

# ACTIVIST PHILANTHROPIST

Winter 2019  
VOLUME 5 | ISSUE 1

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On the cover: Grantee partner IGNITE!

**Dear Friend,**

Welcome to the current issue of *Activist Philanthropist*. While women continue to make strides, there is still much work to be done to ensure that all women and families are able to prosper and live safe, healthy lives. In this issue, we are excited to showcase the work of our grantee partners and leaders working to advance economic, gender, and racial justice in New York City and beyond:

- Vivian Nixon, Executive Director of College and Community Fellowship, shares her personal connections to the final installment of our *Blueprint for Investing in Women Age 25-59* report.
- Karla Alvarez, Executive Director of Mixteca, shares the organization's work including programs that address issues ranging from intimate partner violence and adult education, to Know Your Rights campaigns that address the current political landscape.
- Afua Atta-Mensah, Esq., Executive Director of Community Voices Heard, shares her work leading grassroots organizing efforts to build power with individuals and families of color in low-income communities throughout New York State.
- Author Donna Hylton discusses *A Little Piece of Light: A Memoir of Hope, Prison and a Life Unbound*, her powerful memoir of her 27-year incarceration and journey to becoming a champion of criminal justice reform and women's rights.
- Manizha Naderi, outgoing Executive Director of Women for Afghan Women, reflects on her time leading this dynamic organization.

You'll learn more about our unique partnership with Cause Effective and a program we co-designed to support the leadership of development directors—a key role in nonprofit organizations and a launching pad to executive director roles. You'll also meet Daisy Khan of Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE). Daisy is a longtime activist and thought leader on Muslim women's rights whose powerful journey is shared through her memoir *Born With Wings*. This issue also includes roundups of the Radical Generosity Gala and Neighborhood Dinner, The Foundation's fall signature events.

Thank you for your continued engagement as an activist philanthropist, and for standing with us as we create community-based solutions alongside women and families in the heart of New York City and beyond!



Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ana Oliveira', written in a cursive style.

**Ana Oliveira**  
President and CEO



OP-ED

# Blueprint for Women Age 25-59

## Investing When it Matters Most

by Reverend Vivian Nixon,  
Executive Director of College  
and Community Fellowship

At the age of 14 I aspired to be a writer. I vividly remember writing a short story inspired by my mother. The title of the story was *Life Begins at Fifty*. I painstakingly wrote my sci-fi fantasy of a middle-aged bad-ass heroine based on the observations I had made during my mother's reinvention of herself, which began when I became useful in the care of my younger brothers. The protagonist of *Life Begins at Fifty* is a prominent space scientist living in a dystopian society in which a worldwide mandatory euthanasia policy had been established. Euthanasia in this society was meant not only to relieve suffering from grave illness but suffering from persistent poverty as well. In short, the governing powers of society had decided

that the right to live past age 50 was dependent on one's financial security and ability to be completely self-reliant.

My mother was 37 years old when I etched out my crude short story in number 2 pencil. She'd begun to scorn the complicated mix of caretaking roles she had been forced to take on. With three children aged 5-14, two aging parents, an ailing husband, a full-time job, and a sense of obligation to contribute time and resources to our community, my mother was stretched thin and unsupported. Mom also had her personal aspirations to contend with. She had been accepted into nursing school in 1955 when she graduated high school but could not afford to attend. Instead, she took a job

at the phone company. Twenty years later, when she was able to hand off the care of my brothers and the running of the household to me, she set out to follow her own path. She enrolled in nursing school at New York Institute of Technology, she joined several nonprofit boards, she took on leadership roles in the church, she ran for the school board, she ran for police commissioner—all in quick succession as if she were making up for lost time. Sadly, she was not able to escape the overwhelming responsibility that many women of color bear. There was no assistance for her to finish school. She dropped out. My dad became disabled from work-related injuries and cancers in his early fifties. The unsuccessful legal fight for compensation

financially crippled our family. Hopes of home ownership, college, and comfortable retirement were destroyed. Dad died of liver and colon cancer in 1990. At age 58 my mother took a retirement package from the phone company and took a part-time job to make ends meet. In retirement she continued to use her political voice as an advocate for racial equity, particularly as it relates to healthcare, policing, education and housing. She worked until she died at 70 from heart disease and diabetes.

The New York Women's Foundation report, "Blueprint for Investing in Women Ages 25–59," uses empirical evidence to articulate what I learned by watching the women in my family and community live their subsistent lives. Some see women younger than 25 as full of possibility and promise. Investing in their health, safety, and professional and personal success is an obvious choice. On the other hand, women over 59 are often assumed to have stopped producing. Thus, services to the elderly are society's way of taking care of those who can't take care of themselves. That is an investment that most Americans understand and support. But what about women who live between those extremes? Black and brown women age 25 through 59 are assumed to be at their peak. Still, there is

something distinctive about us that demands attention. The expectation that we should be superwomen like the protagonist in my teenage dystopian fantasy has driven women of color to raise generations of men and women who exceed the accomplishments of their ancestors. This has come with significant sacrifice. As in the case of my mother, our own ambitions are often ambushed in the process. Our role as caregivers and beacons of support often eclipses the fact that to nourish others without depleting ourselves, we need support from our community and our government. While all women stand to benefit from being supported in their role as caretakers, as this report shows, adequate support looks different in communities of color.

According to the report, "Women of color and immigrant women hold paid jobs—and are the primary or sole providers for their families—significantly more frequently than white, U.S.-born women." My mother entered the workforce long before the women's liberation movement, and in the years since, employment opportunities have risen for women overall. But the quality of those opportunities still reflects the limitations of patriarchy, structural racism, and xenophobia. Across New York State, the rate of workforce participation for

women with children under the age of six is 81 percent for Black women and 64 percent for Latina women—and only 50 percent for White women. The report also found that while "women earn less than white males across all job categories—the size of the wage differential varies greatly by race and ethnicity.

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**Women of color and immigrant women hold paid jobs—and are the primary or sole providers for their families—significantly more frequently than white, U.S.-born women.**

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White women earn 84 cents to every dollar earned by White men; Asian women earn 63 cents; Black women, 55 cents; and Latina women, 46 cents.”

Women of color age 25–59 juggle countless challenges as we attempt to reach our full potential. Black and brown and immigrant mothers bear the brunt of policies that target and punish

their children from school to prison to the workplace. We, at the age when many

and otherwise troubled children, parents, and partners as well as extended

## **The majority of Medicaid recipients are wage earners, and of the rest, a plurality are either ill or disabled, or they perform necessary unpaid work in families supported by other breadwinners, like taking care of children, and elderly or sick relatives.**

privileged women thrive, are fighting for equal education, equal housing, affordable child care, reproductive rights and healthcare, protection from violence, and fairness in the courts and the workplace. The report indicates that while women in our prime years still want to accomplish our dreams, there are precious few supports to do so. “Despite exceptionally high rates of workforce participation, they are largely barred from enjoying economic security, safety, and health, due to: (1) exploitative wages and untenable working conditions; (2) lack of access to the basic tools of well-being that other New Yorkers take for granted; and (3) the degree to which they are regularly exposed to violence from a range of sources.” Our resources are spent caring for unemployed, underemployed, imprisoned

family and community. All this while we ourselves remain underemployed and underpaid, working behind the scenes as others build empires around us.

The world view may be changing but remnants of a world where women serve at the pleasure of men’s survival and success persist. This plays out in unambiguous ways in communities of color. Black, brown and immigrant women are tolerated when they function in support of others. When we exercise our own judgment and authority to pursue our goals, we’re often left to our own devices. Even when programs do support women coming into their own during this prime age, critics are out there scrutinizing every step, making sure we don’t get away with anything. This “gotcha” mindset in supporting people is demonstrated in

the emergence of “work for Medicaid” policies. “The majority of Medicaid recipients are wage earners, and of the rest, a plurality are either ill or disabled, or they perform necessary unpaid work in families supported by other breadwinners, like taking care of children, and elderly or sick relatives.” Heaven forbid we might get support for our care after decades of taking care of others. All we really want are the basics of a secure future. These are things that others, whom we have carried, take for granted.

