

# REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE IN ACTION

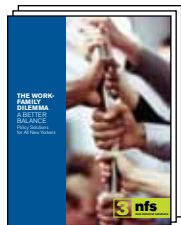
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Published by the Barnard Center for Research on Women  
and The New York Women's Foundation

Written by Rebecca Jordan-Young, Lucy Trainor, and Janet Jakobsen

Based on a Participatory Action Research Project with the Catalyst Fund/  
NYWF Grantee Partners for Reproductive Justice

## GRANTEE PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

### **African Hope Committee**

[afriquehope.org](http://afriquehope.org)

### **Brooklyn Young Mothers' Collective**

[brooklynyoungmotherscollective.org](http://brooklynyoungmotherscollective.org)

### **DAMAYAN Migrant Workers Association**

[www.damayanmigrants.org](http://www.damayanmigrants.org)

### **Girls Educational and Mentoring Services**

[www.gems-girls.org](http://www.gems-girls.org)

### **Girls for Gender Equity**

[www.ggenyc.org](http://www.ggenyc.org)

### **Love Heals, the Alison Gertz Foundation for AIDS Education**

[www.loveheals.org](http://www.loveheals.org)

### **New York Civil Liberties Union Teen Health Initiative**

[www.thi.nyclu.org](http://www.thi.nyclu.org)

### **Red Hook Initiative**

[www.rhicenter.org](http://www.rhicenter.org)

### **RightRides for Women's Safety**

[www.rightrides.org](http://www.rightrides.org)

### **Sauti Yetu Center for African Women**

[www.sautiyetu.org](http://www.sautiyetu.org)

### **Sistas on the Rise**

[www.sistasontherise.org](http://www.sistasontherise.org)

### **Sisterhood Mobilized for AIDS/ HIV Research and Treatment**

[www.smartuniversity.org](http://www.smartuniversity.org)

### **Sylvia Rivera Law Project**

[www.srlp.org](http://www.srlp.org)

### **Voces Latinas**

[www.voceslatinas.org](http://www.voceslatinas.org)

### **Women's HIV Collaborative of New York**

[www.womenscollaborative.com](http://www.womenscollaborative.com)

### **Young Women of Color HIV/AIDS Coalition**

[www.statusispower.com](http://www.statusispower.com)

### **Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice**

[www.ympj.org](http://www.ympj.org)



# INTRODUCTION

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This report is the result of a multi-tiered collaboration among Groundswell’s Catalyst Fund, The New York Women’s Foundation (NYWF)—seventeen NYWF grantee partners doing reproductive justice work in New York City—and the Barnard Center for Research on Women (BCRW). Together all of these groups are working to enable, expand, document, and enhance the possibilities of creating reproductive justice. In particular, this collaboration was developed to explore the ways in which organizations led by women of color are elaborating reproductive justice in connection with economic justice. The diverse reproductive justice movement documented in this report works at the intersections of multiple issues in order to produce a vision of comprehensive justice and holistic well-being. The Catalyst Fund was created by the Women of Color Working Group of the Funders Network on Population, Reproductive Health and Rights in order to mobilize new funding and capacity building resources for women of color-led constituency building and policy advocacy. The Fund helps to build a stronger, multiracial movement for reproductive health, rights and justice—a movement with the power to generate social change that benefits all women (Catalyst info: [www.groundswellfund.org](http://www.groundswellfund.org)). The Catalyst Fund has partnered with individual donors, and national and local foundations, among them The New York Women’s Foundation, which supports work throughout New York City so as to “achieve sustained economic security and justice for women and girls” (NYWF website: [www.nywf.org](http://www.nywf.org)). Through

its philanthropic partnership with the Catalyst Fund, NYWF was able to form further partnerships with 17 organizations doing reproductive justice work in New York City. Not only does this initiative provide crucial support for organizations working with women and girls across the metropolitan area, it also brings these organizations together in a way that amplifies their individual work and connects their efforts to broader movements for systemic change. As a group this set of grantee partners is building a new vision for reproductive justice, one that springs from the lives and thoughts of the women with whom they work in New York City. In order to help the organizations articulate this vision, and to document the best practices of these organizations, NYWF approached the Barnard Center for Research on Women in the spring of 2009 to take up a participatory action research project with the Catalyst Fund grantee partners. This project is the sixth installment of BCRW’s *New Feminist Solutions* (NFS) series ([www.barnard.edu/bcrw/newfeministsolutions](http://www.barnard.edu/bcrw/newfeministsolutions)), which demonstrates the effectiveness of bringing a feminist lens to pressing social issues while also bringing a new lens to analysis of traditional feminist issues. Using the methods of participatory action research, this project (NFS 6) will produce a film, a website, and this report. The project culminates in the fall of 2010 with a conference dedicated to moving the vision of the organizations toward action for systemic change.

Participatory action research (PAR) has several key features. First, there is no sharp line between the

researchers and research “subjects” who they study. Instead, the intellectual work of identifying the goals of a study and how those goals will be achieved is shared. In traditional research, the study population only has the power to decide whether or not to participate in research—that is, to become research “subjects” or not. In participatory research, the study population has the authority to decide whether the goals make sense, whether specific questions are framed appropriately, and whether the analysis is accurate. The “action” part of participatory action research refers to the commitment to do research that not only contributes in a general or remote way to knowledge, but is directly useful for goals upon which the researchers and study populations have agreed. Thus, participatory action research fits well with BCRW’s longstanding commitment to bridging feminist scholarship and feminist activism, which is highlighted in the *New Feminist Solutions* series.

The guiding questions for this PAR were initially crafted in a joint meeting with NYWF participants, grantee partners, and BCRW staff, and were revised and approved by all the research partners. The questions were circulated and answered by all the grantee partner agencies, and were reviewed by BCRW for common themes and examples of “best practices.” The resulting summaries were circulated among all the research partners, and were revised based on a second round of input. Next, these results were contextualized with background information on the concept of reproductive justice and its relationship to economic justice, and the full report was again circulated for comments and revisions. The research questions on which it is based are:

1. Describe in detail the projects or activities that your organization would identify as “best practices” that you want highlighted in the report and video.
2. Recently, some women of color activists and organizations created the idea of “reproductive justice” to describe a new vision for their activism. Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice defines the idea this way:

“Reproductive justice is the complete physical, mental, spiritual, political, economic, and social well-being of women and girls, and will be achieved when women and girls have the economic, social, and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our bodies, sexuality, and reproduction for ourselves, our families, and our communities in all areas of our lives.”

Does this concept relate to your organization’s mission and work? If so, how? That is, what specific links do you see?

3. If the concept or term of “reproductive justice” does not resonate for you, is there another term or concept that better captures your broad vision?
4. What are the connections you see or does your organization make between reproductive justice or your more resonant concept and economic security? Are there connections to other issues as well?

Together, the multiple participants in this project developed three broad research goals: 1) to document the best practices of the grantee partners; 2) to support community leaders



in articulating their visions for excellent services and effective organizing for change; and 3) to explore whether and how the concept of reproductive justice resonates with the missions and activities of the grantee partner organizations. This report also demonstrates how important partnerships across sectors are to the project of making change. By bringing together funders, researchers, and activists in this exciting collaboration, we hope that this report will expand the reach of the organizations' innovations and contribute to the burgeoning activism and scholarship on reproductive justice. Exploring how this concept is received and transformed by front-line

organizations who share the crucial commitments to holistic approaches towards equality and dignity helps build a more inclusive movement. The grantee partner organizations featured here, while diverse in approach and in the specific communities and issues on which they focus, all provide practical daily help in ways that also move their communities towards long-term change. Collectively, they share the goals of a more just, equitable, and healthful society. The grantee partners are also distinguished as organizations that creatively manage limited resources to provide an extraordinary level of service while contributing to projects for social change.

