

# **WEology**

## **Transformative Justice in Practice**

**By Qu'eed Batts, Avron "JaJa" Holland,  
David "Dawud" Lee, and  
Nyako Pippen**

Linocut Illustrations by **Emily Kastrul** (@sisterspecies)  
Layout and Design by **Jake Olson** (@slopmotion)  
slopmotiondesign@gmail.com

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Contact: [lifelinesphilly@gmail.com](mailto:lifelinesphilly@gmail.com)  
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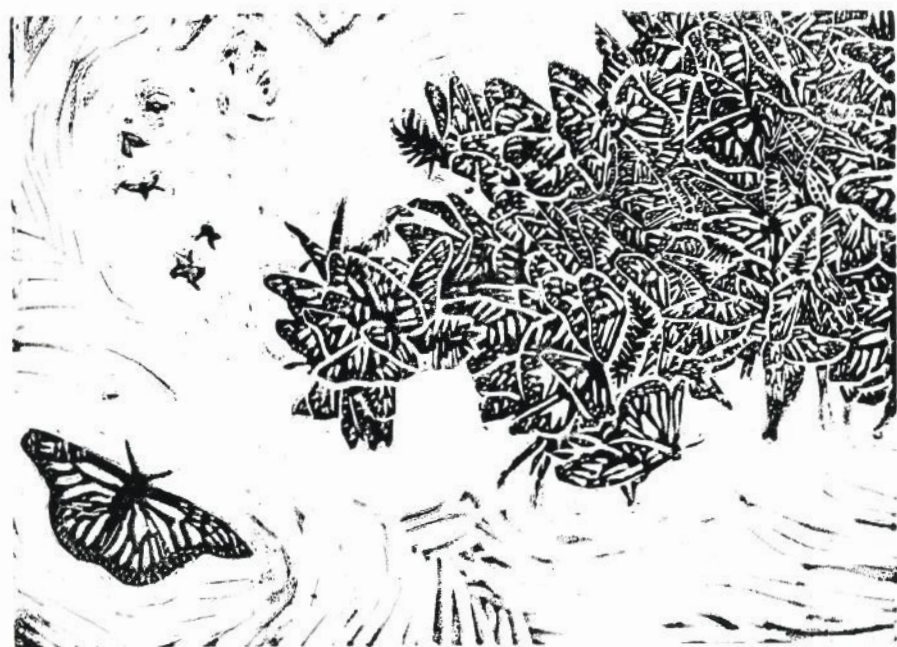
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## **Transformative Justice in the Black Radical Organizing Tradition**

By Robert Saleem Holbrook

I served 27 years in prison and was involved in Inside-Outside<sup>1</sup> organizing for over two decades. There were many pivotal moments in my organizing experience while imprisoned. The most pivotal was in 2001, when the Human Rights Coalition was founded in the solitary confinement units of SCI-Greene and SCI-Huntingdon. The core of HRC was at SCI-Greene and its members were Russell Maroon Shoatz, Kerry Shakabonna Marshall, Luqman Abdullah, Andre Shaka Gay, and Jerome Hoagie Coffey. At SCI-Huntingdon it was myself and David Dawud Lee. With the exception of Russell Maroon Shoatz, who is one of the longest held political prisoners in the world,<sup>2</sup> all of us were in prison for offenses that harmed members of our communities. Over 20 years later, the Human Rights Coalition continues to exist and organize prisoners and their families. It publishes the Movement newsletter and its members have gone on to help found the Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration, Decarcerate PA, and Abolitionist Law Center, as well as helping lead the fight against mass incarceration and state violence in the United States.

The events of 2001 inside and outside of SCI-Greene and Huntingdon were both a highlight into the Inside-Outside organizing concept developed by HRC and a demonstration of the power of transformative justice leaders in that organizing. In 1999, I landed at SCI-Huntingdon by way of SCI-Dallas after several years in the Special Management Unit at SCI-Greene. By this time, I had close to 10 years in and was 26 years old. At the time, I was heavy into the writings of George L. Jackson, whose book "Soledad Brother" I treated like a religious text. In solitary confinement, Comrade George's statement that we must "transform the criminal mentality into a revolutionary mentality" resonated over and over in my head.

Criminal Mentality. For most of my adolescent life, the criminal mentality dominated my thinking and guided my actions. It was that mentality that led me to believe that selling drugs and defending drug territory was the same as defending and fighting for my neighborhood. It is what led to my involvement in the death of an innocent woman from my neighborhood. It is what led to me being imprisoned at 16 and subsequently sentenced to spend the rest of my life in prison. It was what led me to embrace values which were not rooted in community and loyalty but rather were transactional and shallow. It was a mentality that devastated my life, my family's life, my neighborhood, and my people.

After coming into maturity and consciousness – first through the Nation of Islam and then later through the tutelage of Political Prisoners from the Black Panther Party and BLA in Pennsylvania prison kamps – I knew that I had to escape this mentality. However, escaping it wasn't enough because the more I tried to escape it by going deeper into Black Radical study and application, the more I felt I was running from it as opposed to addressing it. I felt as if I was putting a bandaid on an open wound as opposed to letting it heal and allowing new skin to grow over it.

I was not the only one going through this process; around the same time, my comrade Big Dave, known as David Dawud Lee, was also going through it. He, like I, came to cultural and political consciousness through the Black Liberation Movement. Like myself, he was encouraged to grow and educate himself by political prisoner Russell Maroon Shoatz while in solitary confinement in 1991. After that conversation, Dawud buried himself in the library, enhanced his literary skills, and became an avid reader and writer. Like myself, Dawud first grounded himself in classic African cultural authors like John Henrick Clarke, Chancellor Williams, Ivan Van Sertima, and Amos Wilson. Later, we graduated to the giants of the Black Radical Tradition like Walter Rodney, Amilcar Cabral, Chokwe Lumumba, Assata Shakur, and many others. We all held George L. Jackson in high esteem and patterned our lives and thinking after him.

We also buried ourselves in the writings, examples, and movements of Political Prisoners, not just from the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army in the United States but from all around the world. We saw these captive freedom fighters as our role models and examples. We saw them as kindred spirits. We devoured their memoirs. In a dank cell on the 3rd tier of SCI-Huntingdon when I read about the imprisonment of activists from the Tupamoros<sup>3</sup> by military dictatorships in Latin America or how the racist white apartheid regime in South African treated ANC and PAC activists in Robbins Island prison, I was right there with them resisting the regime of oppression and solitary confinement.

However, Dawud and I were both facing a glaring contradiction that is unlike the political prisoners we admired and patterned our struggle after; we were not imprisoned for political offenses against the state and at the time of our imprisonment we did not belong to national liberation movements.<sup>4</sup> We were in prison for harming our own people and members of our communities. That was and is the distinguishing factor that we had to reckon with before we could continue to grow as freedom fighters.

What did this mean? It meant that we had to have deep conversations with each other and more importantly ourselves to address the trauma and harm we caused our families, our communities and ourselves. We had to face head-on the fact that for many of us, the person whose life we took was not an armed agent of the state but rather was a member of our community whose life we snatched from their families and community. That life was forever torn from our community, never to be returned, thereby creating an absence that would be felt for generations by their family and community.

This led us to the process of restorative justice. However, our process of restorative justice was not guided or influenced by the present-day Restorative Justice profession or RJ activists. Our process of Restorative Justice was organic and ironically found some of its source and inspiration in the early founding of the Black Church in the United States. It may sound hard

to believe but, from the 1700's up until the 1920's, the Black Church was the incubator of Black Radical politics and Black Nationalism in the United States. The Black Church served as a cover for all political, social and civic activity that was prohibited by slavery in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

The Church's governing council was patterned after the village governing council in the West African societies our ancestors were taken from. Community disputes were settled within these councils, as was mutual aid and support for the community. Our ancestors realized they could not go to the regime that enslaved them to settle their disputes. Many Black Churches maintained this role as arbitrator up into the 1920's until the Black Nationalism of the Garvey Movement, with millions of members, brought Black Nationalism out in the streets en masse.

This was the role of redemption in the Black Church, and how that redemption resonated with our people. Because our ancestors were oppressed and held in wretched conditions, the theme of redemption for a downtrodden people stands out. Our ancestors knew they were more than an enslaved people; they knew that they could make a better life for themselves and their family and that better life was through freedom. Freedom was the path to redemption. For us, in the bowels of the prison system, freedom too was our redemption but with an important distinction. Our redemption was not found in the Bible or any other religious text, our redemption was found in participation in the Black Radical Tradition and fighting for our people.

This is where we grew from restorative justice to transformative justice. It was not enough for us to recognize the harm we caused our victims, their families, our families, and community. We realized that we could never fully repair the harm we did to our communities but, we also realized that the greater harm was perpetuated by a racist and classist governing social contract in the United States that created endless cycles of harm in our communities. Therefore, although it is possible for us to individually heal and at times heal together as a community



and people, the only way to end the cycle and harm perpetrated by this system is to abolish it. This is what Abolition means in the Black Radical Tradition, this is what it means to be an Abolitionist. A Black Revolutionary Abolitionist.

### Endnotes

**1** Inside-Outside Organizing is a method of organizing that involves deep collaboration with imprisoned leaders, their family members, and outside advocates. In Pennsylvania, the method was pioneered in the 1970's by members of the Black prison movement; it was continued into the 80's and 90's by groups such as Fight For Lifers Inc; and in the 2000's, the method was continued by the Human Rights Coalition, Decarcerate PA, and the Coalition to Abolish Death by Incarceration (CADBI).

**2** Since 1972 — nearly half a century ago — Russell Maroon Shoatz has languished in a prison cell built on stolen land, poisoned and irradiated by the fossil fuel industry.

A Black Panther Party member and soldier in the Black Liberation Army, Shoatz was falsely accused of killing a cop in the Cobbs Creek area of Philadelphia in 1970. His family, pillars of their community, have tirelessly fought for his release and carried Maroon's revolutionary message through the years, whether in solidarity with MOVE, Mumia Abu-Jamal, George Floyd, Walter Wallace Jr., or other struggles demanding justice.

After 48 years of imprisonment, Shoatz, 77, is currently held at SCI Dallas in Luzerne County, Penn. In 2015, the state Department of Health found the cancer rate there was "significantly higher than expected." Shoatz survived prostate cancer only to develop Stage Four colon cancer in 2019. In November, he tested positive for COVID-19.

**3** The Tupamaros were a group of urban guerrillas who operated in Uruguay (primarily Montevideo) from the early 1960s to the 1980s. At one time, there may have been as many as 5,000 Tupamaros operating in Uruguay. Although initially, they saw bloodshed as a last resort to achieving their aim of improved social justice in Uruguay, their methods became increasingly violent as the military government cracked down on citizens. In the mid-1980s, democracy returned to Uruguay and the Tupamaro movement went legitimate, laying down their weapons in favor of joining the political process.

**4** A liberation movement is an organization or political movement leading a rebellion, or a non-violent social movement, against a colonial power or national government, often seeking independence based on a nationalist identity and an anti-imperialist outlook.

**5** See *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (Second Edition) by Sterling Stuckey.

# **Transformative Justice (TJ) From the Perspective of Incarcerated Human Beings (IHBs) Introduction**

by David Dawud Lee

We think that it is important to begin this project by thanking some folks and organizations for their support of this project, and many others, which include IHBs. To Emily Abendroth, Emily Kastrul, Layne Mullett, Abolitionist Law Center, Amistad Law Project, CADBI (Coalition to Abolish Death by Incarceration), HRC (Human Rights Coalition), and Decarcerate PA, we want to extend a warm thank you for your endless work to abolish oppressive institutions, and towards healing.

Often when the topic of TJ is thought of or mentioned, it is mainly from the perspective of preventing or addressing issues related to harm from a communal standpoint. We want to acknowledge the vital nature of the TJ work taking place in our communities. We salute all of the wonderful people who sacrifice time, resources, and even their lives to do this work.

With this pamphlet we plan to highlight how TJ works in the heart of the prison industry. We want to show how transformation takes place, and how harm is prevented. We will also show how we help each other heal even after harm has taken place.

