

# Criminal Justice Initiative

A project of the Solidago Foundation

CJI is 15!

## 2016 Grants

*15 Years funding those most impacted to end mass criminalization and incarceration to create a more just society*

**“Impossible,”** we were told 15 years ago when CJI began its work to end mass incarceration. I am reminded of the words of Nelson Mandela—the most famous formerly incarcerated person in the world—who said, **“Everything is impossible until it is done.”** I think of this whenever I feel overwhelmed with how much needs to change for our society to be truly equitable and just.

Looking at the tremendous movement gains in the past year alone, no one can deny that we have advanced from protest to politics. We have moved the majority of Americans from seeing the criminal legal system as a good system with some problems, to one that is fundamentally flawed and not providing anything that resembles justice. Now the question we are asked is, “But what is a better system? How do we get there?” Now is the time to **“make the vision plain.”**

Can we collectively envision a system whose roots are not deeply embedded in white supremacy, classism, sexism, homophobia and gender oppression? **Yes.** We can build a system that seeks restorative justice instead of vengeance, includes diversion programs that treat illness instead of punishing people for it, and teaches children true safety practices that do not rely on police. CJI’s grantees this year are proving that the vision can be realized. From campaigns to redirect funds from prisons to jobs programs, to preventing the separation of families, to centering those most impacted in creating solutions, CJI grantees are creating a world in which we are all allowed to thrive. We hope you’re as inspired by their work as we are.

—Aleah Bacquie Vaughn, Director of CJI

### **BreakOUT! New Orleans, LA**

**Received a \$20,000 grant**

In 2015, longtime CJI grantee BreakOUT! responded to the murder of one of its core member leaders, Penny Proud, with a call for jobs, housing, and education to keep trans youth safe. Penny Proud was one of 23 transgender women murdered last year in the United States. Almost all were women of color. For BreakOUT! members and staff, this crisis of violence bolstered by criminalization is an everyday reality they are working to change. BreakOUT! works with LGBTQ youth of color in New Orleans who are targeted by the police and incarcerated at alarming rates. Through BreakOUT!’s programming, youth develop their leadership and research the ways that criminal justice system and policing impact their lives. They release and participate in groundbreaking reports, advocate for policy change, and raise awareness of issues that LGBTQ youth—especially LGBTQ youth of color—face through organizing, advocacy, and art. In addition, BreakOUT! plays a key role within the criminal justice movement by ensuring that voices of LGBTQ youth are included in conversations about mass incarceration.

## Organization for Black Struggle **St. Louis, MO**

Received a \$20,000 grant

In August 2014, when Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson killed unarmed teenager Mike Brown, the world got a window into the violence and injustice at the hands of the police that Ferguson, Missouri's African American citizens have been experiencing for decades. In fact, white supremacist ideology in St. Louis County is so entrenched that its police department is being sued by the justice department for refusing to address racist policies and practices. Organization for Black Struggle (OBS) was one of the key first responders during the Ferguson rebellion, and with 30 years of experience building a grassroots base of support for racial justice, greater police accountability, and radical transformation of "the justice system," they played a critical role turning a moment into a movement. OBS has also played an essential role nationally building analysis around police violence and making clear that structural racism must be dismantled or there will never be justice for those criminalized in this country.

## Puente Human Rights Movement **Phoenix, AZ**

Received a \$20,000 grant

The Puente Human Rights Movement is a leader in the immigrant rights movement nationally. Their work centers resistance to the life-threatening state practices of criminalization, detention, and deportation—issues that acutely affect their base while connecting them to the larger movement for racial justice and community safety without criminalization. Last year, Puente stopped over 50 deportations and after organizing victims of workplace raids was granted an injunction in the lawsuit Puente V. Arpaio, stopping these raids in their tracks. Having successfully fought and won deportation cases for people with only immigration-related charges, Puente's deportation defense work now includes people targeted for crimes of poverty, the War on Drugs, and the rampant over-policing of communities of color. As they intervene and stop deportations in these cases, Puente's success sets a precedent for decreased sentencing in all communities.

## Voice of the Ex-Offender (VOTE) **New Orleans, LA**

Received a \$20,000 grant

A leading national voice on criminal justice reform whose campaigns are replicated nationwide, VOTE (Voice of the Ex-Offender) is a membership-based organization of formerly incarcerated people working to build power in the most incarcerated state in the country. Led by Norris Henderson, a formerly incarcerated man who was exonerated, VOTE creates living wage job opportunities for people with felony convictions, does voter engagement with formerly incarcerated people and their families, and organizes to stop the building of new prisons and jails in Louisiana. A grant from CJI will support VOTE's Statewide Voter Registration and Engagement campaign, registering people to vote while highlighting the 90,000 disenfranchised people in Louisiana.

## Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice **Birmingham, Alabama**

Received a \$15,000 grant



In 2011, HB56—the harshest anti-immigrant law in the U.S. to date—passed in Alabama turning local law enforcement into immigration enforcement and encouraging immigrants to self-deport. Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice (ACIJ) stepped up to the challenge, and has built a grassroots network of 14 groups active in 21 counties across Alabama, all led by undocumented immigrants. Last year, ACIJ's work with black mayors across Alabama resulted in the passing of a "TRUST" policy in Tuskegee in which city officials agreed to use their local authority to end police collaboration with Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) in their jurisdiction. A grant from CJI this year will support ACIJ's continued work to disentangle police and ICE across Alabama and build the base of resistance against criminalization, detention, deportation, and racism on a key front.

## Ex-Prisoner and Prisoners Organizing for Community Advancement (EPOCA)

**Worcester, MA**

Received a \$15,000 grant

95% of longtime CJI grantee EPOCA's base have been personally affected by the criminal justice system. For the past two years, EPOCA's primary campaign has been a visionary *Jobs Not Jails* campaign led in broad coalition with other Massachusetts social justice organizations as well as workers' and faith-based organizations. Last year, after the *Jobs Not Jails* movement's work with Senator Sonia Chang-Díaz and Rep. Mary Keefe, they filed The Justice Reinvestment Act in the Massachusetts House and Senate. Less than a week later, media highlighted the bill, and in two weeks ¼ of Massachusetts' legislature (12 Senators and 45 Representatives) had signed on as co-sponsors. Tenets of the Act include: the repeal of mandatory minimum drug sentences, job training and transitional job and pre-apprenticeship programs, and a trust fund in which money saved in the state budget by reducing incarceration is earmarked for a jobs program targeting low-income, high-crime neighborhoods.



## **Justice Now** **Oakland, CA**

**Received a \$15,000 grant**

Justice Now is the home of the only activist-led legal rights training clinic focused on building a movement in the nation's largest women's prisons. To date, Justice Now has trained over 650 legal advocacy interns comprised of formerly imprisoned people and family members, who have helped empower over 5,000 imprisoned people to facilitate legal processes and safeguard against abusive prison conditions. Last year in broad coalition both locally and nationally, Justice Now achieved a major victory with the unanimous passage of their Anti-Sterilization Abuse Bill in the CA legislature, finally making it illegal to forcibly sterilize incarcerated people and *all* people in California. Since the passage of this bill, Justice Now has shifted their *Let Our Families Have a Future* campaign toward ensuring state compliance with the law and creating access to avenues of redress and healing for sterilization survivors.

## **California Coalition for Women Prisoners** **San Francisco, CA**

**Received a \$10,000 grant**

Women are the fastest growing incarcerated population in the United States. In California—a state with an incarcerated population second only to Texas—92% of all women in prisons had been “battered and abused,” and 71% report experiencing continual physical abuse by guards or other prisoners.<sup>1</sup> California Coalition for Women Prisoners plays an important role in the movement for criminal justice reform by exposing the ways state violence continues the pattern of violence responsible for landing many people in women's prisons. Longtime CJI Grantee, CCWP was founded 21 years ago by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women, and their work has remained vital. This was proved last year when they helped achieve a landmark victory in reducing long-term solitary confinement in California state prisons. A grant from CJI will support CCWP to ensure enforcement of this ban.

## **Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children** **New Orleans, LA**

**Received a \$10,000 grant**

Longtime CJI grantee Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) is a statewide membership-based organization that organizes to ensure that every child has an opportunity for a better life, particularly those who are involved in or targeted by the juvenile justice system. By developing directly-impacted members into strong parent advocates and leaders, FFLIC has reduced suspensions by over 10,000 and expulsions by 300 in the past two school years alone. Last year, FFLIC's work to educate Senator Weston Broome and the public resulted in a huge victory: the passing of Act 248 prohibiting suspensions or expulsions of students in grades preK-5 for uniform violations, an advancement that affects more than 20,000 students across the state. A grant from CJI this year will support the third year of FFLIC's 50/2017 Campaign: *Building a Movement to Stop the School to Prison Pipeline*.

## **The Justice Committee** **New York City, NY**

**Received a \$10,000 grant**

The Justice Committee (JC) empowers low-income Latino/a communities and other people of color to change the criminal justice system by building a base of directly affected New Yorkers empowered to know and exercise their rights, document and expose abusive policing, and develop their own vision and practices for community health and safety. Last year, the JC organized families who have lost family members to police violence to put crucial pressure on the governor to endorse the demand for a special prosecutor for police killings in New York, and they won! A grant from CJI this year will help them begin the critical work to develop community safety practices that don't rely on police.

