



WOMEN TRANSCENDING

Collective Leadership Institute Alumni



Cohort #6, 2024-2025



Barbara Ornelas, Texas

Barbara Ornelas, based in Austin, TX, is an accomplished Executive Director and Program Coordinator with extensive experience in re-entry program management. Currently leading RARE Academy, she specializes in developing and implementing re-entry services, coordinating educational pathways, and managing placements for justice-impacted clients. Barbara also serves as a Reentry Advocacy Fellow at the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable and participates in the Hogg Foundation Policy Academy and Fellows Program. Her prior roles include Program Coordinator at the Austin Area Urban League and Life Skills Mentor for the State of Texas. Barbara holds numerous certifications, including Reentry Workforce Development Specialist and Mental Health Peer Support Specialist, and is known for her excellent communication, sound judgment, and strong time management skills.



Chermaine Black, Pennsylvania

Chermaine Black is a Social Worker/Researcher/Justice Advocate. Chermaine currently holds an MSW from Columbia University. She is currently employed at Volunteers of America Greater NY as a Client Care Coordinator/Social Worker, Fairleigh Dickinson University as a Sr. Researcher, and P2P (Prison Cells to PhD) as a Research Coordinator. Chermaine also volunteers at Women Community Justice Association as a coordinator for one of the committees under the Justice 4 Women

Taskforce. She is also the first Justice Fellow for Alliance of Families for Justice. Chermaine's aspirations are to obtain her PH.D or DSW and open a program dedicated to serving young people.



Dara Baldwin, Washington D.C.

Born in Torrejon, Spain to parents involved in serving their country, the desire to serve has continued through her education and current career journey. She is an activist, scholar and author. Her debut non-fiction book will be released in July 2024. She is an Adjunct

Professor at McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University and a strategist, writer, instructor, project manager, connector, changemaker, and policy wonk.

Currently Ms. Baldwin is President of DMadrina, LLC. a consultant firm working with organizations around the world to incorporate Intersectional policy agendas with an emphasis on disability justice. She has held senior level positions in federal policy at multiple organizations. She was the Director of National Policy for the Center for Disability Rights, Inc. (CDR) and Senior Policy Analyst at National Disability Rights Network (NDRN). She works within the Disability Justice movement and with an intentional strategy to end racism and systems of oppression.



India Johnson, Maryland

India Johnson, a serial entrepreneur from Baltimore, has always found great joy in assisting and watching people of the African American community succeed. Growing up, India had dreams of becoming a nurse and successfully entered the medical field by becoming a Certified

Nursing Assistant and Medical Assistant. She soon realized that the medical field was not the best fit for her. She longed to assist businesses directly, so she acquired the titles of insurance producer, real estate agent, tax preparer and youth leader to fulfill her true passion. These opportunities allowed her to support her family, while assisting families in communities with little to no resources.



Janet Hughes, California

Janet Hughes is a Los Angeles native. She is a leader in the Sisterhood Strategy Team for Essie Justice Group, a sister/member led organization. Joining Essie Justice Group has allowed her to use her leadership and advocacy skills for everyone who has been impacted by mass incarceration. In being an advocate, it has led her to be a part of Essie's Campaign Team, working on the local campaign to close the Men's Central Jail and the state bill for incarcerated pregnant people in tandem with the Solis Policy Institute. As a life coach, with her own organizations, Finances Simple and Healing N Wholeness, she uses her voice to help people put into practice caring for their financial traumas and having mindfulness of their soul care. She's trained and certified in several therapeutic modalities to guide healing. Janet knows if our community works together we can have the best we deserve.



Jessica Drew Umberger, Georgia

After serving a five-year sentence, Drew Umberger became a Certified Peer Recovery Empowerment Specialist who has dedicated her life to helping others, particularly incarcerated women and underserved communities in Atlanta. Originally hailing from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Drew is currently working towards her B.A. from Atlanta Tech. Drew joined the Policing Alternatives & Diversion Initiative in August of 2022 as a Peer Advocate on the Street Wellness Enhancement & Engagement Team, providing intensive-street level peer support to unhoused individuals experiencing serious mental health concerns. Now as a Care Navigator, Drew provides case management to people impacted by the criminal legal system through a harm-reduction, person-centered approach. Drew is actively involved in several organizations based in Atlanta, including Motherhood Beyond Bars, Living on Purpose ATL, Women in Transition, Support + Feed, and ATL Free Fridge. When not working or studying she enjoys spending time with her children and doing home improvement jobs to her home she just purchased in December.



Justine Moore, New York

Justine Moore, a native of Brooklyn, NY, served 16 years of a 20-year sentence. Even prior to her release from prison Ms. Moore decided she needed to make a difference, she participated in the CHOICES program where incarcerated women shared their life experiences with

students from the local high schools, group homes, college students, lawyers, judges and politicians. Ms. Moore also was part of a group of women in the prison who began to have discussions about the criminal justice system and how they could use their expertise to help create change. Upon release Ms. Moore began sharing her story and organizing formerly incarcerated women as a co-founding member of The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. She is also founder of Empowerment: Before, During and After. Currently she serves as the Director of Training for The National Council and part of the training team for Silicon Valley Debug.



Katrina Butler, Georgia

Katrina Butler is a resilient woman, published children's book author, and social impact life coach who has transformed life's challenges into opportunities to inspire and assist others facing similar hardships. As the founder of "Different Souls on One Accord" and "So Far So Close,"

Karina's organizations are dedicated to supporting women survivors of domestic violence and incarceration toward freedom, self-worth, and empowerment utilizing a holistic approach of peer mentorship and restorative justice principles. Her commitment to her work has led her to obtain certifications in Social Justice Life Coaching and Restorative Justice Facilitation. Currently pursuing higher education at Georgia State University and Strayer University, Karina lives by the words, 'Never forget where you came from and stand on your truth no matter what!' She believes it is only when we stand in our truth that we can foster personal growth and work towards the betterment of humanity.



Lisa Guss, Alabama

Lisa Guss is the Family Engagement Specialist at Offender Alumni Association (OAA), Credible Messenger, Pastor and Peer Specialist. She is the ultimate example of a success when given a second chance. She has previously served as Senior Case Manager in the PROVE program with

IMPACT Family Counseling.

Lisa credits a portion of her road to success to her 99 year prison sentence that she was given but through God's Favor and Blessing, she received an early release after doing 25 years.

Lisa's desire is for others to follow her lead and live a productive life and bring life, hope, help and healing to the families and communities they once destroyed. Lisa is a Messenger not only of the Gospel but also to bring life to what was once considered a dead situation.



Maria Morris, Oklahoma

Maria, a former award-winning culinary arts student and talented chef, tragically lost her 22-month-old daughter in a house fire in 2018. Despite being wrongfully arrested and imprisoned for her daughter's death, Maria continues to use her trauma and culinary gift

to help others triumph. In January 2020, she created Carabelle's Legacy to aid women who have experienced loss and justice system involvement. Maria currently advocates for the underprivileged, providing second-chance employment and training through her catering business, and increasing fire safety awareness in the community.



Marion Rodriguez, Texas

Marion is the Creative Founder of MUVSU What Moves You?. MUVSU's mission is to uplift and support formerly incarcerated women and to educate and empower the masses. Every one of a kind bag is significant because when women are incarcerated they are stripped of their possessions. The empty bag represents a new beginning and a fresh start. Personalized note cards of encouragement are included in every bag. The therapeutic value of creating and giving is Marion's privilege, especially since she is formerly incarcerated. Women who are gifted a bag are grateful to know that people care and support her in the journey to re-enter society. Since 2020 Marion has created, sold, and gifted over 3000 bags. MUVSU bags are sold in 7 women-owned businesses in Texas and New York.



Marsha King, Virginia

Marsha King's life journey has been shaped by her personal experiences with the justice system, which taught her the critical importance of having an advocate on the outside. Her passion for the protection of inmates' rights has inspired her to become an activist, serving as a voice for incarcerated individuals and their loved ones. Marsha is committed to providing a range of prison services that enable prisoners and their families to navigate the complex legal and administrative processes involved in incarceration. Marsha also serves as a resource for those who have been impacted by the policies of the penal system and is dedicated to fighting for human rights in this context. She is deeply committed to ensuring that these rights are honored even after a sentence has been completed, and she believes that this is critical for the well-being of both individuals and society at large. In addition to her work as an advocate, Marsha is also committed to promoting legislative policy that addresses the accountability of lawyers and judges who violate the rights of offenders during the pretrial phase. She believes that this is essential for ensuring that previously incarcerated individuals are able to achieve meaningful and lasting restoration.



Melinda Johnson, California

Melinda Johnson is a Black Certified Birthing Doula, Emotional Wellness Coach, Domestic Violence Coach, Mental Health First Aid Responder, Motivational Speaker, Author and Poet.

She is the founder of the Self Determination Initiative, a nonprofit organization designed to prepare incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, and their family members to prepare for their release from prison, identify reentry barriers, and how to navigate the reintegration process. Her passion comes from being formerly incarcerated and learning how to rebuild her and her children's lives after being incarcerated. She has twenty-five years' experience working with this community.