The history of the United States is replete with the pursuit of power and control. White supremacy, patriarchy, misogyny, fascism, and violence have been at the core of those pursuits. Therefore, we are suffering greatly from all the pain associated with surviving under such conditions. Human beings understand that we cannot live holistic lives after experiencing so many layers of trauma. Ergo centuries ago we created Healing Circles to address our traumas. Moreover, we understood the concept known as Ubuntu – “I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am.” Centuries ago we understood not to misuse

power, and not to control human behavior through the use of violence, shaming, and creating traumas.

We understood then, as we do now, that community is necessary to build connections with each other. The sense of responsibility which is necessary for good decision making grows out of our connections to each other. TJ is about connecting people in a manner where we feel a natural desire to protect, to nurture, and to heal at times when we are hurting.

IHBs have studied the various methods of healing, and harm prevention, so that we would be able to incorporate those concepts into our daily lives. We do our best to limit input or involvement from the state as we work towards our collective care. However, we are not naive, because we know that totally eliminating the state is not possible inside or outside of prison. Therefore, we do our absolute best to accomplish our goals of transformation, healing, and preventing harm or additional harm with as little state involvement as humanly possible. We are not perfect at this work, because we are still learning and teaching as we move about, but we are trying. We think that it is time for people out in the streets doing TJ work to connect with us as we discover new methods or old methods to incorporate into this important process.

The work that IHBs are doing to assist with the transformation of other IHBs is vital, because most IHBs will someday return to our communities. We want to return as healers, not as harm doers. We have been doing this work because we care deeply about our communities, but with the support of the community we could accomplish a lot more.



## Dedication to the Memory of Kevin White - Bro. TK

By David Dawud Lee

I could not participate in this project, which is heavily influenced by our Dare-2-Care program, without giving serious mention to one of our fallen founders of the program. In 2017, Kevin White (aka TK) succumbed to a painful battle with leukemia. I can still remember being at medical, and running into him, and him saying that something was wrong with his body. At that moment he had no idea what was wrong, but his body was telling him that things were definitely not right. TK was with us as we were building the Life Line Association, and was with us when there were only a handful of us going to the gym to meet every month. TK was there when Dare-2-Care was just a pilot program in 2014. TK was always that voice in my ear telling me how we could not allow the program to be buried, because he saw the potential in the program. TK's spirit is still with me now, and will continue to influence my work. I can still remember him doing everything within his power to make it to Dare-2-Care every week, even while being seriously ill.

I can still remember the last conversation with him, and how he told me that he was not going to make it to Dare-2-Care, because he did not feel well. I hugged him and told him that I loved him. He told me that that meant a lot to him, especially coming from me. And he said that he loved me, too. We both had tears in our eyes because it was a very emotional moment between two brothers. I went ahead to Dare-2-Care that morning but, I had a very empty feeling in my body. I could tell that I had seen TK for the last time, and it just kept bothering me, because there was nothing I could do. Tk had to go back to medical, and I never did see him again. About two days later while in the shower the block counselor came to the shower to tell me something important, and I knew it was something bad. He said that White had passed. I cried quietly right there in the shower and I knew we had to do something to remember him.

TK meant a great deal to me; to us! I will never forget him!

## Transformative Justice Behind the Wall

by David Dawud Lee and Nyako Pippen

There are perhaps millions of folks currently incarcerated carrying the pain of some form of violence, either as a survivor of violence or as a harm doer, or both. In addition to this pain, they're also suffering from other traumas associated with their childhoods or with living inside of these cages. All of this without a space to heal, be accountable, or achieve justice. The programs that are offered by the state are rooted in mistrust and misunderstanding. The persistent use of violence and pain as a tool for healing undermines any chance of meaningful transformation and accountability. Thankfully, there are some folks inside of these cages that understand the kind of love and patience that is required to help others make the transformation from living a life of perpetual pain and violence to living a life of healing and accountability. This is a short story and brief Q&A about how David Dawud Lee led Nyako Pippen through a transformative process.

In telling this story we want to demonstrate how the Transformative Justice (TJ) process is connected to this moment in our lives. We think that many important lessons can be learned from our experiences and we want to provide a concrete example of how TJ works on this side of the wall. This story is deeply personal and emotional, full of pain and healing.

**Dawud:** In the winter months of 2014, I was out in the East Yard of SCI Coal Township with a younger brother named Maurice when he introduced me to a friend of his named Nyako Pippen. Early in our relationship our conversations consisted primarily of (DBI) Death by Incarceration related issues, because we both have DBI sentences, along with family and community-oriented topics. We talked about politics too, but Nyako was very early in his political understanding at that moment.

I took a liking to Nyako, because he was intelligent and honest, and he possessed a powerful desire to learn history and politics. We used to walk the yard and discuss various topics; he would also come to the library where I worked and we would engage in many moving conversations. I would loan him books, which he would devour as if his life literally depended on reading those books; and he kept coming back for more information.

In 2016, a situation came up involving Nyako's past, and people who really did not care about either one of us were running around the prison speaking badly about him and also about me for continuing to deal with him -- I want to allow Nyako to give more details about the situation and how it felt for him to be in that position.

Nyako: Entering prison at twenty years old with a death sentence, I carried a lot of pain. Not only pain from being sentenced to death, but also pain from my childhood. In addition to this pain, I also carried burdens that I was afraid to confront. These two burdens were frowned upon in both prison and in the street culture that ensnared me at a young age. One was considered more egregious by my peers than the other, but both were considered a weakness nonetheless.

At the time when I met Dawud, I had recently landed in the prison through a disciplinary transfer and had recently gotten out of the RHU (restricted housing unit) for getting caught with drugs and cell phones. During my stint in the RHU, I done a lot of soul searching and I felt deeply within that I wanted something different for my life. So, when I met Dawud I immediately detected his sincerity; he spoke of nothing but positive things. However, my reservations would not allow me to fully embrace his guidance. Up until that point in my life, most of my experiences with people inside and outside of prison were predicated on manipulation and illicit behavior, thus I did not know how to engage in a relationship predicated exclusively on positivity and brotherhood. Ultimately, I reverted back to my old ways of coping.

Throughout my entire life, my idea of love was one of transaction — what can I provide for you materialistically and what can you provide for me. I had always felt that if I had money and materialistic items, I would be beloved amongst friends and family, and this mentality did not stop when I came to prison. I continued to sell drugs within the prison but I also continued to build with Dawud. He remained patient with me. He never abandoned me for my actions but, he stated explicitly that he did not want anything to do with what I had going on, including any of the earnings. This made me look at him differently. I had never met anyone, aside from my father, with such unwavering conviction. Especially in prison where the access to resources is scarce. For a person to turn down free money is admirable, and his example made me gravitate toward him even more.

The first burden that I carried and will continue to carry is one of remorse: the feeling of remorse caused by the loss of life. Although I never directly killed anyone, the pain of not preventing death weighed heavily on my heart, and I struggled for a long time with how to hold myself accountable for the pain that my non-action caused. Furthermore, my distorted thinking led me to believe that if I ever exposed this remorse, or if I ever truly held myself accountable, I would expose my vulnerabilities. So much of my life had taught me that to expose my vulnerabilities meant admitting I was weak — something I spent practically my entire short life trying to prove I wasn't.

The second burden that I carried was the burden of testifying on my co-defendant. While the pain of evading accountability ate at me emotionally and spiritually, this pain ate at me mentally. It prevented me from growing. I withheld parts of myself out of shame and fear of being ostracized. However, in 2016, in spite of all of the so-called social capital and love that came along with selling drugs, when my truth was exposed everyone turned their backs on me, except Dawud and a good friend of mine named Maurice “Rebound” Jackson. (Not the same Maurice mentioned above.)

I was at a crossroad in my life; I could either physically harm the person that was responsible for exposing my truth and perpetuate pain and violence, or I could confront my truth and finally hold myself accountable for the pain and damage I caused. My immediate decision was the former.

I had not yet run into my intended victim but, I secured a weapon and was prepared to act as soon as I saw him. Before I could catch him, I went to the law library and had a conversation with Dawud that would prove to be a pivotal moment in my life.

It didn't matter that I tried to play it cool, Dawud sensed something in me. He sensed the amount of pain I was experiencing, he sensed my lack of direction, and he sensed the despair that came from my lack of accountability and the continuation of folks abandoning me at my lowest moments. He pulled me to the side and for the first time in my life, I witnessed in someone's eyes that they truly believed in me -- believed in me as a person instead of just a person that could do something for him. He urged, with care and compassion, for me not to throw my life away and explained that there was a better way. Witnessing a person of his dignity and character resort to such a level of concern caused me to realize that I had more than harm and destruction to offer myself, my family and my community. Ultimately, I trusted Dawud's wisdom and guidance and became his mentee, but most importantly I became his family. I decided to confront my truth, embrace my mistakes, and become accountable to those I wronged and harmed - I began the process of healing.

The following are a series of questions and answers to help the reader further understand what transpired in 2016.

***1. During the most difficult period of this situation in 2016, what kept you going in a positive direction?***

Dawud: First I wanted to be a big brother to Nyako because we had an emotional conversation about what people were saying.



I did not want to see him throw his life completely away. We were already dealing with enough traumas in our lives, so it's important to understand this moment will pass. But we cannot hide from the truth. Nyako told me he felt bad about the mistake he had made, and he realized that he had to face it. I could look into his eyes and see the pain and honesty. I, too, was hurt because incarcerated people have a tendency of throwing good people away based on mistakes made years ago. We have a tendency of only looking at the mistake rather than the person.

Nyako: After that situation, life was very difficult for me. I had understood the horrible mistake I made, but I was being reminded of it every day. I continued to work toward changing my life, however you just don't change overnight after operating a certain way for most of your life. So, there were moments when I reversed course, but Dawud was patient with me and continued to guide me. Furthermore, whenever I could contemplate fully returning to my old self, I would reflect on the moment Dawud and I shared in the Library.

Something else was happening as well; I began to understand what it meant to be accountable. I began to make the connection between me living a positive active life, which consists of me helping others heal, and my obligation to those I harmed. This created the sense of purpose I lacked.

***2. When you think about the meaning of TJ, how does it relate to this situation?***

Dawud: TJ is about addressing harm, or potential harm without including the state. We had a situation where my little brother felt pressured to prove himself to people who didn't care about his well-being in the first place. It was important for him to understand that and I wanted him to know that I would be there for him. So, we prevented further harm from taking place while at the same time strengthening our relationship. He had to trust me and believe that his life was worth more than putting on a show for people with a warped understanding of manhood. Through some very emotional, passionate conversations, I was

able to get him to see the importance of getting past the pain of the moment. I felt a lot of his pain and I felt his commitment to change his life. The process did not happen overnight because it was a process of learning for Nyako but he was very honest about this process.

Nyako: When I think about TJ, I think about resolving conflicts without involving the state and without perpetuating pain and violence. I think about a cultural shift and how we see the world, how we see each other's humanity. Ultimately seeing each other with love, compassion and empathy.

.When Dawud intervened in my life, he helped transform the way I felt justice should be administered, which I thought should be done through violence. But he prevented any violence from taking place through a process of love, compassion and patience. A lot of patience – (LOL).

***3. What important lessons did you learn from the situation that you now take with you through life?***

Dawud: I saw the power of brotherly love, and how that love and true concern can help our loved ones through difficult situations. The power of belief can go a long way, and sometimes our youth need to know that we believe in them. I believed that Nyako could eventually move away from the street mentality and toward something greater, and he has done that and much more. Now he is one of our best facilitators for our program called Dare-2-Care. He is a prolific writer and a fantastic political thinker, so the belief paid off! We must provide people with the opportunity to change and stay with them along the way.

Nyako: Wow, there are so many lessons that I extracted from this experience that there is no way I would be able to list them all. But broadly speaking, I learned an entire new way of living. I now understand true brotherhood and community. I learned to forgive myself for some of the horrible mistakes I made in the past. And I learned what it means to be accountable. I

will probably never know whether or not my commitment to positivity and the work I do to help others navigate a process of healing will bring those people I harmed any justice. However, I understand that it is my obligation to continue to work and deliver justice, which is a lifelong journey. This transformative approach to life is the result of one person believing in me, being patient with me and nurturing me in ways I never experienced.

