I write to you today feeling proud and humbled by the strength of our community as we share Root & Rebound’s 2020 Annual Report: Justice. Liberation. Healing. This has been a year of resilience for our team and for the people and families we serve, whose strength and courage astound me every day.

When I think about 2020 as a whole, I am reminded of a quote from the great James Baldwin: “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

This year has presented a choice to us as a nation: to face the truths about our country’s history and the inequities underpinning our society, now rising to the surface—or to look away. We are facing the dual pandemics of the Coronavirus, which has caused greater illness and death in communities of color, and ongoing police violence against Black people all around our nation, with justice denied again and again. In the midst of these entwined pandemics, the murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and so many others sparked a global awakening, with the 2020 election providing us the opportunity to commit to change.

Root & Rebound’s vision for justice, liberation, and healing has never been stronger or more exact. Everyone on our team – two-thirds of whom are directly impacted by mass incarceration – does this work because we understand how the legal system harms people disproportionately—how low-income people and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color face a system of injustice while people with financial means and people who are white encounter a system where justice is possible.

While this year has been one of the most challenging yet, it has revealed the strengths of our model, our team, and our impact. At Root & Rebound, we understand all the ways a criminal record keeps people locked out of opportunity—barred from housing, jobs, food security, and so many other basic tenets of human life, long after they have served their sentence.

Every day of this most difficult year our work has contributed to changing this reality for individuals, families, and communities in California and South Carolina. As COVID-19 broke out in the U.S. and spread inside prisons and jails, we joined coalitions in both states to fight for the release of people whose voices are silenced by the prison walls that surround them, and we filed a lawsuit in a South Carolina jail, demanding protections for the extremely vulnerable people inside whose health and safety is at risk.

As we saw that thousands of people with records and their families lost jobs, housing, and access to health care, we quickly rolled out virtual programming, clinics, and services and opened a Family Support Fund to anyone with a record in need of cash for basic necessities. This money went to food, groceries, diapers, and medicine; it went to emergency shelters and housing costs. It helped keep people alive and safe.

Through this report, you will learn more about Root & Rebound’s work through the eyes of our clients Andrew, Van, and Monica, and their families. These three amazing people represent the thousands we are honored to support, who are trying, against all odds, to live lives of dignity in a world that often denies them even the most basic opportunity. As you read their stories, we hope you can feel the impact of the work we do—work that you make possible.

Thank you for joining us in this work and for your continued support and partnership. Our work for Justice, Liberation, and Healing has never been more important. As we face collective truths together, let’s stay focused on the reason why we are engaging in this deep learning and understanding: to bring about change.

Onward,

Katherine Katcher
Executive Director
Root & Rebound
MISSION

Root & Rebound's mission is to restore power and resources to the families and communities most harmed by mass incarceration through legal advocacy, public education, policy reform and litigation—a model rooted in the needs and expertise of people who are directly impacted.

We are lawyers, advocates, and activists committed to creating a more just and restorative society. We carry out this work through an innovative model which combines interconnected prongs to dismantle racial and economic inequity from all sides:

Educate

In 2020, we educated and trained more people about the rights of justice-impacted people than ever before, reaching 5,500+ people with records, their families, and service providers who support them. Since our founding, we have educated and trained over 12,500 people.

Advocate

R&R attorneys provided comprehensive free legal support to 1,800+ justice-impacted people and their families with 2,200+ different legal issues—from reducing barriers to employment to reuniting with their children. Since our founding, we’ve provided legal support to more than 7,500 people.

Reform

We continue to bring together directly impacted activists and movement partners to protect the rights of justice-impacted people. This year, we successfully opened pathways to housing, higher education, and employment for people with records. As we ramped up our reform work over the past three years, we’ve led and worked alongside coalitions to advance eight major legislative reforms in these arenas.
STAYING THE COURSE IN AN UNPRECEDENTED YEAR

The dual pandemics, 2020 elections, & the CARES act

It’s been an unprecedented year in California, South Carolina, and across the country. Our team has done an incredible job of responding to both the COVID-19 pandemic and the national awakening around racial injustice that followed the killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd.

It’s also a historic election year—with so much at stake. In response, we’ve provided a range of voting resources focused on educating our clients and communities about their voting rights, key races and propositions, centering the civil rights and political issues that matter most to systems-impacted people.