She is also the founder of Hidden N' Him, a nonprofit organization that holds sacred space to educate and empower women through intimate conversations that navigates through releasing pain, healing, restoration, and child birthing.



Michelle Daniel Jones, Indiana

Scholar, Artist, Organizer and Executive Director.



Noreen McClendon, California

Noreen McClendon is the Executive Director of Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles (CCSCLA) and is responsible for day-to-day management of the non-profit founded in 1985. CCSCLA developed over 700 units of affordable housing, an 80,000 s.f. grocery-store anchored shopping center, provided job training and placement assistance, entertainment industry training and re-entry services for community residents and been a co-sponsor of the Central Avenue Jazz Festival since its inception in 1995.

CCSCLA was involved in gang intervention from 2005-2013. Ms. McClendon teaches anger management and curriculum she developed based on her book HURT PEOPLE HIGHWAY, Identifying Unhealthy Elements in Relationships, (published in 2018) in various prisons in California.

Ms. McClendon received her education in the Philadelphia public school system, studied Electrical Engineering at Clark College, received a Certificate in Engineering and Construction Management from UCLA and completed the USC Minority Program in Real Estate.



Rose Harris, New York

Rose Harris is the Director of Adult- Young Adult Initiatives at the Women's Community Justice Association. For the past 20 years, she has served in one role or another to educate, uplift, and edify women. She has over 10 years of re-entry expertise and is extremely passionate about re-entry work because she believes in second chances. She aims to incorporate her education and resources into assisting women returning to their community from jail or prison. In addition to her work at WCJA, she is an ordained Evangelist and the Assistant Director of the Sons and Daughters Ministry. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from the University of Phoenix.



Sannecia Davis, Arkansas

Sannecia started a brand called BlessedGals and Prison Transportation Called Blessings after working for a company that transported young men, women, and children to see their incarcerated parents. Sannecia has become a mentor in the lives of many, putting sweat, blood, and tears into criminal justice reform because she believes in hope and giving second chances. In 2015, after being in and out of the justice system from her youth, Sannecia completely changed her life. She is blessed and very thankful and dedicated to helping as many as she can in hopes of preventing them from making the same mistakes she did. She is filled with gratitude for the second chances God has given her. Her prayer is to continue to bless others as God has blessed her.



Sappho Fulton, Pennsylvania

Sappho Reynan Fulton is a seasoned life coach and social justice advocate with a rich social work and community leadership background. She holds advanced degrees in social work and organizational leadership and is pursuing a Ph.D. in International Psychology. As the founder of Sapphosway LLC, she offers trauma-informed coaching and counseling focusing on empowering marginalized communities, including the LGBTQBIPOC+ community. Her expertise extends to program development, public speaking, and nonprofit management. Sappho's journey through the carceral system has fueled her passion for aiding those affected by social injustice, leading her to establish impactful programs for pre-entry and reentry support and serve as the executive director of Womxn Beyond Borders, which works with QTBPOC individuals who are justice-impacted.



Tammara McCoy, New York

As an activist and advocate deeply committed to justice reform, Tammara McCoy is dedicating her life to challenging the carceral punishment paradigm in the United States, with a particular focus on domestic violence. She is steadfast in addressing the disproportionate impact of incarceration on marginalized communities, including Black, Brown, Indigenous, queer, trans, and low-income individuals. Additionally, Tammara is a proud member of WCJA: Women's Community Justice Association and works closely with SJP: Survivors Justice Project and WJP: Women Justice Project. Through collaborative efforts with these esteemed organizations, she strives to amplify voices, advocate for rights, and foster positive change within marginalized communities.



Traletta Banks, North Carolina

Born in Boomer, West Virginia, Traletta is a mother of two wonderful children, ages 24, and 17. She is passionate about helping others. Traletta works with individuals who have criminal backgrounds, connecting them with meaningful employment and resources, to help reach their personal and professional goals. She is the Chief Visionary Officer and Founder of Erika's Closet, a grassroots organization that assists justice involved individuals with clothing, job coaching, and other essential items needed to transition back into the community. She is also the CEO of Another Level Staffing LLC, that provides second chance direct hire placement and they also provide training and development to employers, jobseekers with barriers to employment, and other nonprofits that service formerly incarcerated job seekers.

Traletta is also a founding member of Reentry Housing Alliance, a Fellow with Emancipate NC's Justice League, Central Piedmont Community College Human Service Advisory Board Member and recently Mecklenburg County Criminal Justice Community Engagement Task Force.



Virginia Douglas, New Jersey

Virginia Douglas, a native of Harlem New York served 17 years in Danbury Federal Correctional Facility, with five years' supervised release. While incarcerated Ms. Douglas was a part of a group of women in prison who began to have discussions about criminal justice reform and how they could use their experience to create change. Upon release Ms. Douglas began sharing her story and organizing formerly incarcerated women for The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. Currently Ms. Douglas is one of the CO founders of the leadership team for The National Council. She is also the founder of Step Beyond Women and Girls, and continues her work to advocate on behalf of incarcerated women and to educate society in ending incarceration of women and girls.

Cohort #5, 2023-2024



Abigail Cook, Georgia

Abigail Cook is an Atlanta-based artist and advocate. As co-founder of Beyond the Box GA, she has been able to change statewide policy to allow hundreds of thousands of system-impacted people to apply to college without barriers while being invited to teach Advocacy Workshops across Georgia. She currently has a bill filed in the Georgia General Assembly, and was awarded the Sparks Award for perseverance from Georgia State University; the first person on felony probation to win the award in its 50 year history. She has been honored to work for RestoreHER on legislation to end prison birth, the Southern Center for Human Rights on policies to reduce police violence, and with DeKalb County writing policy to make affordable housing more available. Cook works as a practicing artist completing her first solo exhibition in 2022 with invitations to exhibit across Atlanta. Her work has been published by Columbia University, Tufts University, Variant Literature, Quarter Press, and UC Denver.



Anita Robinson, Arkansas

I am a single mom, with 6 beautiful children and 6 amazing grandchildren. In the midst of my life's journey, After being released from serving 2 years of prison in 1995, It was still so hard to pry myself from the streets, and crack cocaine, so I made a decision to go to BCD (Better Community Developers Hoover Treatment Center). While there I was able to graduate with my GED. I went back to using after having my 4th child and I lost 2 of my children in the system and all hope of being the person I wanted to become seemed like it went spiraling down. Along with a 4 page criminal record and not being able to hold down a job, I thought that I was destined to fail. Today by the grace of God, I was able to not only learn to live a sober life, I continued to pray and worked diligently to be reunited with my children, which has been one of my biggest accomplishments. I then graduated from Philander Smith College with a Bachelor's in Social Work in 2017 from a HBCU college in which I always wanted to attend growing up. I went on to obtain my Master's in Social Work in 2021, and am currently pursuing a Doctoral in Social Work.



Ayana Thomas, New Jersey

Ayana Thomas is the visionary behind Grieving Back to Life, a personal development organization that empowers women, with a special focus on those who have been impacted by the justice system and are struggling with grief, trauma, and adversity. Recognizing the immense burden of grief that these women carry, both before and after their encounters with the justice system, Ayana is dedicated to helping them overcome their past and find a renewed sense of purpose. As a grief advocate and counselor, Ayana understands the profound and transformative nature of grief, which can fundamentally reshape a person's identity. She is based in the NY/NJ tri-state area and primarily online. She is available for workshops and keynote speaking engagements, sharing her own inspiring journey of triumph over adversity.



Carla Taylor, Georgia

Carla Taylor is a community advocate committed to changing the world one heart at a time. A true ATLien from the westside of Atlanta (Zone 1). And though a Mandatory College Graduate, it doesn't stop her, but drives her to be great on the "assist", to make others great. Born to be a freedom fighter; because until we're all free, none of us are free.



Danielle Donaphin, New York

Danielle Donaphin serves as Director of Programs for New Hour for Women Children - Long Island. In her role she works with justice-impacted women on Long Island. Danielle embodies New Hour's mission to empower our members with knowledge and opportunities to address the stigma of incarceration and racial disparities they face in their reentry journeys. Through providing education and awareness, her work is focused on empowering the voices of justice-impacted women who encounter stigmatizing and discriminatory practices in almost every aspect of their lives. Throughout her career and personal life, Danielle has cultivated a personal passion for helping others realize their own potential through sharing her own life and growth experiences. Her work includes working with women in a variety of capacities to help them discover their own inner strengths, their passion for overcoming challenges and setbacks, with the ultimate goal of proactively creating their own success.



DiJon McKoy, New York

DiJon McKoy is a full time stay at home mom of two. She is also a volunteer to the National Council of Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls in Waterbury, CT. DiJon is actively working on The FreeHer campaign and reimagining the community. Her ultimate goal is to open a home for children who have aged out of the foster care system.



