



IN PURSUIT OF

HUMAN RIGHTS

**THE SPIRAL
OF INJUSTICE**

S A R A F R Y

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SPIRAL OF INJUSTICE

"the other"

LANGUAGE

Language

targeting "the other" through language, word choice, connotation, and imagery (name calling, ridicule, telling jokes, belittling, accepting and promoting stereotyping, etc.)

Avoidance

excluding "the other" through conscious or unconscious treatment that denies participation, limits and/or restricts access (social avoidance, scapegoating, portrayal and non-portrayal of marginalized communities)

Discrimination

denying and disadvantaging "the other" through direct and non-direct acts based on class, race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability, or religious preference (employment and/or educational opportunities, workplace and housing)

AVOIDANCE

DISCRIMINATION

VIOLENCE

ELIMINATION

Violence

intimidating or harming "the other" through physical acts (threats, assault, desecration, stalking, harassment, arson, murder, terrorism)

Elimination

eradicating "the other" through deliberate and/or systemic destruction of life and /or liberty (CULTURAL: customs and traditions, language, music, art, history, science, political participation; BEHAVIORAL: segregation, isolation, relocation, resettlement, removal; PHYSICAL: murder, genocide)

"The Other"

an individual who is perceived by the group as not belonging, as being different in some fundamental way; often targeted because of association with a group based on class, race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability, or religious preference



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The Spiral of Injustice was designed and developed by the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights in Boise, Idaho. The Center is the builder and home of the Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial. The Spiral of Injustice is a model that illustrates the devolution of humanity whether discussing the Holocaust, other genocides from history, or contemporary acts of injustice.

The model suggests that the “stages” of injustice (language, avoidance, discrimination, violence and elimination) are in motion and employed as weapons targeting “the other.” “The other” is defined as an individual who is perceived by the group as not belonging, as being different in some fundamental way; often targeted because of association with a group based on class, race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ability, nationality or religious preference.

For this book in the Spiral of Injustice series, Boise State Professor Sara Fry uses the model to present insights from four different organizations that endeavor to advance human rights for populations who have been “othered.” Each chapter describe the human rights issue, the organization’s efforts to uphold and advance rights for those being “othered,” and how the organization handled a challenge that impacts their work.



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FOUR ORGANIZATIONS THAT ADVANCE HUMAN RIGHTS

Whether you are in a career that gives you the opportunity to advocate for human rights, a high school or college student studying the Spiral of Injustice, curious about how organizations respond to challenges, or have some other interest that led you to open up this e-book, I¹ invite you to read on with curiosity. This e-book presents insights from four different organizations that endeavor to advance human rights for a population that has been marginalized and “othered.” Each organization works in different ways and with disparate populations, yet they are all similar in having a strong mission and focus that drives their efforts to interrupt the injustice that impacts real people’s lives. The table below offers an overview of the organizations featured in the chapters ahead:

Organization	Population
Cardinal Academy	Pregnant and parenting teens
Equal Justice Initiative	People who have been illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in state jails and prisons

¹ First person is used throughout the book. Unless in the context of a direct quote from one of the human rights leaders featured in this book, “I” refers to the author, Sara Fry.

Pride Foundation	LGBTQ+ people
Kessler Keener Foundation	Native and Indigenous people ²

I interviewed a senior staff member at each organization to learn more about their work, and I also asked them to explain a challenge the organization has faced. We don't always speak publicly about challenges. If you take a look at your social media feed, and you will likely see posts that highlight people's joys and accomplishments. Yet there is so much we can learn about resilience and growth by better understanding challenges that can come up in life.

THE SPIRAL OF INJUSTICE



The Wassmuth Center of Human Rights designed the Spiral of Injustice as a powerful teaching resource to help facilitate understanding and discussion of marginalization image that shows how humanity can devolve: The process of othering, marginalizing, or demonizing a group of people in a community is a downward spiral that may start with language and move to physical harm and elimination.

Educators at the Wassmuth Center have developed resources that support using the Spiral of Injustice to help people consider when and how to

² The terms Native and Indigenous are both used in this e-book, based on insights from educator and Nez Perce tribal member Phill Allen. Phill explained that individual people may have different preferences for which term to use, and he has observed generational differences as well – e.g. his parents prefer “Indian” and he prefers “Native.” More insights from Phill Allen are available through the “Native Voices for Educators and Learners” resource collection at <https://www.kesslerkeenerfoundation.org/native-voices-educators>.

interrupt injustice and prevent harm to people in their communities. This e-book is an addition to the resource collection, adding a new perspective by exploring how organizations with a specific, focused human rights mission approach their work and overcome challenges.

While each organization addresses the hurtful language often used to describe the people they support, their work focuses on addressing the damage done further down the spiral. As an organizational tool, each organization is presented as a chapter titled after one level of the spiral even though their work to support human rights address multiple levels of injustice. I matched each organization to the level of the spiral that was most salient in my discussion with the organization's senior staff member. The table below shows which aspect of the Spiral of Injustice each organization is partnered with in the chapters ahead:

Organization	Spiral of Injustice
Cardinal Academy	Avoidance
Equal Justice Initiative	Discrimination
Pride Foundation	Violence
Kessler Keener Foundation	Elimination

CONTEXT AND LANGUAGE

I have contributed to two other e-books in the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights Spiral of Injustice series. In the e-book *Words Have Weight*, Steve Utych and I wrote about the Rwandan genocide, which occurred in 1994. We focused on the specific role of dehumanizing language that extremist Hutus used to justify genocide of the Tutsis. Dehumanizing language refers to human beings as animals, vermin, or disease. We wrote:³

³ Fry, S.W. & Utych, S. (2020). Dehumanizing language and the Rwandan genocide. *Words Have Weight* E-Book. Wassmuth Center for Human Rights. <http://wassmuth-center.org/spiral-of-injustice/>

The Hutus labeled Tutsis as “cockroaches needing to be exterminated.”⁴ Calling to Hutus to help fill the graves, phrases like “When you kill the rat do not let the pregnant one escape”⁵ were used to further incite violence and brutality. Dehumanizing language works through a cognitive process that denies uniquely human traits – things like critical thinking, and the ability to feel emotions like suffering – to groups that are dehumanized.⁶ When groups are dehumanized, they are assigned lower levels of worth than other human beings, which excludes these groups from standard moral considerations.⁷

Reading the words Steve and I wrote in 2020 reminds me that there is a feeling of safety that comes with analyzing historic events. From the safety of my office as a professor at Boise State University in Idaho, I read and wrote about how language played a role in the brutal murders of more than 800,000 Rwandan people and the rape of 150,000-250,000 women.⁸ The feeling of safety that comes with time, distance, and privilege is not present when writing about contemporary human rights issues that are still unfolding and impacting people. The human rights issues I write about in this book are ongoing. The issues impact people I know – and, more than likely, impact someone you, the reader, knows, too. Do you know anyone who is of Indigenous heritage, identifies as LGBTQ+, who has been or is incarcerated, or had an unplanned pregnancy at a young age? If you don't,

⁴ Donohue, W. A. (2012). The identity trap: The language of genocide. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 31, p. 23.

⁵ Dowden, R. (1994) ‘The graves of the Tutsi are only half full - we must complete the task’: Richard Dowden, Africa Editor, reports on the rising tide of blood in Rwanda. *Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/the-graves-of-the-tutsi-are-only-half-full-we-must-complete-the-task-richard-dowden-africa-editor-1438050.html>

⁶ Haslam, N. (2006). “Dehumanization: An integrative review.” *Personality and social psychology review* 10(3): 252-264.

⁷ Bandura, A., C. Barbaranelli, G.V. Caprara and C. Pastorelli. (1996). “Mechanisms of moral disengagement in the exercise of moral agency.” *Journal of personality and social psychology* 71(2): 364-374.

⁸ United Nations. (No Date). Rwanda: A brief history of the country. <https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/historical-background.shtml>.

perhaps you know a parent who is working hard to provide their child the best care they can, or know someone who has a family member or friend who has spent time in prison, or suspect someone you know identifies as LGBTQ+ but doesn't feel comfortable publicly sharing their status, or can't recall many or any educational experiences about Native people because their stories were largely absent from your school's curriculum. I encourage you to read each chapter from whatever personal points of connection you can construct more meaning for yourself from the stories, issues, and challenges.

Because this e-book examines current issues and how human rights organizations approach challenges, we do not get to hide in the comfort that comes with historic distance. When I began conducting interviews for this e-book in fall 2021, I anticipated leaders in human rights organizations would share stories of overcoming challenges they faced in the past. Instead, the challenges they shared are ongoing and do not have easy solutions. Anthropologist and author Ruth Behar, whose numerous awards include being the first Latina to receive a MacArthur "Genius" Grant,⁹ explained the importance of authors being intentional and transparent about their personal experience and the subject under study. It "requires a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied."¹⁰ Taking Behar's words to heart, in the next section, I explain one event that was influential in my thinking about the importance of language.¹¹

LANGUAGE CHOICE AND IMPRISONMENT

When I conducted the interviews for this e-book, I was also teaching a 5-week course through Boise State's extended studies program. The course

⁹ Ruth Behar. 2022. <https://www.ruthbehar.com/>

¹⁰ Ruth Behar. 1996. *The Vulnerable Observer*, p. 13. Beacon Press.

¹¹ There were more contextual events that influenced how I thought and wrote about these organizations – from Covid-19 to the war in Ukraine and the resulting refugee crisis. Trying to make sense of them all is worthy of an entire book of its own.

was titled Introduction to Human Rights, and the content was inspired by my involvement in Boise State's Marilyn Shuler Human Rights Initiative.¹² My students were serving sentences for felony crimes and were "residents" in one of Idaho's medium-security prisons.

The course was my first opportunity to teach students in a prison setting. Through conversations with an educator who works for the Idaho Department of Corrections, I learned about the ongoing evolution of language used to describe people who are in prison. In effort to use language that is more humanizing and supportive of their potential for growth, there has been a move away from terms like "convict," "felon," "inmate" and even "prisoner" to "resident." The spirit of the language shift makes sense to me; as a college professor and former middle school teacher, I have seen first-hand how the words I use have an impact. In the first Spiral of Injustice e-book, *When Humanity Devolves*, Beau Seegmiller and I wrote the chapter about Language. We began the essay by stating:

Language is the beginning, the foundation, and an essential ingredient to any injustice. The way others are framed and labeled by the words we choose creates possibilities for action and being - words couched in respect and acknowledgement of the dignity inherent in all humankind brings out healing and security. In contrast, words that demean or dehumanize rob people of their personhood and inherent rights as shared members of humanity. The words we choose to use project us and others onto a path, whether a path that leads to safety or one of injustice depends on our chosen words.¹³

To intentionally use language that projects people with felony convictions on a positive path makes sense to me – so the move towards a term like "resident," or putting the person first in "people who are in prison" felt

¹² Boise State University. 2022. <https://www.boisestate.edu/sps-shulerhumanrights/>

¹³ Fry, S.W. & Seegmiller, B. (2017). Language: Foundation of injustice or possibility. *When Humanity Devolves* E-Book. Wassmuth Center for Human Rights. <http://wassmuthcenter.org/spiral-of-injustice/>

appropriate. I wanted the course to help my students build confidence about their potential to succeed in college coursework. Additionally, I hoped to avoid hurtful or offensive language.

