



WHEN WE TELL OUR STORIES

How survivors of color are most harmed and
least helped by the public safety system

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A Note from the Steering Committee

Our first commitment to this process was to have it be guided by people from the communities whose stories it aspires to tell.

Engaged with survivors of color from the communities in which we live, we are community advocates who work within law enforcement, city- and county-level agencies, community-based reentry programs, and behavioral healthcare systems.

We collaborated on this project in which Partnership for Safety & Justice played a coordinating role. As directors of the project, we developed the questions and invited participants. We conducted the individual and group interviews, and we provided guidance to staff and interns on interpreting and contextualizing responses. And we also played a core role in determining the final recommendations that grew out of the dozens of interviews that were conducted.

Acknowledgements

We're deeply grateful to all those who were involved in and supported this project. Special thanks to our interns: Bianca Pak, Sophie Adler, Stephanie Grayce, and Roberta Munger whose compassion and dedication to equity and healing pave the way for change.

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To all our friends and colleagues who got messages at unreasonable hours pleading for your expertise: You are all essential parts of a much larger movement that will lift up these stories and bring healing. Thank you for what you bring to the world.

And most importantly, to the survivors who participated in these conversations: Thank you for your stories. We're endlessly inspired by your hearts, your resilience, and your courage. Universally, you voiced a desire to make things better for others by sharing your story. We're so honored to have shared this experience with you.

Juntos avanzamos.

Project Team

COMMUNITY HEALING INITIATIVE PROGRAM, LATINO NETWORK

latnet.org/chi-overview

Latino Network, in partnership with the Multnomah County Department of Juvenile Justice, runs the Community Healing Initiative (CHI) and Early Intervention Community Healing Initiative (Early CHI) to prevent and reduce youth violence, decrease rates of juvenile justice involvement, and increase community safety. CHI engages our highest risk, adjudicated Latino youth on probation and parole to set and pursue positive life goals and to avoid future incarceration.



LatinoNetwork

CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM, POLICE BUREAU CITY OF PORTLAND, OREGON

portlandoregon.gov/police/72124

The Mission of the Portland Police Bureau's Crisis Response Team is to intervene in traumatic situations which impact individuals, families, and the community at large. The Crisis Response Team responds to incidents in an effort to enhance community livability and reduce the threat of violence and the fear of crime. This is achieved through crisis counseling, emotional and bereavement support, and improved communication among all groups who are affected by such incidents.

** While Police Bureau staff advised and was involved in many aspects of this project and research, the Bureau did not ultimately take a formal position in endorsing this report.*

Healing Hurt People, POIC

portlandoic.org/resources

The HHP program serves individuals of color, ages 10 to 35 years, who have experienced intentional trauma such as gunshot or stab wounds. HHP Portland employs a trauma-informed approach, which takes into account the adversity clients have experienced over their lives, and recognizes that addressing this trauma is critical to breaking the cycle of violence. The program was originally launched in 2013 through Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare, and it transitioned to POIC as a service partner with Legacy Emanuel Hospital in 2018.



OFFICE OF YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION CITY OF PORTLAND, OREGON

portlandonline.com/safeyouth



The Office of Youth Violence Prevention (OYVP) was created in 2006. It reflects priorities identified by City Council to build a more family-friendly city and increase public safety, and reflects the emphasis on attacking the root causes of problems in neighborhoods, rather than simply focusing on policing efforts. OYVP is staffed by a director and policy manager who coordinate resource services, administer grant funding to private non-profit organizations, and facilitate and join community problem-solving.

PARTNERSHIP FOR SAFETY & JUSTICE

safetyandjustice.org



**PARTNERSHIP FOR
SAFETY & JUSTICE**

Partnership for Safety & Justice is Oregon's leading public safety and criminal justice reform organization.

Our mission is to transform society's response to crime through innovative solutions that ensure accountability, equity, and healing. We advance reforms that promote social and racial equity; reduce levels of incarceration and criminalization; and better address the needs of crime survivors, people convicted of crime, and the families of both.

RED LODGE TRANSITION SERVICES

redlodgetransition.org



Red Lodge Transition Services is a non-profit grassroots organization supported by volunteers who have experience working with men and women in prison. Our primary objective is to assist Native men and women who are ready to transition from prison, jail, and treatment back to community. Creating a realistic plan for transition can be very stressful! There are many obstacles and barriers each person, family and community must navigate through in order to be successful. Red Lodge Transition Services is working to identify barriers and help prepare people for successful re-entry.

VICTIM'S ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MULTNOMAH COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY

mcda.us/index.php/protecting-victims-families/victim-



The primary goal of the Victim's Assistance Program is to make the criminal justice system more responsive to individual citizens, particularly to victims of crime. A primary concern of the District Attorney's Office is to ensure crime victims a meaningful role in the criminal and juvenile justice system and to accord them due dignity and respect. To this end it is the philosophy of the office that every effort be made to maximize victim involvement at every possible stage of a criminal case. The office is committed to full implementation of Victims Rights as embodied in Oregon law.

