

## Racial Justice Training Institute

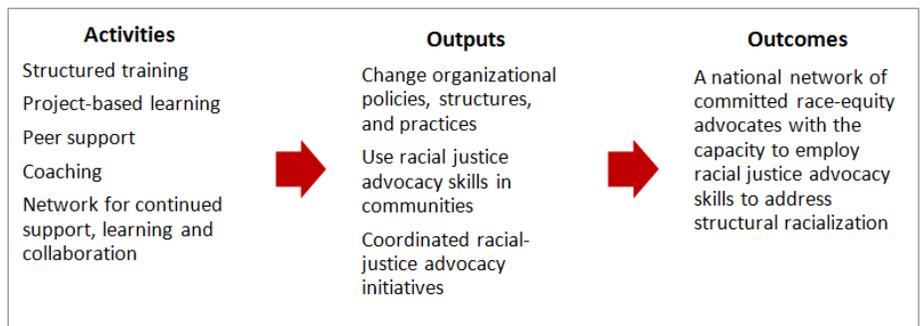
In May 2014, the Shriver Center launched the Racial Justice Training Institute (RJTI), a unique and innovative resource for the national legal aid and public interest law communities. By placing the most up-to-date racial justice tools in the hands of front line advocates, the Institute provides real opportunities to address the impacts of structural racialization and ensure that race is front and center in our efforts to eradicate poverty in the communities we serve. The goals of the Institute are to strengthen advocacy capacity of both individual advocates and organizations and to build an ongoing national network of equal justice advocates who are committed to and skilled in advancing a coordinated racial justice advocacy agenda.

The RJTI works to accomplish these goals through two key initiatives: 1) an intensive six-month long training program; and, 2) an ongoing advocacy network that cohort members join once the formal training period ends.

In our first two years, 80 advocates from 39 organizations in 17 states

have participated in the RJTI. The inaugural 2014 RJTI cohort included 38 advocates working in twelve racial equity teams; the second cohort includes 41 advocates working in thirteen racial equity teams. Each of these cohorts are diverse with respect to members’ racial and ethnic backgrounds, prior legal experiences and positions within their organizations, the organizations in which they operate, and the communities they serve.

RJTI’s Theory of Change

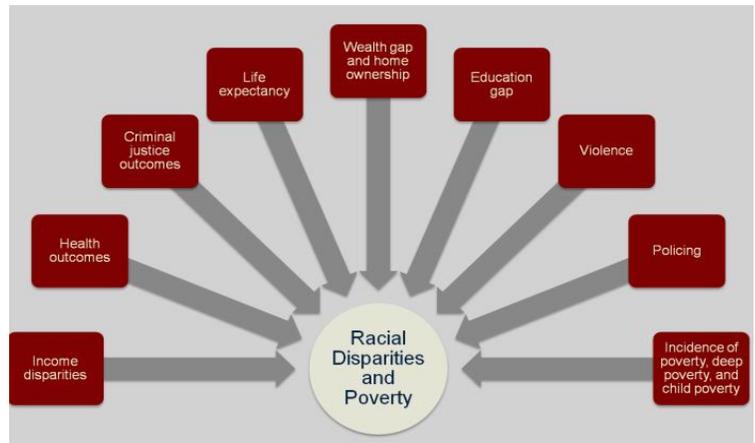


## The RJTI Model

The RJTI’s intensive training program takes place over six months and uses a combination of online and onsite training activities structured into three parts. Cohort members participate in the training program as part of racial equity teams. Using an action learning model, and with support from skilled faculty and other cohort members, they apply new knowledge and skills to racial justice initiatives within their organizations and communities.

Faculty include experienced advocates from within the legal aid, public interest and civil rights communities who serve as presenters, facilitators and equity team coaches. Cohort members also bring a wide range of racial equity experience to the group and, as appropriate, also serve as presenters for selected onsite sessions and webinars. Our goal is to build a deep bench of racial justice advocates who can serve as faculty and coaches for future RJTI cohorts.

Ideas for equity team projects evolve over the course of the training program as team members refine their understanding of the systems and structures that contribute to racialized poverty and other inequities. For example, members of the 2014 cohort worked on a range of issues from disproportionate representation of native children in foster care in Alaska to educational inequities in St. Louis County to racial profiling and mass incarceration in North Carolina. Using the RJTI Organizational Readiness Survey as a starting point, many teams also initiated internal organizational work groups to examine the efficacy of various structures – e.g., client intake protocols; case selection criteria; recruitment, hiring and retention of staff of color – necessary to support their organization’s capacity to engage successfully in racial justice advocacy. Almost all have undertaken racial equity training programs for in-house staff and the larger equal justice community.