Transformative Justice is practice. It's brotherhood and sisterhood, it's fatherhood and motherhood — it's family. It's community, it's culture, it's healing... It's not healing, it's having the courage to attempt to address the ills of this complex society with love, empathy, and compassion. And for those of us who are trapped in these cages immersed in violence and pain, it's a path to redemption!



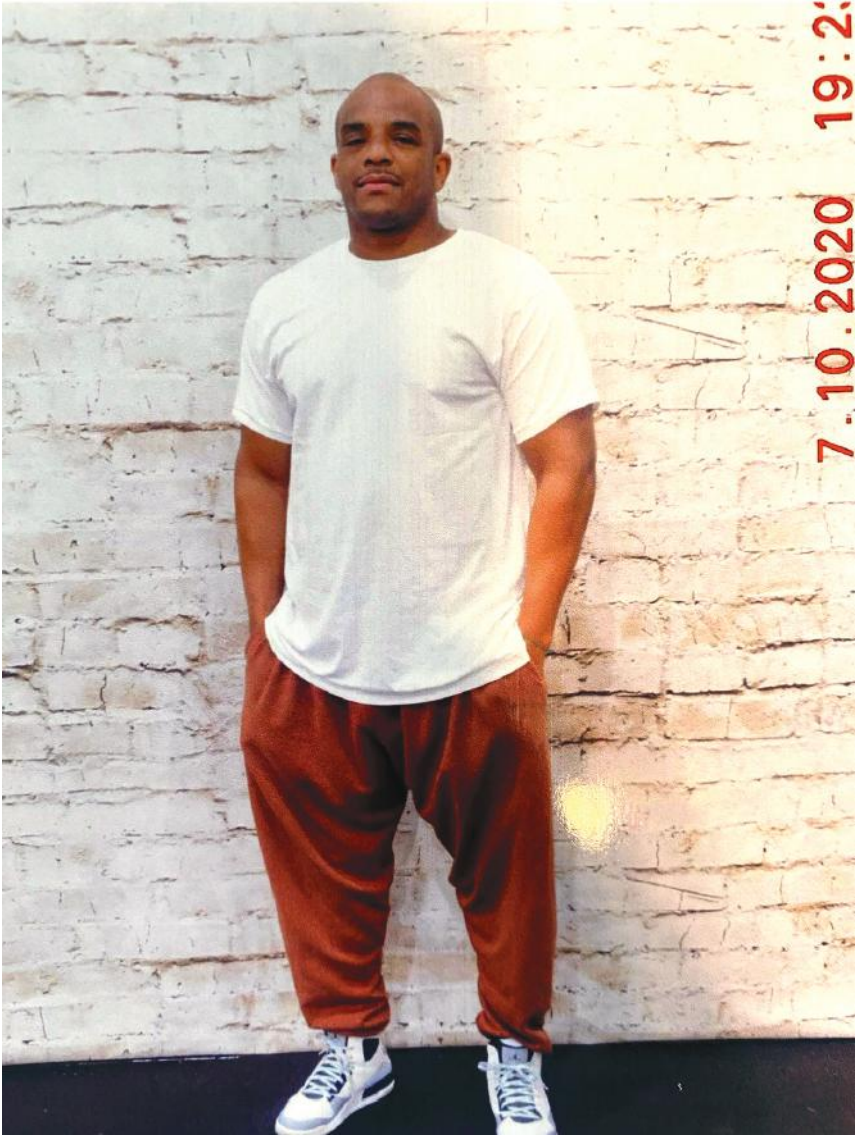


## Avron “JaJa” Holland Jr.

My name is Avron Holland Jr, AKA JaJa. I am 44 yrs young. I am the proud son of a single, strong, caring, supportive, and loving Black Mother, and also the proud father of two remarkable, loving, and respectful children. I have been incarcerated for 17 years and am serving a life or DBI (Death By Incarceration) sentence. I am a co-founder of ARC (Abolitionist Reading Circle), a member of the Dare-2-Care program, a member of CADBI (Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration), and a full time activist. For the past 17 years and counting, I have been vigorously and diligently fighting for my liberation while simultaneously fighting for progressive and radical changes of law and policies of this current system. With the coalition of brothers from IHBs (Incarcerated Human Beings), I know that I am not alone in this arduous endeavor for social and systemic change as a whole.

**I CLAIM THAT OUR INCARCERATION  
OCCURS NOT BECAUSE OF CRIMINALITY OR  
ACCIDENTS OF INJUSTICE BUT DUE TO THE  
STRUCTURAL DESIGN OF THIS NATION.**

-Charsee C. L. McIntyre.



# Transformative Justice (TJ) From the Perspective of Incarcerated Human Beings (IHBs)

Questions & Answers

By Avron “JaJa” Holland

1. *In the book Until We Reckon by Danielle Sered, the author references the four drivers of violence as: shame, isolation, exposure to violence, and not being able to address your economic needs. Please give your thoughts about those drivers of violence.*

Avron: The drivers of violence are created out of the inadequate social, economic and political conditions we are subjected and exposed to at an early age, which is the impetus for the violence and poverty that plagues our communities. The negative conditions that we have to endure and experience cause the violence, which is contrary to the false narrative which those that created the conditions in the first place would have us believe: that it's the violence that causes the conditions.

This false narrative has been theoretically and practically proven false. However, what has been proven true is that the negative conditions such as Social degradation, Economic exploitation, and Political oppression are the true impetus for these drivers of violence. As long as this system of oppression is able to continue to function and thrive as designed, absent any progressive and radical transformation, these drivers of violence will inevitably continue a perpetual revolving cycle of destruction. In closing, with great emphasis added, the drivers of violence are created by a racist, oppressive system, and until we address the problem in this country, nothing will change.

- 2. Can you explain the difference between Restorative Justice and Transformative Justice? And please give your personal thoughts about why those concepts are important to you?*

Avron: Restorative Justice is reaching back and bringing forth structures and systems of healing: (Example) healing circles in Afrika were and still are a vital component of the community and integral element to the oneness and wholeness of the people in the communities, as well as many other cultures. These systems of healing and addressing harm have been tried and proven to complete efficacy to work. The healing circles allowed us to restore balance and health when there was a disruption and unbalance in our communities. The healing circle was not allowed to be unbroken until complete restoration was restored. We need to take a long look at history and the many examples it offers for us to see how we managed to identify, confront, respond and overcome the pain associated with communal harm and transgression and incorporate those principles into our work today.

Transformative Justice is about moving away from the current oppressive patterns and mechanisms found in this system. We cannot prioritize safety in our communities until we are able to create a process centered on true justice for all. We need to find ways to restore or make whole survivors of harm once harm has occurred. Moreover, Transformative Justice is about holding harm doers accountable without using the current system in place, because the current system punishes, but does not heal the harmed parties, or address the need of the harm doers. Most importantly, the system does not address or recognize the underlying issues that give birth to harm doers and create survivors. If we fail to address both the need of the harmed and the harm doers, we are only asking to perpetuate the cycle and pain.

**“ The state system was not designed on the premise of eliminating violence. The state system thrives off the very drivers that Transformative Justice advocates are trying to eliminate. ”**

3. *Normally Transformative Justice (TJ) works best when a circle has been created. Can you explain why?*

Avron: The Circle allows the victims and the wrong doers to be present, as well as chosen voices rightfully suited to weigh in and intervene. Having a healing circle is very therapeutic, supportive, encouraging, strengthening, validating. It also gives the survivors a safe place to confront the wrong doers (optional), to ask questions and receive answers which could start the journey for healing for the survivors. Additionally, the circle allows the wrongdoers to face and listen to the trauma that they caused. The raw emotion and reality of the pain, hurt, frustration, confusion, empathy, and compassion coming from the survivor can make a huge difference. The circle allows the raw, organic emotions to be seen and felt. It is important for the wrong doer to visualize and witness the hurt grief, and anger from the survivor's family/friends and those who have been impacted. For the wrong doer to witness and visualize the sadness, disgrace, anger, empathy, love, compassion, and hurt from their family/ friends is an equally important element to bringing forth justice. The circle helps to implement a process that will provide the mental, physical and spiritual resources needed to assist survivors with a healing process. It provides a Sanctuary where they can feel safe as they tell their truth.

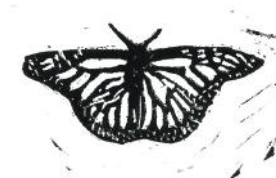


4. *Why is it important to exclude, or at least limit state involvement with the TJ process?*

Avron: The state system was not designed on the premise of eliminating violence. The state system thrives off the very drivers that Transformative Justice advocates are trying to eliminate. The state is not in the business of providing survivors and wrong doers with the adequate resources and tools to heal survivors and deal with the wrong doers effectively. The state has a one-track mind and solution in regards to crime, which is incarceration. The state incarceration solution is counterproductive and inadequate and is designed to keep the real focus off the real problem which is a societal problem. This is why Transformative Justice is paramount. Incarceration goes directly against the core principles of Transformative Justice, which are recognizing harm and identifying effective solutions to that harm.

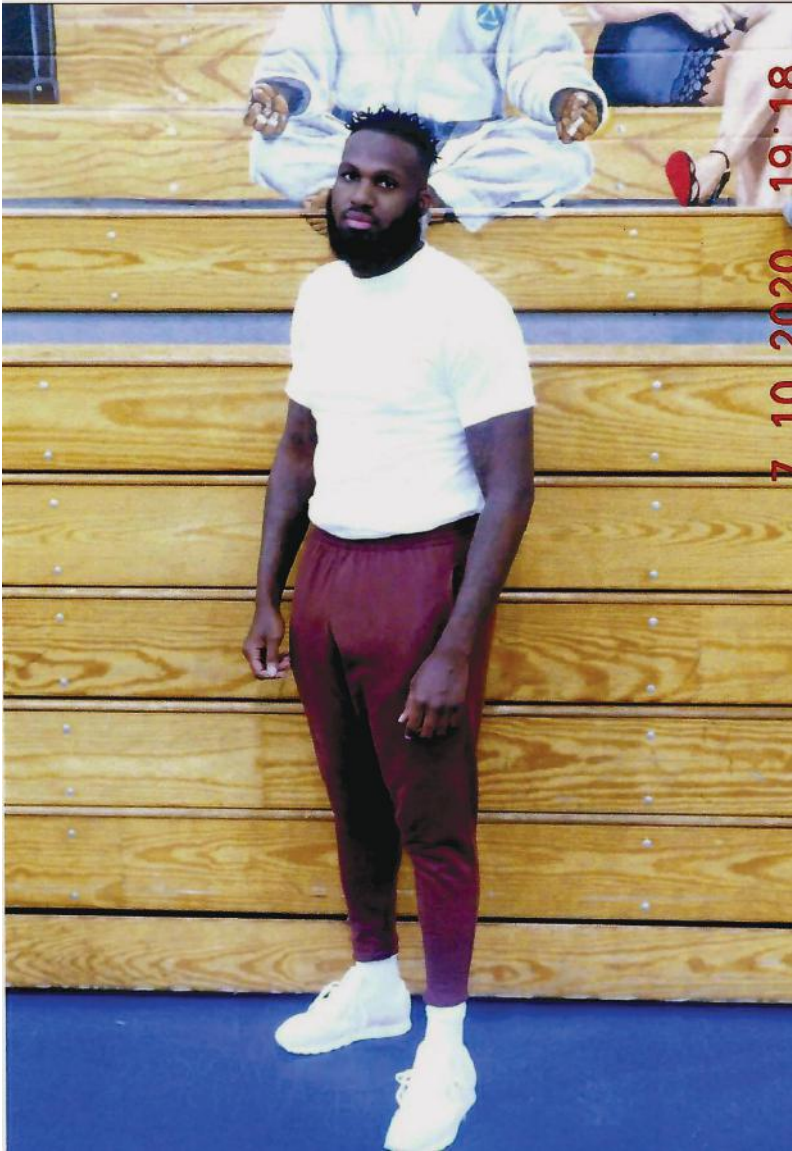
5. *Please explain your involvement and experience with Dare-2-Care.*

Avron: My experiences with the Dare-2-Care program were very informative, enlightening, therapeutic, and emotionally moving. It allowed me to hear other brothers' world views, such as their thoughts, perspectives, intelligence, some of their regrets, and even embarrassment. I had an opportunity to listen to some of the back stories that shaped their views on life. It was powerful to hear brothers vent, express forgiveness, anger, confusion, hurt, and pain all in one shared space without feeling judged. It also provided me with an opportunity to witness firsthand methods of deescalating tactics and how to properly intervene in situations that could lead to harm. And at the end of each class it highlighted that the one ingredient missing from many of our experiences and lives is to be loved and give love.



