



RED HOOK INITIATIVE

YOUTH-LED COMMUNITY BUILDING IS VIOLENCE PREVENTION: A PROGRESS

REPORT

2 0 2 3





Background

The Real Rites team recommended that RHI launch youth-led violence prevention initiatives that include youth-led activities and events to promote community building, healing, and interconnectedness. The foundational pillar was that Youth-led community building is violence prevention. Young adults need opportunities to lead, mentor, contribute their expertise, and build unity in their communities. [The Public Safety Program](#), founded in early 2021, is another next step on that journey.

The program seeks to educate, train and employ young adults from the Red Hook neighborhood, while providing them the safety to explore their own identities. Highlighting issues surrounding public safety, and challenges our young adults to see how their perceptions around these issues are shaped by their own identity intersections. Many choose to ignore the voices of young adults and discredit their understanding of the issues that plague our society, while simultaneously blaming them and their lack of involvement for many of those issues, specifically youth of color, and surrounding issues of community safety. The program seeks to break that cycle by providing direct platforms for our young adults to engage with local community stakeholders, to have their voices heard by decision makers, and learn more about the issues and policies that affect them and their community.



“COMMUNITY SAFETY IS MULTIDIMENSIONAL. IT’S FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE, ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND GREEN SPACES, WELL-PAYING WORK AND STRONG COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS, AND MORE. YET RESEARCH AND EVALUATION OFTEN FOCUS ONLY ON CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM DATA, MISSING THE TRUE IMPACT OF WORK TO BUILD A DEEPER AND MORE RESILIENT FORM OF SAFETY.

WHAT COUNTS AS “EVIDENCE” AND HOW DO WE MEASURE “SUCCESS?”



Trainings



Critical Race Trainings:

Youth-Led organizing spaces must acknowledge that due to the fact that young people are typically left out of policy and safety decision making spaces, they are often not given the necessary tools and information that they need to be successful in creating their own campaigns. **Putting young people in organizing spaces, and not providing them with the necessary information, training and skills (and safe healing spaces as this work can be draining), is not setting them up for success.**

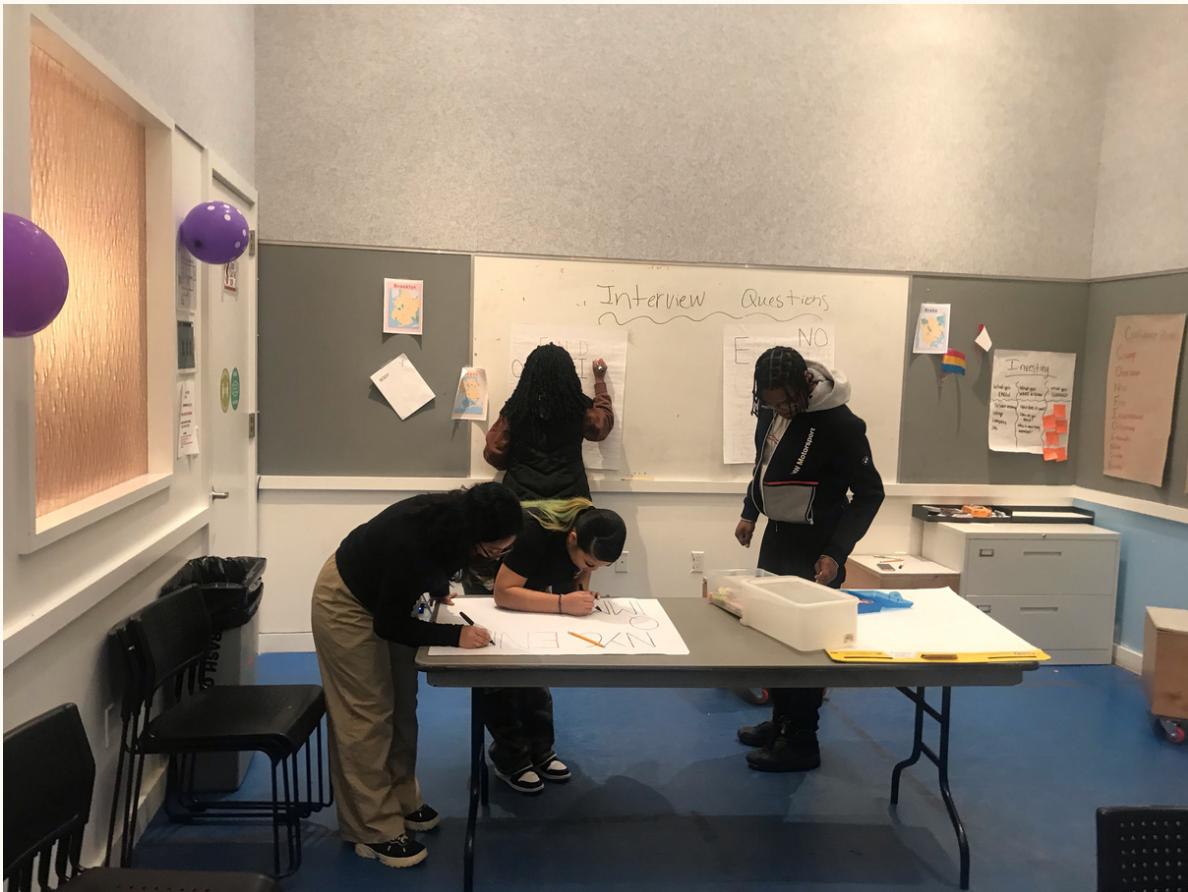
We created a Critical Race based training curriculum, with the help of Professor Michael Ralph from NYU. This training program takes shape as a 1.5 hour weekly training run from April-November at RHI. **Each Public Safety Organizer is tasked with achieving 25 of these specific training hours over the course of the calendar year.** To support these trainings, we have had several guest speakers and presentations from various public safety stakeholders, these include:

- Alex Vitale, an active leader of the Gangs Coalition and an acclaimed author.
- Andre Apparicio, Founder of Its Process and an Acclaimed Author
- Alexa Aviles, Councilmember for District 38 and the team of Assemblymember Marcela Mitaynes who came for a presentation on RHI's 2011 Stop and Frisk report.
- The Katal Center for a status report on #LessIsMore
- The Team at Youth Represents to educate us about Youthful Offender status and the YJ&O Act
- Representatives from the Public Advocates Justice Squad

- Vidal Guzman, the leader of the #Fixthe13th Campaign from by the Next100
Each Public Safety training is co-facilitated by one of the graduating organizers from the previous cohort, who are promoted to the title of “supervisor” and given a pay raise to accommodate for more advanced advocacy and facilitation work.

ABOLITION AND HEALING JUSTICE PROGRAM AND TRAINING:

Abolition and Healing Justice Program and Training: The Public Safety Team has been involved in the Abolition and Healing justice program at RHI since November 2021. The program's overall goals are to develop a tiered Peer support system within Red Hook, while providing participants with a communal healing space. This program is spearheaded by a weekly 3 hour training meeting led at RHI by one of the counselors that lasts approximately 6 months. **Each participant graduates with approximately 72 of these in house healing justice training hours.** Additional external trainings are provided in the form of B.E.A.M Trainings, and Relational Uprising Trainings (Listed Below).



External Trainings:

In addition to these training, our Public Safety Team members are offered **100+ hours of external training, all rooted in critical race based discussions**, to further support their work and their own professional and mental emotional development. These include:

- Civic Engagement Training - Conducted by NYC Votes (1 Hour)
- Voter Mobilization Training - Conducted by NYC Votes (1 Hour)
- Decriminalize, Dismantle & Erase the Database: A Summit on Gang Policing in NYC's Neighborhoods - Conducted by the Gangs Coalition (3 Hours)
- Intersectional Approaches to Disability and Race - Conducted by Intersectional Neurodiversity & Disability Reading Groups (3 Hours)
- COVID, Racism, & Xenophobia and the Impact on Asian American Mental Health -
Conducted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (1 Hour)
- NYC Summer Town Hall on Environmental Justice - Conducted by the NYC Mayor's Office (2 Hours)
- Introduction to Structural Racism & Implicit Bias - Conducted by Future Makers Coalition (2 Hours)
- HIJACKED: How Trauma Impacts the Brain and Body - Conducted by Southern Arizona Trauma Informed Network (2 Hours)
- A.A.I.T SAFER SPACE TRAINING! - Conducted by the Audre Lorde Project (3 Hours)
- Public CopWatch Training - Conducted by The Justice Committee (2 Hours)
- Know Your Rights - Conducted by an Attorney from the Gangs Coalition (1.5 Hours)
- Organizing Academy Training - Conducted by RHI's Lead Organizer (20 Hours)
- Train the Trainer Training - Conducted by Surveillance Technology Oversight Project (1.5 Hours)
- B.I.P.O.C Activism Workshop Series - Conducted by Anti-Racism Everyday Committee (10 Hours)
- Mandated Child Abuse Reporter Training - Conducted by Pathways to Hope for Children (2 Hours)
- Healing Justice Peer Support Training - Conducted by Black Emotional And Mental Health Collective (10 Hours) *A part of Healing Justice Curriculum*
- Relational Uprising Healing Justice Training- Conducted by Relational Uprising (14 Hours) *A part of Healing Justice Curriculum*
- Media Spokesperson Training - Conducted by The Justice Committee (3 Hours)
- Upstander Training - Conducted by IPV (2 Hours)
- Deep Canvassing Training - Conducted by the Peoples Action (6 Hours)

Work Overview

Events:

Even through the struggles of a pandemic, the Public Safety Team has prioritized involvement and planning of events that connect the conversations and the work we do with our external stakeholders, for the benefit of our community.

- The 2021 Spring Into Community Event - A Voter Registration and District 38 City Council Debate
- Covid-19 Vaccine Q&A with Dr. Comrie and Professor Michael Ralph - A community conversation surrounding vaccines and what the hesitancy that is found in our communities.
- Public Safety Presentation at Brooklyn Community Board 6 Meeting - Each of the Organizers from the first cohort who completed the program, presented their findings and overall public safety impressions during a CB6 Public Safety subcommittee meeting.
- The 2022 Spring Into Community Event - A voter registration and community resource fair thrown in partnership with Senator Brisport's Office.
- Fright Fest Field Trip - Due to the lack of community activities found during the pandemic, The PS team sponsored a trip for 50 young people to attend Fright Fest for a day of community and fun.
- End Qualified Immunity Albany Day of Action - 3 of our organizers went with the Vocal NY organizing leaders up to Albany for a day of lobbying for the End Qualified Immunity bill.
- End Qualified Immunity Borough Hall Rally - The PS team co-led a rally at Borough Hall a few weeks before the End QI bill was voted on in the state senate. Organizers designed the promotional materials, and spoke at the rally.
- Preliminary Budget Hearing for Public Safety - During the City's budget hearing season, 4 of our organizers submitted testimonies advocating for increased resources for their community.

Events:

- **Communities United for Police Reform PAR Study** - CPR hosted a 5 Day participatory action research project at RHI that interviewed hundreds of residents from the Red Hook community, and asked them their views on policing. This project was supported by the PS teams organizer graduates who worked with VocalNY to staff what was a busy week!
- **Youth Action Summit** - A Youth centered rally led by the Gangs Coalition centered on educating young adults about the gangs database. Each of the breakout rooms was co-facilitated by at least 1 organizer from our group.
- **Rally to Abolish the NYPD Gangs Database** - Co-led a rally at Borough Hall to bring awareness to the city council abolish database bill sponsored by Councilmember Carolina Rivera. In addition to promotional material creation, a few of the organizers spoke at the Rally as well.
- **4th Annual We the Young People Hearing** - 4 of our organizers gave testimonies during NYC Votes annual conference on young people voter engagement.
- **NYU Prep Seminar Series** - The Public Safety team gave a presentation on community safety within Red Hook and the importance of PAR research to Masters level students in NYU's Global affairs department.
- **#Erase the Database Rally Outside of the Inspector Generals Office** - 3 of our organizers gave speeches at our rally for the Gangs Coalition to get the IG to release his report on Gangs policing in NYPD.
- **Response Rally to the Mayors Directive on Mental Health** - The event was moderated by Lead Public Safety Organizer and most of the PS team attended as additional supports.