Ghania Miller, New York

Ghania Miller is part of the LGBTQ community and the strongest advocate for the youth who identify as such. Ghania works to support marginalized women, girls, and gender-nonconforming youth particularly those who are impacted by mass incarceration. Ghania Miller is part of the LGBTQ

community and the strongest advocate for the youth who identify as such. Ghania works to support marginalized women, girls, and gender-nonconforming youth particularly those who are impacted by mass incarceration. She has dedicated the last 13 years since her release to providing support, resources and being the voice to those who often go unheard, she is the definition of everything that is a credible messenger. Ghania wears many hats from Advocate Mentor to at-risk youth currently under the NYC Department of Probation, establishing “The Real Connect” a not-for-profit whose formerly incarcerated as well to empower re-entering and system impacted women to be the next and current generation of leaders in criminal justice reform.



Kimberly Woodson, Michigan

Kim Woodson, is a civil-rights advocate, legal scholar, public speaker, and directly- impacted organizer working to end mass incarceration and expand opportunities for people upon release from jail and prison. After being sentenced to life in prison at just 17 years of age, Woodson took

her first step on the road to redemption after the Supreme Court ruled juveniles serving a life sentence should have their sentences reviewed. Woodson is one of two female juvenile lifers who were released in Michigan in the wake of the Supreme Court’s decision in Montgomery v. Louisiana (10 more remain incarcerated). In May 2017, Woodson was released after serving 29 years and vowed to do all she could to help save others from making the same mistakes she’d made decades prior. She was determined to do something positive with the rest of her life and since founded Redeeming Kimberly in 2019. -- a nonprofit dedicated to assisting returning citizens

transition from prison life to society, and helping those who were previously incarcerated navigate the many challenges of re-entry, securing housing, food, clothing, and jobs. Woodson now serves as campaign organizer for Michigan Liberation and is the mother to 4 yr old, Jai'Marie, her miracle baby born in 2017.



Latanya Pierce, New Jersey

Tanya R. Pierce, MBA, is the Founder of Life Unbolted, which supports people impacted by the federal carceral system. She created the Young Adult Initiative (YAI), a peer-led training, mentoring, coaching, and accountability cohort-style training for federally impacted individuals

aged 18-24. YAI empowers the participants by providing a pathway and blueprint of life-changing programming, community healing, and health. The program collaborates with the U.S. District Court - Eastern District of New York Special Options Services (SOS) Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) Program. Before that, she was a co-designer of the Columbia Law School Paralegal Pathways Initiative (PPI), which aims to amplify the talents of formerly incarcerated individuals by providing skills-based legal training and connecting them with professional mentorship in preparation for a legal career. Tanya is a federal criminal justice reformist working to dismantle systemic barriers perpetuating pre-entry and re-entry disparities in programming and policies for all individuals impacted by the federal injustice system.



Lauren Johnson, Texas

Lauren Johnson is a policy & advocacy strategist at the ACLU of Texas, where she focuses on criminal legal reform as part of the Smart Justice team. Her experience as someone who is formerly incarcerated informs her advocacy on issues ranging from Fair Chance Hiring to

reducing sentencing guidelines for low-level drug crimes and improving prison conditions, especially for women. Before joining

the ACLU staff in 2017, Lauren worked as an activist and volunteer to pass the first Fair Chance Hiring ordinance in the Southern U.S. that applies to private employers. She also worked to remove the lifetime ban that prevented people with felony convictions from ever receiving food assistance. Lauren was a Just Leadership fellow in 2016 and a Leadership Austin Essentials alum in 2017. She is a founding member of the Texas Coalition for Incarcerated Women, a founding member of the Reentry Advocacy Project, inaugural fellow for the Travis County Reentry Planning Council, and Conspire Theatre board member and participant, which worked with currently and previously incarcerated women to tell their stories. Her work has been recognized by Grassroots Leadership, the Texas Observer, and the Texas Council on Family Relations. She is based in Austin.



Leah Faria, New York

Leah Faria (She/Her) is a mother, daughter and sister who has dedicated over twenty years advocating for communities most impacted by the criminal justice system. Leah is a survivor of both domestic and State violence and uses her direct experiences as a way to educate, build community, network and organize within vulnerable Black and Brown communities. She is an instrumental leader of the Rikers Island initiative program where during bi-weekly visits she provides support and resources to the women and gender expansive people detained at the Rose M. Singer Center, bringing them a sense of hope in what so often feels like a hopeless situation.



Linda Small, Maine

Linda Small is the founder and executive director of Reentry Sisters to assist female returning citizens throughout Maine, transitioning from prison to society. Reentry Sisters uses narratives of justice-impacted women to challenge attitudes, change policy, and deliver opportunities to build and maintain women's self-esteem, self-respect, and self-sufficiency. We endeavor to form close relationships and

build a sisterhood to advocate for economic justice, fair treatment of system-impacted women, and lasting change to systemic biases and processes that disenfranchise the disadvantaged. Linda serves on the New England Commission for the Future of Higher Education in Prison. She is a member of the Justice Scholars Network and Colby College Think Tank, highlighting the scholarship and research of justice-impacted people. She is part of an American Council of Learned Societies grant team for the Freedom & Captivity (F&C) Curriculum Project, developing community-based classes taught by incarcerated people. Linda is a member of the National Humanities & Mass Incarceration Committee and a program coordinator for the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition. She is a DJ for Justice Radio, a talk show about the carceral state. Linda is completing an MS Adult and Higher Education program and is part of a collaborative effort to develop a Justice Collective for Maine.



Marquitta Rucker, Georgia

Marquitta Rucker is the CEO and Executive Director of SWAT Foundation Inc. Marquitta Rucker is the mother of three beautiful young ladies that are also all entrepreneurs. She has been in education for over a decade. She graduated from Augusta University and holds a master's in educational leadership. Marquitta is a certified teacher and grant writer. She has presented at conferences all over the United States concerning grant writing, youth civic engagement and the effects of poverty. She was also nominated and chosen as the Favorite Local Businessperson in the Augusta area for 2022, and 2023 through the Alignable network. She was also nominated and chosen for the Sisters Only Club 2022 SHERO Award recipient. This year her children are nominees. SWAT Foundation was awarded nonprofit of the year by the Greater Augusta Black Chamber of Commerce. Swat Foundation was also recently nominated as best Charity Organization in Georgia. SWAT Foundation Inc. allows Marquitta to remember and honor her mother's legacy, and help the community at the same time. SWAT Foundation's main mission is to provide intervention services to meet the urgent needs of the community. SWAT Foundation helps to feed, heal, educate, inspire, and nurture people of all ages, genders, races and socioeconomic status.



Minerva Pascual, New York

Minerva “Mimi” Pascual is a co-founder of the Social Justice Network, a platform championing communities affected by mass incarceration. As the Recruitment and Partnership Manager at College and Community Fellowship (CCF), she’s deeply committed to justice reform. An alumna of Second Chance Studios, Mimi founded La-Madrina

Entertainment, celebrating her Latino heritage. Her collaborations span from the SingSing Prison Museum to Paramount Studios, showcasing her media expertise. Mimi’s work with the SingSing Prison Collective Oral Histories and fashion pioneer FUBU highlights her diverse impact. Participating in numerous fellowships, she’s a beacon in social justice advocacy. Holding a Bachelor’s Degree from The City University of New York’s City College, Mimi seamlessly blends justice reform with media prowess.

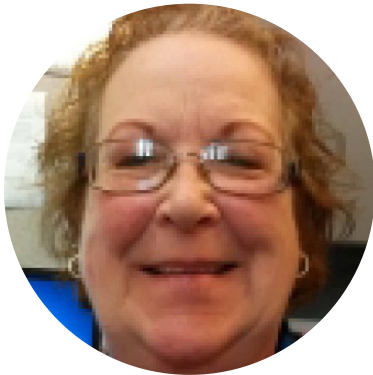


Naquasia Pollard, New York

Naquasia Pollard is an advocate, activist and direct service provider. She has been deeply involved in movements for social justice drawing upon her own experience – 15 years of incarceration in a Women’s Correctional Facility at the age of 19 and being pregnant on Rikers

Island. Upon her release, she went to work at the Ladies of Hope Ministries where she utilized her degree earned in prison to support women impacted by incarceration. In 2018, Naquasia founded Pure Legacee Inc, an organization that provides a haven of healing for young girls to break generational barriers and develop community leaders. She is also a part of the Beyond Rosies campaign and Herstories documentary. Naquasia is involved in the Probation and Parole Reform Project with Columbia University. In 2021, she was part of the FACES Speakers Bureau to lift the voices of formerly incarcerated people as agents of change. Naquasia is an alumnus of Women Influencing Systems and History through Community College Fellowship to train women to be organizers and advocate against mass incarceration. She is a Reform Alliance Ambassador for

New York and has been a certified Credible Messenger since 2019 through The New School, where she currently teaches and prepares other Credible Messengers in New York City.



Patricia Berger, Missouri

For the past 22 years Patty has worked to free people by using her voice to challenge policy, change perceptions and help other FIPs re-enter their communities. Patty sees herself as someone fortunate to have made it out. She sees her work as an opportunity to pay it forward!



Ruby Welch, Arkansas

Ruby Welch is a motivational speaker, criminal and restorative justice advocate, JLUSA Alumni2023, healer, and Founder and CEO of F.E.L.O.N (Formerly Incarcerated Empowered Leaders Overcoming Negative Stigmas). Ruby currently is employed with Dream.Org as a

Campaign Coordinator. As an Ambassador for #Cut50 Ruby was instrumental in the passing and signing into law #Dignity Arkansas for incarcerated women. Ruby views her work as an extension of her Christian Faith.



