ethnic disparities.

### **E. Alternative to Detention Toolkit**

We are currently working on a Alternative to Detention (ATD) Toolkit, which will instruct a nonprofit community agency that is interested in serving youth who would otherwise be locked in detention.

When used appropriately, these programs are bet-



*Los Angeles demo site members Kim McGill and Allegra Padilla.*

pressures placed on system stakeholders internally; community members ask for unrealistic things or make requests that are too broad; and the community demands timelines that are too short.

Our staff works to demonstrate the importance of dispelling underlying assumptions in order to establish a concrete foundation for a local reform movement.

In our first demo site of Los Angeles, however, we did not spend enough time emerged in the process of “knowledge transfer,” or addressing the assumptions of community-based stakeholders in order to achieve complete understanding of the way a local system operates. Thus, problems arose when members of one group appeared ready to move forward, while other members felt they needed to spend more

## V. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**J**ter, cheaper and safer options for adolescents who find themselves in trouble with the law. Juvenile justice reform is rooted in the significant contributions of community members – everyday people who changed the function, form and philosophy of juvenile justice.

The first “children’s court” was established in 1899 in Chicago by community activist Jane Addams. Prior to that she founded Hull House, a community-based organization serving the needs of 2,000 community members annually. Jane Addams’ expertise was social service, not law enforcement.

Juvenile probation was established in Boston by shoemaker John Augustus, who provided the first alternatives to 19 boys ranging in age from seven to 15-years-old. He took responsibility for the boys and put them to work in his shoe shop. Augustus was a highly motivated community member whose focus was getting people out of jail and back in the community where he felt they belonged.

Jane Addams and John Augustus represent the historical role of community leaders in the juvenile justice reform movement. A community activist and a shoemaker with no institutional authority were able to make lasting contributions to reform that are still fundamental components of juvenile justice. Today we are continuing to uphold their legacies.

### A. State of the Field

Most of the success in juvenile justice system reform has been attributed to system stakeholders who have a position of authority within the local system. Our theory of change relies heavily on both the leadership of system stakeholders *and* the expertise of outside community experts, who together provide a strategic road map to successful reform.

There are more than 3,100 counties in the U.S. The vast majority are not involved in any efforts to reform the juvenile justice systems that they operate. Often, the motivation to reform a local system comes from people within the system, and/or pressure from outside agencies. At the same time, much of



*Community members are part of the Ramsey County collaborative in MN*

the resources for juvenile justice reform are focused on the agencies and departments that make up the system (see the BI’s report, “Adoration of the Question” for further explanation of this process). For that reason, the communities most impacted by juvenile justice systems see very little of the reform money flowing in their direction. There are few mechanisms being built locally to ensure sustainability.

### B. Our Approach

The BI is one of the few outside agencies that provides consultation to jurisdictions on juvenile justice reform strategies around racial and ethnic disparities. At CJNY, we help encourage jurisdictions to include community stakeholders from the neighborhoods most impacted by the juvenile justice system.

We find that many system stakeholders often express confusion about why they should engage the community. Many lack clarity around the role that the community should or could play within a reform effort, and most are apprehensive about hearing from people who may be angry and possibly confrontational with the system stakeholders.

Among system stakeholders, there is a general notion that efforts will run more smoothly without engaging the community – that meetings will be led in a more cooperative manner and that no one will feel uncomfortable during the effort.

Despite all these obstacles, we push community engagement as a core strategy to juvenile justice system reform. One of the most significant barriers we must overcome in this work is the inherent power dynamic between system stakeholders and community stakeholders, which leaves community members in a dependant position. Community members must rely on the system stakeholders to share infor-



*Community members at the Pima County, AZ collaborative*

mation and power throughout the process, which is often an area of breakdown.

Another significant barrier is the issue of time. System stakeholders are participating in the reform effort as part of their job, and the meetings are usually held in their offices at times that works for them. Community stakeholders are most often not compensated for their participation, and they do not have the flexibility to attend afternoon meetings.

Most importantly, community members are not interested in reform for the sake of a more efficient system. Community stakeholders are involved because they – like Jane Addams and John Augustus – want to see something better for youth. Thus, we help the community and the system work together to find ways to create reform tables that work beneficially for both sides of the effort. The current model for community engagement enlists community stakeholders to join the process, and push the collaborative forward from within.