**Vivian Nixon is Executive Director of College and Community Fellowship (CCF), an organization committed to removing individual and structural barriers to higher education for women with criminal record histories and their families. As a formerly incarcerated woman and prior CCF program participant, Rev. Nixon is uniquely positioned to lead the charge to help justice-involved women and their families have a better future.**



## About the *Blueprint for Investing in Women Age 25-59*

New York City women—particularly women of color and immigrants—are hindered in what should be their prime years by challenges and barriers that limit their prospects and keep them in poverty. The report finds that in New York City, women of color and immigrant women aged 25-59 bear the main brunt of responsibility for both raising and providing for their own families; for furnishing the labor force that undergirds the economy; and for leading the efforts that sustain their communities. Compounding the core economic tolls created by inequitable wages, two main factors overwhelmingly contribute to the high rates of poverty experienced by so many women of color and immigrant women and their families: the lack of affordable housing and lack of access to quality child care. In addition to calling for collaborative, accelerated actions to expand access to affordable permanent housing and high-quality child care, the report includes other recommendations for dismantling the obstacles that women of color and immigrant women face. These include:

- recommending that government further the creation and enforcement of legislative remedies that support economic protections

such as family leave, equal pay, and fair overtime pay;

- calling on the nonprofit sector to continue its advocacy and provide programs and services that promote economic self-sufficiency;
- and recommending that the philanthropic sector in New York actively support and prioritize those organizations addressing the concerns of women of color and immigrant women through multi-funder efforts designed to promote unified new infusions of resources.

This report is the final installment of The New York Women's Foundation's Voices from the Field series comprising four reports that explore the position, needs, and strategies for supporting the security and contributions of low-income New York City women during one of four major developmental periods (ages 0-8, 9-24, 25-59, and 60+). Its goals are to broaden understanding of the key roles and issues of New York City's low-income girls and women; stimulate broad, productive discussion of how best to support those roles and address those issues; and catalyze bold investment into promising strategies and solutions. Visit [www.nywf.org](http://www.nywf.org) to read the full report.

# Sanctuary and Security in Sunset Park: Meet Mixteca

by Humera Afridi

On any given Saturday, the bright, loft space of Mixteca in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, bustles with activity. Community members gather for health, literacy, and immigration rights workshops and Healthy Relationships support meetings. For many Spanish-speaking immigrants in New York City, Mixteca's office is "a second living room."

Saturday, January 26, was particularly busy—a volunteer orientation workshop was in progress with close to twenty new people in attendance. Three to 4 times a year, Mixteca puts out a call for volunteers to fill a variety of positions across its program areas. Volunteers form the backbone of this community organization—up to 40 volunteers each year serve in various roles from yoga instructors to computer and adult literacy class teachers.

"We offer a variety of holistic services and all of them ultimately serve the immigrant community," explains Karla Alvarez, the dynamic executive director at the helm of the venerable nonprofit, which started in the basement of a dentist's office 20 years ago. Mixteca aims to



Mixteca's Sunset Park location.

remove the cultural, linguistic, social, and economic barriers that can impede the ability of Mexican and Latin American immigrants to thrive. It also offers a critical lifeline to immigrants who are uncertain of their options—and the fate of their families—under the current political administration.

In 2000, founding member Dr. Gabriel Rincon realized the urgent need for sexual health education—especially on the topics of HIV/AIDS risk, prevention, and treatment—among Spanish-speaking immigrants and began giving informal talks out of his office

and at churches and community centers. "Back then in Sunset Park, there would be seven to eight immigrant men living in very small one- and two-bedroom apartments in townhouses—all working construction and manual labor jobs. They'd hire sex workers to service multiple men and HIV would spread very, very quickly," Karla recounts. Since then, the organization has evolved to support a host of other needs among Spanish-speaking immigrants. While in its early days Mixteca focused on Mexican Americans, today its membership includes people originating from Venezuela and Central America, reflecting



Mixteca's Know Your Rights workshop.

## Recognizing that many women were not going to leave their abusive partners for several complex reasons, we decided it was very important that we talk to the other side of the issue—talk to men about how to have healthy relationships.

the diverse Spanish-speaking population from recent waves of immigration.

Four main areas of programming form the bedrock of Mixteca's services: general health education (health screenings, nutrition, wellness); mental health; adult education; and immigration rights.

The New York Women's Foundation supports programming in the second focus area of mental health. In this area, Mixteca works to address intimate partner violence. Every Saturday, Mixteca

hosts Healthy Relationship workshops— a men's group meets in the morning and a separate group for women meets in the afternoon.

"Recognizing that many women were not going to leave their abusive partners for several complex reasons, we decided it was very important that we talk to the other side of the issue—talk to men about how to have healthy relationships," says Karla. Topics of discussion and contemplation include emotional intelligence, effective communication between partners, finding healthy outlets for pent-up

frustration and anger, and unlearning conditioned ways of thinking about gender.

"We didn't think there'd be enough interest, but we have around 40 men who come every week! It's bigger than our women's group," Karla exclaims. "It's because no one offers this to men ... If we really want to break the gender inequality cycle, we have to include work with men. We see there's a lot of work to be done and there is a real need. We've seen the importance of peer support for men and of having a space in which they're allowed to be vulnerable—which is not, at least in Latinx culture, allowed. Another interesting dynamic is that amongst compañeros, they call each other out if they see something that perpetuates gender inequality."

News of the success of the men's Healthy Relationship groups has reached the legal system. Courts requiring offenders to seek behavior modification refer them to Mixteca's workshops, which are free and offered in Spanish—a unique diversion solution in New York City.

"Our main goal is to support families as they navigate their situations. We're here to give them the tools. If they want to stay together and are willing to learn, we are here to provide the support," Karla explains,

sharing that there are men who come back months, even years, later to thank Mixteca for having given them an opportunity to address their behavior, saving them from being stripped away from their families without a chance.

Mixteca's third area of programming, adult education, provides English classes of various levels, as well as literacy classes in Spanish that cater to community members who did not receive formal education

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**Our main goal is to support families as they navigate their situations. We're here to give them the tools.**

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in their countries of origin. “Before they can even begin to learn a new language, they need to learn the basics of reading and writing in their native tongue,” explains Karla. While public libraries offer literacy programs, they are in English, making them inaccessible to many of Mixteca's constituents.

The fourth area of programming is fairly new in implementation, but one

that Mixteca has worked on from its earliest days—an immigration rights program that conducts “Know Your Rights” outreach and provides informational workshops on immigration issues. In the aftermath of the presidential election of 2016, outreach from a trusted source was particularly essential as fear and uncertainty rippled through the community amid questions and misinformation. Mixteca conducts preventive education outreach to arm community members against the predators and legal fraud that are rampant. In addition, it connects constituents to pro bono immigration attorneys and legal services. Six times a year, in collaboration with the Consulate General of Mexico, Mixteca hosts the Consulate on Wheels program in its office, helping hundreds of community members to access vital documentation.

Partially supported by a grant from The Foundation's Resilience NYC initiative—a response to changes in the national political landscape and the impact of federal policy changes on women and other disadvantaged communities—Mixteca piloted an initiative to train local women leaders, or promodoras, to carry out “Know Your Rights” workshops in the community. The promodoras build solidarity as an antidote to fear and connect members to a variety of services available from trusted sources.



Karla Alvarez, Executive Director of Mixteca.

“There is a lot of myth busting, a lot of regaining trust. We make it explicit that we serve everybody regardless of status,” Karla explains. “It's hard enough to ask for help. It's even more complicated when you fear disclosing such sensitive information about yourself.” Fear and uncertainty about immigration policy has resulted in self-withdrawal from public services, especially amongst those who are undocumented and concerned that any information they give might be used against them. Meanwhile, the expiration of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in December 2018 has complicated matters for women seeking asylum who are experiencing violence by a partner. Many of Mixteca's community members were once eligible to apply for asylum through the U Visa, but things are not so clear cut any more, especially for those

fleeing such circumstances in their countries of origin.

The separation of children from parents is not a direct issue that Mixteca has had to deal with, but on occasion, it has facilitated the reunion of unaccompanied minors with family members in New York City. Mixteca cautions relatives who are stepping forward to take guardianship of minors to first consult with a trusted attorney and ensure that their own status is secure before contacting officials. Circumstances like these have been used as a snare tactic, making legal support all the more crucial.

“For me it’s more important than ever that the community has an intimate relationship with us and that we open our doors to continue to be there for them, to be the antithesis of what they hear in the news, which is daunting and negative. Every day, I see community members come in and refuse to lose hope,” says Karla.

