

Vera's Center on Victimization and Safety

The Center on Victimization and Safety at the Vera Institute of Justice works to promote healing and restore justice for survivors of crime – especially domestic and sexual violence – as well as their families and communities. Our work focuses on communities that experience heightened levels of violence and trauma but are marginalized by the services and systems in place to support survivors. Our work recognizes that traditional approaches to addressing crime haven't worked and, in some cases, have caused harm to survivors and their communities, especially survivors from marginalized communities. Our work focuses on promoting approaches that reverse these negative impacts and support individuals and communities in their healing. We:

- Catalyze national dialogue to raise awareness and transform the principles and frameworks that guide our country's approaches to healing and justice;
- Manage change initiatives;
- Build capacity; and
- Re-grant funds to high-impact organizations that center people from marginalized communities in efforts to address violence and support survivors of crime.

Our Strategic Priorities

Our goal is **substantially more survivors from marginalized communities receive support** to help them heal from violence and trauma. We are pursuing four core priorities vital to achieving this goal.

1. Reframing survivor advocacy around an anti-oppression framework and center survivors from marginalized communities.
2. Opening doors to healing and justice for survivors with disabilities.
3. Promoting cultural and language justice for Deaf survivors.
4. Advancing healing and dignity for people behind and beyond bars.

Reframing Survivor Advocacy

Every year, millions of people in the United States become survivors of crime. Yet, only 13 survivors out of 100 receive victim services and the number drops to 5 for crimes that go unreported to the police. Survivors from marginalized communities are disproportionately represented among survivors who are underserved and inadequately served by anti-violence programs. Mainstream victim services programs were not designed with these communities in mind and have systemic barriers that prevent these survivors from getting help. Many of the programs that have the trust of community members and are effectively helping people from marginalized communities heal from trauma face a unique set of challenges, including getting victim services funding. Our work focuses on:

- Changing the conversations and practices of the anti-violence movement to center survivors from underserved communities and an anti-oppression framework;
- Quickly and strategically supporting the anti-violence field through unexpected, yet critical events that impact the lives of survivors from underserved communities;
- Providing in-depth support to solve the problems unique to each program and community; and
- Regranting funds to small organizations that are making a difference in the lives of survivors from marginalized communities to build capacity and spur innovation.

Opening the Doors to Healing and Justice for People with Disabilities

People with disabilities experience harm at epidemic levels. They're three to five times more likely to be sexually abused as children, and at least three times more likely to be victims of violent crimes ranging from robbery to rape as adolescents and adults. Equally as troubling, survivors with disabilities rarely get the help they need to enhance their safety, healing or justice. Our work focuses on:

- Reforming laws and policies that have adverse effects on crime survivors with disabilities;
- Promoting approaches to healing and justice that recognize and account for the multiple systems of oppression in the lives of people with disabilities;
- Fostering collaborations among victim services programs, disability organizations, and other stakeholders and building their capacities to support survivors with disabilities; and
- Supporting self-advocates and other people with disabilities to lead and participate in efforts to address violence.

Promoting Cultural and Language Justice for Deaf Survivors

Deaf individuals in the United States experience domestic and sexual violence at much higher rates than hearing people. Deaf and DeafBlind survivors routinely face barriers when reaching out for help. From 911 systems that only take phone-based calls to domestic violence programs and rape crisis centers that do not provide bilingual and bicultural services in American Sign Language to prosecutors who question the credibility of Deaf witnesses, mainstream services and systems that respond to domestic and sexual violence are not equipped to meet the unique language and cultural needs of Deaf communities, especially Deaf communities of color, in the United States. Our work focuses on:

- Expanding, sustaining, and networking “for Deaf, by Deaf” advocacy and restorative justice programs nationwide;
- Supporting the leadership of Black, Indigenous and other people of color in Deaf advocacy, restorative justice, and language justice efforts;
- Increasing the number and use of sign language interpreters who are qualified and prepared to work in victim services, with a particular emphasis on interpreters of color and Deaf interpreters; and
- Helping mainstream victim service programs, law enforcement agencies, and district attorney’s offices better serve Deaf and DeafBlind survivors.

Advancing Healing and Dignity Behind and Beyond Bars

People with disabilities are overrepresented in U.S. prisons and jails, and for people with disabilities living in jail or prison, life can be particularly harsh, difficult, and isolating. Another reality is that many incarcerated people were victims of crime before they entered the system, and many experience high rates of sexual and physical violence while they are incarcerated. For a host of reasons, most never get the help they need to heal while they are incarcerated or after they return home. Our work focuses on:

- Increasing safety, dignity, and fairness for incarcerated people with disabilities by helping correctional systems to identify access needs and processes for providing accommodations;
- Advancing safety and culture change in American correctional facilities by supporting PREA implementation in jails and community confinement facilities; and
- Helping reentry and victim service providers create trauma-responsive services for crime survivors who have a history of incarceration.

How We Work

How we work is just as important as the outcomes of our work. Accessibility and equity are at the center of everything we do.

We can't end violence and create effective strategies for healing and justice unless the people who are most impacted - including people with disabilities and Deaf people - are at the table. Their focus must be contributing their expertise and ideas about what healing and justice looks like and developing strategies to address the root causes of violence - not fighting for their own access and participation, which is a far too common.

We strive to meet the highest standards of equity, accessibility, and language access in our work. Our team reflects this commitment. Everyone on our team plays a role in creating access and equity, and we have dedicated staff positions that drive the accessibility of our work. We also have cultivated a diverse pool of vendors and consultants who we work with us to ensure the strategies we use to meet the access needs of our staff, partners, and constituents as well as their cultural, linguistic, racial, and other needs.

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Visit our websites:

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