## Training Program -- Part 1 - Online

**Part 1—Online** takes place over three weeks through the Shriver Center’s online campus. It includes a combination of independent learning and equity team activities that cohort members complete on their own schedules and “synchronous” live sessions that cohort members engage in together.

- **Weekly independent learning activities** provide individual participants with readings and other materials to learn about core racial justice concepts and practices. Through online discussion forums and live activities, participants share their reactions to and questions about these resources; they also begin to engage with other.
- **Weekly independent equity team activities** provide an initial forum through which team members begin to work together to apply racial justice concepts and skills to issues in their own organizations and communities. Team members submit weekly reports which are posted on the online course site for review by faculty and other cohort members. Faculty draw from these reports when engaging cohort members during online sessions; they also use these to assess team engagement and progress as the Institute progresses.

Sample: Online Week

**Week 2: June 2 - 6**

Cohort members will: 1) work independently to review materials on social cognition & implicit bias and systems thinking; 2) meet in race-equity teams to begin to apply racial concepts and tools to issues in their programs or communities; 3) come together as a large group on Wednesday, June 4 to explore systems thinking and community lawyering practices in more depth.

Independent Learning Module	Equity Team Module	Live Sessions Module: June 4th
<p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Through the Independent Learning Module, cohort members will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Review materials on social cognition and implicit bias</li> <li>○ Take at least two Implicit Association Tests (IATs)</li> <li>○ Review materials on systems thinking</li> <li>○ Share insights and experiences through the discussion forum</li> </ul> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #002060;"><a href="#">Go to Independent Learning Module Page</a></p>	<p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Through the Independent Equity Team Module, cohort members will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Review equity team planning template</li> <li>○ Identify current strengths/challenges of your organization in relation to race equity</li> <li>○ Respond to questions related to race equity issues to be addressed through the Institute</li> </ul> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #FFC000;"><a href="#">Go to Equity Team Module Page</a></p>	<p style="font-size: 0.8em;">The live sessions on June 4 include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Webinar 4: Systems Thinking Concepts &amp; Tools</li> <li>○ Small groups: Application of systems thinking tools</li> <li>○ Webinar 5: Community Lawyering - Principles &amp; Practices</li> <li>○ Small groups: Community Lawyering experiences</li> </ul> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: #800000;"><a href="#">Go to Live Sessions: June 4 Page</a></p>

- **Weekly live activities** take place through the Adobe online forum over five hours each Wednesday during each of the three online weeks. These sessions include both interactive large group presentations and facilitated small group discussions. Cohort members begin to get to know each other and build relationship through these initial small groups.

## Training Program - Part 2 - Onsite

**Part 2—Onsite** takes place over four days in Chicago and includes a combination of interactive presentations, small group discussions and exercises, and equity team planning sessions. These sessions provide participants with a deeper look at key concepts and practices in areas of social cognition and implicit bias, litigation, legislative and policy advocacy, framing and messaging, community engagement and coalition building and leadership and organizational change.



Large group presentations & discussion



Small Group Application



Team Meetings

It also provides a critical opportunity for cohort members to develop relationships with each other – across equity teams, organizations and regions – and to lay the groundwork for the national advocacy network they are building.

## Training Program - Part 3- Online

**Part 3 Online** takes place over four months and includes a combination of bi-weekly live sessions, discussion forums, facilitated peer-support groups, strategic coaching and other activities to meet cohort members' needs as they arise.

- **Bi-Weekly Live Sessions.** Cohort members meet twice each month for two-hour live interactive presentations and small group discussions on topics that arise out of cohort members' experiences during Part 2. During the 2015 RJTI, these sessions included several presentations on the use of mapping tools to both discover and document racial disparities as well as sessions on: Racially Equitable Policy Advocacy; Priming and Debiasing; Communication Strategy and Messaging; and Leadership & Organizational Change.
- **Equity Team Projects & Faculty Coaches.** Working with assigned coaches, teams continue to work on their racial equity projects. At the end of each month, teams post updates on their progress and selected teams make presentations to other cohort members during each of the bi-weekly live sessions. This sharing of

experience provides both inspiration and support to other teams and allows for joint projects to emerge. Coaches meet as a group every other week to check in on equity team progress and to support each other in their coaching roles.

## RJTI Year 1 Evaluation

The Shriver Center retained evaluation consultant Laurie Goldman of Tufts University to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the first RJTI; the purpose of the evaluation was to inform the Shriver Center and its RJTI Advisory Group in planning for the second year of the pilot phase of the RJTI and to guide continued inquiry to refine and further develop the program implementation and design.

