



THE FIRST FOUR YEARS

We hope you enjoy this 4-year look-back on all that JustLeadershipUSA has accomplished - it's only the beginning! We believe that dignity is a fundamental human right and demand that right for all as our experiences and our belief in each other drive us forward.

"We must believe we can radically change the world and act in that manner every day. No movement has ever been successful until those most oppressed rise up into leadership and demand change. That's what JustLeadershipUSA does."

— DeAnna Hoskins, President and CEO, JLUSA

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MISSION

JustLeadershipUSA is dedicated to cutting the U.S. correctional population in #halfby2030. JLUSA empowers people most affected by incarceration to drive policy reform. Through our advocacy, leadership, and membership, we are redefining justice in the U.S.

HISTORY

JLUSA was founded in November 2014 by national criminal justice reform advocate Glenn E. Martin, on the guiding principle that “those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, but furthest from resources and power.” The inspiration for JLUSA came from Mr. Martin’s personal experience, having been previously incarcerated for six years. JLUSA’s #halfby2030 mission came from Mr. Martin’s love for his youngest son, Joshua Martin, who will turn 18 in 2030.



Glenn E. Martin,
Founder of JustLeadershipUSA

As president of the organization until December 2017, Mr. Martin worked with staff to launch the bold and successful #CLOSErikers campaign, propelling JLUSA onto the national stage; engaged in unflinching and non-partisan advocacy on the federal level; and set the foundation for the agency’s multi-city advocacy work. Mr. Martin and JLUSA’s Senior Training Consultant, David K. Mensah, developed the organization’s leadership program with input from over 50 formerly incarcerated leaders from across the US, with support from the Center for Institutional and Social Change at Columbia University. The Leading with Conviction advanced leadership development program and Emerging Leaders regional trainings are an investment in the individual and collective leadership of people directly impacted by the system of mass incarceration.

JLUSA is the first organization in the country to call for the correctional system to be halved, and has inspired a movement of people and new organizations to follow our mission toward decarceration. From closing toxic jails and prisons to reforming pretrial laws, barriers to employment, and the wider system of mass criminalization, JLUSA’s bold campaigns with valued partners across the U.S. amplify the voices and expertise of directly impacted people who are leading us toward #halfby2030.



2018 IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS



JLUSA launched with a benefit in November 2014!
We're celebrating our 4-year anniversary!

CAMPAIGNS IN
8 STATES



MEMBERS IN
50 STATES

A NETWORK OF
580 LEADERS



400 NEW
INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

MORE THAN
**200 COALITION
PARTNERS**
NATIONWIDE



MEDIA REACH:
+20 MILLION

ABOUT OUR WORK

For the last four decades, the United States has relentlessly relied on systemic criminalization and subsequent incarceration as a solution to complex social problems, stemming from decades of disinvestment in basic human needs. As a result, human lives – primarily and disproportionately Black, Native, and Latinx people – have been discarded.

This nation's reliance on a carceral state destroys individuals, families, communities and economies – and weakens democracy from the local to federal levels. JustLeadershipUSA is working to strengthen the United States –its communities, its values, and its social contract–by elevating the voice of people and communities that are most impacted by the criminal legal system, to drive policy change that reduces incarceration. It is possible to build a society where healing and restoration, not incarceration, is the answer.

The three pillars of Leadership, Membership, and Advocacy, fuel our mission to get to #halfby2030.

LEADERSHIP

JLUSA believes that most challenging barrier to expansive, systemic criminal and juvenile justice reform in the United States is the absence of clear and consistent leadership by those who have been directly affected by our failed criminal justice policies. Leading with Conviction (LwC) is an advanced leadership training for formerly incarcerated, mid-senior level leaders with a specific and proven track record in advocacy and community organizing. Emerging Leaders (EL) Training is a day-long leadership development opportunities for advocates directly impacted by the Criminal Justice, including arrest, incarceration, probation, parole, in cities around the country. Our network of leaders is more than 500 strong!

MEMBERSHIP

JLUSA's individual and organizational members view our broken justice system as a threat to our democracy including people who are currently or formerly incarcerated, and non-directly impacted supporters in all 50 states plus D.C. Members of JustLeadershipUSA, stand up against harmful laws and contribute to campaigns to close jails, build communities, and address the collateral consequences of incarceration.

ADVOCACY

JustLeadershipUSA's campaigns, while differing in location, scope, and approach, all fundamentally adhere to our organization's values, and all work to help us achieve our ultimate goal of #halfby2030. Our campaigns go beyond closing brick and mortar jails and prisons – they're about overhauling and dismantling unjust laws and systems so that people can come home and thrive. Our campaigns put forth visions and demands for justice reinvestment that repair the harm and disinvestment in our communities.



2015 Emerging Leaders: New York, NY



2015 Emerging Leaders: St. Louis, MO



BILL COBB

PENNSYLVANIA

“I have to sound the alarm and be a clarion of justice”

Last year, William “Bill” Cobb was hired and fired “for about the dozenth time” because of his criminal record, but this time was different. This time he pushed back. “At the time, I was working on a project on collateral consequences with a University of Pennsylvania law professor who told me I had a lawsuit. I was skeptical, but I began doing the research.” He learned, *for the first time*, that he had rights under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the current Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines and the federal Fair Credit Report Act. “I couldn’t believe it!” he says. “We’ve been trying to get ‘ban the box’ legislation passed in Philadelphia for more than seven years, and all that time we had rights that were even stronger.” Bill had been an advocate for people adversely impacted by the criminal justice system since his release from prison in 2000, and now he had a new mission: to let people know they had rights and to organize them to exercise those rights. “I have to sound the alarm and be a clarion of justice,” he explained.

In 2014 Bill Cobb founded a new not-for-profit grassroots organization: REDEEMED. Its long-term goal is the elimination of systemic employment discrimination practices aimed at people living with arrest and conviction records. While there are other organizations working on this issue, Bill’s strategy is unique: he hopes to build a strong base of activists from among formerly incarcerated people, their families, and their supporters. “I believe a grassroots organization run by someone who has been directly impacted is what’s been missing from this work,” he explains. “I get out and talk to people, letting them know what their rights are and activating them. We’re going to identify the most egregious violators of our rights and then demonstrate at their place of business. We’ll also initiate a dialogue with these companies to point out that they are violating the law, and to assist them in developing better policies.”

REDEEMED receives dozens of calls every week from men and women who cannot find a job. “Just telling people that they have rights changes how they govern themselves,” he says. “It provides them with hope they didn’t have and inspires them to try to do the right thing in spite of the most horrific experiences. You’re talking about evictions, about families being destroyed because the father or mother can’t provide for their children, and children being without basic necessities because their caregivers can’t find employment. And it’s not because they’re not the best people for the job. It’s simply because of a pervasive culture of discrimination against our population.”

Bill says that his participation in JustLeadershipUSA’s Leading with Conviction training has provided him with resources he would otherwise not have access to as well as a network of other leaders he can call on for advice and assistance. “Leading with Conviction demands excellence and demands that you perform at an optimum level to get the optimal output. We each have our own calling but by investing in each other’s leadership, encouraging and educating each other, and sharing resources, it’s the fuel we all need to achieve our goals.”



CAROLE EADY-PORCHER

NEW YORK

“It takes a village...”

Carole Eady knows from her own searing experience that when a person emerges from incarceration, or in her case, court-mandated treatment, “it takes a village to put that person back together again.” During her years of addiction, she couldn’t be there for anybody else, so complete was her self-absorption. During her nineteen months in residential treatment in the late-1990s, Carole greatly valued the help and support she received from her counselors. She decided that when she was released, she would be one of the people in “the village” and help other women put their lives back together again.

Carole was true to herself and today she is a leader in the movement to protect the human rights of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women. The recipient of several awards, Carole is widely recognized as a grassroots leader in the efforts to end the shackling of incarcerated women while giving birth and the termination of their parental rights. She serves as co-chair of Women on the Rise Telling Her Story (WORTH), an organization of formerly incarcerated women who have the expertise and understanding to challenge policy and perceptions concerning women in prison, and she sits on the board of directors for the Center for Community Alternatives (CCA). Carole is also an educator and since completing her Master’s Degree in Forensic Psychology, she has taught several courses at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. Recently she took on yet another advocacy role working with The Education from the Inside Out Coalition to remove barriers to higher education for people with criminal justice involvement.

In spite of her many years of experience in the world of social justice advocacy Carole says, “I never thought I knew enough about criminal justice issues, policy work, fundraising, and leadership. The JustLeadershipUSA Leading with Conviction trainings are finally giving me the opportunity to learn *all* of this. I feel much more adequate as an advocate and leader, especially in how to bring other people into criminal reform advocacy work.”



CHLOE TURNER

CALIFORNIA

“I never looked back.”

When Chloe Turner came out of prison at the age of thirty, she was paroled to San Francisco, a city she hadn't visited in over twenty years. She stepped off the bus, looked around, and was immediately struck by the hustle and bustle that surrounded her. People seemed to be going about their day with an intense sense of purpose. “What would it be like to have a purpose every day?” she asked herself. “I didn't leave prison with the intention of changing my life, but in that moment, I got a glimpse of what a different kind of life could be.” Chloe Turner went on and created for herself a purpose-driven life, and, she says, “I never looked back.”

As Program Coordinator and Lead Case Manager for the Women Rising Program of Community Works at the San Francisco Sheriff's Department's Women's Resource Center- a transitional youth case management reentry program for young women (18-25) in custody or recently released from the San Francisco County Jail - Chloe spends her days advocating for young women involved in the criminal justice system. “I feel blessed to be in the position I'm in,” she explains. “When I was the age of most of my clients, I didn't have access to the resources that exist in San Francisco. For me, working with these young women reminds me every day of my purpose in life, which is so important and very restorative for me.”

Chloe says that participating in Just Leadership USA's Leading With Conviction program has opened her eyes to how she can be a more impactful advocate. “The training lit a fire underneath me. It showed me how to take my advocacy to a more systemic level. A very big challenge we face in California is a state law that bars people convicted of drug sales from receiving government assistance for childcare. I spend a huge amount of time working with a young mother to get her work-ready only to find that when it comes time to get a job, she is doesn't have access to childcare because of her prior conviction, and therefore can't be employed! It's incredibly frustrating. But the JLUSA training opened my eyes to a new approach: I want to work to change that law! I've started reaching out to other advocates and providers who share my concern. I want to make a difference, and Leading With Conviction is giving me the tools to do it.”



DONNA HYLTON

NEW YORK

**“So many are aging and dying in prison.
When is enough enough?”**

When Donna Hylton left Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women after twenty-seven years of incarceration, she felt she was leaving her family behind. During her long stretch beginning when she was only twenty years old, she had not only become very close to many of the women, she had been one of their most dedicated advocates for humane treatment. Donna was part of a core group of women serving time in prison who fought for and won a series of important victories at Bedford – victories that were then replicated in other prisons around the state. Her proudest achievement was the creation of ACE, the AIDS Counseling and Education program. “In my early days in prison, the AIDS epidemic was just beginning. We’d go to bed at night, and the next morning women wouldn’t wake up; they were dead in their cells! We didn’t know what was going on. No one would tell us. When we finally found out it was AIDS we decided to create a safe place for women to come to get support and education, free of stigma.”

Since her release, Donna has continued to advocate for sentencing reform and alternatives to incarceration. She is an advocate with STEPS to End Family Violence, the state’s only alternative-to-incarceration program for survivor-defendants. “I was failed by every system,” she explains. “The adoption system, the educational system, the police, judicial, prison- every system failed me. There should be alternatives before that happens. If a woman who has been abused for the majority of her life acts out against her abuser, should she be retraumatized and punished more? How inhumane is that?” Donna’s priority today is the adoption of the Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act (DVSJA) which will give New York State judges the discretion to consider previous domestic abuse as a mitigating factor when imposing a sentence. “The sentencing guidelines today are ridiculous,” she says. “So many are aging and dying in prison. When is enough enough? What’s wrong with our country? Why can’t we treat people humanely and give them the opportunity to better themselves instead of taking away their autonomy?”

For Donna, participating in JustLeadershipUSA’s Leading with Conviction program has given her a sense of solidarity with people all over the country who are in the same struggle. “You know how a little girl can feel, like she’s all alone. It feels so good to be part of this broad platform for doing the hard work of challenging a system that has to change. Leading with Conviction is inspiring me and pushing me to do more.”



EVIE LITWOK

NEW YORK

“I have to be a witness for the millions in prison.”

Evie Litwok, the daughter of two Holocaust survivors, was born into a life of social activism and worked for many years in support of civil rights, women’s rights, and LGBTQ rights. But it wasn’t until her own arrest, conviction and eventual incarceration that she took up the cause of prisoners’ rights. “Nothing prepared me for what I saw in prison - the suffering, indignity, inhumanity and abuse,” she explains. “So I came out wanting to do something.”

Evie is the Founder of Ex-Offender Nation, an advocacy organization for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. She is an active member of the NYC Jail Action Committee (JAC) whose mission is to eliminate solitary confinement in New York City jails. And she also serves on the LGBT Criminal Justice Working Group (Columbia Law School). But Evie’s primary focus today is the creation of a new project, **Witness to Incarceration**. “I looked at history and asked myself, how do you take the impact of 40 years of mass incarceration to the American public so that change becomes a political demand? There’s so little knowledge about what really goes on in the nation’s prisons. People are stunned when I tell them I was in solitary confinement. It’s difficult for them to imagine what that was like.”

Evie’s vision is to build a virtual library of in-depth videotaped interviews of formerly incarcerated people. Her inspiration is the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation begun by Steven Spielberg in 1994. The Shoah Foundation is now the repository for more than 50,000 survivor testimonials. “I want to interview thousands of people about their lives before, during and after prison. I have to be a witness for the millions in prison and let the world know about the suffering and indignities of the incarcerated.” Evie was released from prison in August 2014, and picking up the pieces of her life has not been easy. But she has a plan and is determined to make it a reality.

For Evie, JustLeadershipUSA’s Leading With Conviction training has been “a gift.” After many years of fighting her convictions, two of which have been overturned by the courts, she eventually had to serve two years in federal prison. “I came out of prison homeless and isolated. But now I’m not operating alone,” she says. “I’m part of a network of people who, like me, are trying to make change against huge odds. We’re all struggling and the support we give one another can’t be measured.”



GALEN BAUGHMAN

VIRGINIA

“I promised myself that I wouldn’t be broken by the system.”

When Galen Baughman was a college student, the life that he had planned for himself – studying to be a professional opera singer at one of the most respected music schools in the country – was abruptly and permanently taken away from him. At nineteen years old, Galen was imprisoned by the Commonwealth of Virginia for the next nine years of his life, including 4 ½ years in solitary confinement. Much of that time was spent in maximum security facilities where he met people from all walks of life and began to see how deeply harmful and ineffective our justice system has become. “When I first entered the prison system I had the opportunity to befriend this young man who was a mirror image of me – identical sentence, similar background & interests, a college kid when he came into the system – except he was in the last couple weeks of his sentence and I was just beginning mine.” Galen could see that the prison experience had destroyed this young man’s spirit. It was then, Galen says, that “I promised myself that I would not be broken by the system.”

Galen hit the ground running when he came home. He was barred from completing his college education by state policies which restricted his opportunities. But if some doors closed to him, he found others that would open. He began to volunteer with CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants), a national grassroots criminal justice reform organization. He was soon brought on staff as CURE’s director of communications. Galen is inspired to act by his experiences in the system. In addition, Galen has also co-founded the Center for Sexual Justice to advocate for the GLBT people who are discriminated against by the criminal justice system. Today, Galen devotes his considerable energy to expanding the conversation around rethinking justice in America. “We won’t ever address mass incarceration until we move beyond the familiar bipartisan chorus focused on first-time, nonviolent, low-level, drug offenders and begin to address the causes of crime instead of merely punishing the symptoms.” He often finds himself at the table with other “inside-the-beltway” policy advocates, where he gives a voice to the most marginalized people in American society, reminding his colleagues that the punitive excesses now being imposed on people labelled “sex offenders” – such as twelve-year-olds playing doctor and LGBT teenaged lovers – can, if history is any guide, later expand to be used against other, less-stigmatized groups.

Galen says that for him, the most empowering aspect of the Leading with Conviction trainings is learning ways to identify in himself and his life experience new opportunities to create the change he wants to see in the world. “Right now my priority is building the Rethink Justice DC coalition, a campaign to stimulate a community conversation about the need to end mass incarceration. No one has ever been able to organize people in the District around criminal justice reform in spite of how many directly impacted persons live there. Leading with Conviction is helping me learn to bring people together that have never been brought together before,” he says.



JAMIRA BURLEY

PENNSYLVANIA

“I made a promise to myself.”

As a child, Jamira Burley was trapped in the justice system. She grew up in a neighborhood in Philadelphia where violence and drug addiction were pervasive. Both of her parents and all of her ten older brothers were either in, or just out of prison. To her, incarceration was a way of life. At the same time, her intelligence and leadership abilities were apparent to other adults in her life. When she was sixteen, two terrible events occurred – her twenty-year-old brother was shot and killed, and her father was convicted of murder. “I was very close to the principal of my high school,” Jamira explains. “She told me that as a young person, I had a choice. I didn’t have to be a victim. I could do something to help myself and others like me. That is when I made a promise to myself: I would dedicate my life to making things better for young people dealing with homelessness, violence and abuse, including my own younger brothers and sisters.”

Twenty-six year old Jamira is keeping her promise. She graduated from high school and went on to graduate from Temple University. Just out of college, she was appointed Executive Director for the City of Philadelphia Youth Commission, and worked to give voice to the interests and concerns of Philadelphians between the ages of twelve and twenty-three in debates over public policy decisions that affected them. She recently left that position to become a Senior Campaigner for Amnesty International USA, where she leads on issues of gun violence and criminal justice. Jamira is the US representative and co-chair to the UN Global Education First Initiative, Youth Advocacy Group and the co-founder of GenYNot, an online platform which uses the youth experience as a way to spark solution-driven dialogue.

Jamira says that her Leading With Conviction training has been transformative. “I haven’t been able to stop talking about it,” she says. “Since I recently started a new job with Amnesty International, the training comes at a perfect time. It has made me much more conscious of the power of story-telling in my work. And what I’m learning about from my fellow trainees is helping me confront and deal with my own biases so that I can be a more effective change agent.”



JASON CLEAVELAND

MISSOURI

“It’s my job to take down the barriers that prevent people from re-writing their own stories.”

Two years ago, after spending a decade in the reentry field working with several agencies, Jason Cleaveland realized that the organizations, agencies and practitioners tasked with helping people returning from prison were ill-equipped to do their jobs. “I saw that there were huge gaps in terms of tools for finding and accessing resources and quality materials for continuing education. And importantly, there were no mechanisms with which to build community among people coming out, their families, and their communities.” Jason’s response was to convene a team of practitioners, academics, probation, parole, and workforce specialists, and information technologists to create Allēlo, an online platform that provides “a complete ecosystem of support to aid in a smooth transition between incarceration and everyday life on the outside.” Allēlo, which Jason explains is the Greek prefix meaning “together,” will launch nationwide after it is tested in several cities this spring.

Jason came to this work through his own involvement with the criminal justice system. He spent five years on probation for a felony in the early-2000s. “I’m white, male, and middle-class, and I’ve enjoyed a lot of privileges as a result. I didn’t have to go prison. I want to do what I can to make sure others enjoy the same privileges I do,” he explains. That means equipping formerly incarcerated people, their families, and the organizations that serve them with opportunities – to find resources, learn and share skills, and connect with the community that can support them through life’s transitions.

Jason says “powerful” is the word he uses to describe his experience so far as a JustLeadershipUSA Leading with Conviction Training participant. “I left the first weekend feeling emotionally overwhelmed after connecting with leaders from around the country and hearing both their pain and their exuberance. I was very moved.” The second session, he says, was about getting serious. “Now we’re honing in on the specific things we can do to own our pasts while creating our futures” – a future, he says, that for him will be dedicated to “taking down the barriers that prevent people from re-writing their own stories.”



JUAN GOMEZ

CALIFORNIA

“We are cultivating change-makers for the Next Seven Generations.”

Juan Gomez came to social justice activism at an early age. He grew up in Watsonville, California, an agricultural and activist rich community. His grandparents, who came to the U.S. from Mexico as “guest workers” in the 1960’s and 70s raised him in the spirit of La Cultura Cura, a culturally based philosophy that is centered on the values of trust, dignity, respect and love. Juan does not work in the fields as his forebears did, but he says he brings “the same work ethic, tenacity, ambition, hunger, drive, and relentless pursuit of health and happiness” into his non-profit work and at many of the state and national policy advocacy tables he attends promoting criminal and juvenile justice reform.

Juan is the co-founder and Senior Advisor of Motivating Individual Leadership for Public Advancement (MILPA), an emerging California-based trans-disciplinary think tank that is braiding the wisdom of our elders with the energy and vision of emerging stewards of racial equity, healing and movement building. He also serves as a Senior Policy and Strategy Advisor with the National Compadres Network, a national effort whose focus is the reinforcement of the positive involvement of Latino males in the lives of their families, communities, and society. In 2011 he was an inaugural Health Equity Fellow with The California Endowment. His work is grounded in the belief that policy and systems change must be a ground up approach rooted in the praxis of community, organizing, healing, and relationships. “We are cultivating change-makers for the next seven generations. We want to be at the table, not on the menu,” he explains. “We’re working with the formerly incarcerated and other marginalized people to get them civically engaged. We’re going to mobilize, organize, and promote governing with a racial equity lens and go up to our elected leaders and say, we must lead collectively from this point forward. We’ve done our homework, we know our data, and we’ve got to eliminate these disparities.”

For Juan, JustLeadershipUSA’s Leading with Conviction trainings have been truly inspiring. “This is the first time I’ve seen so many folks who endured such hardships at the same table and they are all super-stars. Together, we are learning to take ownership of our own potential,” he says. “It’s the best of best trying to make a dent on criminal and juvenile justice reform, and I really do believe we’re going to make a difference.”



KATHLEEN CULHANE

MASSACHUSETTS

“We need to illuminate the humanity of those most marginalized.”

When Kathleen Culhane emerged from prison five years ago, she knew she wanted to work to change the criminal justice system. She had been a strong activist and critic of the system long before her own incarceration, but the experience of prison deepened her understanding of “this human rights crisis and tragedy.” Several of her cell mates had severe mental illness and were really in pain. “We need to stop locking people in cages de facto. We have to illuminate and recognize the humanity of those most marginalized, those most vilified. We need to change our culture of punishment.”

Kathleen recently earned her Master’s degree in Public Policy at the Heller School for Social Policy at Brandeis University, where she was awarded the Student Impact Award for lasting impact on her cohort and program. She is now the Project Coordinator of the Justice and Poverty Project, a new initiative at Harvard University examining the nexus between mass incarceration, poverty, insecure housing, and severe deprivation. Kathleen’s long-term goal is to conduct community-based research that can lead to significant policy reform. “I want to work for systemic change that truly benefits men and women who have been marginalized because of poverty, discrimination, mental illness, addiction, physical disability, and illiteracy. It’s a combination of these processes that make women in particular vulnerable to criminalization and incarceration. Bringing their lives to light is critical to changing public policy.” Kathleen sees this as an energizing moment and says she feels very fortunate to be poised to do this work. “There’s a conversation happening; an opening and realization that the policies of the last 30 years have deepened racial inequity and concentrated suffering. The challenge,” she says, “is for us to continue to provide momentum, keep the conversation moving, and galvanize it into real reform.”

For Kathleen, JustLeadershipUSA’S Leading with Conviction trainings have been very powerful. “The criminal justice system can appear vast with many moving parts. Meeting people from around country who are working in such diverse ways has spurred me to think deeply about what I’m most moved by. And I keep going back to those cellmates I had who face deprivation and punishment every day. I’ll never forget them, and Leading with Conviction has helped me refocus on them.”



KHALIL A. CUMBERBATCH

NEW YORK

“I want to be part of the solution.”

When Khalil A. Cumberbatch was in prison, an older incarcerated man named Chico, who became a kind of mentor, asked him a question that had a huge impact on how he thought about his life from that moment on. *“Do you want to be part of the problem, or part of the solution?”* Chico asked. Khalil knew what his answer was. And all of his major life decisions since then have been measured against that standard. “I have a burning desire to leave a legacy for my children that they can be proud of,” he says. “I made some bad decisions in the past, but I’ve always wanted to help people, so it was just a matter of figuring out how best to do that.”

Khalil figured it out. Since his release from prison in 2010, he earned a Master’s Degree in Social Work from CUNY Lehman College where he was awarded the Urban Justice Award for his work with underserved and marginalized communities. He is the Strategic Initiatives Consultant at *the Immigrant Defense Project*, a legal organization that promotes fundamental fairness for immigrants accused or convicted of crimes. He is a manager and is a periodic guest host for *On the Count: The Prison and Criminal Justice Report*, a radio program hosted and produced by formerly incarcerated individuals. And for his “regular job,” Khalil is a Policy Associate at the *Legal Action Center* where he fights against discrimination towards those who have a history of mental illness, HIV/AIDS and/or criminal justice involvement. In December 2014, Khalil was one of two people to receive an Executive Pardon from New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo to prevent his deportation from the United States.

For Khalil, Leading with Conviction has been a process of rediscovery and empowerment. “It takes courage, bold leadership and new ideas to bring about real criminal justice reform. The training is helping me reclaim that courage. In spite of my accomplishments, I still struggle at times with feelings of insecurity. But through the training I’m learning that I have earned the leadership position I now have, that my voice matters, and that my experience and my insights have value.”



MARTHA LYNN SHEARER

ALABAMA

“‘We Shall Overcome’ sums up the spirit that moves me to do what I do.”

Ever since her release from prison more than twenty years ago, Martha Lynn Shearer has been working to help other women overcome the stigma of a criminal conviction. “I did everything I was supposed to do,” she says. “I received my GED in prison, and then went on to get my college degree and two Masters Degrees and I still have difficulty getting prospective employers to look past my record. So I know how hard it is for women just coming out.” As a social worker, addiction counselor, and post-prison community health worker, Martha has devoted her life to making sure her clients’ needs are met. “What I love most about my work is seeing people get healthy and begin to believe in themselves. Because of my own experience, I can help them navigate the many barriers they will have to overcome. In fact, ‘We Shall Overcome’ pretty much sums up the spirit that moves me to do the work that I do.”

Martha is a native of Birmingham, Alabama where she still resides. She is passionate about sentencing/prison reform, and currently works as a Peer Health Educator for the Alabama Transitions Clinic, a community-based intervention that provides transitional care and a primary care medical home for recently released individuals with chronic medical conditions. She is a peer for the Birmingham Community Policing Revitalization Program and participates with the Alabama Jail Ministry. She also serves on the Jefferson County Reentry Supervision and Services Committee of the Jefferson County Reentry Planning Council.

Martha says that the JustLeadershipUSA Leading with Conviction training has been life-changing for her. “I got so much insight into myself and my ability to do more than what I’ve been doing. My life will never be the same.” The biggest change is in her perception of her role as a leader. “I have a tendency to want to take care of everybody and everything,” she explains. “But I’m learning that part of my role as a leader is to nurture and create new leaders who can stand up for themselves and find their own solutions. Understanding this has been so freeing!”



MONICA JAHNER

MICHIGAN

“We’re going to open doors together...”

Monica Jahner spent twenty-eight long years in Michigan state prison, and she was far from idle. In addition to earning her own paralegal certificate, Associate’s Degree in Criminal Justice, and BA in Behavioral Science, she was a vigilant advocate for others. Monica founded Kids Need Moms, a program to promote quality visits between children and their mothers in prison. And she was involved in four successful class action lawsuits against the Michigan Department of Corrections dealing with a range of unconstitutional prison conditions.

But of all her accomplishments, the one Monica feels most strongly about is the work she did with teenage girls who were incarcerated in the same facility she was. “When these 13 and 14 year old girls would arrive, I saw empty faces, empty shells, and I knew I had to help them.” Monica spearheaded a mentoring program and over time, she saw the layers of hurt and neglect begin to peel away. “I was able to step into their lives at that moment and help them see that they could change their lives around. It was so moving to see them beginning to smile and do well. I knew I wanted to spend my life helping people who had been dealt a bad hand like I was. I had been given a second chance, and I wanted to find a way to give others their second chance by helping them navigate an unjust system.” Upon her release Monica founded a mentoring program for at-risk youth in Lansing called Creating Heroes Stephen’s Way. The program is based in the comic book store formerly owned and operated by Monica’s brother Stephen.

Today, Monica serves as the Manager and Legislative Advocate for Advocacy, Re-entry, Resources and Outreach (ARRO), a project of the Northwest Initiative in Lansing. Her current priority is organizing a statewide conference of employers and political leaders to generate support for a Ban the Box legislative initiative. “When I got out of prison, no one wanted to hire me because of my record,” she says. “Our first attempt to get a ban the box law failed, but now we have bipartisan support, and I’m more hopeful.” Monica is also a member of the Ingham County Board of Commissioners Corrections Advisory Board, the Citizens Alliance on Prison and Public Spending (CAPPS), and the Prison Correction Section of the Michigan State Bar.

Monica says that her Leading with Conviction training experience has been awesome. “To be in a room with twenty other people with the energy and passion to walk the walk and end mass incarceration is overwhelming. I feel more motivated than ever to do more, and I’m learning how to be more strategic. There are so many doors to open, and we’re going to open them together.”



PAMELA ALLEN

CONNECTICUT

“I eat, sleep and breathe what I do.”

When Pamela Allen left prison nineteen years ago she knew what her calling was: to set up a “recovery ministry.” Having freed herself from addiction, she wanted to give others who walked in the same shoes the chance to lead meaningful lives. “I have clarity about what I’m doing and who I’m serving, and I’m comfortable with that,” she explains. “I eat, sleep and breathe what I do.”

Pamela is the founding director of Evergreen Family Oriented Tree, Inc., a grassroots not-for-profit organization based in New Haven, Connecticut. Evergreen’s mission is to help reduce recidivism in addiction, incarceration, homelessness, education, and employment. Its target population is individuals who are involved or at risk of being involved with the criminal justice system. “When I was a child, I asked my mother why there were so many people sleeping in the street. She told me it was because they had no one to love them like I did. That planted the seed in my mind, but first I had to go through what I went through to be an effective witness in the future. I knew that someday I wanted to help people who were marginal, had few resources, and were returning back to society.” Evergreen provides an array of services to its participants. “My passion is to give people who have experienced trauma the support they need to dig deep inside, find the issue, love and forgive themselves, implement a solution and then move forward.” Pamela is also a leader in the movement to expand her state’s reentry services. She is the Chairperson for the New Haven Reentry Roundtable, a group she has participated in for over seven years.

Pamela says her Leading with Conviction training has opened her eyes and helped her become a stronger leader. “I’m learning some really important lessons about working as a team and receiving and growing from people’s feedback,” she says. “The training is going to help me a lot as I work with my coalition partners to get a strong reentry bill passed hopefully this year.”



PATRICE PALMER

OHIO

“I became the change I wanted to see.”