However, “resident” and “people who are in prison” are imperfect language choices. Before class one day, I got to chat informally with some of my students, and the topic came up. One pointed out that he prefers “prisoner” because to call him a “resident” implies it is a choice to reside at the medium security prison. In an essay, another student referred to himself as a “ward of the state.” Another told me that language is just part of the issue: “Society tends to think of prisoners as subhuman. As you have seen firsthand, we are people too.”

Conversations with my students about the language that surrounds their status was fresh in my mind when I interviewed Randy Susskind, Deputy Director of the Equal Justice Initiative. We ended up speaking at length about the challenge of “language policing” and how resistant people can be when told their word choice is problematic. He is not convinced it is the best use of time to focus on language. He explained an example that is directly related to the evolving language used to describe people serving sentences in a prison:

We really struggle with that, with referring to people as prisoners, certainly in the context of Twitter. If we’re trying to Tweet something - which there is a separate question about what kind of advocacy you can do on Twitter. But to the extent that some aspect of advocacy can happen on Twitter, there are space limitations. “People in prison” is a lot longer than “prisoner.” We’re in court, in the middle of Covid, masked up, in the depths of these horrible places, trying to get courts to issue some kind of order to prevent our guys from getting assaulted on a daily basis. And then we finally get an order, and we say on Twitter “Prisoners are protected.” And people are like “They’re not prisoners. They’re people in prison.”

Randy's work is in Alabama, and that state's Department of Corrections is facing ongoing legal action from the United States Department of Justice and other entities because of prisoner-on-prisoner violence and sexual abuse, as well as "excessive force at the hands of prison staff."¹⁴ When Randy's team at the Equal Justice Initiative has a victory that helps make their clients safer, this success seems worth praising, but instead some greeted the news with critique of language choice.

It seems reasonable that people who follow the Equal Justice Initiative on Twitter are supportive of the organization's efforts to support people "who have been illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in state jails and prisons."¹⁵ The people who pushed back on the language choice of "prisoner" on a character-limited platform like Twitter are on the same side of the issue. Randy further explained that,

We're just trying to get the word out here. To engage in that conversation seems so unhelpful. We don't need to push back. And I'm not even sure they're right. I think there are a lot of people in prison who would be really offended by us backing away from calling them a prisoner. That is their identity. But if the people who are vocal are very concerned about it, it feels like the easiest thing to do is just say "people in prison." But it also feels like, we're potentially focusing on the wrong thing.

The nuances of word choice when people are on the same side – wanting to promote the human rights of people in prison – seems like the wrong place to put time and energy. Infighting about language seems particularly ineffective given that, in this specific case, the term "prisoner" is not a dehumanizing term that refers to people as animals, vermin, or disease.

¹⁴ United States Department of Justice. (December 9, 2020). Justice Department Files Lawsuit Against the State of Alabama for Unconstitutional Conditions in State's Prisons for Men. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-files-lawsuit-against-state-alabama-unconstitutional-conditions-states>

¹⁵ About EJI. (2022). Equal Justice Initiative. <https://eji.org/about/>, paragraph #1.

Returning to what Steve Utych and I wrote about the impact of dehumanizing language,¹⁶ it stands out that:

Dehumanization is not the relic of decades old conflicts, but remains a pervasive force in social and political life. Racialized dehumanization occurs against African-Americans in the United States criminal justice system¹⁷ and towards racial and ethnic out-groups (especially ethnic Arabs) in multiple countries.¹⁸ Dehumanization is not confined simply to race and ethnicity, as partisans in the United States view members of the other party as less human than members of their own party.¹⁹ Dehumanization influences how we see the world, in situations both large and small.

As I read my interview notes and transcripts to analyze the data and write this e-book, I tried to keep the complexity of language in mind. The words in this e-book serve to uplift the human rights work that each organization undertakes and explain their response to complex challenges. But as I wrote, I tried to remember to also humanize those who stand in opposition to their work because I have hope that education can transform beliefs, thoughts, and action. Whether we are thinking ideas that we keep in our thoughts or putting ideas onto paper or social media, it is worthwhile to be intentional in our use of humanizing language that uplifts people's dignity and acknowledges their possibilities.²⁰

¹⁶ Fry, S.W. & Utych, S. (2020).

¹⁷ Goff, P.A., J.L. Eberhardt, M.J. Williams and M.C. Jackson. (2008). "Not yet human: implicit knowledge, historical dehumanization, and contemporary consequences." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 94(2): 292-306.

¹⁸ Kteily, N., E. Bruneau, A. Waytz and S. Cotterill. (2015). "The ascent of man: Theoretical and empirical evidence for blatant dehumanization." *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 109(5): 901-931.

¹⁹ Cassese, E.C. (2019). "Partisan dehumanization in American politics." *Political behavior* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-019-09545-w>

²⁰ There is the distinct possibility that I have failed to reach this objective and some will find fault with my language choice. I invite feedback so I can use readers' insights to revise future editions of this e-book.

As you read on, I invite you to consider how your own life experiences influences how you read and response the stories of organizations that work to uplift human rights for populations that have been marginalized. In *Reframing Avoidance: Insights from an Alternative High School for Pregnant and Parenting Teens*, we learn about the challenges of opening a new school in the midst of the Covid-19. In *Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System: Working to End Mass Incarceration and Excessive Punishment*, we learn about the challenge of maintaining a supportive, intimate work culture while increasing the size of an organization to serve more people. In *Violence and the LGBTQ+ Community: “Where you live shouldn’t affect how you are treated,”* we learn about how an organization went into high-gear at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic *and* prioritized care for staff. And in the final chapter, *Countering Elimination: Uplifting Native Voices*, we learn how an organization grew and improved after a public critique of the organization’s work.



REFRAMING AVOIDANCE

INSIGHTS FROM AN ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL FOR PREGNANT AND PARENTING TEENS

THE ORGANIZATION: Cardinal Academy

THE CHALLENGE: Opening a new, alternative school for a vulnerable population in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cardinal Academy is a public charter school in Boise, Idaho that offers an alternative high school option for pregnant and parenting²¹ teens. Cardinal opened its doors in September 2021, and every detail of the school was designed with the needs of young parents – and their children – in mind. The school offers an array of supports to help these students thrive, including an on-site childcare center, two free and healthy meals a day, a social worker, career exploration support, on-campus health care, and other resources.

²¹ “Parenting” includes teen fathers. In its first year of operation, a small percentage of students enrolled at Cardinal Academy were not parenting or pregnant. Instead, they enrolled because they were not succeeding in traditional high schools and heard about the flexibility and support at Cardinal. Idaho Charter School law requires inclusive admission practices. Therefore, although pregnant and parenting students are the priority, other students are welcomed although they are not actively recruited to the school.

Traditional public high schools are not set up to support students who need childcare, extended breaks so they can breast feed, support making up content missed while absent from school while giving birth, and other situations unique to pregnant and parenting students. Specially designed programs for this population of students offer flexibility and support in ways that go beyond academic success. The executive director for the inaugural year of the school, Emily Bergstrom, said the staff help students “find the inner resilience that we believe they already have.” And that resilience is important because teen parents often face ostracization and isolation. As one student explained,

I was scared and alone when I found out at 15 years old that I was pregnant. So many people called me names and I lost my ‘friends.’ I tried to hide my pregnancy for so long, but people finally started staring. I went to a private school and all I got was whispers, to the point I wasn’t going to school.²²

This student’s experience happened recently – her words were not dredged up from the historical shaming and exclusion that young unwed mothers faced.²³ The student quoted above chose to avoid school because, even in the second decade of the 21st century, language and actions among her traditional school peers and teachers excluded, judged, and shamed her. Her experience is all too common. As Jenna Vinson, a professor of English rhetoric who became a parent while in high school, explained the impact of language used to describe teen moms:

The dominant narrative creates a doom-and-gloom context for young women who are pregnant and parenting. When people tell you your life is over, you might want to hide your pregnancy or motherhood to avoid feeling

²² Cardinal Academy. (2021). About Us. <https://cardinalacademycharter.org/about/>

²³ Diane Bernard and Maria Bogen-Oskwarek (2018, November 19). The maternity homes where ‘mind control’ was used on teen moms to give up their babies. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2018/11/19/maternity-homes-where-mind-control-was-used-teen-moms-give-up-their-babies/>

the shame or stigma. You may also be asked to leave your school, your home or your friend group. Even if the consequences aren't so dire, you might not see that you can still do great things and parent your child.²⁴

Vinson's words speak to the heart of why Cardinal Academy faculty and staff emphasize helping young parents find their resilience – so they can rise above the negative narratives that surround teen parents. Emily Bergstrom explained the school's appeal,

They are living a life that is so different from their same-age peers right now because of the increased responsibility. Being around other people who understand that is the biggest draw of our program. Legally they are allowed to stay at their home high school or go to a larger alternative school if that's their wish. There are more resources there and more opportunities for electives and some other perks. But they come to us because they need more support and they want to be around other people who get what they are going through.

Cardinal Academy was designed to provide a caring and supportive learning community where pregnant and parenting students can see others like them who are succeeding in school. Bergstrom stated, "If you don't have other people in your community who you see doing it, how can you envision doing it yourself?"

Teen pregnancy is an intersection for a myriad of social justice issues, and the statistics that surround teen mothers make it abundantly clear that this population merits special support. Less than half of women who become mothers while in their teens complete high school.²⁵ Fewer than

²⁴ Katharine Webster (2018). *English Professor studies shaming of teen moms. Jenna Vincent's book counters doom-and-gloom narrative.* <https://www.uml.edu/news/stories/2018/vinsonqanda.aspx>

²⁵ Perper, K., Peterson, K., & Manlove, J. (2010, January 1). Diploma attainment among teen mothers. Child Trends, Fact Sheet Publication, #2010-01. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/diploma-attainment-among-teen-mothers>.

2% of women who become mothers when 16-17 years old earn a 4-year degree by age 30; the number is only slightly better for those who have a child when they are 18-19 years old – 3%.²⁶ Compared to children of older parents, those born to teen moms are more likely to have lower school achievement and to drop out of high school, have more health problems, be incarcerated at some time during adolescence, give birth as a teenager, and be unemployed or underemployed as a young adult.²⁷ For too many young people, becoming a parent as a teen leads to a cycle of poverty. For Black and Latinx teen moms, the risks are greater.²⁸

One of Cardinal Academy's founding Board of Directors, Hannah Gayle, powerfully alluded to the grim numbers that surround teen pregnancy when she explained:

Since I had my sons at age 17, every day I get up and out of bed attempting to fight the statistics, pushing against the society that is hell bent on me failing. It's hard work, and I am determined to succeed because my family's future depends on it.

Hannah wrote those words in 2016 while a sophomore at Boise State University. She has gone on to earn a bachelor's degree. In 2022 she completed a teaching internship in a diverse urban school where 86% of the students come from low-income families and qualify for free or reduced-price school lunch while also working to earn her master's degree along with certifications to teach special education and English as a Second Language. Hannah's educational achievements may also have a favorable impact on her children because research demonstrates that

²⁶ Hoffman, S. (2006). By the numbers: The public costs of adolescent childbearing. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. http://media.khi.org/news/documents/2011/04/25/Public_Costs_of_Teen_Childbearing.pdf.