Ms. Goldman conducted 16 individual and group interviews of cohort members and faculty/coaches. She also solicited additional input from all cohort members - through an online survey - about their RJTI experiences generally as well as regarding specific Institute components including cohort composition, curriculum and structure, equity teams and projects, capacity to engage in racial justice advocacy and suggestions for future cohort selection and curriculum design. By way of summary, the consultant found that:

- Every participant contacted expressed enthusiastic praise for the RJTI, the faculty, the curriculum, and the overall mission of launching a race-equity movement within the legal aid and public interest legal field. Most participants conveyed that the experience augmented their already high commitment to racial justice advocacy.
- They commended the three-part framework of the on-line introductory sessions on the race-equity framework, followed by the on-site gathering to meet the cohort and launch work on equity team projects, and the subsequent weeks alternating between on-line, live webinars on applying the race-equity skills and work on their projects.
- They reported that they significantly developed their understanding of structural racialization and felt they have begun to develop competencies in the tool kit of racial justice advocacy skills. Both novices to racial justice advocacy and participants with considerable prior experience said they learned even more than they anticipated. Most participants plan to use many of the skills in the near future and many report that they have already begun to do so.
- In general, most participants valued the opportunity to develop a project with their Equity Team partners. Even those who experienced challenges in developing their projects found the experience to be rewarding. Almost all teams said they benefited from guidance and support from coaches and other faculty. Cohort members offered a number of very useful suggestions for strengthening equity team projects; we will implement these beginning with the 2015 cohort.

“RJTI was an experience of a life time for me ... A phenomenal amount of work went into it. It was such a gift and it will impact my work for the rest of my career, no doubt about that. I’m looking forward to continuing to be involved with the faculty and the other participants.”

(RJTI First Cohort participant)



## Participating Organizations – Cohorts 1 & 2

Alaska Legal Services Corps.	AK	Public Justice Center	MD
DNA People's Legal Services	AZ	Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid	MN
Central CA Legal Services	CA	Legal Services of Eastern Missouri	MO
Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles	CA	Mississippi Center for Justice	MS
Legal Services of Northern California	CA	Southern Coalition for Social Justice	NC
Western Center on Law & Poverty	CA	ACLU of New Mexico	NM
Connecticut Legal Services Inc	CT	New Mexico Legal Aid	NM
Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia	DC	Legal Assistance of Western New York	NY
Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida, Inc.	FL	Legal Services NYC	NY
Legal Services of Greater Miami, Inc.	FL	Cleveland Legal Aid Society	OH
Florida Institutional Legal Services Project	FL	Community Legal Aid Services, Inc.	OH
Chicago Lawyers Committee	IL	Legal Aid Society of Columbus	OH
Legal Aid Foundation of Chicago	IL	Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, LLC	OH
Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation	IL	Southeastern Ohio Legal Services	OH
Loyola Law Fellows Program	IL	Texas Applesseed	TX
Prairie State Legal Services, Inc.	IL	Columbia Legal Services	WA
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law	IL	King County Dept. of Public Defense	WA
Iowa Legal Aid	IO	King County Executive Office	WA
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute	MA	King County Prosecuting Attorneys Office	WA
National Consumer Law Center	MA	Northwest Justice Project	WA

## RJTI Advisory Committee & Staff

Ada Shen-Jaffe	Race Equity & Leadership Consultant
Aneel Chablani	Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, OH
Anita Earls	Southern Coalition for Social Justice, NC
Bill Kennedy	Race Equity Project, CA
Camille Holmes	National Legal Aid & Defender Association, DC
Dorcas Gilmore	Community & Economic Development Law Clinic, American University School of Law, DC
Ellen Hemley	Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
Justin Hansford	St. Louis University School of Law, MO
Kimberly Merchant	Mississippi Center for Justice, MS
Maria Martinez	ACLU of New Mexico, NM
Mona Tawatao	Western Center on Law & Poverty, CA
Terry Keleher	Race Forward, IL





## Join us on Facebook

Have you joined [RJTI's secret Facebook](#) group? You should have received an email invitation by now. If not, check your spam folder and also your notifications on Facebook. If you still do not see a prompt to join you may contact [janerickholmes@poverylaw.org](mailto:janerickholmes@poverylaw.org) and include the email associated with your existing Facebook account to ask for another invite.

## Upcoming Sessions

November 10, join us for an education equity session with Mona Towatao of Western Center on Law and Poverty, and Chris Bridges with Equal Justice Society.

In December\*, Aneel Chablani of Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. will lead a criminalization of poverty workshop. \*date TBD

## Resources

September 14, the Shriver Center's Clearinghouse Community held an Advocacy in Action webinar that drew more than 1000 registrants. Click here for the [Access to Affordable Housing for People with Criminal Records webinar](#).

