
Annual Report 2022
National Black Women's
Justice Institute

SEPTEMBER 2023



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Black Women's
Justice Institute

**We envision a society
that respects, values,
and honors the
humanity of Black
women and girls, takes
accountability for the
harm it has inflicted,
and recognizes that
real justice is healing.**

At the National Black Women's Justice Institute, we research, elevate, and educate the public about innovative, community-led solutions to address the criminalization of Black women and girls.

We aim to dismantle the racist and patriarchal U.S. criminal-legal system and build, in its place, pathways to opportunity and healing.

We advocate for access to and expansion of services that support and promote healing and connection and help Black women and girls reclaim their power.

from the Executive Director

This past year marks another strong year for the National Black Women's Justice Institute. In 2022, we released a youth-led policy agenda to expand mental health services to youth of color in collaboration with The Children's Partnership. We helped educators across the country and around the globe strengthen their capacity to implement trauma-informed practices that foster safety, belonging, and wellbeing for Black girls and other girls of color. We released an evaluation report highlighting a promising education model for system-impacted Black girls. And we released the LOVE Curriculum for Victim Services Providers to increase criminalized survivors' access to services, the product of a nearly four-year strategic partnership with formerly incarcerated women, the Young Women's Freedom Center, and the Justice and Joy National Collaborative.

What unifies these projects, and all of NBWJI's work, is our unwavering commitment to the safety, healing, and wellbeing of directly impacted Black women and girls. We firmly believe that real justice is healing. And with ongoing, concerted, and targeted effort, we will transform our vision into reality.

Research and analysis are central to our strategy. NBWJI has been, and will continue to be, at the forefront of innovative, trailblazing research and analysis that pushes the national dialogue around mass incarceration—not only to consider the needs and experiences of directly impacted Black women and girls, but to also demand that we develop an intersectional framework for analysis rooted in a Black womanist tradition. While research has a long history of extracting from and pathologizing Black communities—focusing on “social problems” rather than examining our collective strengths—at NBWJI, we recognize its generative possibilities and are leveraging it as a tool for elevating the expertise and leadership of directly impacted Black women and girls.

NBWJI holds a unique and vital role in the field, and we are poised for growth and expansion and to deepen our work in pursuit of our mission to end the systemic criminalization and punishment of Black women and girls.



Dr. Sydney McKinney
NBWJI Executive Director



Youth Justice

Although the number of Black girls in youth detention has declined, they remain disproportionately represented. And the factors that heighten Black girls' risk of criminalization and confinement—particularly punitive school discipline, unaddressed mental health needs, and gender-based violence—endure. The racial and gender disparities that plague the juvenile legal system will persist as long as punitive responses to youth behaviors continue to exist.

NBWJI is committed to advancing healing-centered policies and practices within the systems and institutions that impact the lives of Black girls. Our goal is to reorient the value systems of these institutions, shifting them to nurturing and supporting Black girls and gender-expansive young people instead of criminalizing and punishing them for developmentally appropriate responses to trauma and harm.

Over the past year, NBWJI's work centered the wellbeing and safety of system-impacted Black girls. Through research and evaluation, NBWJI's research team examined the educational experiences of Black girls and gender-expansive youth who are directly impacted by the juvenile legal and foster care systems as well as how they were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the heightened attention COVID placed on youth mental health, NBWJI partnered with The Children's Partnership and Georgetown Law School to elevate the voices and expertise of Black girls and other young people of color in the national dialogue around supporting the mental health and wellness of our youth. And we partnered with the Indianapolis Public School District's Title IX coordinator to address gender-based violence experienced by Black girls and other girls of color in K-12 schools, a prevalent yet hidden problem in our schools.



You all are a perfect partner for [our program]. ...It really gave us access to students' voices in a way that we wouldn't have been able to get otherwise.

CELSA SNEAD

Executive Director, The Mentoring Center, an EMERGE partner

Repairing Black Girls Relationship with School

As part of our mission to dismantle pathways to the criminal legal system, NBWJI works to identify promising diversion and alternatives to incarceration programs. One such model is The EMERGE (Educating, Mentoring, Empowering, and Reaffirming our Girls for Excellence) Reentry Program.

EMERGE is a promising education model in Alameda County, CA, designed to build pathways to college and careers for Black girls and other girls of color who have been involved in the juvenile-legal or foster care systems.

Many of the students in EMERGE have direct involvement with the juvenile court or probation. Many have been exposed to potentially traumatic life events, and many are survivors of sexual violence, including sex trafficking and exploitation.