Before joining Mixteca, Karla Alvarez, a peace-building and human rights practitioner from the Bay Area, was a deputy country director in Mexico, running gender, labor, and youth violence prevention programs across the country. She firmly believes in the power of building local leadership to be the voice for immigrant justice. “I see Mixteca as becoming a place where we are giving

## Shifting the Paradigm: Violence Against Women

For 32 years, The New York Women’s Foundation has been investing in women-led, community-based solutions to ending the epidemic of violence against women. From economic empowerment for women leaving domestic violence situations, to specialized services for immigrant women escaping abuse, The Foundation has supported a wide range of advocacy and direct response services for survivors and their families.

### To accelerate change in this area, The Foundation made a paradigm shift.

Violence against women has largely been framed as a women’s issue, but that violence is largely carried out by men. The Foundation invests in men who are eager to disrupt cultural norms that marginalize and devalue others. We began in 2015 by supporting A Call to Men, an organization that promotes healthy, respectful manhood, and engages men in taking a leadership role in combatting violence against women. We continue to provide funding to help strengthen their programs and those like Mixteca’s, which address the learned disrespect, mistreatment, and abuse of women as part of the socialization process of boys and young men.

Through our investment, The Foundation is helping build a base of male leaders and allies working towards the eradication of violence and discrimination against women, girls, and LGBTQI individuals.

tools to the community for them to replicate and use. They are the ones who tell us how we need to phrase things and when we should talk to people. Every day, I witness the work ethic and dedication of the immigrant community and how much they contribute to the United States,” she says.

Each morning as she emerges from the subway and walks to the office, Karla has a direct view of the Statue of Liberty, a symbol that has come to represent what she works for with Mixteca every day. “I see the statue and remind myself why I’m here!” she says with a smile.



# Afua Atta-Mensah, Esq

## Q & A with Executive Director of Community Voices Heard

By Saba Sebhatu, The New School/IGNITE Fellow

**Community Voices Heard (CVH) is a member-led, multi-racial organization principally comprising women of color and low-income families in New York State. CVH tackles tough issues and builds power to secure racial, social, and economic justice for all New Yorkers. Through grassroots organizing, leadership development, policy changes, and creating new models of direct democracy, CVH is creating a truly equitable New York State.**

**1. Where did you begin or what prompted your initial interest in advocacy or law? Was there a seminal moment as a young woman that inspired you?**

I would say my interest in law started when I was very young, maybe 10. Our family went to court to support one

of our family members who suffered from the disease of addiction. I remember the racial inequality dynamics of litigants in the courtroom. I said at that moment that I wanted to be a lawyer. I later saw an episode of Law and Order loosely based on the Central Park 5 case and it resonated with me. I ended

up practicing for a little more than 10 years under the civil legal services and learned a lot about power analysis. Still, something wasn't complete. It felt as if there was a pocket missing and what needed to go hand in glove was the idea of strong community organizing... Law is very transactional in nature. You know my evolution from litigation to organizing is one in which I wanted to be part of something that was unapologetic about building power for brown and black folk. What would that look like if we were together building something that tangibly improves people's

lives? I wanted to move to the transformational and that is why I came to Community Voices Heard.

**2. How can we encourage women to take up leadership roles in their communities or encourage confidence in the ability that they can transform their communities?**

Women who are currently in positions like myself and others have to bet on other women. And it is unfair in one sense but as a Black woman, I am clear that I need to make space for women and particularly other women of color. We don't want to stereotype but women are more likely to second guess themselves compared to our male counterparts. If I could go back to my former self, I would say trust yourself more, trust your gut more because you were right.

**3. You mentioned “base-building” in one of your previous talks. Do you have advice for emerging community advocates and organizers on how to develop this base, and maintain it?**

Base-building is treated too much like an afterthought. It is a contact sport. It is not something you do from your office. If you want to do something radical, you have to have a face-to-face conversation. To me, the importance of base-building is just giving yourself the time and space to build

relationships with people. Sometimes where my well-intentioned colleagues go off course is moving campaigns without a base. I think some of us, all of us on the left, have not spent time building a base of engaged folks instead of talking to our friends.

**4. How does that work then if you don't have a constituency in mind?**

I think part of one-on-one meetings is to help you decide what it could be. Let's say you are interested in reproductive rights issues—you should be out there talking to folks who may or may not have an interest in reproductive health justice. Clearly women of all types of demographics, and hopefully within there using some intentional analysis, you then start asking, where is the value add? Who can I have better relationships with in that constituency?

**5. When you hear the term radical generosity, what comes to mind? In what ways can organizers practice radical generosity?**

Radical generosity talks to a different kind of philanthropy. One that takes risks, that understands that movement and movement building doesn't fit in one package. There are ebbs and flows and the radical has the idea of its own sustainability in mind. We see the same thing being done over and over and expecting the same

results. You need to have room for incubation if you are either going to win big, fail big, or you are going to learn. That is a radical notion, that we are going to take chances on each other. That is how we are going to make the system better. I think philanthropic organizations like The New York Women's Foundation should push their comrades in philanthropy to be more radical about how they do their giving. That will engender organizations to be more candid about what works and what doesn't. And also engender some folks to be bolder in some of the pilot work they are doing.

**6. Any progress to social change requires inclusivity. How do you foster that as a leader in your community? And do you have advice for other organizers?**

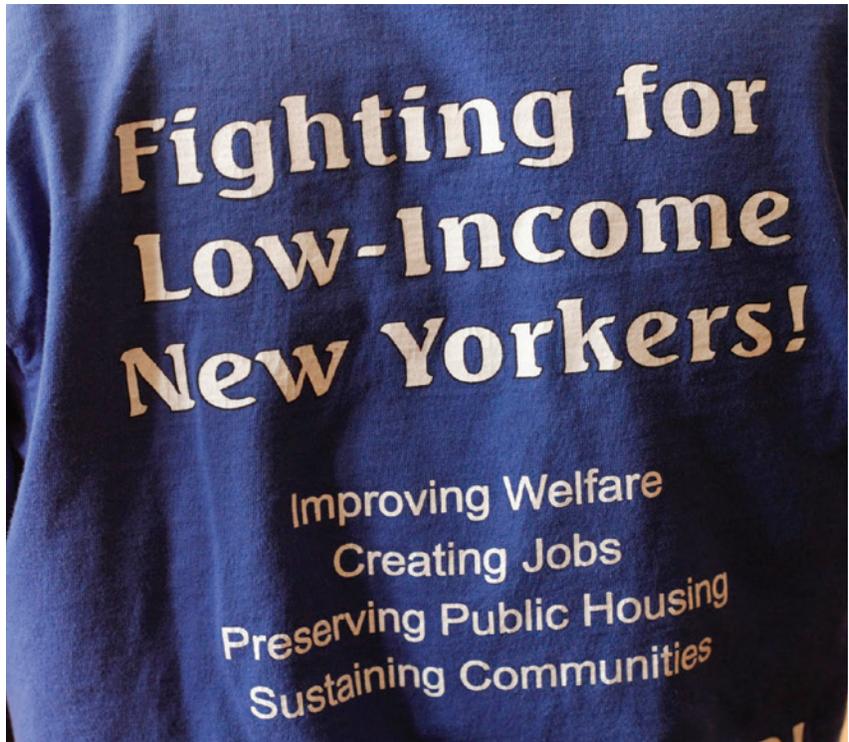
I would say that the way we provide a space where inclusivity is seen as a value means we have to speak to everybody. Not everybody is going to buy into what you are saying. The goal is to get a better understanding and various points of view. That is going to help us as we build power, and learn, and analyze how to win. You would be surprised as to who is a kindred spirit on ideology and winning. As an organization, we run a premium on talking—going to these meetings and trying to figure out what they do, why they do it, the manner in which they do it.

Why does this developer use this financing scheme? Why does this government agency have the policy the way they do? We have to wholesale engage. I think it has to do with engagement, so we aren't just saying, "no, we have to only speak to these people." That doesn't mean we don't engage with them. We have some values that are not malleable but we still have to engage them.

### **7. How has CVH galvanized women building solutions in their communities?**

We were able to push for the end of the Work Experience Program administratively in New York City. If you were receiving public assistance, New York City government would make you go do something like go pick up garbage or be cleaners at the MTA. If you couldn't go to school, you would have to go into the Work Experience Program. CVH started this radical idea that people could make policies that affect their lives better than people in ivory towers. The idea that punishing women, especially women with children, for being poor is not the way to help people out of poverty. Living wages get them out of poverty.