We’ve also been responsive to enforcing people’s economic rights. In September, a judge ordered the IRS to pay people incarcerated in state and federal facilities as part of the COVID-19 stimulus package. The CARES Act order was a huge win for incarcerated people and we were there to get them the information they needed. Calls to our hotline—typically 200 per week—spiked to over 350 a day when the order was announced.
It’s been a year of adapting, growing, and responding to needs as they develop. We’ve been nimble, to say the least. And we couldn’t have done it without the generosity of our donors, partners, and volunteers this year. Your outpouring of support has helped us spring into action each time it felt necessary. Thank you! Here’s how we’ve adapted and how you’ve helped:

**COVID-19**

- We opened what had previously been a small client-only emergency fund to all families in CA and SC that are justice impacted and living in poverty—**distributing more than $35,000 to 680 families.**
- We created a COVID-19 Response Page on our website, keeping it updated with the most relevant legal guidance, employment information, and resources for our community.
- We launched a virtual “Know Your Rights” series—where experts, advocates, and lawyers support people in need, leading **over 20 trainings with 5,500+ people tuning in.**

**Fighting for Racial Justice as the Nation Awakens**

- When people took to the streets to protest for their rights this summer, we led a know-your-rights training on how to respond to police brutality, and shared this information through our Reentry Legal Hotline. We also provided free legal support to people in CA & SC who had been criminalized during the unrest and uprisings.
- Our team took activism days throughout the year to invest in the movements for justice and accountability.
- We hosted two virtual events, Voices for Justice: An evening of Art, Hope, and Resilience and Voices for Justice: Standing for Black Lives, bringing together artists from our community to create a healing space centering Black voices and speaking truth to power through art.

**Civil Rights and Voter Protection**

- To enforce economic rights under the CARES Act, we rolled out an education campaign for incarcerated people to understand how to apply for stimulus payments, and got this information inside prisons and jails through our Hotline.
- To protect our democracy, we protected voting rights:
  - We led three national trainings for justice-impacted people on their voting rights, how to register, and the criminal justice reforms at stake on their ballots.
  - In South Carolina, we worked on election day to protect the rights of people statewide at the polls through an Election Protection hotline.

“Thank you so very much. That will be used to buy pull ups and wet wipes for my four year old son Douglas. I can also buy him some playdough and drawing paper. Thank you for giving the fight by keeping hope alive.” — Family Support Fund Recipient

“Thank you for your support, thank you for your care, thank you for the help and concern. I appreciate you guys so much I’m going through a very difficult time like many others are and the offer of help towards Humanity is welcomed and appreciated. Blessings to you all” — Family Support Fund Recipient
Since our founding, we’ve served nearly 100,000 systems-impacted people across the country, with the furthest reach and deepest roots in California and South Carolina. While our reach has been impressive, we’ve always cared most about impact—the measurable difference we make in our clients’ lives. This summer, we carried out our most ambitious survey yet of our clients who have received in-depth direct legal services. The survey results speak volumes about the impact and value of our work, and we are excited to share them with you throughout this report.

**Employment**

Among those surveyed, only 42% of people were employed when they sought R&R’s support. After working with us, 85% secured employment, and 60% increased their income.

- 80% feel less stressed about their criminal record holding them back from opportunities
- 92% feel more confident that they will be able to find a new or better job if they want or need to.

“The fresh start. Being able to clear away a debt and obtain my license and move forward. You guys cleared the way... there was this barrier that felt insurmountable, and the help I received made me feel alive and like I could move forward in my life.”
Housing

- 68% of respondents have more secure housing since working with R&R; and
- 66% feel they are better able to keep their housing.

“Now I can go to a lender and qualify for housing I want. There’s not even a word to explain your services.”

Family Wellness

- 75% say that Root & Rebound helped them reconnect with their family;
- 91% feel more confident in their ability to be there for their family.

“They helped me to deal with my divorce and custody hearings and give me guidance on the next step I should take. If I didn’t have that I may not have been able to get custody of my kids.”

Confidence and Community Engagement:

- 90% feel more knowledgeable about their rights;
- 88% feel more confident navigating government systems and programs;
- 72% have more time to participate in their community;
- 87% feel more confident that they can play a part in changing the criminal justice system; and
- 100% of people surveyed feel that Root & Rebound will be there for them if they experience barriers or challenges because of their conviction history or past justice system involvement.