We conducted a process evaluation to better understand the model and the strategies it uses to repair Black girls' bonds with school and restore a commitment to their educational success.

The strategies that EMERGE used to repair girls' connection with school centered around making the program a space where girls felt physically, psychologically, and emotionally safe. To do that, EMERGE instituted trauma-informed, gender-responsive, and culturally affirming policies, assessments, and program activities that helped educators better understand students' needs and experiences and allowed students to feel in control of the educational environment. These strategies not only reflected the program's educational values, but they also sought to forge strong student-educator relationships, helping to shift students' attitudes and perceptions about school and their ability to achieve academic success.

With these strategies, EMERGE has helped revitalize students' commitment to their education and confidence in themselves and what they can achieve.

Preventing Gender-Based Violence in K-12 Schools

Gender-based violence and sexual harassment is a widespread problem in K-12 schools throughout the country: 8 in 10 students report having been sexually harassed at school at least once. And Black girls experience these forms of violence in schools at much higher rates than their peers. In school and out of school, Black girls are more likely to report experiencing sexual harassment than any other group.

To assess the impact and prevalence of gender-based violence in schools, NBWJI partnered with the Indianapolis Public School District's Title IX coordinator. We conducted a needs assessment, including administrative data review, interviews of key stakeholders, and focus groups with Black girls and other youth of color as well as adult school staff. We reported on our work to the Indianapolis School Board, and, because of our intersectional lens centering Black girls, we were invited by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights to report on our work as part of its Lessons from the Field series.

Expanding Mental Health Services for Black Girls

The overwhelming majority of girls in detention struggle with serious mental health concerns. Approximately 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14. In addition to challenges that youth in general may face, many Black girls also have to contend with racism, adultification, sexual harassment, and violence. And because youth engage with services differently than adults do, we must address youth mental health needs differently than how we address adult mental health.

When mental health needs go unaddressed, it can lead to terrible outcomes: Mental health continues to decline, and the impact of not addressing adolescent mental health issues last long into adulthood. Unaddressed mental health and trauma are also pathways to criminalization and confinement for Black girls. This is why it's imperative that we enact policies and practices attuned to Black girls unique needs and preferences for how to engage with mental health services

With our partner The Children's Partnership (TCP), we formed the Hope, Healing



and Health Collective—a youth-led policy council that worked to elevate the voices of Black youth and other youth of color—to create a comprehensive set of youth-developed policy recommendations to improve access to better mental health care for Black girls and other youth of color. The policy report highlights several issues that impact access to mental health care for youth of color, including high mental health costs, a lack of culturally diverse mental health professionals and inadequate access to community services and supports that promote mental health. The report sets forth actionable solutions that policymakers at the federal, state and local levels can implement to build a culturally-responsive and gender-affirming mental health care system for all youth, especially youth of color.

Analyzing Impact of COVID on System-Impacted Black Girls

As the COVID-19 pandemic stretched on, the impact of the crisis, especially on vulnerable and disenfranchised groups, became clearer. NBWJI was especially concerned with how system-impacted Black girls and gender-expansive youth were being affected. We conducted a study of service providers that work directly with girls who have been directly impacted by the juvenile legal system and foster care and found that the pandemic exacerbated many of the issues that these girls already had: needs—such as housing, mental health support, and education—intensified for system-impacted Black girls.

Bill of Rights

The Learning Network for Girls of Color, of which NBWJI is co-leader, provides a secure platform for educators and school system leaders to learn from experts across the country about trauma-informed approaches for girls of color and engage in peer-to-peer learning. This Learning Network’s content is guided by a youth advisory committee comprised of girls of color and a steering committee comprised of professionals with expertise in trauma-informed learning and/or issues relating to race, ethnicity, and gender.

The Youth Advisory Committee created a bill of rights to support the mental health of girls and gender-expansive youth of color in schools. The Youth Advisory Committee begins this bill of rights with “we recognize that the United States education system is lacking necessary mental health support and care for girls and gender-expansive youth of color in schools. As girls and gender-expansive youth of color, we demand respect for our rights so that we can focus and learn and be treated with dignity and respect as students and as human beings.”

Bill of Rights to Support the Mental Health of Girls and Gender-Expansive Youth of Color in Schools

- 1 The right to mental health care
- 2 The right to culturally relevant curricula
- 3 The right to physical health
- 4 The right to spaces to be ourselves
- 5 The right to police-free schools



Policing

The vast majority of interactions between police and the community are considered “routine, everyday” encounters: traffic stops, street stops, police patrolling neighborhoods, or responding to calls for assistance. Yet, each of these interactions pose a risk of harm to Black women, trans, and gender nonconforming (TGNC) people.

