

# ***The Center for Young Women's Development Discussion Guide***



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Visit the Reentry Web site at: [www.reentrymediaoutreach.org](http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org).

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**The Annie E. Casey Foundation**

## The Film: *The Center for Young Women's Development*

The Center for Young Women's Development (CYWD) was founded in 1993 in San Francisco. According to its Web site, "The Center is leading the nation as an innovative youth directed model and has received national recognition for its gender specific and transformative work with young women living in poverty. Staffed entirely by young women who have progressed through its programs, the Center is proving to the world that given the opportunity, young women facing the hardest circumstances can change their lives and impact their communities."

Outreach Extensions learned about CYWD through the documentary GIRL TROUBLE, which is part of the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign. To capture CYWD's practices, particularly its success in helping young women to rebuild their lives as well as become agents of change in their community, Outreach Extensions commissioned Dean Radcliffe-Lynes, D.R. Lynes, Inc. to produce a short documentary film. Entitled *The Center for Young Women's Development*, this 14.5-minute outreach video presents the day-to-day work of the Center, the issues it confronts, its partnerships, and how it builds a strong and effective community among its staff and clients.

Programs and practices at CYWD offer replicable models. One of the young women in the film, Sayyadina Thomas, program advocate, describes why CYWD is important to the community: *"The Center provides structure for a lot of women. We find ourselves unstructured when we come out of the [juvenile justice] system. No one sits down and tells us we need to keep a date book. No one gives us second chances. No one brings us into a job and gives us the hands-on training while we're doing the job, like the Center does."*

*The Center for Young Women's Development* can also encourage young people like those in the film to seek opportunities and resources to transform themselves in ways they may never have thought possible. The film can be used effectively on its own or as a companion to the documentary GIRL TROUBLE.

GIRL TROUBLE is a groundbreaking documentary that chronicles four years in the lives of three teenage girls entangled in San Francisco's juvenile justice system. The film is a production of Critical Images Inc., produced in association with Independent Television Service and KQED Public Television, San Francisco, with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Additional support is provided by The Annie E. Casey Foundation. See the GIRL TROUBLE segment on the Reentry Web site ([www.reentrymediaoutreach.org/gt.htm](http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org/gt.htm)) for more information on the film as well as the GIRL TROUBLE Discussion Guide for Youth Audiences.

Find out more about The Center for Young Women's Development and access its excellent "Know Justice" Handbook: and "Know Justice" Curriculum on its Web site: [www.cywd.org](http://www.cywd.org).

## The Organization: The Center for Young Women's Development

The Center for Young Women's Development (CYWD) in San Francisco is a nonprofit organization, originally called the Streets Survival Project. It is run by young women, all under the age of 27, who work with other young women from the streets and the juvenile justice system, providing them with educational and employment opportunities and helping them build healthier lives and healthier communities.

The agency was founded in 1993 by Rachel Pfeffer and members of the Come into the Sun Coalition, a San Francisco collective of service providers working with young and adult women in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Its guiding principle was that young women are the experts on issues facing young women, so they should run programs for young women.

In 1997, the founding executive director left the agency. The young women served by the organization assumed responsibility for its direction, making CYWD one of the nation's first youth-run social service organizations. Under the leadership of executive director Lateefah Simon, they began to build on this model to change the power dynamic in San Francisco for the most marginalized young women. The success of this model means that young women of color who were formerly incarcerated, working in the street economies, who may or may not be in school, can be leaders, researchers, employers, policymakers, and activists – people who turn their ideas into new solutions to old problems.

CYWD provides services in four areas:

**Health** – Physical, mental, and spiritual health services help women who have experienced domestic violence, assault, rape, emotional abuse, addiction, and other traumatic life events and health challenges. Services range from traditional counseling to alternative medicine, to self-defense classes.

**Critical Thinking** – Young women develop the skills they need to come to terms with their own experiences, understand them in the larger context of our society, and take responsibility for how they choose to respond. Education methods include social biography, civic engagement activities, attending city commission and board meetings, political education, policy work, and other activities.

**Community Building** – Rather than encouraging young women to escape their circumstances, CYWD helps them re-invest in their own communities by being involved and working for social justice. Activities include street outreach, organizing campaigns, conferences, trainings, social activities, and service projects.