Sharon McKinney, Texas

Sharon is the Executive Director of the Texas Incarcerated Families Association. She teaches the New Family Workshop for families whose loved ones are entering the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and the Parole Workshop for families whose loved ones are approaching

parole eligibility. Sharon is system-impacted and has a passion for criminal justice reform. Sharon is a Certified Mental Health Peer Specialist and a Certified Reentry Peer Specialist. Sharon is also a Certified Equine Therapy Riding instructor.



Vanessa Garrett, Georgia

Vanessa is a highly experienced and passionate professional with a deep understanding of the challenges faced by mothers and children impacted by the criminal legal system, making her an invaluable asset. Over the course of nine years, she has dedicated herself to supporting justice-impacted mothers, leveraging her extensive experience to help them overcome the numerous obstacles they face upon reentry. As a certified paralegal with concentrations in criminal, business, and family law, Vanessa brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to her work. She is also fluent in both Spanish and American Sign Language, further enhancing her ability to connect with and support the diverse needs of her clients. Vanessa's commitment to helping families extends beyond her professional experience, as she is a Certified Circle of Security Parenting Facilitator and a Certified Peer Specialist. Through these designations, she has developed a unique skill set that allows her to provide holistic support to mothers and families, helping them to build stronger relationships and promote positive change.

Cohort #4, 2022-2023



Brittany Bethea, North Carolina

Brittany Bethea was born in Durham, North Carolina after being formerly incarcerated and directly impacted by the carceral system and surrounding herself around people that were determined to fight for justice for Black folks. She sought out to see what it was that she could do and step in and do something. She has been a part of many organizations ending money bail, helping directly impacted folks find employment and also housing and connecting them to many other resources. She looks forward to assisting the younger generation with mental health issues and ending generational curses.



Charlotte Garnes, Georgia

Charlotte Garnes launched ReNForce, a nonprofit organization that compliments the labor force by administering tailored training and coaching to businesses and organizations looking to employ justice-involved individuals within their workforce. Charlotte also manages and operates

Innovative Staffing Solutions, whose responsibility is to staff and employ the underutilized workforce of justice-involved individuals. She organized the Dignity LeadHERship Alliance (DLA) collective of directly impacted women who successfully experienced informing policy through lived expertise that advocates for marginalized women internationally. She desires to assist individuals returning home from incarceration with more professional and wholesome opportunities to obtain employment, housing, and goals for self-sufficiency. Through her personal experience, she works to change the stigma and prejudices surrounding formerly incarcerated or the directly impacted. Charlotte Garnes volunteers with various organizations, from United Way to From Prison to Ph.D. She is a 2020 Leading with Conviction Cohort Graduate of JustLeadership USA. She mentors young women across the globe who are advocates for criminal justice and social and healthcare change. Charlotte currently sits on the RestoreHER US America and Formerly Incarcerated Union of Rhode Island. And in her spare time, she enjoys reading, traveling, writing, and motivating others to be their best selves!



Chazidy Bowman, Ohio

Chazidy Bowman is the Founder and Executive Director of Opportunities People's Justice Leaders, an organization geared toward assuring those incarcerated receive fair humane treatment and that their civil rights are not violated. They offer families resources to aid them in their

advocacy efforts for their loved ones during their incarceration. The organization was established in March of 2020 and received a lot of credibility for their aggressive campaigns toward Covid-19, lack of

healthcare, and the abuse of those in American prisons. Chazidy is a member of the 2021 Just Leadership USA Cohort and JLUSA advisory Committee. She also holds the title of Prison Committee Chairman for the Cincinnati NAACP chapter. She serves on the Hamilton County Public Defender Advisory Committee and is a Steering Committee member for Community for Sheriff Accountability. She was elected as the Hamilton County Democratic Party Executive Committee member. She serves on the Smart Justice Advisory Board with ACLU of Ohio. Her biggest organizational accomplishment in 2022 was winning a successful campaign to have body cameras placed on all correctional officers in Ohio's Prisons. She is the proud wife of Rufus Bowman who is currently incarcerated, as well as the mother of 4 beautiful children. Through her incarceration experience, Chazidy and Rufus have collaborated and created two peer led programs for men and women incarcerated and previously incarcerated.



Gale Muhammad, New Jersey

Gale Muhammad, Founder & President of Women Who Never Give Up, Inc., is known nationally as a tireless and passionate activist for criminal justice, and prison reform. Gale Muhammad is a veteran social justice warrior on the national stage. Gale's organization WWNG Up, Inc., fights for the rights of the incarcerated and their families who face injustice within the criminal justice system. WWNG Up, Inc., fights for prison reform, advocating on behalf of the families of those incarcerated who face an array of difficult issues that disrupt their lives and create challenging barriers to success and independence.



Haydee Lee Scott, New York

Haydee Lee Scott is a Certified FDC Family Developer, Proud Afro-Latina Mother of three, Mental-Financial Wellness Coach and Founder of Women's Empowerment & Wellness Initiative, Love Thyself First. Haydee's core belief is that Wellness is a Human Right.



Jessica Davis, North Carolina

Jay Rene is a documentarian, and to date has completed two documentaries that expose the corruptions of the police, government officials, and other government entities, including prisons from state to state. She is the founder of Prison Riot Radio, a journalistic service and advocate platform where the efforts, lives, achievements, wrongful convictions, over sentencing, etc. of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals can be heard. She provides the Incarcerated with the ability to talk about their cases, the facilities, their treatment, as well as help them to promote their crafts and abilities, skills and organizations. She also assists them in creating ebooks, books, podcasts, musical pieces and content. She reaches out to family, lawyers, other advocates, activists and organizations on the behalf of Incarcerated individuals from coast to coast. To date, all have been free of charge. She has created a platform for the loved ones of those incarcerated to be able to talk about their experiences and have brought families together that were having similar circumstances which assists in creating support systems.



Marilyn Mateo, New York

Marilyn Mateo was a High School English Teacher for 16 years teaching Speech & Debate, Literature, English Regents, Creative Writing, SAT, PSAT, MCAT, LSAT, Grammar & Critical Reading/Writing. She is also the Producer of Latinx Affairs on WBAI's On the Count, Inc. Radio 99.5 FM. As an alumnus of New York University having majored in English & Philosophy, she is concluding her master's degree in Liberal Studies. Impacted by the Criminal Legal System, Marilyn began working as a Senior Re-Entry Specialist on Riker's Island over 7 years ago after also witnessing the school-to-prison pipeline. She is currently a Coordinator for the NYC Criminal Justice Agency nurturing her experiences. Her goals are to conclude her Ph.D. in Urban Education and publish her work.



Page Dukes, Georgia

Page Dukes is a core organizer with liberatory memory and writing projects Mourning Our Losses and Georgia Freedom Letters, and Communications Associate at the Southern Center for Human Rights, where she raises awareness about the effects of incarceration and the need for agency and accuracy in conversations about prisons and people. She's honored to serve as a 2022 Represent Justice Ambassador, and as a board member at Motherhood Beyond Bars, which supports families separated by incarceration, and Georgia Coalition for Higher Ed in Prison, which advocates for equitable access to education. She dreams of new backdrops for our collective imagination, ones where no one is locked out of sight and out of mind.



Robyn Hasan, Georgia

Robyn K Hasan started as a contractor in June 2020 with Women on the Rise and rose quickly in the organization by becoming the Executive Director in January 2022. Since coming home in 2020, after serving 10 years in prison, she has been fighting to reform the criminal legal system through the campaign of Closing the Atlanta City Detention Center, which has gained national attention. While inside she created a newsletter to help uplift women in her situation, since coming home she continued the newsletter through Women on the Rise and Reverse the Cycle of Incarceration. She lives in Atlanta with her daughter, Nadya and 4-legged friend Nova.



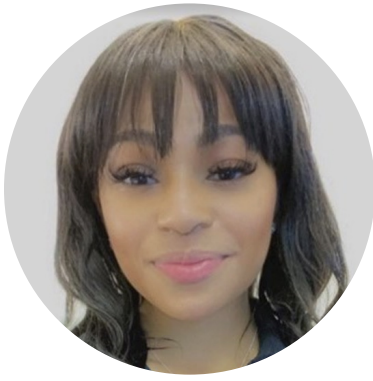
Shameeka France, New York

Shameeka France is the Community Outreach Specialist for the Women's Prison Association. She assists individuals within the five boroughs that currently suffer from Substance Use. She educates and distributes Naloxone (Narcan) a safe medication that can save someone's life by reversing the effects of an opioid overdose. Ms. France also provides fentanyl testing strips and provides preventative linkage and information for care in prep for HIV testing. She is well versed in her community and well respected in the field of Human Services. She is also a current student in Columbia Law School participating in the Theater of Change: Reimagining Justice through Abolition social change work, the arts provide a vital space to imagine alternative solutions to our broken systems and promote those alternate futures as achievable realities. In this course, Ms. France has developed her individual and collective ability to blend artistry, law, policy, and community engagement to produce pieces of impactful activism in policy spaces where change can happen.