Today, many community stakeholders participating in juvenile justice reform express frustration and outrage over the slow pace of reform, as well as the lack of willpower on the part of system stakeholders, particularly when it comes to the is-

sue of addressing racial and ethnic disparities.

### **C. On the Ground**

Our community engagement work in jurisdictions begins with reaching out to community members who are serious about changing the system *and* working with system stakeholders. We also work with system stakeholders to develop an understanding of the purpose of engaging local community.

Often, when system stakeholders are asked to think about “engaging community,” they suggest ideas ranging from early childhood intervention to parenting skills for new mothers and fathers – all of which are distracting and unrelated to the system’s role in contributing to racial and ethnic disparities.

Instead, we push system stakeholders to focus on connecting detention reform work to the community because community members are a major part of the solution, as people and groups willing to provide alternatives to detention and incarceration.

Once we identify community members who can engage in reform, we coach them up on the system. That can include “mapping” the system and all of the decisions that fall under each juvenile justice agencies’ jurisdiction (*See Graph 1, page 12*). This process informs community members of the form and function of their local system, which enables them to participate at a much higher level by using system language about policy, practice and procedure.

**Community members are not interested in reform for the sake of a more efficient system. Community stakeholders are involved because they – like Jane Addams and John Augustus – want to see something better for youth.**

Ultimately, community engagement is a lengthy and rewarding process that ideally results in educated community members sitting at a decision-making table *with* system stakeholders – working with them while also pushing them to do the tough work of looking at the decisions that push youth of color deeper into the juvenile justice system.

It is our goal to leave jurisdictions with passionate community members who are also sophisticated

## VI. THE FUTURE

**A**nd knowledgeable about the juvenile justice system, who are able to push for innovations and sustain the changes that have already been achieved.

As the BI's work across the country has increased, so has the demand for the expertise that CJNY staff and members provide. We are continuing to train the community to work with *and* push against the system, and at the same time are working to instruct system stakeholders on the process of engaging and inviting the community to join the reform process.

It is now CJNY's 10th year and our network is more than 130 organizations strong. The juvenile justice reform movement that our members are leading is continuing to challenge misperceptions around "public safety" that lead to harsh, unnecessary and ineffective legislation. Our goal is to shift the conversation, and behavior, to keep low and medium level offending youth in the community, where they can receive services and rehabilitation.

As the nation continues to explore ways to salvage depleting budgets, our members are picking up this debate and reframing it to push for facility closures, detention reform, and the establishment of more community-based alternatives. The changes on the ground have been transformative. We are pushing against the modern ideologies of juvenile justice, and in favor of holistic approaches to rehabilitation and a new definition of public safety that embraces restorative practices that work with youth and their families to achieve better life outcomes.

As a network, we have established a direct link between the communities most impacted by racial and ethnic disparities, and solutions around detention and DMC. This was the goal of CJNY pioneers who believed that community members



must be equipped with insider information about the system in order to truly Stop the Rail to Jail.

The stakes are high. Our communities are being robbed of our children, who are returned to us with fewer opportunities and more obstacles in their way. It will be our greatest achievement to transform the system into one that does not consider our children "throw-aways." Until then, our members are working to redirect funds, and systemic responses to adolescent behavior, from detention to mentoring, relationship building, cultural awareness, life skills, violence prevention and after-school programs that are abundant in affluent communities.

Our staff continues to support communities across the country working to reduce the adverse impacts of this nation's addiction to incarceration.

In the spirit of one of our founders, John Bess, who passed away in January of 2010, we have taken our movement to the nation's capitol, Washington D.C., where we are collectively leading a national "Week of Action to Stop The Rail To Jail."

Together, we will amplify the voices and experiences of all families and youth crying out with collective outrage about the injustices they experience at the hands of the system. We will remember those who

## VII. SPOTLIGHT: CJNY MEMBERS



are no longer with us, and honor those who have come before us, as we take our part in the legacy of those who have chosen to fight for justice.

**Albino Garcia, Executive Director of La Plazita Institute (New Mexico)**

*La Plazita Institute serves youth in custody and those previously incarcerated, gang-involved youth, and returning veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. It provides a sense of belonging and “familia” and offers opportunities to engage positively with the larger community.*

Our philosophy is *la cultura cura*; culture heals. Most of our youth have assimilated and they don't identify with their traditional culture; they have re-created a subculture within U.S. culture, like gang culture, to create a sense of belonging. For our methodologies, we use everything that works in subculture and apply it within ancient culture, but retool it in a contemporary setting. For example, in gang culture you earn your street name by committing violent or destructive acts. Here we have naming ceremonies, but you earn respect not by destruction or hate for your enemy, but by love for your people.