“It’s given me so much personal strength and empowered me to the point where I’m giving that to my daughter. My daughter is also incarcerated, she sees me empowered, she sees me fighting, and now she believes there is hope for her future, and that is invaluable. I’m a stronger person so now I can give that to her.”
Ensuring Access to Justice for All
Reforming Systems of Justice
Tribal Justice: Supporting Indigenous Communities
Addressing the Harm of the War on Drugs

Freedom Through Education
Inside Prison Programs: Opening Pathways to Reintegration
Strengthening Pathways to Economic Opportunity

Restoring Communities: Legal Advocacy Projects Across California
Reparative Justice in South Carolina
Changing the Narrative: Healing through Art & Dialogue
STORIES OF JUSTICE, LIBERATION, AND HEALING

When we launched Root & Rebound more than 7 years ago, we recognized that the criminal legal system was not exactly “broken” as many people would say. In fact, it works exactly as it was designed to. Its “tough on crime” policies are rooted in racial and economic discrimination and injustices that didn’t begin in carceral facilities. We saw that we needed both legal expertise and policy advocacy to fuel our model. However, we also needed a more just, liberatory, and healing framework to truly make a difference—so we created one. That’s why we provide our clients urgent access to Justice, Liberation, and Healing through our trauma-informed legal and direct services; through our in-prison and women’s programs that provide wraparound services and supports; and our advocacy, public education, and narrative changing work that centers systems-impacted experiences and interrupts the cycles of trauma and violence in California, South Carolina, and nationally. That’s why we’re introducing you to Andrew, Van, and Monica—so you can understand the impact of our work through their eyes.
Supporting people in overcoming the barriers to economic opportunity associated with their arrest or conviction records has been core to our model from the beginning. It is clearly unjust that people face 48,000 legal barriers to opportunity post-conviction while there is only one public interest lawyer for every 20,000 people who need one in California—and one for every 40,000 in South Carolina. How can we expect formerly incarcerated people—people who’ve served their time—to overcome their past and move forward in their lives when we accept these statistics? We do not accept the status quo—because our clients, their families, and their futures matter.
How Has Root & Rebound Helped Andrew Access Justice?

“Root & Rebound helped me with a second chance at life. They helped me with everything I needed to move forward.”

— R&R client Andrew
Andrew was born and raised in Stockton, CA, where there were few opportunities available to him—both a cause and a consequence of incarceration’s impact on his community. “Growing up there was no college prep, it was prison prep in the hood.” He recalls constantly visiting family members in prison and jail—his father, uncles, his brother. “Those are the cards that were given to me since I was born, it was like this is all you got, boom, these three cards, these three colors: red, blue, and black.” Then when Andrew turned 18, he too got caught up in the system and began cycling in and out of jail. “Every single year or two after that I was locked up, at least six months every year.”

In 2012, when Andrew was released from prison after 16 months, he was determined not to go back again—but reentry wasn’t easy. “When I came home, it was scary. Not knowing what you’re going to do, where you’re going to stay. It was just so much anxiety, so much anxiety, and just, you feel like a second class person.... It’s crazy but that part of my life was worse than prison.” Andrew realized that if he was going to turn his life around, he needed to clear his record. That’s when he heard about R&R and showed up to one of our mobile legal clinics in Stockton. “I started working with Root & Rebound and it just gave me options. It opened up a rainbow of colors, you know, not just black, red, and blue no more, now I had all these colors.” Andrew worked with an R&R attorney to file record expungement applications and together they were able to clear the majority of the felonies from his record.

He was then able to get a job as a case manager with a local reentry organization—using his experience to help other formerly incarcerated people. Soon after, the city of Stockton noticed his impact in the community and reached out to recruit him. Now a peacekeeper with the city’s Office of Violence Prevention, Andrew outreaches to members of his community most at risk for violence, providing them resources and positive pathways that weren’t there for him in his youth. “The main reason that I do this reentry work is because I’ve been there. I know what it’s like. I give back because so much was given to me, so much restored to me.”

Not only has this opportunity allowed Andrew to help his community, it has also afforded him the resources to create a stable home for his family. He and his wife own their own home and are raising four children. “I’m trying to instill values and trying to break that generational curse that’s been on my family...just being there, being present in their lives, and keeping them as far away from the justice system as I can.”
ENSURING ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL

Through our direct legal services, we fight housing discrimination, employment discrimination, the denial of entry into higher education and school programs. We fight the child welfare system that separates our clients from their children and denies them their parental rights. We fight for the rights of our rural and native communities to fight exorbitant fines and fees that prevent them from accessing driver’s licenses, leaving them unable to work or provide for their children. We fight for the rights of our clients to become career professionals, gaining access to occupational licensing in a system that supports blanket bans and denies so many people with records. We do this and so much more, all free of charge.

Our Expansive Reach

Across California and South Carolina, we provide direct legal support for justice impacted people and their families. Since our founding, we have directly served more than 7,500 people. In 2020 alone, we provided direct legal support to 1,800 people in California and nearly 200 in South Carolina. This support ripples across each and every one of our clients’ families and communities.