## Qu'eed Batts

My name is Qu'eed Batts, AKA Q, and I am 29 years old. I have been incarcerated for 15 years and I am serving a DBI (death by incarceration) sentence. I am a cofounder of ARC (the Abolitionist Reading Circle), a Dare-2-Care facilitator, a member of CADBI (Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration), and an activist. Since my incarceration I have been fighting for myself and other children who have been thrown away by the system as if we were not human. But with the help of other incarcerated human beings (IHBs), I've learned that no one should be thrown away.



## Transformative Justice (TJ) From the Perspective of Incarcerated Human Beings (IHBs)

Questions & Answers

By Qu'eed Batts

1. *In the book Until We Reckon by Danielle Sered, the author references the four drivers of violence as: shame, isolation, exposure to violence, and not being able to address your economic needs. Please give your thoughts about those drivers of violence.*

Qu'eed: I believe that it is vital to identify and explain these four drivers of violence. I believe that being exposed to violence, especially at a young age, can make it seem as if handling things violently is normal. As human beings, if we are around something enough it becomes routine and can be normalized. On not being able to address your economic needs, Sered points out how parents who work multiple jobs but that employment still does not guarantee them to make a livable wage can cause people to become absent in their children's lives. They may begin to unintentionally neglect the rest of their children's needs to provide for them. Shame can make people feel bad about something but, feeling shame lacks responsibility. Without feeling responsible, it is easier to push whatever a person may be feeling shame about off and place blame elsewhere without ever dealing with why we feel shameful.

2. *Can you explain the difference between Restorative Justice and Transformative Justice? And please give your personal thoughts about why those concepts are important to you?*

Qu'eed: I believe that Restorative Justice takes place after harm has already been done and it will take harm doers and survivors of harm to come together and heal. Transformative Justice is harm prevention. Both of these concepts are very important to

me because I was once a person that committed harmful acts in my community and the first step of me trying to restore some of the harm I committed was holding myself accountable. Holding myself accountable didn't just mean accepting blame for the things I had done and apologizing for them. Holding myself accountable meant taking full responsibility for my actions, apologizing, then proving that I had learned from the bad decision I once made and sharing my experience with other people to prevent them from making the same bad decisions.

3. *Normally Transformative Justice (TJ) works best when a circle has been created. Can you explain why?*

Qu'eed: I had the pleasure of being a part of TJ circles at SCI Graterford in 2018 and I believe the circle was referred to as a healing circle. When you are in a circle, I believe it levels the playing field and everyone is equal. You have facilitators but they are engaged in the circle as everyone else is so there are no big I's and little u's. A talking piece is even used to make sure that while a person is speaking the rest of the circle is quiet and attentive.

4. *Why is it important to exclude, or at least limit state involvement with the TJ process?*

Qu'eed: I believe that Transformative Justice is rooted in harm prevention and healing and in most cases once the state gets involved they come with a punitive mindset. The state does not want to get to the root of issues, it just wants to rule with an iron fist.

5. *Please explain your involvement and experiences with Dare-2-Care?*

Qu'eed: Dare-2-Care is a mentoring program here at SCI Coal Township. It is facilitated by other IHBs that understand that the vast majority of incarcerated people will one day return to the communities we came from. In 2017, I began Dare-2-Care as a participant and after the first week I knew that this wasn't

a typical prison program. It's a voluntary program and there is very limited state involvement. There are about 13 weeks of this program and each week we have a different type of discussion ranging from why it is important to have good character, to what it means to be held accountable, to are we obligated to give back to the communities we once caused harm to. Initially it took time to get used to speaking in front of different people but, a safe space was created where your thoughts and opinions were never judged. Challenged but not judged! You get to hear so many different points of view on one topic in one setting that it forces you to grow into something you couldn't even see for yourself. After graduating as a participant, I was asked to join as a facilitator which I humbly accepted. Being a facilitator keeps pressure on you but not bad pressure. It pressures you to say what is not always a textbook answer but what is always genuine. As I said earlier, the vast majority of us will be returning to the communities we were taken from so the same way the facilitators before me did their best to plant the right seed inside of me is the same seed I try to plant in people who come behind me.

## The Poster Child for Life Imprisonment

By Qu'eed Batts

Throughout this pamphlet we had an opportunity to share what RJ and TJ meant to us, but I would like to share some of my story with readers. I am not sharing this story as an excuse, but rather as an example of how if I hadn't met someone with a Transformative Justice mentality at the time that I needed him most, I would still be on a very destructive path. I was born to teenage parents; my mother was 13 and my father 17. Up until the age of five, I lived with my mother and her two sisters and my maternal grandparents. At five years old, I was kidnapped by one of my aunts and when I was found I was placed in the foster care system, where I would remain until I was twelve years old. During my time in foster care I experienced more pain, neglect, abuse, and trauma than I ever experienced with my family, but yet and still I was supposed to be "safe."

During those seven years, I moved more times than I can remember and experienced many different types of emotions. Hurt, sadness, abandonment, but most of all I was angry. I never got any of those issues addressed and the entire time I was in the foster care system I would act out -- from running away to fighting. In my little kid brain, I formulated a plan to act out as much as possible so no one would want me, and the foster care system would have no choice but to send me back to my mother. Part of the plan worked, no other foster homes would take me, but instead of being placed back with my mother, I was put in a homeless shelter for kids at 10 years old.

When I was 12 years old, I was finally able to go home and be with my family, but as I stated earlier, none of my issues had been addressed, so my behavior stayed the same. Not long after moving back with my family at age 12, I joined a gang. Looking back, I can honestly say that I had no intentions of hurting anyone, but two years later at the age of 14, hurting people is exactly what I ended up doing. I fatally shot one young man and wounded another young man, which I deeply regret doing.

I was arrested at 14 and at 16 convicted and sentenced to spend the rest of my life in prison.

Even after being sentenced to the harshest penalty allowed under the law, I still continued to live the same lifestyle behind the prison gates and walls. The vast majority of my early incarceration was spent in RHUs or restricted housing units, which is also known as the hole. That would continue off and on until I was about 24 years old. I landed in the RHU for the last time and spent 7 months in isolation until I was transferred to Coal Township where I am now. I was only here for a few days and was introduced to David Lee aka Dawud. After introducing ourselves, he asked me what I was doing, and I knew right away what he was asking: was I done with the gang lifestyle? I said I was done, but truthfully at the time I really didn't know, and it was the first time I had said those words out loud.

Not long after that conversation we became cellmates and still are cellmates today 4 years later. He began to teach me different concepts and encouraged me to read more and taught me the true meaning of accountability and responsibility. He taught me concepts such as Transformative Justice (TJ) and Restorative Justice (RJ) and taught me that just because I had done harm in our community did not mean that I should be written off.

**“ Imagine if the first option  
was to find a real solution,  
and not create more pain,  
where might I be? ”**



.Since meeting Dawud, I stayed true to my word of changing my lifestyle and have participated in many programs such as Dare-2-Care (which is a mentoring program), Healing and Rebuilding our Communities (HROC) , Alternatives to Violence, Transformative Justice programs, Violence Prevention, Long Term Offender programs, Suicide Prevention programs, and I have obtained my GED and Barber License. I mentioned Dare-2-Care being a mentoring program, but it is so much more. First, I want to state that it is a voluntary program run by IHBs where we talk about family, community, politics, and everyday life experiences. I first was a participant in the program and after graduating from the program, I was asked to join as a facilitator. I've learned many lessons from Dare-2-Care, both as a participant and facilitator, but I think the greatest lesson I 've learned is how to always look at things from a collective standpoint.

I realize that we all have stories and that part of being associated with a collective problem-solving group is sharing those stories and doing our best to prevent them from becoming the stories of the youth coming behind us. Imagine if I would have met Dawud or someone like Dawud at age 10 or 11. I wonder would I still have become the poster child for life imprisonment? Imagine if I wasn't taken from my family at age five, but instead given the proper resources to help keep my family together. Imagine if that could happen to anyone of us, and you were forced to deal with all that pain without the proper help to assist in your healing process. Imagine if the first option was to find a real solution, and not create more pain, where might I be? Just imagine!

## **Q & A: From Nyako to Qu'eed**

Nyako: If the allure of gangs and gang culture is the ability to experience true family and brotherhood, would you say that that element contributed to you joining a gang? If so, how would you compare your family/ brotherhood experience from when you were in a gang to since you devoted yourself and your life to positivity?

Qu'eed: Looking for a sense of family and brotherhood did contribute to me joining a gang, and the comparison between the brotherhood aspect of both walks of life is about the same. The lessons and survival tactics are what separates the two worlds. When I joined a gang, it was with other kids just like me. None of us had a clear understanding of anything except that we didn't want to feel alone and we wanted to survive. We were too young to work so we engaged in criminal activities to survive. Our views were distorted but that bond was and still is there even though we have transitioned out of that lifestyle. The biggest difference between the gang brotherhood and the brotherhood I have found since devoting my life to positivity is when I was in a gang I was learning how to survive short term and for myself and the few people around me. The lessons I am learning now will help me far down the road, and these lessons include the collective and not just a few people.

Nyako: If your today self could say something to or do something for your fourteen-year-old self before you were arrested, what would you do and/or say?

Qu'eed: I would tell myself to be patient. I was so in a hurry to take care of myself that I didn't realize I didn't need to anymore. I was so used to being my own protector that when I finally was able to move back home, I didn't know how to put my guard down. Always ready to be let down, but I knew that I was set on living my life how I chose to, and the thing I would do is put the time in with myself as someone has done with me now.

### **Q & A: From Dawud to Qu'eed**

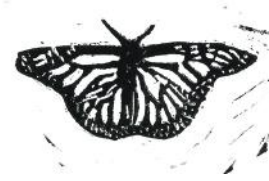
Dawud: Over the years that we have known each other, do you think I should have done anything different to assist in your growth and political development? Please explain your thoughts.

Qu'eed: I honestly don't think you could have done anything differently. As I 've heard you quote many times, "when the student is ready the teacher will appear." You gave me all the

tools I needed, but until I believed in myself there was nothing you or anyone else could do that would help me, until I was ready to help myself. This monster we are fighting against is so powerful and oppressive that it makes you think one voice cannot make a difference, but I had to learn that I was not just one voice. I had to learn that it would not just be my voice or story being told, but I could add my voice and story to the collective, and by doing so, I could strengthen the collective. By working together, it could strengthen our chances of overcoming these oppressive circumstances.