Projects we are currently working on include organizing a statewide Gang Violence Reduction Task Force. Our state has one, but it is exclusive to law enforcement. So they are making one-sided policies. I hope to create one that is inclusive of everyone so that we can create solutions that work. We're putting together a multi-based approach with people coming from political, criminal justice, schools and community bases.

Being a member of CJNY is important because not many people are as inviting to our people. That is because our qualifications don't count their eyes because they come from a different school of thought. But CJNY helped us most by being a national model of inclusivity. They interacted with us despite our lack of sophistication, and it's really a good thing. It exposes people to attitudes, situations and people



they might never interact with in their own respective worlds. 'I have multiple degrees,' I like to tell people. 'I went to the University of Hard Knocks and graduated at the top of my class. I got a Masters in Streetology, and a Ph.D. in Barrio-ology.'

**Daniel “Nane” Alejandrez, Director of Barrios Unidos (California)**

*The California Coalition of Barrios Unidos began as a community-based peace movement in the violent streets of urban California in 1977. Incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1993, the national office of Santa Cruz Barrios Unidos established the mission to prevent and curtail violence amongst youth within Santa Cruz County by providing them with life enhancing alternatives.*

Our method is to do everything in a traditional way as far as partnering with other departments. But we also work directly with the population with what we call *conocimiento*, getting to know and acknowledge them. Our strategy is to look at where we come from, how we got there and break that down on an individual level. That means looking at the causes of why the number of Latinos incarcerated in Santa Cruz is so high. There is a lot of good work being done here, but the numbers are still very high and I think it's because there is a lack of resources for those coming out. Police target certain areas and a lot of freshly released people get caught up. We try to provide those being released with the tools to stay out and the resources to survive like contacts, etc. We stress cultural connections.

A big success is that we're now seen as partners within the juvenile justice system and the community. We are viewed as a force in the system now; we're not the new kid on the block anymore so we're given access and trust. We're often invited by inmates who have heard about us – they want what we have to offer and that's a sign that we're successful.

A member of ours, Juan Gomez, was sent to CYA when he was 15. When he came out he came to us and because he had the support he stayed out. He's

now 27 and runs our juvenile hall program, at the same place he was locked up – but from the other side. Another member Maria, was in and out of juvenile hall for a while. She went through our program and she is now employed at the Santa Cruz Community Credit Union and handles our mortgage.



What CJNY does is help create a vehicle for non-profits. It gives us the tools and the language we need to know. It allows us to discuss ideas and strategize. We're able to exchange contacts and they also keep us on the same page of the discussion.

**Ernest Johnson, Community Organizer at the Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children - FFLIC (Louisiana)**

*FFLIC is a statewide member organization that fights for a better life for all of LA's youth, especially those involved in or targeted by the juvenile justice system.*

Our tactics are radical and aggressive. There are a number of youth who are supposedly reformed in our system according to the people that enforce it, but actually are not. A lot of minors are being transferred to adult facilities at the discretion of the judges at 15. We are attempting to act against the system. Their reports are inadequate and we're calling them out.

A big success was closing the Tallulah Correctional Center for Youth (TCCY) and establishing Senate Bill 1225, which calls for a decrease in the number of kids in secure facilities. As for reform of the entire justice system, we were supposed to be modeling the Missouri system but that hasn't happened yet. We are still fighting.

Being a member of CJNY means being offered a lot of info on tracking and being assisted in identifying stakeholders and gatekeepers in your area. Founder James Bell informed us about a lot of statistics and gave us a broader look at how the society views youth. He helped us understand that when you really analyze it all you realize that it's bigger than any of us. He provided us a very broad lesson on a lot of levels.



**Grace Bauer, Field Organizer, Campaign For Youth Justice – (D.C.)**

*CFYJ advocates for juvenile justice reform by providing support to federal, state, and local campaigns; coordinating outreach to parents, youth, and families; fostering national coalition-building; encouraging media relations; conducting research; and publishing reports and advocacy materials.*

We strongly believe that any movement must involve those who are most impacted by the laws and policies. We seek to empower those affected by encouraging them to use their voices and experiences to effect meaningful change. We come together as families and allies, from all walks of life, to create a caucus to elevate the voices of those most affected by the juvenile justice system. One of our biggest successes is the change of laws and policies that reduce the number of kids charged, tried and incarcerated as adults in Connecticut.

