SOMETHING ELSE IS POSSIBLE.

COMMON JUSTICE: 2023 IMPACT REPORT
At Common Justice, restorative justice is more than our ethos; it’s our practice. In New York City, we operate the first alternative-to-incarceration and victim-service program in the United States that focuses on violent felonies in the adult courts.

We develop and advance solutions to violence that transform the lives of those harmed and foster racial equity without relying on incarceration. When violence happens, we facilitate channels of healing and repair for all parties involved. As part of our direct service work, we prioritize accountability and safety over punishment. Locally and nationally, we leverage the lessons from our direct service to transform the justice system’s response to violence.

In addition to advancing real solutions to address harm, in our narrative shifting work we are committed to telling the truth about violence—about the people who survive it, the people who cause it, and the strategies that will work to end it. Through our policy and organizing work, we build power with those living in Black and Brown communities that have been disproportionately harmed by violence. We advocate for and with survivors of violence, as well as those who have been adversely impacted by interpersonal, community and state violence.

Our guiding principles:

- Accountability based
- Survivor centered
- Safety driven
- Racially equitable

We uplift an affirmative vision.

We know we will move people not primarily by exposing the pain and wrongs of incarceration, but rather by offering a compelling, values-based, pragmatic, and visionary affirmative vision of things as they could be and giving people an opportunity to contribute to making that world real.

We are interested in building movement, not empire.

This means we know we will never win transformative change alone, and that everything we do we do in partnership and relationship with others in our formidable national movement.

Our mission:

More Justice and More Safety

Common Justice: 2023 Impact Report
**Who We Serve**

In Brooklyn and the Bronx, Common Justice works with young people who commit violent crimes and those they harm, we refer to these individuals as the responsible party and the harmed party, respectively.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>RESPONSIBLE PARTIES</th>
<th>HARMED PARTIES</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>95%</strong> PEOPLE OF COLOR</td>
<td><strong>90%</strong> PEOPLE OF COLOR</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>80%</strong> MALE</td>
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Nearly all of our participants live in low-income communities, many are first- or second-generation immigrants, and a portion (15%, to our knowledge) are LGBTQIA+.

Our policy and organizing work serve those most impacted by violence and the criminal legal system in New York State, while our strategic communications work aims to shift the narrative surrounding violence, engage crime survivors, and those impacted by violence and incarceration nationally.

**A Closer Look**

at our Direct Service Impact

Only 7% (of responsible parties) have been terminated from our program for committing a new crime.

Of program graduates who enrolled after 2012 (when the program model was first solidified), only one has been convicted of a new violent felony offense.

**100% of Circles**

**Have Resulted in Agreements.**

In addition to maintaining these low failure rates, the project has delivered a wide array of services to underserved survivors of color.

**Our Harmed Parties Have Reported Improvements in Their Mental Health, Including Self-Reported Reductions in Symptoms and Hardships Associated with Trauma.**

In the coming years, we look forward to measuring these outcomes with a newly developed and statistically validated Healing Scale we have co-created with movement and academic partners over the past several years.

**Ever After Spotlight:**

* Circles are a restorative process where responsible parties and harmed parties come together to dialogue through conflict.

*Common Justice: 2023 Impact Report*

4
Building a member base of survivors

Developing a validated scale to measure healing from community violence

Winning our first legislative campaign - Fair Access to Victim Compensation

Launching our work in our partnerships and replication sites nationally

Expanding our direct service to Manhattan

Convening a table of movement leaders on narrative to develop concrete tools and shape our vision for the next phase

Pragmatic and optimistic, we begin this work in practice. In New York City, Common Justice engages younger adults (ages 16 to 26) and those they have harmed. If the harmed parties agree, these cases are diverted into a restorative justice process that gives participants the power and opportunity to collectively identify and address impacts, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible. In the restorative justice circle, all parties agree on agreements other than incarceration to hold the responsible party accountable in ways meaningful to the person harmed. Staff closely monitors responsible parties’ compliance with the resultant agreements—which may include extensive community service, vocational and educational programming, leadership development, and restitution, among other commitments unique to each case—and connects the harmed parties with appropriate supports. These agreements replace the lengthy prison sentences our responsible parties would otherwise have served, and the felonies are removed from their records when they complete the program.

We continue to build services that address the needs of our harmed parties, which include recently launching a Healing Labs incubator to teach tactics to help trauma responses and instill healthy practices to help cope long-term.

This year, we were excited to continue the expansion of that work into Manhattan, an effort more than a decade in the making.
In January 2022, we launched our first policy campaign to make New York State’s victim compensation laws and policies more equitable. Victim compensation funds are used to reimburse survivors for costs associated with harm, like hospital bills, burial expenses, temporary housing, or lock replacement. Victim compensation funds are often used as a life-changing support in the aftermath of violence; however, survivors of violence might choose not to report their crimes for a variety of reasons, including interpersonal dynamics, fear of retaliation, and mistrust in law enforcement.

The Fair Access to Victim Compensation (FAVC) Act removes the required police reporting requirement and would make the filing process more trauma informed. When passed, the law will give thousands of survivors who do not feel safe reporting to the police a pathway to resources for healing and safety that has long been unjustly foreclosed.