²⁷ Hoffman S. D. & Maynard, R. A. (2008). Kids having kids: Economic costs and social consequences of teen pregnancy, (2nd ed). The Urban Institute Press.

²⁸ Tang, S., Davis-Kean, P.E., Chen, M. & Sexton, H.R. (2014). Adolescent pregnancy's intergenerational effects: Does an adolescent mother's education have consequences for her children's achievement? *Journal of Research of Adolescence*, 26, 180-193. doi:10.1111/jora.12182

maternal education translates to “positive achievement outcomes for the next generation, particularly for those children who may be most at risk for poor outcomes.”²⁹

Emily Bergstrom put research-based data into the context of working with Cardinal Academy’s students when she said:

Work with young parents is social justice work. We are leveling the playing field so that these young people have the same opportunities for success as their non-parenting peers. It’s a difficult journey, but an incredibly rewarding one since you get the opportunity to impact outcomes for two generations.

The importance of this work was heightened because of timing. Bergstrom and the founding board members were in the process of applying for charter school status shortly before Covid-19 swept the globe in early 2020. The school opened its doors in September 2021. Bergstrom explained:

As a new organization, our biggest challenge is student recruitment during a global pandemic. Covid-19 has impacted single mothers more than any other group and they will likely take the longest amount of time to recover. We are competing with higher waged jobs, widespread uncertainty about the future, and experiences of trauma that we are only beginning to understand. The isolation and economic hardship hit this group especially hard. They continue to face housing and food insecurity. If any support network was in place prior to the pandemic, they likely lost it.

Emily pointed out that “every school has struggled with the pandemic, and it’s going to take a couple years to bounce back. But since we opened *during* the pandemic, for us, it’s just plain old surviving.” Recruiting and retaining students was made all the more challenging because Boise, Idaho

²⁹ Tang, et al., p.p. 10-11.

and surrounding communities were experiencing low rates of unemployment when Cardinal Academy opened, leading many business owners with entry-level to raise their starting hourly wage well above the state minimum to attract more applicants.³⁰

Such work enticing, especially because of Boise and surrounding community's high and rising housing costs for renters,³¹ with increases in median rental prices increasing as much as 20% in one year.³² Yet long term, such low-wage employment does not set young families up to break the cycle of poverty.³³ By offering career exploration experiences, Cardinal Academy's staff specifically help young parents consider opportunities that will allow them to have more economic stability and hopefully identify meaningful and personally rewarding career pathways.

INTERRUPTING THE SPIRAL OF INJUSTICE

Cardinal Academy's work provides an interesting twist on the spiral of injustice. While other organizations featured in this book actively endeavor to interrupt one or more aspects of the Spiral of Injustice, Cardinal Academy provides pregnant and parenting teens with an option to *avoid* traditional high school and peers. In schools that are not set up to support them, and with peers – as well as faculty and staff - who too often do not understand and express judgement, traditional school can be a setting where pregnant teens and young parents experience the cruel realities of degrading language and acts of avoidance.

³⁰ John Sowell, Sally Krutzig and David Staats. (June 2, 2021). Fight for employees forces up starting pay in Boise. *Idaho Statesman*.

³¹ Paul Schwedelson. (June 1, 2021). Boise's 'on fire' rental market pushing renters to edge. *Idaho Press* <https://www.idahopress.com/news/local/boise-s-on-fire-rental-market-pushing-renters-to-edge/article dbc3af3a-773e-56a3-8f01-774b411b3431.html>

³² Sowell, John. (February 5, 2019). "You Already Know Boise Housing Rents Are High. Here's How Much They've Increased." *Idaho Statesman*. www.idahostatesman.com/news/business/article225553125.html.

³³ Policy Link. (2022). An Overview of America's Working Poor. <https://www.policylink.org/data-in-action/overview-america-working-poor>

The student quoted earlier who described dropping out of her regular school and a private school because of shaming said, “I then found out about this teen mom school. I felt so welcomed and all of the teen moms were so excited to talk to me and tell me their stories.”³⁴ Cardinal Academy presents pregnant and parenting teens with a positive way to engage in avoidance by taking themselves out of a traditional school setting that dehumanizes and delegitimizes their experiences - both the challenges they face and the potential they possess. Contextualizing the history of how teen parents were treated offers insights to better understand the empowering nature of the choice Cardinal Academy provides to students.

A LOOK BACK ILLUSTRATES THE IMPORTANCE OF CHOICE FOR TEEN PARENTS

For young women who became pregnant while still in high school, the proverbial schoolhouse gates were often closed to them. It is estimated that 1.5 million teen moms,³⁵ mostly white and middle-class, “were systematically shamed, hidden in maternity homes and then coerced into handing over their children to adoption agencies without being informed of their legal rights.”³⁶ Historically, teen mothers often had the following experiences which align with how avoidance is described in the Spiral of Injustice:

- ▶ Denial of participation in a regular high school experience – i.e. being denied access at all once the pregnancy became visible,
- ▶ Avoidance of the shame a family would face if an out-of-wedlock pregnancy was made public by sending the young woman off to a facility for the pregnancy and forcing the young woman to give her child up for adoption, and as a result,
- ▶ Non-portrayal of young mothers.

³⁴ Cardinal Academy. 2021. About Us.

³⁵ Dan Rather (March 27, 2012). Adopted or Abducted? *Yahoo! News*. <https://tinyurl.com/mr3tu6n6>.

³⁶ Diane Bernard and Maria Bogen-Oskwarek (2018), paragraph #5.

We don't have to go back far very far in time to dredge up stories of exclusion for teen parents. As the author of this essay, my interest in this population began in 2013. That was when I first learned that Boise, Idaho had an alternative school for pregnant and parenting teens because a graduate of the school nominated an outstanding teacher, Marian Pritchett, for the Pesky Award for Inspirational Teaching. In her nomination for Pritchett, who died in 2002, this teen mom wrote, "[Mrs. Pritchett] always told her students that no matter what, we could do anything as long as we had the desire and drive to do it... She taught me what it means to be a teacher and I have wanted to become one ever since."³⁷ I was on the committee that reviewed the nomination and remember other details because Mrs. Pritchett's former student and I are the same age. In the early 1990s, while I was a traditional high school student enjoying extra-curricular activities and fairly typical ups and downs of my senior year, this woman was kicked out of her home when her parents found out she was pregnant. Her public high school's counselor told her she could no longer attend her high school but gave a phone number for a school that might take her. When our paths crossed, we were both in our late 30s. I was a middle-class tenured professor who was able to save money for international travel. After nearly two decades as a working parent, my student was finally pursuing her goal of becoming a teacher and earning her bachelor's degree. My heart broke open when I read the nomination for Marian Pritchett and her special gift for inspiring young parents to believe in themselves.

Historically alternative settings for teens mother were designed with avoidance in mind: to allow these young women to hide their shame and protect their families. In contrast, Cardinal Academy is a publicly visible and inviting place where young parents can choose to avoid traditional school settings that were not designed with their needs in mind. It's a choice that allows this vulnerable population to interrupt the Spiral of Injustice themselves by attending a school that focuses on their needs and their children's needs.

³⁷ Pesky Award for Inspirational Teaching. (2013). Boise State University. <https://www.boisestate.edu/education/pesky-awards/>

FLEXIBILITY, GROWTH, AND FOCUSING ON A MISSION: AN ENDURING AND APPLICABLE LESSON

Overcoming the challenge of opening an alternative school in the midst of a pandemic in a community with low unemployment and a high cost of living does not have an easy solution. After talking to leaders of other schools that work with teen parents around the country, Emily Bergstrom learned that, “percentage wise, we are actually doing great.” The percentage is based on Cardinal’s enrollment compared to the number of births reported to teen moms in Ada and Canyon counties. She continued, “Our percentage is comparable to every other program I talked to - but it’s lower than what we had hoped it would be.” Every five years Cardinal Academy will be reviewed by the State of Idaho’s Charter School Commission. If the school is not financially viable by 2026, they could lose their state funding and have to close. The pressure to get to financial sustainability is considerable. The work of recruiting, reaching and maintaining sustainable enrollment will continue long after this e-book is available to readers. However, Bergstrom offered an insight that is enduring and applicable to the myriad of other challenges people working to promote human rights may face: stay true to the mission.

As the first year of Cardinal Academy’s existence unfolded, Bergstrom and Cardinal Academy’s Board of Directors explored different options. Growth in enrollment is necessary for Cardinal Academy to survive, so flexibility is necessary. The Board of Directors explored partnering with an existing charter school that has a successful history of serving students with alternative learning needs, a change that would bring new administrative approaches and systems for the school’s second year of operation. Although the school’s future was uncertain when this e-book was published, commitment to supporting pregnant and parenting teens was unwavering.

For any human rights organization, staying focused on the mission despite external pressures offers an enduring and meaningful lesson from this chapter in Cardinal Academy’s development. Bergstrom shared that she became a parent when she was in her 30s and already working as a school counselor in an alternative school for pregnant and parenting teens. She explained:

They were kind of my birth club, and I just remember how hard it was. Personally, I found parenting really difficult. I was watching them figure it out with so much less support. It was really inspiring. That's when I had that click about how resilient this group of people are. So *anything that I can do to help move them towards their goals is like a moral imperative. I have to do it*, and it's so exciting to see them make those connections and reach their goals and see their kids growing up happy and healthy. It's an honor to be a small part of that journey.



DISCRIMINATION IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

WORKING TO END MASS INCARCERATION AND EXCESSIVE PUNISHMENT

THE ORGANIZATION: Equal Justice Initiative

THE CHALLENGE: Expanding to serve more people while preserving the supportive work culture that allows organization staff to succeed.

The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) is a “501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides legal representation to people who have been illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in state jails and prisons.”³⁸ Founded in 1989, EJI’s work gained enhanced notoriety and public acclaim as a result of founder and Executive Director Bryan Stevenson’s best-selling book *Just Mercy*, published in 2014, which was made into a feature film in 2019. When EJI was founded, there were fewer than ten people on the staff. Over the last 33 years, the organization has grown to more than 150 people.³⁹

The increased number of staff allows EJI to serve more people with criminal convictions and expand their services beyond legal representation to include policy reform, education, re-entry support for people after prison, as well as a museum and memorial. EJI’s growth in 33 years has a chilling

³⁸ About EJI. (2022). Equal Justice Initiative. <https://eji.org/about/>, paragraph #1.