When Patrice Palmer left prison thirteen years ago, after cycling in and out over the previous twenty years, she stood before her sentencing judge and thought, “You’ll see me again, but never in this capacity. I will never stand before you or any other judge in inmate clothes and shackles. But I will come back to advocate for other people.” Patrice was true to her word. She spent the next eight years earning her college degree and a Master’s degree in Social Work. Today Patrice holds an Ordained Elder of Ministry License and is a Licensed Social Worker, a Chemical Dependency Counselor, and a Prevention Specialist. She is the first restored citizen to be appointed to the Franklin County (Ohio) Reentry Task Force Coalition, and is the founder of Chosen4Change, a cognitive behavioral therapy program that provides hurting individuals with the tools they need to change their lives around. “I’m a servant,” she says. “I became the change that I wanted to see. I wanted to break the cycle of self-abuse and dysfunction one life at a time beginning with my own. My mission is to help those whose lives are hanging in the balance. I want to equip, empower, and enhance the quality of life of those impacted by mass incarceration.”

Going forward, Patrice says she wants to spend more of her time doing advocacy work at the state and national levels. “There are 2.3 million people in prison in this country; 54,000 in the state of Ohio alone,” she says. “I want to change policies and laws. I want to navigate the system and bring about fairness, equality and justice for the disadvantaged. Addressing mass Incarceration and the war on drugs is a central focus for me. I believe that the war on drugs shatters lives instead of restoring them.” She recently testified before the Ohio General Assembly in support of H.B. 56, a law that will, if passed, prohibit the state from inquiring into a job applicant’s criminal record until after the person has been selected for employment. She is also working on an empowerment/healing program for incarcerated pregnant women and connecting them with the supportive services they need. Another of her current priorities is raising awareness about voting rights. “Formerly incarcerated people and Ohioans in general are confused and misinformed about this issue. They think former prisoners can’t vote, but they can. I go into communities, college campuses, agencies, and faith-based communities to educate people and empower them with the truth.” She utilizes The Process of Change workshop tools. Having sustainable employment is critical to the well-being of individuals returning home.

Patrice says that JustLeadershipUSA’s Leading with Conviction trainings are “the most amazing encounters I’ve ever experienced next to my relationship with God! The organization believes in my ability to lead,” she says. “Its investment in developing my leadership skills will add another audacious voice to the movement to bring about systemic change. Someday people will recognize that it was restored citizens coming to the table that was the missing piece of the puzzle in the effort to bring balance and restorative measures to the criminal justice system.”



PATTY KATZ

OREGON

“We are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and friends.”

More than anything, Patty Katz wants people who have never been in jail or prison to understand how dehumanizing the experience of incarceration really is and how vital it is to bring about change. “I was once a person who lived in prison. We are not just ‘inmates,’ she says. “We are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and friends and I want my fellow Oregonians to know that we are using the most expensive and least effective way of addressing drug addiction and mental illness.” She points out that there are 14,500 people in prison in Oregon, and 74 percent of them have drug or alcohol problems. More than 4,000 have been diagnosed with severe mental health problems, and many of them are kept in solitary confinement akin to a dungeon.

Patty herself is a recovering heroin addict with years of experience cycling in and out of the prison and jail system. Her activism began during her very first exposure to a jail cell. “When I went to jail I got a pad and pencil and started interviewing the other women about why they were there. Their stories opened my eyes to how inhumane our criminal justice system is. My activism started as a mustard seed that just grew and grew.” When Patty came out of prison, her first act of advocacy was to persuade the Portland needle exchange program to give her 5,000 syringes and condoms to distribute to prostitutes and drug users. The program soon made her their afterhours outreach worker.

Since then, Patty has worked on many issues to bring about reform including successful local ban the box campaigns and work to reform the structure of the state’s parole board. She currently sits on the Governor’s Reentry Council where she co-chairs the committee on family issues. “I often say I went from sitting in a jail cell to sitting at the decision-making table,” Patty says. “I’m a recovering addict with fourteen felony convictions and twenty-seven parole violations, and here I am sitting with the mayor, the chief of police, and the DA, and they want to know whether I have a different spin as someone who has been on the other side. Doing this work literally helps me breathe!”

JustLeadershipUSA’s Leading with Conviction trainings are giving Patty confidence in her own experiences and abilities so that she can “stop walking in someone else’s footprints” and be a real leader. “Since the trainings I have found myself being brave enough to say the things I’ve learned. I used to talk about being a formerly incarcerated person to let people know I wasn’t like them. Now I talk about it to let people know I’m just like them. I might have a different spin, but what I have to say is as valuable as what anyone else at the table has to say. I feel blessed and honored to be working with JustLeadershipUSA.”



RONALD SIMPSON-BEY

MICHIGAN

“I refuse to be the victim of a prearranged destiny.”

Ron Simpson-Bey’s conviction was overturned in 2012 because of prosecutorial misconduct. But he had already spent twenty-seven years in Michigan’s prison system. He attributes his ability to survive the ordeal to a quote he read that became his personal daily mantra while in prison. During the days of the African slave trade, a Malian king spoke these words to his people to give them strength before the Middle Passage: “I am a vital force among vital forces and I refuse to be the victim of a prearranged destiny.” “I was determined not to be a victim,” Ron says. “Being stigmatized is a two-way street, and if I reject the stigma of imprisonment, it dissolves.” This consciousness helped him survive and emerge with a laser-like focus on social justice.

Soon after his release, Ron became the head of the American Friends Service Committee’s Good Neighbor Project in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The statewide Project is a co-mentorship program based on the principles of restorative justice. Its goal is to build empathy, understanding and self-reflection between people serving long prison sentences and members of the larger community. “By connecting people inside with people outside,” Ron explains, “the people on the outside learn that not everyone in prison is a bad person. Many of them are good people who made a bad mistake.” Over time, positive relationships develop that will still be there if and when the person on the inside is released. And those on the outside are empowered to become involved in advocacy for criminal justice reforms.

For Ron, the “Leading with Conviction” training has changed his perspective on leadership. He went into the training with a traditional, top-down concept of leadership, and emerged with the understanding that part of being an effective leader is recognizing and developing new leaders. “This concept really enlightened me and I’m already putting it to use in my work,” he says. “I look forward to future trainings with JustLeadershipUSA. The knowledge and experience are very empowering.”



STEVE GORDON

TEXAS

“Solving the prisoner reentry problem in America – that’s my passion!”

When Steve emerged from state prison in Oklahoma more than a decade ago, he knew he wanted to put his extensive experience as a systems analyst and project manager to use in a new way. With 8,000 people coming out of prison in his home state each year, Steve envisioned a cutting-edge program that would make the transition from prison back into the community as seamless as possible. The result was his Framework for Reentry Reformation, a four-phase approach to driving community-based reentry solutions. In January 2013, Steve Gordon became the first formerly incarcerated person in the country to start a for-profit consulting firm specializing in prisoner reentry solutions – the Strategic Reentry Group (SRG).

“Solving the prisoner reentry problem in America is my passion,” Steve explains. “And my own personal experience as a returning citizen has given me insights into how to do it the right way.” Currently, Steve is the project consultant for the Tarrant County Reentry Coalition based in Ft. Worth, Texas. Tarrant County has one of the largest reentry populations in the country; 7,000 people come home every year. “This work is very rewarding,” Steve says. “We are bringing people from state and federal government, corrections, and local law enforcement together with people of faith, public and mental health experts and workforce specialists to solve a huge problem that affects not just the returning citizens and their families, but the county and state as a whole. I’ve been amazed at the spectrum of formerly incarcerated people and family members who have become actively involved in this process.”

For Steve, the experience of participating in Leading with Conviction is about learning new skills and discovering a new family. “The other leaders I’m meeting through Just Leadership USA are the best of the best – strong people who have overcome bigger barriers than I have,” he says. After the first training session, Steve did something he’s never done before. He went to the state capitol and visited the offices of all the members of the Public Safety Committee of the House of Representatives. “I explained to each member’s staff that I was from Just Leadership USA and that our goal was to halve the prison population by 2030. The response was overwhelmingly positive; every person I spoke to agreed with the goal. I’m looking forward to building these relationships and working for real change.”



TERESA Y. HODGE

MARYLAND

“I had the audacity to believe that a prison sentence was not going to ruin my life.”

When Teresa Hodge entered prison to serve a seventy- month sentence for a white collar conviction, she was determined not to let it ruin the successful life she had worked so hard to build. She immediately began to focus on what her life would be when she returned to the outside - and she was not alone. Her daughter, Laurin Hodge, who had recently graduated from Johns Hopkins University, became her close collaborator and together they developed a business plan for a new and unique not-for-profit organization. “We decided that the way we would maintain our relationship and stay relevant in one another’s lives while I was away was to build an organization together,” Teresa explains. “When an individual goes to prison, their families go to prison too. Laurin and I wanted to make the experience count.”

Today Laurin is the Executive Director and Teresa is the Director of Innovation & Strategy of Project Launch, Inc., a Washington, D.C.-based organization focused on making the reentry process safer and more efficient through technology. “By holding a series of talking sessions with service providers in the D.C. area, we learned that they were underutilizing new technologies that had the capacity to make re-entry much less stressful and time-consuming for returning citizens. So we organized the tech community to build a tool that providers can use in an open source manner. We’re currently beta-testing the new software and hope to make it available soon.” The software, called “Clean Slate D.C.,” will be able to answer returning citizens’ questions about record expungement in a matter of minutes. And it is just a beginning.

Teresa says that JustLeadershipUSA’s Leading with Conviction training has been invaluable. “Everyone who knows me can see the difference since the trainings. I was passionate and committed before, but I didn’t have a team of people around me to encourage me and give me that extra edge.” She likens the experience to going to a gas station: “I had the car, but I needed the gas. It’s very exciting to be around other people doing this work, people who are willing to stand up and boldly tell their stories. For me it has been empowering and uplifting to find a family who I can talk to and who understand as only those who have been through the prison experience can.”



2017 Emerging Leaders: Austin, TX



2018 Emerging Leaders: Chicago, IL



2017 Emerging Leaders: New Haven, CT



COLETTE PAYNE

ILLINOIS

“I used to be incarcerated at Logan. Now I have meetings with the Warden...”

I am a Community Organizer for CLAIM, which stands for Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers. We're a project of Cabrini Green Legal Aid. I grew up in the Chicago projects, and it's my passion to fight for the rights of formerly incarcerated women, their families, and their communities. I have been in prison five different times and it was during my last sentence, which was for five years, that I found my voice. I overheard corrections officers talking about us as their “job security” and that made me angry. Then I witnessed the abuse of a woman who almost died because the corrections officers ignored her pleas for medical assistance. I stepped up and said something. Everybody looked at me and said, “You can't do that; you're going to get in trouble.” I started thinking about myself in a different way. I started speaking out at the “town hall meetings” and I started writing for the prisoners' newspaper.

One of the main areas I work on with CLAIM is ending barriers to employment for people with records. Last year we formed the ROPI Coalition – the Restoring Rights and Opportunity in Illinois. We spent days and nights in Springfield, the state capital, talking to legislators and asking for their support. It looks like we're going to win the passage of a law that will remove the lifetime ban on certain professional licenses such as nursing and occupational therapy. I recently started a Reunite Moms and Kids Campaign at Logan Correctional Center, which is three hours away from Chicago where most of the incarcerated women come from. I was incarcerated in Logan three times. Now I'm having meetings with the warden about what needs to be done to improve conditions. We're asking for a child friendly area where visits can take place, and we're raising money for transportation. Our voices haven't always been heard and a lot of incarcerated women have been shut down so long they still don't buy into the concept of having a voice. But I'm working to change that.

The Leading with Conviction training is like no other training. It's amazing to have a group of people coming together who have all been formerly incarcerated to share ideas and experiences. No other group has done anything like this. I know there are people who say cutting the prison population in half by 2030 can't be done. But I know if we can get people together to buy into the concept it can be done, and we will not be “job security” anymore. I'm an optimist.

Colette Payne is a student at Harold Washington College in Chicago where she is working towards a Master's Degree in Social Work.



DALE WHITE

TEXAS

“I can’t wait to get up the next morning to ask God what he wants me to do today.”

I am the Founder & President of The Living Harvest, Inc. The Living Harvest, Inc. is a not-for-profit reentry organization that serves the formerly incarcerated in Tallahassee, Florida. We are a Christ-centered 12-step recovery program and we operate The Living Harvest Sharing Center which is home to our meeting facilities, food pantry, donation center and thrift store which is run mostly by volunteers. Our residence, Serenity House is a stable, drug and alcohol-free home for men coming out of prison. About thirty men have come through the program so far. We help them develop life skills, get plugged into the recovery community, and help them build their support system. We pick them up from prison as they’re released, bring them to Serenity House, and provide them with clothes from our thrift store. They serve alongside us to develop work ethic and also as a way to give back. Once they’re ready, we help them find a job. Basically we put a net under our residents while they’re making the transition from the inside to the outside.

Starting The Living Harvest in 2013 was the culmination of a long and painful journey for me. In 1997 I was sentenced to six and a half years in prison for my fourth DUI. I was released in 2000 after serving three and a half years, and after a while I went back to doing the same old things and I fell again. Things went downhill from there. I got to a point where I didn’t want to live anymore but I was afraid to die. After my fifth treatment center I walked through the doors of Celebrate Recovery and that’s where God met me and changed my life.

Celebrate Recovery is a Christian 12-step program and for me, it led to a spiritual awakening. Eventually, I became the Southeast USA TEAM Lead for Celebrate Recovery Inside, and I’ve helped set up CR Inside programs in prisons all over the state of Florida. I’ve watched God change people in front of my very eyes. I’ve found that most of those that are incarcerated want to do the same thing I did; they want to get back on track and help other people. They have huge hearts, but they’ve been oppressed and struggling for so long. They can relate to me as I’ve slept in their bed and walked in their shoes. Most of my life I hated thinking about going to work and hated what I did. But since I’ve been doing this work, I go to bed and can’t wait to get up the next morning to ask God what He wants me to do today.

For me, being at the Leading with Conviction trainings is like drinking out of fire hose. There is still so much I don’t know it can be hard to digest it all. I had trouble getting through high school so my formal education is lacking. It’s a challenge for me but I’m willing to put in 110%. Just Leadership USA is giving me that opportunity, and I’m grateful for that.

Dale White is the Founder & President/CEO of The Living Harvest, Inc., volunteers for Kairos Prison Ministries International, is a Mentor for the Florida Department of Corrections Mentoring Program, and serves on the Board of the BBARC- Big Bend After Re-Entry Coalition. He has served as Florida Reentry State Rep for Celebrate Recovery Inside and as the TEAM Lead for Celebrate Recovery Inside for the Southeast USA.



DEANNA HOSKINS

OHIO*

“It’s okay to be the poster child for change.”

I am the Re-Entry Director for Hamilton County, Ohio and the first person to hold that position. When I was released almost 17 years ago, there were no resources or assistance for individuals like me. I had to figure it out on my own. Back then, people were getting released with a plastic bag saying, “I just served 15 years and I have no place to go.” Today, my job is to give individuals with criminal histories the resources to overcome barriers to being successful. Everything from, an ID or Social Security card to, removal of outstanding open arrest warrant because they couldn’t pay child support while they were incarcerated. But I feel the most important thing I do is: changing the climate in my county on how people view Previously incarcerated individuals.

Recently, I was at a meeting of the local Manufacturing Roundtable and company representatives were saying they would have to leave the Cincinnati area because they couldn’t retain workers. I suggested that maybe they weren’t looking in the right places and pointed out that prisons are run and maintained by the people who are incarcerated there, and that they might be the most loyal employees they could find. I started taking employers into the prison so they could see the jobs people were doing, and they were totally amazed. Now we are piloting a concierge program where we identify employers who are looking for workers and guys who are returning home soon. We’re setting up Skype job interviews for folks while they’re still in prison. My goal is that these guys have the possibility to walk out of prison with a job or at least a second interview.

One day I had a vision of being a poster child for change around re-entry. I was on a corner where I used to get drugs, and there was a big billboard there. I pictured my face on the billboard with the caption, “People can change.” I see my role as being a voice for previously incarcerated individuals. If I’m at a meeting with the mayor and there’s been an increase in shootings, the first thing he’ll want to do is hire more police. I’ll challenge him and say, “You know, if there’s more crime and the only resource you give the African American community is more law enforcement, that’s not going to work. Look at Hyde Park. Why is that community performing better? It’s because they provide more resources so people can be successful.” I feel this population depends on me and if I have to be the poster child, it’s okay. I have to take the hit because we have to have a voice. When I was flying into New York for the first Leading with Conviction training I had the feeling that I was at the beginning of something bigger. I was finally with people who think like I do. We are finally being heard, and it is a little surreal. When you’ve been fighting in your little world, and then you’re introduced to the whole world you realize it’s not just your little fight any more. It’s the whole shebang. You’ve just been assigned to your region.

DeAnna Hoskins is President of JustLeadershipUSA (JLUSA). DeAnna Hoskins holds a Masters’ degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Cincinnati and a Bachelors of Social Work, from the College of Mount St. Joseph.

**DeAnna Hoskins was profiled as a Fellow in the LwC 2016 Cohort. As of July 2018, she is President of JustLeadershipUSA (JLUSA). DeAnna Hoskins holds a Masters’ degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Cincinnati and a Bachelors of Social Work, from the College of Mount St. Joseph.*



J. JONDHI HARRELL

PENNSYLVANIA

“Everywhere I go I talk about the importance of building a network of formerly incarcerated leaders across the country to end mass incarceration.”

I am the Founder and Executive Director of The Center for Returning Citizens (TCRC) in Philadelphia. We offer comprehensive services for people in prison and formerly incarcerated people. I’m also active with several other justice reform organizations. Right now one of my main priorities is building our Reentry Coalition. There are 300,000 returning citizens in the City of Philadelphia and that number increases every day. The Coalition has a seat at the table where policy decisions are being made that will affect our community for the next ten years. It is our position that when we return, we accrue all the rights of citizenship, to fair housing, employment, the right to vote, sit on juries, and eventually with serious effort we will win the right to bear arms and defend our families, as all other citizens have. One of our successes is that we persuaded the Mayor to issue a proclamation stating that from now on, all official documents will use the term “returning citizen” rather than “ex-felon” or “ex-convict.” We feel that language can be very powerful in influencing how people think about issues.

One issue we’re working on that’s of paramount importance is ending juvenile life without parole (LWOP). Pennsylvania was one of only four states that decided not to make the Supreme Court’s 2012 ruling in *Miller v. Alabama* retroactive. In that decision the Court banned mandatory LWOP sentences for juveniles, but didn’t say the ruling had to be applied retroactively. But in 2015, the Court decided that states had to hold resentencing hearings or give people the opportunity for parole. In Pennsylvania we have 512 juvenile lifers who are now eligible for resentencing, and we’re going into the prisons and helping give people a smooth transition to freedom. We see this as an opportunity to show everybody in the country that with transitional support, former lifers can be reintegrated into society without mishap. We call LWOP “death by incarceration.” If you incarcerate somebody for life, they’re going to die in prison, and we don’t believe in the death penalty.

I came home in 2009, but I’ve been preparing to do this work since 1993. That was the year I met Mutulu Shakur in the Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary. Mutulu is a wonderful African elder and one of the co-founders of the New African Nation. Over the next 12 years, through three different federal prisons, we worked together to help young men transform their lives so they could go back into the community and do the work that I’m doing now. Today I’m organizing returning citizens to think in same direction and work together collectively. We recently formed the BLOC Party, which stands for Build Lobby Organize Campaign, to advocate for change. I’m speaking in universities and colleges, at law schools, social work schools, influencing the people who will be doing the work. Everywhere I go — high schools, community venues, churches, faith-based and grassroots organizations — I talk about the importance of building a network of formerly incarcerated leaders across the country to end mass incarceration.

J. Jondhi Harrell has a Bachelor’s Degree in Human Service Management from the University of Phoenix and is a Master’s in Social Work candidate at Temple University.



JERRY BLASSINGAME

SOUTH CAROLINA

“I had the audacity to believe that a prison sentence was not going to ruin my life.”

I am the Executive Director of Soteria, a ministry I founded after I was released from prison in 1999. Soteria is from the Greek and means salvation; deliverance, preservation, and safety. We're an organization that takes men and women who have criminal backgrounds and we train them to be the brightest and the best they can be so that they can help rebuild their communities. There are twenty-three prisons in South Carolina, and Greenville County where I live is the number one committing county in the state. It commits more people to the department of corrections than any other. When I got out of prison, there were no re-entry programs. Today Soteria is there, and men and women getting out of prison call us every day looking for help. I get up every morning thinking, “who can I help today?”

I started envisioning Soteria when I was still in prison. For the entire 3 ½ years I kept a journal and wrote about what it would look like. Every time guys would come back from court and say their appeal had been denied, or came back from the parole board saying “my parole was denied,” I would talk to them, read their documents, and use that research to refine my plan for Soteria. When I got out, all I had to do was get people to believe in the plan and then implement it. When I see a problem, I want to solve it. That's the kind of person I am.

At Soteria we provide transitional housing, career development, and job training to people just coming out of prison. One of our programs I'm most proud of is Green Start. Green Start is a recycling and deconstruction salvaging service and social enterprise. It has two main purposes. It provides a funding stream to support Soteria's other work, and it creates employment opportunities for our participants. It also contributes to a healthier community and to strong relationships with local neighborhoods and business communities. I'm happy to report that Green Start is going strong.

I have faced some tough challenges in my life, but I have always had a drive to do better. That drive was what got me paroled out of prison after only 3 ½ years of a 20 year sentence. Every day I use that drive to help people and to raise awareness about the injustices I see all around me. Being a part of the JustLeadershipUSA Leading with Conviction training is an empowering experience that will help me be a better advocate for criminal justice reform. JLUSA's tagline, “those closest to the problem are closest to the solution,” is brilliant. Bringing folks like myself together from around the country so we can share ideas is going to make a difference and I'm honored to be a part of it.

Jerry Blassingame lives with his wife and three young children in Greenville, South Carolina. In 2014 he received a Chuck W. Colson Scholarship from the Institute for Prison Ministries to attend the Wheaton College Correctional Ministries Program. Soteria CDC is the recipient of the South Carolina Association of Community Development Corporations Award and the Max Heller Neighborhood Improvement Award of the Greenville Chamber of Commerce.



KARA NELSON

ALASKA

“The life I’m living today is the vision I’ve always had.”

I am a woman in long-term recovery. I was in and out of prison for 20 years, but when I left in 2011, I knew I wouldn’t be going back inside. I knew I had a long journey ahead of me, but I have always been a leader, even during my years of active drug use. Now I wanted to utilize the skills I learned on the street - always thinking ten steps ahead - to make a difference in the lives of other women coming out of prison. So I joined a group of concerned citizens who founded Haven House in my hometown of Juneau, Alaska. Haven House is a grassroots faith-based recovery residence for women returning home after incarceration. We are living proof that we can recover. With support, a safe place to live, and a sense of hope and opportunity, people in long-term recovery can make it and give back to their community. But it wasn’t easy.

When I found the house that would become Haven House at first the entire neighborhood was up in arms about us being there. People put signs in their yards saying, “Right idea, wrong place.” They didn’t want us to be out when their children were walking to school. I realized that folks were motivated by fear based on lack of education, so I made it my mission to educate the community and empower other formerly incarcerated community members to rise up, speak up and show up. My message was, “I understand your fears, but this is what long-term recovery looks like and we are worth it. This is not an ‘us versus them’ situation. We do recover and we want to come home to our own community.” It took time and a lot of meetings and discussions, but eventually we changed hearts and minds and many of our neighbors came to support us. My faith and knowledge of who I am in Christ gave me strength through the seemingly impossible. Freedom in Identity.

Changing hearts and minds is now my passion. We have been instrumental in changing policy within our State concerning substance use disorders and criminal justice reform. We just had an omnibus reform bill pass on the state house floor. S.B. 91, which we advocated hard for, passed the House of Representatives by a fantastic 28-11 vote after four days of floor debate. It’s been called one of the largest overhauls ever to Alaska’s criminal justice system. If enacted, it will change dozens of laws, including shortening sentences, improving bail and pretrial release practices, allowing for driver’s license reinstatement, and providing funds for alternatives to incarceration and reentry planning. This was a huge victory, and I know my testimony and the testimony of other advocates made a difference.

The Leading With Conviction training is very empowering. The life I’m living today is the vision I’ve always had, but I didn’t always know how to get there. Being surrounded by people who understand the journey and the vision and who support and validate my work - I haven’t always gotten that in my own state. I love that they value us where we’re at and elevate the gifts we already have. My life has changed since I started the training. Just having people believe in me allows me to rise to who I really am.

Kara Nelson is the Director of Haven House Juneau, the presiding co-chair for the Juneau Reentry Coalition (JREC) and a member the Association of Recovery Community Organizations (ARCO). She possesses Certification in Recovery Coaching and Training.



KEN MOSS

OHIO

“Son you were incarcerated long before you got to prison.”

This was the message I remember hearing from God as I screamed and yelled to Him by way of a question after learning my wife of 23 years had just died, and I was told I would not be going to her funeral. It was as though I died too, twice that night in a cold prison cell on December 4, 1998” A day I will never forget! As a Trainer and Coach with Think Tank, Inc. I was appointed Director of Reentry Connect, an Ohio-based community-based initiative aimed at drastically reducing recidivism, and stopping returning citizens from being re-incarcerated. This model was also developed to connect returning citizens with members of the broader community. We offer a variety of training tools and reentry models to help increase community awareness and engagement in solving some of the toughest social issues facing our nation. Our participants get’s a glimpse into the lives of people who have been impacted by poverty and incarceration. In order to give people an understanding of the barriers returning citizens face, some of our most successful trainings are with prospective employers, and social service providers. They want to know, “Why should we want to hire an ex-felon? Why should we care? Won’t that be a risk to our business?” I like to highlight the fact that returning citizens are more than just ex-cons, or criminals. They are our sons, daughters, and neighbors. Some, like myself have made some terrible mistakes, but have since paid our debts to society and many of these returning citizens are intelligent hard working men and women who are simply looking for a chance to start afresh. Think Tank, Inc., like Just Leadership USA believes in the restoration and redemption of others and this is why Reentry Connect, The Ohio Association of Formerly Incarcerated Offenders, Think Tank, Inc., and organizations like JLUSA is so vital to our Nation. The results of building these high impact relationships and networks are imperative to say the lease. In fact, the impact is far reaching that here in Ohio; the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODR&C) has requested that we provide a Reentry COPE Simulation to all the state’s reentry coalitions. It is our goal to have a Reentry Connect support group in every community as well as, a Reentry COPE Simulation to be provided to every community and private agency across The United States of America. How did I get here? Here’s my story...

I spent 17 ½ years behind prison walls and came out in early 2000. The turning point came for me in 1998 when I lost my wife to multiple sclerosis when she was only 38 years old. I remember getting the call from my case manager, as I reported to her office at exactly 10:30 AM Saturday morning. She told me my wife had passed away, it was almost as if she had a sly grin on her face as she followed that up with "you will not be going to her funeral." My heart was ripped from my chest. It was as if, I had just died two times over. I could not believe it; I knew she was ill, but I thought this day would never come. I thought I still had time. I remember returning to my cell with a devastating broken heart. I was numb, frighten and feeling what am I going to do now? As I stood in the middle of my cell where I could reach out and touch both sides of the walls and cried uncontrollably, and with a loud voice I screamed “*Lord, why am I here?*” As clear as day, I heard the Lord say to me, as though He etched it in my soul “Son, you were incarcerated long before you got to prison.” What? What did this mean? I heard Him. H! It was at that pivotal moment in my life that I realized my thinking had been controlling my behaviors all of my life, and I didn’t have a clue. WOW! My life was in a full downward spiral and unless something significant took place by a power much greater than myself, my life was over. I had to make some real changes and I had no time to lose. I discovered the first area of change had to begin in my way of thinking. So, I began the process of surrendering my will over to Jesus Christ and begging Him it seemed, to come into my life and show me my sin against the backdrop of the Cross. So He did, my journey started there. I requested counseling with the prison chaplain and the prison psychologist. And for the next five to six years twice a week I came face to face with the reality of myself. Where I had been, where I was headed and where I wanted to be. It was here I learned how to confront and no longer hide from the “sick” me. I was desperate to be free in my mind, free in my heart, and free in the way I lived.



KYLE D. BACON

VIRGINIA

“JustLeadershipUSA is what I have been looking for.”

My work is at the intersection of incarceration and the impact it has on the whole family. I am the Mentor Program Coordinator of the U.S. Dream Academy Learning Center in the Anacostia/Congress Heights neighborhood of Washington, D.C., the most economically challenged part of our nations capitol with (one) of the highest unemployment rates in the country. I reach out to small businesses, universities and faith-based institutions and encourage folks to get out of their offices, their classrooms, and their pews to mentor our children. The best part of my day is when I see mentors connect with the children in our afterschool program and see the dream-building process come alive.

I see the impact of mass incarceration on the lives of the children we work with every day. A little girl came to us two years ago when she was only nine. She was in foster care and her life was in chaos. Before she even got to school she was hungry and tired, she didn't know where she was going to sleep that night, and she was scared. Learning her ABCs and 1,2,3s was not her top priority. Then her mentor became a constant presence in her life and helped her father, who had been incarcerated, find stable housing and employment. Two years later, this 11-year-old is living at home and thriving. That's only one of many success stories I could tell.

I grew up in Springfield, Ohio in a family culture of social justice and giving back. I was fortunate to have a large community around me that supported and encouraged me. When I got off track, they helped me learn and grow from the experience instead of punishing me. That is what every child deserves, but so many of our children are being left behind. They are our next generation of leaders and we don't have the luxury of wasting time. We have to invest in them and make every moment count, and it takes all of us.

For me, JustLeadershipUSA has come into my life at just the right time. I want to do more advocacy work. My direct service work is important, but we only have the kids for a limited amount of time and a lot of families get left on the sidelines. I want to be an advocate for policy change, especially in the area of juvenile justice. The Leading with Conviction trainings are a space where I can grow into that role. We need to make big, dramatic changes in this country and stop tinkering around the edges. By providing skills development and partnership with people working in different areas of reform all over the country, JLUSA is a model for making the big changes necessary so our children, families, and communities can heal and thrive just like the rest of the communities in America. JustLeadershipUSA is what I have been looking for.

Kyle D. Bacon is an alumnus of the Howard University School of Business. In 2013, he was selected by The White House to receive the “Champions of Change” award for his continued commitment to providing increased educational opportunity for African Americans.



LAUREN JOHNSON

TEXAS

“People change. Nobody is the same as they were ten years ago.”

I am the Advocacy Fellow with the Austin-Travis County Reentry Roundtable. I’m the first person to hold this position, and I’m the only staff member with a criminal history. My hope is that this position will always be held by people with criminal backgrounds and that they will use it as a kind of spring board to strengthen the areas they’re already strong in and the areas they’re not as strong in, and as a way to enter into the world of advocacy and do an amazing job. People change. Nobody is the same as they were ten years ago.

People coming out of prison in Texas are faced with so many problems. A big one is housing. There’s a 50,000 unit housing shortage in Austin, and a 99% occupancy rate, so even people without barriers are having a hard time. People with a history are ending up homeless. So I convened a Reentry Advocacy Project to work under the umbrella of the Roundtable. There are about fifteen core members and all of us are formerly incarcerated. We get together once a month to brainstorm solutions and nip problems in the bud. I keep looking for and taking the next step. I don’t stay still.

When I was in prison, a motivational speaker who was a rapper came to talk to us. He said he’d had four felony convictions and that he had just graduated from the University of Texas with a 4.0 average. He planted a seed in me and when I got home I started thinking about something that made me really angry—the law that prevented people with felony drug convictions from ever getting food stamps. I had been complaining about it for a long time, but it never occurred to me that I could do anything about it. So I made up my mind to stop whining and to try to change it. I started on that journey shortly after coming home. We won the food stamp fight, and I learned a lot along the way. During the first legislative session, someone took me from office to office, teaching me the process. By the next session it was me approaching a representative and saying, “Hey, here’s an alternative proposal I’d like to propose” and we got bipartisan support. It was an emotional roller coaster, but against all odds, it went through.