# A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

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Reproductive justice, or the idea that reproductive freedom is possible only when women and girls have “complete physical, mental, spiritual, political, economic, and social well-being,” encompasses a diverse set of movements and concerns. Advocates for reproductive justice are allied with other movements for social justice and the individuals and organizations working within this model are just as diverse in their missions, constituencies, and methods of action. By using a broad, inclusive framework to combat reproductive and sexual oppression, the reproductive justice movement has been able to include the expertise of many communities whose concerns have not been sufficiently integrated into the reproductive rights movement—especially women of color, low-income people, young women, and queer and transgender people, the very underrepresented and underserved people who “should be at the center of shared leadership” (Third Wave Foundation 2006).

Reproductive justice is a model for thinking about reproductive freedom and gender- and sexuality-based oppression that moves beyond the narrative of “choice” that has been the dominant framework in mainstream conversations about reproductive rights. Reproductive justice takes into account how individual freedom to maintain autonomy over one’s body may be limited by a lack of economic, social, environmental, and political privilege, as well as by social structures that institutionalize racism, homophobia, and other dominant norms of embodiment. By re-framing the discussion around the pursuit of “justice,” rather than “choice,” we can more accurately describe how, for many people,

including women of color, poor people, and queer and transgender people, these freedoms will be achieved not solely by legislative changes, but by transforming our society into one that is more inclusive and that values the lived experiences of diverse groups.

## Towards an Inclusive Definition

The term “reproductive justice” was coined by a group of African American women’s health activists in 1994. At a national pro-choice conference in Chicago, sponsored by the Illinois Pro-Choice Alliance, a Black Women’s Caucus formed to discuss their concerns about the Clinton Administration’s policies around health care, women, and families, and its lack of understanding in domestic public policy about the links between these issues. The reproductive choice framework did not seem to describe sufficiently the difficulty in advocating for women’s reproductive freedom in the context of preserving women’s rights not just to abortion and contraception, but also their rights to comprehensive healthcare, political and social empowerment, and economic security. Thus, the group decided to call themselves “Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice,” defining reproductive justice as “reproductive health integrated into social justice,” in order to highlight the ways in which the two are inextricably linked (Ross 2006).

The reproductive justice framework was taken up widely over the next decade by activists working to maintain connections among issues of gender, sexuality,

race and class. SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective, which has been a leading organization in expanding the struggle for reproductive justice into a movement, notes that the reproductive justice framework “offers a new perspective on reproductive issue advocacy, pointing out that as Indigenous women and women of color it is important to fight equally for 1) the right to have a child; 2) the right not to have a child; and 3) the right to parent the children we have, as well as to control our birthing options” (Ross 2006). Reproductive justice thus widens the scope of what can be considered “reproductive rights” and also acknowledges that race and class often limit reproductive “choices” just as much as legislation and access to services.

The definition of reproductive justice was similarly articulated by Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice (ACRJ) in their 2005 report “A New Vision for Advancing Our Movement for Reproductive Health, Reproductive Rights, and Reproductive Justice.” Their definition of reproductive justice reads as follows:

We believe reproductive justice is the complete physical, mental, spiritual, political, economic, and social well-being of women and girls, and will be achieved when women and girls have the economic, social, and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our bodies, sexuality and reproduction for ourselves, our families and our communities in all areas of our lives. (ACRJ, 2005)

The ACRJ report usefully distinguishes three separate frameworks that can be used to fight reproductive

oppression. Although they are often used interchangeably, the terms Reproductive Justice, Reproductive Rights, and Reproductive Health can represent different strategies for securing reproductive freedom and social justice for women and girls. Each of these strategies can have narrower or more expansive versions. The Reproductive Health framework is focused mainly on securing access to reproductive health services, including abortion and contraception, but in its narrow version does little to address the structural and legal inequities that prevent some communities from having access to any type of comprehensive healthcare. The Reproductive Rights framework is invested in securing legal rights to reproductive healthcare services and sparking changes in legislation that will advance women’s individual rights to choice and to privacy. Although legal strategies are very important in the fight for reproductive freedom, this type of activism is often only accessible to more privileged communities who have access to the political system and may leave out marginalized groups, including immigrants and people of color. Partly in response to the limitations of the Reproductive Rights and the Reproductive Health frameworks when they are more narrowly defined, the more holistic Reproductive Justice framework was developed.

## Broadening the Framework, Creating an Inclusive Movement

The wider definition of reproductive autonomy that is promoted through the reproductive justice framework





includes, in addition to the right to safe and legal abortion, the right to decide whether to parent, to be pregnant, and to raise one's family without scrutiny from the state. The reproductive justice framework allows for the inclusion of multiple constituencies that have been marginalized historically and in contemporary struggles over reproduction:

### Reproductive justice addresses sterilization abuse.

A reproductive justice perspective allows us to realize that throughout US history, different groups have been identified as “unfit” to reproduce. Many scholars have pointed out that for women of color and poor women, who have historically been the target of state surveillance and sterilization abuse, the decision to carry a pregnancy to term is just as relevant as access to contraception or abortion. Eugenics programs in the United States were enacted in the early twentieth century with support from government funding and wealthy benefactors, as well as prominent medical and social scientists, and by the middle of the century, 33 states had passed laws that dictated the sterilization of the “feeble-minded” and “insane” (Burke and Casteneda 2007). Although most such statutes made no mention of race, scholars have found that immigrants from Eastern Europe and African-Americans were disproportionately sterilized through these programs, displaying how race, ethnicity, and perceptions of physical and mental fitness were conflated (Stern 2005).

## Reproductive justice supports the human rights of incarcerated women.

The reproductive justice framework has been useful in addressing the multiple reproductive and human rights oppressions faced by women involved in the criminal justice system, especially those who are current or former drug users. Jeanne Flavin describes how “the law and the criminal justice system establish what a ‘good woman’ or a ‘fit mother’ should look like,” by limiting the reproductive rights of incarcerated women (by denying them reproductive healthcare, or by sterilization or other limits on their ability to procreate) and by interfering with women’s abilities to parent their children while incarcerated (Flavin, 2008). Women who have entered the criminal justice system because of drug-related offences are often subject to even greater levels of scrutiny. Lynn Paltrow, Executive Director of National Advocates for Pregnant Women (NAPW), an organization that seeks to protect the human rights of pregnant and parenting women, especially those who are most vulnerable (including low income women, women of color, and drug-using women), has written extensively about the punitive measures directed towards women who use drugs and alcohol during pregnancy. Incarcerating women under the rubric of “protecting the fetus” has been shown to exacerbate rather than address substance abuse problems and often undermines the health of women and children by making women less likely to seek out care while pregnant for fear that they will be prosecuted for their drug use. Instead of criminalizing the actions of these women, NAPW recommends that pregnant women “not be subjected

to arrest, confinement, incarceration, or other detention solely for the protection, benefit, or welfare of her fetus.”