³⁹ About EJI. 2022.

parallel: the number of people incarcerated in the United States increased dramatically over a similar time period. As demonstrated in the table below,⁴⁰ from 1980 to 2019, the number of people behind bars increased 500%, mostly due to changes in policy and sentencing law – not increased criminal activity.⁴¹

Year(s)	Number of people incarcerated per 100,000 adults
1980	310
2008	1000
2019	810

Despite the decline since 2008, the United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world,⁴² a rate that is “13% higher than the rate of the next-closest country, El Salvador.”⁴³ The United States also has the dubious title of world leader for total number of people in prison: 2 million, which is 300,000 more than second-place China.⁴⁴ If the national landscape can be described as bleak, it is even worse in Alabama, where EJI is located. Alabama’s criminal justice system has been described as being in crisis in part because it has above-national-average rates for incarceration,⁴⁵ death

⁴⁰ John Gramlich. (2021, August 16). America’s incarceration rate falls to lowest level since 1995. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/08/16/americas-incarceration-rate-lowest-since-1995/>

⁴¹ The Sentencing Project (2022). Criminal justice facts. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>

⁴² World Prison Brief (2022). Highest to lowest – prison population rate. https://www.prisonstudies.org/highest-to-lowest/prison-population-rate?field_region_taxonomy_tid=All

⁴³ John Gramlich, 2021.

⁴⁴ John Gramlich, 2021.

⁴⁵ Equal Justice Initiative. (2005). Criminal Justice Reform in Alabama. Part One: Sentencing, Probation, Prison Conditions and Parole. <https://eji.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/criminal-justice-reform-alabama.pdf>

sentences,⁴⁶ and prison violence, including the murder and sexual assault of prisoners.⁴⁷

An EJI publication explained how prison violence is a result of “overcrowding and severe staffing shortages,” which then

resulted in the abandonment of rehabilitative programming. The absence of programming, education, treatment, and meaningful rehabilitative services means that most people incarcerated in Alabama have little structure. Severe understaffing has meant there is often no officer presence in the housing units and basic security functions, including searches for contraband and the control of movement in the facility, have been all but abandoned. This has fueled an epidemic of drug use, untreated mental illness, and a thriving underground economy. Drugs, weapons, and other contraband flow through prisons unregulated and sometimes aided by correctional staff. Thousands of incarcerated people accumulate debts to other incarcerated people, who enforce collection through violence and sexual assault.⁴⁸

The situation in Alabama’s prisons is so dire that in December 2020, the United States Department of Justice:

filed suit against the State of Alabama and the Alabama Department of Corrections. The complaint alleges that the conditions at Alabama’s prisons for men violate the Constitution because Alabama fails to provide adequate protection from prisoner-on-prisoner violence and prisoner-on-prisoner sexual abuse, fails to provide safe and

⁴⁶ Equal Justice Initiatives. (2022). Alabama Executions. <https://eji.org/alabama-executions/>

⁴⁷ Equal Justice Initiative. (March 11, 2019). What you need to know about the Alabama Prison Crisis. <https://eji.org/news/what-you-need-know-about-alabama-prison-crisis/>

⁴⁸ Equal Justice Initiative. 2019.

sanitary conditions, and subjects prisoners to excessive force at the hands of prison staff.⁴⁹

Violence continued to be rampant in Alabama's prisons even after this lawsuit and other legal action against Alabama's Department of Corrections. For example, three prisoners were murdered in one week in May 2021,⁵⁰ while the number of prison staff has "barely increased in the last three years."⁵¹ Given the dire situation in Alabama, EJI staff have no shortage of opportunities to advocate for justice for clients in their state.

INTERRUPTING THE SPIRAL OF INJUSTICE

EJI's work seeks to interrupt the discrimination that is inherent in the United States criminal justice system. Black men are disproportionately reflected in the number of people in prison; they are six times more likely than white men to be incarcerated.⁵² Bryan Stevenson wrote, "One in every three black male babies born in this century is expected to be incarcerated."⁵³ EJI staff recognize that "Racial disparities persist at every level from misdemeanor arrests to executions. The 'tough on crime' policies that led to mass incarceration are rooted in the belief that Black and brown people are inherently guilty and dangerous."⁵⁴ Although EJI began as an organization focused on capital offenses – crimes that are punishable by

⁴⁹ United States Department of Justice. (December 9, 2020). Justice Department Files Lawsuit Against the State of Alabama for Unconstitutional Conditions in State's Prisons for Men. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-files-lawsuit-against-state-alabama-unconstitutional-conditions-states>

⁵⁰ Kim Chandler. (May 18, 2021). 3 inmates killed in 1 week as feds sue Alabama over prisons. *ABC News*. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/inmates-killed-week-feds-sue-alabama-prisons-77753380>

⁵¹ Equal Justice Initiative. (December 29, 2021). Unconstitutional Conditions Persist in Alabama Prisons. <https://eji.org/news/unconstitutional-conditions-persist-in-alabama-prisons/>

⁵² The Sentencing Project. (2022).

⁵³ Bryan Stevenson. 2014. *Just Mercy*. p. 15. Spiegel & Grau.

⁵⁴ Equal Justice Initiative. 2022. Criminal Justice Reform. <https://eji.org/criminal-justice-reform/>

the death penalty - the organization has expanded its focus considerably since its inception.

EJI's Deputy Director, Randy Susskind, is an attorney who began working with EJI in 1994, when the organization was still small. He reflected: "I think for most of us on staff who have been around for a long time, the growth feels very natural, organic." When he first started at EJI, he only worked on death penalty cases. Randy explained that he experienced, "an awakening" regarding "the limitations of the strictly legal work in terms of advancing change." There were a number of cases where his EJI team had a victory for an individual client, which meant the person would not face the death penalty. However, the result sometimes felt like one step forward and two steps back. Randy explained how after one such EJI victory, "The prosecutor was very frustrated. The judge was very frustrated. The next legislative session the legislators added to the [relevant] statute," so that in the future, the same crime would be eligible for the death penalty. Randy explained that early on, "We were only a non-profit that received funding for capital work." Therefore, policy reform and education "wasn't what we did." Randy said the EJI team realized that, "If every time we win a case, the statute gets worse, we need to get information out there. That was the beginning." That growing understanding led to the organic expansion from direct service with clients to include criminal justice reform, racial justice, public education, and a museum and memorial that advance their multipronged goals.

Although Randy and other early staff members at EJI were happy helping clients, expanding the focus of the organization became imperative in order to play a role in reframing the discriminatory practices imbedded in the criminal justice system. Randy explained that,

We started basically as just a law office. To solve broader problems, we think there are bigger ways of advocating. We issue reports that are geared towards a much bigger audience. There is broader narrative work where we have the museum and memorial. We think of the book [*Just Mercy*] and the movie as part of the public education

efforts. We're trying all different approaches to dealing with the issues. Internally, we all do all areas. It's not like a boutique appellate law firm or a memorial organization or policy organization - we try to do all of it.

Often the work can have impact across areas. For example, in 2021 EJI released a report titled "Race and the Jury: Illegal Racial Discrimination in Jury Selection."⁵⁵ The report presents the "long history of tolerating racial bias in jury selection and a continuing indifference to correcting widespread underrepresentation of people of color on juries" in the United States. Randy explained that the report is an effort at "trying to educate courts and media writers and anyone interested in the issue that there is a baseline layer of race bias not even connected to the specifics of a crime but just the general system." Thus, the report has the possibility of contributing to criminal justice reform and public education.

Collaborative initiatives like the report are the norm at EJI. Randy used the word "we" 36 times when describing EJI. In contrast, he used the word, "I" eight times, either as part of a statement that led with "I think" or when he explained his early work on death penalty cases. Randy's language use seems reflective of part of what makes EJI successful – a supportive, collaborative work culture focused on a shared mission. He reflected:

There's value in having people around for a long time. There's wisdom, there's knowledge through experience, knowledge through mistakes, building up credibility over time, succeeding - we have a pretty good track record of winning cases at the United States Supreme Court and winning a lot of cases for our clients in Alabama. And feeling like the way we have done it in the past is because we've been an intimate small group. People are committed, and we're all working together.

⁵⁵ Equal Justice Initiative. 2021. "Race and the Jury: Illegal Racial Discrimination in Jury Selection." <https://eji.org/report/race-and-the-jury/>

Preserving this supportive culture as more staff join the EJI team is an ongoing challenge for EJI.

AN ONGOING CHALLENGE: GROWTH

Randy Susskind explained that “when you’ve got a big appetite for justice,” growing and getting bigger is appealing. The staff at EJI have that appetite, and the injustice of incarceration in the United States in general and Alabama in particular provides ample opportunity to do criminal justice work. As EJI developed its multipronged approach, the number of staff expanded from fewer than ten to more than 150 people. From Attorneys, to a Deputy Director of Strategic Initiatives, to Community Educators, to a Merchandise/Warehouse Manager, there are a myriad of roles for EJI staff with different skills and talents. These expansive job titles reflect the growth that allows EJI to serve more clients and deepen its impact on communities and policy.

That growth is not without challenges, however. And as Randy explained,

Once we start hiring people, you have to deal with general management stuff. All of a sudden administrative policies become more important. That just means people like me have to spend more time dealing with “What are our leave policies? Do we count by the day, or by the hour, or by the half hour...” That kind of stuff feels debilitating at times.

For a veteran attorney whose heart is with serving clients, Randy’s expanded responsibilities can feel like they take time away from his direct service to EJI’s mission. Yet figuring out fair workplace policies are part of the challenge presented by growth – they are necessary so EJI can retain the supportive culture that has allowed the organization’s staff to thrive.

Mentoring and supporting newcomers into becoming part of that culture also means that sometimes EJI can’t accept law students who have funding from their institutions for short-term public interest internships. Randy explained that enthusiastic law students “call and say ‘I’ve got

funding. You don't have to pay me anything.' It's a hard conversation. Years and years and years ago we'd say 'Come on down!'" However, because EJI has interns work closely with attorneys to provide meaningful mentoring,⁵⁶ they had to limit the number of interns they accept because, for example, interviewing clients and witnesses is a complicated and intricate process. When interest in internships expanded beyond EJI's capacity to provide mentoring, Randy said, "For me, this was the beginning of realizing growth is complicated. It's not easy growing and getting bigger."

For EJI staff to recognize their limited ability to support law students is about more than just ensuring clients and witnesses have effective experiences. Mentoring can have career-related and psycho-social benefits for students,⁵⁷ and it is important for EJI to make sure their expansion stays within the limits of their ability to support newcomers.

Randy was clear that EJI's growth has been beneficial for clients. He explained,

We have community projects now, we have social workers, we have a re-entry program. Helping someone get out of prison is great, but when they get out, if they don't have a support system and an ability to navigate the free world, it's really unfortunate and unfair to the client. ... For people coming out of prison, just trying to get basic things like a driver's license, a copy of their birth certificate, social security benefits, whatever they're entitled to, it's just impossible without an advocate.

Despite nearly three decades of work with EJI, Randy did not have a clear answer or advice for how other human rights groups can navigate the challenges that come with growth. He said, "We're still trying to figure

⁵⁶ Equal Justice Initiative. (2022). Summer Law Student Internship. <https://eji.org/employment/summer-legal-internship/>

⁵⁷ Theresa Smith-Ruig. (2014) Exploring the links between mentoring and work-integrated learning, *Higher Education Research & Development*, 33, 4, 769-782, DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2013.863837.

that out. An awareness of the problem is one thing I would say is useful. Not realizing that doing more stuff might cause problems” can exacerbate the challenges inherent with growth. For human rights organizations, the moral imperative to expand services is a realistic pressure. But growth within recognized limitations is a sustainable path forward.