Sharon Turner, Georgia

Sharon Turner is a grassroots activist and community organizer and social entrepreneur living in Atlanta Georgia fighting for equity, freedom and justice on behalf of marginalized populations on a local and national level. Her lifelong pursuit of learning through personal and educational experiences has developed herself into the leader she is today. She has received several accolades of accomplishments, however some of the most meaningful are the women led fellowships cohorts with Women Organizing for Justice and Opportunity (WOJO), Ladies Of Hope Ministries (LOHM) DOULA Initiative, and now Women Transcending and the Collective Leadership Institute.



Sheena Dume, Connecticut

Sheena Dume` has overcome many hardships throughout her life.Despite her oppressions, Ms. Dume` choose to utilize her life experiences as a message to motivate others to overcome their adversities. She considers herself a survivor and not a victim of her past circumstances. Through it all she has managed to obtain a A.S. in Business Management as well as a Paralegal degree in Legal Studies. Ms.Dume` has also rendered her services and expertise with non-profit organizations in betterment of the community. She's a goal driven oriented advocate whose sole purpose in life is to share her story to empower, heal and educate all women with relatable experiences.



Tabatha Trammell, Georgia

Tabatha Trammell is a formerly incarcerated criminal justice reform advocate and nonprofit founder of Woman With a Plan, a Georgia organization that empowers other women who are directly impacted by the Georgia criminal legal system with mentorship, grocery assistance, clothing for interviews and recovery mentorship. She is the mother of 5, two of which were minors in her care at the time of her incarceration, who had to go into the foster care system. Tabatha experienced great challenges to regaining custody of her children once released, including obstacles placed in her way by the criminal legal and foster care system to make her goals unattainable but because Tabatha is indeed “a woman with a plan”, she advocated on her own behalf and eventually regained custody of her children, freeing them from the system. She dedicates a large portion of her advocacy to helping other mothers overcome the same challenges that she experienced with regaining custody post incarceration.



Tanya Smith, Connecticut

Tanya Smith's strength is from a long line of Strong Brown Women who've contended with systemic racism in some form or fashion. They've molded her to be the fierce mother of three beautiful daughters in whom she feels are her greatest accomplishments. She has been chosen to be a grandmother of three beautiful granddaughters. She served in the community of Human Services as a Mental Health/Substance Abuse, Domestic Violence and Child Welfare provider for over 18 yrs in the City of Waterbury CT and most recently in The Bronx, New York. Her calling is now strengthening women and girls incarcerated, formerly incarcerated and those enormously impacted. She is now an abolitionist fighting for women to be made whole and seen as individuals, not our mistakes.



Tashoy Miller, Florida

Tashoy Miller is a driven & motivated advocate fighting for women impacted by mass incarceration. While she's just beginning her career in advocacy she's no stranger to upper level management positions, spearheading initiatives, project management & client relations. Her background has consistently been characterized by her steadfast dedication to enhancing organizational performance and achieving company objectives. Her passion for social justice reform and community engagement has helped her to make an impact across various communities. Her advocacy work began after she gained lived experience & realized how unjust the criminal justice system really is. With her proven ability to leverage communication, presentation, and leadership talents to make significant contributions, Tashoy intends to grow in this field while being a voice for incarcerated women. Tashoy is passionate about advocating for women and Black communities throughout her career and will continue to do so on her path to fight for justice.



Tiffani Dean, Pennsylvania

Tiffani Dean is a performer/poet/playwright, mixed media and doll artist and teaching artist. Her theater work has been seen at The Think Create Inspire Theatre Festival, The Cool Stories Theater Festival, The Bridge PHL Theater Festival, The Philadelphia Art Sanctuary

Celebration of Black Art, the SheNYC Summer Theatre Festival and the SheLa Summer Theater Festival. Artistically her mixed media and dolls art has been in several art galleries and featured at many art festivals across the country for the past 23 years. She is the CEO of La Diva Dolls, LLC, Co-founder and COO of The Collective Mic Productions, and has been a Philadelphia Art Sanctuary Teaching Artist Fellow.



Vichelle Sanders, Washington

Vichelle Sanders is a Chicago native that currently resides in Renton Washington. She is a field coordinator and Art healing specialist with Sacred Community Connections (S.C.C). SCC serves communities in King County which includes Seattle residents. We are committed to

serving the underprivileged and providing a voice for the voiceless.



Waleisah Wilson, Georgia

Waleisah Wilson is a dedicated criminal justice reform activist and has been most vocal on issues related to eliminating the unjust barriers to successful reentry, voting, entrepreneurship and economic prosperity for individuals with felony convictions, ending slavery in Georgia, solitary

confinement, mass incarceration, the death penalty, justice equity for disabled, mentally ill and LGBTQIA+ individuals, reentry challenges for individuals and families impacted by sex offender registries and the faith community's critical role in supporting reentry. She is the founder

of NewLife Second Chance Outreach, Inc., a Georgia nonprofit that exclusively serves individuals impacted by a criminal conviction, a 2017 JustLeadershipUSA's "Leading with Conviction" Fellow, a 2019 Southerners on New Ground's the Lorde's Werg Leadership Fellow, a 2020 Soros Justice Fellow and is currently a 2022 Represent Justice Ambassador and is the owner of Phoenix Recruiting & Employment Services, LLC. and Beautiful Pride, an ecommerce apparel store that allows its customers to support grassroots social and criminal justice causes and organizations through its collection purchases.

Cohort #3, 2021-2022



Ahkia Rayne, Washington

Ahkia-Rayne is by their own definition "just a Chi-town gurrlll. Living in a lonely world". Ahkia-Rayne identifies as a nonbinary queer black disabled femme. They have worked hard to provide healing spaces for folks that share their intersections as well as training for entities that service these communities. They have made it their life mission to connect people back to their pleasure and souls. They use self-awareness and accountability to increase humor healing while promoting positive self-image and understanding.



Aisha Elliott, New York

Aisha Elliott works as a Staff Associate at Columbia University's Justice Lab and Center for Justice assisting in research for the Rikers Island Longitudinal Study and the Women Transcending Oral History Project. As we move forward, she knows that it is not just about you, but it is also with you that we will advance this work. Aisha holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Marymount Manhattan College,

walks in the spirit of abolition democracy, and is passionate about dismantling the harmful systems that inflict injustices and violence against all of us. She is a collaborator and a leader, and knows that nothing is out of our league when it comes Women Transcending!



Allison Hamik, Oregon

Allison Hamik has a Business Management degree from Washington State University...Go Cougs! She has a fierce curiosity to learn and experience new things, leading her to accumulate a diverse set of skills in an eclectic variety of arenas. Most notably, for the past 25 years she

has been the owner/operator of her family's hotel, cafe and espresso event truck in Southern Oregon. Recently, Allison has begun the transition from hospitality management to prison reform and advocacy. Her passion will continue for connecting with people, creating spaces of inclusion and utilizing her proficiency in developing efficiency in systems and communication. Allison is excited for her new passion project, The Freedom Exchange. She is having live conversations with formerly incarcerated people to share stories of resilience and to bridge the gap between justice impacted individuals and people curious about a complex and inconsistent system.



Andréa "Muffin" Hudson, North Carolina

Andréa "Muffin" Hudson is an activist, abolitionist and a freedom fighter who fights for people's rights in and out of the courtroom. Her own interaction with the criminal justice system which led to incarceration resulted in homelessness, restriction of employment opportunities and access to support services. With two children, the

intersectionality of the aforementioned consequences, coupled with systemic racial discrimination directed her to advocacy, where, while trying to find remedies for herself, enabled her to become a leader in service to others.



Ashley Messier, Vermont

Ashley Messier is the Executive Director of the Women's Justice and Freedom Initiative in Burlington, Vermont and a commissioner on the Vermont Commission on Women. As a formerly incarcerated woman who had direct experience with domestic and sexual violence, human trafficking, substance use disorder, poverty, and the child welfare system, she felt committed to find a way to change the policies and systems impacting women and her communities. After developing significant networks as the ACLU's Smart Justice organizer in Vermont, she convened colleagues, allies and directly impacted women to consider what a new local model for change might look like. Messier also served as the Vermont Organizer for the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. She is a dedicated advocate and public speaker. Most importantly, she is a mom/bio-mom to 7 amazing kids.



Chastity Michel, New York

Chastity Michel a rising leader and advocate in criminal justice reform and creating healing spaces for formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. As the child of a formerly incarcerated man, Chastity experienced first-hand the impact mass incarceration has on individuals, their families, and society at large. This experience propelled Chastity on a journey to understanding and ultimately dismantling these systems while simultaneously reversing and healing some of the long-term detrimental effects of the systems at play. Along with her father and Executive Director, Frantz Michel, and a passionate team, Chastity is a part of Dream Deferred Inc, a nonprofit organization that provides resources and opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals and their families, including but not limited to Computer Tech Training, Housing and Life Skills Tools. Chastity is currently leading the safe housing project, Vanee's Dream House, for formerly incarcerated women. With a background in psychology and wellness it is Chastity's goal to help create external and internal spaces of healing for individuals and families impacted by incarceration.