## Launching the RJTI Network newsletter

With your help, the Racial Justice Training Institute (RJTI) is fostering a network of advocates committed to advancing a coordinated racial justice agenda. As RJTI wraps up its second year, we are excited to announce the official launch of the RJTI Network with new vehicles to facilitate communication among the nearly 100 leaders who make up the Network, and whose daily work provides opportunities to address America's racial equity challenges head-on. The Network will also provide vehicles to support ongoing learning and information sharing, joint advocacy, and peer support.

One key Network resource is this, our inaugural newsletter. Regular RJTI newsletters will offer periodic highlights of the Network's efforts in the fight for racial equity; it will also profile the work and accomplishments of individual members and racial equity teams. Another platform for communication is the [RJTI Network Facebook group](#), which launched in September and is already inspiring terrific collaboration among members.

A third resource in development is this [storymap](#), which currently illustrates 2015 cohort members' work through team member photos and equity team project descriptions. We have begun populating it with content, and will continue to add more stories as well as information about 2014 racial equity teams in the coming weeks. Finally, stay tuned for news about upcoming network activities including soon to be scheduled joint advocacy sessions on education equity and the criminalization of poverty. Through these and future meetings, cohort members will have opportunities to workshop specific advocacy initiatives and receive feedback and support from invited guests and other cohort members.

In the coming months, we look forward to providing opportunities for cohort 1 members to reconnect and for cohorts 1 and 2 to get to know each other and deepen their engagement and leadership in pursuit of racial justice. We hope that these new resources and communication tools will foster continued collaboration and help

## Network Highlights



2014 alum Anita Earls of the Southern Coalition for Social Justice recently argued a case challenging North Carolina's HB59, a restrictive voting rights law. We were fortunate to have Anita present the details of this case during a recent webinar. [Click here](#) to read about the importance of Anita's case. Or watch a short biography of her via [YouTube](#).

Read Shriver Center Clearinghouse Community interviews with 2015 cohort members Justin Page, staff attorney at the Minnesota Disability Law Center at Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid, and Kristen Noelle Hatcher, managing attorney of the Benefits Unit at Connecticut Legal Services Inc. [Read more](#).

## Events

Attending the 2015 National Legal Aid & Defender Association annual conference in November? Ellen Hemley and other RJTI cohort members will be there. Reach out to [ehemley@povertylaw.org](mailto:ehemley@povertylaw.org) to meet up or join the ongoing [Facebook](#) discussion.

members advance each other's racial equity goals.

We look forward to hearing your voice! If you have questions about using these new resources, please contact [janerickholmes@povertylaw.org](mailto:janerickholmes@povertylaw.org).

## 2014 RJTI alum awarded education equity grant

Mississippi Center for Justice (MCJ) Educational Opportunities Director Kimberly Merchant works to end the school to prison pipeline through her Indianola, Mississippi office. During a recent RJTI meeting, Kimberly announced a newly acquired two-year, \$1 million grant she proposed to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation using some of the tools gained through the Institute.



MCJ joined the ACLU of Mississippi to write the ambitious grant, which offers intervention techniques such as implicit bias training for school resource officers, local law enforcement, and media and youth court staff. Using a re-framing approach, the project seeks to address the excessive discipline problem and increase educational opportunity and success rates for young males of color.

"We are working to change systems and institutions that bring about disparity through unfair discipline practices and policing youth in this community," said Merchant. "I used what we learned in RJTI, built on that, submitted a successful proposal to Kellogg and hope to continue to report on the success as we move forward," she continued.

The grant results in a partnership with the ACLU of MS, MCJ, the Sunflower County Community Engagement Council and the Sunflower County School District. Read the official press release about the grant on the [Mississippi Center for Justice website](#).

**photo: Kimberly Merchant, Mississippi Center for Justice Educational Opportunities Director, 2014 cohort member and 2015 equity team coach and advisory committee member.**

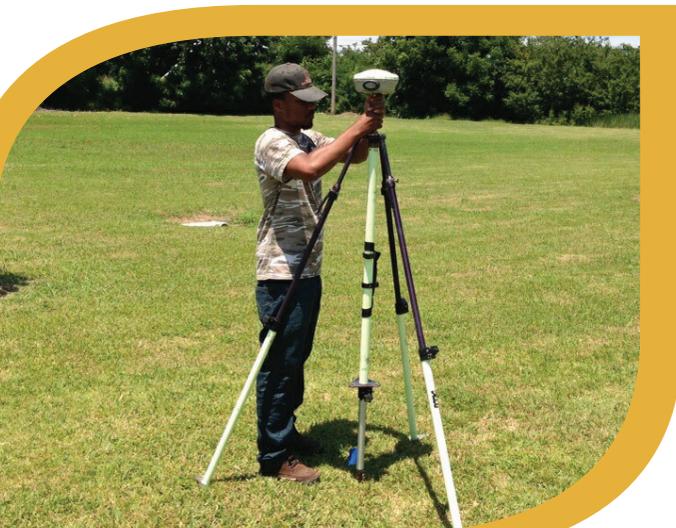
# SUNFLOWER COUNTY Systems Change PROJECT