Prosecuting women for drug use during pregnancy also sets a dangerous precedent for claims on behalf of “fetal rights,” a tactic that has been used by the political Right to justify limiting women’s access to abortion (Paltrow 2008).

## Reproductive justice challenges the surveillance of immigrant women's reproductive lives.

Advocates for immigration reform have noted how immigrant women (both documented and undocumented) are subject to similar surveillance of their reproductive health. Lacking economic security and political power, immigrants often work jobs that do not provide healthcare or other benefits, which can be especially detrimental to women who cannot access reproductive health services including family planning services, prenatal care, HIV/AIDS testing and treatment, and screening for cervical and breast cancer (National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health 2005). Despite the prevailing notion that immigrants are a “drain” on social welfare systems, studies have shown that both documented and undocumented immigrants access these programs at much lower rates than US citizens (Huang 2007).

## Reproductive justice promotes inclusive access to and increased safety for reproductive technologies.

Access to assisted reproductive technologies (ART) is another area in which reproductive justice activists have

identified inequalities across race and class. Although ART has made it possible for many people to have biological children when they may not have been able to on their own, researchers have raised questions about how accessible assisted reproductive technologies are to individuals who lack healthcare and other resources, thus creating a “reproductive caste system,” wherein

for the fetus (including risks of miscarriage and low birth weight) that are greater than those associated with either alcohol or illicit drugs for which other women are criminally punished. Race and class also affect one’s need for infertility treatments. Recent studies indicate that women of color actually experience higher rates of infertility, although they tend to use reproductive technologies less frequently and

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE IS A MODEL FOR THINKING ABOUT REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM . . . THAT MOVES BEYOND THE NARRATIVE OF “CHOICE”. . . . BY RE-FRAMING THE DISCUSSION AROUND THE PURSUIT OF “JUSTICE” . . . WE CAN MORE ACCURATELY DESCRIBE HOW, FOR MANY PEOPLE, INCLUDING WOMEN OF COLOR, POOR PEOPLE, AND QUEER AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE, THESE FREEDOMS WILL BE ACHIEVED NOT SOLELY BY LEGISLATIVE CHANGES, BUT BY TRANSFORMING OUR SOCIETY INTO ONE THAT IS MORE INCLUSIVE AND THAT VALUES THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF DIVERSE GROUPS.

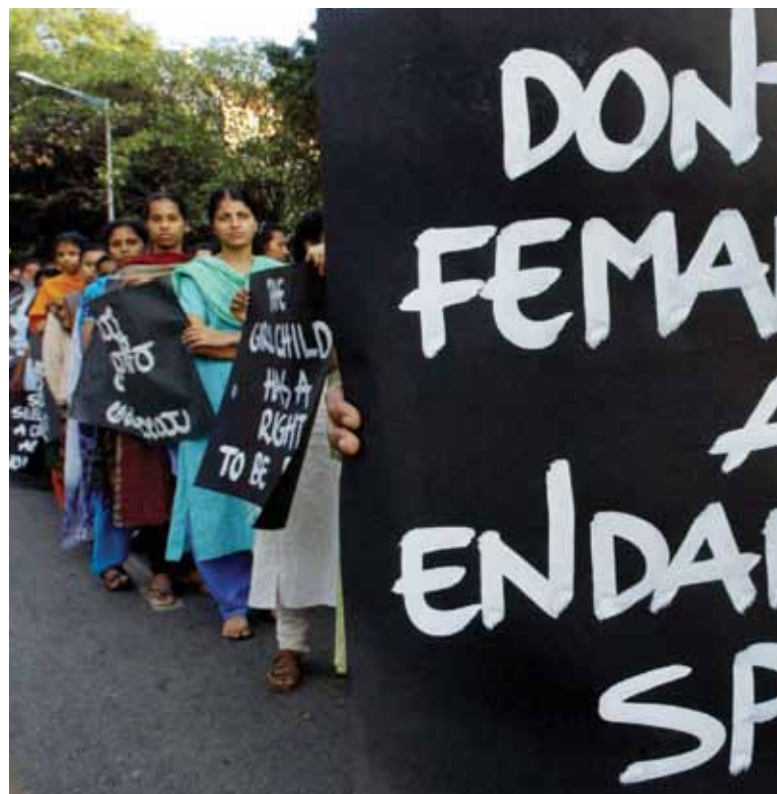
only economically and socially privileged individuals have access to these technologies (Roberts 2009). While “the public begrudges poor mothers a meager increase in benefits for one more child. . . it celebrates the birth of high-tech septuplets that require a fortune in publicly supported hospital care,” further emphasizing the ways in which the very idea of who should reproduce and how they should do so is differentiated by class and race (Roberts 2009). In addition, the long-term effects of fertility drugs (some that have not been approved specifically for these uses) are not known (Galpern 2007). Differential treatment that values white, middle-class women’s reproduction persists, despite the fact that ART carries risks

after longer periods of infertility than do white and privileged women (Huddleston, Cedars, Sohn, et al. 2010). These differentials may be due to numerous factors, including lack of healthcare (leading to higher rates of untreated sexually transmitted infections) and environmental racism, which increases their exposure to toxins (Galpern 2007).

The concept of reproductive justice can broaden organizing around gender and sexuality.

LGBTQ people are still routinely denied the right to parent their biological children, the children of their partners, and children they might seek to adopt or foster. In the US as of 2010, three states (Nebraska, Utah, and

Arkansas) prohibit foster parenting by LGBTQ people, and six states (Nebraska, Florida, Michigan, Mississippi, Utah, and Arkansas) restrict adoption to heterosexual people or have laws that de facto prohibit LGBTQ people living with partners from adopting, because such couples cannot be legally married (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force 2008 & 2009). The National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) notes that when they were founded over 33 years ago, “nearly all the cases on [their] docket were about ensuring LGBT parents could keep custody of their children after they came out” (NCLR 2008). While LGBTQ parents do have significantly greater protections now, the ground is far from level when it comes to the parental rights of sexual minorities. Even in jurisdictions where the local laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, LGBTQ parents often face obstacles to being recognized as “fit” or even as legitimate, legal parents, due to factors that range from conflicts among local, state, and federal laws, to confusion about whether faith-based service agencies (who are often contracted to administer foster care) are subject to non-discrimination laws, to anti-LGBTQ hostility on the part of teachers, pediatricians, and others with whom parents must routinely interact. Sixteen states and the District of Columbia allow LGBTQ parents to undertake “second parent adoption,” meaning that the biological parent does not terminate parental rights, but the child gains a second legal parent. NCLR points out, though, that “Parents should not have to adopt their own children;” further, many jurisdictions accomplish second-parent adoptions through procedures



established for stepparents, and “a same-sex partner who plans the birth or adoption” (NCLR 2010).