I rely heavily on the research that comes out of CJNY and the Burns Institute. All publications and materials that come out have been utilized by myself and the families I work with throughout the country.



CJNY's extensive connections in other states is also very helpful to me. I can't express enough how much I get out of being with the CJNY group of folks. I find the staff at Burns and all of the fellow CJNY folks to be great sources of inspiration, resources, ideas and good energy. I find myself re-energized and fired up after any time I spend with any of these folks.

**Dr. Juan Sanchez, President and Founder of Southwest Key (Texas)**

*Established in 1987, Southwest Key services have expanded beyond residential and wrap-around services to include a state-of-the-art school, employment re-entry programs and an independent living programming. It is also the nation's largest shelter for unaccompanied minors in the U.S.*

Our basic approach is to ensure that youth who commit offenses are kept out of prison and detention centers. Our goal is to provide an immediate response with wraparound services individualized for each child. Prevention is our strategy and we're community-based and culturally competent. We

interact with these kids in their neighborhoods. We try to work within every aspect of their life to help them stay in the community and develop a good life. We address the stressors that cause them to offend in the first place.

There are many success stories but there was one kid who was 16-years-old when he was referred to our residential treatment center in Dallas. After doing some time, he came to our program and successfully completed it. Now, 10 years later, he is working full-time, is able to support his family, is enrolled in school part-time and volunteering for us.

We're heavily invested in the East Austin Children's Promise. This is program we have just started. Being one the most vulnerable neighborhoods in Austin, many of the kids involved in the system here come from this neighborhood. Along with some community partners, we have looked at some data and identified 200 families we want to work with to ensure children are successful in school and that they never even see the juvenile justice system.



Being a member of CJNY means a lot of exposure for Southwest Key. In fact, the idea of going into a vulnerable community and trying to change it from within, our strategy with East Austin Children's Promise, was born out of a CJNY member conversation. We were all sitting around brainstorming, and we thought a good strategy would be prevention.

### **Susana Almanza, Co-Director of People Organized in Defense of the Earth and her Resources (Texas)**

*PODER was formed to increase Austin residents' participation in corporate and government decisions related to economic development, environmental hazards and the impact on their neighborhoods. Their mission is redefining environmental issues as social and economic justice issues, and collectively setting their own agenda to address these concerns as basic human rights.*

Our approach involves a lot of hands-on training. Our curriculum is focused on how the juvenile justice system was put together, the history of it, its goals. We've put together a game like family feud

where there are different categories and points available. This idea was put together by our Youth Commission and we've taken it on the road. It's really very successful, they totally get into it.

One of our biggest successes was the passing of Senate Bill 103. In working with other groups we managed to get that bill passed. As a result, thousands of kids who were incarcerated for non-violent offenses were released. The push to get that bill passed closed a lot of detention centers, and opened the doors for discussion on things that needed to be changed, like the abuse of power that was going on under the non-supervision of a broken system.

A project right now is stakeholder meetings with the Austin school district. There are alternative schools that are pretty much a prelude to the juvenile justice system. They make students wear uniforms and have metal detectors – the whole nine. Teachers and principals refer students, mainly students of color, to these schools without being asked any questions. The school district contacted us about reviewing the referral policy, so we are working with them on that.



Being a member of CJNY has helped us because they set an example. We use some of their curriculum model in ours and they've also networked and shared with us, which is very important.

### **Tarsha Jackson, State Coordinator, Texas Families of Incarcerated Youth**

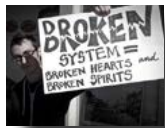
*TFIY is a network comprised of family members of youth that are currently or formerly incarcerated in the Texas Youth Commission (TYC). TFIY's mission is to offer support and information to families, and advocate as a unified voice for systemic change for families of incarcerated youth.*

Our focus is to hold the system accountable, to continue the relationship with major stakeholders and give our input as parents. We also educate parents and youth on their rights, keep them up-to-date on policy changes and act as a support group for parents who are or have been through the system.