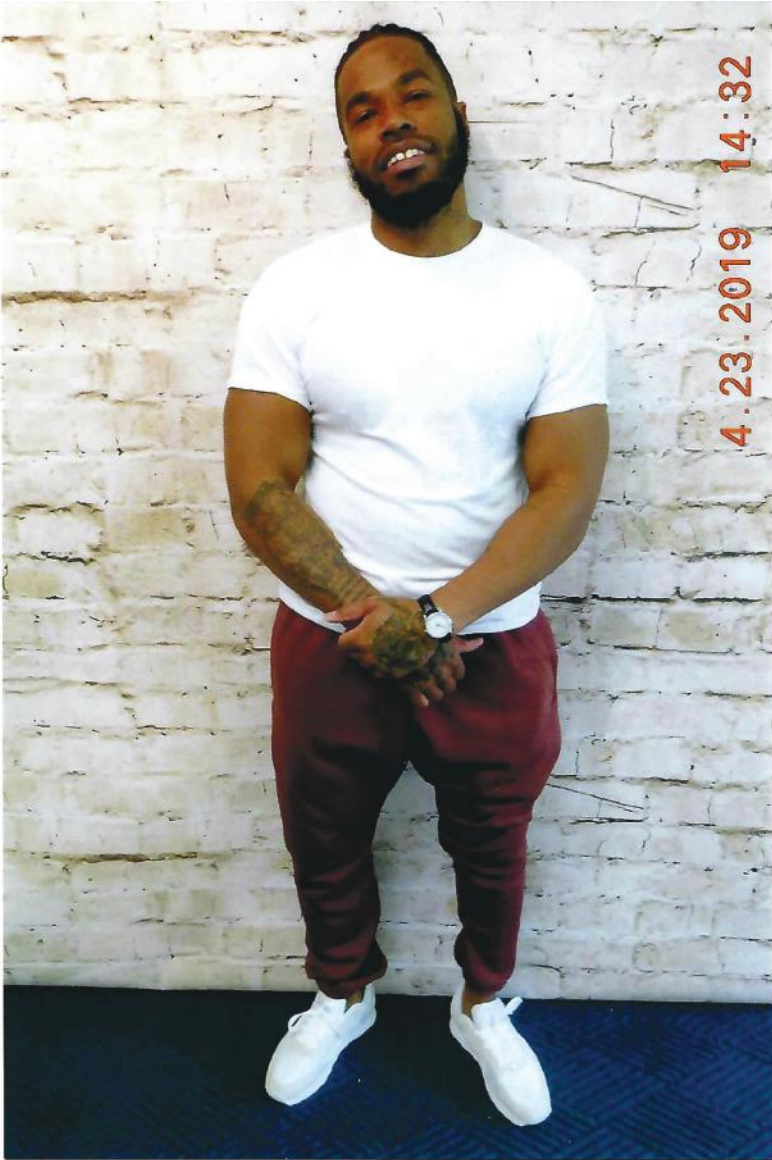
Dawud: Since your transformation into a conscious man, please give me an example of how you have assisted in preventing harm or assisted in someone's healing process. This person can be an IHB or someone on the outside. Please give details.

Qu'eed: During my first stint of being resentenced I met a young man that was 18 years old in Northampton County Prison. He, just as I had been, was facing a future that meant he would spend the rest of his life in prison, and for a crime that was committed while he was a juvenile. I automatically felt the obligation to be an example for positivity and change for him, just as I had needed when I was his age. I knew that I could not just start barking orders and telling him how he has to change, but I knew I had to show him that I had moved in a different direction in my life. Now he is about 24 years old and we still stay in contact and I can tell that he is now coming into a state of consciousness himself. I did for him what you did at the beginning of our friendship; you planted seeds in me, and now through the work I am just beginning to do and the way I carry myself on a daily basis, you get to watch the seed blossom.



## Nyako Pippen

My name is Nyako Pippen and I am 33 years old. I was arrested at 19 years old and ultimately given a DBI (or a death by incarceration) sentence for felony-murder, which means I have a 2nd degree. Although state law does not currently grant me Juvenile Lifer status, I was under 21 and considered a juvenile in other significant categories, like being able to purchase alcohol. I am a cofounder of the Abolitionist Reading Circle (or ARC) and I am a member of several different organizations like Human Rights Coalition (HRC), Coalition to Abolish Death by Incarceration (CADBI), and the LifeLine organization here at Coal Township. I am an activist, organizer, writer, and a champion for justice.



## Transformative Justice (TJ) From the Perspective of Incarcerated Human Beings (IHBs)

Questions & Answers

By Nyako Pippen

1. *In the book Until We Reckon by Danielle Sered, the author references the four drivers of violence as: shame, isolation, exposure to violence, and not being able to address your economic needs. Please give your thoughts about those drivers of violence.*

Nyako: Reading *Until We Reckon* and learning about the four drivers of violence allowed me to gain a better understanding of myself and my environment. I feel that when we ignore context and reason, we diminish our understanding and we undermine our ability to heal. So often when we discuss incidents of violence, we treat them as isolated experiences and fail to properly recognize the difference between context and excuses. While I fully agree that there is no excuse for committing acts of violence against each other, I do however understand that it is important for us to identify some of the reasons and conditions that cause one to commit harm/violence. At least for the purpose of developing sound strategies to prevent harm and ideally to give folks who survive these traumatic experiences an opportunity to gain some form of insight into why – which could hopefully lead to some sense of justice and healing.

Furthermore, I personally identify with several drivers of violence, namely shame and not being able to address my economic needs. Understanding these drivers was especially urgent for me as I engaged in my personal transformative journey. Being a person that experienced both, being a survivor and perpetrator of violence, I found myself falling into a state of victimhood, which I used to justify my acts of violence against others, ultimately diminishing my own humanity. Learning these drivers allowed me to not only better understand accountability, it also reinforced my decision to embrace

accountability as a primary value in my life. .

2. *Can you explain the difference between Restorative Justice and Transformative Justice? And can you please give your personal thoughts about why those concepts are important to you?*

Nyako: I believe that TJ and RJ share a lot of the same core principles, with both of them geared towards healing, accountability and restoration: principles that are designed to address the needs of both those who survived harm and those who committed harm. The greatest distinction I believe is that RJ is a process that can take place with/through the state or criminal justice system, for e.g. survivors and harm doers can enter into an agreement with the police, the court, or the prosecutor to participate in a RJ process. Which can be used to mitigate sentencing and/or used as a substitute for prosecution. TJ on the other hand is a process that takes place completely independent of the state. It is a process initiated and conducted by/through members of the community.

I believe that we must always remain aware of the fact that, whether we're discussing RJ or TJ, the underlying connection between both of these concepts is that someone was harmed. And when you have someone who has been harmed and is trying to find ways to heal, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Therefore, as we continue to move forward in this work, I believe we should allow ourselves to be fluid, while remaining humble. Ultimately, I believe our goal as a community is to eradicate violence in all its forms. However, we understand that violence in this society is very prevalent and as long as we recognize this truth, it is our collective responsibility to continue to find ways to address harm in our communities without perpetuating pain and violence.

Lastly, I believe learning and practicing these concepts has presented to me a frame of reference that I have been able to use to accept responsibility for the harm I caused others and also to be accountable to those I harmed and to myself.

3. *Normally Transformative Justice (TJ) works best when a circle has been created. Can you explain why?*

Nyako: I believe that the creation of a circle during a TJ/RJ process works best because when you're in a circle everyone is balanced. The circular setting provides everyone with equal exposure; it allows everyone to see each other eye to eye, to focus and listen as everyone speaks. This could ultimately lead to genuine empathy and connection, which is foundational to the human experience. It is only when we truly recognize each other's humanity that we find ways to heal or move forward in a healthier way.

4. *Why is it important to exclude, or at least limit, state involvement with the TJ process?*

Nyako: I believe that if we do not exclude state involvement, fundamentally we do not have transformative justice. I think that when you involve the state, even in a limited capacity, what we have is RJ. With that being said, what does TJ look like in a society where state presence and influence is omnipresent? I think that while state presence definitely permeates our lives, we must find ways to continue to be deliberate in our exclusion. Which is something that we attempt to do here in prison where state presence is magnified. We organize with the understanding that presence does not mean involvement. We do this because we understand the role of the state to be oppressive and despite its expressed goal, we understand that the primary role and aim has been and continues to be, to contain and control; with the ideal form of justice being punitive and retributive, which is in direct conflict with what we're trying to accomplish.

5. *Please explain your involvement and experiences with Dare-2-Care?*

Nyako: My experience with Dare-2-Care was and continues to be a transformative experience. It has been especially important in learning how we can turn theory into practice; and how it is sometimes necessary - with all due respect and humility



to those who've come before us - to expand concepts with the goal of meeting the needs of the folks who are participating. As incarcerated human beings (IHBs), we're constantly trying to balance navigating the oppressive constraints of prison administrators while also trying to engage in holistic processes of healing and accountability. Which is something that these institutions and this system at large simply does not encourage and is in direct conflict with their punitive philosophy. As I expanded my understanding of TJ, I found more and more opportunities in Dare-2-Care to turn my understanding into practice.

Dare-2-Care is fundamentally transformative. It is a program designed and facilitated by IHBs and IHBs alone. In this setting, we acknowledge conflict and resolve issues of harm that occur between one another. We accomplish this independent of state influence through meaningful dialogue, being vulnerable, building genuine connections/community, and embracing our responsibility to one another as fellow human beings which is the lynchpin of this process. Aside from resolving conflict, we also assist each other in our personal transformative journeys.

I believe from an overall perspective that this work that we are committed to is in fact transformative justice work. Because as we continue to transform ourselves and each other, we decrease the chances of further harm taking place; we help each other become accountable to the people and communities we harmed, and we become accountable to ourselves which contributes to the overall concept of achieving justice and creating a just society.

## **Dare-2-Care: A Space to Heal in a Place Designed to Destroy**

By Nyako Pippen

When Dawud first suggested that I sign up to participate in the Dare-2-Care program, I was a bit reluctant. I had already been incarcerated for several years at this time and had the unfortunate luxury of attending several DOC-run programs which I found to be ineffective at best and counterproductive at worst. My participation in DOC programs consisted of me sitting in a room with mainly folks that look like me, and come from similar backgrounds and environments being forced to listen to someone that has no understanding of who I am culturally, basically scolding me and asking me questions that are made up of unrealistic hypotheticals and require unrealistic, out of context answers that lack nuance. The consequence of challenging these instructors either on the reality of these scenarios or the relevance could at worst lead to disciplinary action or failing of the program – which leads to a “failure to adjust” report in your file. In spite of my disbelief in programs as a meaningful path to growth, and mainly due to my belief in Dawud, I signed up for Dare-2-Care.

At the outset of the very first session I attended, I immediately felt uneasy. There were upward of twenty or so people in the group, including the facilitators, and we went around the room introducing ourselves by name. Around this time, my name was familiar to most of the folks in the prison, though for all of the wrong reasons. Which is one of the reasons I had trepidations from the beginning. I felt that it was very likely that if I was in a setting comprised of a lot of people, someone would say something disrespectful and I had already made my mind up that if I encountered such a scenario, I would respond with violence. At the time I carried a weapon with me at all times and this included to the program. I was very immature, and I carried with me a lot of pain, guilt and shame.

The first topic we discussed was: Character. After the initial awkwardness, the facilitators were able to drive the conversation to a point where we all became involved. Before long, all of us in that room had forgotten all about our personas. We forgot about being “gangstas or hustlers” or “Bloods or Crips”; we just engaged in a powerful exchange of ideas, experiences, and perspectives. I felt the power of this exchange and I wish that I could say that this was the feel of every session moving forward, but it wasn’t. There were ups and downs, there were conversations that were uncomfortable. Ultimately, we banded together and created a mutual understanding and respect for each other that spilled outside of the room. Participating in Dare-2-Care certainly provided a transformative platform for myself, however, a lot of the work continued outside of the group.

Eventually I was invited back to Dare-2-Care, this time as a facilitator. While being a facilitator requires a different level of responsibility in terms of driving discussions, the experience is very much similar to being a participant. By design, Dare-2-Care is an open dialogue, equal input kind of setting, so despite the nerves that are associated with trying to spark a meaningful discussion and trying to ensure that you do not come across as arrogant or pretentious, the bonding process and the learning process are the same. Being a facilitator has precipitated my growth and my healing. I am constantly learning more about myself and others, and I am constantly working with my comrades to develop strategies for transformation and healing in this complex, traumatic environment.



## Q & A From Dawud to Nyako

**Dawud:** Over the years that we have known each other, do you think I should have done anything different to assist in your growth and political development? Please explain your thoughts.

**Nyako:** I do not think you should have done anything differently. I am by nature an inquisitive person and an independent thinker and I feel that you understood this. Instead of trying to influence the way I think, you provided me with information, helped clarify different concepts, and gave me the space to arrive at my own conclusions. Which was very important for me and my political growth. I believe a pivotal moment in this process was during the developing and planning of the Day of Responsibility. This was pivotal because you entrusted in me a great deal of responsibility to develop and plan this big event. As the planning came together, I realized that I possessed the skills and knowledge needed to not only work out the logistics of bringing upward of twenty outside guests into a prison setting, but that I also had the knowledge and understanding of what responsibility and accountability is all about.

**Dawud:** Since your transformation into a conscious man, please give me an example of how you have assisted in preventing harm or assisted in someone's healing process. This person can be an IHB or someone on the outside. Please give details.