The JustLeadershipUSA Leading with Conviction training is amazing, and I want to share as much of it as possible with people I work with in Austin. There’s so much good content that I’m having trouble figuring out how to share it in short bursts. I’m learning a lot and putting a lot of it to use. I don’t want any of it to go to waste or slip through the cracks.

Lauren Johnson serves as a board member with Conspire Theatre, a not-for-profit organization that does theater and creative writing with women who have been impacted by incarceration. She studied business communications with the University of Phoenix and is an active member of the X-Offenders Council.



LAYNE PAVEY

WASHINGTON

“I had the audacity to believe that a prison sentence was not going to ruin my life.”

I am the founder of *I Did the Time*, a Spokane-based advocacy group led by formerly incarcerated people, and the co-founder and CEO of Revive Reentry Services, LLC which helps reentering citizens move forward with their lives. When I got out of federal prison in 2011, I couldn't find a job. So I decided to go back to school for a Master's Degree in Clinical Social Work. In my second year, my Macro Level Policy professor told us the starfish story. A young man is walking on the beach and sees thousands of starfish washed up on the shore. He begins to throw them back in the ocean one by one. An old man comes along and says, "You're a fool. You can't save them all." But the young man throws another starfish in and says, "I just saved that one." It's supposed to be a parable about the importance of helping one person at a time. But the professor said, "I'm here to tell you how to save all those starfish with the stroke of a pen. You can get into macro level policy work and help everybody at the same time." And that's when I went, "Oh my God, I'm going to reform the entire criminal justice system!"

For the past two years, *I Did the Time* has been working to pass The Fair Chance Act, Washington State's ban the box legislation. It's gathering a lot of momentum, and I'm optimistic that it will pass next year. We're also working on legal financial obligation reform. The state imposes a 12% interest rate on "user fees" that fund the corrections system. The interest starts compounding the minute someone is incarcerated and keeps going until they get out. You can go in owing \$1,500 and come out \$15,000 in debt, and you can go to jail for failure to pay even though you don't have a job and can't get one because of your record. I'm optimistic we're going to win that fight too.

When I first started doing advocacy work I wasn't sharing the fact that I had a criminal record. But it was so freeing when I finally told our legislators that I had served 20 months in federal prison. . They didn't stop listening to me. I realized they really wanted to hear from me because I was the one who could give them the most insight. Now I make sure that formerly incarcerated people always speak at legislative briefings. I want them to experience what I experienced when I realized my voice mattered. I love that I can embrace what I've been through and can talk about it openly without shame because I know that I have done my time. And I know that if we don't continue encouraging people to talk about these things we will just end up perpetuating the old system and the stigma will impact us for the rest of our lives. "I did the time" means we should be able to move on. Or else, you're serving life.

For me, Leading with Conviction is so empowering. Before, I didn't quite know where I fit. Since I'm not an attorney or community organizer, and I haven't been studying policy reform for years, I didn't know if I had the skills. The training is showing me that I have the answers. I don't need a long career or another degree. I'm learning how to handle conflict and keep people motivated and inspired. JustLeadershipUSA is teaching me top notch leadership skills which I wouldn't have gotten from anybody else.

Layne Pavey is a Certified Peer Counselor. She received her Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and Sociology from Montana State University Billings in 2005, and her Master's Degree in Clinical Social Work from Eastern Washington University in 2014. She serves on the Executive Committee of Smart Justice Spokane and is a co-facilitator with Community Partners in Transition Services.



MARC CARR

WASHINGTON, D.C.

“I had the audacity to believe that a prison sentence was not going to ruin my life.”

In August 2014, when Michael Brown was killed and the city of Ferguson erupted I was in Ghana where I had been working as a sales and marketing manager for a large corporation. It was almost surreal. I grew up in Jennings, Missouri, less than a mile away from Ferguson. I was watching TV news, and I knew the street where the killing took place. It was very emotional, and I began a process of soul-searching. I started thinking critically about what I wanted to do to make an impact. I had to ask myself, why am I here when there's a place I'm much more familiar with that has all these underlying systemic problems? I have to be true to my roots. So I came home and founded Social Solutions.

Social Solutions is based in Washington, D.C. Our mission is to attack the most intractable social problems, and mass incarceration is at the top of our agenda. Involvement in the criminal justice system creates extra barriers for people who have already experienced barriers from the get go. We use technology, media, especially social media, design thinking, community forums, civic engagement and activism to achieve our mission. The basic concept is to crowdsource ideas to come up with local solutions. Our Capitol Innovation Lab will generate, test, and then bring to scale the most promising strategies for reducing the incarceration rate in Washington D.C. by half in five years. We spread the word through the Capitol Innovation podcast and community forums. In September 2015 we held our first five-day Social Innovation Festival and brought together an amazing group of organizations and individuals to network and create solutions together.

When I walk down the street in Washington's African American neighborhoods and see the effects of marginalization and discriminatory policies, it motivates me to fight. We live in a great society, but it is also very unjust. We have to face our history, and we have a lot of work to do. Mike Brown's death got me passionate about criminal justice reform. I want to use social enterprise to build a pipeline of opportunity for all.

I am learning so much from the Leading with Convictions trainings. JLUSA is helping me think more concretely about how I want to carry out my advocacy work. “Empowering” is the word I would use to describe my experience as a JLUSA fellow.

Marc Carr holds a Master of Arts Degree in Social Enterprise from American University and a Master of Business Administration from Webster University.



MARIA ELANA MORALES

CALIFORNIA

“Every day I feel a burning passion for change and the desire to make a difference.”

I am the co-founder and president of the Urban Scholars Union (USU) at San Diego Community College. Our mission is to empower and provide resources to students who were formerly incarcerated. About five percent of our student population of close to 50,000 has been in prison in the past. That's almost 2,500 students. Many of us felt lost on campus, and the drop-out rate was high. When one of my classmates broke down in tears one day and told me she felt more scared of going to college than going back to prison I realized we all needed help. USU is filling a real need, and now we are planning to take it to other community colleges in the state.

I am the mother of five children, and I've spent more than fifteen years battling drug addiction and stigma. My last time in jail was in 2008. In 2011 I was back in the Coachella Valley where I grew up, and my ties with my family were in tatters. Then I was given a chance to come to San Diego and my life began to change. In the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous, I realized that I needed to go back to school and I enrolled in community college. In my first term I took a sociology class, Los Latinos (Sociology of Latinos), and that is when a light bulb went off in my head. Our professor showed us a video about a young man who had been shot to death (tasered to death) by border guards (border patrol agents) while trying to cross the border (while being deported back to Mexico). I remember watching that video and becoming so angry and so hurt for him and his family. That weekend I went to a protest rally at the border and for the first time got to see people coming together to make a difference. It was such an awakening, and it triggered a whole change in my mind when I saw that we could have a voice.

A big part of my story is that I was always trying to change somebody else until I finally realized that I didn't have that power. The only person I could change was me, and other people have to make their own choices. But as I educated myself, I saw that justice-involved people weren't being given any choices. They would come out of jail or prison and they would relapse on drugs and get into trouble (and violate their parole or probation, and once again they were being sent back) again. Now I understand that it is my responsibility to use my education to change policies and create resources so people coming back to the community can have the opportunities I've had. Every day I feel a burning passion for change and the desire to make a difference.

JustLeadershipUSA has opened up a door for me that I didn't think was possible. The Leading with Conviction trainings come at a point in my life where they give me a lot of hope. It is very inspiring to be connected to people who have the same belief system that I do. They keep that passion burning inside of me because they believe in me. JLUSA has been the most amazing experience I've had so far.

Maria Morales formerly served on the Board of Directors of Pillars of the Community (no longer on the board) and is a community leader with the ACLU of San Diego and Imperial Counties.



MISTY BERUBEROJO

CALIFORNIA

“Even small victories can remind us that we’re making changes.”

I am the Co-director of Justice Now. We’re based in Oakland, California, and our mission is to end violence against women and stop their imprisonment. We do this by providing legal services, building coalitions, mounting mobilization campaigns, and training the next generation of activists and lawyers committed to working for social justice. Right now one of my priorities is building a coalition of reproductive justice and criminal justice groups to work on issues around pregnancy and parenting in women’s prisons. The new coalition’s goals will be to improve visitation, help women stay connected with their families, expand access to contraception, end sterilization abuse, and expand programs to bring people home to their families sooner.

I saw my four young sons only twice in the ten years I was incarcerated and it almost destroyed me. I don’t want to see other people go through what my family went through. So my passion is to get rid of the barriers that make it impossible for women to stay present in their children’s lives while serving time.

I got out of prison in 2009 and the first few years were rough. I couldn’t find steady work, and I was homeless for a while. But in 2011, I got pulled into policy work, and I was like a fish to water. I realized that I was good at it and could have an impact on things I cared about. Doing policy advocacy is both frustrating and empowering. The elected officials never give us enough time, so I’ve gotten good at giving a two minute soundbite. I tell them that I was homeless and fighting for every meal every day, and I ask them to give me a reason why I should not have the resources to eat. Even if they’re not going to vote my way, they still have to answer my question.

The Leading with Conviction trainings are really Intense and challenging. They’re exhausting, but also powerful. JustLeadershipUSA is doing similar to things to what I’ve been pushing – sharing resources, building other people’s leadership skills, opening up opportunities for others. We should all be in this fight together if we want to win.

Misty Rojo is a member of the California Coalition for Women Prisoners and is a frequent speaker at public events focusing on issues affecting women in prison.



SHELTON MCELROY

KENTUCKY

“I had the audacity to believe that a prison sentence was not going to ruin my life.”

I was in foster care from age of three until I was 18. And then I went into another state system – prison. When I got out at the age of 25, there was nowhere to go. I had \$25 to go back to Louisville, where I was born but never lived. I didn't have a Social Security card, a birth certificate or a photo ID. I had no housing and no job. For the next two or three years I barely got by. But then something happened. I went to hear a man speak. He was a former gang banger who had changed his life. He was talking about injustice and the system and when he was finished, I ran after him and asked him to help me. That was eleven years ago.

Since then I've finished college and earned a Master's Degree in Education and Human Development, and I work three different jobs. But I've never forgotten what I saw in prison. I saw the abuse of power, the violence, and the mind crushing environment in which people were supposed to be “rehabilitated.” I promised the guys inside that I would do what I could to amplify their voice, and I do that through my work with Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, a grassroots organization that works for economic justice and democratic rights. My priority is the restoration of voting rights. Kentucky is one of only three states that still permanently disenfranchises convicted felons. There are 250,000 of us whose right to vote has been taken away, and that number grows bigger every year. Polls show that the voters are with us, so we're working on putting a constitutional amendment on the ballot that will automatically restore the right to vote to anyone who has completed their sentence.

In my full time job as Parent Advocate with the Department of Community-Based Services I help parents who have come into contact with the child welfare system. I am their advocate and I walk them through the reunification process. I see myself and my brother at 3 and 4 years old, living in a state sanctioned housing project designed to disempower us and keep us from advancing. So in my work I'm constantly thinking about what's best for the children so they can live full lives and not get on the pathway to the prison industrial complex. I am a father myself, with an 11 year old daughter and another on the way. My passion is in overcoming obstacles and reunifying families.

JustLeadershipUSA is the umbrella that wraps all my local work under a national framework. I get to connect with leaders all over the country doing profound work. I learn about best practices, strategies, and ways to affect change. JLUUSA is shifting the paradigm. No longer will we be ostracized and excluded from the spaces where decisions are made that affect our lives. We are going to be strong and present and give voice to the people closest to the problem.

Shelton McElroy became a member of the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels in 2010. This organization, founded in 1813, provides financial support to Kentucky charitable and educational institutions and organizations. He is the recipient of the Kentucky Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (KACRAO) Plenary Speaker Award and was recently honored by Congressman John Yarmuth (D-KY).



THERESA SWEENEY

OREGON

“We have to act fast and get as much done as we can before the window closes.”

I'm a child of the 60's and started going on peace marches when I was seven years old. When I was in 5th grade, I started an organization called Power of Kids. I have never liked it when people don't have a voice. When I got to college, I discovered the criminology department and fell in love with it as the focus of my studies. I think the way we treat people accused or convicted of crimes is a microcosm of our society as a whole. And I realized as a college student that our criminal justice system was one big human rights violation. We make people who are incarcerated invisible so we don't have to think about them. But people in prison are still part of the community.

Years later, I got into trouble and ended up serving a 13 month sentence in the Utah prison system. I got to see what the prison system was really like up close and personal, and I thought, all the craziness I'd been studying- oh my god it's really true. The abuse from the guards was horrific. I never felt in danger from fellow prisoners, just corrections officers. I saw that the system was set up to keep people marginalized. I think we know what to do to make things better, but we choose not to. Why is it we think that people will learn only if we put them in cages? A couple of months ago I realized that when we say justice in this country, we really mean punishment and retribution. It has nothing to do with justice.

While I was incarcerated I made a list of all the things I would do when I got out to get back on track. Within 15 months of my release, I reunited with my three children, graduated from college, and found a full time job. When the economic crisis happened I lost my job and decided to go back to school. I earned a Master's Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice in 2010. Since then, I've dedicated myself to criminal justice reform. I was one of the leaders of Oregon's successful Ban the Box movement. The new law took effect on January 1 of this year. My main priority now is my work as Outreach Coordinator for the Hands Across the Bridge Project. Our mission is to provide leadership training and development to returning citizens and to people in recovery.

I'm so excited about the window of opportunity we have to make change. But we have to act fast and get in there and get as much done as we can before the window closes. When I look at the people in JustLeadershipUSA I see so much talent. Every one of us realizes we need to give back, and our energy feeds off of each other. To be around people who are just as driven as I am is truly empowering.

Theresa Sweeney received a Master's Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice from Portland State University in 2010. In January 2012 she received a Full and Unconditional Pardon from the State of Utah. She currently works as a Residential Counselor for Volunteers of America.



TONI BUNTON

MICHIGAN

“I tell my story to whoever will listen.”

I was only seventeen years old when I went to prison. I played a minor role in a botched marijuana deal and was sentenced to 25-50 years in Michigan state penitentiaries. In 2009, after seventeen years in prison, my sentence was commuted by the outgoing Governor, Jennifer Granholm. I was finally free, but the stories – my own and those I heard in prison – would not leave me. If you’ve read a novel and the characters stay with you long after you’ve turned the last page, that’s how I was affected. I knew I wanted to devote my life to helping young people stay out of trouble, stay in school, and be successful.

I believe in the power of storytelling to bring about personal and social change, and I’m developing a narrative therapy-based training curriculum with Wayne State University that will be piloted in the fall with kids in Detroit’s Youth Assistance Program. These are 14-17 year olds who have been convicted of low-level crimes like shop-lifting. We read a book together and then locate the turning point in the story when the protagonist was able to change the outcome of his or her life. The goal of narrative therapy is for readers to identify with the protagonist, then identify their own struggles and see how they can overcome obstacles to be a hero and have a successful life. Stories are so powerful!

Policy advocacy is something I take very seriously as well, especially if it is about young people. I’m part of Raise the Age Michigan. My state is one of the few states that still automatically prosecutes all 17-year olds as adults, which is what happened to me. I am also an advocate for ending life without parole for juveniles. I tell my own story of incarceration and abuse to whoever will listen if it will help bring about more justice.

Leading with Conviction is the best leadership training I’ve ever experienced, and here’s why: This training, unlike others I have experienced, is specifically designed for someone like me, a formerly incarcerated person. I came back from the training with so much more clarity on how to create a call to action which was something I had been struggling with for a long time. I was doing advocacy work, but didn’t have clear call to action. But I came back from JLUSA inspired, full of confidence, and ready to go out there and do what I do better!

Toni Bunton is a published author and has a Master’s Degree in Liberal Studies from the University of Michigan. In 2011 she received a Creative Writing Award for her thesis entitled, “A Tree Grows in Prison.”



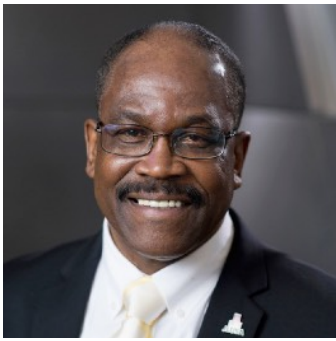
2017 Emerging Leaders: Cambridge, MA



2018 Emerging Leaders: Los Angeles, CA



2017 Emerging Leaders: New York, NY



ALBERT DANCY

CONNECTICUT

“I am compelled to make a difference in a world where there is so much injustice.”

I am the Executive Director of Serving All Vessels Equally (SAVE), a non-profit faith-based organization based in Norwalk, Connecticut. Our mission is to divert young people in our community from involvement with the criminal justice system. As is the case in other cities, many of our youth of color are forced into the school to prison pipeline through discriminatory school push-out and code of conduct policies. Because of excessively high suspensions and expulsions, these students are at risk of coming into contact with law enforcement.

We run two programs in public school settings. Pathways Academy is an alternative school for youth who are over-age and under-credited. They have a high rate of absenteeism, and some have already been involved with the criminal justice system. Our work there focuses on elevating their voices and encouraging them to become activists around issues that relate to their lived experience such as the school push-out problem. We helped create a Youth Council for Justice as an after-school program where the youth learn about community organizing and activism. Our other high school program is called “Check and Connect.” It’s a drop-out prevention program that matches each student with a teacher who becomes their mentor for the four years they are in school. We know from our own research that if a student has an adult in the school who they can trust and talk to, the chances are they will stay engaged in their academic pursuits.

During the four years I was incarcerated, from 1973 to 1976, I earned two college degrees and learned how to program main frame IBM computers, so upon my release I started working in the field of information technology. I was climbing up the corporate ladder, but I was under a lot of stress and experienced a personal crisis in 1988. That is when I heard and answered a call to the ministry. God called on me to promote social justice and equality for all individuals, especially young people. I have always had an affinity towards working with young people. I can relate to what they are going through because of my own experience. I am compelled to make a difference in a world where there is so much injustice, and where people face so much opposition in trying to live decent lives. So I walked away from the corporate sector and its demands and a whole new career was opened for me.

The Leading with Conviction experience has been phenomenal. Hearing the stories of my peers and learning about the work they are doing in their communities has energized me and given me a fresh view of the work that I’m doing and why I’m doing it. I think that Glenn is definitely a visionary. His theory of change—that the people closest to the problem are closest to the solution but farthest away from resources—is totally accurate. I’m committed to keeping my voice elevated for criminal justice reform and JLUSA has helped prepare me to do that.



ALBERTO “BETO” VASQUEZ

CALIFORNIA

“I tell my story to whoever will listen.”

I was raised in Barrio Logan, a low-income Latino neighborhood in southeast San Diego. I got into a lot of trouble growing up and was in and out of detention facilities and state prison from the age of 15 to 29. While I was in prison, I became an inmate wildland firefighter (40 percent of California’s forest firefighters are incarcerated people) and earned my state certification in water treatment. That’s how I discovered my strong interest in biology. As soon as I was released, I enrolled at San Diego City College and today I’m finalizing a Master’s degree in biology.

When I started community college, I told everybody I was there for three reasons: to meet girls, to get financial aid, and to stay out of trouble. I showed up, but I had no plan. Then one of my teachers told me I could get extra credit if I got involved with a student organization. That led to my involvement in student government, and I became the student body president and student trustee for the San Diego Community College District. One year we flew to Washington, D.C. to lobby our representatives about lowering the tuition rate. It was my first time flying, and my first time traveling without shackles. It was on that trip that I had a kind of epiphany and realized I wanted to be an advocate for people like myself; people just out of jail who want to do something different. I knew I wanted to commit a good portion of my time and experience to bringing down the barriers that prevented people like me from being successful in education and in life.

Today I am the President of the Nosotros Alumni Association, a non-profit committed to assisting men in recovery and transitioning from prison, and the Outreach Program Coordinator for San Diego Continuing Education (SDCE). I’m setting up the framework for a brand new department which oversees outreach for six different facilities throughout San Diego that offer a wide range of free educational opportunities.. When I started college, the resources were limited. At SDCE we are offering high school programs, computer literacy, English, over 40 vocational trades and professional development courses. Plus we operate on an ongoing enrollment basis, and it’s all free!

Here in California, there’s a lot going on in the area of justice reform. The state was federally mandated to decrease its incarcerated population because we were at 150 percent capacity, so a lot of people are returning home. Those of us in the advocacy community have been pushing for more funding and resources to prepare folks for their reentry and transition. You have a lot of folks like me who are really passionate about the work and about creating equitable opportunities for returning citizens, including educational opportunities. What we’re trying to do is cultivate a culture where folks are receiving educational services while they’re still incarcerated, and then during transition, they’re handed off to a receiving institution like SDCE and San Diego City College, and then we’re able to hand them off to similar programs in the universities. It’s about walking folks through the process as opposed to just throwing them back out there.

For me, Leading with Conviction has been very educational. Having been born and raised in Southern California, even New York City’s cold weather is something new to me. I’m learning that while different regions of the country share similar struggles, they also have different needs. The networking piece is huge. Because of JLUSA I was able to collaborate with my JLUSA peers when I was recently invited to speak at the Harvard Graduation School of Education’s Alumni of Color Conference on the subject of using higher education to challenge mass incarceration. That was a beautiful experience.



BEATRICE CODIANNI

CONNECTICUT

“I’ve been an activist for over 50 years and I will continue to be one for as long as I have left on this earth.”

I had my “aha moment” when I was 10 years old. I lived in a totally white neighborhood and a black family moved in. A mass of people surrounded their house and were shouting racial epithets, telling them to “go home” and “get out.” A young woman bravely came out of the house and looked me in the eyes. At that moment I knew what I was doing was wrong, and that was my wake-up call. Over the decades, I’ve been involved in many social justice movements. I started in the late 1960s with the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement. In the 1970s I immersed myself in the women’s liberation movement and worked in one of the first women’s centers in the country. All these things are interwoven, and they prepared me for what I do now. To my mind, the movement of formerly incarcerated people is so important because mass incarceration destroys families and communities. If things keep going on like this, there will be generations of children who will be irreparably harmed either because their parents are incarcerated or because they are swept up in the system themselves.

In the 1990s I became involved with the Latin Kings in New Haven. I wanted to stop gang-related violence and use my community activism skills to fight for jobs, education and mental health and substance abuse treatment for young Latinos in my community. In 1994 I was caught up in a statewide police sweep and charged with racketeering. I spent fifteen years in the Federal Correctional Institute in Danbury, Connecticut. While I was in prison my activism didn’t stop. I was active in the AIDS Awareness Group which educated women about HIV prevention. My greatest achievement was taking the Bureau of Prisons to court to eliminate cross-gender pat searches for women who had been sexually or physically abused. I was granted an exemption and that opened the door for other women in the federal prison system to apply.

When I came out in 2009 I knew I would never forget the people I left behind. Today I am Managing Editor of Reentry Central, a national website for news and information about reentry and other criminal justice issues. I’m a board member of the Connecticut Bail Fund, a charitable organization that posts bond for people who are too poor to afford bail. Our push for change was partially realized in June when the state enacted a bail reform law with bipartisan support. Last year I founded a new organization, Sex Worker Allies Network (SWAN). Our goal is to stop the arrest, harassment and abuse of sex workers and to connect them with legal representation, housing, and mental health and drug treatment services. We are all volunteers, and our work is already being recognized. The police chief has agreed to call off the stings that were leading to multiple arrests, and social workers from hospitals reach out to us when they encounter a woman in the ER who they think is involved in sex work. We want to continue doing whatever we can because this population is so stigmatized and ignored and marginalized. Right now I’m working with a legislator on a sex worker decriminalization bill. We know it will be a hard sell in puritanical New England, but we will get the message out and eventually it will become a reality.

As a Leading with Conviction fellow I feel that I’m in the company of giants. JLUSA has brought me together with strong and committed leaders from across the country and pushed me out of my comfort zone into make more effective decisions. I really believe that we’re going to make the changes that other people could never make. I am reminded of the poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay in which she writes, “My candle burns at both ends; It will not last the night; But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends— It gives a lovely light!” I want to be remembered as someone who fought beside other sisters and brothers against this cruel system that was designed to destroy us. It’s exhausting and overwhelming, but JLUSA gives me the strength to carry on.



CALEB MARTINEZ

CALIFORNIA

“In today’s political climate, there need to be more people working for the greater good.”

My entry into criminal justice reform activism was really serendipitous. I was born on the Pascua Yaqui Tribe Reservation in Arizona, was raised in several inner city neighborhoods in California that were rife with crime, and spent much of my teen years and early adulthood cycling in and out of prison. When I was released in 2015, I couldn’t find employment because of my record, so I enrolled in community college. Although my grades were good, I began to doubt myself and was about to drop out when a counselor took me under his wing. He gave me a job in his office, put me in positions of leadership, and I ended up graduating as the Valedictorian and commencement speaker and going on to complete my undergraduate work at UC Berkeley. Before classes started at Berkeley I was interning at a food pantry. As luck would have it, the pantry was across the street from the Underground Scholars Initiative, and the Initiative’s founders were doing the same internship as I was. That was really the beginning of my foray into activism and advocacy. Today I am the Initiative’s Lead Transfer and Outreach Coordinator.

The Underground Scholars Initiative (USI) was founded and is staffed by formerly incarcerated students. Our mission is to build a “prison to school pipeline.” As the Transfer and Outreach Coordinator, I go into community colleges around the state and identify eligible formerly incarcerated students. I coach and mentor them to the point where they can navigate the college application process. Last year we had 5 people apply; this year there were 25. We invest a lot in our members. Our Retention Program provides tutoring, counseling services and writing workshops. Most of our people are first generation college students who lack social capital so we view our services as an equalizer, and many of our students go from surviving in college to thriving.

Direct service is not our only mission; we also work to change policy. Our most recent victory was to convince Berkeley’s Human Resources Department to “shift the box” so that job applicants don’t have to reveal their record until the end of the hiring process, and only if it’s relevant to the position they’re seeking. Since UC Berkeley is one of the biggest employers in the Bay Area, this will have a big impact. Next we’re hoping to take this policy UC-wide. We also worked for the passage of Prop 57 in the 2016 election, which will increase parole and good behavior opportunities for people convicted of nonviolent crimes and allow judges rather than politically motivated prosecutors to decide whether to try juveniles as adults. The proposition passed by almost a two to one margin.

I became a single father at the age of 17, and my main motivator is my 11-year-old daughter, Nevaeh. I think a lot about the world I’m going to leave her and the world her children will grow up in. She’s a Native American-Mexican girl who will grow up to be a Native American-Mexican woman, and I want her—and our community as a whole—to have all of the opportunities that I lacked. The injustice in our society bothers me a lot, especially in today’s political climate. There need to be more people working for the greater good.

My Leading with Conviction training has been both humbling and empowering. In academia we are exposed to a certain kind of education, but the kind of education JLUSA provides is the kind that I need. I left the first LwC session feeling very empowered about my position and my ability to affect change collectively.



CAROLYN “FREDA” KING

FLORIDA

“I never say second chance. I always say another chance.”

I am a certified substance abuse counselor and a trauma counselor, and I’m currently working towards my Master’s Degree in Criminal Justice Studies. The question I am researching and writing about for my Master’s thesis is, why has there been an influx of females into criminal justice system, and what is happening to their children? How do poverty, trauma, substance abuse, untreated mental health issues and lack of education combine and lead to violence and incarceration? I bring my own life experience to this academic work. For over twenty years I was addicted to drugs, engaged in prostitution, lost custody of my children, and experienced bullying and trauma.

One day years ago, when I was at my lowest point and feeling nothing but dread and a fear of death, a stranger gave me a Gideon Bible. I took it as a sign that God loved me and wanted me to grow and reach my true potential. I had been called a trick, a whore, and treated like trash. I was mentally exhausted, homeless and couch surfing here and there. I hadn’t seen my sons in 7 years. I got on my knees and said “God, if you can save someone like me I’ll serve you the balance of my days.” I found the spiritual strength to turn my life around. I never say “second chance.” I always say “another chance” because I can’t even count the number of times I’ve said, “Thank you God for another chance.”

Today I am a Program Supervisor for the DISC Village-L.I.F.T. Program, a re-entry program that partners with the Leon County Jail in Florida. I work with men transitioning from the jail back into the community. I am also an aftercare case manager for the Florida Department of Correction and I supervise a substance education program at the Leon County Jail and I volunteer as a facilitator for a female substance abuse group at the Federal Correctional Facility for Women in Tallahassee.

I do a lot of public speaking. I have spoken before church congregations, juvenile justice administrators and gang members and single moms to name a few. Additionally, I lead break-out sessions at Trauma-Informed Care conferences. I want society to see that incarcerated people are human beings. I don’t negate the fact that there’s trauma, substance abuse and mental health issues that may lead a person to make bad choices. But what are we going to do when they’re coming home to our community, meaning their community as well? Are we going to help? Or are we going to kick back and say, “Okay, let’s see what they’re going to do next time? How can we judge and not want to give them an opportunity to restore their lives?

For me, Leading with Conviction has been life-changing. I knew I had leadership skills already there within me, but they were not cultivated. What I learned from David was how to listen and how to let go. I learned that constructive feedback is helpful. One of the things that I’ll never forget David saying is you need to expect and embrace conflict. Leaders do not run away or shut down. The training has really made a difference in my life and will I take this wonderful opportunity to use my leadership skills and apply them in all areas of my life and help others succeed.



DAWN HARRINGTON

MICHIGAN

“I knew when I got out and got on my feet that I wanted to be an advocate for the mothers and their children.”

I spent many years working in the entertainment business, but after my nine month incarceration at Rikers Island in New York City, I changed course and became a full time advocate for families affected by incarceration. At Rikers, I got to know women who were having to parent while being in jail. They were going into custody battles, losing their children, and having a horrible time. It was a real eye-opener for me, because I come from a very wonderful and supportive family. The contrast between my own background and the lack of support these women had was really shocking to me. I knew when I got out and got on my feet that I wanted to be an advocate for the mothers and their children. So, I went back home to Nashville and founded Free Hearts.

Free Hearts is staffed primarily by formerly incarcerated women. We provide education, support and advocacy for families affected by incarceration. We do workforce development and we're about to launch a students-affected-by-incarceration program at some colleges and universities in the state. We also have support groups for incarcerated mothers and for middle school students where we work on life and leadership skills. We run a Storytelling For Public Policy Program where we are building the capacity of mothers and children so they can have a strong voice advocating for humane public policies. I'm really proud of the fact that we just got our first bill filed for this legislative session with bipartisan support. The Primary Caretaker bill requires a sentencing judge to find out if a person convicted of a non-violent offense is the primary caretaker of dependent children, and if so, to divert that person to a non-prison alternative so that they can fulfill their parenting responsibilities without interruption. I'm really excited about this bill because it's so aligned with our mission, which is to keep people out of prison in the first place.

The Primary Caretaker bill comes out of the other organization I work with – the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. The Council is our movement's policy think tank, and I am its Systems Manager. In my former life in the music business, when I was getting ready to drop a new album I thought about what I did as pushing the “big red button.” It meant that all the touch points had to be in sync. The Council wants to organize 100,000 incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and girls from around the nation to end the incarceration of women and girls. My goal is to create the big red button so when the time is right I can press it and our members will have everything they need to win a victory.