The “Causes in Common” project sponsored by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center delineated shared goals between the reproductive justice movement and transgender and queer liberation movements. All of these movements are concerned with protecting basic rights to privacy and autonomy with regard to sexual partners, reproduction, and gender determination. *Griswold v. Connecticut*, the initial Supreme Court decision protecting access to contraception, along with *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion, were based on the constitutional right to privacy. Many court decisions supporting LGBTQ rights, including the 2003



*Lawrence v. Texas* decision, have also referenced the right that adults have to privacy in their sexual and reproductive lives and decision-making (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center 2003). Transgender and queer activists have furthermore noted that the same structural inequalities that limit women’s reproductive freedom also limit the lives of queer and trans people. The Sylvia Rivera Law Project identifies how these “systems of inequality” limit transgender and gender non-conforming people by keeping them in “vulnerable and unequal” situations (Sylvia Rivera Law Project). For instance, trans people are much more likely to be poor or homeless, which directly limits their ability to access education and healthcare (especially trans-specific physical and

mental healthcare). A holistic vision of physical, spiritual, social, economic, and political justice, as offered by the reproductive justice framework, can help identify how to dismantle these systems of inequality.

Organizing for reproductive justice can also be made more expansive by recognizing the contributions made by religious advocates.

All too often, mainstream US public discourse assumes that all advocates for reproductive rights and justice are secular and all religiously committed people oppose reproductive rights. However, these claims are largely unfounded. According to the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, 87% of Catholics believe abortion should be legal,

and the majority of Protestant denominations in the US, as well as Reform and Conservative Jewish congregations support a woman's right to choose (Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice).

Religious advocacy is an important component of the overall reproductive justice movement. Coalitions such as the Religious Institute, a multifaith organization advocating for sexual and reproductive freedom, have called for “a sexual ethic focused on personal relationships and social justice rather than particular sexual acts,” a shift in the public conversation about sexuality and reproduction that would provide a more holistic view (Religious Institute 2010). Religious groups also advocate for the social conditions that would allow individuals to make better decisions about their health, reproduction, and ability to raise families. Groups like the Women of Color Partnership, a project of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, have called for an end to the empty rhetoric of the “pro-life” movement, emphasizing that “homelessness, hunger, and unemployment” are the real problems affecting communities and limiting reproductive freedom (Women of Color Partnership 1994).

## Expansive Movements at the Intersections

Overall, reproductive justice provides a framework for an expansive set of social movements that bring together a range of issues affecting the lives of women. The 17 organizations that are profiled in this report show the powerful ways in which using the reproductive justice

framework can support movements for systemic change even as they provide for the most pressing of daily needs. These organizations also demonstrate the need to continue to press the boundaries of the framework for action. They bring economic justice to the fore, showing how a lack of economic security undercuts women's reproductive health and autonomy and, concomitantly, a lack of access to healthcare, knowledge, and reproductive autonomy undercuts women's economic security. The organizations further develop the connections between reproductive oppression and all gender oppressions. They show that the devaluing of women's bodies, which is the mark of reproductive oppression, limits not only reproductive possibility, but also the ability to live one's life in myriad ways that do not conform to traditional gender norms. Similarly, they show that the devaluing of women's work diminishes the value and importance of reproductive labor and childcare—in fact, of all of the labor necessary to reproduce society—in ways that reinforce the contemporary dynamics of race, class, and immigration. Because it is undervalued, underpaid women of color and immigrant women do this work; because women of color and immigrant women do this work it continues to be undervalued. The only way to break out of these dynamics is with strong movements for social change that refuse to compartmentalize issues that are, in fact, interdependent. The vision and best practices of these organizations, profiled in the next sections, provide a brief summary of the exciting work currently being done in New York City to build such movements.

# THE ORGANIZATIONS<sup>1</sup>

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## African Hope Committee

African Hope Committee (AHC), located in Harlem, works to build community by addressing the issues that affect the lives of African immigrant women, young girls and boys, and their families. AHC works with women to gain employment, find housing, and seek proper health care, to navigate the US legal system and to respond to the culture shock of adjusting to life in the United States. In addressing reproductive health in African immigrant communities, AHC tackles obstacles to women's social, economic, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. A combination of cultural, linguistic, and economic obstacles have created barriers to receiving adequate reproductive healthcare services such as annual pap smears, breast cancer screening, HIV/AIDS testing, and contraceptive options. The notion of reproductive health and the right of women and girls to make informed choices that will improve their sexual health and quality of life includes the ability for immigrant women to increase their chances to become pregnant and access early prenatal care; determine whether or when to have children; and to participate in healthy life styles for themselves and their families. The programs through which AHC accomplishes these crucial interventions include a mentorship program for clients, volunteers, and interns which empowers them with skills to be change agents in the community, and advocacy on issues related to immigration reform, thereby ensuring the right

and freedom of immigrant women to make informed decisions for themselves and their families. In addition, AHC hosts annual summits including African Women and Children/HIV & AIDS Health Summit and the AHC Participant and Provider Summits, bringing together community members, providers, stakeholders, and program beneficiaries.

## Brooklyn Young Mothers' Collective

The Brooklyn Young Mothers' Collective (BYMC) was formed in 2004 to address the particular needs of young mothers so that they might experience fewer educational disruptions. BYMC provides reproductive/maternal health education, social services support, and legal information to pregnant young women and young mothers. By addressing the needs of young mothers, BYMC also works to reduce episodes of child abuse and neglect. BYMC's comprehensive, community-based approach rests upon its extensive experience with providing services to individuals and families. The goal of the Collective is to break the cycle of early parenthood and poverty by ensuring that pregnant teens and young mothers have access to good information about their bodies and the opportunity to pursue academic achievement and employment. In particular, BYMC supports a young woman's right to an education regardless of pregnancy or parenting status. In addition,

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1. Sources for these organizational descriptions are responses to BCRW survey, organizational grant application to NYWF, and NYWF summary descriptions of Catalyst cohort.

BYMC's member engagement program and leadership classes support young women in addressing the issues that affect their lives so that they can positively engage with their communities and build their futures.

## DAMAYAN Migrant Workers Association

DAMAYAN Migrant Workers Association is a grassroots organization of and for low-income Filipino im/migrant workers, primarily women domestic workers. Through its programs and campaigns, DAMAYAN comprehensively tackles the various labor, immigration, health, and gender problems of the community while building the power and leadership of its members. Its primary mission is to unite Filipino migrant domestic workers to take control of their lives, defend, assert, and fight for their rights, and address forced migration as a root cause of the issues they face. DAMAYAN's flagship program is LUNAS ("healing") Filipino Migrant Workers Holistic Health program. Its emphasis is on developing each participant's ability to become a skillful navigator of the health system and to develop into a strong advocate for her own welfare and human rights. The LUNAS project works to fill the enormous gap between the needs of the low-income Filipino immigrant community that DAMAYAN serves and the basic healthcare services and programs that are available to them. The LUNAS program uses the concept of "holistic health" to cover physical, emotional, economic, and social issues, and also includes a Gender Rights and Safety module tackling domestic violence and

sexual harassment. DAMAYAN's political education and public information program broadens public discussions to include the social and economic context for healthcare, while enabling members to assert that health is a basic human right to which all women and workers are entitled, and for which women need to advocate collectively.

## Girls Educational and Mentoring Services

Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS) is committed to ending commercial sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking of children by changing individual lives, transforming public perception, and changing policies that affect sexually exploited youth. GEMS helps girls and young women gain control over their bodies and lives by providing the range of services they need to address their physical and mental health, social and housing needs, and safety. Programs provide crisis intervention, intensive individual counseling, and strength-based support groups, as well as access to health care, job training, and transitional housing. GEMS works with each young woman who comes into the program, over time and at her own pace, to help her achieve her personal goals, such as self-sufficiency, educational attainment, and leadership development.