We are able to serve thousands of people a year because we have built a model designed to create access. **We do not use restrictive income, geographical, or other eligibility criteria that many legal services groups do—we serve everyone with a record in need.** And we do so through a “we come to you” model—making access free and easy through our Reentry Legal Hotline and mobile legal clinics, which have gone virtual in 2020.
Reforming Systems of (In)Justice

While this work to help individuals overcome the impact of their justice involvement is crucial, R&R recognizes that because an estimated 100 million Americans—nearly 1 in 3 American adults—has a record, we must simultaneously work to change the systems that lock these people out of opportunity. In CA and SC we have made systemic advances in the following areas this past year:

### CALIFORNIA

**Expanding Job Opportunities:** In California, one in five jobs require an occupational license, but for decades the boards that grant these licenses have denied them to anyone with a record. So we took action. Starting in 2017, R&R founded and has co-led a coalition supporting occupational licensing reform. Our first big victory—California Assembly Bill 2138—reduces barriers to licenses for people with conviction histories under the Department of Consumer Affairs, which covers the majority of the boards in CA. The bill went into effect on July 1, 2020, reforming over 40 boards’ policies, and R&R and its partners are litigating cases to enforce the law.

**Breaking Barriers to Higher Education:** Education is critical to economic mobility, but private and public higher education institutions have long equated candidates with their records and not provided applicants an opportunity to show who they are to admissions offices. We’re changing that. R&R founded and co-led a Higher Education Coalition that advanced a bill to “Ban the Box” in higher education—CA Senate Bill 118. The new law went into effect on Aug. 6, 2020, requiring public and private colleges and universities across the state to remove the criminal history “box” from all applications for admission by Fall 2021—a huge step towards brighter futures for our community.

### SOUTH CAROLINA

**Protecting Parents and Children:** After just one full year in SC, we are pushing forward systems change work on multiple fronts. We are working to reform broken child support laws that further punish and alienate incarcerated people from their children by deeming incarceration a “voluntary” absence from their children. And we are moving to end the archaic “felony food stamps ban” which has been abolished in all but 13 states—which prevents needy parents with certain past drug convictions from accessing food to feed themselves and their children.

**Protecting Our Democracy and Our Vote:** In South Carolina, we led massive outreach and voter protection efforts for those with criminal records. In advance of the election, we hosted multiple educational events and created written resources to answer questions on how people with records can successfully exercise this essential civil right. We watched the polls on Election Day, serving hundreds of voters through a legal hotline for our community members facing discrimination at the polls. We continue to advocate for policies that would make voting from jail easier and would eliminate the fees often associated with regaining voting rights after incarceration.

### National Litigation—Enforcing Civil Rights

Stemming from our policy reform work over the last few years, in 2020 R&R devoted significant efforts to building out a new strategy for systems change—litigation. In CA, our team is exploring opportunities to enforce new laws that protect people with conviction histories from discrimination in employment, housing, and occupational licensure through the courts. In SC, we filed federal litigation against the Spartanburg County Jail, for the jail’s deliberate failure to protect the people detained there from COVID-19 by denying people access to the most basic, medically required protections. We advanced this litigation in hopes of securing urgent protections and release of the most vulnerable people across the state and to influence the behavior of people running jails and prisons across the country.

**In 2021, we look forward to welcoming R&R’s first National Litigation Director for Economic Opportunity to expand our litigation strategy in California, South Carolina, and nationally.**
TRIBAL JUSTICE

Supporting Indigenous Communities

Indigenous peoples have known very little justice in this country, and today, our legacy of colonization and genocide manifests itself in a legal system that disproportionately harms Native Americans. In partnership with R&R Board Chair and Chief Judge of the Yurok Tribal Court Abby Abinanti, R&R has long partnered with tribal communities throughout California to bring legal advocacy to Native people impacted by incarceration through mobile legal clinics and trainings. **Since our inception, R&R has led over 35 clinics targeting rural tribal communities and provided direct legal support to 314 Native American- or Indigenous-identifying people.** We have lifted up this experience to create a toolkit for other legal service providers on how they can expand programs into Tribal communities, and we are passionate about seeing this work grow across the country.

Going forward, R&R seeks to deepen our partnership with the Yurok Tribe, the largest surviving tribe in our state, as well as the other tribes we work with in Northern CA, including the Karuk Tribe, the Hopland and Sonoma Bands of Pomo Indians, the Yuki Tribe, the Hupa Tribe, the Tolowa Dee-ni’ Nation, the Cahto Tribe, the Yakama Tribe, and the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians. We are helping them bring home tribe members from state prisons and supporting their efforts to build back their own systems of justice—which emphasize healing, wellness, and responsibility to the community, rather than punishment.

“It is only through understanding and unveiling where we are today — what is “not right” — that we can recreate these systems. These systems need to be recreated not only to support Tribal people — the true, original people of this country — but to protect all of us as one nation today, and those most marginalized among us. Today, we fight for our lives to matter by a system never meant to protect them.”