As opposed to getting free services from people, NYC government would have to hire people. So we had over 200 members who have been hired by the MTA—who were on public assistance—getting



a starting wage with benefits. Within a year they could be part of the union. We can say that is a life change, a generational change based on women who founded this organization. Similarly, in our Westchester chapter, we started Ban the Box—a bill in Yonkers that would allow folks, who had been previously in the criminal justice system, access to jobs to take care of themselves and their families.

How do we do something different? We also had a council member on the Yonkers City Council who did a campaign on behalf of then-candidate 25-year-old Corazon Pineda, who campaigned and won. She was the only woman on the Yonkers City Council and she brought our bill to the floor and was able to get it passed. This is what happens when women work together.

### **8. If there are young women who do not know where to become informed on how to start their journeys in community organizing, where would you suggest they begin?**

Come to CVH and talk to someone. They should also talk to people they respect or think are interesting. The schools are a microcosm unto themselves. We have young women now who are bold and unapologetic. When you look at the work organizers do, it is because it is deeply personal to them.



# Donna Hylton Wants to Change How the Judicial System Treats Victims of Abuse

By Mireya Navarro

“My name is Donna Hylton, and I’m formerly known as inmate 86G0206,” Hylton shouted into the microphone over the roaring crowd at the 2017 Women’s March in Washington. “But in this

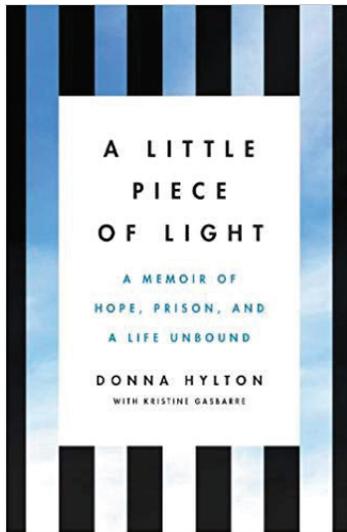
moment, in this movement, I’m here to talk about those women and those girls that society refuses to talk about.” She was referring to survivors of violence, abuse, and marginalization—because

she was one of them.

Just a few years before passionately addressing this crowd, Hylton had been released from prison, where she spent almost three decades on charges of murder and kidnapping. But her story began long before that. As a little girl, she had endured years of abuse and molestation in the darkness of a closet, her eyes fixed on the sliver of light coming in under the door. That image prompted the title of her new book, *A Little Piece of Light: A Memoir of Hope, Prison and a Life Unbound* (Hachette Books, 2018), a powerful read that explores the victimization that often precedes crime.

Co-authored with writer Kristine Gasbarre, this book comes at an important moment for women. In the midst of the #MeToo movement, Hylton, now 54, and a consultant who speaks on prison issues and women’s rights, is giving a voice to women who remain invisible even in this period of heightened sensitivity.

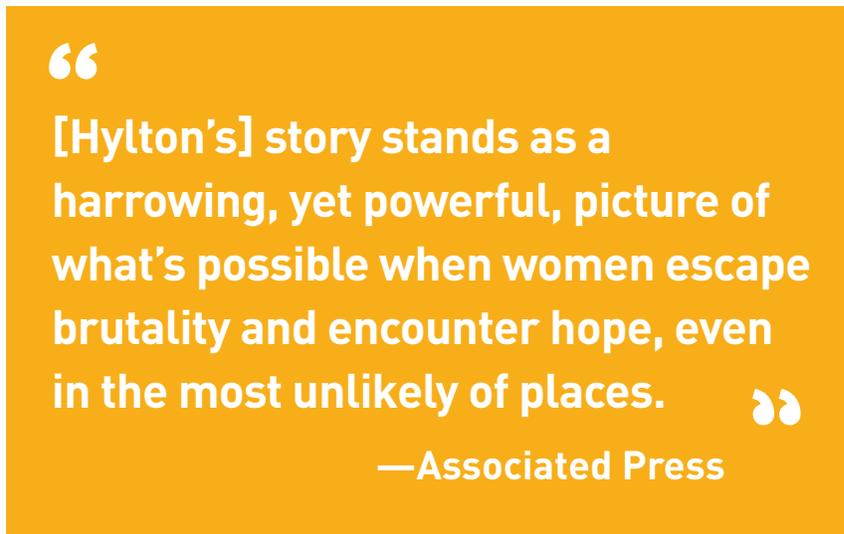
Many women in prison have experienced sexual assault, and Hylton, who served nearly 27 years, argues that it drives bad decision making, drug use and mental illness. Yet sexual assault is not taken into consideration when women are sentenced. “My biggest thing is to get people to understand that incarceration cannot be the response,” Hylton said when we met at a cafe near her home in Brooklyn. “We



have punished everything that we find wrong in a society of people, not realizing that we've perpetuated or forced those wrongs."

*A Little Piece of Light* tells Hylton's own tragic story. Born in Jamaica, Hylton was sold by her mentally unstable mother to a New York couple of Jamaican descent who were known for luring children to the United States with the promise of an education. To get her on the plane, Hylton's mother told her then 7-year-old daughter she was going to Disneyland.

"I was waiting to see Mickey and Minnie Mouse," Hylton remembers. "That's all I knew." The couple brought Hylton to their apartment in the Bronx and enrolled her in school, where she excelled as a student and athlete. But the man she was told to call "father" started molesting her after she turned nine. When Hylton told his wife and a school counselor about the abuse, no one believed her.



Repeated sexual assaults by her "father," and later by a teacher, pushed Hylton to run away with a neighbor who offered protection—but instead raped her and got her pregnant. Hylton was only 16 when her daughter Adrienne was born. "I never had a childhood," she said over coffee. "I never saw that light within me."

Hylton eventually returned to the couple in the Bronx, who took care of her child while she moved in with two girlfriends and found a job. A short marriage to a rapper followed. Hylton hoped that a modeling career would help her start a new life, but she needed \$1,500 for a photo portfolio. A coworker offered a solution: participate in a bizarre debt collection scheme involving her and six others. It turned out to involve the kidnapping of a Long Island real estate executive.

The victim later died of asphyxiation under the group's watch after being deprived of

food and beaten, newspapers reported at the time. Hylton and most of the other accomplices were found guilty and sentenced to 25 years to life in prison for kidnapping and second-degree murder.

She was 21.

In her book and in person, Hylton is adamant that she did not know beforehand about the kidnapping. She said the ringleader of the scheme, an associate of the victim whom prosecutors said was a major loan shark, coerced her by threatening her and her daughter's life. Hylton says the death of the victim still haunts her. She starts her book with an apology: "I am so sorry that I didn't help you."

During her years at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in Westchester County, Hylton got into some fights and faced sexual assault once again—this time by a correctional officer. But she also found opportunity. Over her three decades of

incarceration, she became an HIV counselor, an organizer in a domestic violence program, and an ordained Christian minister. She also took writing classes and completed her Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

Perhaps even more importantly, her fellow inmates became the family she had longed for. Many of them shared the trauma of sexual violence, and she realized that violence often leads—directly or indirectly—to the crimes for which many women are

In addition, she has her own initiative, "From Life to Life," which supports women's reentry to society after prison. In 2019, Hylton plans to form a nonprofit called "A Little Piece of Light" to focus on providing safe housing options for women upon release from prison.

And Hylton hasn't forgotten about the women who are still behind bars. Through tears, she tells me she is lobbying for a bill pending in the New York legislature

incarceration for women. "We strived to be as inclusive as women are diverse, and it was important that we included those who've spent time in the clutches of our justice system, as well as those who have reached the pinnacle of success in their relative fields," Perez said.

Since the march, Hylton's public appearances have inspired many—but have also drawn threats and criticism on social media. Last May, she was invited to a White House summit on prison reform with Jared Kushner, only to be denied admittance when she showed up. Despite obstacles, she remains committed to her work and to strengthening her own relationships. She still visits the women she befriended at Bedford Hills and sends them packages of food and clothing. She's in a relationship with a man she calls "a great friend," and she's trying to repair the bond with her daughter, now 37, who grew up in her father's custody and has struggled with drugs. "My relationship with my daughter is a process," Hylton says. "She blames me for stuff that happened to her because I wasn't there."

Perhaps most importantly, Hylton continues to work on her relationship with herself and with the vulnerable child she once was. "I talk to that little girl: 'It's okay, honey. I love you,'" she says. "And I'm going to take you to Disneyland."