**Skills Development** – Training in literacy, math skills, job etiquette, personal economic strategies, resumes, interview skills, self-expression, assertiveness, and conflict resolution helps women become self-sufficient.

All of the CYWD's services are based on women using their own experiences as the basis of their learning, on integrating all four of the areas listed above, and on bringing each of the four elements to young women in a manner appropriate to their particular situations.

Two important CYWD projects presented in *The Center for Young Women's Development* film are the Girls' Detention Advocacy Project and Sisters Rising.

***Girls' Detention Advocacy Project*** – GDAP works intensively with incarcerated young women in group and one-on-one settings. Since the majority of young women in the juvenile justice system are survivors of violence, the program emphasizes healing as well as accountability. Using its "Lift Us Up, Don't Lock Us Down" curriculum, GDAP provides self-advocacy training, leadership development, court accompaniment, mentorship, support groups, legal education, self-care techniques, and life skills training. GDAP also engages young women in advocacy campaigns, working to implement juvenile justice reform. Strategizing with young women to identify priority issue areas, GDAP provides an avenue for young women to engage in dialogue with officials and achieve real change. GDAP stays in contact with young women post-release to provide community connection and support.

***Sisters Rising*** – Employment training has been at the core of CYWD's work since the very beginning, based on the knowledge that you must have the ability to meet your basic needs in order to be able to focus on developing and achieving your visions for the future. The Center pays low- and no-income young women a living wage to learn transferable job skills while working in their communities and receiving case management and referral services. These young women work together as a team, participating in trainings, outreach, and campaigns while creating bonds with each other and with other young women in San Francisco. Once a young woman leaves CYWD, the Center works with her to ensure that she transitions into a quality educational program and/or meaningful employment.

Young women in Sisters Rising build self-sufficiency while learning job skills, critical thinking, self-care, and more. Participants complete 200 hours of training in computers, life skills, sexual health, substance abuse, job readiness, writing, educational planning, public speaking, political education, and conflict resolution and communication. They then go on to conduct street-based outreach and education, lead community trainings, and provide research and reports on the status of young people involved in the juvenile justice system and street economies in San Francisco. Young women complete this program with organizational management skills, leadership abilities, and opportunities to continue community work.

CYWD works with young women in juvenile hall, on the streets, and on-site. They provide referrals and "street law" training, while also engaging in conversations with young women about the circumstances that led them to the streets. Peers share their own stories, offering a credibility that others do not possess. CYWD provides a place to heal and to experience a strong sense of sisterhood while providing the support, information, and skill-building that help young women get through difficult times and become positive change agents in their communities.

Over the course of the next two years, CYWD will publish articles as well as release a study about the impact of its work over the past decade. Please check its Web site ([www.cywd.org](http://www.cywd.org)) for information and read its most current newsletter.

## Lateefah Simon, Executive Director



*Lateefah Simon*, executive director of The Center for Young Women’s Development, has spent the past nine years of her life advocating for health, safety, and economic justice for young women from the streets of San Francisco. Simon began working at CYWD as a community health outreach worker at age 17. Her immense passion and commitment led her to move up through the organization into her current role at the age of 19. As the organization’s leader, she has helped CYWD to grow and develop its approach. She was awarded a 2003 MacArthur Fellowship for her innovative work in developing the Center as a peer-run social service provider.

## Statistics

- Girls are 28 percent of juvenile detention population, but receive only two percent of delinquency services. (CWYD)
- 40 percent of adult prisoners were once in the juvenile justice system. (CWYD)
- Seven percent of all prison inmates are female, about 40 percent of them for violating drug laws and about 25 percent for committing a violent crime. (Amnesty International)
- 41.3 percent of the correctional population in America has attained only “some high school or less” compared to 18.4 percent of the general population. (Harlow, Caroline Wolf. “Education and Correctional Populations, BJS Special Report, January 2003. (NCJ 195670))

## Using the Video

This Discussion Guide is designed to help you use *The Center for Young Women's Development* video to make decisions about engaging and assisting youth who are facing challenges related to incarceration, release, and reentry into their communities. It can be used by youth-serving organizations as well as by organizations operated by youth themselves. People involved with the juvenile and criminal justice systems, including community courts, probation and parole, and public defenders, may find ways to collaborate with organizations similar to CYWD. An additional set of questions is designed to engage at-risk youth.