Ivy Mathis, Louisiana

Ivy Mathis who grew up in prison from the age of 17-43. Hearing the parole board say “IMMEDIATE RELEASE” was the moment where I had the chance to honor my word which was” I will NEVER forget you and join forces with those who are about change. It is my sole duty to be a voice for the women and show society that We can be

Successful after Incarceration. I am an organizer with VOTE (Voice of the Experience) and it’s here where I am embracing every opportunity to tell the world about my sisters who are no less deserving of a 2nd chance than I was. Advocating for my sisters is a passion of mine and seeing them home is the GOAL!



Latanya Henderson, Massachusetts

Latanya Henderson is a humanitarian and patron of the Arts. Early in life she moved to New York City seeking a career in modeling, and quickly became prey for predators that roam the streets for new game. This ended her pursuit of modeling and arrested her interest in the Arts, creating way for inner-city stigmata to manifest.

She became a teenage mother, drug addict, and felon. But Latanya’s story is one of redemption. She returned home to Boston, completed a fellowship at M.I.T, became a certified Urban Planner, and found her passion; working to empower the lives of young people from marginalized communities. Her motivation was/is to prevent as many young people as possible from succumbing to the pitfalls of the urban province as she once did. Today Latanya is the founder and Executive Director of a nonprofit organization, “All Things Art, Inc.”



Miea A. Walker, North Carolina

Miea A. Walker, MSW is a social justice advocate and a prison abolitionist whose passion is addressing the intersectionality of race, class, gender and reentry for incarcerated men and women. In 2015, Miea received her Master's Degree in Social work from North Carolina State University and previously worked at Forward

Justice as the Criminal Justice Manager. Prior to working at Forward Justice, Miea worked at the North Carolina Justice Center. Recently, Miea has been contracting with Donna Hylton at a Little Piece of Light to help pass the Less is More Bill in New York. Additionally, Miea serves on the Board of CMCA (Christian Ministries, Chaplains Association) and is an organizer and trained through the LCN group and is a member of the North Carolina Second Chance Alliance.



Nafeesah Goldsmith, New Jersey

Nafeesah, is the Senior Criminal Legal Fellow for Salvation and Social Justice, and Co-Chair for New Jersey Prison Justice Watch (NJPJW).

Nafeesah is a former Criminal Justice graduate student from Monmouth University. She holds a BA in Sociology and is an alumna of Rutgers the State University of NJ, including Douglass

Residential College for Women. Nafeesah completed an Associates of Arts Degree in Sociology from Passaic County Community College, while residing at Millicent Fenwick House a halfway house for women in Paterson NJ. At the age of 21 years old her life changed. While serving a 15yr prison sentence at EMCFW (Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women, Nafeesah began her college career. It was via Clinton College Bound/ NJ-STEP that she began to change her life. Nafeesah soon became a proud member of MVC (Mountainview Community) where she was afforded the opportunity to attend Rutgers University (New Brunswick). Nafeesah dedicates her time traveling to speak on various topics such as; Incarceration, Reentry, the School to Prison Pipeline, the effects of incarceration on families and communities. Her primary focus is building sustainable

prison free futures. Nafeesah is determined to create change. Her goal is to connect to the youth and global community by sharing her story of triumph. Nafeesah's message of working through hope continues to inspire her captive audiences.



Pam Neely, New York

Pam Neely spent a big part of her life involved with the criminal justice system. She's made many steps on her journey in positive changes in her life. She has experience with Prevention Case Management, Grant Funded Case Management, and utilizing information for monthly reporting.

She also has experience with pre and post HIV/AIDS testing. Pam is a strong advocate, speaking for those who can't speak for themselves - "Helping others is my life and I believe in what I do, we all at some point in our life need a Second Chance." She also adores animals and takes time in her day to make sure all her cats are well fed.



Pamela Winn, Georgia

Pamela Winn is an activist from Atlanta, GA and single mother of two sons that studied Biology at Spelman College, obtained three post-secondary degrees in Nursing, and worked more than 10 years as a Registered Nurse specializing in Women's Health prior to serving a 78-month federal sentence for a white-collar crime while

pregnant. During her incarceration, she was shackled, causing her to fall and miscarry, then placed in solitary confinement. Rather than diminishing her spirit, Pamela allowed the separation of her family, a miscarriage, revocation of her nursing license, and closing of her businesses that she experienced while in prison to empower her. Pamela Winn is the founder of RestoreHER US.America, a policy advocacy reentry organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of directly impacted women and work in partnership with those women to end the mass incarceration of women of color and pregnant women. RestoreHER is a core movement partner of Southern Black Girls and Women.



Quniana Futrell, Virginia

Quniana Futrell is from the streets of Newark, NJ, having two incarcerated parents featured on PBS's Emmy award-winning show, *Virginia Currents*. Quniana Futrell, known as "Author Q.", is a real success story and champion for change. Quniana captivates audiences from all over the world, from the United States to Uganda, with her straightforward and realistic methods to resilience and healing. She builds champions from the inside out using her proven methods as a Certified Trauma Professional. Quniana has been recognized by both international and local media outlets for her work. She is a captivating keynote, author and award-winning filmmaker shaking up the norm and changing lives.



Sharon "Shay" Smith, Florida

Sharon M. Smith (Shay) born and raised in the Bronx, now residing in Winter Haven, Florida. She Served 6 years total in prison, 5 years in a state prison and 1 year in federal prison. After being released from state prison 1998 she worked for the Center of Employment Opportunities as a site supervisor in the Supreme Court building in Brooklyn, New York for 10 years. This program helps formerly incarcerated women and men build skills in building and floor maintenance (stripping, buffing, waxing etc.) until placed on permanent Jobs. In 2009 she went to federal prison for 1 year for a money transgression (conspiracy charge) she sat in Danbury Ct. prison with women who talked about the criminal justice system. And how we need to dismantle this system. She was released in 2010 and began working for a moving company as the supervisor of contract hiring. She would hire over 100 formerly incarcerated women and men all over NYC for summer employment for 11 years. Over the years, Shay has stayed in contact with the women from Danbury, CT prison who created The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. She attends the #FreeHer conferences and has also volunteered over

the years. Today Shay is a National Organizer for The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. Here is where she has re- united and joined the fight to end incarceration of Women and Girls.



Sharon White-Harrigan, Connecticut

Sharon White-Harrigan, is the Executive Director of the Women's Community Justice Association (WCJA), a gender-focused, trauma-informed, advocacy-for-justice agency. Prior to joining WCJA and leading the BEYONDrosies2020 campaign, Sharon was the Program Director at the Women's Prison Association. She has worked

in a range of direct service fields including reentry, domestic violence, homelessness, mental health, and substance abuse. She was a leader in the successful 10-year campaign to pass NY's Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act (DVSJA) in 2019. Sharon is a minister, motivational speaker, adjunct lecturer, consultant, and therapist. She holds a master's degree in Social Work from Lehman College, a bachelor's degree in Social Work and Criminal Justice from City University of New York where she was a Thomas W. Smith Fellow, and an associate degree in Liberal Arts from Marymount Manhattan College. Sharon is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the 2017 Frank & Lisina Hoch Award for Social Justice Advocacy and Activism, and the 2019 Leadership Award for her advocacy to pass the Domestic Violence Survivor's Justice Act.



Tia Hamilton, Maryland

Tia "MZ Konnoisseur" Hamilton is a Mother, Entrepreneur, CEO, Producer, Journalist, Publisher, Author, Prison/Youth/Community Advocate, Motivational Speaker; the list is endless. Tia Hamilton is the owner of Urban Reads, and the publisher of State vs. Us Magazine, a publication for incarcerated people

around the country.



Tonie Willis, Pennsylvania

Tonie Willis Founder and Executive Director of Ardella's House As a visionary leader, Tonie's advocacy supports access to transitional housing for family reunification. This has been a priority especially when as many as 60 percent of incarcerated women are mothers. Her work at Ardella's House aids over 300 hundred women

and their families annually and offers a continuum of care in the area of employment, housing, family, health and wellbeing, and criminal justice compliance.



Yolanda Johnson-Peterkin, New York

Mrs. Yolanda Johnson-Peterkin joined the Housing Authority in 2015, her current role is Chief of Housing Community Activities. This position has afforded her the opportunity to implement systemic change by reunifying formerly incarcerated people with their families.

Mrs. Johnson-Peterkin received her Master's degree in Social Work from Hunter College. She has received honors from the Correctional Association of New York, Citizens Against Recidivism, and the NAACP. Mrs. Johnson-Peterkin is an active alumna and Board Member of the College and Community Fellowship program where the mission is to help formerly incarcerated women achieve their goals through higher education. Yolanda Johnson-Peterkin has been described as the "Ambassador of Freedom".