## **“There’s a link between rates of brutal domestic violence and a prison full of wounded, broken, silenced, crying, desperate women.”**

convicted, including killing their abusers. Studies have found that most women in New York prisons are survivors of physical and sexual abuse. "The fact is undeniable," Hylton writes. "There's a link between rates of brutal domestic violence and a prison full of wounded, broken, silenced, crying, desperate women."

Hylton is now the director of the Women and Girls Project at the Katal Center for Health, Equity and Justice in Brooklyn, which fights mass incarceration. She also works as a consultant for Exodus Transitional Community, which offers programs for adults and youth affected by the justice system.

that would allow judges to consider prior abuse as a mitigating factor in sentencing in cases where the crime is related to the abuse. The law allows judges to consider community-based programs as an alternative to prison for some women, and also allows women already in prison to apply for re-sentencing. (The law was passed before the publication of this issue.)

Carmen Perez, co-founder of the momentous 2017 Women's March and executive director of The Gathering for Justice, which works on juvenile justice issues, said she invited Hylton to speak at the march because of Hylton's deep understanding of the causes and effects of



# Women for Afghan Women Bids Farewell to Longtime Executive Director, Manizha Naderi

By Siham Inshassi, The New School/IGNITE Fellow

On a residential street in Fresh Meadows, Queens, between buildings 18 and 20, I stood baffled at the sliver of alleyway that should theoretically be Unit 19, where the headquarters of the non-profit organization, Women for Afghan Women (WAW), is located. It took me a bit of maneuvering and New York-savvy to finally find the sparkling new facility across the street, but I was glad when I did. While a little hidden, this gem in the community is no secret; for 17 years it has been a haven the female Afghan community in Queens has known they can turn to for services like ESL, driving lessons, citizenship classes, vocational training, children's leadership programs, and case management. WAW's New York Community Center has been a staple in the neighborhood since 2001 when it began with 10 volunteers coming together just months before 9/11, eager to support Afghan women who were struggling and torn between the issues prevalent within their community, and the fear of being "Othered" as immigrants in a foreign land. Now WAW has over 750 employees in New York and Afghanistan working tirelessly to improve the lives and prospects of Afghan women indefinitely.

At the helm for the last 16 of those 17 years was Women for Afghan Women's Executive Director, Manizha Naderi. She joined the organization as a

volunteer in 2002 while still in college studying political science, because she was passionate about finding a way to improve the lives of Afghan women. But times were changing—rapidly. Mere months after WAW opened their doors, the United States invaded Afghanistan and ousted the Taliban. Suddenly the country was given a chance at rebirth—and WAW was given a chance to expand their reach. Change was in the air. New government in Afghanistan was being erected, and for the first time women had a seat at the table during the creation of a new constitution. A Ministry for Women’s Affairs was created, but there was still a long way to go. Naderi’s drive and spirit at this critical point in history catapulted her career, making her the leader WAW needed at a time when an entire people were being turned upside down.

In 2003, Naderi went to Afghanistan for a year on behalf of WAW, where she did a needs assessment, talking to Afghan women all over the country to identify the challenges they were facing and the kind of support WAW could provide them. Women and girls in Afghanistan were frequently subjected to gender discrimination and domestic violence, and literacy rates among adult women were staggeringly low. One of the first things Naderi did was visit the women’s prisons. Almost every woman she met there had run away from an abusive

marriage, forced marriage, or rape, and there were no resources or support. Many even had their children with them. Naderi worked closely with the Ministry for Women’s Affairs, as well as the Human Rights Commission, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs,

the organization in Afghanistan from the ground up—designing the programs, fundraising, and hiring staff—as well as expanding their work in New York. Today, WAW has 33 facilities in 14 provinces in Afghanistan, employing over 750 local women and supporting over 25,000.

**With Islamophobia on the rise and immigrant rights being threatened, WAW had to once again think about their next step. With the help of funds from The New York Women’s Foundation’s Resilience NYC initiative—a response to changes in the national political landscape and the impact of federal policy changes on women and other disadvantaged communities—WAW worked to build out more citizenship training to help get community members naturalized.**

to gain the government and religious support she needed to build out WAW in Afghanistan.

In 2006, WAW launched their first support center in Afghanistan, providing family guidance, shelters with hidden addresses, and life skills training. During this time, Naderi was appointed Executive Director, building up

They are the first and only organization to work with the government to get children 5 and older out of the prison system, providing schooling, healthcare, tutoring, and caretakers. As a result, they are the largest women’s organization in Afghanistan.

In New York, WAW has expanded beyond ESL classes.

They provide leadership training for young girls and—most recently—young boys, teaching them about women’s rights and creating generational change. They’ve managed cases for over 4,600 clients, helping with housing, Medicaid, family court, and workforce development. Their advocacy and outreach have reached over 20,000 Afghans in New York, thanks to the tireless work of Manizha Naderi and her dedicated team.

policy changes on women and other disadvantaged communities—WAW worked to build out more citizenship training to help get community members naturalized.

WAW also launched Coalition X, a mission to join together 17 women-led, Muslim-led, and immigrant-led partner organizations in New York, to make their collective voices count more.

others to the airport, leaving behind family, kids, and other commitments, simply because someone needed to be there. It was this impetus that told Bahram and Naderi that they are stronger together. Most recently, Coalition X hosted weeks of voter registration drives among their shared communities, leading up to the midterm elections.

After 16 years, and veritably a lifetime of work, Naderi is stepping down as Executive Director of Women for Afghan Women in order to spend some time with her family—but her legacy will remain. Her successor, the former Country Director in Afghanistan, was hired by her, as was everyone else currently working at Women for Afghan Women. She will stay on as advisor and hand the reins to a powerful group of women she and her entire community trust completely. A year after it was founded, Naderi took this organization from a fledgling idea with a small seed fund provided by The Foundation in 2001, to a self-sustaining \$6.8 million organization. Talking to the staff at the New York Community Center, it’s clear she leaves behind plenty of hope and energy. There is still much work to be done, both in the relatively young new Afghanistan and in New York—where a new federal administration threatens everything they’ve built—but the team Naderi created is ready to take it on.



When the federal administration changed in 2016, it posed new threats to Afghan women and the organization. With Islamophobia on the rise and immigrant rights being threatened, WAW had to once again think about their next step. With the help of funds from The New York Women’s Foundation’s Resilience NYC initiative—a response to changes in the national political landscape and the impact of federal

Coalition X is about creating a larger galvanized community, sharing resources and support, and uniting toward common goals. It started in response to the Muslim Ban in January 2017 when volunteers at WAW, including the current New York Program Director Naheed Samadi Bahram, went to JFK Airport to help translate for those being detained. Afghanistan was not on the list of banned countries, but the shared language of Farsi drove Bahram and



# Learning Circle Brings Development Directors to the Forefront to Drive Nonprofit Success

By Siham Inshassi, The New School/IGNITE Fellow

As part of a continued commitment to fostering the growth of grantee partner leadership in the form of capacity-building support, grants, and initiatives, The New York Women's Foundation partnered with Cause Effective to launch the Development Directors' Learning Circle. Cause Effective is a New York-based nonprofit with 35 years of experience helping community-based nonprofits plan and implement effective resource development strategies. This six-month program combines peer support, leadership training, and customized coaching to help new development staff—who have anywhere from three days to three years in their current position—build their

skills, galvanize their staff, cultivate their donor base, and ultimately actualize their dreams for the organization and for themselves as leaders.

The Learning Circle was open to grantee partners of The Foundation through an application process. The first cohort of 10 people was selected based on shared goals and experiences, and ability to commit to the full breadth of the program, which included six monthly peer sessions and six private coaching sessions with a Cause Effective senior consultant. While primarily a professional growth opportunity, the Learning Circle's mission to bring directors of development

(DoD) together was key to its success. Often, DoDs can be a forgotten or disenfranchised group within the nonprofit sector, though their role of liaising between Executive Directors, donors, and program directors is invaluable. As such, many feel isolated in their professional journeys. The Learning Circle allowed for a safe space for DoDs to discuss their goals and personal challenges, compare notes, and share insights that help each other better serve their respective organizations.