As we consider new approaches to public safety, it is important that the experiences of marginalized genders within Black communities are centered in national conversations about policing to ensure we build toward the safety of all Black people in the United States.

Examining the Experiences of Black Women, Trans, and Gender Nonconforming People

Given this, we are using an intersectional framework to examine how “everyday” encounters with police inflict violence and harm on Black women and TGNC people, including on their emotional wellbeing and perceptions and experience of safety in their communities.

The experiences of cis- and transgender Black women, transmasculine, gender-nonconforming and nonbinary people in police encounters have rarely been the central focus of policing research. Findings from this study should be released in 2024 and will

- Increase awareness of the contexts and contents of Black women and TGNC people’s encounters with police.
- Elevate and amplify the voices and experiences of Black women and TGNC people in national conversations about policing.
- Expand the national conversation about policing to integrate the experiences of Black women and TGNC people.



Reentry

When people are released from incarceration and are reentering their communities, they face many challenges regarding housing, employment, physical and behavioral health needs, and parenting. Women experience these risk factors at higher rates and degrees than men, and more often face multiple risk factors at the same time. In addition, the vast majority of women involved in the criminal legal system are survivors of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, and these histories of gender-based violence often relate to their criminal offenses.

Yet despite clear evidence of gendered pathways to incarceration, most reentry services and post-release policies have been created primarily with men in mind.

This poses significant risks to the success and well-being of formerly incarcerated women, especially Black women, who face additional systemic barriers due to race and gender. Structural racism and systemic oppression shape Black women's reentry experiences. Black women are vulnerable to rearrest, and they have more difficulty maintaining stable housing and employment.



Without support, formerly incarcerated women risk rearrest and reincarceration and have little hope of interrupting the cycle of criminal legal system involvement. Transformative policies and practices that are gender-responsive and culturally-reaffirming are needed to eliminate barriers and support Black women to thrive after release from confinement.

Given this reality, one of our goals is to expand resources and opportunities for Black women returning to their communities from incarceration to ensure they succeed and thrive.

Analyzing Black Women's Health & Self-Care in Reentry

Black women are not only disproportionately incarcerated in the United States, but we also tend to experience worse health outcomes compared to white and Hispanic women. In addition, the experience of mass incarceration may be an underlying cause of the persistent inequities in overall health, reproductive health, and mental health outcomes experienced by formerly incarcerated Black women.

Given this and the lack of research examining the health of incarcerated Black women exclusively, we launched a new study—Pathways to Wellness: Black Women's Health & Self-Care in Reentry—that is learning directly from formerly incarcerated Black women to understand their health needs, how they access healthcare, and barriers to care.

Although research describing factors that support women's reentry exists, few studies explore how women navigate returning

home, and none explore how race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and geographical location interact to shape the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated women and their health, especially the experiences of Black women who are disproportionately represented within this population. NBWJI's study focuses exclusively on Black women to understand the specific race and gender-related factors that promote health and wellness among formerly incarcerated Black women returning to their communities from confinement. Our study included 21 Black women from across the state of California, ranging in age from 33 to 65 years old.

Key findings

- **The care Black women receive in prisons impacts healthcare-seeking behaviors when they return home.** Formerly incarcerated Black women described feeling disconnected from their bodies in prison, and for some, this disconnect and lack of bodily autonomy was an internal barrier to seeking healthcare once released.

- **Women need education about navigating the healthcare system and its costs.** The cost of care during confinement is a significant barrier to accessing health care for incarcerated Black women, causing major delays in treatment. Once released, many do not understand the full scope of various insurances and how they work. Although health insurance coverage is strongly associated with reduced rearrest rates among women, there is limited education and pre-release planning to facilitate women's ability to access healthcare after leaving confinement.
- **Programs, especially with wraparound services, are key to helping women succeed in their reentry journeys.** Formerly incarcerated Black women in the study who were in treatment programs during confinement were required to make an exit plan, which helped identify their reentry priorities and was critical to their continued substance use treatment after release.



NBWJI is an important organization because it connects activists with scholars on a holistic level.

DR. CHERYL HICKS

Associate Professor, Africana Studies &
History, University of Delaware



Survivor Justice

Among women in prison, between 70% and 80% have experienced violence from intimate partners. And women who have been incarcerated are significantly more likely to report experiencing victimization across their lifespan, in comparison to women without incarceration histories. It's critical, therefore, to better support these women when they leave prison.