We've provided a diverse range of questions. Choose the ones that may be most helpful to your group or organization in discussing the film. We also invite you to create additional discussion questions about the film that are relevant to your work/practice, goals, or community setting.

## Audiences

*The Center for Young Women's Development* is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Youth- or peer-run social service organizations
- Community- and faith-based youth serving organizations
- Counselors and counseling training programs
- Juvenile justice system participants, e.g., youth detention facilities, judges, attorneys, community courts, public defenders, probation and parole supervisors, Legal Aid service providers
- Colleges, universities, and community colleges, especially in conjunction with departments of women's studies, sociology, law, criminal justice / law enforcement, social work, counseling, psychology
- Young people in juvenile detention or on probation or parole
- Shelter and transitional housing staff and residents
- Groups working on criminal justice reform issues
- Elected officials, policymakers, and their staffs

## Discussion Topics

Topics you might address using *The Center for Young Women's Development* include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Youth- or peer-run organization/program development
- Services for girls involved in the juvenile justice system
- Leadership development
- Advocacy, detention advocacy
- Skill development and employment
- Case management
- Community building and community organizing
- Gender-specific programming in the juvenile justice system
- Law, policy, and legislation that affect girls and women

## General Discussion Prompts for Adults

- This video presents the programs, practices, and culture of The Center for Young Women's Development, as well as the belief system of the young women who run the organization. They work with young women from the streets and the juvenile justice system and help them build healthier lives. Before viewing the video, talk about what you plan to look for in evaluating or learning from the work of CYWD.
- After viewing the video, talk about whether the criteria you established was useful in evaluating the work of CYWD. Why or why not? What approach did you find more useful?
- What did you learn from the video? How do you think this new insight might change the way you work with young people?
- Did anything in the video surprise you? If so, what? Why was it surprising?
- The Center for Young Women's Development is a youth- or peer-run social service organization. What role does the Center play in the lives of its staff and the young women it serves? Are there other ways the Center might support these young women?
- What aspect(s) of the Center's work seems to be most helpful to the young women who are employed as staff or interns?
- What aspect(s) of the Center's work seems to be most helpful to the young women who obtained services from the Center?
- Executive director Lateefah Simon talks about "street based outreach." How do you define what that is? Why do you think CYWD is so effective in "fighting the ills" it deals with everyday? What strategies can your organization or program employ to replicate the advocacy results of CYWD?
- Describe the collaborative work within CYWD as well as its efforts as a good partner to other community groups, organizations, and entities within the juvenile justice arena. What types of collaborations can you build within and outside your organization that would improve services to your clients?

## Discussion Questions by Topic

Discussion questions are provided to help viewers address CYWD's four areas of service as well as the two programs presented in the film.

### CYWD's Four Service Areas

CYWD divides its services into four areas: health, critical thinking, community building, and skill building. The following questions should be helpful in evaluating the effectiveness and replicability of the services and supports provided by the Center. You may want to review the descriptions of these service areas on page 2 of this Discussion Guide.

#### Health

1. The following statements help to describe the culture of CYWD as well as the level of support interns and clients feel, which contributes to their overall health, well being and self-esteem. What other examples did you find in the film? What strategies and interactions resulted in this culture? How can these be incorporated in other youth-run or youth-serving organizations?

- "Society sometimes doesn't give us those second chances. Programs sometimes don't give us those second chances. But at the Center, we feel that those second chances will eventually help you be successful. If people would have given up on me ten different times, I wouldn't be here right now. It was those times that people forgave me that gave me another chance." – *Marlene Sanchez, Program Director*
- "It was like a safe place that I could come to and even when everything else was totally chaotic, I could come here and be safe and people believed in me when I didn't believe in myself." -- *Izzy Carson, former client*
- "I just walk with my head held higher, and I feel that I could do anything now that I opened doors to better opportunity and just to better myself." – *Krystal Morales, Intern*
- "This place keeps me focused, and I like everybody here. I'm comfortable around everybody." – *Ronnica Merritt, Intern*

2. Each month, young women who participate in Sisters Rising (one of CYWD's programs) build an altar to address self-healing. They believe that, if they can heal personal ills, then they are better equipped to build healthy communities. What are your thoughts on this practice and its projected outcomes?