Executive Summary

Most crime survivors want a public safety system that offers a pathway to accountability for harm, support for healing, and a process of restoration after experiencing violence.

While decades of research have informed programs and services that best meet crime survivors' needs, remarkably little attention has been paid to the experiences of survivors of color.

This report delves into one overarching question: What do survivors of color need in the aftermath of trauma?

The qualitative research collected here presents the lived experiences of 40 Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and multiracial survivors. While participants' experiences are as diverse as the people themselves, their voices converged over shared themes of invisibility, strength, distress, resilience, unhealed trauma, and determination.

The data pointed to four findings.

Finding #1: Most survivors of color do not report crimes.

The vast majority of survivors interviewed in our study did not report the crime or crimes they experienced, mostly out of fear that they'd be disbelieved, blamed, ignored, or harmed further by police. And while generations of survivors of color have turned within their close-in networks for safety and healing, broader community-based support is limited.

Consequently, crime survivors of color are less likely to experience healing and resolution that could come with survivor programs and services. to experience healing and resolution that could come with survivor programs and services.



Finding #2: Most survivors of color do not have access to opportunities to heal.

Few survivors of color felt supported by the public safety system in the aftermath of a violent incident.

Most received no information on how to navigate the criminal justice system or how to access trauma support; when help was offered to survivors, it was often culturally inaccessible.

Finding #3: The criminal justice system prioritizes prosecution and incarceration over the needs of survivors.

Survivors of color expressed that their needs were generally not met by the criminal justice system. Survivors wanted accountability, justice, and safety, but many felt that the criminal justice system's means of achieving these were inadequate, narrow, and sometimes even at odds with what they would have liked. With the system's strictly punitive focus on prosecution and incarceration, it offers no options for people to get on the path they need to heal.

Finding #4: Many survivors of color do not identify as victims.

Survivors of color, particularly men, found it difficult to acknowledge that they have been a victim and need help to heal. Survivors attributed this to a range of factors: racial bias in the criminal justice system that assumes men of color are potential perpetrators; the false binary that a person can either have committed a crime or been a victim, but not both; and a culture of masculinity that socializes men to think that being a victim or needing help is a sign of weakness.

This range of factors and traumas notwithstanding, crime survivors of color expressed what was missing from our current public safety approach and how we can improve services to achieve better outcomes.

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Recommendation #1: Elevate restorative practices that are responsive to and driven by people impacted by harm.

City, county, and state governments and funding organizations need to invest in community-driven restorative processes. Survivors should have the option of choosing a restorative process, not just be given the false choice of incarceration or not accounting for harm at all.



Recommendation #2: Substantially increase funding for new and existing community-based and culturally specific healing services.

Criminal justice systems should shrink the use of prosecution and meaningfully invest in community-based and culturally specific services for people who have experienced harm and violence. These services should be readily available and not depend on a survivor's willingness to prosecute the harm or otherwise cooperate with law enforcement.

Recommendation #3: Identify and address historical trauma to Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people and communities as well as other people and communities of color in Oregon.

The state needs to conduct its own truth and reconciliation process to identify and address the harms of historical trauma to people and communities of color in Oregon. The process must be driven and informed by Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people, as well as other people of color.



Recommendation #4: Improve public safety and other agencies' capacity to serve people who have experienced trauma and survived violence.

The state should require training in culturally specific and healing centered approaches for law enforcement and other relevant agency staff who interact with people who have experienced trauma or been harmed by violence, with measured in changed outcomes for survivors.

Part Three of this report outlines different actions that all of us can take to advance the changes we need.

Whether as a community member, advocate, direct service provider, public safety professional, or elected official, we all have an important role in creating and supporting better outcomes for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other survivors of color in our communities.

Together we can use the resources and power we have to meaningfully transform our response to violence — one rooted in humanity, equity, accountability, and healing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	12
Part 1. Findings: How we fail to meet the needs of survivor of color	16
#1. Most survivors of color do not report crimes	17
#2. Most survivors of color do not have access to opportunities to heal	27
#3. The criminal justice system prioritizes prosecution and incarceration over the needs of survivors	33
#4. Many survivors of color do not identify as victims	38
Part 2. Recommendations for better outcomes for survivors of color	40
#1. Identify and address historical trauma to Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people as well as other communities of color	42
#2. Substantially increase funding for new and existing community-based and culturally specific healing services.	46
#3. Elevate restorative practices that are responsive to and driven by people impacted by harm.	50
#4. Provide trauma education to public safety and other responders (such as hospitals and schools), and evaluate their engagement with survivors of violence.	54
Part 3. What you can do to create and support better public safety outcomes	58
Appendix	62
Endnotes	66