COALITION AND LEGISLATIVE WORK:

Most of the Public Safety decisions that affect Red Hook, are not made in Red Hook. Red Hook is distributed at all 3 levels (city, state, and federal) into zones with neighborhoods that are more affluent and have lower public housing populations. Red Hook is a neighborhood with a variety of different community needs. It is a food desert, the educational and employment opportunities are scarce, and the most accessible health center is about a 20 minute commute away. There are tangible linkages between a lack of community resources, and increased crime. These conditions, along with an increased presence of law enforcement entities in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods, which typically have higher rates of black and brown residents, leads to increased incarceration. To rectify this, RHI's Public Safety team has become actively involved in several coalitions and legislative campaigns that align with our goal of decarceration through fighting for policy that holds law enforcement agencies accountable to the communities they aim to serve, and fill the financial gaps that will bring restorative reimbursements to the Red Hook community. Our work includes:

- The Commission to Close Rikers - The Public Safety team are active members on 3 of the commissions monthly working groups.
- Communities United for Police Reform - Through our involvement with CPR, we have been able to form connections with other decarceration based organizations and groups, who have brought necessary resources and information into Red Hook. Also Participated in CPR's PAR Study as RHI was a host location.



COALITION AND LEGISLATIVE WORK CONT'D:

- The Gangs Coalition - The PS team works very closely with the Organizing and Action committee for the Gangs Coalition. Our organizers support their work by attending meetings with City Council members to encourage them to support our bill, working as graphics and media support, facilitating training for other youth, and attending Rallies and other events. CM Aviles who represents Red Hook, and has a strong relationship with our team, is one of the cosponsors of the city Gangs coalition bill.
- The End Qualified Immunity Campaign - The PS Team have been actively involved in the End QI campaign. Many have gone up to Albany with Vocal NY to support their lobbying events. The PS team also co-led a Rally at Borough Hall which was planned over the course of a month with the coalitions leaders and steering committee org Vocal NY. When the End QI legislation did not pass in the state senate, we hosted a meeting in Red Hook for the End QI leaders, and Senator Brisport, who is a Co-Sponsor of the bill, to reflect on this past legislative session, and what the next steps are.
- The YJ&O Act Campaign - The PS Team initially hosted Youth Represents representatives at RHI for a training session, in addition to helping them coordinate a community info session with the Open Streets team. The PS team also helped coordinate meetings between Red Hooks political representatives and the campaign's leaders to get them to sign on to support the legislation.
- We have also been apart of the campaign calls for actions like #LessismoreNY and the Cut, Shut, Divest campaign run by the Katal Center.
- The Disband SRG Campaign - In addition to supporting and promoting actions and events, 4 Public Safety team members submitted testimonies for the City Councils Disband SRG hearing on December 9th.
- **Various coalitions and groups have attended our RHI trainings on Fridays to introduce new campaigns and ask RHI to support.**



Community Support

RHI is a grassroots organization, and while much of our Public Safety work is external facing, we do not want to lose touch with the community we are fighting to make safe. To do this, we do our best to support the programming of community led orgs and groups reinvesting in their community. This includes supporting work like:

- The Red Hook Art Projects weekly youth led art classes that take place at P.S. 61
- Redemption Churches Weekly Food Pantry
- RHI's Weekly Open streets resource tabling day.
- Setup and Takedown support for RHI's events like the Health Fair and Block Party
- Tabling at Red Hook centered community fairs like the Annual Redemption Halloween Festival and National Night Out
- Supporting events like Community proms, and community building activities
- Joining regularly the Brooklyn Community Board 6's General Body and Public Safety subcommittee meetings.
- Regular attendance at NYPD Community Council meetings and CCRB Public monthly meetings.