Some of our successes include that the state can-

not send youth to a state prison on misdemeanors. It also cannot be left up to the state to determine the amount of time a youth stays without the right paperwork. Allegations of abuse are now investigated by the attorney general, the DOJ and an independent ombudsman, instead of within the facility, an obvious conflict of interest. There is now a curriculum in place for youth education.

Prior to passing 103, staff only needed a GED to work with these kids, now they must have at least 300 hours of college credit. Parole has to be involved from entry to re-entry. Risk assessment tests are now in place as well as a mental health court to prevent facilities from being used as a warehouse for children who are mentally ill. There is also a re-integration program, which wasn't there before, and they were just dropping the kids back on the streets. Advocacy groups are also now allowed into facilities but can speak with youth in a room without a guard.



I am currently working on the DMC task force in Harris County. I work with community members, and prepare my Racial Disparities Task Force. I also serve on the sub-committees for Juvenile Justice and

Transition. CJNY has helped me so much. They provide me with guidance on where to find information in Texas. They're a great resource. By me working on the local and state level, they've taught me who to target and who to hold accountable, but also how to approach them in a civilized manner and what questions to ask. They've helped me change my frame of thinking from the old school.

### **Wesley Ware, Youth Advocate at Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana – JJPL (Louisiana)**

*JJPL fights on several fronts, including with class action lawsuits, to challenge the way the state handles delinquent youth. Its Schools First project aims to reduce the number of suspensions, expulsions, push-outs and arrests in schools.*

Our focus is youth empowerment. We also work on litigation, change policy, and detention standards, legislation, youth organizing, media. We visit youth prisons and were working on a campaign to end juvenile sentencing without parole. We work on the statewide and local level.

A few major successes have been the closure of the Tallulah Correctional Center for Youth (TCCY), the passing of the Juvenile Justice Act of 2003, driving privately owned juvenile prisons out of the state, and reducing the size of the population of the Jetson Center for Youth by more than half. I am also part of coordinating investigations of allegations of abuse as well as conditions in youth prisons.



Right now we are working on trying to pass the juvenile life without parole legislation. It will allow kids a chance to get in front of a parole board at age 31.

We have a lot of great allies but it's so easy for me to feel isolated because when you are so tight with your allies it's easy for your work to turn into commiserating. It's important for me to feel connected to a larger movement otherwise doing the work that I do, it's really easy to get burned out. That is what CJNY has done for me in the last several months, it's helped me feel connected to a larger purpose.

### **Zachary Norris esq., Director, Books Not Bars – (California)**

*A statewide campaign to shut down California's abusive and costly youth prisons and replace them with alternatives like regional rehabilitation centers and community-based programs.*