For me, JLUSA's Leading with Conviction training has already been transformational. My most powerful takeaway so far is the importance of collective leadership. I understand now that my job as a leader is to empower others – my co-workers, the moms we work with, and their kids – to take on leadership roles themselves. That means giving them responsibility, and also giving them room to try different things and even to fail sometimes. I know the training will be transformational for my whole team.



EMANUEL JACKSON

OREGON

“Oh man, second chances are for everyone...”

I was incarcerated as a teenager, and paid the price long after I was released. My record was such a barrier that it even prevented me from getting entry level jobs that I was certain I was overqualified for. That was really disheartening. Returning to my community post-incarceration with a business degree and diligently seeking employment, all I was able to find was warehouse labor work or food service industry jobs and this was not the life I'd hoped for. When I was told that I wasn't even going to get an interview because of my background, it really hit me hard and I realized my only option was to move away from Portland, Oregon, my home town, to see if I could do better somewhere else.

So I picked up and moved to Atlanta and within two months I had a job. By three months, I had two jobs, and by six months I had my own apartment and a car. I came to Atlanta for a second chance, and I started playing with the idea that, *oh man, second chances are for everyone*. I began to sketch out in my mind a new organization called S.C.A.F.E-- Second Chances Are For Everyone. I had some experience working in the nonprofit sector mentoring kids who were released on parole or probation, so I decided to return to Portland and work towards setting up my own nonprofit organization.

S.C.A.F.E. is all about providing support services to people coming out of prison by providing employment, mentoring supports, and immediate needs. We go into the prisons and hold classes for men and women who are close to their release dates and we help them get prepared. Do they need clothes? Shoes? Health resources? We tighten up their resumes to show how the skills they acquired inside can be used as work experience qualifying them for employment on the outside. When they get out, we help them get back on their feet by paying for identification cards, birth certificates, flagger certifications, and meeting other immediate needs that will reduce barriers to employment.

Right now I'm working on S.C.A.F.E.' client application to be an Individual Development Account Initiative (IDA) partner. The state legislature started this program to help low-income Oregonians reach their goals, be it higher education, home ownership, or starting a business. Participants enroll in a one year 3:1 matching program with financial coaching classes accompanied by a free business checking account. Once the goal is reached, every dollar saved is matched by the Initiative. My plan is to have a series of food carts managed by S.C.A.F.E. clients so that they can have the experience of running a small business. We will teach them financial literacy, how to budget profit and loss, how to cook, and how to do things the proper way. This way our people can gain employment right away, gain significant work experience, and not worry about providing for themselves and families.

I have always cared about social justice. I was a Portland Human Rights Commissioner and in 2015 I was selected to sit on a new Community Oversight Advisory Board responsible for overseeing the progress of the Portland police reforms mandated by federal court. I'm a board member of HAAP, a program that promotes AIDS awareness and prevention in prison, and I serve on the Restorative Justice Statewide Steering Committee. I helped to pass a Ban the Box city ordinance and state law in 2015. I know that change is possible, and I know I still have work to do. Those before me did it, and those after me are going to do it, and I will do my part as well.

Leading with Conviction causes you to do some serious soul searching. It challenges you in a positive way to make the necessary changes to become more effective. I didn't expect this experience to be so positive. I have already noticed a transformation within myself and I am rethinking and reframing my narrative to become a better leader, a better advocate, and a better parent. This training will lead to the successful outcomes I've set for myself.



REV. DR. HAROLD "DEAN" TRULEAR PENNSYLVANIA

"I try to take my nightmares and turn them into a dream."

I am the National Director of Healing Communities USA. We create bonds between religious congregations and their own members who have been impacted by mass incarceration. We think of ourselves as a congregation culture initiative. The goal is to help congregations, synagogues and masjids develop the kind of culture that says, "Dealing with incarceration is what we do. It's as natural to us as taking care of the sick." We've trained 1,000 congregations in the past ten years. I will go to a worship service and preach—I am an ordained American Baptist minister—and do an altar call for the families of the incarcerated. The way the faith community does systems change is by engaging individuals who become the names and faces of what's wrong with the system. Rosa Parks became the name and face of the injustice of segregation, and the faith community gathered around her and formed the Montgomery bus boycott. If you find out that there are people in your own congregation who are incarcerated, whose families come to church every Sunday with the pain and weight of an incarcerated son, or parent, or brother or sister, then you are more likely to mobilize for systems change on behalf of those faces. That's our change model.

I had been working on behalf of people who were incarcerated for twenty years, but it was during my own incarceration that it became personal and went from being part of a job description to who I am as a person. It wasn't "them" anymore; it was "us." Now I know what it's like to be deprived of liberty, to be given a number, to be yelled at by COs, to look from the inside out and not from outside in. I still have nightmares about being locked up. When I wake up, my first thought is, God, how can I help people who have been through what I've been through? I try to take my nightmares and turn them into a dream, where every congregation takes care of the families of the incarcerated and helps keep them together when people come back home.

Two years ago, Glenn Martin and I were at Harvard University together and I told him I would apply to be a Leading with Conviction fellow, but that I was too old. He said, "What do you mean too old. You'd be perfect." Those of us who have been out here for a while might think JLUSA is just another iteration, but it's important for older people to understand that as far along as we may be, this program can be really helpful. I'm learning to be strategic, which is important for people like me who want to put all the right stuff on the table right now and blame others for not being ready. What I'm learning is a self-reflective style of leadership that I've never thought about before. It's been life changing for me even at this stage of my life.



JOHN KOUFOS

NEW JERSEY

“All of us are recovering from something and all of us are on the road back from somewhere.”

I am the Executive Director of the New Jersey Reentry Corporation (NJRC). We have five programs in New Jersey and our mission is to connect returning citizens to addiction/mental health treatment, housing solutions, employment and training, healthcare and legal services. What I've learned in life is that everybody wants the opportunity and dignity of work. So the philosophy I bring the program is restoring the dignity of work through employment and self-sufficiency. Our whole focus is very corporate and I run it like a law firm in a lot of ways. It doesn't look like other social service programs out there because at all times the only thing I care about is getting you a job and hopefully a career. We have a good rate of success with 60 percent employment agency-wide and a rate of recidivism that is about half the state's overall rate. Based on our success the state has told us to build four more sites, basically doubling our capacity.

Before my own incarceration I was a successful attorney specializing in criminal defense. I managed a law firm while lecturing at a university and teaching continuing legal education courses. I successfully argued state cases from municipal court to murder at the trial, appellate and Supreme Court levels, and was counsel to the NAACP (Metuchen-Edison Area branch). Then, in 2011, my addiction caught up with me and I was incarcerated for a drunk driving accident and related crimes.

I was paroled after a little more than a year, and being released hit me hard. I couldn't practice law anymore. I lost my home and was living with a law school roommate. I realized I had to do something good for my soul because I could not shake the constant feelings of remorse for hurting someone. I read about a reentry program run by former Governor Jim McGreevey in Jersey City. My mind immediately went back to the guys I had met when I was in prison. They'd get out of the halfway house and then they'd come right back on administrative returns due to unresolved traffic tickets and low-level bench warrants. As a person who tried serious criminal cases, this was the easiest thing in the world to resolve. So I thought, "We can do something about this. We can put basic motions that were being filed *pro se* on steroids by getting them a lawyer." So I contacted Governor McGreevey and when we met I told him about the post-conviction relief work I had done when I was still practicing law, including clearing up people's drivers' licenses so they could work again. I asked Governor McGreevey to volunteer, and based on the success of the legal program I started I was offered a job in late 2014 and named Executive Director of NJRC in 2015.

I've been blessed with sobriety now for over five years and for me this job is a daily 12th step. When you're in recovery the 12th step is, you finally had your spiritual awakening--of course you've gone through the first 11 steps--and now it's time to take the message forward. I look at returning citizens as all of us are recovering from something and all of us are on the road back from somewhere. Mine was alcohol and prison. For other people it will be heroin, addiction to the lifestyle, or lack of opportunity. But whatever you're trying to recover from, if we can provide a mechanism at the New Jersey Reentry Corporation to help you, each day we're carrying a 12th step across the state. That's what motivates me.

The Leading with Conviction program has been instrumental in making me better at leading the NJRC. The tools I've learned allow me to be better at delegating and empowering the folks who work for me to do tasks that I would normally do but shouldn't be doing. That has freed my mind to think about any other number of issues and make the program better.



JOHNNY PEREZ

NEW YORK

“I left friends behind who are doing 20, 30 50 years. I bring them with me everywhere that I go.”

I grew up in the Bronx. I don't like bullies, whether they're people or systems of oppression like I'm fighting now. I like to tell people I was an advocate long before I received the title. From a young age I always tried to advocate for people who couldn't advocate for themselves and needed to be empowered. While I was in prison I took on jobs that allowed me to play that role. I worked in the law library, helping people do research and helping people with their appeals. The intense satisfaction that comes with going up against a large system of oppression and winning—at least to some degree—always made me smile. I love my work, and to be honest, if I was to hit the lottery tomorrow I would still continue to do the work I'm doing now.

I just started a new job as the Director of U.S. Prisons Program of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. My main focus will be replacing the use of solitary confinement with restorative alternatives based on human dignity. I know firsthand the torture that is solitary confinement and see it as a microcosm of the larger issues in our society as they relate to the justice system. The first response to people who test positive for drugs, or who get caught with contraband like a cell phone or some cash is the hammer of “punitive segregation.” We're in a country where we've criminalized everything. We've criminalized poverty, we've criminalized homelessness, and we've even criminalized just being from certain countries. So solitary confinement is just a representation of how we've gotten to a place where we respond to everything with punishment and retaliation.

I was released in September of 2013 with 30 college credits and no job. I applied for about 50 different jobs, but couldn't get hired. Finally, someone sent me a job description from the Urban Justice Center and I was hired as the Safe Reentry advocate for the Center's Mental Health Project. I worked directly with people with mental illness and histories of incarceration to connect them to the services in the community. Within a few months of starting, I realized that this was something I could turn into a career and I've been doing it ever since. I left friends behind who are doing 20, 30 50 years. When I'm in this space, I bring them with me everywhere that I go. I realized that I am here for a reason and that I add value to the struggle in spite of not having a fancy degree.

What I appreciate about Leading with Conviction is that I get to learn about the work that people are doing around the country and that gives me a national perspective on a lot of the issues I care about. By collaborating with other leaders, I can use their experiences to overcome problems that I'm having in my own jurisdiction and move the campaign forward. If I have to go and do a talk in California tomorrow I can call a bunch of Just Leadership fellows, whether it's to just pick me up at the airport, or join me in whatever conversation I'm having out there. That's a really good feeling to have, knowing that you have a national network that you can rely on and also be available to. In the end it increases my effectiveness exponentially.



LAMONTE MORGAN

OREGON

“Everyone makes mistakes in life, and everyone is capable of change.”

I work as a Drug and Alcohol Counselor for the Lane County Veterans Treatment Court program in Eugene, Oregon. It's a year-long alternative to incarceration program that gives veterans charged with a felony the opportunity to go through substance abuse and mental health treatment instead of prison. If they complete the program, the felony gets wiped from their record. The exciting thing is I'm seeing more openness to this approach than ever before.

Three or four years ago, when I went to the Second Chance Act Conference in Washington, D.C., I met a district attorney from Lane County who, like me, struggled with addiction in his past life. He also works in the Veterans Treatment Court, and we have been working together to change the mentality of the DA's office when it comes to mental health and addiction issues. Not long ago he invited me to speak to other prosecutors at a brown bag lunch. I asked them to imagine for a minute the worst mistake they had ever made. I said everyone makes mistakes in life, and everyone is capable of change, but if you have a record, it never goes away. I asked them to think about the fact that even if you've tried to move past it and done a lot of work to better yourself, it still comes up. As I spoke, their faces softened, they leaned in, and I could tell they were really listening. I see raising awareness as part of my job, and I'm seeing more and more judges, prosecutors and defense lawyers pushing for alternatives to throwing people away for three to five years and then dealing with them when they get out. So we're making progress even though we have a long way to go.

I decided to work in the field of criminal justice reform after I was rejected from a job by the state's Department of Human Services because of a ten year old felony conviction. I appealed and went through a telephone hearing during which I felt like I was on trial again. The two people on the other end didn't seem to care about all the work I had done to make sure I wouldn't reoffend or get re-involved in the drug world. They were not interested in the letters of reference I provided. They focused only on my past conviction. It was then that a light clicked for me and I realized that if this happened to me, it was happening to a lot of other people, and if we didn't speak up about it, nobody would know what was going on.

One issue I'm working on right now is to reform the state's sex offender law. In Oregon all sex offenses are classified as the same thing, whether you're caught urinating in the park or you've actually kidnapped a woman and raped her. This is the most marginalized population I worked with and they face huge barriers finding jobs, housing and any kind of acceptance. Once you are in the sex offender registry you're in it for life. I'm working with other reformers to pass legislation that creates a three-tiered system, recognizing that some offenses are far more serious than others and that if a person does not reoffend for a certain period of time, they can be removed from the sex offender registry. To me this is a simple matter of fairness.

Going through the Leading with Conviction program has been a phenomenal experience, and it's already making a huge difference in the way I view myself and how I work with my clients. One of the tools I learned is to ask the question, “What would your life look like if this thing you were struggling with right now was no longer a struggle?” I've been using this tool in my work, and even though it seems simple, it's been amazingly effective. Most of all being involved with JLUSA has made me realize that I really do have a seat at the table.



LASHONIA THOMPSON-EL

WASHINGTON, D.C.

“My whole life’s purpose is to give back and make a difference in the lives of other people.”

I was paroled in December of 2011 after spending 18 ½ years in prison. When I got home to Washington, D.C., I thought I would finish my education, be with my family, and establish a career. But what I found was that women like me who were going through the reentry process were not connected to one another. This surprised me because while in prison, I spent a lot of time with the same women and we formed a strong family bond. But although there were a lot of men doing reentry and civic engagement work, I saw that women were not as involved. So while working as the Female Reentry Coordinator for the Mayor’s Office on Returning Citizens Affairs (MORCA) I decided to start an organization called The W.I.R.E. (Women Involved in Reentry Efforts).

The women of The W.I.R.E. have successfully reintegrated into the community after release from prison. We do a lot of speaking, writing, mentoring, and organizing around criminal justice concerns especially as it relates to gender responsiveness. We try to enlighten the community about the differences between how women do time and how men do time and how women reintegrate versus how men reintegrate. We strive to make sure that women are ‘at the table’ when policies, services, and programs are being discussed. A lot of our focus is on raising awareness around family reunification. Getting jobs and an education are important, but one of the biggest concerns for many women is how to reunify their family. A woman might come home to a three-year-old and need child care while she’s trying to find housing and employment and complete her education. We want to help criminal justice professionals recognize what outcomes to seek. As they say, ‘everything that is important can’t be measured and everything you measure is not important.’ Our goal is to make sure that we don’t duck the conversation about family reunification and what mass incarceration has done to children as a result of separating them from their mothers. This conversation can get messy and emotional, but we have to be brave and broach the topic.

Washington, D.C. isn’t a state so our local politics are really important to us. We don’t have a state prison; so people who are serving a year or more go into the Federal Bureau of Prison (FBOP) system to serve time in facilities very far away from their families. One of The W.I.R.E.’s goals is to encourage the FBOP to house all D.C. women in the closest federal facility, which is in Hazelton, West Virginia. We advocate before the City Council and speak to service providers, and criminal justice professionals in our effort to help shape the gender-responsive narrative and inform the public about the impact of mass incarceration on women and families.

We have gone back into FBOP facilities and the local jail and halfway houses to speak directly to incarcerated women who are preparing for release. I do this work because I have both an obligation to my community and a debt to pay to society. Because I have the lived experience of incarceration, I can’t leave it up to the academics and intellectuals to make the decisions when I know they have a limited perspective. I can’t sit back and allow that to happen. That’s my obligation. But the debt is more about things I’ve done that have been unjust and that caused other people pain. My whole life’s purpose is to give back and make a difference in the lives of other people.

When I came home from the first Leading with Conviction training forum, I felt like somebody opened up my soul and showed it to me. I felt like I came full circle. It was the affirmation that I needed, almost like a stamp of approval from God. When Glenn said, “We didn’t select you to make you leaders, we selected you because you are leaders,” I knew I it was going to be an amazing journey.



ELDER LESLIE MATHEWS

MICHIGAN

“Justice is the blood that runs through my veins.”

I have been a minister of the gospel for over twenty years, and I am the Faith Organizer for Michigan United, a statewide organization of community members and organizations fighting for the dignity and potential of every person. Criminal justice reform is a major focus of mine. As I looked around my community, I noticed that young men were disappearing. Here today, gone tomorrow. I asked myself, “What’s going on.” I read *The New Jim Crow* and began to understand how diabolical the criminal justice system is.

Right now I’m working to pass a Fair Chance 4 All ordinance in Detroit to win access to quality employment opportunities for our loved ones with criminal backgrounds. Detroit is going through a big economic construction boom in the downtown area, and the companies that are coming in are not hiring Detroit residents. So we are pushing for a community benefits agreement to change that.

In doing my work, I look at things through both a racial and a gender lens. Detroit is a predominantly African American city that is predominantly populated by single mothers. African American females are the fastest growing segment in the prison population. Without policy reform, when they are released they won’t be able to find a job, and they probably won’t be able to get housing. Most women who are justice involved have children, so now we’re talking about removing children from their mothers because they can’t find affordable housing. I’m working on a study with Wayne State University on how Fair Chance laws affect women. There is only one reentry program in Detroit that caters to women, and that one isn’t always up and running. So there’s a lot of work to do.

I’m also a member of the mass incarceration team at National Peoples Action where we are guiding policy that we want to see in different states. We’re looking at the issue of prosecutor accountability in a systemic way. Prosecutors cannot prosecute people under the law unless those laws are coming from our lawmakers. We have to begin to take an aggressive approach to making sure we have lawmakers that don’t look at mass incarceration as a business opportunity for the districts they’re in. When a person is incarcerated, the money follows them. We have small communities way up in Michigan that are being fed and sustained by black and brown bodies.

God is my joy and my strength and he shows me that I have won and I can continue to win. And I want to win, especially on the mass incarceration front. I believe that everybody deserves a chance to have a good life—a great life. But if our children are growing up in a society that isn’t affording them that chance and that’s taking away every opportunity and every sense of normality, then I am called to help and fight.

For me Leading with Conviction has been liberating and life-changing. It’s taking me from a place of politeness to a place where I can be much more direct. I don’t run away from conflict any more. Instead, I swim in it, I embrace it, and I lean into it. I know that if I allow conflict to come then I can deal with it and then we can go on and work on what we need to work on.



LEWIS CONWAY, JR.

TEXAS

“I wake up every morning to the smell of a closing prison and it smells like freedom.”

I spent 8 years in Texas prisons in my 20s, and another 12 years on parole, but until 2015 I never told my story. In fact, I ran from it. And then in January of that year I ended up in the hospital with an irregular heartbeat. The doctor who was treating me asked me if I had a will and an advanced directive, and I realized that if I died I was going to die alone. So I asked God if he would let me live I would tell my story. He let me live and held up his end of the bargain, so I'm holding up mine.

Today I am the Criminal Justice Organizer for Grassroots Leadership (GRL), an Austin-based not-for-profit organization that works for a more just society, where prison profiteering, mass incarceration, deportation and criminalization are things of the past. Having worked for years as a digital marketing manager, video editor and filmmaker, I am responsible for the organization's web development, film production, and social media presence. I also work with several community organizations that support formerly incarcerated people, including Tent Maker's Ministry, Second Chance Democrats, and Reentry Advocacy Project.

Our goal at GRL is to close one public and two private prisons this year and reduce the state's incarcerated population by 6,000 men and women. I never thought I'd have a job that paid me to close prisons! I wake up every morning to the smell of a closing prison and it smells like freedom. I know that had alternatives existed when I was a young man, I could have been spared spending 2,095 days inside. For too long, prisons have been used as mechanisms for social control. My passion is to give people with my background an alternative. It's so important that people hear my story and see that it's possible to go from being homeless and sleeping on the floor of my office, to spending a weekend in New York City with the amazing people from JLUSA's Leading with Conviction program.

For me, LwC is a transformative, break through experience that is taking me to the next level of leadership. The biggest takeaway for me so far is that there will always be conflict, and I should not run from it. Conflict is what gets the conversation started. The very exchange of ideas creates friction that lends itself to conflict, and so I should lean into it. I'm excited about applying what I'm learning to the work I love.



LILLIE BRANCH-KENNEDY

VIRGINIA

“I just use common sense. If something isn't right, we need to bring it to light.”

I am the founding Executive Director of the Virginia-based Resource, Information & Help for the Disadvantaged (RIHD). It's an all-volunteer organization committed to eradicating racial bias from the criminal justice sentencing process. In 2012 I started the Mobile Justice Tour now in its sixth year. It brings together criminal justice reform advocates in different locations around the state where we have public workshops. We raise awareness about the need to end mass incarceration and encourage citizen activism. So far we've visited more than 60 cities and counties in Virginia, and our audiences have grown larger and more diverse. We leave each workshop with a list of folks to follow up with.

This year we are concentrating on three key state initiatives. First we want to cut the state's incarcerated population in half through sentencing reform and reinstating the parole system. The state abolished parole in 1995, so anyone sentenced after that date has no opportunity for parole at all. Second, we want to promote fair hiring for people with criminal records. In 2015 Governor McAuliffe signed an executive order removing criminal history questions from state employment applications, but statewide legislation has stalled, and the next governor might not support the order. So we have taken the fight to the local level. We provide community activists with the tools to take “ban the box” to their city council or mayor, and so far 22 local groups have done so. For many, this was their first experience with advocacy and it was very empowering. The third issue is the restoration of voting rights. Virginia is one of only four states whose constitution, adopted during the height of Jim Crow, permanently disenfranchises citizens with past felony convictions. About 156,000 people, disproportionately African American, have so far been granted relief through the Governor's individual restoration orders, but many people aren't aware that they can vote. So the Mobile Justice Tour does on-site look-ups to identify people whose rights have been restored and then helps them register to vote.

I never planned to become a criminal justice reform advocate. I am a retired federal employee with more than 30 years of service under my belt. But I was thrust into activism by circumstance. When my son was in college he got mixed up with the wrong people and was arrested. Even though it was his first offense and no one was injured, he was sentenced to 127 years! His lawyer was able to get the sentence reduced to 23 years, and he is now in his 16th year of incarceration in a low security-level facility, although he began his sentence at the notorious Wallens Ridge State Prison in the Appalachian Mountains. A one hour visit with my son meant a sixteen hour round trip and I tried to go twice a month. Since 2002, at my son's request I started driving the families of other incarcerated people, and I started learning about terrible injustices, and pretty soon I decided to get a 15-passenger van. Five other mothers from these trips became the backbone of my volunteer organization, and now we take family members to six different prisons every month. I sometimes wonder why was I thrust into this and so I have to take it to a spiritual level. If not me, then who? I'm nothing special, but somebody's got to do it.

I was thrust into a leadership position, and now I'm learning how to be more effective in my work. Hearing and watching my peer Leading with Conviction fellows has helped to restore my commitment and my confidence in the work. It's beyond training; you have to really believe in what you're doing. LwC touches my core, my soul, my inner me, to be a better person and a better steward.



LILY GONZALEZ

CALIFORNIA

“We had to create the conversation.”

When I began college at California State University at Northridge, no one was talking about the issues of mass incarceration, its impact on society, reentry or the idea of second chances. So I got together with some other formerly incarcerated students and we started an organization called Revolutionary Scholars. We had to create the conversation. So, our first activity was to hold two panel discussions that were open to all students. Our first speaker was Susan Burton, the founder of A New Way of Life. Next we held a roundtable discussion with formerly incarcerated students, and it was standing room only. Now we have 75 members including formerly incarcerated students and our allies and a few weeks ago we got an award from the university as the best new club on campus. We beat out 23 other clubs, and when the announcement was made, everyone was screaming and the Dean came and congratulated me. It was amazing!

Our goal is to create a safe space for formerly incarcerated students on campus. We want to make sure our people can stay in college. A big part of that is overcoming financial barriers. Financial aid covers only so much. How are you going to pay for a laptop? How are you going to find employment when you have a criminal history? My thing is to create more pathways for people to complete their education. Revolutionary Scholars is also an advocacy organization. We're planning to win a ban the box policy on campus; I was denied employment by the university because of my background. Another of our campaigns is to get the university to divest all its funds from public and private prisons. I don't want a desk that was made in a prison by inmates. That's modern day slavery.

My work with Revolutionary Scholars led to other things. I was invited to speak at the Beyond the Bars: Transcending the Punishment Paradigm conference at Columbia University to talk about the work we're doing on reentry and higher education in California. I was asked to be part of the statewide Formerly Incarcerated Student Advocacy Network (FISAN). And I'm working with Susan Burton on a project called Just Us Voices, which is elevating the voices of formerly incarcerated women. I never said to myself, "I want to be a reentry advocate when I grow up." When I came home I wanted to be as under the radar as possible. I didn't want anybody to know about my past; I just wanted to be normal and go with the flow. But as I tried to reenter I faced all these barriers. I couldn't find a job, I couldn't do this, couldn't do that. I felt like I did my time, so why can't I vote? I thought, "This isn't cool, but who's going to speak up for us if not ourselves? The politician in Washington?" We know what we need, so we have to do the work. Now I'm really passionate about the work I do.

Leading with Conviction has been amazing. There aren't that many people doing this work, so where do I go for the roadmap? Now I have people I can go to for advice and say, "Hey I'm having this difficulty--how do you go about this or that?" To be in a room filled with people who have a similar past and are doing great things throughout the nation and to see their passion and their drive—it's inspiring and empowering.



LOUIS L. REED

CONNECTICUT

“I can’t be one of those people who, knowing it’s not right just sits back and rides into the sunset.”

I am the Reentry Director for the City of Bridgeport, Connecticut. This is a position I negotiated when our mayor rolled out his Initiative for Reentry Affairs. We are in the unusual position of having a mayor who is a returning citizen himself. Mayor Ganim served 8 years in federal prison for corruption and was then reelected in 2015. So my office is second chance-oriented and serves the 10,000 people of Bridgeport who have criminal histories.

There are three things that are my primary objectives right now. First is adequate housing, which means engaging our local housing authority in conversations about their current practice of denying housing to people with convictions. Second is making the state’s Certificate of Employability worth more than the piece of paper it’s written on. The Certificate is supposed to tell employers that a person has been rehabilitated for purposes of employment or licensure. But we know that in practice, employers still turn down qualified people based on a conviction, so we want to pass a law that seals the records of people who have been issued a Certificate. Lastly, we want to reduce stigma through a social activism campaign. We’re trying to bring employers together with people with criminal histories so they can begin to view them on the basis of their qualifications and not just their criminal histories.

I did 13 ½ years in federal prison and it was during that time that I had the privilege of going to a university and I was able to earn dual degrees, one in psychology and one in criminal justice. Somewhere between years 7 and 8 something awakened in me and I realized I wanted to be involved in changing the system. I was seeing individuals who got 20 and 30 year sentences for less than an ounce of crack cocaine and I thought, this is not right, and I can’t be one of those people who knowing it’s not right just sits back and rides into the sunset. So I started helping people with their reentry planning while I was still incarcerated myself. I saw that folks were ready to be released, but they weren’t *prepared* to be released. As a Christian, I believe there is a larger purpose to my life and that I can serve as an example to others who are going through what I went through. My faith keeps things in perspective for me when I’m challenged by naysayers and detractors. It serves as a GPS for the things that I’m doing because whatsoever I’m doing I am doing for the least of people.

JLUSA has created a space for people like me to be able to walk through doors which would otherwise be closed to us. How else could I have had the opportunity to fly to Los Angeles with Glenn Martin and make a presentation to a prominent foundation? Leading with Conviction is innovative and visionary. Everybody in the room comes from a shared space in life, but we don’t harp on our criminal convictions. We focus on the contributions we can make in our respective practices.



MARIA FORD

OHIO

“It’s my intention to be there to give returning citizens comfort, and comfort means to give them hope.”

I spent a year at the Ohio Reformatory for Women. I believe in God, and when I was incarcerated I heard a voice—and it was almost audible—that said, “This is not forever. You are here so you can comfort those who are going through the same thing that you’re going through.” I saw women who lost their children because they couldn’t obtain their court date. I saw so many things that were wrong. Women whose boyfriends were dealing drugs, and since they were in the house, they got charged too. Or women who were facing time that was unimaginable because of mandatory sentencing. What I saw opened my eyes to the inequities of the justice system. There are people struggling in prison or returning from prison who may not have anyone who understands their struggle, and so it’s my intention to be there to give them comfort, and comfort means to give them hope.

I work for the State of Ohio as an Employment Professional, and about 60 percent of the people I try to help return to work have some type of criminal history. A few years ago I sat down with some friends and brainstormed about how we could provide resources to people with convictions and their families that wouldn’t cost anything. We came up with the idea of a Restored Citizen Summit -- a one-day event that would bring together formerly incarcerated people, employers, educators, not-for-profit organizations, and public officials to collaborate and exchange resources for assisting successful community reentry.

In 2011 which was our first year a few hundred people came. Last year we had 1,500. In fact several prisons bussed in people who were close to their release dates so they could get a head start on the reentry process. Each year it gets bigger, and now people look forward to it. We offer panel discussions, including one with people who have been released for at least a year who can talk about the service gaps they’ve encountered and give their advice about solutions to existing problems. After the Summit is over we follow up with attendees and help them with their interviewing skills and resumes and we help them find jobs.

I can tell you that a job beats anything else you can do for someone coming home from prison. Before anything else we need to help people become self-sufficient. Low socio-economic status is a major contributor to opioid addiction and mental health problems. If a person with a record can obtain sustainable work, their chances of recidivism drops drastically because now they have something of value and feel they are of worth. So part of my job is to help employers understand that they have a social responsibility to hire people who have criminal histories. By doing so, they can help change our society for the better.

Leading with Conviction is a life-changing, mind-altering experience that gives you strength and encouragement when you most need it. Before I became a fellow I had a pretty strong voice in the community. But now I see myself as a force to be reckoned with. JLUSA has given me the tools to be more than just a voice. Now I am a driving force!



MARK RICE

WISCONSIN

“I realized that I had something to give, that there was power in my story, and that I could make a difference.”

It took some time for me to be able to speak publicly about my 26-month incarceration in Wisconsin state prisons. I was released in 2000 when I was only 21 years old, and I was not yet ready to get involved in organizing and advocacy. So I did a lot of studying. For my senior project in college, I created a strategy for reducing overcrowding in the Dane County jail where jail administrators had forced me to sleep on the floor several years earlier. It was while I was in graduate school examining the emergence and evolution of efforts to end mass imprisonment in my state that one of my professors told me about a campaign to end mass incarceration under the leadership of the faith-based organization, WISDOM and the work of Milwaukee Inner City Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH).

One of the first events I went to was a protest against unjust parole and probation revocations. It was a powerful experience for me because the protest took place at the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility where Wisconsin officials had forced me to spend six months in 2007 for allegedly violating probation. Although the state claims it's a medium security facility it functions more like a super max. People are locked down for 22 hours a day, conditions are inhumane, and attempted suicides and suicides are not uncommon. When I was detained there, I thought that nobody cared. Seeing so many people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds coming together at the protest was very emotional for me. It was then that I realized that I had something to give, that there was power in my story, and that I could make a difference. So I jumped in and just kept going. I am now passionate about connecting other formerly incarcerated people with leadership development opportunities so that they can have experiences similar to my own.