**This partnership is committed to the following goals:**

1. To develop a statewide model for the implementation of a community driven systems approach as an alternative method to address student discipline and youth court referrals.
2. To reduce suspensions and expulsions, and lessen the contact of YMBOC with the juvenile justice system, interrupting the school to prison pipeline.
3. To improve interactions between students and school resource officers (SROs), promoting SROs as guardians of our children and schools as safe places for our children.
4. To promote and increase community and media engagement in the reduction of negative stereotypes of YMBOC.

## Sunflower County Has the Solution

Sunflower County is leading the state in its efforts to address the challenges faced by YMBOC. The community will review, deliberate and develop new processes and procedures for the best interest of the children, and engage each system in an examination of contributing factors to the school to prison pipeline. The SCSCP seeks to promote positive outcomes that impact the entire community.



For more information, visit:  
[www.sunflowercountysystemschange.com](http://www.sunflowercountysystemschange.com)

 Sunflower Systems Change

 @SCSystemsChange

 SunflowerSystemsChange

 [info@scsc.com](mailto:info@scsc.com)



SUNFLOWER COUNTY  
**Systems Change**

## About SCSCP

### Sunflower County Systems Change Project (SCSCP)

is a community based systems change approach that addresses school discipline, juvenile justice and media narrative of young men and boys of color (YMBOC). This project is a partnership between the American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi, Mississippi Center for Justice, Sunflower County Consolidated School District and the Sunflower Consolidated School District P-16 Council.

Young men and boys of color face cultural and criminal stereotypes that leave them vulnerable to adverse impacts like school pushout and negative media perceptions, forcing them in the school to prison pipeline. By engaging systems - school district, juvenile justice, media, and community stakeholders - the SCSCP seeks to establish best practices and supportive strategies to create positive pathways designed to help YMBOC succeed.

The Sunflower County community is the first in Mississippi to adopt this systems approach. This project will promote unbiased and positive dialogue of YMBOC and proactively and collectively engage systems to improve the outlook and outcomes for YMBOC.

## What is "Systems Change"?

Systems change is a shift in institutional culture, policy, process and procedure within an individual organization or across organizations that eliminate barriers and disparities to a particular needed population. The SCSCP will address how the school system, juvenile justice system, local media and the community each play a role in how we engage our YMBOC and explore how the implementation of school discipline, youth court referrals and media portrayal can unintentionally contribute to disparate and disproportionate outcomes.

## Why does Sunflower County need this project?

Sunflower County is currently number two in the State for youth court referrals. Of the 224 youth referred to the juvenile justice system in 2014, 212 were children of color. Nationally, young male students of color are three times more likely to be subjected to school discipline and referred to the youth court system. This is not the result of students of color acting out more; rather, how adults respond to student behavior. Suspensions and expulsions take students out of the classroom. Each time a student is placed outside of the educational setting, it is more likely that he will repeat a grade. Any student that repeats a grade is more likely to be a drop out. Repeated contact with the juvenile justice system increases an adolescent's chance of being a part of the criminal justice system.

## How do I play a part in this project?

All of us have a vested interest in ensuring our community and the people in it succeed. You can help ensure the success of the SCSCP by:

- Serving on the steering committee to learn about innovative, evidenced-based models of success and decide which models or what component of models can work in Sunflower County;
- Encouraging community involvement, reviewing policies, making positive and fair recommendations to systems;
- Participating in focus groups and encouraging community involvement;
- Having an open mind and making a commitment to the intended goals of the project; and,
- Sharing your opinion about the current process and how we can do better.



## Sunflower County Leads the Way!

### Who Benefits?

- **4,200 students and 300 teachers and administrators in the consolidated school system** by connecting the systems that impact school environment, thereby enhancing
- **Law enforcement and juvenile justice systems** by developing alternatives that support positive interactions with YMBOC, thereby, reducing the number of youth court referrals.
- **Sunflower County community as a whole** by developing and encouraging students to be better educated and productive contributors to the local economy.
- **Other school districts** by having a tested and proven model that can be tailored to teach individual community's needs.



Sunflower County is the **first county in the state** to use a community based systems change approach to improving outcomes for YMBOC.



## Stay Connected

The RJTI Facebook group is growing strong with nearly 60 members. To join contact [janerickholmes@poverylaw.org](mailto:janerickholmes@poverylaw.org).