## Girls for Gender Equity

Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) is a grassroots youth development organization that promotes the well-being of adolescent girls through comprehensive after-school

programs that help participants achieve academic excellence, build self-esteem, maintain physical fitness, and explore career opportunities. Through grassroots organizing initiatives and programs that raise awareness, GGE mobilizes low-income communities of color to transform barriers that keep women and girls from living lives free of violence, poverty, and injustice. GGE gives voice and support to youth from underserved communities of color (African American; Latina; Caribbean/West Indian; Southeast Asian/Asian) who have experienced the sexism, racism, and homophobia-induced violence embedded in the school system. Through a Participatory Action Research project, GGE's youth organizers (aged 15-19), Sisters in Strength (SIS), documented experiences of gender-based inequities in NYC public schools. GGE also sponsors the Coalition for Gender Equity in Schools, a city-wide partnership of more than 20 youth, parent, school, activist, and community-based organizations committed to lending their expertise and resources to end gender-based violence and create an expectation of gender equality throughout New York City schools.

## Love Heals, the Alison Gertz Foundation for AIDS Education

Founded in 1992 in memory of AIDS activist Alison Gertz, Love Heals empowers young people in the fight against HIV. Love Heals' HIV-positive speakers are putting a face to the epidemic and their youth empowerment programs are training a new generation of

community educators and activists. Love Heals creates and distributes educational materials, shares its expertise, and advocates for young people's rights to HIV/AIDS education. Love Heals' Leadership Empowerment and Awareness Program (LEAP) for Girls targets young women of color from low-income neighborhoods hardest hit by the HIV epidemic—including East Harlem, Central Brooklyn, and the South Bronx. By partnering with individual schools and community-based organizations, LEAP for Girls provides participants with a series of workshops on HIV/AIDS, human anatomy, reproductive health issues, gender roles, and communication skills. The program culminates with participants designing and delivering an HIV/AIDS education service project in their own communities. The program fosters parent-child communication, includes coaching of partner-agency staff members, links participants and the partner-agency to community resources, and engages participants' peers through the service-learning project. Designed and implemented in conjunction with the young women of color that it serves, LEAP for Girls also includes an alumnae program through which graduates have the opportunity to engage in ongoing learning, skills-building and activism.

## New York Civil Liberties Union Teen Health Initiative

The New York Civil Liberties Union Teen Health Initiative (THI) works with a group of high school



age Peer Educators to advance the reproductive rights of young women in low-income communities in New York City. The initiative conducts extensive community outreach to raise awareness on the issues of minors' rights and disseminates information and materials outlining the legal framework behind the right to receive reproductive healthcare services confidentially. Peer educators learn and present workshops, including "Know Your Rights" and a workshop on the contributions of peer health education to social change. When possible, the program presents to patients, students, clients, and staff at the same institutions, reaching both youth and the adults who work with them. Teen Health Initiative's work takes place with the Reproductive Rights Project of the New York Civil Liberties Union, a legal organization focused on civil rights and civil liberties, which understands the meaning of "reproductive rights" expansively. Teen Health Initiative pursues this broad vision through a program that strives to increase the leadership of its participants and to represent the needs and interests of the diverse group of people most affected by reproductive oppression.

## Red Hook Initiative

Red Hook Initiative (RHI) works to confront the consequences of intergenerational poverty. Begun in 2002 as a program of a local hospital in response to the severity of health and social issues facing women in Red Hook, the program has expanded from providing services focused on traditional notions of health—cooking classes, reproductive health workshops, exercise programs—to more comprehensive programs providing support in the areas of education employment, health, and community development. RHI's Health Educator and Leadership Program (PHE) allows young women (aged 14-18) to receive training and become leaders as they create programs and provide services to their peers within the Red Hook Houses and local Brooklyn communities. The four-year program focuses on reproductive health, social and emotional health, community development, and leadership. The program is led, designed, and evaluated by RHI staff, almost all of whom live in Red Hook Houses and many of whom participate in the program.



Photos are for illustrative purposes only. They do not depict the work or membership of the organizations described here.

## RightRides for Women's Safety

RightRides for Women's Safety (RRWS) builds safer communities by ending gender-based harassment and sexual assault through community organizing, direct services, safety education and advocacy programs. Their flagship RightRides program offers free, late-night rides home for women and LGBTQ individuals in 45 NYC neighborhoods across four boroughs to address gender-based violence, including sexual assault. In providing free and safe rides to their homes, RightRides reduces Riders' threats of sexual assault while guaranteeing their right to safe mobility. RRWS is also a founding member and the managing partner of the New Yorkers for Safe Transit coalition, raising awareness of gender-based violence in mass transit, organizing survivors and pursuing policy change work. Through all of its programs, RRWS works to engage constituents at the core level of organizational and program decision-making as a crucial part of a holistic approach to justice not only for women and girls, but for all communities targeted for harassment and violence in public spaces.

## Sauti Yetu Center for African Women

Sauti Yetu (meaning Our Voice in Swahili) works with immigrant African women and girls to articulate, demand, and exercise their rights. Sauti Yetu focuses on gender-based violence, reproductive and sexual health and rights, and enhancing women's and girls' leadership. The organization's long-term objectives are to raise awareness about violence against women and girls; develop strategies to support victims and survivors in the community; ensure that women have access to information and services on reproductive and sexual health and rights; develop culturally appropriate information, education and training materials for service providers and immigrant communities; and educate the general public by providing analysis of emerging issues for and the experiences of African women and girls. Sauti Yetu accomplishes these objectives through public education, advocacy, training, capacity building, and direct services to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

## Sistas on the Rise

Sistas on the Rise (SOTR) emerged out of the need for a space for young women of color (particularly young mothers) to participate and make their voices heard in social and economic justice work. Out of this need SOTR developed a youth-led collective model, called the Leadership Circle, which is also the core decision-making body for the organization, composed of members and staff who are all from the community and are almost all young mothers. SOTR uses the framework of reproductive justice to strengthen connections among issues and to create a wider spectrum of work with young mothers. SOTR provides a Young Mothers Leadership Development Program, which runs for ten weeks with ten young mothers who receive childcare on site, a weekly stipend, and a scholarship upon completion of the program. The training has three interconnected themes: 1) “The personal is political,” which focuses on personal healing from trauma and abuse, establishing healthy relationships, trust and team-building skills, and stress management techniques; 2) “Women keep our skies from falling,” which introduces community organizing skills, public speaking skills, action planning, and movement Herstory; and 3) “New Blood,” which pushes the young mothers to use all the skills they have learned to create a community action project that speaks to the issues that they have become more passionate about.