In December 2023, Governor Kathy Hochul officially signed the Fair Access to Victim Compensation Act into New York Law. The broad and intersectional coalition that converged behind this bill as powerful it is unusual, including mainstream victims’ advocates, violence interrupters, youth gun violence survivors, mothers who have lost their children to violence, immigrant survivors, LGBTQIA+ advocates, advocates against unjust policing, and more.

Common Justice is not here to judge you – they’re here to show you a better path. At the end of the day, they know that you made a mistake, and the fact that you came here means that you want to fix that – to right your wrong.
The biggest lesson for me was learning how to be accountable for my own actions. I learned that I’m not as aggressive as I’m perceived, I’m not as angry as people think that I am.

In the past year, we have published and ghost-written pieces for key influencers and spoken with many reporters to help shape the narrative about violence in our nation. We have continued to convene a number of visionary leaders from across our movement in small groups, where people leading policy and organizing campaigns and diversion projects related to violence can come together to learn from one another. These gatherings have helped position us all collectively to respond to the long-standing barriers to addressing violence in our criminal justice reform work and to emerging regressive reactions (from upticks, real or perceived, in violence, and others), hone narrative frames and strategies for building narrative power and identify opportunities for alignment where they exist, increase our shared capacity to concretely express an affirmative vision for safety, and identify any opportunities for collaboration, whether public-facing or behind the scenes.

When the direct service work launched 15 years ago, it was created with the bold vision of changing the way we responded to violence.

Our aspiration was never to be the only alternative-to-incarceration and victim-service program that focuses on violent felonies in the adult courts, but rather to provide the critical demonstrative proof that such a bold intervention could work, and it could be implemented throughout the United States. This year, we gained incredible momentum and were excited to work with powerful leaders standing up for aligned interventions in cities where there is a crucial need and desire for a new path forward. These include St. Louis (with the Freedom Community Center), Jackson, Mississippi (with the People’s Advocacy Institute), Nashville (with the Raphah Institute), and Minneapolis (with an emerging range of partners).
LOOKING FORWARD: What we Believe is Possible

To ensure our local work serves as a catalyst for broader change and reform, our policy and organizing work seeks to build power in marginalized Black and Brown communities that have been disproportionately impacted by violence.

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES ARE ENGAGING AS MEMBERS OF A BASE AND ARE COMMITTED TO BUILDING NEW SOLUTIONS AND FIGHTING TO PUT THOSE SOLUTIONS INTO PRACTICE.

With the passing of the FAVC Act, in the coming year we look forward to seeing its implementation through while we launch our next policy campaigns aimed at reducing and repairing the harms of the criminal legal system to those responsible for and harmed by violence.

SCALING UP AND REPLICATING SUCCESS ACROSS THE NATION

As part of our commitment to encourage restorative justice processes nationwide, our Partnerships and Replications team offers training, support, and capacity-building to organizations across the country who are interested in doing this work. We’ve already made an impact on the cities we’re currently partnering with and we’re just getting started. There are dozens of jurisdictions that have demonstrated serious interest in diverting cases of serious violence into restorative justice alternatives to incarceration.

THE APPETITE FOR OUR WORK IS VAST IN A WAY WE HAVE NEVER SEEN, AND THIS MOMENT IS BOTH OPPORTUNE AND, IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, IMPERMANENT.

As we anticipate sharing our new validated Healing Scale to partners and stakeholders nationally, we are equally as excited to launch our Common Justice Practitioners Lab year-long learning cohort for a wide range of select national organizations working to stand up aligned interventions.

GROW MOVEMENT FROM THE GROUND UP

DEEPEN PROGRAMMATIC WORK AND IMPACT IN NY STATE

IN THE COMING YEARS, WE LOOK FORWARD TO BRINGING OUR DIRECT SERVICE WORK IN NEW YORK CITY TO SCALE FOLLOWING THE DISRUPTIONS OF THE COVID PANDEMIC AND SOLIDIFYING OUR EXPANSION TO MANHATTAN.

In 2024, we’re looking forward to increasing the numbers of participants diverted from prison and survivors engaged in support, building deeper community buy-in, and further strengthening our relationships with key system partners.
At Common Justice, we know narrative is bigger than content or messaging. It is about the filter through which people take in information, stories, and experiences. That filter is about culture, power, relationships, belonging, values, and the scope of what is possible.

Our aim in changing the narrative about violence is not just to tell new stories, but to fundamentally transform that filter.

As part of this effort, we are disseminating our narrative change curricula and community education tools to help challenge existing biases about violence and open up new conversations about safety that encourage accountability and empower survivors. In addition, we are partnering with award-winning artist, photographer, and filmmaker Bayeté Ross Smith on a multimedia project that will challenge dominant narratives about violence.

“Common Justice is the place for you... they will be there for you, stride with you through your good times and bad times, and they will not let you down. Trust the process of Common Justice, and you'll succeed.”
TAKE ACTION:

LET'S CREATE NEW POSSIBILITIES TOGETHER

We invite you to donate to continue our work to advance solutions to violence that don’t rely on incarceration.

Connect with us and stay updated with our work:

JOIN OUR MAILING LIST

www.commonjustice.org