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Looking In the Mirror – Reckoning with Inequities in Our Own Movement



To fully commit to a future where Black lives are heard, valued, and cared for, we must do the hard work of looking inward and asking how we got here. For a long time, Black movement leaders in the domestic violence field have been sounding the alarm on an overreliance on the police. They've been talking about the disproportionate violence and fear their families are subjected to. They've poured their precious energy into helping white colleagues understand the pain of raising children in a racist society. And they've provided concrete guidance on increasing equity in organizations—often at great personal and professional risk.

Black advocates and preventionists, as well as advocates and preventionists of color, have been targeted, silenced, and even pushed out if they do not comply with the unwritten rules. It is clear that the movement hasn't been listening enough. Too many in this field have expressed feeling gaslit, and that can't stand.

murders at the hands of police, we have lost George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, Sean Monterrosa, and countless more lives. Things are not okay, and they haven't been in a long time.

In her book *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation*, Beth Richie casts an important light on our history: "It might be possible to imagine that anti-violence programs would have built coalitions with groups organizing against police brutality in African American communities or with groups working to respond to hate crimes in major urban areas. However, the stories that frame this book present contrary evidence—that the success of the anti-violence movement in the United States has been unequal, and the ways that it has become institutionalized disproportionately benefit women with social privilege."

White supremacy is baked into the domestic violence field. We've heard from too many Black people and people of color that they've faced pushback and backlash from predominantly white leadership for fear losing funding, political support, board members, and more. The Culturally Specific Collaborative was born out of this frustration.

We have a responsibility to hear the voices in our field—the exasperation, the harm, the inequities, and the underlying systemic causes. It is our duty to learn and take action to address those inequities, counter implicit bias with inclusion, and heal the trauma inflicted within our own organizations. Will you embark with us on a journey to review structures, challenge current policies, and be self-critical? Can we explore if resources are flowing in the direction needed to build equity, or are they sustaining models that aren't working for everybody? How are leadership decisions affecting staff and diverse groups? This week, we will send information about the [Cultural Responsiveness Organizational Self-Assessment tool](#), as a starting point or a way to deepen this work.

Our field's solidarity with Black Lives Matter is not real unless we take accountability for the harm that our work has caused. We must publicly acknowledge our role in the pain of survivors, families and communities.

The Violence Against Women Act was built on years of local and state advocacy, with considerable energy invested in criminalization as a way to change social norms around domestic violence. This planning and coordination was largely done at the exclusion of Black communities, Native communities, and communities of color, resulting in damaging impacts that led to the harsh reality of survivors being arrested for self-defense. Just read [Tomiekia Johnson's](#) and [Liyah Birru's](#) stories.

At the Partnership, we had to get uncomfortable—and take accountability to move in the right direction. We decided to stop pouring our advocacy into criminalization and try to make up for lost time by following Beth Richie's concepts on partnerships. This is the strategy that has allowed us to make progress on challenging the notion that there is a one-size-fits-all approach to serving survivors. Through the guidance of immigration advocacy organizations and the [Alliance for Boys and Men of Color \(ABMoC\)](#), our

been vocal about the need for the C.R.I.S.E.S. Act, sponsored by ABMoC. If passed, this will expand public safety options through community-based alternatives to law enforcement.

Police brutality takes an enormous toll on Black survivors—especially on trans people, gender-nonconforming people, and women—and it derails our missions. It underscores our role to infuse anti-oppression into all of our prevention efforts, knowing that harmful beliefs keep systemic racism afloat every day. There is a lifetime of silence and unchecked power that contributes to the disproportionate use of force on Black people—so in addition to seriously reviewing our policy and budget stances, our movement can make even greater strides in the work to promote community inclusion.

Importantly, our movement must use our unique and powerful position to defy state violence. With scarce resources, it is our responsibility to put our advocacy where our values are. This is a reflection point on whether criminal legal alternatives are enough. With our team, Policy Advisory Council, and Members, we are committed to discussing the hard questions about the most effective use of our dollars. Knowing that racism, homelessness, and poverty compound domestic violence, our solutions must prioritize the most marginalized people in our state. *We will hear the most important information from Members who have not been heard before.*

Many have expressed that they want to have these conversations and challenge the inequities that exist in our own movement. In service of strategic followership, we will be reaching out to Black advocates and preventionists, and advocates and preventionists of color—to take direction on the ways we can engage our movement in an honest dialogue.

We acknowledge that white supremacy infects our work to serve Black survivors and communities, as well as survivors of color and their communities. For people aspiring toward allyship as an ongoing commitment, this is a time to embrace discomfort, and take informed, inspirational risks to truly fulfill our missions and disrupt the status quo. We will be in touch with all Members to continue the discussion of our critical role at this moment in history.

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