Publications

Part of improving the visibility of our community, is giving our young people the platforms to offer commentary of the various Public Safety topics that are near and dear to their hearts. We have set out to do this through both written and visual publications. These include:

Auto-Ethnography Projects:

- [Odd One Out by Karla Osorno](#)
- [Chilli's Struggles: Identity and the Pursuit of Public Safety by Zhane Ramsey](#)
- [I Don't Feel Safe by Knowledge Westbrooks](#)
- [Some thoughts on Public Safety from a Young Black Woman. Not a person of Color, or young girl. A YOUNG BLACK WOMAN by Faith Anderson](#)
- [I Shouldn't have to work this hard - Dylana Bourne](#)
- [The Enduring Issue - Charisma McWhorter](#)

[The Public Safety Video](#)

[The 2021 RHI Ambassador Discussion Series](#)

[Responses to Increased Community Gun Violence by Endiya Beard and Kiara Turner](#)

Cop Watch Media Publications

- [Op: Ed: I don't Trust the Police - Kiara Turner](#)
- [Op: Ed: The Criminal Injustice System - Knowledge Westbrooks](#)
- [OP-ED: Erase The Gang Database](#)
- [RHI Releases Stop and Frisk Report: 10 Year Anniversary](#)
- [The 2022 RHI Ambassador Discussion Series](#)





Why Programs like This are Important

Youth-led community building is violence prevention. We need to create opportunities for young adults to lead, mentor, and contribute their lived experiences in order to build a sense of community unity. This was the first major finding of the Real Rites research project.

The Public Safety Program set out to establish a connection between the young adults of the Red Hook community, who are typically the most affected by incarceration factors, like over policing and a lack of community reinvestment, and the politicians and lobbyists who are working to combat these factors. We approach this in this program through a trauma informed, education based approach.

Youth from marginalized communities are often viewed as a monolithic group. They aren't given the freedom to explore the intersections in their identities. So if we are asking them to examine community safety through the lens of the entire community, that lens can often be narrowed through their own viewpoint. We are asking our young people throughout this entire program, to take stock of their identities. Their privileges, and marginalizations, and asking them to consider how the way they view themselves, influences how they view community safety. This is represented in our auto-ethnography projects. Our goal is to create young organizers and community leaders who are ready and willing to fight for the most marginalized in their community. If our young black, cis, heterosexual men cant understand that their perceptions of safety and community violence, might differ from other identity groups within their own community, we are doing them a disservice.





This approach helps foster community dialogue and trust. We task our young adults to find the commonalities within their experiences and that is how our safety platform was created. We decided to focus our mission on de-carcerating the community of Red Hook through reinvestment and police accountability, because those were the areas we were able to unite our communities' young people behind. Many of the young adults were, and still are, actively weary of police due to the rampant over policing they face (Red Hook is a community with SRG groups, Neighborhood Safety Teams, and ICE patrolling, as well as common officers), and the visibility of the 2020 #Feduprising. However, due to their experiences with community violence, specifically gun violence, you have many young adults who feel as though some sort of policing is necessary to maintain community safety. Still, regardless of where they fell on the spectrum, all of our young people believed that the lack of tangible community resources available to the community fostered where many young people feel as though their only options to survival are violence and crime. This is especially true for young adults undergoing reentry who are frequently denied access to housing and employment opportunities.

Every neighborhood looks different. However, the same systems of oppression that target Black and Brown youth will always be there. We need to engage young adults in the decisions being made to combat these forces. We need to trust and respect their voices, and understand that their perspectives might not align with ours. Our goal as organizers is to build up leaders within the communities we serve so we can not exist. Youth organizing pipelines with education and mental health components are a way to do so, in an age bracket that is often hard to engage within these conversations.

Congratulations to all of the Public Safety Organizers who completed the program!

Dylana Bourne
Zhane Ramsey
Karla Osorno
Charisma McWhorter
Knowledge Westbrooks
Faith Anderson
Kiara Turner
Jamel Evans
Christian Rose
Endiya Beard
Raysha Vassal
An Doc
Ashley Craig