— Abby Abinanti, Chief Judge of the Yurok Tribal Court and R&R Board Chair
ADDRESSING THE HARMs OF THE WAR ON DRUGS

Despite national efforts to decriminalize certain drug use and advance justice for victims of the failed War on Drugs, there is a parallel injustice that persists. The now legal cannabis industry is booming and those formerly criminalized for use or sale of the drug aren’t sharing in the fortunes.

R&R is working to change the cannabis industry and promote the hiring of people impacted by the War on Drugs by educating the cannabis sector and connecting people with drug convictions to new “green jobs.” Alongside our partners at Viola—a cannabis company seeking to advance social equity in their industry—R&R recently published A New Leaf, a reentry planning resource to connect people with drug-related convictions to employment in the legal cannabis industry and other sectors.

“In joining forces with Root & Rebound, we will look to help those communities of color who have historically been the victims of cannabis-related incarceration and who have fallen on hard times, and turn those struggles into opportunities for success within this rapidly growing industry.”

— Al Harrington, Founder, Viola
For us at Root & Rebound, liberation means freedom and second chance opportunities for people with records, eliminating the barriers that keep them imprisoned, even in the community. It means empowering systems-impacted people, their families, and their advocates through education about how best to navigate life with a record. Sometimes, liberation is simply being there for someone who’s just come home from prison, walking with them as they find their way through the most challenging time in their lives.
How Has Root & Rebound Supported Van’s Liberation?

“Reentry really has no meaning to me, and my journey. It implies that I’m coming back to something, but for me really, after everything I’ve been through, after believing that I would die in prison, I wasn’t coming back to anything, I was entering something for the first time.”

— R&R client Van
Van was 4 years old when he came to the United States from Vietnam. In high school, he fell in with a gang of other Vietnamese teens in his neighborhood, chasing a sense of belonging. At just 16 years old, he was arrested for a felony and sent to prison—a frustrated and confused young boy. After 25 years in prison, Van was released in 2019 and found himself starting at square one at 41 years old. Van, like all people in reentry, did not want to go back into the criminal justice system—ever—but he was daunted by the prospect of having to build a life for himself while carrying the mark of a criminal record. What’s more, because Van had immigrated with his family to the U.S. as a child, fleeing violence, his felony conviction meant that he faced the additional threat of deportation. Van’s liberation was uncertain.

**Root & Rebound: Los Angeles**

Shortly after returning home to Los Angeles, Van was referred to R&R’s partner agency, the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, where he met R&R Senior Staff Attorney Nicole Jeong. Van confided in Nicole about the stress he was feeling and how he was struggling to find a job without a work permit. Nicole supported Van with the legal process required to obtain his work permit—and he was successful. He’s since begun working for another R&R partner organization, Homeboy Industries, as an Associate of Government Relations.

Nicole also helped Van prepare an application for a pardon which, if granted, would allow him to legally stay in the U.S.—writing a letter of support on his behalf, testifying to his commitment to his family and reentry goals. For Van, Nicole’s support and advocacy have made all the difference for his own confidence in reentry: “Just to have someone who is there rooting for me. It’s just so healing”.

While Van’s reentry is still very much in progress, he’s now beginning to find his footing and start making up those lost years. “17 months [since my release] feels like 25 years . . . I didn’t know so much life could happen within this short amount of time. It’s reminding me what I’ve missed out on. But I’m slowly putting my life together, and I’m out here going through more stages in my life, and it won’t stop… I want to be part of something bigger, and to contribute and to be valued.”

Today, Van is reconnected with his family, housed, and working—and we remain with him every step of the way in his pursuit of a pardon.

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**After working one-on-one with an R&R attorney:**

- 94% of our clients feel more confident in their abilities; and
- 92% feel more capable of reaching their goals.
Because of the scale of the problem—100 million Americans are impacted by a record due to mass incarceration—R&R provides legal education at scale. We conduct free and accessible trainings for directly impacted people, their families, and service providers who support them on how to navigate barriers to each of their goals, from finding a job to reuniting with their children.

R&R’s seven-year track record of getting accurate know-your-rights information into the hands of the people who need it most prepared us well to respond to COVID-19’s sudden and devastating impact on our community. Families with loved ones inside prison worried as infection and death rates inside soared. People in reentry couldn’t access basic necessities because of months-long DMV closures—with no way to identify themselves and access services, many found themselves on the street. R&R took action.