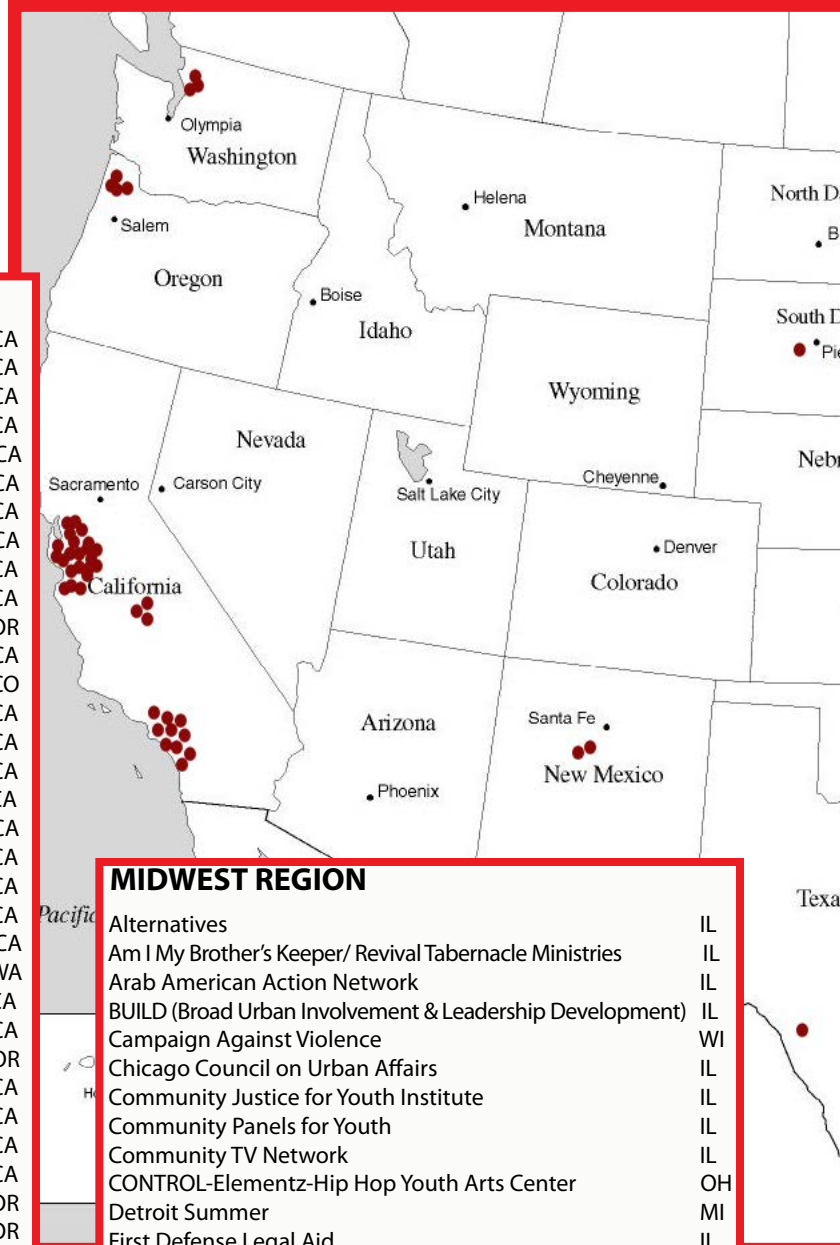
Traditionally, juvenile justice efforts come from the law enforcement side and don't include the families of the kids. Our approach involves families, which I think sets us apart; it puts a human face on the movement and gives a power-base to the people involved.

Major successes as a result of our efforts is that El Paso de Robles, Dewitt Nelson and the Heman G. Stark Youth Correctional Facilities have all been closed down in recent years. That kind of success hasn't been recorded in the last 30 or 40 years. Another success was teaming up with the BI/CJNY to help defeat Prop 6, a.k.a. The Runner Initiative, a multi-billion dollar initiative with the goal of locking up more youth and adults and emphasizing harsher sentences for gang-related and drug crimes.

We are currently continuing work to shut down Cali-

# CJNY MEMBER MAP

Our members reflect the regions of the country with some of the highest rates of disproportionality in local juvenile justice systems.



| WESTERN REGION   |    |
|--|----|
| "N" the Classroom  | CA |
| Ali International Inc.                                       | CA |
| Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy & Leadership | CA |
| Barrios Unidos   | CA |
| Bay view Hunters Point Foundation/Youth Services             | CA |
| Brothers Against Guns  | CA |
| Catholic Charities of the East Bay                           | CA |
| Center for Community Learning and Development                | CA |
| Center for Young Women's Development                         | CA |
| Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice                      | CA |
| CH2A and Associates  | OR |
| Children's Defense Fund                                      | CA |
| Colorado Progressive Coalition                               | CO |
| Community Restoration Services                               | CA |
| Community Wellness Partnership                               | CA |
| East Bay Asian Youth Center                                  | CA |
| Ella Baker Center for Human Rights/Books Not Bars            | CA |
| Homies Organizing the Mission to Empower Youth               | CA |
| Homies Unidos  | CA |
| Korean Youth Community Center (KYCC)                         | CA |
| La Causa/Public Allies                                       | CA |
| Legal Services for Prisoners with Children/All of Us or None | CA |
| Milestone Adolescent Services                                | WA |
| Office of Restorative Justice/Archdiocese of Los Angeles     | CA |
| One Fam  | CA |
| Oregon Social Learning Center                                | OR |
| Pacific News Network/Beat Within                             | CA |
| Pico Youth and Family Center                                 | CA |
| San Francisco Youth Commission                               | CA |
| School of Unity and Liberation (SOUL)                        | CA |
| Seattle Young People's Project                               | OR |
| Self Enhancement Incorporated                                | OR |
| Skrappy's/Tuscon Youth Center                                | AZ |
| St. Mary's Home for Boys                                     | OR |
| Standing Against Global Exploitation                         | CA |
| United Playaz  | CA |
| The Mentoring Center   | CA |
| Youth Alive  | CA |
| Youth Community Restoration Project                          | CA |
| Youth Justice Coalition                                      | CA |
| Youth Making a Change/Coleman Advocates for Youth            | CA |