**Nyako:** I think that there have been numerous occasions throughout my life where I prevented harm – some times with good intentions and others not so much. For example, there have been times where I prevented harm because committing an act of violence was not the right thing to do strategically for what I was trying to accomplish. Then, there were times when I prevented harm because committing such harm just didn't make sense and the person who was intended to be harmed simply did not deserve it. I think that as I matured into a man with a deeper understanding of the widespread traumatic impact of harm, I now prevent it with an understanding of

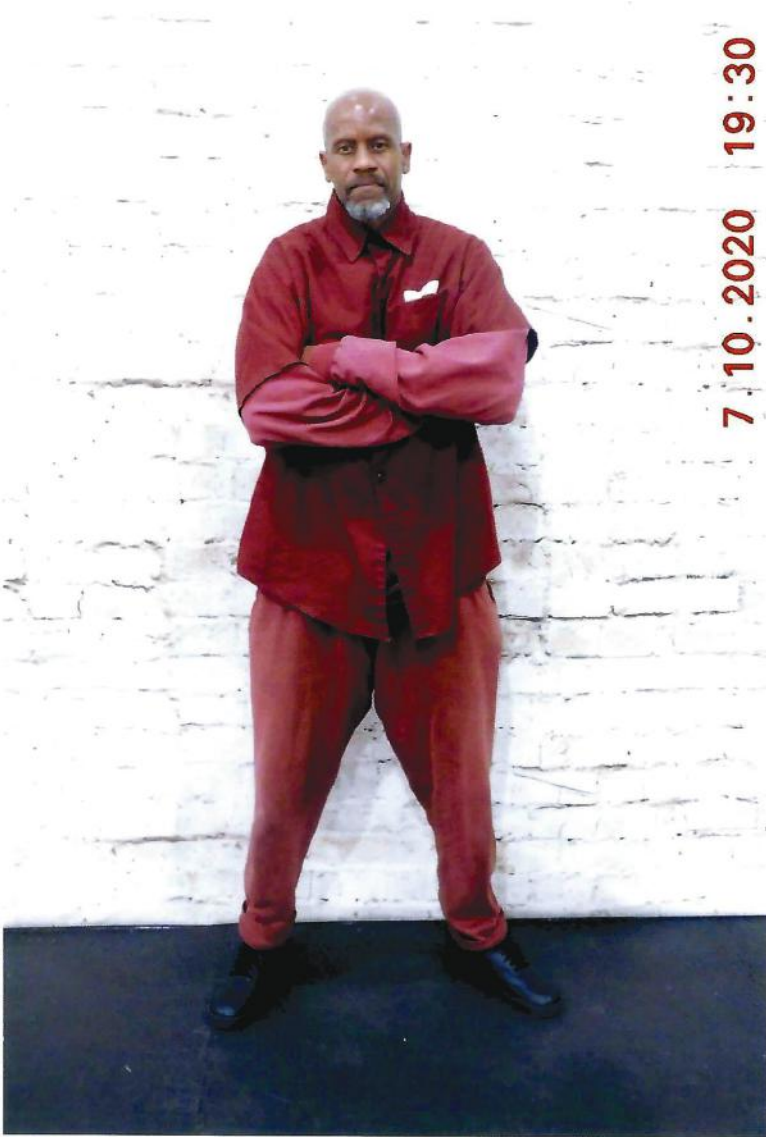
how that harm will not only impact the person upon whom the harm is inflicted, but also the person who inflicts the harm and the entire fabric of the community at large. This sort of approach has allowed me to be more consistent, diligent, and most importantly committed to this work.

A recent example of this was when one of my close friends who was stabbed at another prison felt that he had to retaliate on someone that was now here at this prison – someone that was an associate to one of the men who assaulted him. I understood his pain and I also understood his desire to defend his honor because prison culture uses violence as a means of conflict resolution, and if you are not willing to use violence, you can be considered weak and unfortunately become a target yourself – or at least this is the perception. I was able to talk to him – really, less talking and more listening. I listened to his frustration and allowed him to express not only his pain, but also the pressure he was feeling. After several conversations, he finally decided not to act on his impulses. Although the perpetrators never assumed responsibility for the pain they caused my friend, I believe he found a way to heal. Also, I believe that one of his main reasons for not perpetuating this pain was not because he did not want to get into trouble or anything like that; he has actually expressed to me that one of his reasons was because he did not want someone else to suffer what he did. This to me was a clear example of someone who decided to move forward in a healthy manner. This experience for me was also a transformative experience because I know that in the past, my concern would have been mainly about keeping my friend out of trouble. I would have maybe tried to talk him out of it, or perhaps out of the way he planned on doing it, because I didn't want him to get into any trouble. However, during this situation, I felt responsible for both my friend and the other guy. I did not want to see anything happen to either one of them, and explaining this to my friend and challenging him to think about it from a different perspective assisted in his healing.



## David Dawud Lee

My name is David Dawud Lee. I am 57 years old, and I have been incarcerated for over 32 years. I am serving a DBI sentence, or a death by incarceration sentence. I am a co-founder and member of the Coalition to Abolish Death by Incarceration (CADBI); I sit on the inside advisory board for Human Rights Coalition (HRC) and Decarcerate PA; and I work with the Amistad Law Project and Abolitionist Law Center. I am one of the co-founders of ARC or Abolitionist Reading Circle. I am a co-founder of Dare-2-Care and have helped to facilitate the program since the beginning. I have been a part of the Lifelines Media Project since 2014. I am also a co-founder of the Life Line Association here at Coal Township.



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## Transformative Justice (TJ) From the Perspective of Incarcerated Human Beings (IHBs)

Questions & Answers

By David Dawud Lee

1. *In the book Until We Reckon by Danielle Sered, the author references the four drivers of violence as: shame, isolation, exposure to violence, and not being able to address your economic needs. Please give your thoughts about those drivers of violence.*

Dawud: Starting with shame, from everything I have read over the years, shame can be a dangerous feeling if a person does not have the necessary understanding to deal with shame in a healthy manner. Shame is a feeling that can cause a person to view themselves as a bad person. Shame occurs when people feel disconnected from family & community and begin to view themselves as bad people, rather than imperfect beings. Shame causes people to want to hide, and sometimes to want to hurt those people who witness their imperfections. Shame is that feeling you get when you have committed a social deviance, which can make a person feel unworthy of love and respect. For instance, a person who has worked their entire lives at a particular job but gets fired from that job for stealing. It turns out they stole out of a sense of desperation due to a drug addiction that people did not know about. People on the job used to hold this person in high esteem, and this person understood their status on the job. But now they begin to think that people are abandoning them due to their feelings of shame. They now feel hurt and unworthy of the high esteem that had been given to them. Rather than understanding that they are imperfect and deserving of redemption, love, and support, they retreat into a state of shame. That place they now find themselves in can be very dangerous without support. They may want to hurt other people, or even themselves. Human connection and support could provide them with the tools they need to heal.



Isolation is the second driver of violence because being disconnected is not normal. We are social creatures, and we do not function well once we are isolated. The concept mentioned in the introduction of this pamphlet, and spoken of in the book *Until We Reckon*, which denotes connection is ubuntu: “I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am. “Isolation moves a person away from the social guidance associated with family and community. Connection comes with social responsibilities, and isolation moves people away from a sense of collective responsibility. It is easier for a person to make up their own rules, often violent rules as well, when they are not guided by a sense of social accountability & responsibility.

Being exposed to violence is never a good thing, especially early in life. Early exposure to violence can traumatize a person, and if they do not have access to a way to heal from their pain, they could go on to hurt other people. Mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally injured people need help to deal with their pain. Without proper help some people purge their pain in the form of violence. In this society, people are exposed to violence all the time, and many express their pain violently as a result.

Looking at the fourth driver: Not being able to address your economic needs. This is something that millions of people in America are dealing with. I consider being houseless and poor a form of violence, because sleeping on the streets in the wealthiest country in the world is deeply painful/ traumatizing. Not being able to feed your family is traumatizing. Hungry and houseless people deal with all sorts of indignities and can explode at some point from the stress and strain of their situation. In many cases, people just want to be treated with human decency, but feel and/or are locked out of access to assistance. Sometimes people engage in desperationism because they cannot pay their bills, and those acts could sometimes lead to violence. However, those people really just wanted access to an effective way to pay their bills. Legal means may not be available to them, so they are forced into acts of desperation. If social safety nets were in place to protect people from the harm known as poverty, there

might be far fewer acts of desperation.

2. *Can you explain the difference between Restorative Justice and Transformative Justice? And can you please give your personal thoughts about why those concepts are important?*

Dawud: Restorative Justice has been around for centuries, but in the last few decades there has been a reemergence of the concept. The concept is designed to repair harm and hold the harm doer accountable. The objective is to bring the harm doer together with the survivor of harm. A circle or communal circle is usually created to bring balance to the process. The idea is to figure out how to repair the damage that has been done, while at the same time getting the harm doer to understand what they did to the harmed party. Restoring the harmed party is at the core of these gatherings, and these gatherings have been conducted inside and outside of prison – often with the assistance of prison administrators. Transformative Justice or TJ is a process of repairing harm, too. But TJ is more about preventing harm, because if things are done correctly on the front end, harm can be prevented or at least reduced. Decent employment with a livable wage, health care (and this includes mental health care), education & developmental programs, and affordable housing all work to prevent harm. Even at moments when harm has been done, TJ works to restore the harmed party from a communal standpoint. Also, there is a humane process to hold the harm doer accountable for their actions. Due to the normal operation of the TJ process, it is sometimes believed that TJ does not take place inside of prison environments with IHBs finding ways to prevent harm and to heal each other when harm is done. However, nothing can be further from the truth; we engage in TJ all the time, but these acts just normally go unnoticed. We do these things because we care about each other, and the communities we came from. We also want to assist each other in the process of returning to our communities in a healthy state, thus adding value to our communities rather than destruction.

3. *Normally Transformative Justice (TJ) works best when a circle has been created. Can you explain why?*

Dawud: The circle is about balance, sharing, equality, and a non-hierarchical approach to addressing communal concerns. In the circle, we are all equal, all family, all working collectively to solve our problems. One of the lessons we need to relearn is collective sharing of power, and the circle can help us move towards that direction. Also, the circle is an ancient concept used in traditional societies in Africa and Native American communities.

4. *Why is it important to exclude, or at least limit state involvement with the TJ process?*

Dawud: The state usually approaches criminal justice in the sense that a law has been broken. Well, for many people in America the law has been the root of the problem, along with concepts rooted in the legal process like white supremacy. The enslavement of African people, Black Codes, Jim Crow, stealing of Native American land, and elements of the 13th Amendment all used the law to oppress, enslave, and murder human beings. Moreover, the state has historically been more interested in protecting business interests than the human rights of people of color and the poor. Elite interests are at the core of state involvement with criminal justice, and TJ is about addressing the needs of all people. The state has shown us that when they get involved with problems, violence actually increases, rather than decreases. Often when people call the police for help, the police ended up killing unarmed people or using unnecessary degrees of force to address the issues at hand. When people are sent to prison, there is never any healing involved, nor any accountability, just more pain. The state does not enter into our communities with respect for the people of those communities. The state usually comes in with force, and not seeking to understand the needs of the people. TJ is about understanding the true needs of the people and working collectively to address those needs.

5. *Please explain your involvement and experiences with Dare-2-Care?*

Dawud: I am one of the cofounders of Dare-2-Care, and have been one of the facilitators from the beginning of the program. But before I go any further I want to mention the name of one of our founding members and comrades who passed away. His name is Kevin White, or TK. TK was one of our best facilitators and we definitely miss his presence, because he was very good at his job, and he loved the program. We started in 2014, and the program was placed on the shelf for about two years. In 2016, we were able to create the Life Line Association and Dare-2-Care was the first active program of the Life Line Association. It ran all the way up until Covid 19 stopped movement in the prison. Life Line is a Lifers and Long Termers organization designed to address some of the needs of IHBs. In the Dare-2-Care program, we do have one staff member who sits in to listen to our conversations; however, they allow us to run the program, they just monitor. We have discussions about politics, family, culture, and many other things. We also watch movies and have discussions about the movies. We try our best to formulate a circle in the room or space we operate inside of. We make sure that every voice is respected, and that everyone has an opportunity to participate in our conversations. We ask people to participate once they feel comfortable, but we do not force them.