We created a COVID-19 response page on our website with legal information, resources, and employment opportunities for impacted people. This vital information, as well as our entire library of legal educational resources that empower justice-impacted people to self-advocate, is now easier than ever to access on our redesigned website.
We also began hosting regular virtual community forums open to the public, leveraging the legal expertise of our team and bringing in topic experts from partner organizations to train attendees on everything from what to expect when reentering during COVID-19, to protesting with a record, to how to find transitional housing with a record. We led 20+ trainings over the year, reaching over 5,500 impacted people and their advocates in California and South Carolina. We hosted national forums as well as forums specific to issues and communities in CA and SC. These forums included:

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<th>TOPIC</th>
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<tr>
<td>COVID-19 &amp; Reentry in CA and SC</td>
<td>Reached 490+ people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responding to State Sanctioned Violence and Police Brutality Nationally</td>
<td>Reached 700+ people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mother's &amp; Father's Day: A Discussion of Family Separation and Reunification in CA</td>
<td>Reached 560+ people</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Color of Incarceration—Racial Disparities in SC’s Criminal Justice System</td>
<td>Reached 200+ people</td>
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Expanding our national education work and our COVID response prepared us for what happened next—the national racial justice reckoning and protests following the police murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. We quickly expanded our curriculum and training to include first amendment rights and protections for people engaged in protest.

After a year in which we reached more people through our public education than ever before, we surveyed our community to see how we had done:

- 91% of people who tuned into our trainings reported a stronger understanding of the criminal legal and reentry systems.
- 91% have shared, or are planning to share, what they learned about the collateral consequences of incarceration with their colleagues, family members, or others who could benefit.
- 89% of people who listened to our employment trainings have encouraged, or are planning to encourage, their employer to offer people with records a fair chance at job opportunities.
Our work to support the liberation of impacted people by fostering self-advocacy begins long before someone’s release from prison. Through our in-prison Roadmap to Reentry program, we help people anticipating release prepare for the stressful transition period that lies ahead.

What began as an educational program for men inside California Correctional Center in Susanville, CA, has continued through an alumni program, and our team has expanded our educational work to the Central California Women’s Center in Chowchilla. R&R In-Prison Programs Attorney Jamie Popper and In-Prison Programs Coordinator Sandra Johnson go inside CCWF to teach classes of 40-60 women how to set themselves up for success once released. Each woman receives a tailored “Blueprint” reentry plan that maps out what resources they’ll need to meet their goals on the outside.

Our team was just getting their work at CCWF started—having graduated their first class of 55 women—when COVID-19 hit and CA prisons went on full lock-down. We have adapted the curriculum into a correspondence course while the pandemic persists, and are eagerly awaiting the day we can continue classes inside.

In the meantime, the team is leading an “Alumni Program” by holding regular group check-in classes with graduates of the Roadmap program from both CCWF and CCC—making sure they have the support they need as they navigate their reentry one day at a time.
Strengthening Pathways to Economic Opportunity

In Fall 2020, after a federal court ruled that incarcerated people were eligible for the CARES Act stimulus payments but had a limited window of time to apply for the relief, we jumped into action. Our team created educational trainings and fact sheets on how incarcerated people with records could apply for the $1,200—a massive sum for someone in prison. For the month after the case was decided, R&R spoke to hundreds of people per day on our Hotline, hiring a CARES Act coordinator to disseminate critical information. **R&R is the only statewide legal services provider in CA with free hotline support, serving the thousands of incarcerated people in need of economic support.**

Voices of “Roadmap to Reentry” Graduates

“One day there was this sign up on the wall about a reentry class. I thought, awesome, because I’m leaving in 5 months!...Because of the class and the Roadmap, I knew all the things I needed to do. So by the first day I was like okay, I need my birth certificate, I need to go to the DMV, I need this form, I need that. I had it all planned out. Sandra and Jamie also clued me into a lot of resources I didn’t know were out there—where to get free food, how to sign up for a free clinic where I have access to a social worker.”

— Denise, a former Roadmap to Reentry participant at CCWF, now a corporate trainer at Safeway with plans to open her own Sober Living Environment for reentering women.

“Guess what? I got the job!!!! They emailed me the official welcome letter and I am starting this Monday!!!! Man I cannot be any happier...Hard work pays off, right? I kept trying and trying and kept going after 6-7 denials. Thank you to both of you, you both have always supported me, believed in me and always motivated me to keep pushing and that’s exactly what I did. I highly appreciate you both and will never forget everything you guys did for me. You both are good hearted people and god loves you.”

— Kam, Roadmap to Reentry alum, now back at work in the IT field.
Forg the people R&R serves, healing is a constant process, and that process looks different for everyone. We see healing through our clients' resilience—when a mother can reunite with her children after coming home, or discovers that her true calling is to help counsel others who are taking their first steps in reentry. We also try to bring about collective healing through our efforts to change the narrative about incarceration, to name the trauma it has wrought on so many, and speak truth to the powers that entrenched this unjust system.