Zaria Davis, Ohio

Dr. Zaria Davis is a mentor, educator, and advocate. Zaria serves as a coach and consultant for those servicing directly impacted communities through New Direction Coaching & Consulting, LLC. and is Founder & Executive Director for Filling the Gap, serving currently & formerly

incarcerated women. She holds a DSW (Social Work) from Capella University, MSW from University of Cincinnati and BA in Sociology from Wilberforce University and currently enrolled in Eden Theological Seminary pursuing her MDiv. Zaria serves on the Ed Trust Justice Fellows Advisory Board, Subject Matter Expert with Jamii Sisterhood & member of Dignity Leadership Alliance team. Dr. Zaria is passionate about addressing barrier for impacted women, full restoration of citizenship of directly impacted people, and access to higher education during and after incarceration.

Cohort #2, 2020-2021



Bleu Inkk Watkins, California

Born and raised in Compton, CA. Bleu Inkk served 28 years, 6 months, and 4 days before being released as a woman who found her voice and her soul's purpose while being quieted in a broken system. She became a resident of A New Way of Life and after being there a year, Bleu became the housing Coordinator where her new way of Life continues. She speaks on how unresolved traumas as youth affects the choices as women.



Ayoola Mitchell, California

Born and raised in San Francisco, California, Ayoola Mitchell has spent more than three decades working in the punishment system, as a fierce advocate for those impacted. She currently works full-time developing, overseeing and facilitating programs in jails and prisons. She believes the most important aspect of her life is being a Mother and facilitating healing within her family and in communities. Ayoola's world changed drastically over a decade ago when her family experienced not one or two but three separate tragedies. In a little

more than four years, Ayoola experienced her oldest son surviving 17 gunshot wounds only to lose her middle son to murder 15 months later. Less than three years later, her Godson was killed by a drunk driver. Although initially self-identifying as a Survivor, Ayoola found her greatest strength, power and resiliency on her Healing Journey. She is a firm believer in the importance, necessity and power of healing. She often states, “We must stop looking for things externally to heal us internally”. In what she sarcastically refers to as her infinite free time, she loves spending time with her family, reading and writing.



Cass Severe, New Jersey

Cass Severe is a mother, certified social worker, survivor, activist, credible messenger, and change agent living and working in Newark, New Jersey. She currently works with the Newark Housing Authority to support the Asset Manager and the Department of Operations. Cass previously worked as advertised Project Manager at Newark Community Street Team. NCST is a community-based violence reduction strategy that trains and deploys Outreach Workers and High-Risk Interventionists in the South and West Wards. Cass knows firsthand the difficulty and challenges people face after traumatic life experiences, has made it her mission and passion to incorporate healing in her social work practices.



Chanel Rhymes, Washington

Chanel Rhymes is the co-owner of Monarch Consulting LLC and the Director of Advocacy for the Northwest Community Bail Fund. Prior to joining the Northwest Community Bail fund, Chanel served as the Court Program Analyst for the Washington Supreme Court Minority and Justice Commission., executing the mission of ensuring that all courts in the state of Washington remain free of bias so that justice might be adjudicated in a neutral and fair manner. Previously, she was a Program Manager for the Freedom Education Project of Puget

Sound where she developed and coordinated college courses for women seeking to attain their AA degrees while incarcerated at the Washington Correction Center for Women. Chanel has worked with the Council of State Governments Justice Center, supporting their work on national criminal justice reform. She also has legislative experience as a Political Field Organizer and as a Legislative Liaison for the Washington Student Association, where she lobbied for the interests of students in higher education around issues of affordability, administration transparency, and accessibility.



Consuela Gaines, Louisiana

Consuela Gaines is the VOTE Team (Voice of the Experienced) Chapter Organizer for the Lafayette, Louisiana region. After spending 22 years in prison she is an organizer, leader, motivational speaker, writer and teacher who desires to change the criminal justice system. Her passion is

assisting women and girls. Consuela has a vision to open a halfway house for women re-entering their communities.



Cynthia "Cindy" Shank, Michigan

Cynthia Shank, criminal justice advocate and mother of three, is the subject of the Emmy Award winning film *The Sentence*. This intimate portrait of mandatory minimum drug sentencing's devastating consequences, captured by Cindy's brother, follows her and her family over the

course of ten years.



Jonel Beauvais, New York

Jonel Beauvais is a Mohawk mother of three and is of the Wolf Clan family in her home of Akwesasne, located in Upstate New York on the U.S./Canadian political governing border. As a formerly imprisoned woman she now has the honor of doing Community Outreach for Seven

Dancers Coalition, which creates awareness and prevention on Sexual Assault and Domestic violence within the Indigenous communities of New York State. With valuable life experience and through the traditional Indigenous teachings she has inherited, addressing harm, trauma and violence through ancestral knowledge has brought purpose and passion to her work. This is vital in order to bring forth the healing her people deserve, co-powering with the sharing of Indigenous ceremony and brilliance so that it may enter the hearts and minds of all people from all directions. Fully engaged in community she diligently strives to bring forth the truth of indigenous history, along with changes necessary to dismantle the many forms of oppression imposed on the original descendants of this continent.



Kimberly Haven, Maryland

Kimberly Haven is a thought leader and a powerful voice and force in the social justice movement. She is a focus-issue expert and is a frequently called upon speaker on issues such as Women in Prison, Women's Reproductive Justice, Voting Rights and Democracy, Collateral

Consequences, Mass Incarceration and Re-Entry, Pre-Trial Reform, and Parole and Probation reforms. She is a sought-after expert for legislative testifying and media commentary on a broad range of criminal justice reform and advocacy issues and she consults with state and local elected officials and executives on criminal justice issues. During her extensive career she has played a leadership role in numerous statewide efforts and she has the unique distinction of being one of only 2 formerly incarcerated individuals (and the only woman) who has written and gotten passed several pieces of legislation at both the State and City levels. She is an author, advocate and activist and brings a fresh voice, insight and authority that brings new attention to the issues in the criminal justice system.



Kristie Puckett, North Carolina

Kristie Puckett is the Statewide Campaign for Smart Justice Manager for the ACLU of North Carolina and is a working scholar in Mass Incarceration with a focus on the treatment of women including pregnant women in carceral facilities. Recently, Kristie was appointed by NC's Governor to serve as the Chair of the Women in Incarceration, a working group for the State Reentry Council Collaborative. Also, Kristie is currently traveling across the state of North Carolina with the Attorney General and his staff to conduct roundtables to talk about pretrial detention practices in the state. Her goal is to use her educational and life experiences to convey a message of strength and hope in the community as well as a message of recovery, restoration and redemption.



LaTonya A. Tate, Alabama

LaTonya A. Tate is a national leader, social justice activist and a retired Probation and Parole Officer formerly with the Florida Department of Corrections. She is often called upon speak on panels as an expert on probation and parole reform. LaTonya launched the Reimagining Probation and Parole Reform Project in Alabama, where she educates those directly impacted and formerly incarcerated to push for legislative change on outdated probation and parole practices in Alabama. She is the Founder and Executive Director of Alabama Justice Initiative, dedicated to dismantling mass incarceration, the probation/parole system that's affecting and tearing families apart. LaTonya is "2018 Soros Justice Fellow".



Lauren Hansen, Colorado

Lauren Hansen is the Communication and Community Engagement Coordinator for the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison. Lauren served as the co-chair for the 2019 National Conference for Higher Education in Prison (NCHEP) planning committee and serves on the advisory board for NJ F.O.R.T.E. House and Princeton University's Prison Teaching Initiative (PTI). She has been speaking about the dangers of drunk driving since 2011. She co-founded STERR in 2019, a company to speak in tandem with her brother, Ryan Hansen, about the dangers of drunk driving which they hope to launch nationally in the near future. She regularly speaks about her experience of higher education in a prison program to now working for the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison. She is passionate about empowering, educating and supporting people affected by incarceration.



Leslie Credle, Massachusetts

Presently, I am leading a local non-profit in Boston, MA where our mission is to end the homelessness problem for formerly incarcerated women and women currently involved in the criminal legal system who have lost housing. We fight to change the current legislation surrounding these discriminatory policies that disproportionately affect people of color.



Markie Bledsoe-Grant, New York

Born in Harlem and raised in Jersey, Markie Bledsoe oversees the Criminal Court Mediation Program for all of Brooklyn and Manhattan at New York Peace Institute. Markie works to divert people away from punitive systems and provide a platform for people to access restorative processes. As a mediator, circle keeper, and facilitator, Markie believes in using restorative and transformative justice to contribute

to the women's justice movement to end mass incarceration. As a NYU Fellow for Emerging Leaders in Public Service (FELPS) her focus is to create alternatives, end violence and advocate for racial and social justice. Markie earned her B.A. in Forensic Psychology and Dispute Resolution Certification from John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

Michele Quick, New York

Chaplain Michele Quick received her Doctorate of Theology in 2013. She is a Mental Health Coach and WRAP Facilitator. Michele is also the Founder of True Vine Christian Academy Prison Ministry since 2009 where she serves as advocate for the incarcerated and those impacted by incarceration. Chaplain since 2012 and commissioned by The New York State Chaplain Task Force.



Monica Cosby, Illinois

Monica is currently employed with West Side Justice Center in Chicago where she is a lead community organizer, event manager, intake specialist, and facilitate legal literacy workshops and other teach-ins. At Mom's United Chicago, she is involved in participatory defense, mutual aid work, and facilitates workshops and teach-ins. She also sits on the steering committee with Unitarian Universalist Prison Ministry.