Today I chair the post-release issues workgroup of WISDOM and serve as an organizer for EX-Prisoners Organizing (EXPO), a group of formerly incarcerated people who drive WISDOM's campaign to transform Wisconsin's penal system. I am also a board member of Project RETURN, a nonprofit organization in Milwaukee that helps men and women leaving prison make a positive and permanent return to our community. I recently served as a member of an advisory committee that guided a Health Impact Assessment regarding excessive revocations in Wisconsin. I seize any opportunity to educate the public about topical issues in Wisconsin like ban the box, rights restoration, and crimeless revocations by publishing op-eds and appearing in TV and radio public affairs programs. Last year I received the Distinguished Leadership Award from MICAH and a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition from Congresswoman Gwen Moore for my work to end mass incarceration.

My first Leading with Conviction training session was inspiring. There are so many people doing great things all over the country. I feel that I am part of a nationwide movement. We're not isolated in one city or one state; we're coming together to learn from each other and to unite for one purpose and that is very powerful.



NICHOLAS BUCKINGHAM

MICHIGAN

"When I first came home from prison, I knew I wanted to do something great."

I wasn't sure what it was, but I wanted to be successful. But after being turned away so many times from housing, from my family, and from jobs because of my felony conviction I started believing that the stigma would forever hold me back. I became so frustrated that I actually violated my parole and went back to prison. When I came home to Detroit that time, I decided that I was never going to allow this felony stigma to get the best of me. I wanted to start opening up doors for myself. So every day I look in the mirror and tell myself I'm going to "dominate" my day. My past is not who I am today.

Today I work fulltime for criminal justice reform. I am the lead organizer for an organization I helped to found called Detroit FORCE (Faithfully Organizing Resources for Community Empowerment). Our mission is to connect directly impacted people with opportunities to create policy solutions to the problems they are dealing with. Detroit is going through dramatic changes and those of us who have been affected by mass incarceration need to have a voice. Right now our priority is stopping a new jail from being built. The city is planning to close 15 schools while at the same time spending \$40 million on a new jail. This just guarantees a bigger school to prison pipeline. The last thing Detroit needs is another jail.

I've spent a lot of time talking to crime victims, and what I've learned is that they really want to tell their stories to somebody who will listen; not somebody who will hug them and feel sorry for them, but somebody who will listen and take the opportunity to change things for the better. I've learned about how the community looks at individuals who commit crimes. They don't necessarily want to see people just thrown in prison. They'd rather see them redeem themselves, come home, transform their lives, and do something great.

I'm a big believer in restorative justice and bringing together the victims and perpetrators of crime. I've seen cases where a person has actually committed murder, then come home and received forgiveness from the victim's family, and now they work side by side. I've seen how this transformation can work. Just because somebody commits a crime you don't have to give them 100 years. Instead, start to implement some restorative justice strategies and reduce the sentences people get. Right now I am in the process of trying to meet with the victims of my crime. I want to look them square in the eyes and apologize and ask for forgiveness. I want to work with them to make things better.

Working with JLUSA is the greatest experience I've ever had in my entire life. Out of all my leadership and organizing trainings, Leading with Conviction is the best. One of the most valuable things I've learned is to lean into conflict. Every time I have conflict I call David [Mensah] and say, "David, I'm leaning into conflict today," and since I've learned that technique, great things have been happening. That's JustLeadership for me.



PAMELA CLIFTON

COLORADO

"I am the Communication Coordinator for the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition (CCJRC)."

The organization was founded almost 20 years ago and it's composed of people convicted of crime, survivors of crime, and the families and allies of both. We've passed over 40 pieces of reform legislation and those sentence and policy changes have helped to close six prisons in the state and redirected millions of dollars directly into funding for mental health, substance abuse and reentry services. CCJRC has helped to shape policies that may change the lives of thousands of people in Colorado.

Every day I get to stand up to a system that doesn't care about the human beings under its control. I get to be the voice of people who don't have a voice, and through our correspondence with prisoners, we let them know there's someone out there who cares and who will continue to fight for them.

In the legislative session that just ended we were able to get a bill passed with bipartisan support that will really change the dynamics for folks coming out of prison by, among other things, cultivating and supporting entrepreneurship through small business lending. Our Justice Reinvestment bill reinvests \$4 million into crime prevention initiatives in North Aurora and Southeast Colorado Springs, two of the communities most negatively impacted by mass incarceration. The funding (which comes from prison budget savings brought about by parole reform), will expand small business lending, direct services, and other community development strategies. The bill also empowers local community planning teams so that key partners have a voice in deciding which programs work and which don't. I was able to video the public hearings that led to the bill's passage and will be creating a short film that captures the language, momentum and spirit of this victory.

Before my own incarceration, I knew very little about the criminal justice system. I was centered on work and raising my family, not politics. But the hurt I experienced in prison opened my eyes to what the system was about. When I realized what they were willing to do to me and to others I was locked up with, the veil came down. I realized there was nobody out there to help people in prison, and that wasn't okay. So I made it my mission to learn about how politics works, how systems work, what the difference between laws and policies is and how those things change. In 2005 I was given the opportunity to work at CCJRC where I wear a lot of hats, and I love doing what I do.

In the Leading with Conviction sessions there is no pretense. For the past 20 years, in whatever room I was in, I wore the "formerly incarcerated person" mantle. That was the foundation I was working from. But with the other JLUSA leaders, I can lay the label aside and bring all the emotion, knowledge and authenticity of who I am into those rooms. It is such an incredible group of people. Listening to them describe what they've been through and how they've moved forward in life has helped me feel part of something bigger that's carrying me along. I'm standing on the shoulders of giants, and I'm standing next to them as well.



PAMELA KENNEBREW

PENNSYLVANIA

“I’m working on bringing what I learn from my research into the struggle to end mass criminalization.”

I am a scholar activist based in Philadelphia. I’m working on bringing what I learn from my research into the struggle to end mass criminalization and the stigma of having a criminal record. My focus is on the economic consequences of a criminal conviction, particularly as it relates to women, including women whose conviction did not lead to imprisonment, or women indirectly impacted by a family member’s conviction. My published doctoral dissertation, “Innovation, resiliency and transformation: Older African American women respond to economic injustice using mindful strength consciousness,” encapsulates my belief in the strength and agency of Black women in the face of enormous barriers to self-sufficiency. In the course of my research on economic insecurity, I noticed that for many Black women the cause was either direct or indirect contact with the criminal justice system. Women were afraid to apply for a promotion for fear of a background check, or their household income was negatively affected by a family member’s conviction. Reentry programs were not helping these women. They were suffering the financial effects of a conviction even though they had not gone to prison.

Based on my research findings I founded the Black Women’s Center for Carceral Empowerment . The Center’s mission is to expand the conversation about mass criminalization by including women convicted of crimes but not incarcerated. I call them “the invisible members of the convict class” because they are generally ignored in the public discourse about the economic consequences of having a criminal record. But the barriers they face as they strive to support themselves and their families are severe. I partner with organizations that work directly with these women and hold workshops and one-on-one sessions focusing on housing, education and employment. I have found that because of the prevailing narrative, many of these women aren’t aware that they are being discriminated against or that their rights are being violated. They think that because of their criminal convictions landlords, employers and educational institutions have the right to exclude them. By raising their awareness, I believe women will begin to exercise their rights and become involved in grassroots campaigns to change policy.

I also work with employers to raise their awareness and challenge their reliance on background checks which have no bearing on an applicant’s ability to do the job. My strategy is to infiltrate spaces that aren’t usually part of the criminal justice reform space. Recently I attended a mixer for entrepreneurs who share an office space. It wasn’t a social justice or “second chance” employer event, but rather a group of small business people having their monthly meeting. I raised the issue there and although most of the people hadn’t given it much thought, they wanted to do the right thing but didn’t know how. I talked about the concept of equity and planted a seed which I think will take root and lead to positive results. To have any reform take place you have to have all stakeholders at the table.

When I tell colleagues and friends about Leading with Conviction, I describe it as transformation 2.0. It’s not so much that I’ve learned things I didn’t know before. Rather, it is giving me the opportunity to activate what I know in a way that leads to better outcomes. I have a deeper understanding of how leaders are responsible for the results they produce. So, if something doesn’t work out the way I had intended, instead of focusing on the result I didn’t get I’m looking at how I contributed to that outcome and how I can make a change.



PAMELA WINN

MICHIGAN

“A fire started burning inside me, and something inside of me said ‘so what are you going to do?’”

When I came out of federal prison after serving five years I just wanted to get on with my life. Before my incarceration I had earned three post-secondary degrees in nursing and ran two businesses. My mother, Marilyn Winn, who was part of JLUSA’s second Leading with Conviction cohort, tried to get me involved in reform work, but although I was willing to help out, I wasn’t really interested. Then one day she asked me if I would sit in on a Women on the Rise conference call in her place. I figured I’d just listen, take notes, and tell her what she missed. But that call changed my life. Listening to other women who had been through the experience of incarceration, a fire started burning inside of me, and something inside of me said ‘so what are you going to do? Keep hiding behind your anger, your shame, your guilt and your selfishness, or are you going to act?’ I made a decision that day that I was going to act and be true to myself. I ended up speaking up on the conference call and the next thing I knew I was agreeing to participate in a webinar.

Today I am on the advisory board of Women on the Rise and I serve as the Organizing Director of Reverse the Cycle of Incarceration which works to reduce the number of women under correctional supervision in Georgia. I’m also a member of the Women’s Advisory Team, comprised of women working to end mass incarceration and public health professionals who come together to address the social determinants of criminalization. My current priority is our campaign to restore voting rights to people on parole or probation. In Georgia, you can’t get your voting rights back until you’ve completed probation and parole, but we believe that once you’ve served your time, you shouldn’t have to wait. I am also involved in the implementation of Atlanta’s new Pre-Arrest Diversion Initiative (PAD). Launched in June 2016, PAD will divert people whose infractions are driven mainly by addiction, mental illness, and poverty into treatment or other services so that they won’t have a criminal record and can get the help they need. This makes Atlanta and Fulton County only the fifth jurisdiction in the U.S. to adopt this approach.

For me, the Leading with Conviction training has been empowering and it’s helping me be a more effective leader. By providing me with a safe space, I am able to share and reinforce my knowledge, strength and passion for empowering women and restoring rights. I am very proud to be a second generation LwC fellow.



PATRICIA MCCRAY

FLORIDA

“So many of my brothers and sisters have been broken by the words and deeds of others and made to feel unworthy. I want to let them know that if I did it, they can do it too.”

Every Tuesday night I go to the Federal Correctional Institution, Tallahassee. From 6:00 to 8:00 I teach mentor incarcerated women, preparing them for the hills and valleys, successes and challenges they'll face when they transition back into the community. I talk about my own life experience and how I found the power and courage to put my past behind me and start a new life of purpose and meaning. These sessions are always emotional for me because this is the same prison I was incarcerated in more than twenty years ago. Recently, I also began working with incarcerated women at the Federal Correctional Institute, Marianna. They heard about me and petitioned the Bureau of Prisons asking for me to come. I'm there every Saturday from 12:30-2:00. This work has changed my life.

It all started in 2013. A friend of mine told me about a meeting organized by criminal justice reform advocates to discuss the need for more support for reentry programs in the city of Tallahassee. I was nervous about going because I knew that there would be representatives from law enforcement from the sheriff's office and the city police, but I pushed myself. As we went around the table introducing ourselves, I heard God encouraging me to tell my story. So when I stood up, it came out—I said I was a convicted felon and I thanked everybody in the room for all they were doing for my brothers and sisters who had just come home or who were still inside. I got a standing ovation, and that was the defining moment that set me on my path.

Not long after that meeting I founded Butterfly Life Journeys, a faith-based organization providing coaching, training, and mentoring to women recovering from adversity. I compare my own life experiences of domestic violence, incarceration, homelessness, financial and health crises to the four stages of metamorphosis experienced by the caterpillar becoming a butterfly. In addition to working with women transitioning from incarceration, I go into the community to talk to and learn from women who have been affected by crime--the mothers, sisters, and wives left behind when their sons, brothers, and husbands are incarcerated.

Tallahassee has the unwelcome distinction of having the highest crime rate in the state of Florida. The city is known for its great educational institutions, but there is no manufacturing or industry to speak of, and good paying jobs are hard to come by. There's nothing else for us to do but work at low-paying fast food restaurants. My sisters and brothers returning home from prison and young black men and women who can't find employment become frustrated because their families are in need. So for some, crime becomes an economic opportunity. My mission is to be a voice and a vessel to inspire people to recover from adversity, uncover strengths, and have faith in their capacity to change themselves and the conditions that oppress them.

I love the powerful and dynamic energy I experience in Leading with Conviction. My three years in prison are nothing compared to some of the other brothers and sisters who had 10, 15, and more years. When I walk into a session, I want to bow down to Glenn and David and Ronald and all the staff for bringing us together. I want that same thing here in Tallahassee because so many of my brothers and sisters have been broken by the words and deeds of others and made to feel unworthy. I want to let them know that if I did it, they can do it too.



REUBEN JONES

PENNSYLVANIA

“I was given a chance at redemption, and that’s what I’m trying to give other young people.”

I am the Executive Director of Frontline Dads, Inc., a Philadelphia-based organization that provides cultural/educational programs and prevention/intervention services for youth and their families throughout Philadelphia and Montgomery Counties in Pennsylvania. We serve about 1,000 kids a year through our various mentorship programs.

I can personally attest to how crucial it is to have a mentor. As a young man I experienced tremendous setbacks and my bottom came when I was incarcerated. The idea that all prisoners are “predatory” is a misnomer. There are actually a lot of good people who happen to be incarcerated. They may have made bad decisions in the past, but at their core they are still human beings who care about other human beings. I had a couple of great mentors who introduced me to the world of literature, who introduced me to the world of philosophy and thinking and challenged me to be accountable for my actions and to have self-respect. So I went through a process of digging deep inside myself, finding meaning, and getting rid of some baggage. And then I started facilitating groups and running programs inside the prison. I co-developed and wrote a book while I was inside, and one of the first things I did when I got out was volunteer at a group home for kids. I’ve been volunteering at that same shelter now, and others, for 15 years.

I was given a chance at redemption, and that’s what I’m trying to give other young people who may not have had that mentor or father figure or role model in their life. And I see a lot of successes. I see kids graduate from high school and go on to college and the military. I’ve seen young men become fathers, take responsibility for their children, and go into different vocations. At the same time, we help our kids navigate a system which isn’t responsible, doesn’t respect life, and is racist, is sexist, is homophobic. That’s the reality we live with, and we don’t shy away from it. So we teach people to make better decisions, but we also teach them to look at the world around them and to hold folks in positions of power accountable.

Frontline Dads also leads and participates in policy reform campaigns. Right now one of our priorities is ending cash bail in Philadelphia. Unlike other places in the state, in Philadelphia you pay bail and the city keeps a percentage. We feel that the city shouldn’t be in the business of profiting off of other people’s misery. Through our coalition work with Decarcerate Pennsylvania and the Reentry Coalition we’ve worked on freeing juvenile “lifers” from prison and we’ve stopped the city from building a new county jail. We support individuals and families through training and services, and we also mobilize members of the community to lobby and rally in support of social justice.

Leading with Conviction has been a great experience. The training is very specific in that it challenges you to really delve deep into what you think you know versus what may actually be the reality in terms of dealing with people. Getting feedback from other people in my cohort and just watching Glenn and learning from him and his team has been extremely helpful. I love the fact that Glenn takes every opportunity to highlight us as leaders, so when we have the training there are always visitors from different walks of life and fields of expertise for us to meet and network with. At every level JLUSA has created these spaces for the leaders to shine. I am eternally grateful for this opportunity.



RICHARD SMITH

NEW YORK

“I’ve always had a sense of compassion in my heart for other people’s suffering.”

I am the Director of the Liberty Partnership Program, a college access program that services over 300 students and families in the city of Albany, New York. Many of the young people we serve have been impacted by the criminal justice system through the experience of having an incarcerated parent or other relative. We know that access to a post-secondary education is one of the best crime prevention strategies we have, and so the work I do is good for the individuals and families I serve and for the general public as well.

This past March I spoke at a rally at the statehouse in support of the successful Raise the Age New York Campaign. More than one thousand people came to call upon our elected representatives to raise the age of criminal responsibility from sixteen, a distinction New York shared with only one other state—North Carolina. For me it was really touching, because my first conviction happened when I was only 16 years old, and the rally was the first time I had spoken about it in a while. It forced me to think about all the ways I had been affected by being charged as an adult at the age of 16, being put into solitary confinement and being beaten up by corrections officers. Like many of the young people I work with, I was really just a kid struggling with issues related to child abuse—physical, emotional and sexual abuse--and struggling to define myself and deal with my anger. I know that sharing my personal narrative at the rally helped win hearts and minds, and that gives me a feeling of hope for the future.

I have always been someone who spoke out. I have this childish view of fairness that I’ve always kept with me. I was always the one who spoke out when I was a kid when I thought something was unfair and I’ve always stood up for other people who were being bullied or taken advantage of. Because of my own experience of abuse as a child, I became the self-proclaimed bully of other bullies. Then through my experience of being incarcerated for almost ten years I came to understand that the poverty, substance abuse, and impact of mass incarceration on my life early on were the results of policy decisions that were made by people who didn’t care about a particular segment of the community--poor people of color. When I got out of prison I went back to school, and today I am a doctoral candidate at SUNY Albany’s School of Social Welfare. My research focus is male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. I want to empower other people to become leaders and participate in the process of trying to correct some of the things we’ve gotten wrong in our society.

For me, being part of Leading with Conviction is incredibly timely. I had gotten to a point in my life where I felt alone, and that loneliness was driven by the unique experience of incarceration. Even though I’m a professional and I have these degrees and people see me in one way, there’s also a hidden reality. There’s something about being able to connect with people who can identify with that experience and help me make meaning of it. It’s not so much a training as it is a family of people I’m connected to through a mutual desire to utilize our experiences for the purpose of serving, helping and empowering other people. So when I talk about JLUSA, I talk about us as a family.



ROMARILYN RALSTON

CALIFORNIA

“I go everywhere to talk about education as a transformative practice for returning citizens.”

I am the Program Coordinator for Project Rebound at California State University, Fullerton. Our mission is to encourage and assist currently and formerly incarcerated people in our state to return to college, or go to college for the first time. I visit prisons, day reporting centers, and parole meetings to do my outreach. I go around and visit colleges and community colleges and connect with pipeline students to make sure they are getting the services they need to be successful. I recently spoke with the Orange County Sheriff's Department and they want to start having onsite presentations by Project Rebound in their five facilities. I'm a one woman show! I go everywhere to talk about education as a transformative practice for returning citizens and how important it is to help with the process of reentry and the quality of life.

Education has always been my saving grace, even as a child, and I've always loved books and learning. I had my first college experience while I was incarcerated. In the early 1990s I was part of two different college programs that were offered inside the California Institution for Women. But in 1994 we lost access to Pell Grants because of the federal crime bill, and those programs went away. I was stuck with a handful of credits but no degree. Later on I started to develop educational programs within the prison so I was able to stay involved. Then I realized I could continue my degree through correspondence courses. By the time I was released, I had all these degrees from schools that were basically diploma mills. But I'm hooked on the cap and gown, and I wanted to graduate with a real degree. Today I have a Bachelor's degree with honors from Pitzer College and a Master's degree in Liberal Arts from Washington University in St. Louis. Education is transformative and uplifting. It changes your world view because it changes you.

What gets me out of bed in the morning is the image and idea of one more person walking across the stage in a cap and gown and getting that graduate degree. I'm very inspired by the returning citizen scholars I work with. One young man who had taken some community college courses while serving almost nine years in prison contacted me about getting a BA degree in business. We helped him get admitted, and he paroled three days before the semester started in January. He hit the ground running and is doing remarkable work in the classroom, participating in campus organizations and clubs, and being an ambassador for the program. I hope to bring him and some other Project Rebound scholars to Los Angeles in May to attend the JLUSA Emerging Leaders training.

JLUSA's Leading with Conviction program isn't just about leadership training. It's about bringing your organization and the work you do to higher level of performance. It pushes you to think more deeply about who you are as a leader, and about the decisions you make and the relationships you have. The tools are different from standard leadership programs I've been involved in. It's really impressive and engaging.



SAM LEWIS

CALIFORNIA

“While I was incarcerated I helped others and when I came home, it just seemed natural to continue.”

I had a tough childhood. My parents divorced when I was seven, and by the age of 14 I had attended seven different schools in seven different neighborhoods. I was labeled as disruptive and angry by my teachers and told I would never succeed. By the age of 16, while I was living in South Los Angeles, I dropped out of high school and became heavily involved in gangs. By 18, my gang activity led to a 15-year- to-life prison sentence. I served 24 years.

It was in my seventh year of incarceration that I changed the course of my life, and I owe that change to my daughter, who is now 29 years old. She was only seven when she softly whispered in my ear, "Can you stop fighting?" That simple request started me down a new path. I started going to Alternatives to Violence Program (AVP) workshops and became certified as an AVP Team Coordinator/Facilitator. I earned an Associate's Degree in Paralegal Studies so that I could help other inmates with their legal documents. I was denied parole eight times, but I never gave up, and finally, in 2012, I was granted parole. I went on to graduate with honors from college with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration degree.

Today I am the Director of Inside Programs for the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC). I manage two grants covering six prisons in California. I visit the prisons and talk to the people inside to learn what programs they need to move forward. Just recently, I went into the Calipatria State Prison which is a maximum security prison. I spoke to over 100 guys who are currently incarcerated and found out that they didn't have access to the kinds of programs that would help them move forward. So we will be creating and facilitating a curriculum there that will include everything from Board of Parole hearing preparation, job readiness, literacy and youth offender mentoring. Giving directly back to people who are incarcerated is the work I love. I also spend every Saturday evening mentoring youth currently incarcerated in Juvenile Hall and facing lengthy prison sentences. While I was incarcerated I helped others and when I came home, it just seemed natural to continue.

Through ARC I am also involved in policy reform advocacy. There is a lot going on in the State of California. During this legislative cycle we are supporting about 24 different bills, including bail reform, and raising the age of "youth offenders" from 23 to 25. One of our biggest victories was the passage of Proposition 57 in November 2016. It shifts the power of deciding whether a juvenile should be tried as an adult from the prosecutor to the judge and allows for a more robust "fitness hearing" to consider the child's life experience. Prop 57 also rewards people serving time with sentence reductions based on their participation in programs that reduce recidivism, including high school and college programs and self-help groups.

The fact that formerly incarcerated people like me are sharing our life stories has made these reforms possible. We're no longer just a number on a state sheet; we're people who have had opportunities that should be afforded to all justice-involved people.

The Leading with Conviction training is helping me remain professional in circumstances that are sometimes difficult. Doing this work, you're not always going to be in a space where you can be calm, cool and collected. Knowing how to navigate feelings and how to respond on a professional level and stay focused is critical. I'm also learning how to lift up my staff and to elevate them as leaders.



SANDY LOMONICO

CONNECTICUT

“We’re creating a new platform for telling the story of mass incarceration.”

When I was 19, I became pregnant with my daughter, who is now 15 years old. At the same time my mother was diagnosed with terminal metastatic cancer. After telling my elderly father that I was pregnant, he kicked me out of the house and I became homeless. Without any kind of support system, I made some desperate and impulsive choices that led to a felony conviction and a prison sentence.

For a long time after I completed my sentence, I hid my past incarceration out of a feeling of shame. I began attending college and tried to fit in. I put on this persona that I thought was “normal.” At the same time, I was having a hard time finding full time employment so I could support myself and my daughter. I was turned down by literally hundreds of employers. Once they found out about my conviction, they told me I was a “liability” and I realized this was a stigma I would have to carry for the rest of my life. It was all very discouraging.

But things changed when I became a graduate student at the University of Connecticut’s School of Social Work. I had an advisor who I was able to confide in, and he said, “You have a story and I think you need to share it.” We talked about the need to shift the culture and to change the way people thought about those of us who made a mistake, paid the price, and were trying to rebuild our lives. It was really hard to be open about my past, but it felt good and it led to my becoming a community organizer and criminal justice reform advocate.

Since then I have helped lead the successful campaign in support of a statewide Fair Chance Employment law, and worked on the adoption of the Second Chance Society Initiative. Today I am advocating for the passage of a new raise the age law that will make my state the first in the U.S. to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 21. I founded Students Against Mass Incarceration (SAMI), an on-campus group that holds events to raise awareness about how social workers can become more involved in organizing and policy work. And I was a lead organizer for the University’s annual Stop Mass Incarceration Week. Last year I was honored to receive the Student of the Year Award from the Connecticut Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

My own experience taught me the importance of having a voice and using it. For those of us who have been incarcerated, it doesn’t matter how old you are or what your background is. Whether it was the culture you were a part of or you simply lost your way, we are all human and we all make mistakes. We need more people willing to tell their stories and JustLeadershipUSA is creating a new platform for telling the story of mass incarceration.

For me, Leading with Conviction has been an amazing experience. It’s giving me the tools to be a more effective leader and to help others become leaders and have a voice. I’m very excited about being a part of the JLUSA family.



SHAE HARRIS

WASHINGTON, D.C.

“Because I care about my people, I can’t just sit and not speak up against injustice.”

I work as Policy Advisor for the Deputy Mayor of Public Safety and Justice in Washington, D.C. where I am the first person to hold this position. I was brought on board to help guide the policies and practices of the District’s criminal justice system. Before I was hired as Policy Advisor, I served as the Deputy Director at the Mayor’s Office on Returning Citizen Affairs where I ran day to day operations. What I learned through my daily interactions with the people directly impacted by the system prepared me to serve as a committed advocate. I see my career as doing what I can to create equal justice for all the residents of D.C., regardless of their zip code. I want to leave the world a better place than how I inherited it. I have a genuine love for Black people and culture, and because I care about my people, I can’t just sit and not speak up against injustice.

I have cared deeply about these issues since I was a child. When I was home in Columbus, Ohio for Thanksgiving, I came across an old scrap book of mine. In it was an essay I had written in 8th grade when there had been a spike in crime in the city. The schools were being patrolled by police officers, and students had to pass through metal detectors. I described the school-to-prison pipeline before that term was coined and wrote that it was not only discriminatory, but it created an atmosphere that undermined our right to a quality education. That essay won a prize and the experience taught me an important lesson: I had a voice and I could make an impact and a difference.

Years later, when I was in college in North Carolina, I had a summer internship with the NAACP Washington Bureau. I had the opportunity to meet and talk with Marc Mauer of The Sentencing Project, Julie Stewart of Families Against Mandatory Minimums and other leaders. Those conversations were transformative. I walked away from that summer knowing I wanted to change the criminal justice system. I saw that our laws were extremely unjust and led to the disproportionate incarceration of Black and brown people. And when I went home to Ohio, I saw how the collateral consequences of involvement with the system were absolutely destroying the community I was from. So many people I know and love were damaged. The more I learned, the more I knew what my path would be.

My participation in JLUSA’s Leading with Conviction training is yet another step on what I see as my life’s path. Being among other leaders who have been affected by the criminal justice system affirms my purpose and reenergizes me. Having just completed the first training session, I am truly excited about the experience and looking forward to the next one.



SHAWN GARDNER

MISSISSIPPI

“People don’t understand what you go through when you have a criminal record.”

Just before Christmas in 2015 I found out that I was one of almost 200 people who received a pardon from Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear. On that day, I finally got to live my life as a free person. Up until then, even though I had earned a Master’s degree, founded a successful nonprofit organization and published a memoir, I felt like I couldn’t really live life. I felt like I couldn’t breathe. People don’t understand what you go through when you have a criminal record.

When I was 18 years old, I was charged with a felony and ended up spending two years in the county jail. I was pressured into pleading guilty so I could be released with “time served,” and so even though I was never sent to prison, I emerged with a criminal record that would hang over my head until I received the pardon many years later. During those years, I was hit with a bunch of curve balls that made me incredibly frustrated. Worst of all was when I filled out the form to be a volunteer at my children’s elementary school and was told that I was disqualified after they did a background check. That meant I couldn’t be a chaperone on class trips, and I couldn’t even do something as harmless as read to the kids in the classroom. There was no appeal process, and I started speaking out about the unfairness of the process. I felt that it wasn’t right, and I wanted to do something about it. I reached out to other fathers in my community who were also having difficulty being the responsible parents they wanted to be because of different barriers that stood in their way. We had a powerful and emotional meeting as we shared our stories. We realized that there were no services in all of Jefferson County to help us be better fathers, so I started a new organization, 2NOT1 Fatherhood & Families, Inc. As I got deeper into the work I discovered that many of the fathers were, like me, dealing with the stigma of a criminal record.

Our slogan is, “Changing the Lives of Children, One Father at a Time!” We engage, educate, and empower men to be the best fathers they can be. Since 2007, we’ve provided family-building services to more than 4,500 Louisvillians. We hold different events, like our annual Fatherhood Conference, our Young Fathers Summit, and our Mothers Forum. Our Rites of Passage is a program for boys between 4th and 7th grades because we recognize that they’re missing some of the support they need when their fathers are absent. It covers life skills and conflict management over a 20 week period of discussions and activities designed to get the boys out of the inner city and into the wilderness where they take fishing and camping trips and learn skills to navigate life, and strategies to deal with conflict. In the future, I plan on strengthening 2NOT1’s advocacy program. Two issues I know we’ll be looking at are first, pressuring the Jefferson County School Board, which is not very forgiving, to change its policy so that parents with records can volunteer in their children’s schools. Watching the #CLOSErikers campaign has really given me an understanding of how to build momentum to get things done. It will be an uphill battle, but I do believe that if can get people who are most affected to come out and talk, we’ll do okay. Second is the issue of child support. Right now there’s a lack of communication between the state and local agencies. This causes the state to garnish fathers’ paychecks and even their bank accounts even though they’ve been making their child support payments. These mistakes cause a lot of problems for men who are struggling to fulfill their responsibilities.

The Leading with Convictions trainings have been transformational. It feels really good to be in a space with so many people who didn’t give up and who have endured so much. It’s inspiring and also humbling once you realize that you’re not the only one who is successful. I’m getting my Ph.D., but you’re in a space where 4 or 5 people are getting their Ph.Ds and 2 already have them. I got a pardon, but I’m not the only one. My fellow leaders are doing good work, and that’s inspiring.



TARI WILLIAMS

MICHIGAN

"I am the Organizing Director for the Greater Birmingham Ministries (GBM), a civil rights and social justice organization founded in 1969 by a group of far-sighted faith leaders from the Birmingham community."

Voting rights is one of my highest priorities. Disenfranchisement is a huge issue in Alabama, especially for African Americans and especially for formerly incarcerated people. Alabama's 1901 constitution stripped voting rights from anyone whose crime involved "moral turpitude." The term was left intentionally vague and was a major tool for disenfranchising African Americans during the Jim Crow era, and it functions the same way today. In Alabama, 90 percent of the people who can't vote because of felony convictions are African American. In May, the Governor finally signed a bill that defines "moral turpitude" with more specificity, but we are still fighting to overcome the barriers that prevent justice-involved people from voting.