We know that because of the impact of a criminal record, trauma doesn’t end for people when they’re released from prison or jail. We also know, however, that their trauma didn’t begin with incarceration. Of the clients we surveyed this year 63.5% had been suspended or expelled from school as children, and 49% had been in either the foster care system or the juvenile justice system.
How Has Root & Rebound Helped Monica Heal?

“What I want my kids to learn is that sometimes people fall in life, but you can definitely bounce back. We always talk about that, me and my kids, bouncing back in life, being strong.”

— R&R client Monica
Monica eventually could see her girls one day a week, but it was so hard for all of them—she wanted to have more time with them and to bond with them as a mother. It was then that she found out about the FRWEI program. “When I met Felicia [Root & Rebound’s Fresno Site Director and Attorney] I felt like I now had a voice that was an advocate that was speaking for me, that this wasn’t just a game, that this was real.”

Today, due to R&R’s continued advocacy, Monica has a more secure relationship with her daughters. “[R&R has] definitely been there for me. They’ve been with me, they’ve helped me stand straight up and on my hind legs and they’ve been a voice for me...I can’t stop referring women to Root & Rebound.”

Now, Monica is pursuing a certificate in alcohol and drug counseling. She wants to be a walking inspiration, and help other women like her through the healing process. “If I could help one life, one mother who can help her kids, that’s how I want to pay it forward.”

Roughly 23% of the people who reach out for R&R's in-depth direct legal support are seeking to regain custody of their children, or have another family law related issue. After working with R&R, 91% report feeling more confident in their ability to be there for their family; and 78% say their family feels safer or more secure.
Fresno, CA
In 2020, R&R provided ongoing legal, social, and employment readiness support to 47 justice-impacted women like Monica through the FRWEI, and legal support to an additional 645 people in Fresno and the broader Central Valley through community clinics and the Hotline. Despite how challenging COVID-19 has made connecting with clients, the team has adapted by leading Rooted in Resilience, a weekly Zoom group meeting intent on creating a safe space for the women in the program to participate in workshops that empower them with the tools to be independent and financially stable.

Los Angeles, CA
Through our partnership with the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC), Site Director Nicole Jeong leads one-on-one legal support, direct representation, and know-your- rights workshops available to their entire ARC member base of 1,300 formerly incarcerated people across LA County, as well as the over 6,000 men and women they serve still inside prisons and detention facilities. In 2020, she provided direct legal support to over 190 justice-impacted people in ARC’s mentoring, supportive housing, and employment programs as they navigated their reentry during COVID-19.

San Bernardino, CA
R&R’s Rights, Equality, and Law (R.E.A.L) partnership with San Bernardino-based housing and social service provider Time for Change Foundation (TFCF) turned one year old at the end of July 2020. Over the project’s first year, Site Director Veena Gursahani, in partnership with the TFCF team, has provided wraparound legal and social support to 55 system-impacted adults and 58 children—helping families reunite, secure housing, enroll in financial education and parenting classes, and secure Individualized Educational Plans and age-appropriate therapy for their children.

Voices of Direct Service Clients

“As I began to love myself, I found that anguish and emotional suffering are only warning signs that I was living against my own truth. Today, I know, this is Authenticity. THANK YOU (it makes me cry)!” — Judy

“What Root & Rebound does is very powerful. When I came home I was so frustrated I almost wanted to give up. I had an old DUI from 10 years before, I owed 6 hours of the 18 month program and because I was gone—in jail—they wanted me to repeat the whole program...I was like, man I just got out, I don’t even have the money to do all this.... but I need a drivers license so I can get a job, and get back to work and get back to my life. It was a nightmare, but R&R was great. They helped me argue my point...we kept pushing, and they gave in. I was able to finish the program.” — Michael

“Root & Rebound has helped me to not feel like I’ve abandoned my youngest baby, like I did my oldest two... without you guys, I wouldn’t be as far as I am today with the connection I have with my daughter, and her grandparents.” — Bunna
I have dreams and goals again. They have been so kind and compassionate and empathetic to me. I didn’t know people could be this good. Even at 63, I feel like I have a future. I intend to pursue that future. I feel empowered to live my life now. None of this would’ve been possible were it not for R&R.”

— Recently surveyed SCJC client

Beyond our direct legal support in South Carolina, we’ve worked to change hearts and minds. Kate and Jerry have partnered to lead conversations and public presentations on the intersection of race and mass incarceration in their state, and presented to hundreds of people at colleges, probation/parole departments, conferences, and faith communities prior to the pandemic. When COVID-19 broke out, they adapted this work virtually to lead a webinar on mass incarceration and the racial inequities of the system in partnership with United Ministries, which reached an audience of over 2,300, and co-authored an op-ed in the Greenville News, imploring the public and the state to not ignore the plight of inmates during pandemic.