## Sisterhood Mobilized for AIDS/HIV Research and Treatment

Sisterhood Mobilized for AIDS/HIV Research and Treatment (SMART) is the only community-based treatment, health, and prevention education, service, and advocacy organization run by and for women living with HIV/AIDS in New York City. SMART’s program model is designed with significant participant input: It is based on a realistic and practical approach that engages “hard to reach” and overlooked women that represent New York’s most economically vulnerable and underserved populations, who in addition to living with HIV/AIDS, have experienced and/or are at risk for homelessness, domestic violence, substance abuse, incarceration, and mental illness, which complicate their ability to effectively access HIV treatment and maintain their health. The core 24-week program, SMART University (SU), provides interactive and educational sessions that help women successfully navigate their way through the complex and often intimidating medical care system and develop the knowledge, tools, and confidence to advocate on their own behalf, becoming active partners in their health and care rather than passive patients. Women who regularly attend SU classes are eligible for the simultaneously run adjunct SMART “A-B-C” programs: SMART Art, a unique comprehensive and hands-on art program; SMART Body, an interactive cooking and nutrition program that promotes healthy eating and safe food preparation; and SMART Computer, a program that builds concrete writing and basic

computer literacy skills. The SMART “A-B-C” programs build practical skills that help women take steps to break the cycle of poverty and gender-related inequities to improve their socio-economic status. Participants also develop an understanding of how the challenges they face trying to access and sustain care may be the consequence of discrimination, racism, poverty, and domestic violence. This increased understanding of the impact of these external issues on their lives helps them gain/regain self-esteem and reduce isolation, take control of their health and lives so as to ensure they are receiving the acceptable standard of care for living with HIV, and encourages participation in advocacy.

## Sylvia Rivera Law Project

The Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP) works to guarantee that all people are free to determine their gender identity and expression, regardless of income or race, and without facing harassment, discrimination, or violence. Combining direct legal services and litigation, policy-reform, public education, and community organizing, SRLP works to improve access to respectful and affirming healthcare and provides services for low-income people and people of color who are transgender, intersex, or gender non-conforming. SRLP’s Transgender Health Equality program improves healthcare access for transgender people in New York. SRLP’s community-based approach views direct services as only one component in enabling trans people to take

up an active political voice in the movement focused on poverty and racism. SRLP uses a non-hierarchical collective structure that models a more just society. Staff and volunteer collective members share equal decision-making power through processes structured to avoid traditional hierarchies based on class, race, and educational privilege. This collective structure maximizes community involvement and supports both the sustainability and accountability of SRLP’s work.

## Voces Latinas

Voces Latinas was founded to reduce the rate of HIV transmission among immigrant Latinas by connecting them with culturally and linguistically sensitive resources and services. Voces Latinas’ programs are all geared to educate and empower immigrant Latinas around reproductive rights in order to reduce violence and HIV risk. Through workshops and trainings, Voces Latinas points out that economic, social, and political power and resources are needed in order for immigrant Latinas to make healthier decisions for themselves and their families and in order to advocate for their community. Using a peer-to-peer model, the Promotoras advocacy and leadership training program prepares immigrant Latinas living with or at risk for HIV/AIDS in Queens to be advocates, leaders, and mentors in their communities. The 16-week curriculum and practicum includes trainings on HIV and violence prevention, as well as life skills such as communication, engagement,



advocacy, presentation, and computer skills. The training prepares women who initially sought services to reach out to their communities, make referrals, advocate for their communities with city and state legislators, and bring more awareness about HIV/AIDS and risk factors to the Latino community. The women participate in condom distribution projects, travel to Albany to meet with legislators, participate in community forums, conferences, and workshops, and testify at City Council hearings.

### Women's HIV Collaborative of New York

The Women's HIV Collaborative of New York (WHCNY) emerged out of ad hoc meetings among HIV/AIDS service providers and women living with

HIV. By 2000, the Women's HIV Collaborative of New York had more than 40 nonprofit service providers and advocates for women's health from New York State, including 30 HIV-positive women—all working together to establish a sustainable and broadly based network dedicated to addressing the multiple needs of women infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS. The Collaborative seeks to promote gender equity in HIV clinical research, create women-centered models of care, and increase access to services for women living with HIV/AIDS. The Collaborative works to document disparities in funding, research, and treatment for women and uses the collective power of its members to advocate for policies that advance women's rights. For example, the Collaborative has developed a community mapping project that will provide integrated access to

various data sets that have traditionally been in disparate sites, thus allowing for the development of a holistic view of women and girls and the issues that impact their lives, namely poverty, the criminal justice system, reproductive and sexual health, and health services and care.

## Young Women of Color HIV/AIDS Coalition

The Young Women of Color HIV/AIDS Coalition (YWCHAC) was convened as a response to the steadily increasing HIV rates among young black and Latina women in NYC, who lead the nation in reported AIDS cases among 13 to 24 year olds. The organization provides community-based peer health education and information, access to an adolescent medical center, and comprehensive social services to support young women living with HIV/AIDS. YWCHAC's vision is a coalition of and for young women of color that fosters their development of the organizing and advocacy skills necessary to change the climate in which decisions about them are being made—a climate that too often both excludes young women of color, and approaches issues like economics, reproductive health, and safety as if they belong in separate silos. To bridge the gaps created by these silos and connect these issues YWCHAC develops effective youth-adult partnerships; convenes Speak Out sessions designed to allow young women to articulate the issues they face each day; conducts meetings on topics affecting the lives of young women of color for

youth services providers in NYC; provides trainings and workshops for peer educators; hosts safer sex education parties for young women; and convenes a health summit for young women of color in NYC in honor of National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day.

## Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice

Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice (YMPJ) works in some of the most impoverished neighborhoods in the Bronx with the mission of creating justice for these communities. YMPJ's innovative programs include a peer-mediated conflict resolution model, created and implemented by its restorative justice team, along with a model for Community Building and Organizing Projects (CBOP). A CBOP can be realized in the short term while being connected to larger campaigns. A project may include getting signatures on a petition, creating a mural, or installing rain barrels. Building on the success of its Center for Community Wellness, YMPJ has launched Sisters of Prophetic Healing and Action (SOPHIA). SOPHIA, which builds young women's leadership through organizing, creates safe places for young women to explore the physical, mental, health, and spiritual issues that they face and to grow together as leaders in the community. Through SOPHIA young women, aged 13-18, meet weekly to share experiences, discuss issues specific to girls, partake in sisterhood activities with adult female staff, and design and lead girl-specific activities that will raise community awareness on gender issues.

# VISIONS & THEMES

## Justice Beyond Reproduction

What does “Reproductive Justice” look like in practice, in the vision and daily work of a diverse group of grassroots organizations focused on women and girls with exceptionally challenging situations in New York City? The 17 agencies, profiled above, are distinguished by their innovative programs that expand the meaning of reproductive justice. While the concept of reproductive justice resonates with the missions and projects of many of these groups, others are concerned that the term calls up too narrow a vision for social change. Their critiques range from a concern that reproductive justice implies a singular gendered focus on women and can leave out issues of sexuality not related to reproduction, to a concern that the concept of “justice” slips too easily into a model of crime and incarceration. For those organizations that do take up the term, they find it resonates most if they can make the concept and movement a site for developing connections among issues. Reading across the many responses to this question, the consistency with which organizations creatively wove together long- and short-term change suggests at least one possible redefinition: Reproductive justice would mean, for a start, not reproducing the structures that have put their communities in crisis in the first place.

**Brooklyn Young Mothers’ Collective:** “We stretch the idea [of reproductive justice] by focusing less on how ‘reproduction’ is framed and more on the economic and social well-being of women and girls. We do this by developing programs and advocacy work that are less about ‘body sovereignty’ and more about achieving agency through the advancement of young women through access to education.”

**Sistas on the Rise:** “The concept of reproductive justice has created a space for an organization like ours to become a part of a larger movement where a number of intersections have been created. Our primary work that identifies with the reproductive justice concept is our educational organizing. We believe that all young mothers deserve a right to access educational services and have a support system within the institution to increase their likelihood of completing their educational goals. This will help to break the cycle of poverty and help young mothers to move on and become economically secure adults.”