The RJTI listserv is already helping users connect. Email the Network at [rjti@poverylaw.org](mailto:rjti@poverylaw.org).

## Joint Advocacy Sessions Underway

**December 18, 1-2:30 p.m. CT**  
Aneel Chablani of ABLE will lead a criminalization of poverty workshop. The criminalization of poverty broadly covers issues that deal with the intersection of the criminal justice system – e.g., fines and costs, jail or incarceration, collateral consequences - and an individual's or community's poverty status. Click [here](#) for more info and to register.

The inaugural **Nov. 10** session on the school-to-prison pipeline was a great success with nearly 40 attendees. Thanks to organizers Mona Tawatao and Shelia Burton & presenters Allison Elgart and Chris Bridges of Equal Justice Society for sharing news about recent education equity litigation.

## Daryl Atkinson first-ever DOJ Second Chance Fellow



Congratulations to Daryl Atkinson (2014 RJTI alum) who was recently announced the first-ever U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Second Chance Fellow by Attorney General Loretta Lynch. Daryl attended the Institute as a Southern Coalition for Social Justice (SCSJ) Senior Attorney,

working on drug policy and criminal justice reform issues in North Carolina.

From the [DOJ announcement](#): “Daryl will work with us, as a colleague to the Reentry Council, as an advisor to the BJA [Bureau of Justice Assistance] Second Chance programs, and as a conduit to engage the broader justice-involved population so that DOJ and the Administration are hearing from all stakeholders as we move forward in strengthening our nation and empowering our communities.”

His new fellowship is one of the Second Chance Grants aimed at reducing recidivism through increased federal resources, training and technical assistance. During the fellowship, Daryl will collaborate with advocates in 45 jurisdictions, also working to eliminate barriers to successful reintegration, as a focus group on the most promising reentry practices. He also plans to rely on the RJTI Network.

“The fellowship guarantees that the people and communities most directly impacted by mass criminalization will have a voice in developing the federal policies that most intimately affect their lives,” said Daryl. Learn more about Daryl and his work by [viewing](#) his appearance on The Daily Show with Trevor Noah. Or, visit the [SCSJ website](#) to read about his reentry roundtable with President Obama, who recently called for Ban the Box actions that will promote rehabilitation.

Best of luck to Daryl in this new position, we look forward to updating you on the initiative's progress.

**Network Highlights**



Read [the](#) Shriver Center Clearinghouse Community interview with Western Center on Law & Poverty Senior Attorney Antionette Dozier (2014 RJTI alum). The Western Center on Law & Poverty also recently published a report about court fees increasing racial disparity: Not Just a Ferguson Problem How Traffic Courts Drive Inequality in California, [read more](#).

**RJTI Network Photos**

This fall, some of your favorite advocates have been traveling far and wide to lead important conversations about racial equity. **On the right** are just a couple of photos from the RJTI Facebook group:

Following the RJTI panel at the NLADA conference cohort 1 members Pavita Lassie Krishnaswamy, Navneet Grewal, and cohort 2 members Luz Maria Henriquez, & Maddie Sloan joined Ellen Hemley for a photo op.

Members of cohorts 1 and 2 in Illinois gathered in Chicago to plan for the launch of ICARE (Illinois Community of Advocates for Racial Equity).

**PJC shares ongoing race equity focus**

The final 2015 RJTI live session took place on October 28. It was a great opportunity to reflect on this year’s Institute and explore ways to continue a racial equity focus. Dorcas Gilmore began by introducing 2014 RJTI alums Deb Gardner and Camilla Roberson of the Public Justice Center (PJC) who shared what their organization has done to move forward since completing RJTI. (Watch PJC’s October 28 presentation [here](#))



Deb spoke about PJC’s internal organizational change, convening a newly formed race equity team and a staff retreat with facilitation from a unique partnership between Camille Holmes of the NLADA and Baltimore Racial Justice Action (BRJA), a local anti-racism group. Their staff also committed time to a long-term contract with BRJA and NLADA for bi-monthly trainings and monthly affinity group meetings. Camilla covered how PJC’s advocacy includes formation of a work group led by four women of color to promote integration of race equity and human rights frames in legal services, creation of a race equity track at Maryland’s annual statewide legal services conference, and new advocacy initiatives. They also touched on how PJC staff was permitted time to support local activists during and after the Baltimore Uprising this April.

As part of their orientation to staff, the PJC team also gave an [on-site presentation](#) in September 2014 to about what they learned in RJTI. “The presentation was designed to report back, in just two hours, to our staff of 20, on the whole of the RJTI that Camilla, John and I completed, and to set the stage for more to come,” said Deb.