#### Critical Thinking

3. "We survive because all of the young women, all of the sisters here, do want to learn and do want to figure out how we create solutions for ourselves." – *Lateefah Simon*  
What activities did you observe in the film that helped the young women to think critically and become invested in their own futures?

4. "I come here because, so I can stay out of trouble in the streets, because I used to be bad. I used to like beating up on people and stuff. But, since I got this job, I've calmed down and I be more focused on school and stuff now." – *Enisha Ned, Intern*

Enisha is now taking responsibility for how she chooses to behave. What factors within herself and within her experiences at CYWD may have led her to a different level of thinking and functioning?

5. CYWD's leadership is responsive to the special needs of its clients – demonstrating their own practice of critical thinking in developing the work of the organization. What examples of this did you find in the film?

### **Community Building**

6. Executive director Lateefah Simon summarizes the work of the Center in the following way: "If she takes job skills away from this place, accounting skills, fund raising, etiquette, organizing, that's beautiful. But, that's not the most important thing. The most important thing is that there's a community here. Because all this other stuff is great, but at the end of the day, when somebody's hurting physically, mentally, spiritually, if they can't pick up the phone and call somebody, we have not done our job."

- Do you agree with Lateefah that establishing a community is the most important work of the Center? Why or why not?
- What evidence did you see in the film that staff and clients regard the Center as their community?
- Why might this aspect of support be particularly important to the young people served by the Center?

7. Lateefah further describes the Center's aspirations for its staff and clients, and its vision for them to contribute to community building. "We've consistently provided jobs for young women who've been on the streets and in juvenile hall and in the foster care system. With really the goal that young women who have been most ignored can develop opportunities for themselves, can employ and train their own people, their own sisters, to begin not to just address, but to fight the ills that we have to deal with everyday."

- Do you share Lateefah's confidence that the women involved with the Center can make a difference in their communities? Why or why not?
- What evidence did you see in the film that staff and clients are utilizing their skills to act as community change agents?

8. What strategies and practices of the Center shown in the film can be adapted to your organization to develop leadership and community building skills?

### **Skill Building**

9. CYWD highlights skill development opportunities for interns and staff. What kinds of skills, including "soft skills" might be needed in the following situations? Will these skills be useful to the young women in advancing in the workforce? Why or why not? How might similar tasks/opportunities be incorporated in your organization?

- The Center has also been meeting with Juvenile Hall to advocate for young women who are mothers and are unable to see their children, an issue that had previously not been addressed. "We're trying to get the probation department to open spaces for

young sisters who are incarcerated who have babies and we're going to create a bill of rights for young mothers who are incarcerated.”

- Each week Juvenile Hall conducts case management meetings on girls as they come through the system to determine what steps need to be taken to assist in getting them out of detention as soon as possible. These meetings are attended by community-based organizations that provide wrap around and after care services for these girls. The Center for Young Women Development is a participant in those meetings.
- Every year, the young women decide on an issue that they want to address as a group. This year, they decided to collaborate with other youth organizations in a major media campaign to address domestic violence. They are designing and creating literature and posters that will be displayed on buses, at bus stops, in shelters and in schools.

### **CYWD's Programs**

Designed with a holistic approach, all of the Center's programs recognize that each young woman already has the experience and strength necessary to become a powerful leader and an agent for change. Review the descriptions of the Girls Detention Advocacy Project and Sister's Rising on page 3.

**10.** Review the following comments about the Girls Detention Advocacy Project and Sisters Rising. Discuss what works and how you might add value to them. What elements of these programs could be replicated in other communities? How would you go about doing that?