| MIDWEST REGION   |    |
|--|----|
| Alternatives   | IL |
| Am I My Brother's Keeper/ Revival Tabernacle Ministries                | IL |
| Arab American Action Network   | IL |
| BUILD (Broad Urban Involvement & Leadership Development)               | IL |
| Campaign Against Violence  | WI |
| Chicago Council on Urban Affairs                                       | IL |
| Community Justice for Youth Institute                                  | IL |
| Community Panels for Youth   | IL |
| Community TV Network   | IL |
| CONTROL-Elementz-Hip Hop Youth Arts Center                             | OH |
| Detroit Summer   | MI |
| First Defense Legal Aid  | IL |
| Freedom Inc.   | WI |
| Girl Talk  | IL |
| Kaleidoscope   | IL |
| Kuumba Lynx  | IL |
| Multicultural Youth Project  | IL |
| OMNI Youth Services  | IL |
| One Hood   | PA |
| Parents Who Care Coalition   | SD |
| Sankofa Safe Child Initiative of Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health | IL |
| Southwest Youth Collaborative  | IL |
| Teen Build Up/Wexford Ridge Neighborhood Center                        | WI |
| Urban Underground  | WI |
| Westside Association for Community Action                              | IL |
| YO! The Movement   | MN |
| Youth As Resources/Chicago Area Project                                | IL |
| Youth Struggling for Survival  | IL |



| EASTERN REGION                                   |    |
|--|----|
| Alternative Rehabilitation Communities           | PA |
| Boston-area Youth Organizing Project             | MA |
| Bronx PRYDE/Bronx Defenders                      | NY |
| Campaign for Youth Justice                       | DC |
| Center for Community Alternatives                | NY |
| Children's Defense Fund                          | DC |
| Correctional Association                         | NY |
| DRUM - Desis Rising Up and Moving                | NY |
| East Baltimore Youth and Family Services         | MD |
| Ella J. Baker House                              | MA |
| Esperanza/Hope                                   | NY |
| Exodus Transitional Community                    | NY |
| Fearless Leading By Youth                        | DC |
| Forest Hills Community House                     | NY |
| Friends of the Island Academy                    | NY |
| Girls Education and Mentoring Services           | NY |
| Girls Inc of NYC                                 | NY |
| Justice for DC Youth                             | DC |
| Maryland Juvenile Justice Coalition              | MD |
| No Doubt, Inc                                    | NY |
| One Hood   | PA |
| Peace-a-holics                                   | DC |
| Philly Student Union                             | PA |
| Providence Youth Student Movement                | RI |
| Reflect and Strengthen                           | MA |
| Roca Inc   | MA |
| The City School                                  | MA |
| Institute for Juvenile Reform & Advocacy         | NY |
| Urban Leadership Institute                       | MD |
| Urban Youth Alliance/Bronx Connect               | NY |
| Vera Institute for Justice/Youth Justice Program | NY |
| Voices of Youth                                  | NY |
| Voices Unbroken                                  | NY |
| Youth Rights Media                               | CT |

| SOUTHERN REGION  |    |
|--|----|
| Associated Marine Institutes, Inc. (also in (SC, LA, GA, PA, TX, VA, IL) | SC |
| Be Present Inc   | GA |
| Destiny Academy  | GA |
| Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children                | LA |
| Families and Allies of Virginia Youth                                    | VA |
| Highlander Research and Education Center                                 | TN |
| Juvenile and Education Training/American Resource Technicians            | LA |
| Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana                                    | LA |
| La Plazita Institute   | NM |
| MECCA-Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts            | TX |
| National Latino Children's Institute                                     | TX |
| New Orleans Parents Organizing Network                                   | LA |
| PB & J Family Services   | NM |
| PODER-People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources             | TX |
| Power U Center for Social Change   | FL |
| Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide     | GA |
| SHAPE Self Help for African People through Education Community Center    | TX |
| Southern Echo  | MS |
| Southwest Key (also in (TX, CA, GA, NY, WI, LA)                          | TX |
| Spirit House   | NC |
| Tejano Center for Community Concerns                                     | TX |
| Texas Families of Incarcerated Youth                                     | TX |



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