## **Workers Center for Racial Justice** **Chicago, IL**

**Received a \$10,000 grant**

The Chicago Police Department is currently under investigation by the U.S. justice department and has a proven track record, historically and currently, of illegal, racist, and extraordinarily violent conduct. This is the context informing Workers Center for Racial Justice's holistic analysis highlighting the historical connection between exploitation of Black labor and criminalization. CJI's grant will support WCRJ's critical efforts to eliminate the barriers to sustainable and living wage employment for Black workers, strengthen economic security for Black families, and end the over-criminalization prevalent in Black communities by shifting public resources away from policing and incarceration towards jobs and educational opportunities for formerly incarcerated Black workers in two major campaigns—*De-Criminalization of Race and Dignity of Work*. Demands include: UN oversight of U.S. police conduct, community oversight of police departments, decriminalization of marijuana, and job vouchers for formerly incarcerated workers.



## Families for Justice as Healing **Boston, MA**

Received a \$7,500 grant

Between 1980 and 2014, the number of incarcerated women increased by more than 700%, rising from a total of 26,378 in 1980 to 215,332 in 2014.<sup>2</sup> Families for Justice as Healing (FFJAH) organizes incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women to raise awareness of this crisis of U.S. domestic policy while creating legislative and policy alternatives to mass incarceration. Founded in 2010 by visionary leader and 2015 Soros Justice Fellow Andrea James while she was incarcerated, FFJAH currently has members in every federal women's facility in the country. A grant from CJI will support FFJAH's *Justice Home* project, a pilot alternative sentencing project for women arrested on drug charges that delivers treatment instead of punishment and keeps families together that would otherwise be torn apart by incarceration.

## Racial Justice Action Center **Atlanta, GA**

Received a \$7,500 grant

Georgia has the highest rate of people on probation in the country with 1 in 13 people under some type of correctional supervision. This is no coincidence when 80% of people on probation are supervised by private companies who gain financially by keeping as many people as possible on probation for as long as possible. This is the context within which Racial Justice Action Center (RJAC) is building a movement of women and trans\* people directly impacted by the criminal justice system. Key projects include the Solutions, Not Punishment Coalition (SNaPCo) and Women on the Rise, in which members advocate for community-based solutions to criminalization such as the huge recent victory of a pre-arrest diversion program, which directs people targeted for arrest to programs instead, reducing recidivism and addressing root causes of criminalization and mass incarceration. RJAC's visionary work immediately impacts the lives of incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, and hyper-policed Georgians while shifting Georgia's reliance on the criminal justice system for the long term.

## Release Aging People in Prison **New York City, NY**

Received a \$7,500 grant

Most organizations seeking to reduce the prison population focus on non-violent offenders. Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP) critically seeks to refocus the conversation on rehabilitation and redemption—a conversation essential to addressing violence in our society, and a formidable challenge to the ideology of mass incarceration. RAPP works to accelerate the release of elderly people who have already served a considerable amount of time behind bars, are parole eligible, and who are at low risk for committing a crime upon release from New York State prisons. Led by formerly incarcerated organizers who have served long sentences themselves, RAPP also seeks to raise awareness about parole and release policies and practices. This year will see the implementation of two pilot projects RAPP helped develop, including a housing program for the newly released.

## Transgender, Gender Variant, and Intersex Justice Project **San Francisco, CA** Received a \$7,500 grant

Longtime CJI grantee, Transgender, Gender Variant and Intersex Justice Project (TGIJP) is member-led organization of mostly trans women of color that organizes, advocates, and provides imprisoned people with support, legal services, peer advocacy, and wrap around re-entry services that dramatically reduce recidivism for trans, gender variant, and intersex people who have experienced incarceration. TGIJP members represent a community profiled and targeted for incarceration *and* facing the highest risk of violence inside prison and out. With TGIJP, members develop their political analysis and leadership skills and organize for imprisoned peoples' rights and racial, economic and gender justice in coalition with other organizations. TGIJP is a critical voice in the movement organizing against expansions to the prison system that claim to be safe or safer for trans and LGBTQI people.

Photos:

page 1 – (both images) BreakOUT!

page 2 – Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice

page 3 – Workers Center for Racial Justice

page 4 – Longtime member-leader of Transgender, Gender Variant, and Intersex Justice Project Gail Spencer at the 2015 SF PRIDE Parade as part of the Black Lives Matter contingent.

Endnotes:

- 1) The American Civil Liberties Union. "Facts About the Incarceration of Women in the United States." Accessed June 30, 2016. <https://www.aclu.org/facts-about-over-incarceration-women-united-states>.
- 2) The Sentencing Project. "Incarcerated Women and Girls." Accessed June 28, 2016. <http://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/incarcerated-women-and-girls/>.