#### ***Girls Detention Advocacy Project***

“For me it was like a big accomplishment that we were able to change [this policy], because you couldn't go in unless you were twenty-one and we were able to change that and actually begin to facilitate our own groups. It was the goal of the program that they were facilitated by girls who've been incarcerated to facilitate groups with other incarcerated young women.” – *Marlene Sanchez, Program Director*

“We hear and we're learning about the issues that they're facing and we develop campaigns and policy, and we try to open up opportunities for young women in the most horrible situations to be treated with some respect.” – *Lateefah Simon*

#### ***Sister's Rising Project***

“I was incarcerated and they [CYWD] came in every week and did groups with the young women who were locked up. One of the representatives who came in told us that when we got out there was an opportunity for us to be employed here at the Center. So when I got out, I applied. The first time I applied I didn't get the job. And then I came back a year later and applied and I got the job.” – *Nadiyah Shereff, Program Coordinator*

“Young women are trained from the Sister's Rising Project and continue on their line of leadership here, to do work inside juvenile hall with sisters who are locked up....We're in the courtroom with young women pushing them to advocate for themselves, for their freedom. Not just, you know for better sentences. If you feel like you need drug treatment instead of incarceration, baby girl, let's prep and let's figure out how to fight because we're fighting for your lives, for the lives of other sisters. We do one-on-ones with the young women and we train her in advocacy techniques that we've learned that have been successful for other young women.” – *Lateefah Simon, Executive Director*

## General Discussion Prompts and Activities for Youth

From the questions and projects below, choose the ones that serve the interests of your group. We encourage you to make up your own questions and activities.

- CYWD is based on the belief that everyone has something positive to offer and can, with help, find ways to contribute to her community. As you watch this film, think about what kinds of things you have to offer. After the film, make a plan for how you might take action on one of those things.
- What did you think about the young women in the video – those who work there and those who are served by the Center? What is the most important thing you learned from them? How do you think this new insight might change you?
- Did anything in the video surprise you? If so, what? Why was it surprising?
- Which things in the video are most like your own experience? Which things in the video are most different from your own experience?
- One of the staff interns said: *“I’ve watched myself transform in a way that I never saw possible. I just like, my skill level has soared, like in every area.”* What, if anything, do you want to be different about yourself? What possibilities did you see in the video that could make a difference in your life?
- The Center for Young Women’s Development is run by young women. Lateefah Simon was 19 years old when she became the executive director. What do you think about the work they are doing to help street youth and those in the juvenile justice system? What aspects of their work are most effective? What suggestions do you have that would help them to do a better job?
- In what ways do you admire Lateefah Simon? How is she a role model for her staff and the women served by CYWD? What strengths do you have that you think she would admire? What skills do you have that she would encourage you to develop?
- Explore the services, policies, and institutions in your own community. How effective are they in serving young women working in the street or who are involved in the juvenile justice system?
- In 2003, Lateefah Simon was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship for her innovative work in developing the Center as a peer-run social service provider. The MacArthur Fellowship is often referred to as a “genius award.” Do some research to find out more about this award and who some of the other recipients are.
- Just as the staff interns do at CYWD, put together a collaborative group to create a project that will benefit your community. Decide together what issue you will address and what actions you’ll take.

# RESOURCES

## Web sites

[www.cywd.org](http://www.cywd.org) - The Web site of The Center for Young Women's Development.

[www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org) - Child Welfare League of America includes resources related to foster care, juvenile justice, and much more.

[www.ncjj.org](http://www.ncjj.org) - The National Center for Juvenile Justice conducts research related to the treatment and adjudication of minors in the court system.

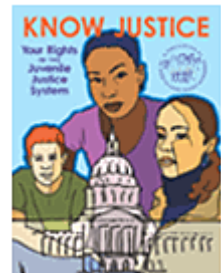
[www.girltrouble.org](http://www.girltrouble.org) - This is the Web site for the GIRL TROUBLE film.

[www.reentrymediaoutreach.org](http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org) - The Web site for the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign includes information on *The Center for Young Women's Development* and GIRL TROUBLE as well as PDF versions of the discussion guides for both films.

## Books

### "Know Justice" Handbook, The Center for Young Women's Development

The "Know Justice" Handbook provides explanations of legal terminology, information about juvenile justice processes, and other resources for youth involved in the system and their families. This 84-page handbook is fully bilingual and features art and writing by incarcerated youth. With the help of The Annie E. Casey Foundation and Tom Toldrin of Ross Periodicals, CYWD is printing 15,000 copies of the "Know Justice" handbook and distributing them FREE to youth throughout California. English and Spanish language versions are available for downloading on CYWD's Web site.