Not only does this narrative changing work raise awareness about the need to reform our unequal justice system—it lets people who might not otherwise reach out to R&R know about the support we can provide them. Take Jerline for example—after hearing about Kate’s presentation at her church from a friend, Jerline realized that the felony charge she’d lived with on her record for 40 years might be able to be removed. She reached out to the team, and we were able to get that process started. “I feel good to know that I don’t have any secrets, and that my name is not in jeopardy of denying me from anything that I want in life.” — Jerline, R&R South Carolina Client
In 2020, given R&R’s position as a prominent voice in the movement for criminal justice reform, we began to leverage our reentry legal expertise and experience in working alongside justice-impacted people to change the narrative around the devastating impact of our country’s broken criminal legal system—which has disproportionately locked poor Black and Brown communities into poverty for generations. Only once the truth about the system’s impact has been heard and understood can healing truly begin.

We launched an op-ed series highlighting how national crises like the U.S. response to COVID-19 and hundreds of years of systemic racism and brutality against Black people reveal the punitive, inhumane, and destructive nature of the U.S. justice system. The series has thus far included: Demanding a System of Justice, Worthy of Such a Name; We Must Do More: Because Black Lives Matter; On Tribal Justice; Laws Written with One America in Mind: Our Statement on the Breonna Taylor Case, and Lessons the Cannabis Industry should take from the WNBA.

Carving out space for this dialogue online has been a crucial step in discussing incarceration as an issue of humanity that requires overhauling violent, broken systems and embracing more restorative forms of justice. We’re proud of what we’ve accomplished in our communications this year and are eager to continue taking deeper dives into the topics at the heart of our work.

Our narrative changing work has helped us reach thousands more people across the country in 2020. We’ve reached clients like Jerline in South Carolina who learned that even after 40 years there can be second chances. We’ve reached clients like Andrew, Van, and Monica who offered to share their stories of second chances and resilience to inspire the millions of systems-impacted people, their families, and communities who most need to hear these stories.

This work balances the need to share critical information with the need to lift up inspiring lived experiences and hope. That’s why we decided to produce the Voices for Justice series. This first of its kind virtual spoken word event series builds on our narrative change work, and was born out of sheer necessity. The pandemic threatened to stop all our 2020 events—our team had other plans.
In 2020, we produced our Voices for Justice spoken word event series, which spotlighted activists and poets whose art is dedicated to the movement for radical change. As advocates fighting against the systems of injustice that are ingrained in the history of this country, we believe that promoting healing and connection is crucial for the strength of our movement. We need time to breathe and process the experiences at the heart of this work so that we can push our fight forward—this was especially important amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide outcry against police brutality that reached a fever pitch in 2020.

Voices for Justice
An Evening of Art, Hope, and Resilience broke the silence that shrouds issues like mass incarceration, criminal justice disparities, and the impact of COVID-19 on the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated.

Voices for Justice
Standing for Black Lives centered Black voices and lived experiences, amplifying the need for racial justice, liberation, and healing—systemically, collectively, and individually.

In bringing these events to life, we were lucky to work with a group of incredible, talented artists. We’re proud to have held space through these events to promote healing as a part of our work for justice.

“Recidivism is the greatest tool for white supremacy. It is working. It always has.”
— Cici Jevae, “Caged Classrooms”

“The opposite of poverty is not wealth. The opposite of poverty is justice.”
— Cece Jordan, “A Block, US History”

“Maybe the first thing we can do to prevent ‘I can’t breathe’ is to let love be the first act that takes our breath away.”

“Being in America, and calling yourselves American is a work-in-progress, and it can only be shaped and realized by how much we are willing to resist the ugly and participate in the beautiful struggle for justice.”
— Watani Stiner, “What does it mean to be an American?”
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Below is a snapshot of R&R’s audited revenues and expenses for the 2019 calendar year.

2019 REVENUE

- **Foundations**: $1,915,135
- **Government**: $447,446
- **Earned Revenue**: $273,499
- **Individual Donations**: $169,401
- **Others***: $124,598

**TOTAL**: $2,930,079

*Others includes corporate donations, special events, interest, donated services and other income
2019 EXPENSES

- $1,885,355 Program
- $355,248 Administrative
- $277,622 Fundraising
- $2,518,225 TOTAL
Thank you! Root & Rebound is able to serve our clients and community because of our generous supporters. We appreciate the individuals, private foundations, law firms, and businesses who made a gift to Root & Rebound between November 01, 2019 - November 18, 2020.

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