The success of this initiative is clear. Participants reported gaining new fundraising wins, successfully executing new events and campaigns, and

renewing confidence in their abilities to effectively fundraise. As a result, many have advanced in their careers at their respective organizations, and some even advanced into new opportunities in the nonprofit sector. One great success story of this first cohort is that of Anika Nawabi, who not only created substantial fundraising growth for Chhaya CDC (where she served as Director of Development), but has since started a new job as the Executive Director of Muslim Community Network (MCN) in New York.

Nawabi started her career as a manager of resource development with Chhaya—a nonprofit that works with New Yorkers of South Asian origin to advocate for and build economically stable, sustainable, and thriving communities. Like many others, she was eventually thrust into the role of Development Director after a couple years. When she'd started, she originally wanted to be in Programs, but as she grew she began to realize the vital role of development within an organization. She was eager to learn as much as she could in order to perform her role to the best of her ability. When she heard about the Learning Circle, she was attracted by the duration of the program and, most importantly, by the idea of a peer network. She'd done a number of one- and two-day training workshops in the past, and found that after a while they became redundant. The Learning Circle promised to be



Chhaya Community Development Corporation

a great way to gain practical, realistic insights by talking to a group of peers who were dealing with the same issues she was.

When the program began, she was amazed to realize that all the women in the cohort were in her age group and all were working at small nonprofits. They were all pursuing the same goals and making the same mistakes. She was inspired by their collective passion and how much they truly cared about their organizations. At first, she took a step back and listened, eager to learn from their experiences and styles. But as time went on—and with the additional support of trainings, speakers, and educational materials provided by Cause Effective—she engaged actively and turned to the group as more of a shared resource than a learning group. Nearly a year later, they are a network, who still communicate regularly and meet once a month to exchange

tips and support. It is a model not found anywhere else in the nonprofit sector, Nawabi realizes upon reflection, which makes her that much more grateful for the experience.

Another key component of the Learning Circle was the private coaching sessions. Nawabi's experience with her coach, Greg Cohen (Cause Effective's Associate Director), built her confidence in fundraising and taking on a greater leadership role within the organization. While she'd worked with him prior to the Circle, learning methods of fundraising, her time during the Learning Circle was focused on strategies to build up greater sponsorships and run successful events. During that time, Chhaya was preparing for their annual Gala, which she'd been given the opportunity to lead. With Greg's guidance and encouragement, she gained renewed confidence in her ability to

run this event, resulting in an evening that exceeded the organization's expectations.

It was thanks to this experience that she felt ready to take on an Executive Director role at a small organization, when the opportunity presented itself. The Muslim Community Network's (MCN) vision is to help facilitate the emergence of a Muslim American identity that transcends generational, ethnic, gender, racial, and class-based boundaries. With newfound confidence and the opportunity to lead a mission she felt passionate about as a Muslim woman herself, she accepted the role of Executive Director of MCN in October 2018. Currently, she manages a team of four building out MCN's platform from the ground up and planning new programs to support the Muslim American community in New York.

As a smaller organization, MCN does not currently employ a director of development, so Nawabi is doubly grateful for everything she's learned. She values the importance of the Development Director role, and now has the thirst to do the work in a way she never did before. "You cannot be an effective Executive Director if you don't have the skills of a Development Director," Nawabi asserts. And it is her hope that, knowing what she now knows, she can manage her team and her organization in a way that is infectious, inspiring, and momentous.

## Camille Emeagwali, *Vice President of Programs at The New York Women's Foundation, on the origins of The Foundation's partnership with Cause Effective and the purpose of the Learning Circle:*

"We've had a collaborative partnership with Cause Effective, and for this program we really wanted to focus on a particular group of leaders. Oftentimes, leadership programs focus on the executive director or board members—but nothing specific to the development role. What's interesting about that role is that it can be a great launching pad for the next leap to an executive level. If you're a good fundraiser and you know the programmatic side, you are really the person folks turn to.

"With this program, we wanted to offer tools and training, but also focus on leadership—particularly how to be a leader in the development role and work in partnership with other positions in the organization, and help participants build their professional network. The team at Cause Effective are experts. But there's nothing like talking to your peers to know different strategies and tips on how to be effective in your role. Cause Effective did a great job designing the program and the first year was very successful. It was transformative for participants professionally.

**The program fits squarely in line with what The Foundation values: fostering women's leadership, supporting and strengthening sustainability for organizations, and then having them be able to think bigger about all of the different opportunities available for them to grow their work and their organization.**

"The Foundation as a value has always invested in long term organizational sustainability just as much as we support the work they do. You have to invest in people. Organizations are people. We invest in people. We invest in leaders."



## Flying on the Wings of Faith and Feminism

Daisy Khan Creates a Map for Innovative Social Change

By Humera Afridi

Daisy Khan is a woman of multiple missions and many talents. Founder and Executive Director of Women’s Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE), Khan is also the author of the remarkable memoir *Born with Wings* (Spiegel and Grau, 2018). The book describes Khan’s riveting journey from an idyllic childhood in Kashmir that becomes shadowed by war to her evolution as a bold activist and thought leader of Muslim women’s rights and Islam in America. Khan brims with a restless energy to achieve, and to achieve yet more. Committed to collaborating across faith and gender lines to achieve justice, equality, and peace-building across the world, Khan is inspired and fortified by her deep spirituality. She has made

it her mission, too, to amplify the voices of Muslim women leaders at the forefront of social change. Faith and feminism are entwined in her work.

One of Khan’s exemplars is Lalla Dad—the female rebel saint of fourteenth-century Kashmir—who was a “spiritual strategist.” She fused the traditions of Hinduism and Islam by blending core values and de-emphasizing conflicts and differences. From unity, Lalla promised, came strength and power. Like her early compatriot, Khan is a spiritual and cultural bridge-builder. In the aftermath of 9/11, Khan felt the increasing responsibility of what it meant to be “an educated Muslim woman...who had been empowered by all the men in her family and was

already heavily involved in the work of her husband, a religious leader.” She quit her corporate career as an architect and devoted herself to community building and “to developing a blueprint for change,” focusing on Muslim women.

The rich diversity of American Muslims had resulted in “balkanized structures that hindered our ability to work with one another. To rectify this, we needed high-level thinking from which innovation could spring,” she states. Khan immersed herself in a year of research and fact-finding to learn about women’s rights and leadership. A pivotal turning point was meeting Helen La Kelly Hunt, whose book *Faith and Feminism: A Holy Alliance* illuminated for Khan

the impact of the faith-based arguments for equality that the suffragettes had employed. Until then, Khan had struggled to reconcile feminism with Islam. Now, a path opened up before her. Gender equality is guaranteed in Islam but, over the centuries, women's rights had been stripped away. With bold determination, Khan set out to rectify the damage. She shared her vision with La Kelly Hunt, who said, "I believe in you and your vision and I will be the first one to give you twenty-five thousand dollars!" And so, in 2006, WISE was conceived as an initiative.

Khan set to work brainstorming ways in which to build solidarity between fragmented groups of Muslim women who were divided along geographic, ideological, and socioeconomic lines. "This meant we had to be inclusive of women with perspectives ranging from traditionalist to secular feminist to spiritualist to revivalist to progressive to literalist." She turned to the ancient Islamic tradition of shura councils—a social and religious advisory body—and formed the very first women's shura council in history, made up of female spiritual leaders, academics, and activists. Together they created a body of expertly researched work that spoke collectively for women on the critical issues of female genital mutilation, women's leadership, domestic violence, terrorism, adoption, and the right to education.

Khan's work contributed to a ban on female genital mutilation in Gambia—no small feat. Between 2008 and 2015, in partnership with scholar and activist Jamila Afghani, she enabled the training of 6000 imams (religious clerics) in Afghanistan, who would go on to become champions of women's rights and advocates against child marriage. She has been instrumental, too, in creating equitable prayer spaces for women in mosques in Afghanistan and America. "The mosque is a place that should welcome women. We keep talking about how great we are, how Islam freed women, how we've given rights to women over the centuries. But we need to *live* these ideals, normalize them in our place of worship."

A natural multi-tasker, Khan admits she wrote her memoir at the same time as she was compiling a hefty research and evidence-based manual—the very first of its kind—that offers expertise on practical ways to counter extremism, hate crimes, and islamophobia. The 375-page publication, *Wise UP: Knowledge Ends Extremism*, was published last fall. It is a crucial educational tool designed for a broad audience ranging from marine officers to mayors, parents, teachers, attorney generals, and more. It draws attention to the vulnerability factors that enable extremists to recruit youth and highlights patterns of extremism that repeat in different contexts, from ISIS to white supremacists.