OPPOSING VIOLENCE BY PROMOTING SAFETY AND THRIVING FOR THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

**“WHERE YOU LIVE SHOULDN’T
AFFECT HOW YOU ARE TREATED”**

THE ORGANIZATION: Pride Foundation

THE CHALLENGE: Ensuring the continued availability of resources and support for the LGBTQ+ community during Covid-19.

Pride Foundation’s mission is to fuel “transformational movements to advance equity and justice for LGBTQ+ people in all communities across the Northwest.”⁵⁸ Serving Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington, Pride Foundation takes a multipronged approach. Pride Foundation offers scholarships to support LGBTQ+ students; grants to support local organizations that support LGBTQ+ people, with priority to groups that serve BIPOC communities and other communities “who have been especially harmed by systemic injustices and who have been

⁵⁸ Pride Foundation. 2022. Mission & Vision. <https://pridefoundation.org/about-us/mission-vision/>

chronically underinvested⁵⁹ by philanthropy;⁶⁰ and community advocacy, education, and research.

Pride Foundation's Chief Executive Officer, Katie Carter, explained that the organization works across "really different geographies, really different lived experiences, really different legal landscapes for LGBTQ+ people in Oregon, Washington, Montana, Idaho and Alaska." Katie explained that at its core, Pride Foundation holds the belief "where you live shouldn't determine how you are treated, what laws you're protected or not protected by. The level of belonging and inclusion that you have in any particular place shouldn't be affected by geography."

In late 2021, when I had the opportunity to sit down with Katie and learn more about Pride Foundation and her leadership at the organization, her words hit home for me. I shared why: years ago, a good friend and her children moved to Portland. While in high school, her oldest came out as "bi-curious." When I found out, I said, "As much as I miss you all, goodness, I'm so glad he's going to school in Portland and not in Boise." Katie responded to this memory by saying, "That's why I'm here in the Northwest. I'm not from the Northwest. I moved out here from the Midwest because I didn't have community there, and I didn't feel like I could safely come out."

Legal protections and lived experience for LGBTQ+ people vary across the geographic areas Pride Foundation serves. For example, with regards to nondiscrimination in housing, although some individual municipalities offer protections, at the state level Idaho and Montana lack "explicit prohibitions for discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in state law." In contrast, Oregon and Washington have legislation that "explicitly prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity." In Alaska sex discrimination law is interpreted to include sexual

⁵⁹ Andrew Wallace. (March 30, 2020.) *Infographic - 2018 Tracking Report: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Grantmaking by U.S. Foundations*. "For every hundred dollars invested by institutional philanthropy, only 28 cents goes to LGBTQ issues." <https://lgbtfunders.org/research-item/infographic-2018-tracking-report/>

⁶⁰ Pride Foundation. 2022. Grant Opportunities. <https://pridefoundation.org/find-funding/grants/>

orientation although these protections are not explicitly codified.⁶¹ This variability in “laws and policies that affect LGBTQ+ people and their families” is also reflected in the Human Rights Campaign’s ratings of these states: Idaho and Montana were rated in the lowest category - High Priority to Achieve Basic Equality, while Oregon and Washington were in the highest - Working Toward Innovative Equality. Alaska fell into a middle category – Solidifying Equality.⁶²

The variability of legal protections in the Northwest provides context for Katie’s poignant words:

We should be able to live in Boise - we should be able to live in these other places, and not have to fear for our safety. Or feel like we won’t be able to go to the doctor. Or wonder whether we’re going to get fired at work or feel like we can talk to our co-workers openly and honestly about who we are.

Katie also explained that Pride Foundation’s work is about more than legal protections – which are important – because:

Laws only do so much. Building inclusive cultures is part and parcel of what Pride Foundation does as an institution, and that’s what motivates me. In addition to the legal protections that we are fighting for, what are the ways that we can ensure that LGBTQ+ people across the Northwest—regardless of where they live, regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation, race, immigration status, ability, all of these things—have the ability to live as our full authentic selves in all of those different places that we may call home?

⁶¹ Movement Advancement Project. 2022. “Equality Maps: State Nondiscrimination Laws.” https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/non_discrimination_laws.

⁶² Human Rights Campaign. (2021). State Scorecards. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/state-scorecards>

Building inclusive culture is particularly important given the devastating levels of violence against people who are transgender and gender non-conforming. At least 57 transgender people were shot or murdered by other violent means in 2021,⁶³ a staggering increase from 37 murders in 2020.⁶⁴ In a Pride Foundation communication for Trans Day of Remembrance in 2021, Katie explained:

The vast majority of these people have been Black and Latinx trans women, many of whom were sex workers. And these are only the cases that we know about—the actual number is likely higher. We know there are many that go unreported, and others whose identities are not respected and honored after their deaths.⁶⁵

Transphobia and racism contribute to the stories of trans peoples lives and murders being ignored and overlooked in the media. In contrast, the brutal, cruel murder of a white, gay, cisgender man, Matthew Shephard, in 1998 garnered national headlines. His story remains one that many are familiar with, in part because his family found the strength and resiliency after his murder to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, which contributed to the 2009 passage of federal legislation: the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act.⁶⁶ Katie explained the importance of intentionally including stories of trans people of color and others who are marginalized because their lives and experiences are a critically important part of our community's truth and narrative. Leaving those stories out

⁶³ Human Rights Campaign. (2021). Fatal Violence Against the Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Community in 2021. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/fatal-violence-against-the-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-community-in-2021>

⁶⁴ Human Rights Campaign. 2020. An epidemic of violence. <https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/FatalViolence-2020Report-Final.pdf?mtime=20201119101455&focal=none>

⁶⁵ Katie Cram. (November 20, 2021). Commemorating Trans Day of Remembrance 2021. *Pride Foundation*. <https://pridefoundation.org/2021/11/commemorating-trans-day-of-remembrance-2021/>

⁶⁶ Matthew Shephard Foundation. (2022). Our story. <https://www.matthewshepard.org/about-us/our-story/>

misrepresents the breadth of our community, and invalidates and dismisses their experiences and lives – and perpetuates the racism, transphobia, and homophobia that resulted in their lives being taken in the first place. Grappling with why people are willing to dismiss or ignore the lives and murders of trans women of color is a crucial step for the effective advocacy and education efforts we need to end violence and promote human dignity.

The epidemic of violence against transgender people is a stark contrast to the popularized version of the thriving LGBTQ+ people in popular media. Katie recounted a panel created by Funders for LGBTQ+ Issues at the Change Philanthropy conference she was invited to be on in 2018. The panel was titled “The Will and Grace Effect,” referring to a popular sitcom with a white, cisgender, affluent gay man as a central character. Ellen DeGeneres, whose net worth may exceed \$500 million,⁶⁷ also reinforces the popularized stereotype of upper class, white member of the LGBTQ+ community. The lived reality for most LGBTQ+ people is quite different than those depicted through these popular media examples.

A study released in 2020 indicated that more than 25% of LGBTQ+ people, over 3 million adults, reported experiencing food insecurity within the past year. That rate is more than double “the proportion of food insecurity found in the general population.”⁶⁸ As the table below shows, LGBTQ+ people of color were more likely than white and Asian/Asian American LGBTQ+ people to not have enough food to eat⁶⁹:

⁶⁷ Laura Woods. (September 13, 2021). Ellen DeGeneres’ Net Worth as Her Show Begins Its Final Season. *Yahoo!* <https://www.yahoo.com/video/ellen-degeneres-net-worth-her-225800779.html>

⁶⁸ Williams Institute. (April 27, 2020). One in four LGBT people experienced food insecurity in the past year. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/lgbt-food-insecure-press-release/>

⁶⁹ Williams Institute. (2020).

Race or Cultural Identity	Percent of LGBTQ+ people who reported facing food insecurity within the previous year
Black	37%
Pacific Islander	35%
Latinx	32%
American Indian	29%
White	22%
Asian/Asian American	8%

The disparity between LGBTQ+ people of color experiencing food insecurity has remained relatively stable since 2016.⁷⁰ Katie explained that the difference between the lived reality of LGBTQ+ people and popular media portrayals contributes to a sense of invisibility.

Given the dire economic situation so many in the LGBTQ+ already faced, Katie explained that, “When Covid-19 hit, we knew we had to act really fast.” She remembers

researching who was collecting data about LGBTQ+ people and communities. We knew the LGBTQ+ folks were going to be differently impacted and more impacted because that’s how it is with almost everything. And the organizations that are set up to support our communities are going to kick into high gear to fill in the gaps of services.

More than two years into the pandemic, some data would become available that confirmed what Katie and her team at Pride Foundation already knew anecdotally to be true:

⁷⁰ Taylor N.T. Brown, Adam P. Romero, and Gary J. Gates. (2016). Food Insecurity and SNAP Participation in the LGBT Community. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-food-insecurity-snap/>

the **COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges and inequities that already existed for LGBTQ+ people and communities.** Across all social indicators wherein LGBTQ+ people were already impacted by inequities—health, healthcare, housing, employment, child and family care, and more—the data indicates COVID-19 has only compounded those already existing inequities.⁷¹

Thus, although there are many challenges the LGBTQ+ community faces, during our conversation Katie focused on how Pride Foundation responded to the challenges Covid-19 presented.

COVID-19 RESPONSE: A NEW INITIATIVE TO SUPPORT COMMUNITIES IN CRISIS

Katie and her team at Pride Foundation felt that acting fast was of paramount importance. She reflected, “At the beginning, we were all wondering what the organizational impacts were going to be. The economy was crashing. Events that were key fundraising opportunities were being cancelled. Support needs were increasing. We didn’t know what this was going to look like.” One of Pride Foundation’s focal points is providing grants to partners – smaller LGBTQ+ focused organizations that serve local communities. Katie explained, “We knew that those organizations would need support, and so we set up the Crisis Community Care Fund.” The initiative was a fundraising success. Pride Foundation raised and distributed over 1.6 million dollars in less than a year, which was three times as much as they had ever been able to move out to communities in one year before. The fund was also a success because it helped community organizations survive - and in some cases thrive - during the challenges of Covid-19. Katie reflected, “I’m really happy to say that most of those organizations are still around. In fact, many of them have grown and have added staff and have expanded their support and their services.” Across the

⁷¹ Katelen Kellogg. (April 7, 2022). What We Know 2 Years Later: COVID-19’s Impact on LGBTQ+ Communities. Pride Foundation. <https://pridefoundation.org/2022/04/what-we-know-2-years-later-covid-19s-impact-on-lgbtq-communities/>

five-state region that Pride Foundation serves, Katie saw community-based organizations demonstrate their existing capability and potential as they responded to the heightened challenges posed by the pandemic.

Acting quickly to support these organizations was important given the already disproportionate impact of inequities on LGBTQ+ people prior to the pandemic. Experience had taught advocates that those impacts only grow in a crisis, and this proved accurate, as evidenced by 2021 data from a United States Census Bureau survey. Respondents who identified as LGBTQ+ experienced food insecurity at nearly double the rate of non-LGBTQ+ people. Other concerning differences were revealed in the study as well: 36.6% of LGBTQ+ adults reported living “in a household that had difficulty paying for usual household expenses in the previous seven days, compared to 26.1% of non-LGBT adults.”⁷² Rates for lost employment and those “not at all confident that their household will be able to make their next housing payment on time” were also higher for LGBTQ+ identified people.⁷³ Many of the organizations who received support from the Crisis Community Care Fund provided assistance with food insecurity for LGBTQ+ people facing financial challenges due to the pandemic.