Meeting the Needs of Black Women Impacted by Gender-based Violence and the Criminal Legal System

In partnership with formerly incarcerated women, the Young Women's Freedom Center, and the Justice and Joy National Collaborative, we developed the LOVE Curriculum for Providers, a training curriculum to build the capacity of victim advocates and service providers to better support women & gender expansive people—people who are transgender, gender nonconforming, gender queer, nonbinary—who have been impacted by the criminal-legal system.

Through conversations with system-impacted survivors and providers and with the LOVE subject matter expert advisory group—including formerly incarcerated individuals and leaders in criminal justice reform, victims' services, and gender-responsive services—the LOVE Curriculum for Providers intentionally centers the needs and expertise of those directly impacted by gender-based violence and incarceration.

Impact

Paid leadership opportunities created for directly-impacted youth and adults

31

13

Events

Fact sheets, evaluations, policy reports, & curriculum

6

4

Organizations receiving technical assistance

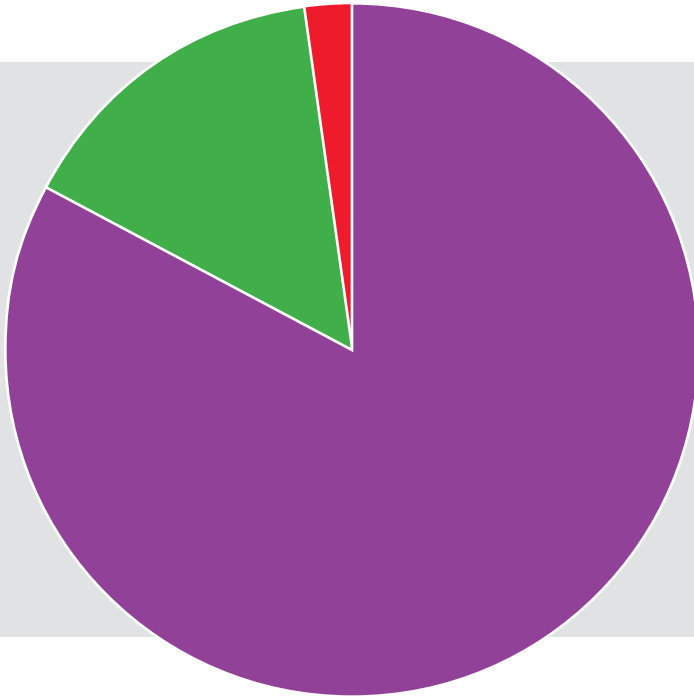


We needed not only a thought partner when we reached out, but practical resources and connections. Our partnership with NBWJI gave our plans a clear path forward to do the work.

KIM KENNEDY

Paralegal & Title IX Coordinator, Office of
General Counsel, Indianapolis Public Schools

Revenue & Expenses



Revenue sources

83% grants and contributions

15% contracted services

2% other

\$1,016,404 total revenue

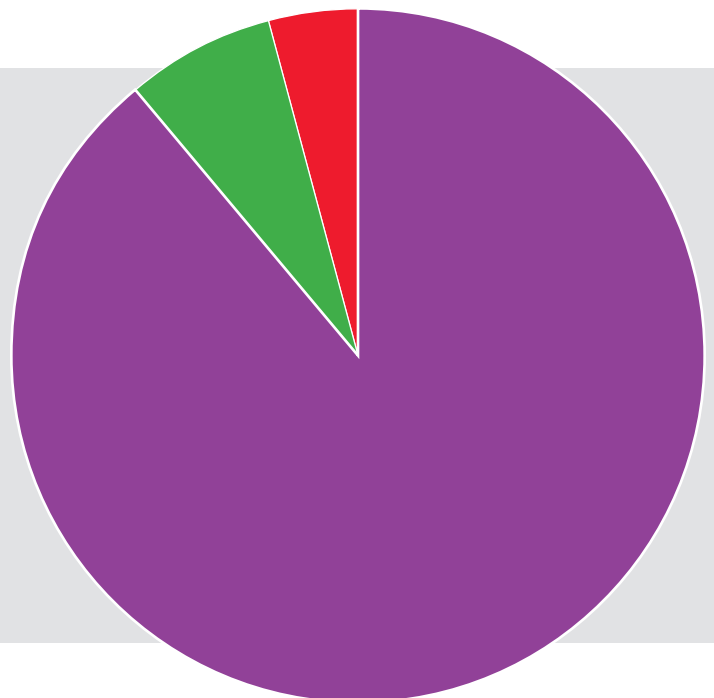
Expenses

89% program

7% management and general

4% fundraising

\$757,508 total expenses



Credits

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