## **Khan set to work brainstorming ways in which to build solidarity between fragmented groups of Muslim women who were divided along geographic, ideological, and socioeconomic lines.**

Khan describes the manual, which includes the work of 72 global experts, as her "most ambitious" project to date: "One of the smallest women's organizations has created the largest response to terrorism! This should excite women!"

Daisy Khan is deep into her latest project—a "Know Your Rights" guide for young Muslim women in the United States. "It's so essential, it's so needed that it's kind of insane no one's done it yet," Khan said, explaining that several of the issues she was contending with globally were actually issues right here in the United States—forced marriage, child marriage, lack of education, female genital mutilation. "The girls dealing with these issues are desperate because there's no information

anywhere. There's no support group. They think it's only happening to them, but it's happening community-wide."

Khan feels a personal sense of responsibility towards helping the young women who, she says, come from "very challenged communities" of newly arrived

The work ahead is complex. The Muslim community is diverse with uniquely varying issues across cultural lines. Child marriage, for instance, is a big issue in some immigrant communities. "Some of whom want to get their kids married at age 13 or 14. These things happen over the summer vacation when they take the

a community is under attack, identity politics kicks in. People feel they can't reveal issues happening in the community because that's like airing your dirty laundry—as if it's somehow going to contribute to more islamophobia. The ambiance is missing for people to think critically about this issue. If we address it as an organization, we can help others because they're looking for guidance," explained Khan.

**Khan feels a personal sense of responsibility towards helping the young women who, she says, come from "very challenged communities" of newly arrived immigrants and refugees with little to no resources, where the mother is usually uneducated and where intergenerational and cultural conflicts quickly arise.**

immigrants and refugees with little to no resources, where the mother is usually uneducated and where intergenerational and cultural conflicts quickly arise. WISE is conducting extensive research on how to address the issues and to offer help. To have the greatest reach and impact, the findings will be digitized and easily searchable online. "It's not only about their rights," said Khan. "I want them to feel empowered, I want them to educate others because what's our future going to be if we don't?"

children overseas. The kids have no recourse. One girl ran away from home and came to our office after she found us online," said Khan.

Parents feel their religion, traditions, and identity are under attack while the children who've acclimated to American public school culture feel alienated from their elders. All too often, girls aren't allowed to study beyond high school and are forced into domestic roles at home or married immediately after graduation. Complicating matters is the issue of islamophobia. "When

While Khan has made it her mandate to be a facilitator, a remover of obstacles in the lives of women, her own path has not been without challenges. Her relationship with Islam was not always smooth. "How could I accommodate the dictates of Islam and still have a modern life?" she asked herself, setting off on a quest that has defined her life's work. After a period of rebellion, she returned to her faith with a clearer, deeper understanding while opening the way for collaboration and connection with women of faith across the world. Like Lalla Dad, Daisy Khan is convinced of the power and strength inherent in unity: "When women join together as a united force, we can create a seismic shift. That's what I'm doing, calling women to unite around a common purpose, and advance a holistic approach."



From left to right: Tarana Burke, founder and leader of the 'me. too.' Movement; Haley & Michaels, 2018 Radical Generosity Honorees; Alyssa Milano, 2018 Radical Generosity Honoree.

# A Look Back at our Radical Generosity Gala

By Nina Rodgers

The Me Too movement has taken the world by storm over the last year, propelling the many stories of survivors from the margins to the center. The New York Women's Foundation's 2018 Radical Generosity honorees have long been stepping forward in the fight for social justice, especially as allies and advocates for survivors of sexual harassment and violence. While Alyssa Milano, Haley & Michaels, Mary T. Bassett and Level Forward co-founders Abigail E. Disney, Adrienne Becker, Rachel Gould and Angie G. Wang may walk

distinct paths, they are unified in their commitment for change. "Everyone we are honoring this evening has been doing what they are doing for a long time," Ana Oliveira, President and CEO of The Foundation, said. "They all share the ability to be ordinary people with extraordinary determination, vision and that the unflinching courage to continue in spite of others not seeing them."

Kicking off the evening with the movement-inspired song *Me Too* were honorees Haley & Michael. The Nashville-based Sony Music duo were moved

to write a song for anyone who has ever felt silenced, so that millions of survivors could reclaim their voices. Honoree Adrienne Becker of Level Forward—an organization created to back film projects by women and people of color—echoed these sentiments by declaring the importance of women being seen, heard and sharing stories that reflect diverse experiences. "Being seen is not a privilege. It is a right. And it is a right that belongs to everyone, and not just a select few," Becker said. "Stories are a path to the unknown. They enable us to

transcend our own experiences, to rise up from our bodies, out of our skins, away from our prejudices, our proclivities, into a space of compassion and mutual understanding, a path to reconciliation.”

Me Too Movement founder and leader Tarana Burke delivered a powerful introduction of final honoree actress and activist Alyssa Milano. On October 15, 2017, Milano tweeted to her followers: “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.” The overwhelming amount of responses allowed the Me Too hashtag and personal experiences of women to be thrust into national attention, bringing the subject of violence and harassment against women from the margins to the center. While #MeToo had been created nearly a decade earlier by Burke, Milano’s viral tweet opened the door to conversations on the movement at a scale not yet seen. But as Burke described, there could have been a moment of conflict over whose movement Me Too was. Milano’s initial outreach to Burke and extending a hand in solidarity made clear that the movement is one for all survivors to stand together. “It is because of Tarana Burke that I have hope that the words ‘me too’ have always been more than just a testament to our past, but that they are a prayer to our future,” Milano proclaimed. Alyssa Milano’s acceptance speech was a rallying call in declaring the



Emcee Ted Bunch of grantee partner A Call to Men set the tone for the evening, acknowledging the year as one of challenges, but ultimately for the reflection, growth and liberation of both men and women.



2018 Radical Generosity Gala honoree Dr. Mary T. Bassett with The New York Women’s Foundation’s Walking Stick Award. Dr. Bassett holds over 30 years of public health experience, including serving as Commissioner of Health and Mental Hygiene for New York City.



Co-Founders of Level Forward - Rachel Gould, Adrienne Becker and Angie Wang with their Radical Generosity Walking Stick



Margarita Guzman, Executive Director of grantee partner Violence Intervention Program (VIP), gave an impassioned speech at the Gala. VIP is a community leader in preventing gender-based violence.

power women stand in as survivors. “We are the heroes of our own story,” Milano said. “We want to end this spectrum of sexual violence, and harassment and assault once and for all, and we want to dismantle the systems that allowed these crimes to go on for far too long.”

The Foundation responded to the call to action of ending gender-based violence posed by Alyssa Milano and all honorees, with Ana Oliveira announcing the first grant recipients of the Fund to Support the Me Too Movement and Allies. “We are supporting the movement in achieving its goals of justice and the healing of survivors,” Oliveira said. “For too many, the resources to achieve these goals are lacking, especially in rural, working class, and immigrant communities and communities of color.” These recipients include Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective, Black Women’s Blueprint, DC Rape Crisis Center, Equality Labs, FreeFrom, The Firecracker Foundation, The “me too.” Movement and Violence Intervention Program. Support provided to these organizations brings The Foundation’s impacts to a national scale, and strengthens each organization’s longstanding efforts in dismantling systems that allow sexual violence to persist in communities, and ensures the momentum and awakening of the Me Too movement is sustained beyond news cycles and hashtags.



2018 Radical Generosity Honorees Haley & Michaels kicked off the evening with a powerful performance of their song Me Too, inspired by the movement to uplift the voices of survivors of sexual assault.



2018 Radical Generosity Gala co-chairs Jean Shafiroff (left) and Lola C. West (right) with Me Too Movement founder/creator Tarana Burke.



Radical Generosity honorees Angie Wang, Rachel Gould and Adrienne Becker—co-founders of Level Forward; Alyssa Milano; Mary T. Bassett; Tarana Burke and Foundation President/CEO Ana Oliveira.



Radical Generosity Gala honoree, activist and actress Alyssa Milano shares a laugh with Me Too Movement founder/creator Tarana Burke, and Foundation board member Yvonne Moore.



The Foundation's signature fall event was held at The Plaza Hotel, where a sold-out crowd gathered to celebrate the evening's honorees.



Ana L. Oliveira, President/CEO of The New York Women's Foundation with 2018 Neighborhood Dinner honorees Alyssa Aguilera, Cynthia Gordy Giwa and Julia Jean-Francois.