The "Know Justice" Handbook covers topics such as:

- What to do and what not to do if you get arrested
- The difference between juvenile and adult court
- Who's who in the juvenile justice system
- How to advocate for treatment
- What your rights are

### "Know Justice" Curriculum

CYWD has produced a companion curriculum to complement its "Know Justice" handbook. This curriculum expands on some of the information in the handbook and includes hands-on activities. This two-part publication is available for service providers or for youth. Trainers are also available.

### The Hook Ups Girls' Resource Guide

The Center for Young Women's Development's 20-page resource guide for young women involved in the juvenile justice system provides information on housing, employment, health care, and other resources. Available free of charge to young women, this first-of-its-kind

guide gives young women in San Francisco some of the tools they need to achieve stability after exiting the juvenile justice system. (This could be used as a model for other communities.)

***Teenage Runaways: Broken Hearts and Bad Attitudes***, Laurie Schaffner, Haworth Press, 172 pp, 1999 (hardcover and paperback). *Teenage Runaways* offers the perspectives of actual teenage runaways to help professionals, parents, and youths understand the widespread social problem of "last resort" behavior.

## ***The Center for Young Women's Development***

### **Production Staff**

**Dean Radcliffe-Lynes, D.R. Lynes, Inc. – Producer.** The Mission of D. R. Lynes, Inc. Video & Television Productions is to *Educate, Empower, Encourage and Enlighten*. For more than 10 years, D. R. Lynes, Inc. has produced both broadcast and non-broadcast videos that provide a voice for the unheard and a forum for the unseen. In particular, we deal with issues that are of specific concern to the African American community and other underserved communities, from negative portrayals in the media to addressing issues of health disparities.

Programs that have been distributed nationally on commercial as well as public television include: “**A Celebration Of Life: Rising Above Breast Cancer**”, a one-hour special, hosted by Nancy Wilson, and distributed by American Public Television. It was broadcast on over 130 public television stations, premiering in April 2001 and licensed through December 2003. “A Celebration of Life” took a proactive look at what people are doing to fight this devastating disease, which is taking the lives of African-American woman more than any other race or ethnic group. “**AIDS at 21: Specter of an Epidemic**”, a look at the increase of this deadly disease in young African-American males and what grass roots groups are doing to combat this rise. It premiered on Discovery Health on World AIDS Day 2002. “**Walk a Mile In My Shoes: the 90 Year Journey of the NAACP**”, a history of the oldest Civil Rights organization which celebrated 90 years of work on the front lines of civil rights. This special was syndicated in over 80 percent of the country and broadcast on the NBC O&O station, affiliates, and other station groups.

### **Producer's Statement**

The young sisters at the Center for Young Women's Development took me back to the seventies when I thought I was an idealistic, activist, nationalist, 'gonna change the world', independent thinking young lady. These sisters are what my generation today would call 'b-a-a-a-d'. They are self-empowering, self-educating, self-healing, sincerely and genuinely caring, and living what they speak.

I am truly impressed by their commitment and dedication to the plight of young women whom most people write off. Having lived in their shoes, the Center's aggressively articulate staff is able to impress and influence the lives of the girls and young women whose paths they cross, while they seek out the hurting and self-doubting juveniles caught up in the juvenile justice system and the streets.

They need our support, physically, spiritually, and financially, and yet, their spirit suggests that they will survive even without it. Their conversation and tireless enthusiasm were exhausting and inspiring and an example of the untapped wealth of talent belonging to the souls of our youth. I wish them Godspeed in their journey. – **Dean Radcliffe-Lynes, Producer**



**The Center for Young Women's Development** is one of the outreach videos showcased in the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign. All productions incorporate the theme of **reentry into family and community by individuals who were formerly incarcerated**. These and other programs are elements of the Making Connections Media Outreach Initiative (MCMOI), an outreach project supported by The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF). Launched in February 2001, MCMOI links media broadcasters to local stakeholders as a means to promote the Foundation's mission to help build strong and connected neighborhoods for children and families. Visit the Reentry Web site at: [www.reentrymediaoutreach.org](http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org).

MCMOI campaigns are managed by Outreach Extensions, a national consulting firm that specializes in comprehensive, high profile educational and community outreach campaigns for media projects. For more information and community-use materials for these exciting programs, please visit the MCMOI Web site at [www.mcmoi.org/](http://www.mcmoi.org/).

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