Katie noted that although she chose the challenge presented by Covid-19 as the focus for our interview, the response is also a success story. She said:

It speaks so strongly to how [resilient] LGBTQ+ communities, including Pride Foundation, have been [historically]. We knew - living through the AIDS crisis, living through violence, living through discrimination - we knew we were going to have to make sure that our communities had access to support structures. Because of systemic discrimination, we were, unfortunately, well positioned to know how to respond in a moment of crisis.

⁷² Thom File and Joey Marshall. (August 11, 2021). Household Pulse Survey Shows LGBT Adults More Likely to Report Living in Households With Food and Economic Insecurity Than Non-LGBT Respondents. United States Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/lgbt-community-harder-hit-by-economic-impact-of-pandemic.html>

⁷³ Thom File and Joey Marshall. (2021).

We could at least monetarily provide that support quickly with no strings attached using a trust-based approach.

The term “trust-based” refers to a values-based approach to philanthropy that Pride Foundation has embraced. Trust-based is “rooted in advancing equity, shifting power, and building mutually accountable relationships.”⁷⁴ It is a dramatic shift from traditional grant-giving and philanthropy, which

has contributed to systemic inequities, both in the ways wealth is accumulated and in the ways its dissemination is controlled. This history is entrenched in racism, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression, which are at the root of every social issue nonprofits seek to address.⁷⁵

Pride Foundation staff members Jeremiah J. Henderson and Kim Sogge created a framework to guide the move to trust-based practices, which is part of the organization’s “intentional shifts to continue to center racial justice in our work, improve the experience of grantee partners, and align our grantmaking with our organizational priorities to move resources to LGBTQ+ communities most impacted by injustice.”⁷⁶ Using the trust-based practice to award Crisis Community Care Funds was a key part of getting the money out to communities rapidly. Katie reflected that the approach “is about really trusting the organizations and groups who are closest to the issues.”

Katie pointed out that the Crisis Community Care Fund was realized in “incredible ways during an extraordinarily devastating time” that was made harder by the “coalescing of so many different challenges over the course of 2020.” Katie explained that in June 2020, “the same month that we’re typically celebrating Pride, the Black Lives Matter uprisings began

⁷⁴ Trust-Based Philanthropy Project. <https://www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org/overview>

⁷⁵ Trust-Based Philanthropy Project. <https://www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org/>

⁷⁶ Katelen Kellogg. (September 23, 2021). Exciting Community Grants Program Updates. <https://pridefoundation.org/2021/09/exciting-community-grants-updates/>

happening” following the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020.⁷⁷ The powerful response to Floyd’s murder “gave us an opportunity to talk about the history of the LGBTQ+ movement, which was started by Black and Brown trans women at Stonewall, which is often forgotten.” The Stonewall Uprising was a response to police harassment of LGBTQ+ people in New York City, and the “six days of protests and violent clashes with law enforcement” that began in June 1969 are considered the catalyst for the LGBTQ+ rights movement.⁷⁸ Katie explained that Stonewall was led by trans women of color, including “Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P Johnson, and many of the mothers of our movement who were being harassed by the police and targeted with violence at the time.” Katie noted that Pride Foundation was “able to show the intersections of our movements and also show solidarity with the movement for Black Lives” and offer meaningful support to those efforts. That support includes providing “resources to Black-led and centered racial justice organizing work in the Northwest—efforts that are addressing the systemic racism that resulted in the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has on Black people and communities.”⁷⁹

COVID-19 RESPONSE: CARING FOR COLLEAGUES

Another success in the midst of the challenges that Covid-19 presented was internal: supporting staff members. Katie stated:

I’m so proud of my team at Pride Foundation, because they did such an extraordinary job of showing up for one another. We did a lot of administrative things to get folks set up to work remotely. We went to four-day work weeks to really prioritize and make sure that people could take

⁷⁷ Evan Hill, Ainara Tiefenthäler, Christiaan Triebert, Drew Jordan, Haley Willis and Robin Stein. (May 30, 2020). How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html>

⁷⁸ History.com Editors. (June 25, 2021). Stonewall Riots. <https://www.history.com/topics/gay-rights/the-stonewall-riots>

⁷⁹ Pride Foundation. 2022. Crisis Community Care Fund. <https://pridefoundation.org/find-funding/grants/crisis-community-care-efforts/>

care of themselves and their families during a time when things were ramping up and so much was uncertain.

Focusing on care was essential. Katie spoke about the importance prioritizing care at work as a speaker at *R/evolution*, the Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy national virtual conference. She explained that

the idea of even talking about care at work can seem out of place because care and personhood is something that you get from home, not work. This is a false dichotomy and creates the conditions for exploitation and burnout. As organizations focused on social, racial, gender, disability, and queer justice and liberation, we have to think about and deeply care for our people.⁸⁰

By identifying and practicing holding these values, Pride Foundation's staff collectively took measures to help everyone in their organization cultivate a supportive, caring environment that promotes collective thriving and resilience. Katie pointed out that to focus on care is a contrast to grinding "ourselves to a pulp all the time. Care makes the work better; it makes our ability to show up for our community stronger." Given the documented evidence of workplace burnout during the pandemic,⁸¹ Pride Foundation's ongoing successes through the pandemic seems inseparable from their focus on care.

We were three-fourths of the way through our interview when I learned that Katie had worked at Pride Foundation for a total of eight years, yet had been in her role as CEO for less than a year when the pandemic hit. She reflected that "learning to lead during unprecedented times is its own trial by fire. I think you really focus on what matters and what matters is that we were set up to take care of community." Perhaps it was Katie's status as a new leader that contributed to her collaborative approach with

⁸⁰ Pride Foundation Staff. (July 21, 2021). Collective Loss, Collective Care. <https://pridefoundation.org/2021/07/collective-loss-collective-care/>

⁸¹ Rashmi Parmar. (August 23, 2021). Navigating COVID-19's Lessons on Burnout. <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/navigating-covid-19s-lessons-on-burnout>

her colleagues. Contrasted with conventional top-down leadership styles, Katie's collaborative approach seems like an example from Brené Brown's 2020 interview with women's leadership consultant Abby Wambach. Wambach encourages women leaders to create their own paths rather than follow those traditionally set out for them. Wambach explained girls are taught from a young age that "I have to stay on the path here, otherwise bad things will happen."⁸² In contrast, Wambach encourages women leaders to create their own paths that are responsive to circumstances and needs – which is how Katie and her team approached the risk for burnout. By co-creating a path that prioritizes the care and personhood of each staff person and of the communities they serve across the Northwest, the team at pride Foundation took an important stance that will remain essential given the ongoing journey to promote equity for LGBTQ+ people.

⁸² Brené Brown & Abby Wambach. (October 26, 2020). The New Rules of Leadership with Abby Wambach. *Dare to Lead* podcast. <https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-with-abby-wambach-on-the-new-rules-of-leadership/#transcript>



COUNTERACTING ELIMINATION

UPLIFTING NATIVE VOICES

THE ORGANIZATION: Kessler Keener Foundation and its Native Voices Project

THE CHALLENGE: Growing and learning from a public critique of the organization's approach to advocacy.

The Kessler Keener Foundation is a non-profit based in Boise, Idaho and focuses on “Centering Indigenous Voices.” Initially the organization had a more general focus of promoting social justice and became more specific over time. The board president, Ed Keener, explained that for “Our first 10 years as an organization, we focused on presenting stories by speakers who are known for their human rights work.” Over time he realized that these events may leave attendees “feeling that they had accomplished something in terms of knowledge. But I couldn’t see that it did much in terms of changing one’s life and really dealing with the injustice of abuse.” Ed and the board members started considering how to move away from hosting speakers and instead situate the Kessler Keener Foundation be part of systemic change.

As Kessler Keener Foundation’s board was considering ways to transform the organization, Ed personally realized how little he knew about Native people and their history. He, and the board members, also realized they did not personally know any Idaho Natives. Through contacts who were connected to Nez Perce tribe in Lapwai, Idaho, Ed and the board were able to set up listening sessions where they learned about some of the

contemporary issues Nez Perce face. Connections to Idaho's Native community grew over time, and the Kessler Keener Foundation reached a point where they were able to sponsor a conference where non-Native people could learn about Native people.

Their first conference featured one-act plays written by Native youth from the Coeur d'Alene people of northern Idaho. The plays were written through a program called the Mentor Artists Playwright Project (MAPP), which brings "mentoring, arts based literacy training and creative education opportunities to underrepresented indigenous youth, to create a platform for their unique voices."⁸³ Plays are written by "young people, each paired with a mentor actor or writer," and they "participate in a progressive series of intensive playwriting workshops" led by MAPP's founder and director.⁸⁴ The culmination of the workshop is live performances featuring professional actors, with the young playwrights sitting in an author's chair on the stage and their families and communities invited to the performances. These professional performances were a central part of the first conference the Kessler Keener Foundation organized.

Looking back on the first conference, Ed remembers that the youth and their families seemed appreciative of how the performances "represented and honored" the young people of the Coeur d'Alene tribe and their communities. His observation is significant given that:

Native American students currently enrolled in K-12 schools across the United States face a variety of challenges unique to their ethnicity and often silenced by a majority culture which fails to recognize key, intrinsic factors critical for the students' success in academic settings... it is critical that educational institutions recognize the value and necessity to respect and maintain the students' language

⁸³ Mentor Artists Playwright Project. (2022). <https://www.mentorartists.org/>

⁸⁴ Bridging New Pathways. (2022). Thomas Dean Kellogg – Bio. <https://sites.google.com/a/malirowanpresents.com/bridging-new-pathways/home/thomas-dean-kellogg--bio>

and culture in order to preserve tribal sovereignty while expanding the students' 21st century knowledge base.⁸⁵

The plays youth wrote during their MAPP experience honored Native culture. In addition to respecting Native language and culture, it is also essential to counteract the impact of their erasure – “the practice of collective indifference that renders certain people and groups invisible”⁸⁶ - from school curriculum and popular culture. Citizen of the Lower Sioux Indian Community and Associate Professor Iyekiyapiwiŋ⁸⁷ Darlene St. Clair explained the result of erasure: “The experiences and realities of Native People are generally absent from the contemporary consciousness of most Americans.”⁸⁸ Ed and his team of “mostly white people” who were committed to learning about Native people realized that their own lack of knowledge was partly a result of Native people being absent from their own school experiences because “the narrative of U.S. history is painfully one sided in its telling of the American narrative, especially with regard to Indigenous Peoples’ experiences.”⁸⁹ Typically, when Native experiences are included in curriculum, students

are often only offered the barest minimum: re-enacting the first Thanksgiving, building a California Spanish mission out of sugar cubes or memorizing a flashcard about

⁸⁵ Angela S. Farmer. (2018). Preserving the Past or Preventing the Future: Native American Parents’ Perceptions of School Efficacy. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 13, 142-151. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1186216.pdf>

⁸⁶ Parul Sehgal. (February 2, 2016). Fighting ‘Erasure.’ *New York Times Magazine*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/07/magazine/the-painful-consequences-of-erasure.html#:~:text=“Erasure”%20refers%20to,certain%20people%20and%20groups%20invisible>.