Thanks to the Public Justice Center for sharing these steps and congratulations to 2015 cohort members on a fruitful Institute.





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## NCLC's Racial Justice Project increases economic sustainability



Odette Williamson (2015 RJTI alum) directs the Racial Justice and Equal Economic Opportunity Project as a National Consumer Law Center (NCLC) Staff Attorney in their Boston headquarters. The Project's mission is to prevent exploitative financial practices, which have drained wealth and resources from families and communities of color. Its work areas include Credit and Economic Opportunity, Equal Access to Higher Education, Sustainable Homeownership, and Equitable Access to Broadband, Media, and Telecom Services.

To keep resources where they are most needed, the NCLC is exposing newer practices that lead to financial distress through the Racial Justice In Utility Rate Design Program. This initiative combats the practice of billing a fixed charge rate, which ultimately bills communities of color more money for less usage. "The National Consumer Law Center partnered with the Natural Resources Defense Council and VoteSolar to lead a national campaign to monitor and push back against utilities in at least 33 states that had proposed to raise fixed, monthly fees," said Odette. "NCLC is working with racial justice organizations to develop data and issue briefs to inform policymakers as well as the public on how increased fixed charges burden low-income, African American, Hispanic and Asian households more than White households," she continued.

Making the connections between disproportionate fees and race is a clear focus of NCLC and their allies. One medium they use to discuss those links is an ongoing series of public webinars. This year Odette acted as moderator for "Debt and Democracy: How the Collection of Civil Fees and Fines Contributed to the Unrest in Ferguson," a webinar to explore how municipal fines disproportionately embed persons of color in a cycle of debt.

Visit the NCLC website for information about how their [legislation and rulemakings](#) involvement and [webinar series](#) continue these important conversations.

## ICARE team members

ICARE pictured from left to right: Jessica Schneider (CLC), Candace Moore (CLC), Marqus Cole (PS), Stephanie Altman (Shriver), Linda Rothnagel (PS), Jennie Sutcliffe (Shriver), Latasha Barnes (LOL), Sheila Burton (LOL), and Alice Setrini (LAF). Not pictured: Catrina Miksis (Intern, CLC) and Charles Petrof (LAF).

## Network Highlights



December's Shriver Center Clearinghouse Community advocacy story is co-authored by Stephanie Altman (2015 RJTI alum, pictured) and Jennifer Doeren of Elev8. Log in to read [Confronting Childhood Trauma to Promote Student Success](#).

Read the Clearinghouse Community [23rd annual Supreme Court recap](#)—co-authored by Mona Tawatao (RJTI Advisory Committee)—with a focus on how the cases from the last Term will affect access to the federal courts. Then join Shriver Center's Amanda Moore for a Google+ Hangout on Air with the authors on Dec. 17, 1 p.m. EST. [Register here](#).

## ICARE plans for February 2016 launch



This October the Illinois joint equity team comprised of 2014 and 2015 RJTI alums gathered to discuss a February 2016 launch of Illinois Community of Advocates for Race Equity (ICARE). The planning session allowed them to design next steps toward their mission to build, train and support a community of advocates across Illinois who are committed to advancing racial justice.

To build their Illinois network the group will rely on a blend of in person and online collaborations. The initial online rollout includes an Illinois advocates' listserv so they may share resources, events, workshop ideas and mobilize thought leaders. A webinar series will focus on topics such as racial structuralization, implicit bias and de-biasing, effective messaging and other such topics gleaned from the RJTI learning experience. All of this collaborative effort will culminate with an annual training rotated amongst local law schools and the triennial Illinois Legal Aid Advocates Conference sponsored by the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois, The Chicago Bar Foundation, Illinois Bar Foundation and Polk Brothers Foundation.

Tapping into the RJTI Network was helpful in refining the ICARE team initiative. "Merging the varying advocacy thoughts and ideas of the 2014 and 2015 cohorts was a bit difficult initially. The 2015 members relied extensively on guidance and direction from Ada Shen-Jaffe and Bill Kennedy to concentrate our efforts on a more cohesive group project that would allow each team member to make meaningful contributions to the combined ICARE effort. Now, the 2015 cohort is working to develop a race-equity toolkit that will further the overall mission of ICARE to build, train and support local advocates. Each team member is working within their area of advocacy to compile research and data needed to enhance the toolkit's effectiveness for allies facing similar challenges," said Latasha Barnes (2015 RJTI alum).

To help foster interest and discussion, ICARE has created a [video teaser](#) to introduce the group to the community. ICARE will release the teaser and a "save the date" invitation in the upcoming weeks, inviting collaborators to join them for an inaugural webinar in February 2016.

Stay tuned for the official launch of ICARE!