Our biggest recent victory was passing a bill restoring people's eligibility for food stamps. Back in 1996 a federal "war on drugs" bill barred people convicted of a drug felony from ever receiving food stamps, welfare and public housing. Until recently, Alabama was one of only four states that had not lifted the food stamp ban. It took us three years of organizing and coalition-building, and in February 2016, tens of thousands of Alabamans had their rights restored. Next we're going to take on the public housing ban.

I was aware of these issues before my own criminal justice involvement. I became a lawyer in order to work on juvenile justice issues, and I spent several years interning at the ACLU of Alabama working on the "driving while black" campaign. But it was my own brush with the system that woke me up to the everyday impact a criminal record has on people's lives. Because of my legal background, I was able to navigate through it. But I met and saw people every day who were just like me who, through no fault of their own, couldn't access the very opportunities that would have allowed them to succeed. I realized I had to work on issues that impact the everyday lives of people. I have a 17-year-old son, and every time he walks out the door I am nervous and fearful. But that fear also feeds the fire in me to make the world a better place.

Being part of JLUSA has allowed me to shine brighter so that I can be seen. Those of us who have been through the incarceration experience often want to shrink up, be small, and pass through as best we can without making waves or rocking the boat. The truth is you engage with someone who has been involved in the criminal justice system every day; you just don't know it. Leading with Conviction is allowing me to be proud of who I am and what I've gone through, and to use my background as an advantage rather than a disadvantage.



TONY FUNCHESS

OREGON

"We all grow up with the understanding that prisons and jails are acceptable because that's where the bad people go."

We trust the police are doing their job the way we trust doctors and lawyers to be doing their jobs--with respect and integrity. So we don't give prisons a second thought. That's what I felt until my life was interrupted by my own criminal justice involvement.

Going to prison was terrifying for me, and at first I was filled with suicidal thoughts. Then one day my six year old son sent me a picture of two stick figures, one on top and one below. The one below he labeled "Dad" and gave him a speech bubble that said, "I'm so sorry." The one above he labeled "God" and he said, "I forgive you." In that moment I knew that no matter what I done that the world had said was wrong, I must have done something right enough that a six year old understood the power of God's forgiveness and understood how desperately I needed it. So I tell my son, who is now 18 that I may have given him life, but he gave life back to me.

After that I began to live again. I began to organize the men I was imprisoned with, and what happened was everyone came and shared their life stories with me. I began to hear that men had hearts and had narratives about their lives being impacted and I began to see that the system was flawed. This was a system that was capturing all these broken people. These were young men who were broken and damaged and just trying to survive. I began to see how the threads all began to weave together, to see that it's by design and that prison isn't automatically for where bad people go because there were plenty of good people in there. That's when I knew that I had to work against that system when I got out.

Today, I work as a consultant with arts organizations in Oregon, my home state. I believe the story telling that takes place on the stage in a theater creates empathy and awareness in the audience. People are exposed to narratives that they traditionally don't hear and that challenge their assumptions. If it's well written and executed, a play can activate a level of curiosity so people are moved to ask, "Can this be true?" And from that place it is my hope that the audience is moved to investigate further and become more aware of the wider world they live in. Through the post-show discussions I organize for the theaters I work with, conversations are sparked and dialogue happens around issues of identity and marginalization. Folks learn and grow and begin to challenge the commonly accepted narrative about who goes to prison and why.

I don't think there's enough story-telling--whether it's informative or theatrical--that elevates these issues to a place that wider audiences can access. What makes theater such an important vehicle is that folks pay to be entertained and so they come in unarmed and open to what's being presented. And if we're able to add a human face to it -- whether it's a story of criminal justice, homelessness, whatever the issue is--then theater has a way of inserting new narratives into your psyche and your heart. It can illuminate how horrific conditions are in prisons across America.

Leading with Conviction is the best leadership development training I've experienced. We so often elevate one leader and expect that person to do the heavy lift for all of us. This training is powerful because it honors the leadership that already exists within us and helps us identify the leadership in others.



TROY F. VAUGHN

MICHIGAN

“People like me who have been the beneficiaries of charity have a responsibility to make sure we’re creating capacity for those coming behind us.”

When I got out of jail in 1988, I was homeless, living on Skid Row in a cardboard box. After four years of homelessness, I had a spiritual awakening and I asked the Lord if he would help me change my life, so that I could dedicate all my gifts and talents to Him for the rest of my life. On December 13th 1992, I checked into the Union Rescue Mission, a Christian Life discipleship program in Los Angeles. I went to community college, graduated with honors, met my wife, got married and started a family, and I haven’t looked back.

Today I am the Founder and Executive Director of the Los Angeles Regional Reentry Partnership, a network of over 400 organizations throughout the county dedicated to creating viable housing, employment solutions and system-wide policy change for formerly incarcerated people. I also serve as Senior Pastor of Inglewood Community Church. My current position is the result of years of education, and of organizing at the grassroots level, going in and out of missions on Skid Row and creating new programs. Over time I realized that I had a talent for creating programs at the community and then the state level and that I knew intuitively how to put together a team to do what needed to be done, and to manage that team so that it could just keep going after I moved on to another project.

In 2009 our state legislature passed SB 678, the California Community Corrections Performance Incentives Act. The Act created a system of performance-based funding for counties that were able to save state General Funds monies by diverting people on probation from returning to prison. In other words, the money saved by alternatives to incarceration is being sent back into the community to create opportunities for returning citizens. I’m currently working with Probation and the Department of Health Services to ensure that the monies garnered from the savings are being distributed to community based organizations doing the work.

A lot of work that I do is to sit on various state and community governing bodies, so I sit on 6 of them. I see my role as being the voice of people with lived experience and creating pathways to use the collective power of my network of over 400 agencies—advocacy groups, large nonprofits, small nonprofits, public entities, business owners, healthcare partners—to increase capacity. I’m a proponent of the inside- out strategy. While I’m at the decision-making table I make sure that my partners are out there mobilizing community support.

One of the programs I’m excited about is a new \$1.3 billion pilot called Whole Person Care involving the coordination of patient-centered health, behavioral health, and social services for target populations with poor health outcomes, including returning citizens. As a member of the Principal Partners Leadership Team, I was part of a team that successfully advocated for a new classification in the county hiring charter so that formerly incarcerated people could be hired and jobs were created specifically for them. And not just entry level jobs; we are in the process of ensuring that they will have a career track to allow people to move up to other leadership positions.

Leading with Conviction has been a life-changing, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me. You come into this space and share it with what I call “world leaders.” JLUSA has sharpened and honed my resolve to make a deeper impact. Now I’m ready to go national! One of the things I’ve learned from Glenn and his leadership style is that you can get out of the way and it’s okay. You can put your team in place and get out of the way, and by allowing them to shine, you shine brighter. People like me who have been the beneficiaries of charity and good will have a responsibility to make sure we’re creating capacity for those coming behind us.



VENUS WOODS

ALASKA

“This is the time for my kind of work.”

I am the Reentry Supervisor for the Cook Inlet Tribal Council. The Cook Inlet region of south central Alaska is the traditional homeland of the Dena'ina and Ahtna Athabaskan peoples, but the population I serve includes Alaska Natives from many parts of the state who have migrated here. I manage a long term residential center for men who are dealing with overcoming the challenges of addiction, homelessness, and reentry. Part of my job is visiting prisons and jails to do in-reach to connect people with the resources they will need when they come out. I know that reentry starts the day you go into prison, and reentry and treatment go hand in hand. Alaska's recidivism rate is high – 64 percent. I aim to change that.

I come from a family where incarceration and addiction have destroyed generations. Growing up, both of my parents struggled with substance abuse and I spent a big part of my childhood in the foster care system. I faced my own issues with substance use which eventually landed me in prison. After my last incarceration in 2009, I vowed to break the cycle of substance abuse and recidivism in both my own family and my community. In spite of the obstacles I've faced, I'm one of those people who believe you can do anything if you put your mind to it. So after my release, I took a position with the Alaska Native Justice Center doing prison in-reach before joining the Cook Inlet Tribal Council where I received my Chemical Dependency Counselor certification. I am also a team member of Alaska's first federal re-entry court, Hope Court, and I serve on the Steering Committee for the Anchorage Re-entry Coalition.

This is the time for my kind of work. It's an exciting time here in Alaska. In July 2016 Senate bill 91 was signed into law. This far-reaching reform came out of the hard work of our advocacy community. It affects pretrial, sentencing, corrections and community supervision, and will reduce the state's incarcerated population by 13 percent by 2024. It's an exciting time, and it aligns perfectly with my personal goals – to continue learning and improving my leadership skills so I can make change at the national level.

Being part of JLUSA's Leading with Conviction training is a life-changing experience for me. I feel like I've known the 35 other members of the cohort forever; we just clicked together. There is so much knowledge and passion in the room, and I truly believe that if we keep practicing the skills that JLUSA is teaching us we're going to be phenomenal leaders.



WALEISAH WILSON

GEORGIA

"What is my ultimate goal on this journey? To reform and shift the system, change perceptions, eliminate stigmas and solve problems."

When I went into prison I already had a Master's Degree and was running a nonprofit organization and working on my Doctorate. To be honest, before I was incarcerated myself I had very little sympathy for people with a criminal record. My attitude was, "I'm sick and tired of these people. There's no reason why they can't get a job or stop using drugs." I was completely dumb to all the issues and barriers that they had to deal with because of their criminal record. But once incarcerated, I quickly learned of those challenges and I spent a lot of time doing what I thought of as research – talking to the other women and learning about the circumstances that had landed them there and why so many of them were back inside after being out for just a few months. I would ask them, "What's the one thing that would help you stay out of jail." And each one said, "If I had a good job I wouldn't have to steal or prostitute."

When I got out of prison I decided to get a second Master's degree--this time in Nonprofit Management--and then set up my own organization in my hometown of Columbus, Georgia. New Life-Second Chance Outreach, Inc. specializes in workforce development and job readiness training for formerly incarcerated people. We show our clients how to complete a job application, how to dress for success, and how to prepare for an interview. We build relationships with employers who want to be a part of the solution. They'll call us and say, "We're looking for 15 or 20 people to work on the production line and we want to give people with records an opportunity." We've helped 135 people with records find jobs so far, and we love it! In February, my State Senator, Ed Harbison introduced Resolution 121 recognizing and commending me for my "outstanding commitment to criminal justice reform."

Now I've got the lobbying bug in me. I'm a rebel and I speak out when I see anything wrong going on. I collaborate with local and state organizations such as the NAACP, the New Georgia Project, Georgia Justice Project, Project Rebound and the Georgia Department of Community Supervision on different projects and campaigns. One of my top priorities is voting rights for people on probation and parole. In Georgia there are between 250,000-300,000 formerly incarcerated people who can't vote because they're still under correctional supervision. In the South, this harkens back to pre-civil rights days when the people in power wanted to keep black voices out of the political arena, and the best way to do that was to take the vote away. So it's deeply rooted, but we're going to change it. I'm also collaborating with other organizations on raising the age of criminal responsibility from 17 to 18 and passing legislation prohibiting the shackling of women prisoners during childbirth. Community education is really important to me, and right now we are planning educational events and screenings of reentry-focused films such as "The Return", "15 Years to Life" and "The Kalief Browder Story" for Georgia's Reentry Awareness Month in July to educate and bring awareness to the devastation and collateral damage caused by incarceration to individuals, youth, families and society.

The Leading with Conviction training has completely turned around my self-confidence and has put me at the level where I can say that I'm not defined by my past. I love the fact that everyone in the room has a shared sense of the experience of being incarcerated and that we defy the myth of what people expect us to be like because of our criminal records. We are NOT our past and to be honest our past has been a blessing to us as it is what drives our advocacy and activism today. JLUSA is giving us the education and training to be better leaders. People don't realize that there is a lot of talent behind bars. I believe the cure to cancer and HIV is behind prison walls right now and if only given the opportunity to do so, we can do great things. When given second chances, we can and WILL prove a lot of people wrong!



2018 Emerging Leaders: Charlotte, NC



2018 Emerging Leaders: Milwaukee, WI



2018 Emerging Leaders: Louisville, KY



2018 Emerging Leaders: Phoenix, AZ



ADRIAN VASQUEZ

CALIFORNIA

“The past is the past and it doesn’t identify who you are now.”

When I was a kid, I wanted to be a DEA federal agent which is ironic because by the time I was 19 years old I was looking at the death penalty. That was in 1994 and it was my first conviction. My sentence was reduced to life in prison, but I got out the “hard way” by trying to behave and excel as much as I could. I finally was granted release in 2014 when there was a shift in politics under Governor Jerry Brown.

The R at the end of CDCR (the California Department of Correction and Rehabilitation) for “rehabilitation” is just a mockery that feeds the lie to the public that there was rehabilitation. There were no programs. When I was at Corcoran State Prison I would try to get college material and the officers would purposely delay our books and I would have to drop classes. I would be working on an assignment and the guards would search our cells and take away our books. So I rebelled by pushing for higher education. Yes, I was marginalized and stigmatized, but my parents always pushed for higher learning. While I was incarcerated two of my brothers graduated from college and one ended up getting his Masters at Stanford, so that motivated me. Three years before my release I started writing to the Director of the Criminal Justice Department at California State Long Beach, and she encouraged me to come back to school. On May 23rd, 2018 I graduated with a B.A. in Sociology.

While I was at Cal State Long Beach I helped found Rising Scholars to advocate for formerly incarcerated students. We ended up getting five professors on our board from the Sociology, History, and Criminal Justice Departments and had our first open forum a year ago. The lecture hall was filled, the College President was there, and we’d never had anything like it before. Since then more people have come out as formerly incarcerated and now we have real momentum. On April 23rd we co-hosted an event called “From Death to Life” featuring the actor and activist Danny Trejo who spent time in jail as a young man. That was a huge thing for us because we got to inform the college community that we are individuals who walk among them who are just like them except that we have some challenges to overcome. The past is the past and it doesn’t identify who you are now. It’s what you’re doing now that makes you who you are.

I also work for the Anti- Recidivism Coalition (ARC) as a case manager and job developer. It’s an organization that helps people who were system-impacted, meaning they were incarcerated or a family member was. I help our participants by providing support around their need for housing, employment, mentoring, and counseling. Eventually, I plan to go to law school so I can represent people who become justice-involved.

Leading with Conviction is phenomenal. It’s amazing to be sitting in a circle of 35-plus people who have been system-impacted, whether directly or indirectly, and everyone is succeeding. To be with people who are professionals, who strive to overcome such huge barriers is an inspiration and a blessing. Our worst enemy is doubting ourselves, so when I hear the same stories coming from so many different leaders I realize that they go through the same thing I go through. It’s been a very wonderful experience and every time I go I look forward to it.



CELIA COLÓN

ILLINOIS

“I decided to take a stand against violence.”

When I came home from prison, I started working for an international diabetes research center. I had never left the hood before, and now I was traveling the world. One day I was on a ferry on my way to the Bahamas, and I found myself thanking God for giving me my dreams back. I realized that when I was in prison, every woman I ever spoke to had been through abuse and trauma growing up. Each of us had a different story, but we were all hurt and wounded. I felt like someone needed to talk to women serving time and tell them that life is bigger than the horrific experiences of the past, and that they can still have happy lives. In that moment, I decided I would open myself up like an onion and share my life with others by starting a speaking ministry. I decided to take a stand against violence. That was 16 years ago.

Since then, I have taken my ministry, Giving Others Dreams (G.O.D.), into county jails and detention centers throughout the state of Illinois. My message is very clear. I tell the women, “You are one decision away from a different life. No one can stop you from doing what you want to do with your life. You don’t need anybody’s permission to make a change. If you feel it in your spirit, you just do it.”

I know that I bring hope to someone every time I go into a prison or jail. Women come up to me afterwards and say, “Hey, I’m going to be just like you when I get out.” Recently, I spoke in a super max facility and a woman asked if she could talk to me. She said, “Don’t you know who I am? I’m Jackie M,” and she began to cry. I hadn’t seen her since we were both 18 years old and fought in the prison yard. We were in opposing gangs from Chicago, where we were trained to hate each other and take each other’s lives just for being in different gangs. Fifteen years later, after hearing me speak, she learned we had lived the same abusive lives. She told me how sorry she was and we embraced. She said, “When I come home I want to do what you’re doing. Imagine how powerful we will be! We were in different gangs and I wanted to kill you. But now we’ll be working together.”

Going forward, I plan to work on stopping prison rape. As a survivor myself, I know there’s no help. There is no rescue team and if you file a complaint, the officers are sure to retaliate against you and abuse you. When I was released and finally able to talk about what had happened to me, the statute of limitations had run out, and nothing could be done. There are currently 30 impregnated women in the Logan Correctional Center, the state prison for women. For them, there is no justice. I want to change that.

JLUSA’s Leading with Conviction training is amazing and impactful. The work that’s being done by JLUSA really opens us up to blind spots and shows us where we need assistance. By working with us to change the narrative about mass incarceration and exposing the inhumane treatment of people in prison it is giving people hope that things can change. Giving hope changes the narrative for so many!



CHANDRA BOZELKO

CONNECTICUT

"What's at the top of my agenda now is my role as the new criminal justice columnist with Creators Syndicate."

I am a columnist, writing and publishing stories about a wide range of criminal justice reform issues. I've carved out an area in thought leadership, so my advocacy comes in challenging assumptions and encouraging people to think really hard about the issues that confront us as a movement. For example, there is a clash of values between the Me Too movement and criminal justice reform; between accountability on the one hand, and redemption on the other. Where do those two meet, and what are we willing to give up on either side to get any kind of consensus about how we should move forward? I took an unpopular position in a piece I wrote for CNN about how it was not a great idea to recall the judge who sentenced Brock Turner, a Stanford student convicted of three counts of felony sexual assault, to a relatively short six month jail sentence. I pointed out that if we're serious about criminal justice reform it would be better to keep a liberal judge on the bench than to replace him with someone harsher. I believe it's vital to raise those hard questions.

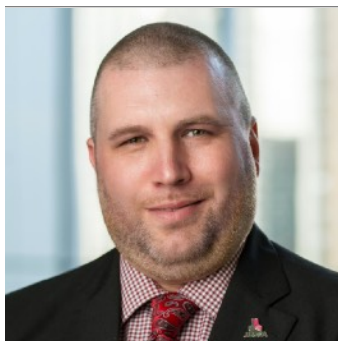
It was never my goal to become a writer, but when I was in prison, I began to take notes for a book or a possible lawsuit against the Department of Corrections because I saw so many things that were horrific and abusive. I took a writing class with the author Wally Lamb, and then my writing went into overdrive. I submitted some articles to the New Haven Independent and they responded, "Why don't we just let you write a regular column?" That was the origin of my blog, "Prison Diaries" and since then I've published articles in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Elle*, *Forbes* and many other outlets.

What's at the top of my agenda now is my role as the new criminal justice columnist with Creators Syndicate. I'm excited that I will be included on a roster with nationally syndicated columnists like Mark Shields and Connie Schultz whose pieces appear in every state and in many big cities. Any topic will be fair game. I can write about individual cases, about laws, and about news stories that have to do with the way formerly incarcerated people are treated. I can take on the big picture ideas, like who are prisons for? I believe that 99 percent of the people currently incarcerated don't belong there. But after spending six years in a maximum security facility, I know that some people need to be removed from society and I would be lying if I said everyone could be let out tomorrow and we wouldn't have any problems. But I want to abolish the way we think about justice and transgression and accountability and put the focus on the root causes of behavior. Bad choices and bad actions have roots in a person's personal history. The relationship between childhood trauma and incarceration is getting more attention today, but we also have to understand the daily trauma of poverty and trying to survive in the American economy.

My cohort was the first one to go through Leading with Conviction after our leader resigned, and grappling with that was a unique challenge. It was also a gift because we had to figure out where we stood on issues of accountability and redemption. I did worry about Glenn and about the movement and about members of my class.

On the other hand, we had some really important discussions about leadership and accepting the flaws of our heroes. Going forward I will be working on co-authoring pieces with other JLUSA fellows and investing in their thought leadership.

Prison Diaries won the 2018 People's Voice Webby Award and a number of other awards. Chandra is the Vice President of the National Society of Newspaper Columnists and a Member of the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences. While she was incarcerated, Chandra published a book of poetry entitled "Up The River: An Anthology."



CHRIS KIMMENEZ

PENNSYLVANIA

“It’s my mission to reengage the faith community with returning citizens on a nationwide basis.”

I am a Bishop Designate, an ordained Baptist minister, a psychologist, and a medically-retired marine warrant officer and combat veteran. I am also the National Director of Support Services for Healing Communities USA, a faith-based prison reentry initiative. My work involves reaching back into the faith community to reengage them in the social justice movement, with a focus on criminal justice reform. There are so many barriers that returning citizens have to overcome today—an estimated 40,000 laws and regulations nationwide that prevent people from finding jobs, homes, and educational opportunities. It’s like someone taking a Polaroid picture of you at one moment in time and having that one moment define your entire life.

I help churches, synagogues and other places of worship set up reentry ministries so they can create supportive environments within their congregations for returning citizens and their families, and also for the people they harmed. Our practice is based on the principles of restorative justice, a process that focuses on the rehabilitation of people through reconciliation with their victim and the community at large. I have experienced restorative justice personally, as both a formerly incarcerated person and the family member of a victim of crime. Twenty-three years ago, when I was emerging from my own addiction, my 14 year old son was killed in an act of street violence by another youth. I know what it’s like to be standing in a morgue at 1:30 in the morning to identify your baby boy. I felt a tremendous amount of guilt for not protecting my son. The other boy, who was only 12 years old, was tried and sent to a juvenile facility. A few years later, I was asked to preach at a facility in Maryland, and halfway through my sermon, I realized that the boy who killed my son was in the audience. I wanted to do what any father would have done, but God tapped me on the shoulder and said, “That’s not what I brought you here for.” I ended up telling him in front of the whole audience that I forgave him and we began a relationship and we’re still in contact today. He lives in California with his family and he does anti-violence work with gangs in LA and we are still very much in contact.

I’ve always been able to see multiple sides of all the issues, and that allows me to speak to different audiences. I’m a formerly incarcerated person with a military law enforcement background and I’m the father of a crime victim. I’m a pastor and a practicing psychologist, and the integration of faith and treatment informs my life’s work. I can speak from all those perspectives. As Co-Chair of the Restorative Justice Committee of the Pennsylvania Reentry Council I recently had a positive interaction with a member of the committee who was constantly blocking consensus on everything we were trying to do. So I took him out to lunch and asked him to tell me how he felt. I just let him talk for 45 minutes and used techniques I’ve learned from Leading with Conviction—just listening and providing feedback in a way that made him feel that he was being heard. Now we have a very different and much more constructive working relationship.

To be in a room with 30 other leaders has been literally life changing. As powerful as each and every one of us is, we are more powerful together and we are forming lifelong relationships. As a pastor, it’s refreshing to be with people who aren’t afraid to push back when I fall short.



DARWIN HAMILTON

TEXAS

“Our life experiences have greater value and power than anyone else’s in fighting for criminal justice reform.”

I left prison twenty years ago, and then spent seventeen years on parole. During that time, I got on with my life and established a career as a Senior Accountant with the Texas state government. Then, in 2011, I read Michelle Alexander’s book, “The New Jim Crow,” and heard her on the radio. She talked about things that most of us who have been incarcerated already knew, so the book wasn’t really a revelation, but it was refreshing to hear someone talking about it. Then she came to Austin to a church to give a talk. It happened to be the church that was my family’s church growing up, and her lecture lit a fire under me. I realized that people like me were going to have to lead the movement for criminal justice reform and against mass incarceration and I knew I had something to offer.

I went on to serve a two year term on the executive committee of the Austin/Travis County Re-entry Roundtable and today I co-chair, the Reentry Advocacy Project (RAP). Our mission is to engage formerly incarcerated men and women as leaders in bringing about policy change. We regularly testify before the Austin City Council and the state legislature, and we share our knowledge and perspectives through the media and public appearances. My current priority is to develop a series of talks that we’re calling RAPSTAR which stands for RAP Speaks, Teaches, Advocates, and Reaches. Modeled on the TED Talks, we’re going to have four or five people speak and then respond to the audience. I’ll be targeting the communities that have been most affected by mass incarceration. If I can get a couple of elected officials to participate that would be fine, but if it’s just people in the community, the directly impacted and their families, that’s also fine. Our life experiences have greater value and power than anyone else’s in fighting for criminal justice reform.

For me this work is very personal. I was 19 when I got arrested and charged with a drug offense, and I was 20 when I was convicted and sentenced to 22 ½ years in prison. That experience with the young and old men that I met and forged bonds with is something I will never forget. One of the first things guys often ask you is, “How much time you got?” This was an unusually long sentence for a first time offender and young person, but many prosecutors have little or no regard for any of that when you’re a black defendant in a jury trial. So the progress we’re making now is very gratifying. Last month the new Travis County District Attorney came to one of our meetings. We discussed decarceration and diversion programs and she challenged us to tell her what would work well versus what we see that’s not working. Now an Assistant DA meets with us regularly and works with us.

When people wonder why I fight for criminal justice reform I explain that I have been both convicted of crime and a victim of crime. All too often the people who are the harshest in talking about what people deserve as punishment have never been victims of crime or convicted of crime. If I expect people to give me a second chance and see the humanity in me then I also have to see the humanity in other people just like me.

The LwC trainer David Mensah is someone who has super powers. He definitely understands us, and I find that very fascinating. The members of my cohort are so dynamic. Just listening to their stories makes me feel like I need to do more.



DONALD PERRY

MASSACHUSETTS

“I am earnestly drawn to advocate for reforms on behalf of my children, my grandchildren and other members of my community.”

I was paroled in 2001 after serving nineteen years in the Massachusetts correctional system and I was committed to being an asset to my community instead of a liability. I have worked in human services for many years with the hungry, homeless and formerly incarcerated. In 2011, while giving a homeless person a ride, I was arrested and falsely charged with receiving stolen property. Even though I was acquitted at trial, the Massachusetts Parole Board revoked my parole and I ended up spending another year in prison before I was finally released thanks to the campaign launched by my supporters. As a result, based on my own experience I realized the necessity of reforming the antiquated policies of the Massachusetts parole system and eliminating the abusive practices of parole personnel. So, I founded Project Operation Change, a state-wide campaign advocating for the necessary reforms.

In Massachusetts, like in the rest of the country, a majority of the people being sent back to prison are for parole or probation violations. They haven't committed a new crime; there are merely charged with a technical violation like failing to report to their parole or probation officer, moving to a different residence without telling their P.O., failing to pay supervision fees, failing to keep a job or failing a drug test. The culture of the parole system is to “trail, nail and jail” people. This is devastating for people who are trying to rebuild their lives and for their families who find themselves that much further behind the eight ball. The culture and practices of parole need to change drastically.

I also serve on the steering committee of the Coalition for Effective Public Safety. We are pushing for the elimination of mandatory minimums for drug offenses, increased availability and utilization of diversion, compassionate release for elderly and dying prisoners, and presumptive parole. Once a person has served their minimum sentence they should not be constantly questioned about crimes they committed in the past when they go before the parole board. The board should look at what they've done since they committed the crime and they should be allowed to move forward.

My own experience has forged me for this work. Every report about mass incarceration identifies the community most impacted as my community—people of color. Based on my level of consciousness and concern, not only for what I've gone through, but for my children, my grandchildren and other members of my community, I am earnestly drawn to advocate for reforms. The way I look at it there's not one specific thing that's going to fix the system. The system of mass incarceration was built incrementally and we must dismantle it incrementally. It's like peeling the layers of an onion. We have to look at the different layers and organize people to undo a lot of the injustices. My objective is to engage my community and mobilize them in ways to help find their voices so they can advocate for the changes that are important to them.

I am honored to participate in the Leading with Conviction program. JLUSA staff are awesome people and I'm truly grateful for their investment in me as a human being, organizer and activist. My heart is full of admiration, respect and love for my cohort. All told, I've been exposed to a spectacular group of people. And, JLUSA has been a great learning experience. I'm already employing the skills I've learned. Based on my new skills I am transitioning from human services to being more advocacy-focused.

Donald Perry holds a B.A. from the University of Massachusetts and is the 2016 recipient of the Criminal Justice Policy Coalition's Peg Erlanger Award for his work toward criminal justice reform.



DOUG SMITH

TEXAS

“I have a real sense each day that the things I’m working on are actually going to result in meaningful policy change.”

I am the Senior Policy Analyst with the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC). These days, the policy that’s taking most of my time and attention is a project we’re doing around state jails. The state jail system in Texas was created in 1993 and was supposed to divert individuals charged with low-level drug offenses from long sentences in the state prisons. It was envisioned that these 4th degree felonies would be handled through probation or community rehabilitation, and if incarceration were warranted, it would be in a rehabilitative setting followed by supervision on the back end. But because the state didn’t provide adequate funding for those services, the state jails became a dumping ground for people with untreated addiction and mental health issues. On any given day, more than 9,000 men and women are serving time in the fourteen state jails. Most of them spend close to a year inside and then are released without any reentry support. Not surprisingly, people in this category have the highest recidivism rates and most will wear handcuffs again.

Our goal is to lower these state jail commitments and to make sure that the communities most impacted have a voice in developing reforms. We have a law providing local probation departments with the opportunity to request funding to develop Commitment Reduction Plans. But we don’t want to leave this process solely in the hands of the criminal justice actors. So I’ve been holding a series of stakeholder meetings where we invite the “system actors”—prosecutors, judges, sheriffs, and probation chiefs—to sit down with the “community actors”—formerly incarcerated people, reentry service providers and mental health folks. We are shifting the conversation away from incarceration and towards what the community wants: more drug treatment, harm reduction case management, and mental health services. Along with another LwC alumnus I recently participated in a successful grassroots campaign to prevent the construction of a \$97 million women’s facility at the local jail in Austin. Instead, we got the county to commit to diverting people to community service.

Working in this field wasn’t something I dreamed would ever happen. I thought I’d shut all those doors as I descended into drug addiction, mental health issues and ultimately criminal activity. My story is a little atypical in that prior to my incarceration I’d already achieved a Master’s degree in Social Work and had worked a couple of legislative sessions for various members of the Texas House of Representatives. I had also taught at the University of Texas as an adjunct instructor and was pretty well versed in policy. But after my life went off the rails I assumed I wouldn’t be able to return to the policy arena or even social work.

When I got out of prison I encountered the usual barriers to employment for someone with a criminal record, and I eventually found a job working in a warehouse for \$9 an hour. Then I learned that a friend of mine had been appointed to the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable. I wrote her an email about how difficult reentry was and I said if this was what I was going through I couldn’t imagine what it was like for someone who lacked the privileges I had. Then I pressed send. She read it and within days I was introduced to the TCJC and offered a job. Three days later I was testifying before a House committee. That was three years ago.

I have a real sense each day that the things I’m working on are actually going to result in meaningful policy change. The Leading with Conviction training is reinforcing the importance of building strong partnerships with grassroots leadership. It has helped me to be a better leader, lean into conflict, and continually improve by seeking feedback. I had a conversation with a funder recently and he said he wasn’t sure which he was more excited about, my policy work or the fact that I was on this journey of leadership.



DR. GRACE GÁMEZ

ARIZONA

“When you reach for the edges of your imagination, what is it that you want for yourself and the people that you love?”

My work speaks to people’s hearts and minds. I communicate a different way of thinking about how we deal with people who cause harm while still respecting and hearing the voices of people who have experienced harm. There’s a difference between accountability and punishment, and as currently organized, our justice system is a punishment system. This creates a host of problems that keeps people cycling in and out of the system. When I talk about a world without prisons, people think it’s pie in the sky. I know it will be a long road, but I believe we can do things better and differently. When you reach for the edges of your imagination, what is it that you want for yourself and the people that you love? We can hold people accountable *and* we can hold space for people who have experienced harm in a way that’s healing, and we can do that through a philosophy of transcendent love.