Dare-2-Care is a 15 week program and we have eight facilitators. Each facilitator gets an opportunity to lead the discussion, and even participants have led discussions. We work to build connections with the IHBs in the program. We understand that human connection leads to a sense of responsibility, respect, and accountability. Also, we want everyone to leave that space understanding the raw power associated with the decisions that they make in their lives, and how those decisions impact other people, as well as themselves. If we can convey those things during the course of the 15 weeks we have to work with participants, we have done our jobs. We want to plant the seeds of growth & development, which can be nourished

in different ways as they continue their journeys in life. Many times, IHBs have come to one of the facilitators with personal problems, and we all have done our best to address those issues. One thing I have learned over the years of doing this work is that most people will grow, if provided with the proper tools. Even something as simple as providing space inside of prison, or providing guiding principles, human connections, and showing a supportive attitude towards people can make a huge difference. We understand that we do not need punitive measures to teach us how to be accountable and responsible. We need a space to heal, and grow, and the resources to provide for our basic human needs. In a small way, Dare-2-Care has been an example of what is possible given the right set of circumstances. Lastly, almost every IHB who I talked to about Dare-2-Care, who participated, wanted to return. Even many teachers in the Education Department would ask if they could send some of their students to our program. We have also been successful at allowing IHBs to see that they can find their purpose in life, if they actively search for it.

## The Transformation of My Two Younger Brothers: Nyako Pippen & Qu'eed Batts

By David Dawud Lee

This pamphlet is a very important project to us for many reasons. One of those reasons is that we want the outside world to know and understand that IHBs are deeply involved with TJ work. Also, we want our brotherhood and humanity to be placed on display. We are not pretending to be perfect human beings, but we are good people. Moreover, none of us deserve to be persecuted on this level. Yes, we have all made mistakes in our lives, and we all want to be provided with the space and opportunity to recover from those mistakes: to redeem ourselves and to serve our communities in a manner that we know that we can.

As I stated in the Q & A about Transformative Justice, I first met Nyako in 2014 in the East Yard here at SCI Coal Township. Since that time, we have developed a powerful brotherhood, friendship, and comradeship. I watched him mature in many ways, and I still watch him as he continues to grow as a political thinker, activist, and organizer. My first big question with him had to do with him being able to evolve out of the street mentality. The street mentality is very predatory, and full of *me*-ology. I was hoping that he would be able to make that transformation in his life, because he is my younger brother, and I have a tremendous amount of love for him. But I also know that the street mentality does not mix with my world.

Nyako wavered for the first couple of years, because he wanted something better for himself, but he was not sure what better looked like. I never gave up on him, because he is highly intelligent and brings a tremendous amount of value to our work, but I needed to see a true commitment from him before I opened the door all the way up for him. Nyako was always able to read and comprehend the literature I shared with him, and

able to develop a unique political analysis. I have always tried to assist in his growth without disrupting his personality. It is not an easy balance, because you want to be present for your family, but not be too much of a presence in their lives. All my comrades must be able to function on a high level, and with integrity, whether I am present or not. Therefore, I will push them to different places in their lives. I definitely hold them to a very high standard, because I know what their capabilities are, and I expect them to do the same with me. I expect Nyako to always give me his best, and I always give him my best.

We all have imperfections, so I do not expect perfection, but I do want my brother to approach our work with love & compassion for the people we encounter along the way. We must be honest about who we are and what we are working towards. Nyako has been able to work his way through some very difficult circumstances traveling back to his childhood, now into a man of integrity. I invited him to be a facilitator in Dare-2-Care because he has very good leadership qualities and a good understanding of what we are trying to accomplish in the program. He has turned out to be one of our best facilitators. He can lead a discussion without being overbearing, and he makes sure to include everyone into the conversations.

In my Q & A about Dare-2-Care, I talk about the passing of TK, or Kevin White. TK was our youngest facilitator in our program, and he brought a powerful perspective, and one that young men could relate to. I needed to replace that powerful presence with people who could relate to young people in ways that I cannot. Now Nyako and Q are our youngest facilitators. They both bring a powerful presence to our work. Nyako loves the Dare-2-Care program, and he brings great perspective and understanding to what we are trying to accomplish. I watched my young brother grow into a conscious man, and I am proud of him. His example is a true example of transformation, and he deserves to be a free man!

I met Qu'eed in 2016. We were introduced by a mutual friend named BC. Qu'eed or Q had just gotten out of the RHU. I had

recently moved from the East Side of the prison to the West Side because we were building the Life Line Association, and a part of the process included us receiving a Life Line block. When Q and I met we talked for a little while, and I was trying to find a good cellie. We both agreed to give it a try. I knew about Q's background with gang activities, and I asked some questions to see where he was trying to go with his life. He told me that he was not active in that lifestyle anymore, and that he was moving in a different direction. I sensed truth in his words. Q is a young man of very high character and integrity, but he lacked concrete political knowledge. I knew that we could build on him having high character. Q has left the cell for extended periods of time for different reasons, one being a trip to court. But I always seek to bring him back to the cell. That says a lot about him.

Q has kept his word regarding his transformation, and he continues to grow as a political thinker. He actually knows more than he thinks, because I have extended conversations with him about some complex political issues that he thinks he cannot add value to, but he does add value to those conversations. Q is also one of the powerful voices that I depend on in Dare-2-Care, and the background that he transitioned out of gives us some great perspective. Over the years, I have watched my young brother mature in many different ways, and I have a great deal of love and respect for him. Q has learned what it means to be accountable for his actions. It took some time for him to make the connection between accountability and daily actions. Accountability is more about what you do than what you say, and Q's actions tell me that he understands what it means to be an accountable man.

What I did not know was that Q and Nyako were friends before meeting me. They were both at another prison together and had been friends for many years. Their friendship/ connection to each other is important because they can see growth in each other that I cannot. They can hold each other accountable through their connection with each other, and help each other grow. They are both my younger brothers, and I am committed



to their growth as men, and in the process of them seeking their freedom. Q has been incarcerated since 14, serving a DBI sentence, and yes he is a Juvenile Lifer who does not deserve to be tortured in this manner. Q is a good man who made mistakes as a boy, and he regrets those mistakes. If given a chance to redeem himself, Q would serve as a tremendous asset to our community. I love and trust both of these men and have watched them both transform into conscious men who deserve a first chance at life! Please help them receive that opportunity.

## Q & A From Qu'eed to Dawud

Qu'eed: You talk about the importance of time, but yet you still invested a lot of your time into the development of Nyako and I. Why keep investing your time into me when after you gave me all the tools I needed, initially I would not put the work in to help myself?

Dawud: Well, to be absolutely honest, it was not easy, because I was trying my best to understand why you would not start investing in yourself. Normally I would have given up after a certain period of time, but something inside of me kept saying be patient. I was very frustrated with you on many occasions, because I could not understand why you were not trying harder to save yourself. And yes, I do consider my time and energy to be important. We cannot get time back, and only have so much energy to give. Therefore, it took a lot, but I felt a genuine love for both you and Nyako, although the circumstances were different. I just could not give up on you, or him, because it appeared that enough people had already given up on both of you.

I kept telling myself that he will begin to understand that he has a responsibility to fight for his own life. Therefore, I kept pushing you, and trying to find creative ways to spark something inside of you, and to motivate you. However, it seemed that nothing was working, but I just had faith in what I was doing. Something just kept telling me to keep trying, because his voice

can be a powerful tool for our movement. Now I am going to share something with you. I remember being at Huntingdon and reading about your case, and the things being said about you in the media. I just believed that you could not be as bad as they portrayed you to be, and if I ever met you that I would want to help you. I was only hearing one side of the story, and I knew you had to have a story to tell the world. I wanted to help you tell that story: the story of the oppressed child who grew into manhood in a cage, without being given any opportunity for redemption in the land of the brave and free! The story of a boy who was not provided with the proper resources to heal, in the land of milk and honey! That story must be told!

Qu'eed: Transformative Justice is not a new concept, but why do you think right now is the best time to highlight other forms of justice?

Dawud: Now may not be the best time, because we needed these concepts on the table many years ago. But now is a good time, because the form of justice that we are dealing with is not working. We are not made any safer by punishing millions of people in this fashion, and no one is being held accountable for the harm they have committed. This system is predicated on profit, not treatment. We must challenge any system which profits off of our pain and pretends to be doing a civic duty. Moreover, due to the outright murder of many people in the streets by police – and the endless work of many organizations like Decarcerate PA, Critical Resistance, etc. – we can now see a change in attitude towards these oppressive institutions. Therefore, it is important for us to push harder for the sort of changes that can save our lives. We also have been working for many years to call this system into question, because we know that this is not the answer. Punishment is nothing short of inflicting pain on people, and I want to know how does that make society safe when the vast majority of these hurt people will return home? We need healing and treatment, not more pain.



I was only hearing one side of the story, and I knew you had to have a story to tell the world. I wanted to help you tell that story: the story of the oppressed child who grew into manhood in a cage, without being given any opportunity for redemption in the land of the brave and free! The story of a boy who was not provided with the proper resources to heal, in the land of milk and honey!  
That story must be told!



## Q&A from Nyako to Dawud

**Nyako:** In prison culture, you are guilty by association. In other words, the problems of those you choose to befriend often become your problems as well, including violent altercations. Upon meeting both Q and I, learning our recent involvement in destructive behavior, and understanding that at any given moment trouble can find us, why did you continue to work with us? And how did you maintain a balance between staying true to your principles and being supportive to us?

**Dawud:** This is a powerful question, and there is no simple answer to this question. First, I had to see something inside of both you and Q in order for me to open myself up to all the possibilities that are in this question. With you, Nyako, we had a relationship before many of the problems started around you. I could not abandon you, because I sensed a sincere desire in you to want change in your life. I felt as though you needed a big brother to help you through your difficult moments, someone who would not abandon you! I felt as though you just needed someone to show you a different way. Yet it was not easy because you continued to engage in things I did not approve of, but understood, because people need money, and the need for money causes people to do things that they do not necessarily want to do to gain access to money. So again, I understood your situation. But I had faith in you being able to see the path I was trying to bring you over to. You had stated on many occasions that you wanted better for yourself, and I could sense the truth in those statements, but I also knew that you were not sure about this path.

I just wanted to be a good example of what other options were available to you. I wanted to be an example for you to move towards. I kept waiting for you to make the total commitment to change your life, because I wanted to open up more doors, but I needed that commitment first. I knew that you possessed a lot of talent, and if placed into something positive, you could accomplish a lot of good in your life. As our relationship grew, I developed a genuine brotherly love for you, and I had to do

my best to help you. Also, the look you gave me at your darkest moment in our relationship told me that I could not abandon you. I saw the raw pain in your eyes and I just could not give up on you. I felt as though you needed someone to believe in you, and I just felt as though I was that person.

Q was in a similar situation as far as needing someone to truly believe in him, and to be there for him, and I believed in him, even at times when he did not believe in himself. When I met Q, it was just something about his sincerity. I knew he was a man of high character but, misguided in some fundamental ways. I knew that he was a good man, just not politically conscious of his own possibilities. Q needed someone to guide him away from the destructive path that he had been on for many years of his life. As cell mates, we spend a lot of time talking about different things, and he needed to be a part of those conversations to build his confidence in himself. Q needed to know that his life had value, and value outside of the gang experiences that had dominated much of his life.

Q used to blame himself for things he has absolutely no control over. Q was basically a hurt boy who grew into manhood without a true healing process, so his development had been disrupted as a result. I knew that we could work through those issues. I helped him to see his own pain and that he was not the one who created that pain in his life, but he had a responsibility to address his pain. Q was ultimately failed by a system that failed to view him as a human being in need of help, not punishment.

As far as maintaining my principles while assisting my younger brothers... Well, I have a lot of faith in what I am doing. Even when other people said I was wrong for supporting and standing by you in your dark moments, it was my faith that carried me through those moments. I absolutely believed that what I was doing was right! I believe in redemption, healing, brotherhood, and creating a better world. No one has a right to persecute a person for a mistake they made at 19 years of age. You and Q both deserved to have an opportunity at redemption, and you

were both worth fighting to save. I just had faith that we could find a way to overcome those dark moments and create positive pathways towards our release.