# We Are The Storm: Neighborhood Dinner 2018

By: Siham Inshassi, The New School/IGNITE Fellow

**“When it comes to dynamic women,  
there is no storm that can stop us...  
because we are, in fact, the storm.”**

These were the evocative words of Laurie A. Cumbo, New York City Council Majority Leader for Brooklyn's 35th District, in her opening remarks at The New York Women's Foundation Annual Neighborhood Dinner in Brooklyn on November 15th, 2018. This annual event celebrates the diverse cultures of our city and the courageous leaders who work to strengthen its communities. Held each year in a different borough, the Neighborhood Dinner honors outstanding women for their community leadership and inspiring entrepreneurship. The 2018 event honored three truly deserving women.

Despite the unexpected snowstorm raging all afternoon, it was an almost full house in the Lepercq Space at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) in Fort Greene. All the boroughs of New York were represented; even Staten Island made it through the white tundra to be a part of this amazing night. We women were dynamic, indeed. We all switched out our heels for sensible, fashionable boots and weathered that storm like we do everything else. Every single woman in attendance (and the few men as well!) knew the importance of supporting and celebrating the achievements of great women acting in and for their communities to enrich lives and create a better future for all of us.

After an enthusiastic welcome from Kwanza Butler, co-chair to The Foundation's Board of Directors, Cumbo's speech fired up the crowd. We celebrated the recent sweep of women entering Congress following the midterm elections, recognizing not only the breadth of female entrants, but the diverse depth of backgrounds and points of view that will be added to the conversations happening at the highest levels of our government. She spoke of motherhood, and of the sheer awe-inspiring strength and tireless perseverance mothers achieve day in and day out. She related stories of her 15-month-old child that were equal parts funny, heartwarming, endearing, and uplifting—and reminded anyone who didn't already



New York City Council Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo providing opening remarks.

know that being a mother and being successful never need be mutually exclusive.

The first award of the evening, a Neighborhood Leadership Award, went to Alyssa Aguilera, Co-Executive Director of VOCAL-NY, a statewide grassroots organization that builds power among low-income people impacted by HIV/AIDS, drug use, homelessness, and mass incarceration. Under her leadership, the organization expanded two-fold and created dozens of new policies to support New York's most vulnerable residents. In her speech, Aguilera spoke of the success of their Mother's Day initiative, *Mama's Bail Out Day NYC*. They exceeded their fundraising goal by double, raising \$60,000 to bail out Black mothers who were separated from their families by the punitive cash bail system. This groundbreaking



2018 Neighborhood Dinner Co-chairs Gail Hochman and Stacy Cumberbatch, Honoree Julia Jean-Francois, Emcee Rhonda Joy McLean, Honorees Alyssa Aguilera and Cynthia Gordy Giwa, CEO & President Ana Oliveira, Board Co-Chair Kwanza Butler and Vice President of Programs Camille Emeagwali.

news elicited a roar of applause from the audience and a standing ovation for her amazing service. The room was alight with our cheers.

The next honoree was Cynthia Gordy Giwa, recipient of the Spirit of Entrepreneurship Award. The first White House correspondent for *Essence* magazine and an award-winning journalist who's written for the *Washington Post*, NPR, and *Slate*, Giwa did not have to step up and create Black-Owned Brooklyn. At least not for her own gain. She saw a gap in her community and decided to fill it, and it's that spirit, drive, and passion that inspired us. She recognized that many Black-owned businesses in Brooklyn were not getting the kind of publicity needed to support their growth—and that 30 percent of these businesses had disappeared in the last five years due to gentrification. So she created Black-Owned Brooklyn, a curated guide to Black-owned, Brooklyn-based brands and the people behind them—to show off the best in local food and drink, art, design, beauty, wellness and culture, and to build support for Black ventures.

The evening's third honoree, Julia Jean-Francois, received the second Neighborhood Leadership Award. She is the Co-Director at the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, Brooklyn—a neighborhood-based

settlement house that provides integrated human services to over 15,000 individuals per year. But the work she does that's most stirring is her cooperative business development program, which has incubated over 15 worker-owned businesses—including Brightly Cleaning, the first worker-owned cleaning cooperative



From left to right: Ann Marie Almeida, Vice President of Development at The New York Women's Foundation; Rhonda Joy McLean, Neighborhood Dinner emcee and former Foundation Board Co-Chair; and William Craig.

franchise. Most recently, this company launched their first app at UpAndGo.coop, where you can book home cleaning services right from your phone. Jean-Francois spoke with the impassioned vigor of a long-time fighter within the community, and that energy bled into the room, reminding us that great work can be, has been, and continues to be done in the community, as long as we're supporting each other.

Throughout the night, from cocktails to dessert, the energy of the room was fueled by the dynamic force of the night's Master of Ceremonies, Rhonda Joy McLean, former co-chair of The Foundation's Board of Directors. McLean is a long-time supporter and advocate for The Foundation, having volunteered and worked with

the organization in various capacities for the last 25 years. I could go on for miles about all the great things that McLean is—lawyer, author, businesswoman—but on this night she was one thing: fiercely spirited. Through the cocktail hour, McLean milled about, her bright flowing dress and animated laughter permeating the air as—I could swear—she talked with every single person in the room.

Then we sat down to dinner and she took the stage, regaling us with stories of her first Celebrating Women Breakfast, a signature event of The Foundation—and how

Foundation, to “refuel” via a simple text transaction. with a screen projection showing us in real time the donations stacking up. We all pulled out our phones and then watched

snow shoes to the menu filled with southern comfort foods; from the local artist and musician who performed during the cocktail hour to the Steering Committee led by Brooklyn natives and longtime supporters, Stacey Cumberbatch and Gail B. Hochman (who worked tirelessly to sell tickets and sponsorships to make this night possible); and for all the women in attendance who fiercely stand up every day ... it was simply, quintessentially Brooklyn.



Groundswell artist Micaela Anaya.

inspired she was (as I was that night and at my own first Breakfast last May) at the hypnotic energy of a “mobilized posse of women united for the greater good.” She had us at hello. She joked with us in the introductory speech, “I grew up in the Bible Belt so you know there’s going to be some church up in here tonight!” Regardless of your religious affiliations or lack thereof, you couldn’t help but be drawn to the sermon of strong superwomen this MC was preaching.

During dinner, we were invited to donate to The

the numbers cascade, and we cheered. When there were lulls, McLean took to the mic again, relentless. At one point, she even started singing, and soon we all were, clapping and looking back at the board, avidly waiting. We watched the numbers spin toward the \$25,000 mark and the room erupted. We reached our goal.

You could say this night was incredible, but I would argue against that. From a semantic point of view, that means it was unbelievable. But it wasn’t. It was so very believable—from our versatile outdoor-to-indoor



Neighborhood Leadership honoree Alyssa Aguilera, Co-Executive Director of grantee partner VOCAL-NY, is pictured with a supportive member of the organization.



The Foundation's annual Neighborhood Dinner was hosted in the Lepercq Space at Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) in Fort Greene.



Spirit of Entrepreneurship awardee Cynthia Gordy-Giwa poses with Kwanza Butler, Co-Chair of The Foundation's Board of Directors.



Council Majority Leader Laurie A. Cumbo greets attendees at the Neighborhood Dinner.

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<b>Our 2018-2019 Grantee Partners</b>	<b>dream hampton</b> Filmmaker, Writer, and Organizer	<b>Cyndi Lauper</b> Co-Founder of True Colors United Grammy, Emmy and Tony Award- Winning Artist	<b>Rhonda Joy McLean</b> Attorney, Author, and Philanthropist Former Board Co-Chair of The New York Women's Foundation	<b>Sarinya Srisakul</b> First Asian-American Woman Firefighter of the FDNY Former President of the United Women Firefighters	<b>Dr. Marta Moreno Vega</b> President of the Creative Justice Institute Founder of the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute
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Since 1987, The New York Women's Foundation has advanced a dynamic philanthropic strategy based on the fundamental reality that, when women thrive, their families and communities also thrive. The Foundation is the largest women-led grantmaking organization in the United States, and one of the top two in the world. We invest in women-led, community-based solutions that promote the economic security, safety, and health of the most underinvested women in New York City. We foster women's leadership, create partnerships that spark catalytic change, exchange insights with experts across sectors, and empower women by training them in activism and philanthropy to accelerate and sustain forward progress.

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