

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/paving-the-way-to-equity-in-victim-services>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Earlier this month, [Common Justice](#) a Vera demonstration project hosted Paving the Way to Healing and Recovery: Conversations with Young Men of Color Who Survive Violence, [a conference focused on what works](#) in addressing the violence young men of color survive. Held in partnership with the Crown Heights Mediation Center and Achievement First Brooklyn High School, the conference explored hospital-based interventions for survivors of intentional violence like shootings and stabbings, group intervention models for young male victims of violence, culturally-informed strategies to address PTSD, the role of intergenerational trauma in young men of color's experience of harm, and community-based violence intervention models. The conference, which included practitioners from fields ranging from victim services to reentry, elevated the leadership and expertise of male survivors of color in presentations and discussions aimed at identifying and implementing solutions.

It was not until the week before the conference that I came to appreciate something about the event we'd been organizing for nearly a year: to our knowledge, it was the first conference on this topic in the United States.

Firsts are often celebrated and should be as they can be transformative, hard-won, just, and catalytic events. But some firsts such as black people or women getting the right to vote should remind us of what came before and why. These moments should be celebrated, their impact honored, and the enormous efforts it took to achieve them recognized. But those of us committed to securing lasting change must also focus on combating the cultural biases and barriers that made these milestones so long in the making and which often persist long after they are achieved.

All of us committed to addressing the violence young men of color survive should take pride in the fact that so many people left the conference more energized, committed, informed, and connected. But we should also grieve and take accountability for how long it took to hold this public conversation. A core concept of grief counseling suggests that our ability to plan for the future is directly tied to our ability to deal with the past. It is part of why grief can so deeply paralyze our ability to imagine, hope, and dream. And it is also why contending with the past can be so transformative.

It is my hope that by recognizing the individual and collective history of pain that men of color have experienced, this conference also elevated and celebrated the profound resilience, creativity, and hope of those same men and we who are invested in their healing. If it did, then the courage and commitment that so many demonstrated in grappling with recent and long-standing traumas may truly pave the way to healing and recovery going forward.

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

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