## Stay Connected

The RJTI Facebook group is growing strong with more than 60 members. To join contact [janerickholmes@povertylaw.org](mailto:janerickholmes@povertylaw.org).

The RJTI listserv is already helping users connect. Email the Network at [rjti@povertylaw.org](mailto:rjti@povertylaw.org).

## Ongoing Learning Session

### January 27, 11:30 - 1 CST Mapping for Racial Justice with Bill Kennedy

This workshop will profile HUD's new online mapping platform, which enables local jurisdictions to evaluate their fair housing obligations under the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Act across 16 different measures. These categories have applications far beyond their intended use and will help advocates push for education, transportation or land use equity and more. Click [here](#) for more info and to register.

## RJTI alums join Make the Road New York



2014 RJTI alums Amy Taylor and Sienna Fontaine were recently named Make the Road New York (MRNY) Legal Director and Deputy Legal Director, respectively. In their new roles Amy and Sienna advance the MRNY mission: to build the power of Latino and working class communities to achieve dignity and justice through organizing, policy innovation, transformative education and survival services.

To advance that mission the legal team provides direct assistance to immigrant clients and support campaigns to address systemic injustice through legislation, policy innovation and impact litigation. MRNY's membership of 18,000 New Yorkers convene in weekly committee meetings to discuss the issues most pressing in their communities in the areas of housing, workplace justice, immigration, education, LGBTQ issues, consumer fraud and more. One recent workplace justice win is the Car Wash Accountability Act, recently signed by New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. The Act improves wages, guarantees workers overtime and includes worker protections and benefits, such as fair scheduling, paid personal days and anti-wage-theft measures. Amy and Sienna are now providing support to ongoing campaigns to bolster the "Fight for \$15," a push for increased minimum wage, and the Right to Know Act a call for NYPD transparency.

While formulating that support strategy, Amy and Sienna are reminded of lessons learned in RJTI. "Onsite in Chicago we discussed framing and re-framing, which surfaces a lot when dealing with disempowered groups in New York," said Sienna. "Tips about how to make stories more universal and accessible have been helpful as we address all the ways our members are racially targeted," she continued.

The duo also found implicit bias training to be helpful and are working with Pavita Krishnaswamy (2014 RJTI alum) to train their staff. [Click here](#) to read more about Make the Road New York.

## Hangout on Air



### January 20, 1 - 1:30 EST What Process Is Due in a “Modernized” Public Benefits System?

Technology has transformed the administration of public benefits like SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid. But when these "modernized" systems fail, what recourse do benefits recipients have? How do due process protections apply?

Join our discussion with three attorneys from the National Center for Law & Economic Justice -- Gina Mannix, Marc Cohan, & Greg Bass -- as they take your questions and describe their work on due process and technology. Be sure to read more about their work in their new Clearinghouse article, "[How to Protect Clients Receiving Public Benefits When Modernized Systems Fail.](#)"

Click [here](#) to register for this discussion convened by the Shriver Center's Amanda Moore.

## ALSC supports tribal child protection efforts

2014 RJTI alums Syd Tarzwell and Holly Handler co-chair the Alaska Legal Services Corporation's (ALSC) statewide Native law advocacy team. Every month, the team (virtually) brings together staff from different parts of the state who work on Native law issues. The team plans new and ongoing initiatives, such as adopting a RJTI-inspired race equity and emerging community lawyering focus.



ALSC's mission is to provide high quality civil legal services to low income and disadvantaged people and communities to protect their safety, health and promote family stability. In Alaska, where the majority of small communities are remote and off the road-system, this often means working to support local tribal justice systems, including tribal child welfare programs. It is a unique and fascinating challenge for ALSC's 11 offices spread across the state.

In the Anchorage office, Syd works to enforce the Indian Child Welfare Act, which allows tribes to intervene in court cases involving Native children, and transfer cases to tribal court. "The Act became law because Native children were being removed from their homes at a higher rate than non-Natives," said Syd. "It's rewarding work to stop these families from being ripped apart," she continued. In Juneau, Holly has a general civil caseload that includes representing a local Tribe to enforce tribal court orders.

Armed with education and support from RJTI, the Native Law advocacy team is forging fruitful partnerships to address disparate impacts throughout Alaska. They recently joined forces with First Alaskans Institute, a policy center and community organizing group, which includes participation in their race equity visionary council. This collaboration led to First Alaskans Institute hosting a one-day advocacy team retreat in Anchorage. The retreat provided a safe space and structure for staff to begin grappling with the agency's internal equity issues. It also provided a foundation to develop future advocacy projects with a race equity and community lawyering lens.

Visit the ALSC [Facebook page](#) or read [a recent news article](#) about their work to make adoptions of Native foster children by Native families easier.