⁸⁷ Iyekiyapiwiŋ is Dr. St. Clair’s traditional name. After seeing it used in some publications and not in others, I contacted her to ask if it was appropriate for me to use it in this e-book. She confirmed that there is “no problem using it. I know different tribes have different traditions and it’s appropriate to check.”

⁸⁸ Darlene St. Clair. (August 2019). Informational Webinar Mni Sota Makoce 6th grade Social Studies Curriculum. <https://dakotawicohan.org/courses/mni-sota-koce/>

⁸⁹ Sarah B. Shear, Ryan T. Knowles, Gregory J. Soden & Antonio J. Castro. (2015) Manifesting Destiny: Re/presentations of Indigenous Peoples in K–12 U.S. History Standards. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 43, 1, 68-101, DOI: 10.1080/00933104.2014.999849

the Trail of Tears just ahead of the AP U.S. History Test. Most students across the United States don't get comprehensive, thoughtful or even accurate education in Native American history and culture.⁹⁰

Erasure of Native voices from school curriculum was intentional and reflects efforts to eliminate Native people from the lands that became the United States.⁹¹

Over time more Native people joined the Kessler Keener group. They helped shape the focus of future conferences, design a new educational program, and serve as members of the board of directors. A new area of emphasis emerged: collaborating with Native people in Idaho to develop K-12 educational resources for educators to increase the visibility of Native people and allow Idaho's non-Native youth to learn a more complete history and contemporary circumstances of Native people.

NATIVE VOICES IN IDAHO

In November 2021, the Kessler Keener Foundation officially unveiled the Native Voices in Idaho project. The *Idaho Press* reported that “The project bloomed out of a planned 2020 conference that ultimately did not happen after the COVID-19 pandemic hit.”⁹² The would-be spring 2020 conference designed to have a central component of teacher education, especially for fourth grade teachers who are responsible for teaching

⁹⁰ Anna Diamond. (September 18, 2019). Inside a New Effort to Change What Schools Teach About Native American History. *Smithsonian Magazine*. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/inside-new-effort-change-what-schools-teach-about-native-american-history-180973166/>, p. 89.

⁹¹ See, for example, Hutton, Paul Andrew. (2017). *The Apache Wars: The Hunt for Geronimo, the Apache Kid, and the Captive Boy Who Started the Longest War in American History*.

⁹² Carolyn Komatsoulis. (November 13, 2021). Foundation to roll out Native Voices of Idaho project. *Idaho Press*. https://www.idahopress.com/news/local/foundation-to-roll-out-native-voices-of-idaho-project/article_c617837e-7be1-58d7-a96c-540da620869f.html

Idaho's state social studies standards that address the five federally recognized tribes in Idaho. As the pandemic unfolded and many conferences were moved to virtual formats, the planning committee grappled with the right approach to advance the goal of providing teachers with resources to enrich curriculum. Committee members personally knew local teachers who were fatigued from pivoting overnight to virtual instruction in the spring of 2020, and then learning how to teach hybrid formats in fall 2020, all while being responsive to their own health and concerns during a global pandemic. Asking fatigued teachers to spend more time online for a virtual conference seemed like a poor choice, so the conversation turned to creating resources that teachers could use in the new virtual learning environment and use when the hoped-for post-pandemic world allowed school to return to "normal."

Momentum built and a vision for the possibilities began to emerge – videos of Native youth and educators that Idaho teachers could use to meaningfully teach their students about Native people.

Three Native women joined the Kessler Keener Foundation board and the pace picked up dramatically because they had specific skill sets that helped transform the project from ideas to reality. Trina Finley Ponce, a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, brought her experience as a diversity, equity, and inclusion professional to the team, along with her connection to Steph Cullen, a Native Hawaiian and professional story teller and film maker. Valerie Miller, a member of the Stockbridge Munsee Band of Mohicans, brought nearly two decades of experience as an English teacher and Special Education teacher to the project. With the addition of these new board members, the Kessler Keener Foundation's board consisted of five Native women and three non-Native people. Their collective skills and energy created the first phase of the Native Voices in Idaho project in less than one year.

The November 2021 rollout of the project featured videos⁹³ of 12 young people from Idaho's five federally recognized tribes and videos of three

⁹³ Native Voices for Students. <https://www.kesslerkeenerfoundation.org/native-voices-students>

young people who are members of tribes from other regions of the United States and call Idaho's Treasure Valley home. The videos are short and engaging – the longest is 3 minutes, 48 seconds. The short length provides teachers with more time for meaningful learning activities and discussion, using the Native Voices in Idaho extensive collection of resources for teachers.⁹⁴ Background knowledge and lesson plans that support the videos were designed to help teachers effectively integrate the video resources into their classrooms.

The project can help teachers act on a recommendation from educator Christine Boatman:

First, we need to humble ourselves and admit that there are gaps in our own knowledge of history. We need to strive to educate ourselves and fill in those gaps with culturally sensitive information, by opening ourselves to multiple perspectives and taking time to truly listen.⁹⁵

Boatman acknowledged one of her own gaps: “I’ve been teaching Native American history for years and only recently learned that Oregon had its own version of the Trail of Tears—a tragic story I learned from an educator with the Grand Ronde Tribe.”⁹⁶ Social studies scholars have long demonstrated the importance of teachers’ content knowledge and the impact it has on their teaching,⁹⁷ which underscores the importance of Boatman’s advice.

Although they were not professional educators, Ed Keener and the “mostly white” people who joined him in learning about Native people essentially set out to enact Boatman’s recommendation. Their efforts to share the

⁹⁴ Native Voices for Educators and Learners. <https://www.kesslerkeenerfoundation.org/native-voices-educators>

⁹⁵ Christine Boatman. (September 18, 2019). Lessons Learned in Teaching Native American History. *Edutopia*. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/lessons-learned-teaching-native-american-history>

⁹⁶ Christine Boatman. (2019).

⁹⁷ e.g. Engle, S., & Ochoa, A. (1988). *Education for democratic citizenship*. Teachers College Press.

opportunity to learn ultimately led to the Native Voices in Idaho project, which has the potential to transform learning for young people across the state. Ed reflected that,

In the process of all this, we have continued to learn and more Native people have come in to join, or to teach us, or to be with us. I think we've learned pretty well to listen and not get all white fragile⁹⁸ and go off licking our wounds. And we've had a number of opportunities to lick our wounds and feel bad about ourselves.

One opportunity to listen and learn rather than “feel bad” and “lick wounds” came in the form of a public critique of the Kessler Keener Foundation's work and its 2019 conference. The challenge the critique presented could have been a setback or unravelling of the group's efforts; instead, processing the challenge proved to be a gift and contributed to the momentum that led to the Native Voices Project.

⁹⁸ Here Ed refers to Robin DiAngelo's ideas presented in her 2019 book *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*. Katy Waldman (2018) explained DiAngelo's theory that white people: “will insist that they ‘were taught to treat everyone the same,’ that they are ‘color-blind,’ that they ‘don't care if you are pink, purple, or polka-dotted.’ They will point to friends and family members of color, a history of civil-rights activism, or a more ‘salient’ issue, such as class or gender. They will shout and bluster. They will cry. In 2011, DiAngelo coined the term ‘white fragility’ to describe the disbelieving defensiveness that white people exhibit when their ideas about race and racism are challenged—and particularly when they feel implicated in white supremacy. Why, she wondered, did her feedback prompt such resistance, as if the mention of racism were more offensive than the fact or practice of it?” <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-sociologist-examines-the-white-fragility-that-prevents-white-americans-from-confronting-racism>

THE CHALLENGE AND GIFT OF A PUBLIC CRITIQUE

An opinion piece titled “Proxy Activism” was published on January 15, 2020 in *The Boise Weekly*.⁹⁹ Although the authors did not name the Kessler Keener Foundation directly, it was clear that the organization was a centerpiece of the critique, which outlined problems that emerge if allies “stand in place of those groups seeking to have a voice.”¹⁰⁰ The authors were critical that “the first time that an indigenous-centric conference was held in the Boise Valley, it originated from a predominantly Euro-centric group that holds to the idea that they are supportive of the indigenous population.”¹⁰¹ They noted that the conference organization was a contrast to activities in the Boise area that supported Indigenous activists protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline, “any protest or support activity in the Boise area” needed to

be led by indigenous people and not well-meaning supporters or allies. The reality of the situation is that most of us have already ... experienced nullification by well-meaning white supporters who felt it was their duty to ‘stand up for the oppressed.’¹⁰²

The concerns about nullification reflect a long history of oppressive acts by well-intentioned white people¹⁰³ as well as those whose intentions were to forcibly assimilate Natives into agrarian lifestyle and customs more

⁹⁹ Idaho Indigenous Alliance. (January 15, 2020). Proxy Activism. *The Boise Weekly*. https://www.idahopress.com/boiseweekly/opinion/proxy-activism/article_8975122f-c65c-5ad4-b3c2-59d215a3a9f8.html

¹⁰⁰ Idaho Indigenous Alliance. (2020).

¹⁰¹ Idaho Indigenous Alliance. (2020).

¹⁰² Idaho Indigenous Alliance. (2020).

¹⁰³ See Tisa Wenger’s (2009) *We Have a Religion* for an in-depth examination of how “Pueblo Indian leaders in New Mexico and a sympathetic coalition of non-Indian reformers successfully challenged government and missionary attempts to suppress Indian dances by convincing a skeptical public that these ceremonies counted as religion.” Wenger’s book includes how some “sympathetic” non-Native reformers had paternalistic approaches that were grounded in a disregard for the Pueblo’s humanity.

acceptable to the American public, and thus “rescue them from their troubled lifestyle.”¹⁰⁴

The public critique also raised concerns about paternalistic moves by the Kessler Keener Foundation. Ed reflected on the timing, “We had these good things going on, and people want to be a part of it. Then the letter came, and it scared me. But I’ll listen to other folks before I’ll react or say something that I would later regret.” Ed turned to Native people who had participated in the conference to help him reflect on the critique since he was unable to speak directly with the authors. The public critique was published on a Wednesday. The following Saturday many of the people involved with planning the 2020 conference, which included Native people and non-Natives, came together for a meeting to discuss the critique.

The meeting was thoughtful and reflective. Antoinette Cavanaugh, a member of the Shoshone-Paiute tribe and member of the Kessler Keener Foundation’s board of directors, had presented at the 2019 conference. She spoke with passion about the vision for the upcoming 2020 conference to emphasize K-12 teachers and education:

Education is the system that was used to underwrite the assimilation of Native people, that robbed people of their children and Native futures. Telling the stories, while hard, needs to be done. And the stories need to be told with Native voices.

She described the conference as having the potential to help with healing. The conversation also highlighted how people could attend the same event and have deeply different perceptions of the experience. Antoinette explained that speaking at the conference was the first time she could unapologetically speak her truth and not have to curtail her voice as a Native woman for the benefit of a white audience. She felt valued, and two other Native people who had presented in 2019 expressed similar positive reflections. In contrast, the public critique stated that for the Native

¹⁰⁴ Stewart, A. J. (2012). Acting for the left behind: How the Native Class Act could close the gaps in American Indian education. *American Indian*, (36), 2-3, 347.

people “asked to speak, help out, or be involved - none had ownership of the conference, let alone felt safe to speak out.”¹⁰⁵ The discrepancy in their experiences was salient – it makes it seem inevitable that conflict will unfold around social justice work, even among people who are united by the same overarching goal.