Nyako: Being in prison for over thirty years can break a person mentally, physically, and spiritually. However, instead of allowing this place to drain your soul, you have found a way to dedicate yourself and your energy to helping others. What inspired you to take this approach to life, and what is it that motivates you to continue?

Dawud: Our struggle for freedom is a very long struggle. All over the globe, people are fighting for freedom. I connected to this struggle in 1991 while in the RHU at SCI Dallas where I met Maroon, JoJo, and other radical revolutionaries who made me think for the first time in my life about concepts like socialism, capitalism, Black Nationalism, etc. That was the birth of my consciousness. But Maroon more than anyone at that time had the biggest impact on my thought process. Maroon had sent me a book about Black Nationalism to read, but I could not comprehend the book at that time in my development. He told me to get a good dictionary and to study it. I have been studying words, history, politics, and other subjects ever since our meeting.

I always believe in being very humble, but fierce in my approach to our struggle for freedom. I truly believe in non-hierarchical arrangements, and that leadership is not dictatorship, but willingness to sacrifice. We have a huge responsibility to each other, and I take that responsibility very seriously. This struggle is my life, and as long as we are still in chains, I do not want to do anything else. I am motivated by the need to stop oppressive systems from causing us more harm. We have suffered enough! I have faith in my vision, and that vision gives me a deep sense of purpose. I wake up every morning thinking about what freedom looks like.

Out on the streets I was an unconscious fool living in an oppressive context, which I could not understand. Now I am a

conscious Black man with a vision about what freedom looks like. Oppressive institutions & systems are not in my vision of freedom! Discriminatory laws and practices are not in my vision. Racial, sexual, cultural, political, and religious divisions are not in my visions about freedom. I am motivated by that vision, my faith in that vision, and by my love of my family, and that includes non-biological family. I am a very passionate man, and I do not hide that passion because I am comfortable with who I am. I believe that Universal forces are on our side. The Creator has never been on the side of the oppressor!

## **A Summary of Transformative Justice: From the Perspective of IHBs**

by David Dawud Lee

Throughout this pamphlet, we intentionally highlighted what we consider to be one of the key components of TJ, and that is human connection. We believe that building trusting relationships is essential in order for us to do the work that we are committed to doing. The primary theme of Dare-2-Care is to build connections through honest dialogue. We have discovered over the course of our work that relationships allow us to communicate with each other in a deeper manner, and therefore place us in a stronger position to solve some of our problems as IHBs. But it is important for us to communicate with each other honestly.

Dare-2-Care has eight facilitators, because we are a community! We each bring a unique perspective to our work, and we have facilitators from different racial, religious, political, and other backgrounds because those different worldviews allow us to create a diverse space to operate inside of. Every voice in our program has value, and we have learned to disagree without triggering traumas or abuse towards each other.

The Dare-2-Care program is a space that enables us to build powerful human connections with each other. Our connections create a situation where we can build the sort of communal relationships needed to hold each other accountable, because although we meet each other in that space, the relationships continue to mature outside of the program. We center our relationship building on respect towards each other and through continued dialogue and sharing, we learn to trust one another. Due to the nature of our relationships and trust, we can help each other heal from some of our historical and systemic traumas. We realize that most IHBs come from oppressed communities and suffer from various forms of trauma. Therefore, it is important for our facilitators to be trauma informed, not experts, but at least able to avoid triggering other



IHBs as we engage in difficult conversations.

We know that we cannot prevent all situations from occurring; in fact, we cannot prevent or heal most situations. But we do prevent some, and we assist each other in healing in some situations. As we continue to do this work, we learn more about how to address our needs outside of state support or assistance. We are far from perfect at what we are doing, but we know that we cannot learn lessons from doing nothing. Therefore, even when we are not able to reach a particular goal, we still are able to learn valuable lessons, so we really did not fail. Nonetheless, we know that it is very difficult to learn the sort of critical lessons that our work requires from being idle.

We also understand the importance of setting positive examples for other IHBs to see and learn from. When we are able to carve out some communal space, even while being caged, we can set some important examples for others to watch and learn from. A couple of years ago, Qu'eed said something to me and I never forgot what he said; he said that he “learns more from watching what I do, than what I say.” Our actions carry a lot of weight. As IHBs, we also believe our version of TJ to be directly connected to abolitionism because we are showing the world our human value. Our examples go against the narrative of us being incorrigible and disposable non-humans. We are not objects to profit off of, either politically or financially. We are imperfect human beings and worthy of redemption, love, and freedom! Yes, we know that there is still much to learn. We know that we do not have all the answers, but I think that it is important for us to approach this work without any egos, being willing to learn from each other. If we are able to do that, we can accomplish a lot of good, but for those of us who are unable to remove our egos from the work that we are doing, it will be very difficult to grow. We must understand how to function in a collective fashion and root out the *me*-ology.



## Supplemental Documents:

### DARE-2-CARE “CODE OF ETHICS”

**RESPECT** — This forum is geared toward creating thought provocative dialogue within the group. There is no room for disrespectful words or actions that could jeopardize the goals of this program or the people who participate in the program. We would hope that these ethics become a central theme within your daily way of life.

**LISTEN** — Listening is vital to the process of continuous growth and development, and we should all be concerned about our ongoing development. Moreover, to successfully aid the movement of a discussion, you must understand the art of listening to what other people are saying, and not develop arguments for your rebuttal before a person is finished speaking, because you might find some areas of agreement.

**BE HUMBLE** — Understand that you will not have all the answers. We are all an equal part of the discussion, and as such, our views are equally important.

**PARTICIPATE** — Each person present has a story to tell and possibly a different view on any particular subject. This makes participation very important to a diverse understanding. Your participation may also promote the participation of others who can learn from you sharing your thoughts with the group.

## Responses from Edinboro University Students

In the fall of 2020, Dawud sent a copy of the essay “Transformative Justice Behind the Wall” by himself and Nyako, as well as the accompanying Q & A, to Dra. Leslie C. Sotomayor at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. Sotomayor shared the writings with her students. What follows below is some of the students’ feedback, shared with their permission.

Leslie Sotomayor: I, Dra. Leslie C. Sotomayor am an educator of undergraduate and graduate courses in the Art department at Edinboro University, teaching all of my courses through a feminist perspective towards social justice centering of underrepresented voices in the United States. One of these courses is ARED 314: Theory and Practice Art Education – an undergraduate course at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. During the fall 2020 semester, one of the discussions I facilitated with my students in the ARED 314 course was initiated by using Antonio Howard’s book, *When A Child is Worth More than the Worst Mistake He Ever Made* (2008) in conjunction with the essay by David Lee and Nyako Pippen, “Transformative Justice Behind the Wall.”

The discussions that students engaged through were multilayered: critical thinking and reading, reflective writing about the readings, class and small group discussions, connections to individual lived experiences, and applying individual and collective reflections to larger social contexts. This included contexts such as: incarceration, education, and the role of writing and other creative acts towards social transformation and healing. Although we do not know how many more ways educational consciousness from these readings will impact students, the seeds of conversations continue growing beyond the classroom spaces and this semester of their educational career. Below I share some of the feedback from the students.

“I was also baffled at how little voice the convicts have within the system. If the goal is remorse, growth, progress then the system in place does not work to reward those improvements. It rather perpetuates violence and pain as described in David Lee’s article.”

“Everyone deserves a chance for opportunity and the room for change, no matter how drastic or poor their life circumstance or upbringing is. I believe that everyone does stand a chance, but sometimes it takes God (whatever that means to you)/ fate to provide light into someone’s life to provide an exception to the given statistics. For example, Dawud served as that light into Nyako’s life. These two readings speak volumes to the importance of connection and mentorship relationships.”

“As for reflection, I was surprised at how quick I was able to become enamored with the book and the article, as I am not much of a reader at all.”

“Look how it went for Nyako, in the article, someone embraced him, he gained a connection, which ended up influencing him in a positive direction. You need to help your own people and reach out to them.”

“In this post, I would like to share a connection that I made between Antonio’s life story and the article ‘Transformative Justice Behind the Wall’ by David Dawud Lee and Nyako Pippen. Towards the end of Antonio’s book, he establishes an account of when he [had] broken one of his own prison rules:

*Several months into my stay at Frackville, I became associated with a prisoner known as ‘Drop-zone. In retrospect, I violated rule #16. I allowed him to choose me as an associate rather than me choosing him; or more appropriately, not choosing him at all (105).*

Here, we can see that after years of keeping mostly to himself, Antonio has made an acquaintance that will positively progress

his mental health. In the article, we see that Nyako formed a similar bond with fellow inmate, Dawud. Nyako and Antonio seem to have had a similar outlook on prison relationships. Nyako mentioned that he had reservations about Dawud's intentions at first, but eventually 'detected his sincerity.' I believe that these relationships that both men established were monumental in their progression as human beings. Humans are creatures that thrive on social interaction, so for them to have both found people to share their thoughts and experiences with could have served as the difference between having a negative mindset and a positive one for the duration of their lives."

"[T]he article realistically depicts the harshness of America's prison system. In a system where it's 'innocent until proven guilty,' all too often do we see disproportionate numbers of 'guilty until proven innocent.' These cases are handled differently and almost always involve BIPOC as the defendant in the case. These stories show just how far we have to go in reforming our prison system. Help isn't truly provided there, and more often than not, these detention facilities provide another place for these kids to get worse. Helping them is therapy and job prep and getting a GED and figuring out why they've acted in such a way in the first place. These cases are handled with an excess of violence and hatred and a deficiency of care and empathy."

"The article really shows what we touched on with the book that we have to have hope in people, and sometimes one person can make a difference. The statement 'We have a tendency of only looking at the mistake rather than the person' directly ties in with how Antonio expressed that regardless of his age, his past, his childhood trauma, and the things he dealt with that got him there people only look at the mistake. People immediately jump to not treating convicts as people, without any attention to what they did or how or why."

"I find it so important that we hear stories from the perspective of those who have been in prison and experienced life in these facilities. Dawud and Nyako's story shows the power of relationships in these circumstances. Nyako explained he

carried a lot of pain with him from his childhood, similarly to Antonio. These stories exemplify the corruption and violence within these prisons and in our society, even when those involved are children. I am thankful for his willingness to share his story with us, as I feel as though I have learned so much more about our society than any news article could ever tell me.”

**Closing Note:**  
**Help us build a path towards  
healing, justice, and love!**

*Transformative Justice in Practice* has been created to express some of our thoughts surrounding Transformative Justice. We do not pretend to have all the answers, but we want people to understand how important it is to work together towards creating healthy solutions to our collective problems. Every step we take to solve our problems gives us more power and control over our own lives. We just want people to understand that we can work together to change the world we live in. However, we must be able to understand what possibilities are in front of us. We know that isolation is one of the core drivers of violence, so we think that it is important to build deeper connections with other people doing TJ and abolitionist work.

The state uses criminal labels as a shame and blame tool with the purpose of disconnecting vulnerable populations or survivors of state violence. We are deemed to be disposable beings, not human beings. We have a personal need to change this narrative by displaying our humanity. We are seeking support as we continue to do this work! We know that most IHBs will return home and we are doing our part to assist those IHBs we connect with to return as healthy as possible. Help us build a path towards healing, justice, and love!



## **Acknowledgements (from Dawud)**

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## CONTACT INFO

The authors of this pamphlet can be reached at the addresses below:

Smart Communications/PA DOC  
David Lee #AS-3041  
SCI Coal Township  
PO Box 33028  
St Petersburg, FL 33733

Smart Communications/PA DOC  
Nyako Phippen #HQ-6180  
SCI Coal Township  
PO Box 33028  
St Petersburg, FL 33733

Smart Communications/PA DOC  
Avron Holland #HN7410  
SCI Coal Township  
P.O. Box 33028  
St Petersburg, FL 33733

Smart Communications/PA DOC  
Qu'eed Batts #HG8577  
SCI Coal Township  
P.O. Box 33028  
St. Petersburg, FL 33733

or via email: [connectnetwork.com](http://connectnetwork.com)



**LifeLines: Voices Against  
the Other Death Penalty**

**[www.lifelines-project.org](http://www.lifelines-project.org)**

Contact: [lifelinesphilly@gmail.com](mailto:lifelinesphilly@gmail.com)  
LifeLines Project  
c/o Decarcerate PA  
PO Box 40764  
Philadelphia, PA 19107