Olivia McCheyne, New York

Olivia McCheyne is a formerly incarcerated doctoral student at Johnson University's School of Business and Public Leadership researching White Supremacy, Systemic Racism, and the Criminalization of Trauma. She has a Master of Art in Interdisciplinary Studies: Coaching and Communications from Liberty University and a Bachelor of Science in Organizational Management from Keuka College. Passionate about using coaching as a framework for reentry, she formerly

served as the Founder and Executive Director of Fall Forward, Inc. located in Syracuse, NY. She has worked on the Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act (DVSJA) which recently became law. Olivia has devoted her life to eradicating violence against women and children and the criminalization of their trauma.



Pauline Rogers, Mississippi

Pauline Rogers is the co-founder of the Reaching and Educating for Community Hope Foundation (RECH) located in Jackson, Mississippi. She also runs the statewide employment and life skills training initiative known as MORE (Mississippi Offender Reentry Establishment). She was the former Field Director for the National Prison Fellowship Organization along with accolades as a Public Speaker, Evangelist, Moderator, and Panelist on reform topics of social and criminal justice and civic issues. an ordained minister whose work has been acknowledged and gained her appearances on CBN News the 700 Club, along with The Link, The Word Network, TBN (Trinity Broadcast Network), and various universities, colleges, magazines, publications and local newspapers during her 30-year dedication to prison activism.



Priscilla Carmona, New Jersey

I am the founder of SCORES, LLC, an organization that helps others find employment, housing and viable resources after incarceration. These services have a positive impact on people who are trying to overcome the barriers that prevent them from transitioning their life. I have dedicated my career to social services in the hope of raising awareness, helping others, just as so many have helped me over the years. I wholly believe that those who have been justice-involved have some of the most powerful, enlightening and heart-driven stories, passions and narratives. It is our job to empower these individuals to tell their story, and find ways to strengthen their skills for leadership and active change within their communities.



Robin Turner, Ohio

Robin Turner is currently President of the American Civil Liberties Union Smart Justice Advisory Board. An educator, organizer and humanitarian, committed to racial equity, directly impacted individuals and cultural proficiency.

Robin's work supports racial and social equity, social justice movements, with a special interest in strategic planning. She is particularly passionate about building personal and professional relationships and connecting like-minded individuals while leveraging networks. She has achieved certificates in Chemical Dependency Counseling, Lead Contracting and is a Cleveland Central Promise Neighborhood Ambassador. She is an experienced civic affiliate. Robin lives in an intergenerational urban Cleveland home with her mother, children, grandchildren and their dogs – Pepper and Rose'.



Russelle "Rusti" Miller-Hill, New York

In loving memory of Russelle Miller-Hill affectionately known as "Rusti": Rusti was a community advocate, motivational speaker and consultant on topics of HIV/AIDS, addiction, reentry, housing, correctional health and the needs of women impacted by these issues for ten

years. Rusti was a tireless community organizer and advocate for women who remain behind the walls. While incarcerated in a Women's Correctional Facility in New York, she was one of the earliest beneficiaries of the AIDS Counseling and Education program; "ACE" at The Bedford Hill's Correctional Facility. Rusti has been featured in a wide variety of publications, videos, and documentaries, including the New York Times, Ebony Magazine, POZ magazine, The House on Fire, Sisters Keepers and Rusti's Story. Rusti's source of inspiration is her Husband, children and grandchildren.

Cohort #1, 2019–2020



Fox Rich, Louisiana

Fox Rich is a formerly incarcerated woman, mother of six sons, and the wife of a formerly incarcerated man. On a mission to restore her family, Fox spearheaded a clemency campaign that brought her husband home after he received a 60-year sentence as a first offender.

Understanding there are thousands of families that were not successful bringing their loved ones home, Fox became an activist for change and is at the forefront of the movement to end mass incarceration. She frequently testifies before members of the Louisiana legislature on behalf of reform measures and in 2017, she worked alongside Louisianans for Prison Alternatives, Voice of the Experience, SPLC, and the ACLU to pass the most comprehensive reform package in the state of Louisiana in the last 30 years. Fox is a member of The Graduates, a performance ensemble of formerly incarcerated women who use art as activism and a member of the National Council of Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. She is a graduate of Grambling State University with a Bachelor of Science and Master of Public Administration, both a teacher and servant, entrepreneur, business owner and most of all a humanitarian.



Jhody Polk, Florida

Jhody is the Director of Community Justice at the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding. She is the founder and lead organizer of L.E.A.H. (the Legal Empowerment & Advocacy Hub.) She also established the Florida Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, the

Jailhouse Lawyers Initiative, and the first Participatory Defense Hub in the State of Florida. Jhody Polk has dedicated her life to legal empowerment, community peace building, and restorative practices as strategies to peace, justice, and power.



Keila Pulinario, New York

Keila Pulinario is a criminal justice reform advocate, who uses her personal experience as a survivor of violence and long-term incarceration to inform her work. Since returning home after 20 years of incarceration, Keila has divided her time between her double passions of culinary

arts and activism. Keila is currently a Fellow with the Women & Justice Project.



Marilyn Lee, Georgia

Marilyn Lee is a human rights activist that includes: Women, LGBTQAI+, religious freedom, and criminal justice reform..... She is a community organizer and civic engagement team leader. Marilyn is an optimist that envisions a world where stigma that is associated with having

criminal justice involvement no longer exists, where the current justice system is torn down and rebuilt by people who come from all walks of life. Marilyn is a mother, grandmother, and organic beekeeper.



Marissa Alexander, Florida

Marissa Alexander was fulfilling a career in IT Management when she was arrested and charged with aggravated assault in August of 2010 for firing a single warning shot after being attacked by her then estranged husband. In August of 2012, Marissa was sentenced to twenty

years in prison under Florida's harsh minimum mandatory sentencing policies. Her story gained national attention and shed light on harsh minimum mandatory sentencing policies as well as the Stand Your Ground Law. Marissa Alexander is a public speaker, success coach, and survivor-defendant expert consultant who has delivered keynotes, participated in panels, and facilitated training at major organizations, colleges and universities. She has also been

profiled on CNN, MSNBC, and ABC, FOX, and NBC affiliates, The New York Times and Rolling Stone. Marissa holds a Bachelor's in Information Technology and Master's in Business Administration degrees. She is a domestic violence survivor and her case remains one of the most-referenced examples of injustice and source of insight, on domestic violence and criminalization of survivors. She is writing her first book.



Miyhosi Benton, New York

Miyhosi Benton is Senior Associate at the Women & Justice Project (WJP), where she works to advance the leadership and build the power of currently and formerly incarcerated women. Miyhosi spearheads WJP's public engagement work and lead partnership work with women

directly impacted by incarceration. She serves as the main spokesperson for WJP in the public and press, and plays a primary role in developing the organization's overall vision, strategy and programmatic efforts. Miyhosi is one of the leaders in the successful campaign to pass the New York 2015 Anti-Shackling law which strengthened and expanded the ban on the barbaric practice of shackling incarcerated pregnant women. Miyhosi is a single mother of two, pursuing her bachelor's degree in Communications, a recipient of the 2015 Susan B. Anthony Award from the National Organization for Women–NYC, and the 2016 Hour Children Mother of the Year Award.



Roslyn Smith, New York

Roslyn D. Smith is a Program Manager at V-day. She shares her experience of incarceration and the broken system through her writing and work as a Vday.org blogger, speaker and advocate. Roslyn was recently released from prison after serving 39 years and is highly committed and

adamant about the change necessary to end the mass incarceration of marginalized communities. She has devoted her life and work to ending all violence against women and girls.

Stacy Rojas, California

Stacy Rojas is a gender nonconforming, formerly imprisoned, survivor of violence. They organized against gender discrimination while serving a 15 year sentence at CCWF in California. They now work with the Young Women's Freedom Center and California Coalition for Women Prisoners to organize system-impacted people to join social justice movements in LA. They are one of the lead organizers of #MeTooBehindBars, a campaign to end gender and sexual violence inside all women's prisons in California



Tabaitha Rodriguez, New York

Tabaitha Rodriguez is a social justice community advocate and founder and CEO of a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization based in the Bronx called, G.I.R.L.S. (Gathering of Independent Resources for Living Successfully). We work with young women and girls to become self-empowered, by building leadership skills, sisterhood, self esteem and resilience. Tabaitha is a 2018-2019 Beyond the Bars Fellow and a 2019 Women Influencing Systems and History Fellow. She is a member of the Bronx Democratic County Committee, the Southeast Bronx Community Council, the Bronx Progressives, and the Local Democrats of New York. Tabaitha is a mother of two and a first generation college graduate, completing her Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice at Monroe College and her MA in Psychology in Education from Teachers College.

Tiara Moore, Nevada

Tiara Moore is a formerly incarcerated community advocate working to end mass incarceration, bring awareness to the injustices of the system and the barriers women face after incarceration. The mother of six and a domestic violence survivor has dedicated her career to helping men, women and children suffering from mental illness, homelessness, domestic violence, incarceration and drug abuse.