Reflecting on the possibility of conflict, Ed said:

I find it amazing that I’m a person who doesn’t like conflict. And yet I do these wacky things that cause conflict. I guess I do it because I feel deep in my heart, and in my soul and my whole being that justice is more important than my fear of conflict.

During the reflective conversation in January 2020, people shared ideas for how to most effectively reach out to the authors of the critique and invite their positive suggestions for moving forward, as well as ways to avoid letting the conference be divisive among the Native community. The group agreed that continuing to go forward with the spring 2020 conference was important. When Covid-19 made an in-person event impossible, there was exploration of new approaches. This ultimately led to the Native Voices of Idaho project which has the potential to have statewide outreach.

Ed remains committed to including non-Native contributions to this work, despite the assertion in the public critique that people involved with the conference should, “ask themselves, ‘have we become gatekeepers? Are we prioritizing work that could be done by activists most affected [by] the problem?’”¹⁰⁶ Ed spoke with conviction that it is important for non-Natives to contribute. He expressed concern about the negative impact a lifetime of oppressive experiences has on Native people’s physical and mental health, especially if they give extensive energy to activism. Indian Health Services stated that “American Indians and Alaska Natives born today have a life expectancy that is 5.5 years less” than the life expectancy for other races

¹⁰⁵ Idaho Indigenous Alliance. (2020).

¹⁰⁶ Idaho Indigenous Alliance. (2020).

in the United States.¹⁰⁷ Ed noted “there are not that many Native people who have the time to do this work, so you can’t always say if it doesn’t have a Native person then it shouldn’t be done.”

While the immediate challenge of a public critique of the Kessler Keener Foundation’s work was handled in a way that contributed to positive growth, a larger challenge remains: How can any organization that provides people who do not experience marginalization the chance to contribute to social justice initiatives *and* avoid the pitfalls that can arise when “‘doing good’ for disadvantaged people”?¹⁰⁸ As the authors of the public critique correctly stated, “paternalism and proxy activism are best left in the past.”¹⁰⁹

Marian Wright Edelman’s admonition that “service is the rent that each of us pays for living”¹¹⁰ speaks to the heart of what drives people to contribute. Paul Loeb described the common need people have “to repay the blessings they’ve received,”¹¹¹ noting that this desire is not limited to those who live in relative comfort: “the poorest fifth of Americans contribute twice as high a percentage of their income to charity as to the wealthiest fifth.”¹¹² The path forward seems to lie in words spoken by Aboriginal scholar and activist Lilla Watson regarding cross-cultural efforts in Australia:

Many whitefellas who got involved found themselves on a steep learning curve. They had regarded themselves as normal: but as Frantz Fanon said, in a racist society, it is normal to be racist. So they had to confront their own racism, and that of their community: and to recognise the persisting colonial perceptions, attitudes and relationships

¹⁰⁷ Indian Health Services. (2019). Disparities. <https://www.ihs.gov/newsroom/factsheets/disparities/>

¹⁰⁸ Indigenous Idaho Alliance. (2020).

¹⁰⁹ Indigenous Idaho Alliance. (2020).

¹¹⁰ Marian Wright Edelman. (2014). Service: The Rent We Pay for Living. <https://spu.edu/depts/uc/response/new/2014-summer/features/service-the-rent-we-pay.asp>

¹¹¹ Paul Loeb. (2010). *Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in Challenging Times*. St. Martin’s Griffin Press. p. 33.

¹¹² Loeb, p. 34.

which underpinned it. Some had difficulty recognising their paternalism: in Brisbane, we used a slogan:

If you have come to help me,
you are wasting your time.
If you have come because your liberation
is bound up with mine,
then let us work together.

Many realised that they knew nothing about Murrís, their history, their culture, and how the community functioned: but came to realise that they needed some of this knowledge if their contributions were to be effective. They had to learn – often from their mistakes - how to consult with the community in an appropriate way, how to work with, rather than for, people.¹¹³

As the story of the Kessler Keener Foundation’s public critique makes clear, it can be difficult to find ways to work together that are universally well-received. Yet the opportunity to work towards the Brisbane collective’s vision of liberation by working together with Native people is worth the risk of more conflict and critique.

¹¹³ Lilla Watson. 2004. Keynote Address: A contribution to change: Cooperation out of conflict conference. <https://uniting.church/lilla-watson-let-us-work-together/> Also, note that Watson has subsequently been credited as the source of the slogan, yet she “prefers that the words be credited ‘Aboriginal activists group Queensland, 1970s’” because the words were “born of a collective process.”

SHAPING THE FUTURE

Along the shore of the Boise River in Idaho's capitol city lies the Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial. My favorite part of the Memorial is the quote wall, where powerful insights from a diverse collection of human rights supporters are etched into stone. The first time I took students on a guided tour of the Memorial was in 2009. Rose Beal, a Holocaust survivor, was our guide. Rose was actively involved with the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights. Her many contributions included leading tours of the Memorial well into her eighth decade of life. Her relentless contributions to promoting human rights inspired thousands of people who were lucky enough to interact with her, including the students who were part of the guided tour in 2009.

I clearly remember Rose stopping us in front of Dr. Haim Ginott's quote and reading them out loud:

Dear Teacher:

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no person should witness: Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot and killed by high school and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your students to become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, or educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, and

arithmetic are only important if they serve to make our children more humane.

Rose's voice made the words all the more powerful. My students were all aspiring elementary school teachers, and Rose's choice to read this particular quote aloud affected us in profound ways. Later my students and I discussed Dr. Ginott's description of the indoctrination through education that contributed to the inhumanity of the Holocaust.

In contrast, education can uplift lives and help us learn to transform our world for the better. Each of the organizations featured in this e-book has an educational component to their work. For Cardinal Academy, education *is* the focus, with creating a safe and welcoming environment for pregnant and parenting teens being at the heart of all their efforts. The Kessler Keener Foundation's Native Voices of Idaho project offers teachers and students the opportunity to learn about Idaho's Indigenous people in ways that are accurate and help young learners understand that Native people are still alive and contributing to their communities. Pride Foundation and the Equal Justice Initiative both have public education components to their multipronged approach to improving the lives of the LGBTQ+ and imprisoned people these organizations serve.

While the road each of these organizations takes has challenges, there are bright spots on the journey. For example, there has been a substantial, positive change in public opinion supporting gay marriage. The General Social Survey is a project that studies the complexity of attitudes in U.S. society.¹¹⁴ In 1988, researchers with the project began asking Americans "whether gay people should have the right to marry. That year, fewer than 12 percent of respondents said yes... In 2018, 68 percent of those surveyed said that gay couples should have that right."¹¹⁵ Sociologist Michael Rosenfeld took a deep look into the data and commented that:

¹¹⁴ The General Social Survey. (2022). <https://gss.norc.org/About-The-GSS>

¹¹⁵ Shankar Vedantam, Parth Shah, Tara Boyle and Jennifer Schmidt. (April 8, 2018). Radically Normal: How Gay Rights Activists Changed the Minds Of Their Opponents. *Hidden Brain*. <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/03/709567750/radically-normal-how-gay-rights-activists-changed-the-minds-of-their-opponents> and <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/709567750>.

This is actually one of the most surprising things in the whole history of public opinion in the United States. What we see in attitudes towards gay rights is a really stunning change over time, sooner than almost anybody thought possible.¹¹⁶

The opinion shift didn't just come from "liberals who were more likely to be open to gay rights, it turns out that there were plenty of evangelical Christians, rural people, Republican voters who actually changed their mind on these issues."¹¹⁷ Rosenfeld pointed out that part of what made the marriage equality movement effective was how it "created a new frame of love and commitment and normalcy"¹¹⁸ that helped undermine existing views that gay people are abnormal or even pathological. This public opinion shift contributed to positive policy changes as well, which demonstrates how education and activism can work together to bring about change.

Cardinal Academy, Pride Foundation, Equal Justice Initiative and the Kessler Keener Foundation all contribute to uplifting human rights for different populations, yet their work is in many ways interconnected. Dan Prinzing, executive director of the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights, wrote these words in the first Spiral of Injustice e-book:

Our hope is that both the voices echoing in the Memorial and the education programming of the Center become the vehicles that encourage us to share a commitment to human rights, to learn from the horrors of the past to guide our behavior and shape our attitudes in the future, and to inspire classrooms and communities throughout the state to promote respect for human dignity and diversity.¹¹⁹

This e-book is part of the Center's education program. Like Dan, I hope Cardinal Academy, Pride Foundation, Equal Justice Initiative, and the

¹¹⁶ Shankar Vedantam, Parth Shah, Tara Boyle and Jennifer Schmidt. (2018).

¹¹⁷ Shankar Vedantam, Parth Shah, Tara Boyle and Jennifer Schmidt. (2018).

¹¹⁸ Shankar Vedantam, Parth Shah, Tara Boyle and Jennifer Schmidt. (2018).

¹¹⁹ Dan Prinzing. (2017). Conclusion. Spiral of Injustice E-Book. Wassmuth Center for Human Rights. <http://wassmuthcenter.org/spiral-of-injustice/>

Kessler Keener Foundation's work, ideas, approaches, and intentional efforts to work through challenges in order to promote human dignity inspires each of us to deepen our own commitments to interrupt the spiral of injustice. May we find ways to work across political and ideological divisions so we can better put Indigenous leader Amelia "Amy" Cutsack Trice's words, also carved into the Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial, into action:

If not me, then who? I have something to do and it has to be done now.

A decorative red ribbon graphic that starts at the top left and loops down towards the center of the page.

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Four dedicated, busy human rights advocates contributed their time to make this e-book possible. In addition to participating in an interview, Emily Bergstrom, Randy Susskind, Katie Carter, and Ed Keener read advanced drafts of the chapter featuring their organizations to ensure I had accurately represented their ideas. There is no way for me to adequately thank these human rights leaders for their time and contributions to this project.

Asking the participants to read the chapter that features their story is a qualitative research practice called member checking, which provides study participants with an important opportunity that promotes the accuracy of the results. Katie Carter and Pride Foundation's Senior Communications Manager Katelen Kellogg contributed in ways that go beyond the typical member checking process, making significant editorial suggestions and helping me to better present the profoundly painful issue of violence against trans women of color. Thank you both - my appreciation for your editorial feedback is profound.

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The Wassmuth Center for Human Rights is the builder and home of the Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial in Boise, Idaho.

Located within the Memorial, the statue of “The Other” offers an artistic representation of the Spiral of Injustice. The stages of injustice are debossed in English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic and Hebrew and embossed in Braille.

The statue was designed by Boise metal-artist Ken McCall.

Featured on the statue’s base:

“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” Amos



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Sara began collaborating with the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights in 2009, shortly after joining Boise State. From attending the Center's professional development events as a learner, to contributing to the e-book series on the Spiral of Injustice, Sara is grateful for the opportunities she has had to learn and contribute to the Center's mission.