**RightRides for Women’s Safety:** “Just isolating the focus on serving girls and women does not relate [to the work that we do], as we work with a significant number of transgender people (both male and female identified), gay and bisexual men, as well as gender nonconforming individuals.”

**Sylvia Rivera Law Project:** “...the concept of reproductive justice definitely relates to our mission and work. However, we believe reproductive justice is not exclusive to those who identify as women and girls, but is for all people who face gender-based oppression.”

Reflecting on the concept of reproductive justice, many organizations also offered expansive conceptions of justice and rights more generally. The Red Hook Initiative offered a compelling new way to frame this comprehensive understanding of rights and justice: *developmental justice*.

**Red Hook Initiative:** “Our work is not just related ultimately to how we reproduce, as women—and what gets in the way of that process. Our work is about developmental justice. Everyone should have the right to develop,

maximize one's potential, and grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and creatively. Limited access to clean air, clean waterways, full amazing libraries, progressive education, safe neighborhoods, and concrete resources like education, food, or living wages limits any human being's ability to develop. Women are more likely to experience these injustices, especially women of African and Latin descent, given racism, sexism, and classism perpetuated within social institutions. Our work aims to confront these institutions and co-create spaces where community residents can gain power and access, while creating new institutions that support holistic development."

**NYCLU Teen Health Initiative:** "[O]ur legal work goes far beyond the traditional arena of abortion rights, as described on our website: *The Reproductive Rights Project (RRP) of NYCLU defines reproductive rights broadly to include not only abortion rights and access, but also birth control, reproductive and sexual health, equal treatment of pregnant and parenting women in employment and education, comprehensive and medically accurate sex and HIV/AIDS education, and patient privacy. RRP is committed to preserving and expanding the rights of all New Yorkers, but especially the most vulnerable: low-income women, women of color, and adolescents. We further our goals through litigation and legal analysis, advocacy, outreach, and education.*"

**African Hope Committee:** "We define reproductive justice as every woman's right for complete physical, mental, spiritual, and social well-being, which can be achieved when women and girls are empowered to have a voice [and] to make informed choices that will improve their sexual health and quality of life."

## Embodied Freedom

Living the dream of justice involves really living in our bodies— not just inhabiting them, but claiming and nurturing our bodily needs and desires. A majority of the grantee partners have at least some programs that emphasize the resources necessary to enable embodied freedom and healthy living.

**Girls for Gender Equity:** "Reproductive justice is about viewing women and girls holistically and not compartmentalizing women's experiences. It includes taking into account the entirety of women's and girls' experiences as it relates to race, class, age, etc. For our Sisters in Strength youth that would look like teenage girls feeling confident in their bodies and being part of the health insurance reform conversation. For our middle school youth that would mean having the much needed and desired education and conversations in school, after school, and in the home about their bodies, desires, and reproductive justice."

**SMART:** "SMART addresses healthcare disparities in a comprehensive way. We know that gender-specific social issues may negatively impact women's ability to access needed services. The role of SMART is to bridge the gap between providers and the women, so they may work as partners in their healthcare decisions. We provide vital treatment and health information in order to make informed decisions about their primary care, mental health, and sexual reproductive health so that they are able to receive the acceptable standard of care. After our participants understand and get the treatment and health

information for themselves, they are able to go on to the next step of understanding the intricacies of policies that affect them.”

## Resisting Gender Oppression

If freedom and justice are to be embodied, or indeed be achieved at all, then resistance to gender oppression is a crucial part of the work of these organizations. They have developed programs to resist various mechanisms of gender oppression, including those enacted through the enforcement of a binary male-female version of gender, as well as through oppressive gender relations. Responding organizations work at many different sites to address and resist gender oppression: within communities, in the larger society, on the street, at work, and in intimate relations.

**SRLP:** “The policing of gender identity, including discrimination based on gender identity and expression, is a form of reproductive oppression because it denies freedom for all people to maintain the autonomy of their own bodies, access necessary healthcare, and exercise meaningful control over their reproductive lives. We strongly believe in broad coalitional work against gender oppression in all forms and we often work within the reproductive justice framework to ensure that all people are able to access the healthcare they need and that all people can make their own decisions about their bodies, including trans people and those who are living in poverty or in prison.”

**Voces Latinas:** “At Voces Latinas we educate

immigrant Latinas around HIV risk and violence and the relation to cultural norms. Culturally, women are raised to not make the decisions around sexual practices, to leave such decisions to the man. Domestic violence is also very prevalent in Latin American countries and the laws do not really lend themselves to protecting women. Immigrant Latinas are often fearful about their immigration status when coming to this country. This fear is the biggest barrier to them seeking services, including medical services, legal services, police help, and HIV testing for fear that it will affect their immigration proceedings. This fear also keeps many immigrant Latinas and their children silent and dependent on their partners. The education we provide around their bodies and high-risk behaviors as it relates to their immigration experience raises their awareness and they begin to identify their risk to HIV and violence.”

**Girls for Gender Equity:** “GGE organizes, educates, and leads programs in the community to change society’s derogatory views of Black and Latina women and girls. GGE was created to right the social wrongs that plague the community and have girls and women living, learning, working, and playing in an environment free of fear and oppression. As a result of the many stories of gender-based violence that students, teachers, and parents have reported and the NYC Department of Education’s Office of Youth Development’s indifference to the crimes being committed in NYC public schools, Sisters in Strength (teen youth organizers), . . . GGE’s brave and often vulnerable youth are on the front lines of GGE’s social justice movements and are primarily

Black, Caribbean/West Indian, and Latina from first and second generation/bilingual homes. Some are parenting teens, LGBTQ and HIV-positive.”

## SUSTAINABLE PROGRAMS WITH IMMEDIATE IMPACT

### Connecting Services and Advocacy

One of the most wrenching dilemmas that organizations concerned with social and economic justice may face is how to address their communities’ urgent day-to-day needs and at the same time take meaningful steps towards large-scale change. Rather than balancing service provision and advocacy against each other, the projects we highlight are eloquent testimony to the idea that providing services to meet basic needs is a crucial first step toward enabling individuals and entire communities to participate in movements for change. At the same time, they show that mobilizing economically, politically, and socially marginalized people to become community change agents does not divert resources from “pressing” needs of day-to-day survival. To the contrary, advocacy can revolutionize possibilities for the provision of services. Making connections between service and advocacy enables those who are most directly affected by issues of injustice to have “an active political voice” (SRLP) in making change.

**Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice:** “We find that if people’s basic needs are not met that they are often ill-equipped to participate in movement work even though they are the ones directly affected by the justice issue we are working towards.

YMPJ has a Center for Community Justice that works with youth and their families to address these needs so that they can then become active on a campaign.”

**DAMAYAN:** “DAMAYAN’s unique model of solid organizing combines sharp political analysis and education with services, base-building, leadership development, and advocacy.... Social change occurs through the direct participation and engagement of the membership and leadership. On one level, our goal is to organize Filipino domestic workers to make the leap from isolation to socialization and from the private sphere into the public sphere of advocacy. On another level, our goal is to develop leaders from amongst the membership who are the most engaged, have ownership of the organization, and are interested in helping to run the organization.”

**SMART:** “SMART offers interconnected HIV intervention and advocacy programs that help women become active partners in their HIV care rather than passive patients.”