I work for the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in Tucson, Arizona where I created “Reframing Justice,” a multi-media storytelling project with incarcerated/formerly incarcerated/convicted people and their loved ones. I bring the voices of directly impacted people into the policy work the organization does around decarceration. Right now we are focusing on two videos we produced that will be introduced as testimony in the current legislative session. Through personal stories, they highlight the negative impact fines and fees have on a person’s ability to reintegrate back into society post-punishment. I am also conducting research on what constitutes “community safety.” A lot of what I do is I introduce a different lexicon into the discussion. When the state talks about “justice reinvestment,” it usually means more police on the ground and arming them with more lethal equipment. But when you ask people what it means to feel safe in their community, they do not say cops. They say knowing their neighbors makes them feel safe. They’re thinking about things like street lamps, libraries, access to good food, good schools, and zones of pleasure where the community can converge and have public events. My goal is to rename what we understand as “community safety” to be more about sustainability, wellness and resilience and less about reliance on a system of punishment.

I spent a long time trying to pass as a “civilian.” I didn’t want anyone to know about my conviction history. I devoted myself to the academy and my goal was to enter into the professoriate. I earned a Ph.D. in Justice Studies from Arizona State University, and a Master of Science degree in Mexican American Studies & Public Health from the University of Arizona. I was selected as the graduate student of the year when I completed my doctorate and was asked to deliver the commencement address. But five days before the ceremony, I received a call from the president’s office informing me the award was being revoked because of my conviction history. I was devastated. An offer I had received for a professorship was rescinded for the same reason—the legal department was afraid the public would find out that the university had hired a convicted felon. I was blessed when AFSC decided to hire me and to give me such broad latitude to bring the voices of directly impacted people into the organization’s work.

Leading with Conviction is a space where you don’t have to explain either the pain of shame and stigma or the passion for running back into that darkness in order to illuminate the way for others. That takes a certain kind of craziness, and I was in a room with a whole bunch of other crazy people and that felt really good. I feel incredibly blessed to be a part of the JLUSA network!



HAKIM CRAMPTON

MICHIGAN

“I felt there was a missing element in the struggle of young black youth, and that was having a mentor.”

AMEN stands for the Academic Mentoring and Education Network. I founded AMEN because I felt there was a missing element in the struggle of young black youth, and that was having a mentor. I went to prison at 18 and by the time I was 19 I ran into a man who was only a couple of years older than me. He was so mature, intelligent and articulate that in just a couple of weeks of me walking the yard with him, I began to grow intellectually. My ability to communicate was enhanced just by being with him for a short period of time. I became part of a group of brothers who were studying and learning and breaking free of who we were in our past and coming to grips with our future. Later in my incarceration, after having been transferred to a private prison in Oklahoma, we were allowed to have our own school in an empty wing of the facility, and that's where I started to plan for my life after prison. I knew from my own experience growing up that there were very few African American men in the traditional big brother type organizations because so few of us can pass a criminal history background check. After I was released in 2006 I began the steps to start AMEN 4 Youth in my hometown of Jackson, Michigan and in 2007 it was launched within a local Jackson non-profit called HAPE (Helping All People Excel).

I started out by mentoring in the schools and juvenile centers, all the way down to middle and elementary schools. Then I started building the educational component of the program by creating a curriculum. My first book, “SLAM, Spoken Lyrics for an Academic Mission,” was published in 2012. Since then I've come out with five more books which are the main ingredients of the AMEN for Youth program. The most recent is We've Got Words: A High School Student's Guide to The Parts of Speech & Public Speaking (S.L.A.M. Lyrical Education Curriculum Series) (Volume 6) which came out in 2016. My staff and I are in four to six classrooms a year and in county juvenile facilities throughout the state. We've reached thousands of kids here in Michigan, and my goal is to train people in different states so they can use the program. AMEN 4 Youth is my baby, and I created it while I was still in prison.

I also work as an organizer for the Student Advocacy Center of Michigan. My role is to organize young people to be student advocates within their school system. Our current focus is to address school push-out and the school-to-prison pipeline and we're part of the national Dignity In Schools Campaign. We have a program in the high school here called Jackson Pathway in which we are training our kids to be young student social workers and advocate for policy change. I've taken kids to the state capital to testify and our students were actually consulted by the Michigan Department of Education on the creation and implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016.

The LwC training ties right into the work I'm currently doing. It's giving me a strong aptitude to drive policy change and move with the collective power base of our youth who are the ones entering the criminal justice system. LwC isn't so much about teaching you about leadership; It's really about how to conduct yourself as a leader, how to be more insightful, circumspect and to actually lead and not be led.



HERNAN CARVENTE

CONNECTICUT

“What motivates me is the idea that I want young people to know that it’s possible to live a different life.”

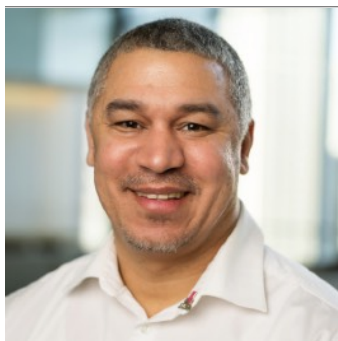
I am the National Youth Partnership Strategist for the Youth First Initiative. We are committed to ending youth incarceration, closing youth prisons, and investing in community-based programs, services and opportunities. My biggest focus is ensuring that young people have the resources and support to be effective leaders in their communities. My primary role is to create youth leadership structures that effectively engage young people in the day-to-day operations of the campaigns we are working on. Right now, for example, we are working closely with the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice on their 150 Years is Enough campaign. Our goal is to close the 150 year old New Jersey Training School for Boys (Jamesburg) and the Female Secure Care and Intake Facility (Hayes), substandard facilities that house predominantly black and brown young people.

We’re running similar campaigns in Virginia, Connecticut, Wisconsin, Kansas, Maine and Ohio, and we’re finding a lot of support in the communities most affected by juvenile incarceration. We’re also picking up some unlikely allies--people who at first were not in favor of closure, but after learning more about the school-to-prison pipeline, they’re rethinking their position on whether young people should be kept in places that are basically warehouses and cages. This is really taxing work where you’re constantly putting your story out there and being held up as a leader when you’re so young and still struggling to figure yourself out. But what motivates me is the idea that I want young people to know that it’s possible to live a different life. I work to make sure that young people see their own potential and that adults create a space for that potential to present itself.

I spent four years incarcerated in a maximum juvenile facility in New York State followed by two years on parole. I was fortunate in that two days saved me from going into the adult system. I committed the crime at 15 years and 363 days and in New York, before the age was raised, 16 year olds could be treated as adults. So I barely made it into the juvenile system which was not much better than the adult system. What got me through those years were two things: First, my daughter, who was born when I went into the system. She was my motivation in the beginning to pull myself together. Second was a man named Mr. James McCain, a teacher at the facility. He was the first person to look beyond the fact that I was a gang member with a murder conviction. He saw potential and he invited me to be a college student and not just another statistic. Through Mr. McCain I connected with a group of other young people in the program where I was able to take college courses. I was able to see that there was a bigger world out there and to see history through the lens of the African American and Latino experience. That education was my saving grace.

Being part of JLUSA has changed my life in many ways. As a young leader in this movement, I haven’t had a chance to invest in myself and I’ve never taken any intentional leadership training. Now I’m able to connect with leaders from different walks of life and from different experiences with the justice system. I’m incredibly grateful for the wealth of experience I’m getting as a Leading with Conviction fellow.

Hernan has served on the New York State Juvenile Justice Advisory Group and the Citizens Policy and Complaint Review Council. He also served as National Youth Chair of the Coalition for Juvenile Justice as well as an advisor to the National Academies of Science and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Hernan was awarded the “Spirit of Youth Award” by the Coalition for Juvenile Justice and the “Next Generation Champion for Change” award by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. He has a B.A. from John Jay College.



JAMES MONTEIRO

RHODE ISLAND

“I have freedom now and I have multiple choices and it’s only right for me to want that for somebody else.”

I am the Founder and Executive Director of Reentry Campus, a program to give people coming out of prison opportunities to access post-secondary education. I know from my own experience that there is a huge disconnect between the educational programming that happens behind the walls and what happens once you are outside. When I was in the Maryland Penitentiary in Baltimore, I accumulated 90 college credits, but when I was transferred up to Rhode Island, they didn’t want to accept my credits. I realized something needed to be done to make higher education more accessible and more affordable for currently and formerly incarcerated people.

The way Reentry Campus works is we prepare students for DSST and CLEP exams. They take a series of courses that we have built around these exams so they can earn transferrable college credits quickly and for free, saving thousands of dollars. When people are released from prison they have different issues going into an educational environment than a 17-year-old does, so we provide them with support services so they can focus and concentrate on their studies. If they need housing, we help them find housing. If they need substance abuse counseling, we help them with that. Once a student gets through these introductory courses with us we register them with our partner institution, Roger Williams University, my alma mater, where 90 percent of them will be eligible for Pell Grants and Financial Aid. We’ve had about 50 students come through our program in our first year and attracting people hasn’t been a problem. In fact it’s been hard keeping up with demand.

I dropped out of school in the eighth grade and spent most of my adult life in and out of the penal system. During my last stretch, I decided enough was enough. I was working in the prison’s employment resource lab and the more I read the more I realized that without a post-secondary education you couldn’t get far in the new economy. I read an article that was pivotal for me about a man who was locked up in Rhode Island and went to Brown University when he was released and then got his law degree from Yale Law School. I couldn’t believe someone could get out of prison and go to Brown. That motivated me to get my GED and I got my Associate’s Degree in Psychology, with Honors, while I was still inside. When I got out, I got my Bachelor’s Degree in Community Development at Roger Williams University.

Education = more money = more freedom--not necessarily physical freedom but the freedom of choice that education brings. I have freedom now and I have multiple choices and it’s only right for me to want that for others. There was a guy who helped me get back into school when I was struggling. I asked, “Barry, what do I owe you, man?” He said, “You don’t owe me anything. Just make sure you do it for somebody else.” That is what Reentry Campus is all about.

The best thing I got from Leading with Conviction is I’m never alone. There’s always someone I can reach out to across the country. I’m in Rhode Island where the population of people like me is small. So to go to New York and be around a lot of individuals who are like me and to have the support around the work I do is everything.

James Monteiro is the recipient of NAACP’s Joseph Leconte Award and is an Echoing Green Fellow. He was named as one of Rhode Island’s “15 to Watch” for his work in youth programs that address violence in the city and prepare the next generation of Providence leaders.



JEFFREY ABRAMOWITZ, J.D

PENNSYLVANIA

“I focus on getting employers to engage in the process of looking at candidates and realizing the talented pool that’s out there.”

I am a columnist, writing and publishing stories about a wide range of criminal justice reform issues. I’ve carved out an area in thought leadership, so my advocacy comes in challenging assumptions and encouraging people to think really hard about the issues that confront us as a movement. For example, there is a clash of values between the Me Too movement and criminal justice reform; between accountability on the one hand, and redemption on the other. Where do those two meet, and what are we willing to give up on either side to get any kind of consensus about how we should move forward? I took an unpopular position in a piece I wrote for CNN about how it was not a great idea to recall the judge who sentenced Brock Turner, a Stanford student convicted of three counts of felony sexual assault, to a relatively short six month jail sentence. I pointed out that if we’re serious about criminal justice reform it would be better to keep a liberal judge on the bench than to replace him with someone harsher. I believe it’s vital to raise those hard questions.

It was never my goal to become a writer, but when I was in prison, I began to take notes for a book or a possible lawsuit against the Department of Corrections because I saw so many things that were horrific and abusive. I took a writing class with the author Wally Lamb, and then my writing went into overdrive. I submitted some articles to the New Haven Independent and they responded, “Why don’t we just let you write a regular column?” That was the origin of my blog, “Prison Diaries” and since then I’ve published articles in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Elle*, *Forbes* and many other outlets.

What’s at the top of my agenda now is my role as the new criminal justice columnist with Creators Syndicate. I’m excited that I will be included on a roster with nationally syndicated columnists like Mark Shields and Connie Schultz whose pieces appear in every state and in many big cities. Any topic will be fair game. I can write about individual cases, about laws, and about news stories that have to do with the way formerly incarcerated people are treated. I can take on the big picture ideas, like who are prisons for? I believe that 99 percent of the people currently incarcerated don’t belong there. But after spending six years in a maximum security facility, I know that some people need to be removed from society and I would be lying if I said everyone could be let out tomorrow and we wouldn’t have any problems. But I want to abolish the way we think about justice and transgression and accountability and put the focus on the root causes of behavior. Bad choices and bad actions have roots in a person’s personal history. The relationship between childhood trauma and incarceration is getting more attention today, but we also have to understand the daily trauma of poverty and trying to survive in the American economy.

My cohort was the first one to go through Leading with Conviction after our leader resigned, and grappling with that was a unique challenge. It was also a gift because we had to figure out where we stood on issues of accountability and redemption. I did worry about Glenn and about the movement and about members of my class.

On the other hand, we had some really important discussions about leadership and accepting the flaws of our heroes. Going forward I will be working on co-authoring pieces with other JLUSA fellows and investing in their thought leadership.

Prison Diaries won the 2018 People’s Voice Webby Award and a number of other awards. Chandra is the Vice President of the National Society of Newspaper Columnists and a Member of the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences. While she was incarcerated, Chandra published a book of poetry entitled “Up The River: An Anthology.”



JENNIFER RODRIGUEZ

CALIFORNIA

“I consider all of the children who are living today in detention facilities, group homes and foster care to be my siblings.”

I spent my childhood in foster care and I was in and out of the juvenile justice system from the time I was twelve years old, often because a more suitable placement couldn't be found. The way children are pushed from foster care to juvenile and adult justice systems has not been given enough attention. It's very common to move youth between systems even though we know that spending even one night in the juvenile justice system exposes you to a multitude of harms. When I exited my last placement, I was in the same position I had been in when I entered foster care. I had no relationships with adults. I was homeless. I had a juvenile record. I had no education. I had moved so many times that I had never completed a single semester anywhere. Most importantly, I didn't have a vision for my future and I didn't have the belief in myself that would be necessary to have or execute a dream.

My road from system involvement to lawyer and leader required supportive policies and programs and the investment of adults who cared. I went to Job Corps, received my GED and was able to start at a community college. I had a teacher who became my mentor. She was the first person who believed I had potential and could have an impact on the world around me. She told me I could be anything I wanted to be. I realized that what I really wanted to do was to make sure that system-involved children had a different life than mine, and that those systems treated them like the special, unique and amazing potential leaders that they are. I don't have any siblings, but I consider all of the children who are living today in detention facilities, group homes and foster care to be my siblings. I wanted to be their advocate, so I went to law school and I received my law degree in 2004.

I have been working at the San Francisco-based Youth Law Center for 11 years, the last six as Executive Director. We are a national organization and we've worked in 37 states and Washington, D.C. Our advocacy is focused on system transformation, and the strategies we use are targeted to have the greatest impact for children--litigation, policy reform, public education, technical assistance, and collaboration. The problems and solutions we work on are identified by the children and families that are most affected and we integrate cutting edge research from other fields--brain science, child and adolescent development, and marketing and branding--into our work. Our Quality Parenting Initiative is aimed at strengthening foster care. We've introduced it into close to 80 jurisdictions across the country. We work to create opportunity for justice involved youth by prioritizing the relationships between parenting youth and their children (including fathers) in our Just Beginning Program, and work to build pathways between higher education and the juvenile justice system so that youth have the access, information and supports to attend and excel in college. Most importantly, our goal is to change the culture of these systems so that instead of seeing the youth in their care as a laundry list of the worst experiences and things they ever did, they see them as they were meant to be seen: as whole and valuable children who are worthy of love, who will be the parents of the next generation and as promising and inspiring leaders who will be neighbors, colleagues and friends.

I often tell people that I have learned the most about what children deserve and how much we need to transform the system from my 13-year-old son and 11-year-old daughter. Their job as teenagers is to take risks and challenge authority to become independent, and my job is not to punish them, but to protect them from harm and help them learn and use those experiences to launch themselves into the world. The only way to do that is with love, compassion and in the context of family. That's what our systems have to understand.

The Leading with Conviction training has been a life-changing experience. When I look at the amount of growth I've experienced in my own work over the past year in the areas where I have been the most stuck, I am inspired that anything is possible. This is important, because the issues we are tackling are the hardest and can seem intractable. For us to lead the necessary transformation of policy, practice and culture, we need the best possible leadership training, skills, and coaching, and that's what we are receiving through JustLeadershipUSA.



JOE CALDERON

CALIFORNIA

“My optimism tells me that there are enough cracks in the system for us to get in and break it wide open. We know what changes need to be made and together we can make it better for everyone.”

I am a Senior Community Health Worker for the Transitions Clinic Network (TCN), a national network of primary care clinics for men and women with chronic diseases recently released from incarceration. We are based in San Francisco, my hometown, but we have partners in eleven states and Puerto Rico so far. Our model is based on community empowerment. We start by creating community health worker jobs in clinics for people impacted by the criminal justice system. That way, people can leverage their experience of incarceration into a career in healthcare and help their community at the same time. Every one of our clinic partners employs community health workers (CHW) with histories of incarceration as part of the clinical team. These CHWs both challenge the negative stereotypes of “criminals” and simultaneously transform the health system.

In my work, I spend about 20 hours in our local Bayview clinic in San Francisco and 20 hours in the community, advocating on behalf of my clients. I love my job. I get to help men and women come home and not only remain healthy, but stay free, and that means a lot to me. As each individual comes out and learns how to take care of him or herself, that’s one more step towards ending mass incarceration. In my free time, I train community health workers in San Francisco and nationally sharing all that I’ve learned and supporting new CHWs in their careers.

I was incarcerated at the age of 23 and spent close to 20 years in the California state prison system. During those years I came to understand myself and the forces that led to my behavior. The pinch of poverty and homelessness that I experienced as a youth created the young man that believed in “by all means necessary” survival. Don’t get me wrong; I have insight into the young man I was and the debt I owe society for the things I did wrong. But from a macro level, it was almost inevitable that many of us went the route we did. Before I went away I took my girlfriend, who is now my wife, to the projects where I grew up. There were BMWs and Mercedes all over the place. As we drove through I pointed and said, “See all those kids around that car? It looks like they’re having fun, right? In communities that have privilege, those Beemers and Mercedes belong to doctors, lawyers and architects, but here they’re owned by drug dealers. So what do you think those kids want to be?”

Growing up in such a community means having to deal with poverty, racism and lack of equity every day. My optimism tells me that there are enough cracks in the system for us to get in and break it wide open. We know what changes need to be made and together we can make it better for everyone. One thing is for certain: the voices of those most affected must be at the table to create the solutions. David Mensah is teaching us that leaders live in conflict, and conflict is an opportunity to change minds or at minimum, be able to define issues so others can understand or agree to disagree. What’s important is the work and system change as we strive for equity for all communities.

For me, Leading with Conviction has been very inspirational. It’s inspirational to meet great leaders from across the nation who were previously incarcerated. The networking and social capital is priceless. The training itself hones the skills of returning community members adding new skill sets as we move forward in hopes for a better world for all.

Joe is a recipient of the Senior Ex-offenders Program’s “In the Trenches Award.” He has served on the San Francisco Reentry Council and the Equity Advisory Committee of the San Francisco Human Rights Council. He currently serves on the San Francisco Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion Policy Committee.



KANDRA CLARK

NEW YORK

"You're born either with a fight or flight response, and luckily I was born with the fight response. I've been fighting since I was a child."

I grew up in a small town in Illinois, population 1,000. My family was poor and plagued with domestic violence, sexual abuse, drug use, and neglected mental health needs. My first arrest, for curfew violation, came when I was fifteen. Throughout my teen years I was arrested for underage drinking and drug possession and was cycling in and out of the legal system. I spent my 25th birthday on Rikers Island, and got sent upstate to the Beacon Correctional Facility. While I was incarcerated, I received a letter from my son saying, "Mom, I'm tired of writing to you in jail." That's when I decided I had to make a change, or I would find myself at the age of 60 in exactly the same spot.

I'd always been interested in the legal system, so I took a legal research course and became a law clerk. My "salary" was 25 cents an hour, and it was one of the best jobs I've ever had. I was able to help women who were like my mother who died at the age of 46 and who had absolutely no voice. I was the first law clerk they felt comfortable with in filing their parole appeal because they were so ashamed of their crime. I was the first law clerk that the girls knew was fighting for them. We had black mold in our shower, and nobody had ever done anything about it. Our superintendent refused to correct it, so I wrote to the Department of Corrections Commissioner and the next week a team of workers were ripping off the roof and redoing the entire heating and ventilation system. That gave me more confidence, and I knew that when I got out I would keep fighting. You're born either with a fight or a flight response, and luckily I was born with the fight response. I've been fighting since I was a child.

Today I am the Strategic Partnerships Liaison & Senior Grant Writer at the Fortune Society. A lot of my advocacy work focuses on the sexual assault-to-prison pipeline. The overwhelming majority of women in prison are survivors of domestic violence, and 85 percent have suffered serious physical or sexual abuse as children. I do a lot of public speaking about the correlation between women and childhood trauma and how it leads to incarceration and I recently gave testimony before the New York City Council about sexual abuse and harassment in the city's jails. I testified that I was living proof of the resilience and strength of women who have been impacted by the legal system, and I urged the Council Members to engage with me and other women leaders with lived experience to work together to overhaul our criminal justice system and to create the gender responsive programming and space to allow women to overcome the trauma they have experienced.

For me, Leading with Conviction has been life-changing. Our cohort started out as a roomful of strangers, but halfway through the very first day, I realized they were my family. David has helped me be a stronger advocate, and I infuse the Breakthrough Actions into my daily life. The training has been instrumental in getting me to open up more, get more support, do more networking, and make more strategic connections.

Kandra Clark is pursuing a Master's Degree in Public Policy & Administration, with a focus on Urban Affairs at John Jay College of Criminal Justice.



KENT MENDOZA

CALIFORNIA

"Even though it seems like we're doing a lot, there's still way more to do."

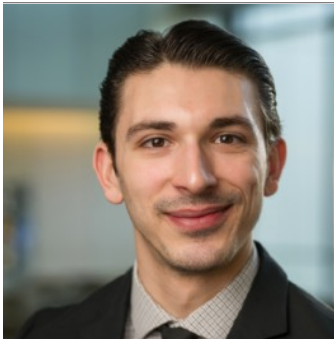
I am the Policy Coordinator for the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) in Los Angeles. We provide hundreds of formerly incarcerated people with mentorship, mental health services, supportive housing, access to jobs and education. We also give our members opportunities to advocate for criminal justice reform. As Policy Coordinator, I conduct trainings for our members to prepare them for lobby visits in Sacramento. I coach them on how to tell their stories effectively and relate their stories to the particular bill we're supporting. Right now we're working on six different bills and one ballot measure. One is a bail reform act which will eliminate cash bail. The ballot initiative is the Voting Restoration and Democracy Act, which will re-enfranchise about 162,000 Californians who are either in prison or out on parole. Even though it seems like we're doing a lot, there's still way more to do.

On April 3rd I took a bunch of ARC members to Sacramento to advocate for S.B. 1391 which will end the transferring of 14 and 15 year olds to adult court. Each of them had been sentenced in adult court at that age and used their own experiences to explain why it's not right to send such young people through the adult system because the chances of recidivism are higher than if they were put through the juvenile system where the level of violence isn't as deep. We were all at the Senate Public Safety Committee hearing where the bill passed 5 to 1. It was a great experience!

I came to this country from Mexico when I was six years old and grew up in the low income immigrant community of Pico Union District. I didn't have a father figure, became involved with a gang, and had my first brush with the law when I was 13. I served time in a probation camp, but as soon as I came out I was arrested again and spent 7 months in jail awaiting trial in adult court. I was facing 25 years to life, but that's when my life changed.

A man named Scott Budnick, who was a movie producer and the founder of the Anti-Recidivism Coalition began to visit me in jail, and he made me feel like everything was going to be okay. I would ask myself, "Is this what a father-son relationship feels like?" I liked having someone out of nowhere care for me and see potential in me that I didn't see myself. I started educating myself. I always loved to read nonfiction books about great leaders like Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X, Pancho Villa, and Emiliano Zapata and I realized that each of them had been incarcerated at some point in their life. I knew I wanted to be a leader too, but I didn't know how.

In the end, I was sent back to juvenile court and I accepted a deal of seven years. I was paroled after five years, and the day I came out the first person I saw was my boss Scott Budnick, and behind him was my mother and my nephew. Ever since that day I've been working to prove to myself and the world that this Mexican, who went through all this, can make it. Today my goal is to be an effective leader, spokesperson, and a subject matter expert. Through the Leading with Conviction training I'm learning that it's my time to step it up more. I have to start thinking critically about policy solutions with the help of my experience and JLUSA is helping me. I feel honored to be part of this fellowship.



LUKE PAMER

INDIANA

"Every single day I say to myself over and over again, 'practice humanity.'"

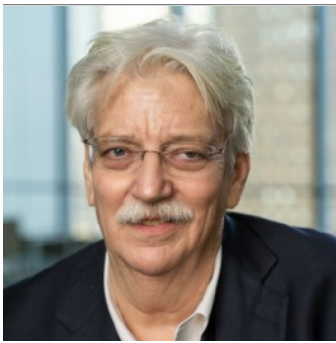
I am the mental health coordinator at PACE (Public Advocates in Community Re-Entry), a reentry program in Indianapolis, IN. I recently accepted a role to become the traumatic brain injury (TBI) resource facilitator. We're the only reentry provider in the country that has a support group specifically for people going through the criminal justice system who suffer from TBI. I know from anecdotal evidence and from recent studies that TBI is common among people who are incarcerated, and that many sustained their injury while they were incarcerated.

Working with my clients has made me have so much more patience for everyone in my life. It's enabled me to take a couple more deep breaths when things are difficult. I've seen the success that happens once you take that little extra time to explain things. You have to see someone who's going through a difficult time as a full person and celebrate them in spite of complications that may arise. Every single day I say to myself over and over again, "practice humanity."

Another hat I wear is working with Showing Up for Racial Justice which is a movement to undermine white support for white supremacy and to help build a racially just society. I'm a core organizer with the Indianapolis chapter and we work in partnership with the organizations including Indy 10 Black Lives Matter, DONT SLEEP and the Indiana Undocumented Youth Alliance on different issues, including ending mass incarceration.

I entered college knowing I was going to be a social worker and I was focused on addiction because of family history. Then I was arrested in November 2016 and charged with a couple of felonies, and I saw how dehumanizing the criminal justice system is. That got my wheels turning, and I realized I wanted to give back by working with that population. When you have a couple of felonies hanging over your head and you're going to court all the time, you start to understand just how disgusting the entire system is and how it affects every facet of your life. You can't plan too far ahead because you don't know if you're going to be incarcerated soon. I started to understand the internalization and overall difficulty that I had never had to consider because of the thousand different privileges that have been awarded to me because of the color of my skin.

The most important thing I've taken away from Leading with Conviction is the relationships I'm building with everyone in the program. I'm in a room with more than 30 absolutely exceptional individuals who are changing the world, and when I say that I don't mean they're bringing about world peace. I don't think that is what changing the world looks like. What it looks like is my friend and colleague Hakim Crampton doing great work with the youth in his community. It's Celia Colon who takes her message of hope and change to women in jails and prisons throughout her state. It's Saul Paul going all across the country playing music for kids and filling them with vision and hope. That's changing the world in these small but unbelievable ways. Another thing JLUSA is giving me is confidence. Growing up in a poor rural community as I did, I didn't hear things like, "you're unbelievable, you're amazing, and you're going to make the world a better place."



MARK RENICK

IDAHO

“I’ve been waiting for an issue and this is the issue that will put Systemic Change of Idaho on page one!”

This morning there was an announcement on the radio that Idaho is hoping to build a brand new prison. I’ve been waiting for an issue and this is the issue that will put Systemic Change of Idaho on the page one. It’s absurd to build another state prison! If you count everybody on probation and parole, the total population under criminal justice supervision is close to 19,000 in a state where only 1.6 million people live. That’s really high. Idaho ranks in the top five for the per capita rate of incarcerated people in the country. This new prison proposal will be the issue on the map, and we will be ready. So my Christmas gift arrived early this year.

I’m one of the founders of Systemic Change which is a faith-based advocacy group whose mission it is to change the way Idahoans view returning citizens. Our focus is on building strong communities, advancing restorative justice and promoting the human development of each person. Five years ago I formed a non-profit organization called IMSI Hope Community Phase II (the concept and name come from an experimental program the Idaho Department of Corrections set up at the Idaho State Maximum Institution). We provide resources and support to help returning citizens find their way. I would argue that many people coming out of incarceration have gone through a major trauma, so as they are coming out of that trauma they may manifest that adjustment by going back to addiction and other problematic behavior. We’re housed in a wellness drop-in center that offers a range of programs. Me and my staff, all of whom have been incarcerated, are there to greet people as they’re coming out of prison. We’ll sit down and have a cup of coffee and a donut and help them decompress by talking about their experiences and what kinds of supports they need to make it on the outside. We’ll also talk to them about Systemic Change of Idaho and encourage them to join us.

I’m a three-time felon, twice in California where I did two two-year sentences that didn’t get my attention. Then I came to Idaho, and they slapped me with seven years to think about my life. I was one of 36 men placed in an experimental faith-based program. We lived together in a separate unit, and basically I went to Bible college. Volunteers from all over the valley came out and shared with us and I did dog training through the Humane Society of Idaho and participated in a suicide watch program. I already had a social service background from my previous life, and before I was released, I was accepted into in a Masters of Social Work program at Northwest Nazarene University on the basis of a handwritten application sent from a maximum security facility. Sometimes I feel like I’ve led two different lives in my 65 years—one before, and one after my release in May of 2011. I feel blessed to do what I do.

The Leading with Conviction training has helped me tremendously. It has given me the confidence to go forward and become a better leader. I have a network of people all over the country who I can talk to. I have a weekly radio show called Victory Over Sin, and I’ve had JLUSA fellows and staff members as guests, talking about different criminal justice reform issues. Leading with Conviction has taught me a lot. It’s fantastic!



MICHAEL KING

WASHINGTON

“No two stories are exactly the same, but everyone is coming to the table.”

I am the National Director of Outreach and Engagement with Facing Addiction, a new organization launched in October 2015 at a big benefit concert in Washington, D.C. Our mission is to unify the voices of the 45 million Americans and their families who are directly impacted by addiction. Today, when overdoses are overtaking car crashes as the number one cause of preventable death, we want to bring everyone under one tent--the recovery community, treatment providers, family support groups, criminal justice reform advocates, public health practitioners—**everyone**.

I think of my work as a three-legged stool. The first leg is working to grow our coalition of partnering organizations into an effective network. Right now we have 770 organizational partners around the country, with a collective reach of 30 million people. The second leg is the grassroots and advocacy engagement piece and we've just launched a new project called Our Communities. The idea is to reach into communities and train directly impacted people and their families in community organizing. We have a goal of training 1,000 community organizers who will then have the skills and resources to fight for evidence-based policies and practices in their community. And the third leg of the stool is working with our partners and activists at the national level to implement Facing Addiction's five Action Items contained in our Action Plan, one of which is, "Suffering from Addiction is Not a Crime – Reforming Public Safety Responses." We know that we are not going to arrest our way out of the addiction problem.

I'm the kind of guy who once upon a time on paper looked like I had the perfect life. I'm a college educated white male in America. I had a career as a professional political organizer, I owned a house, and I had a marriage. I was climbing the career ladder, going from a local organizer to running statewide political campaigns and eventually managing the State Senate Democratic Caucus in Washington State. The picture looked great, but the internal reality was that addiction was taking hold of my life. Alcohol and gambling came to dominate everything and eventually led to the behaviors and actions that led to my incarceration. During my time in prison I got to know so many men who had addiction as part of their story. It just opened my eyes and made me ask, "Why are we here? Prison isn't a treatment center." I developed a passion for the issue of mass incarceration and addiction while I was incarcerated.

When I got out I was in recovery, but I was ineligible to work in my previous field. So I started to think, "Man, if there was some way to merge my personal passion for recovery with my professional passion for organizing what a dream life that could become." Through a series of connections, I contacted Greg Williams who was in the early stages of launching a new national organization called Facing Addiction. And the rest is history, as they say. I feel like I have the best job in the addiction field because I get to work with people from all over the country who are just doing such amazing and inspiring work. On any given day I can talk to a prevention professional in Texas, a recovery advocate in Ohio, a criminal justice reform advocate in California, and an affected family in Massachusetts. Everybody comes to the table with their own experience, and no two stories are exactly the same, but everyone is coming to the table. To see those different personal experiences blending together into one movement with a common goal is like watching a masterpiece painting getting made right in front of you. It's a beautiful thing thing!

To say that I was blown away by my first Leading with Conviction forum would be an understatement. I was excited to go back to work because I was so inspired by the work of the 35 other leaders in our cohort. I can't believe we get to do this three more times over the course of the year. I have felt for a long time that I was a decent leader, but I know I have the ability to grow so much more. I may think I'm pretty good, but I can still be a heck of a lot better and learn so much from the other people. I'm very grateful!



QUINTIN WILLIAMS

ILLINOIS

"I believe in approaching things from a place of possibility. If we lose hope, then we have nothing."

I am a Field Building Project Manager at Heartland Alliance, a national anti-poverty organization based in Chicago. In this role, I conduct trainings, support amazing programs, and lead policy change. Currently, I play a leadership role in the Restoring Rights and Opportunities Coalition of Illinois (RROCI), working with people with records and advocating for the expansion of their opportunities and for broader criminal justice reform in Illinois. One of our priorities is opening up higher education to people with criminal histories. This issue is very personal for me. The last time I got out of prison, after serving two stints starting when I was only 17, I went back to school and earned an Associate's Degree, followed by a Bachelor's, and then a Master's Degree in Sociology. Today, I'm a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Loyola University, where I also teach part-time. So I know the value of higher education, first hand.

RROCI is working to pass a bill that would prohibit public universities from considering criminal histories during the admissions process. We know that statistically speaking, the serious crimes committed on college campuses throughout the country are overwhelmingly committed by people who don't have a criminal record. But we are still facing opposition from some folks within the law enforcement community and some college administrators. My hope is that by educating those who oppose through impactful dialogue, sound research and lived experience, we can change hearts and minds and get this bill passed.

One of the things we want the bill to include is the right to counseling for students with records regarding their field of choice. At Heartland Alliance, we believe that everyone has the right to work, but these students need to be aware of the fact that there are barriers that exist in certain fields and professions, so giving them advice about which studies to pursue and setting them up for success are crucial. We hope to move this bill soon, because too many qualified individuals are self-selecting out of the admissions process as soon as they see the question about a criminal conviction on the application.

I also teach courses in Race and Ethnicity, Social Deviance, and Gangs in Society at Loyola University. One of my number one goals as an educator is to raise awareness among my students (I always ask my students if they know who their elected leaders are) and to challenge to take that awareness and become active in creating change. At times, I see a sense of hopelessness in the face of the current political climate, but I truly believe that my job is to give them hope because I believe in approaching things from a place of possibility. If we lose hope then we have nothing.

I'm seeing an evolution in my students' consciousness, and I'm very encouraged by the notes and letters I receive from former students about what they're doing in the world today. I got a letter from a student who, after taking my class, went to the Philippines and is doing work in communities over there. I have another student who decided to change his whole career path and become a lawyer in order to help people with criminal records. In every academic year I end up having several students who demonstrate to me that they have truly turned their awareness into activism because they go out and get involved. They keep me hopeful.

Just Leadership USA keeps me hopeful as well. One of the most enlightening things about Leading with Conviction is being in a room full of doctors, professors, executive directors and leaders. They all have incredible stories of pain, triumph and leadership. And I'm bringing some of these leadership practices I'm learning back to my colleagues at Heartland Alliance and helping to making connections with other JLUSA leaders whose work overlaps with ours. It's great to see the synergy we're creating!



ROBIN VANDER WALL

NORTH CAROLINA

“I want to be a conduit for change.”

I am the Vice Chair of the National Association for Rational Sexual Offense Laws (NARSOL) and the founder and president of Vivante Espero, the foundation that supports it. Our main focus is on reforming the incredibly onerous and punitive sexual offender registry laws that exist throughout the country. We are not against having a registry, but if the tool is going to be used, it should be used in such a way that comports with constitutional restraints, and today, that is not the case. The registry laws vary from state to state, but one thing they all have in common is the absence of any kind of due process. Our mission says it all: “NARSOL envisions effective, fact-based sexual offense laws and policies which promote public safety, safeguard civil liberties, honor human dignity, and offer holistic prevention, healing, and restoration.”

Our strategy is three-fold. First try to engage the public, which is difficult because of the stigma surrounding people charged with sexual offenses. But in spite of the stigma, our support has grown since our first national conference in Boston in 2008. Most of our support comes from family members, spouses and moms in particular. These are folks who, if you’d met them before a family member got in trouble, they would have been in favor of the registry and totally supportive of everything it purports to achieve. But after they deal with this upfront and personal, it’s a totally different reaction. They see the damage, harm and destructive force of public registries. Second and third are a combination of legislative lobbying and litigation. We go into places where we as a team feel like the restrictions are so onerous that they’re probably low hanging fruit legally speaking. And we work to build partnerships with other criminal justice reform organizations because unless we place some restrictions on this Pandora’s Box, states will start to use the registration tool to cover other categories of felonies, and that kind of mission creep is very dangerous.

While I was in prison I went through a massive transformation spiritually and practically. Before prison I never had any concept of social justice and was a self-identified conservative Republican who grew up as a Southern Baptist. In prison I converted to Catholicism because I saw where social justice fit in, and understood Christ’s teaching that whatever you’re doing to the most marginalized man or woman, you’re doing to me. It was a dramatic, eye-opening experience, and I realized that I wanted to be a conduit for change. It occurred to me that a lot of skills I developed during my previous life—managing campaigns, being involved in politics, direct mail copy writing, raising a lot of money for candidates—I could use to advocate for fair sexual offense laws. After my release, I hit the ground running.

I am very pleased and honored to be part of the Leading with Conviction cohort. I’ve learned a lot and look forward to using the tools and honing my skills to become a more effective leader and to raise up other leaders, because that’s what this is all about.



RYAN LO

CALIFORNIA

“Everybody I know and loved is in a cage and I’m never going to be okay with that.”

I run a Los Angeles-based film company called Unlabeled Digital Media. I started it in 2016 when I was a Soros Senior Advocacy Fellow. We serve as a media company for the nonprofit community and our creative team is composed entirely of directly impacted people. I just had a cumulative 280 years of prison experience working on a 28-day live event around mental health and its impact on incarceration. In Hollywood, if they make a movie about fire fighters they hire fire fighters as consultants. If it’s a movie about soldiers they hire soldiers to keep it real. But when they make a movie about formerly or currently incarcerated people or foster youth, or immigrants, or anyone affected by a governmental system, they hire police, and that gives it a certain slant. It’s inauthentic and not helpful. So I employ directly impacted people at every level. My camera operators have been to prison and my editor is formerly incarcerated. Many of them go on to work in other jobs in Hollywood and then I train the next person coming up to do the same job.

The nonprofits we work with have amazing stories and phenomenal people doing powerful work, but they’re not good at talking about it, and as a result, most people have never heard of them. So we help publicize their work and tell their stories. Right now my main priority is producing the Justice Rocks event on Alcatraz Island, America’s most iconic prison. It will be the first ever live broadcast from the island, which is now a national landmark, and it will include a national town hall about ending mass incarceration and a yearlong art exhibit. We will have directly impacted people interacting on stage with celebrities, thought leaders, business leaders, politicians and formerly incarcerated people in positions of power. In 1985, Live Aid was about ending famine and in 1986 Hands Across America was about fighting hunger and homelessness. Justice Rocks will be about shutting down prisons.

I went to prison when I was 17 and got out when I was 40, so I grew up in prison. While I was inside I got six degrees, three federal licenses, and six state certifications. I took every course I could find and when I ran out of courses I started teaching them. But when I came home the survivor’s guilt of leaving everybody I cared about behind to rot hit me like a ton of bricks. Everybody I know and loved is in a cage and I’m never going to be okay with that. So I got into activism to change the landscape and maybe bring some people home. I realized that the most efficient way to change hearts and minds on a large scale is with a piece of media content so I set about learning how to do what I do.

My theory of change is based on the “Will & Grace effect.” Fifty years ago nobody thought gay marriage was going to happen. But the positive media portrayals of people from that community, specifically Ellen DeGeneris and the Will and Grace TV characters had a humanizing effect, and people on the other side of the screen started to think, “I could have drink a beer with that guy and it would be okay. He’s not the child predator monster I had in my head. In fact, none of them are, they are just people.” So that’s what we’re trying to do--use media to shift culture, and, to use military parlance, to shape the battlefield where reform can become possible.

Ryan is the founder of UnLabeled Digital Media, an independent film company which empowers those with systems impacted backgrounds to tell powerful stories of their lives and community while serving the non-profit community with professional media consulting, design, and production. Ryan is a 2016-17 Soros Senior Advocacy Fellow and a member of the 2018 JustLeadershipUSA Leading with Conviction Program.

Creative Capital supports innovative and adventurous artists across the country through funding, counsel, and career development services. Our pioneering venture philanthropy approach helps artists working in all creative disciplines realize their visions and build sustainable practices.



SAULPAUL

TEXAS

“If you're tired of the same and you wanna make a difference, it's time to Be the Change.”

I call myself a musician with a message. My goal is to inform my audience that they are born on purpose with a purpose, and that regardless of their circumstances, there are no limits. It's really that simple. It starts with the music. My songs are designed to entertain, inspire and empower. About 75 percent of my audience is urban youth, adjudicated youth, foster youth – kids who are at risk. But I also share my message with adults. I can go from a youth detention center in Broward County, Florida and then be the keynote speaker for General Electric and Google. Basically, I'm a story teller, and stories connect with everybody.

“I've been thinking bout it, I should Be The Change
Ain't no doubt about it, it's time to Be The Change
Ain't no way around it, if you're tired of the same
and you wanna make a difference, it's time to Be The Change!”

It starts with the music, but then I create a world around the songs. “Tower to Tower” is both a CD and a DVD that recounts my journey from the Texas State Penitentiary with a view of the watch guard tower, to graduating from the University of Texas at Austin with a view of the famous clock tower; from serving time for 4 felonies, to graduating from college with a 4.0 GPA. “Dream in 3-D” started as an uplifting song I sang with a chorus of children. Then it became a book I wrote in which each chapter is based on a lyric from the song. Then the song became a touring arts festival and an album that was considered for a Grammy Award for being the best children's album of 2017.

My purpose is to figure out how to reach you. I write songs because everybody doesn't like books. I play guitar because everybody doesn't like rap. I make mobile gaming apps because everybody doesn't like books. I make movies because everybody doesn't like speeches. When I was a kid growing up in bad circumstances in Houston's ghetto, people tried to tell me what was right, and they were accurate, but they never spoke my language so I never heard them. There are so many people whose lives are in peril because the person who's telling them what they need to know isn't speaking their language. So that's my job.

I applied to JLUSA's Leading with Conviction program because I want to become involved in more policy work. I have a great platform and each year I get to personally impact hundreds of thousands of lives through my live shows and media. But now I want to be involved in policy change. When I meet the mayor or the governor or a senator as I frequently do as a performer, I want to be equipped with new tools in my toolbox. I want to use my platform to “make a difference and be the change.”

Having just completed the first Leading with Conviction forum, I know I made the right decision. This network of leaders is amazing. I've learned that teamwork makes the dream work. I'm excited about our goal of half by 2030. I've lived long enough to see some cycles repeat and I've seen some things change that people probably thought were permanent. **But things can change!**

SaulPaul was named Austinite of the Year in 2017. Former winners include Michael Dell of Dell Computers and Lance Armstrong.



SEÁN DALPIAZ

NEW YORK

“I still feel a sense of amazement when I look at where I am today.”

I am the Vice President of Real Estate and Facilities for Covenant House-New York. We provide housing and other services to homeless and runaway youth. We are in an era of expansion right now, and I'm responsible for finding properties, negotiating leases, overseeing the contractors doing the gut renovations, and working with architects and designers to create spaces to meet our program requirements and specifications. Right now we're expanding four sites in the Bronx and we have another large construction project going on in midtown Manhattan where we're building a new eleven story building.

Our model is from short-term crisis shelter, to transitional housing, to permanent housing and independent living—from homeless to hopeful. Covenant House has 31 sites in six countries, and the site in New York City is the largest. We get kids from all over the world. They come to the city to start a new life, and they're often in crisis. If you walk up to our door and you need a place to sleep and if we have a bed, you're in the bed in an hour. Our main shelter for runaway youth is a one-stop shop. It has a federally qualified health center on site that's open to the entire Hell's Kitchen/Hudson Yards community, a fully staffed intake department, a wellness center with mental health professionals, and a legal department staffed by lawyers where legal advice is free. We have another department called CovWorks where we have Department of Education teachers on site so kids can get their high school equivalency diplomas as well as other vocational training opportunities. I really believe in what we're trying to create here at CHNY.

I still feel a sense of amazement when I look at where I am today. I spent almost a decade in state prison and came home in 2010. At that time, the only job I could find was as a maintenance man for SCO Family of Services, a foster care agency. I started learning about the foster care-to-prison pipeline and saw that just like in the criminal justice system, the most impacted kids are African American and Latino. I began to move up the ranks of the organization and eventually was appointed Program Director. Based on the work I was doing at SCO Family of Services, I was offered an amazing opportunity to join the CHNY Executive Team. So I went from maintenance man to an executive position with an international nonprofit organization, helping find housing for hundreds of kids in New York City.

I attribute my success to the educational opportunities I was afforded. I've always had an aptitude for academics and had some college exposure before I went away. When I was incarcerated in a maximum security prison, I knew I had to do something, and my first thought was to figure out how to get back into school. I received my Associates Degree in prison through Ohio University's independent distance learning program. When I came home, I finished my BA at Queens College and got my Masters in Public Administration afterwards. Today, I'm using my education and skills to improve the life prospects of our most marginalized children and youth.

The Leading with Conviction training is excellent, and the coaching I received from David was pivotal in helping me make a smooth transition into my new position at Covenant House.



STEPHANIE REGAGNON

MISSOURI

“I feel like I owe it to my family and this movement to use my voice if I can.”

I work in agriculture. I'm the CEO of FieldWatch, Inc., a non-profit company promoting stewardship and collaboration across the food value chain. But after my mother's arrest and four year incarceration in three separate federal prisons, criminal justice reform became a passion. I was born and raised in a very red, white and blue family that believed in truth and justice, which is why we chose to go to trial. My mom was offered multiple plea deals but because she was innocent, she didn't consider for one second taking one. We were operating under the assumption that if you get your day in court, the truth will prevail. For the four years my mom was gone we fought every day to free her, but nothing worked. I knew I wanted to work to change the system, and I knew I wanted to focus on kids, so in 2010 I founded Ava's Grace Scholarship, named after my daughter.

Ava's Grace is an all-volunteer organization based in St. Louis, Mo. We provide college scholarships for children of incarcerated parents. I couldn't be more excited that we are starting to see our kids graduate. We had our first class of graduates two years ago and by the end of this year we'll have eight who have received their diplomas. In the eight years since our founding we have supported forty kids and committed close to \$800,000 in scholarships. The majority of these kids grew up not only with at least one parent incarcerated, but in extreme poverty. One of our kids came to us as the valedictorian of her high school and had been homeless for the previous two years. These young people are amazingly resilient and committed to writing their own story and not letting their past define their future. They are true inspirations.

I'm not a shy person and I'm a bulldog for these kids. Since these kids do not wear their status as children of incarcerated parents on their sleeves, high school counselors don't always know about it, so working with a variety of partners, including the Department of Corrections, is critical. I've spoken to parents in several prisons, I've worked with prison community outreach staff and I've raised money in prisons. Most recently I met with the entire leadership of the Missouri Department of Corrections to figure out ways to spread the word throughout the system. In my mind, I'll work with whoever is willing to work with me to help support more kids, including systems that harmed my family.

I recently joined the Close the Workhouse Campaign. The St. Louis Medium Security Institution, also known as the Workhouse, is a horrible jail and a glaring symbol of all the things that are wrong with our system. Eighty to ninety percent of the people housed there have not been convicted of anything; they just couldn't afford bail. The jail has been sued numerous times because of its inhumane conditions, and we hope to follow the example of the Close Rikers Campaign and shut it down. I feel like I owe it to my family and this movement to use my voice if I can. I have a unique voice in this space because I am white, I am middle class, and I have career in a completely different space. That is unexpected and can be very effective.

In JLUSA's Leading with Conviction program I feel like I'm with my people. In the agricultural space where I work if people have incarcerated family members they don't talk about it. It's something I keep below the surface most days. So to be around people who don't judge and who truly understand is like coming home. When I'm in that room and talking to my cohort everything seems possible. It's been life changing.



STEVEN MANGUAL

NEW YORK

“I want to leave a legacy of humanizing this thing called justice.”

I served 14 years in New York State prisons, and it was while I was incarcerated in the Woodbourne Correctional Facility that I discovered my passion for learning and for activism. The year was 1996, and I met a group of older men who were lifers and long-termers. They were involved with the New Prison Movement which was born out of the Attica rebellion of 1971, and had formed study groups called the Resurrection-Conciencia Study Groups. They developed an analysis called The Non-Traditional Approach to Criminal and Social Justice that examined and explained the relationship between prisons and urban communities of color. I became a student and then the facilitator of a study group and for the rest of my time inside I organized, I spoke, I read, I wrote, and I did advocacy from inside supporting some outside organizations like the Coalition for Parole Restoration.

Today I work as a Senior Intervention Manager for Common Justice. Common Justice develops and advances solutions to violence that transform the lives of those harmed and foster racial equity without relying on incarceration. Locally, we operate the first alternative to incarceration and victim service program in the US to focus on violent felonies in the adult courts. Nationally, we leverage the lessons from our direct service to transform the justice system through partnerships, advocacy, and elevating the experience and power of those most impacted. We build practical strategies to hold people accountable for harm, break cycles of violence, and secure safety, healing and justice for survivors and their communities. As a Senior Intervention Manager, I work with responsible parties in our alternative-to-incarceration and victim-service program, a rigorous, cutting-edge response to serious felonies, including assault and robbery, based in restorative justice principles. If—and only if—the survivors of those crimes consent, Common Justice diverts the cases into a process designed to recognize the harm done, honor the needs and interests of those harmed, and develop responses to hold the responsible party accountable. Those who successfully complete their commitments to those they harmed and the violence intervention curriculum don't serve the jail or prison sentences.

Separate from my work at Common Justice, in my personal capacity, I am the Latino Affairs Producer/Co-host for “On The Count: The Prison and Criminal Justice Report,” a 60-minute talk, news, and interview program featuring criminal and social justice subjects on radio station WBAI, 99.5 FM. It airs weekly on Saturdays from 11:00 am until 12 pm (ET). I've produced several segments on solitary confinement, healthcare in prisons, the struggle to free Puerto Rican Political Prisoners, reentry, and the #CLOSErikers and #FREEnewyork campaigns, and moderated an all-Spanish language webinar on the #FREEnewyork and #JusticeLA campaigns. I'm also member of Latino Justice PRLDEF, Justice Reform Collaborative which works to create a more just society by using and challenging the law to secure justice by empowering our community and by fostering leadership through advocacy and education. The Collaborative is dedicated to promoting fairness, rights restoration and safety by using litigation, advocacy, community engagement, policy analysis and narrative change to make the invisible, visible to all - the concomitant plight of Latinos under a broken and racialized criminal justice system in America. Our program focuses on rights restoration, as well as policing, sentencing, bail and drug policy reform.

It's been humbling and inspiring to meet all these wonderful people in the Leading with Conviction trainings. Being humble is something I aspire to; it's been my nickname for many years. I need to remain grounded and focused in my life no matter where I am. I know I'm still a human being and nothing that I have is better than anyone else's. I'm looking forward to staying in touch with my cohort and hearing about the amazing work they're doing.



SUSAN MASON

WASHINGTON

“I did my time, and I want to move on, and I’m going to have to show society how to let me do that.”

I’ve been out of prison for fifteen years, but I have been reconvicted over and over again because of my criminal record. Over those years I received multiple job offers, but as soon as the employers did a background check, the offers were rescinded, one by one. The final straw happened three years ago when I was hired by a labor union and the offer was rescinded on my first day of work. I wasn’t permitted upstairs and was summarily sent home. I was mortified and thought if this is happening to me—I have a skill set, I’m a white woman, I have a lot of privilege—imagine what’s happening to people who can’t advocate for themselves or to people of color. I realized that I couldn’t keep going through the experience of rejection and discrimination. I did my time, and I want to move on, and I’m going to have to show society how to let me do that. So I founded a new organization: What’s Next Washington.

At What’s Next Washington we focus on three areas. One is building the leadership capacity of formerly incarcerated people so that they can be effective advocates for change. Another is using communications and media strategies to change the narrative about those of us who have served time. To overcome the stigma that comes with addiction and a criminal conviction, we have to come out of the closet about our backgrounds and show the public that there’s a path from what some would consider being broken, to self-actualization, wholeness and civic participation. And third, we want to reduce recidivism by addressing its main causes—employment and housing insecurity. Although they don’t realize it, employers and landlords are perpetuators of the cycle of recidivism that formerly incarcerated people experience. We live in a society that’s based on the American Dream. It’s all about having a career and a place to live, but if nobody will rent to you and nobody will hire you, you’re pushed out to the margins of society. My goal is to ease the suffering of the 70 million people with a criminal conviction. We shouldn’t have to beat the doors down for a job 15, 20, or 25 years later.

Ultimately we need to rein in the private multi-billion dollar background check industry which shuts down whole career paths for us for life. My criminal record is between me and the state, and not only is its use by employers discriminatory; it’s a diversity, equity and inclusion issue. We are incarcerating one in three black men, and if employers won’t hire people with criminal records it’s keeping a whole population out of the labor market. We’re out here living our lives, trying to survive, trying to rebuild our families, and we’re constantly locked out of opportunity. My organization is working with human resource professionals to change policy and encouraging them to take a good hard look at how this practice is affecting our economy as a whole. This needs to end!

I really appreciate the Leading with Conviction trainings and I think JLUSA is a fantastic model and a great way to stay organized and get things done. If I want to build capacity in others and support them, I need to develop my own leadership skills as well.



TARRA SIMMONS

WASHINGTON

“I realized if this was a chance for me to rebuild my career and do something I was passionate about, then I was going to give it 110%.”

On June 16th, before a big crowd of supporters, I was sworn in to the State Bar of Washington. Getting to that point was a long, hard journey. Before I went to prison, I didn't know any lawyers. I grew up in poverty and everybody in my family has been incarcerated. I was a teen mother by the age of 15 and spent time living on the street. By working hard, I was able to access education and I became a registered nurse. But when I went to prison, I lost my nursing career and didn't know what I would be able to do. Then I met some law students, and they told me there was a chance I could be a lawyer. I was fighting some of my own legal issues and helping other women with theirs, and I have always had a heart for social justice. I realized if this was a chance for me to rebuild my career and do something I was passionate about, then I was going to give it 110%.

When I got out of prison in 2013, I was admitted to the Seattle University School of Law and graduated with top honors. But when I went before the State Bar's Character and Fitness Board, I was denied the opportunity to take the bar exam because of my criminal history. I was devastated. I was represented by my law school professor who has represented people before this Board for 35 years, and he too was shocked. So we did something that had a 1% chance of it succeeding and appealed to the State Supreme Court which had not taken a bar admission case on review for decades. The ACLU filed a friend-of-the-court brief which 48 organizations signed onto, including JLUSA, and on November 16th, my case was heard. It usually takes at least five months for the court to issue a decision, but they issued a unanimous same day order in my favor!

Today I practice law at Seattle's Public Defender Association as a Skadden Fellow and also serve as the Executive Director of Civil Survival, an advocacy organization I helped found in 2015. All of my work is focused on helping people with criminal histories and bringing about fundamental policy change. My number one legislative priority this year is organizing support for the New Hope Act, a measure I had a hand in drafting. It will allow people to go before a judge on their own initiative to have their criminal records vacated so that when they fill out a job, college or housing application and have to answer the question, "Have you ever been convicted..." they can check the "no" box and their background check will come back clear. Our New Hope Act coalition is expanding, and we have even drawn support from some prosecutors.

Leading with Conviction has changed my life. It's making me think bigger and helping to undo some of the internalized oppression many of us experience. I always thought working harder meant helping more people, but what I've learned is that working *smarter* is much more effective. People reach out to me constantly because of the publicity my case has generated and I was trying to meet everyone's needs. Now I'm learning how to invest in other leaders and build capacity and collective leadership. It's been beautiful to watch my friends who didn't have access to higher education and who haven't been doing this work for long now stepping up.

MEMBERSHIP

JustLeadershipUSA was founded on the principle that systemic change can happen with a strong base of active members from across the U.S. We are building a national movement to end mass imprisonment and community criminalization. This movement is only as strong as our members.



More than 2 million people are currently incarcerated in the United States. #2MillionVoices is JustLeadershipUSA's national project dedicated to elevating the expertise and stories of the human beings currently incarcerated in our jails and prisons.

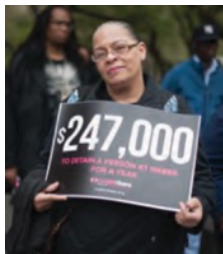
#2MillionVoices is building membership among currently incarcerated people in facilities in every state across the country — creating real opportunities for our members to share their experiences with the correctional system, and lifting up their vision for a brighter future.

At JustLeadershipUSA, we believe that those closest to the problem are closest to the solution. We know that meaningful reform to our criminal justice system cannot exist without the voices of those most harmed at the forefront of the conversation. The 2 million people held in jails and prisons across the U.S., their families, loved ones, and communities, suffer daily harm at the hands of the system. This is not justice. Their voices and the voices of those previously incarcerated, must light the way to a reimagined, more just society.

#2MillionVoices creates sustained space for JustLeadershipUSA's currently incarcerated members to be active participants in the movement to end mass incarceration, reimagine justice in the United States and achieve JLUSA's vision of #halfby2030. Join us in connecting with and amplifying these important but often ignored voices.

ADVOCACY

For the last four decades, the United States has relentlessly relied on systemic criminalization and subsequent incarceration as a solution to complex social problems, stemming from decades of disinvestment in basic human needs. As a result, human lives – primarily and disproportionately Black, Native, and Latinx – have been discarded and billions of taxpayer dollars wasted each year. This nation's reliance on a carceral state destroys individuals, families, communities and economies – and weakens democracy from the local to federal levels. JustLeadershipUSA is working to strengthen the United States—its communities, its values, and its social contract—by elevating the voice of people and communities that are most impacted by the criminal legal system, to drive policy change that reduces incarceration. It is possible to build a society where healing and restoration, not incarceration, is the answer. Join our mission to get to #halfby2030 and help build our communities.



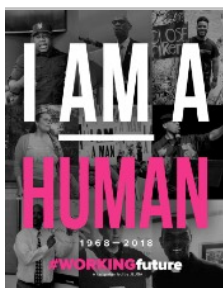
#CLOSErikers BUILD COMMUNITIES

In April 2016, JustLeadershipUSA launched the #CLOSErikers campaign, centering the leadership of people harmed by Rikers to demand the closure of the notorious jail complex which sits on a toxic landfill and is a site of cultural violence by jail guards. In the span of a year, organizers took the demand to close Rikers from a lofty ideal to the stated policy of New York City. Today, this movement continues to gain strength and momentum for our demand that Rikers is closed forever and that New York City reinvest to #buildCOMMUNITIES.



FREEnewyork

The #FREEnewyork campaign was formed in 2017 to achieve real solutions to New York's statewide jail crisis. Led by JustLeadershipUSA, in partnership with directly impacted communities, organizations, and faith leaders from across the state, #FREEnewyork is building grassroots power and the leadership of New Yorkers most harmed by incarceration, and demanding bold legislative action and fundamental change to New York's pretrial system. We can no longer settle for compromise measures or partial solutions. #FREEnewyork demands overhaul of bail, speedy trial, & discovery laws and an end to New York's jail crisis.



#WORKINGfuture

Led by JustLeadershipUSA, and in partnership with directly impacted communities, the #WORKINGfuture campaign seeks to eliminate the barriers to employment that people with records are facing. The #WORKINGfuture campaign is building power within and among impacted communities to challenge legislative barriers that exclude people from the fair chance they deserve, and to transform the narrative about the impacts of collateral consequences on people, families, and communities.



CLOSEmsdf

The Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (MSDF) is an irredeemable torture chamber. It was built to warehouse people alleged to have violated rules of probation or parole – infractions like missing an appointment or being late for curfew. The #CLOSEmsdf campaign was launched in June 2017 by people who have been directly harmed by MSDF. The campaign is led by a coalition of organizations, including: EXPO (Ex-incarcerated People Organizing), WISDOM, IWOC (Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee), & JustLeadershipUSA. #CLOSEmsdf has 3 demands: 1. Stop incarcerating people for violations of supervision; 2. Depopulate and close the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility; 3. Reinvest the money wasted on MSDF, back into communities.



CLOSEthecreek

The #FREEnewyork campaign was formed in 2017 to achieve real solutions to New York's statewide jail crisis. Led by JustLeadershipUSA, in partnership with directly impacted communities, organizations, and faith leaders from across the state, #FREEnewyork is building grassroots power and the leadership of New Yorkers most harmed by incarceration, and demanding bold legislative action and fundamental change to New York's pretrial system. We can no longer settle for compromise measures or partial solutions. #FREEnewyork demands overhaul of bail, speedy trial, & discovery laws and an end to New York's jail crisis.



JUSTICELA

Led by JustLeadershipUSA, and in partnership with directly impacted communities, the #WORKINGfuture campaign seeks to eliminate the barriers to employment that people with records are facing. The #WORKINGfuture campaign is building power within and among impacted communities to challenge legislative barriers that exclude people from the fair chance they deserve, and to transform the narrative about the impacts of collateral consequences on people, families, and communities.

THANK YOU

We would like to thank all of our supporters and funders, who have turned this vision into reality. Your generous support has created a platform to elevate those closest to the problem get closer to the solution by providing necessary resources and access to power.



The Overbrook Foundation





1900 Lexington Ave. New York, NY 10035
1440 G St NW, Washington, DC 20005

347.454.2195
justleadershipusa.org