**Girls for Gender Equity:** “In an effort to end to sexist practices in the New York City public schools and streets GGE takes a dual approach of community organizing and service provision. GGE mobilizes girls, boys, women, men, parents, and teachers under Title IX of the Education amendment . . . to work as a collective toward systemic change in all of the support networks that shape the development and achievement of girls and women.”

**SRLP:** “The partnering of direct legal services with organizing, and the leadership and governance models SRLP is pioneering through our collective model, increase the effectiveness and accountability of our work and maximize

the impact of our agenda for change and equality. We are especially excited about doing this work in the context of service provision, challenging the tradition of legal services that are divorced from community organizing and uncritical of race and class dynamics between lawyers and their clients.”

## Amplifying Impact and Developing Sustainability

The best practices offered by the organizations represent important innovations in sustainable programming. They do this, in part, by deep engagement with individual participants, sometimes working with the same people over the course of years. Many of the organizations develop sustainability by ensuring that their programs come out of “the voices and experiences” (GEMS) or the self-identified and “very specific needs” (Love Heals) of program participants. Other strategies for sustainability included providing interconnected services to multiple constituencies within a single community, and helping participants secure the material resources they need to sustain healthy lives for themselves and their families over the long term.

**RightRides for Women’s Safety:** “We work to engage constituents at the core level of organizational and program decision making. Nearly 40% of program participants then become volunteers who seek further involvement in growing our programs and organization, an incredible show of community ownership and engagement.”

**NYCLU Teen Health Initiative:** “Our peer educators are financially compensated with an incentive stipend for their

work, which both validates the importance of their work and ensures that low-income youth who depend on, or whose families depend on, their income can participate in THI. We also work hard to help them ensure their access to higher education and other job and scholarship activities, and to understand how to make reproductive justice or other forms of social justice activism a lifetime pursuit.”

Finding routes to sustainability can be difficult, but these organizations have developed innovative practices that amplify the impact of their work, thus increasing the chances of developing long-term sustainability. First and foremost, the organizations draw together already existing resources in communities, tapping “into the strengths that each woman contains” (Voces Latinas). When organizations can facilitate the development of new skills for community members, provide new opportunities for community leadership, or bring in additional resources, the positive effects reverberate throughout the community.

**Voces Latinas:** “[We believe] in the peer-to-peer model. It is much more effective for the women in the community to educate other women from their community. They are the true experts and know best how to identify the highest at risk. They learn to reach out, advocate, connect women to service, and facilitate support groups for women experiencing violence.”

**Women’s HIV Collaborative of NY:** “The Collaborative is rooted in the leadership and experiences of women living with HIV and AIDS. They develop research, policy proposals, community organizing, education, and resources to promote platforms that support social justice and human rights for all.”

**Sauti Yetu:** “Women and girls face barriers to reaching

their full potential when confronted with discrimination based not only on race, class, and gender, but also on language, ethnicity, religion, cultural practice, or immigrant status. In New York City and across the United States, Sauti Yetu is working to empower immigrant African women to agitate for, exercise, and protect their rights. Our work is directed by the belief that generating deep-rooted and sustainable social change and justice in any society requires the full participation of all its citizens.”

**African Hope Committee:** “AHC’s ‘best practices’ include our mentorship program for clients, volunteers, and interns which empowers them with skills to be change agents in the community [and helps to] increase advocacy in regard to immigration reforms, thereby ensuring the right and freedom of immigrant women to make informed decisions for themselves and their families.”

## ACTION ON BEHALF OF A COMPREHENSIVE VISION

### Holism

If a single word could capture the aspirations of the organizations, it might be “holism.” A commitment to “not compartmentalize women’s experiences” (Girls for Gender Equity) resonates with virtually all these organizations. Together, the concepts of “comprehensive justice” and “holistic well-being” build a broad and inspiring vision of the world that might be created through the work of these organizations.

### Economic Justice

Comprehensive justice entails a recognition that reproductive and economic justice are intertwined: reproductive justice is necessary to economic stability and economic resources are necessary to realize reproductive justice. In the survey, we asked grantee partners about the concept of “economic security,” which drew some sharp critique as “a myth in our current globalized market economy” (Red Hook Initiative). While economic security may be unrealistic, recognizing and using the resources that are already available in communities is crucial, as is developing new means for community members to gain access to economic resources. Recognizing the interconnection between reproductive and economic justice opens a pathway for these organizations to build a meaningfully comprehensive movement for justice and well-being.

**Love Heals:** “Unintended and/or teenage pregnancy correlates strongly with limited educational achievement and economic security. Those who contract HIV face similar challenges. Young women—and even older women—frequently lack knowledge of their own bodies, communication skills, and a sense of self-efficacy with regard to their ability to negotiate when and how they participate (or do not participate) in sexual activity. At the same time, they see such activity as a means toward economic security—whether in the form of child support or simply someone to pay their cell phone bill—a situation that is exacerbated when young women are involved with older men.”

**Women’s HIV Collaborative of NY:** “We see the links echoed in our report, ‘Women and Girls Living with HIV and

AIDS in NYC: A Mapping Project and Literature Review,<sup>7</sup> that highlights the intersectionality of women who live with HIV/AIDS and the social drivers that contribute to them acquiring the virus. In other words, it is not just behavioral—other stressors such as poverty, high rates of incarceration, and low rates of adults with high school diplomas help to create an environment [conducive to transmission]. Not having finished high school, women are making choices based on survival, and sometimes that might mean having unprotected sex in exchange for food or a place to stay, or remaining in a relationship where [a woman] is being abused where she has no power to negotiate safe sex.”

**Red Hook Initiative:** “Our concept of developmental justice offers women tools to access what is available—be it part-time or full-time, long or short term. The resources we offer and skills we teach at RHI can be leveraged [to] provide increased family stability and opportunities for development.”

**DAMAYAN:** “[A]long with the ability to reproduce and the concomitant task of raising the next generation of American workers, domestic work is the invisible and devalued work conferred upon women. In line with this analysis, reproductive justice is not only about women’s ability to reproduce biologically, but likewise about women’s assumed responsibility to reproduce or enable other work. When this work [of social reproduction] is valued, reproductive justice is more likely to occur.”

**Young Women of Color HIV/AIDS Coalition:** “All the issues in a woman’s life are interconnected. Economic

security plays a major part in decision-making about health, wellness, and safety of women and their families. Reproductive justice encompasses all aspects of a woman/girl’s life, particularly in HIV prevention. So many decisions are made for women and girls without their input or participation and in silos. When we separate the issues, we separate a woman.”

These impressive organizations agree that if we are to build social movements that are fully inclusive we must move beyond advocating for reproductive justice alone. Building such broadly based movements will not only produce a wider sense of justice, it will also promote a stronger foundation for reproductive rights, freedoms and justice. Working in and amongst the intersections of various issues, these organizations strive everyday to make connections: connections between reproductive and economic justice and across multiple issues, between immediate intervention and long-term empowerment, between service-provision and systemic change and among different aspects of any person’s life. By taking this intersectional approach, the organizations have developed new models of action: from fully incorporating community members into organizational leadership, to models of peer-to-peer organizing, to new forms of engagement with mainstream institutions, to models of community education that value embodiment and empowerment regardless of gender. The organizations value individuals and communities holistically and they understand justice—both reproductive and economic justice—comprehensively.

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