



# TRANSFORM LEADERSHIP LIVES JUSTICE NARRATIVE

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

# OUR 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 envision a world where people impacted by mass criminalization have full restoration of their rights, so they can move forward with hope, dignity, and opportunity.

*"If it wasn't for Root & Rebound I'm not sure where I would be. I am where I am right now because they helped me through some serious times that I didn't think I would get through. Along with the women's group, they've given me support I've never experienced and I don't ever want to give up or be without them."*  
— Root & Rebound Client

# DEAR COMMUNITY,

When I joined the team at Root & Rebound seven years ago, I could not have imagined that today I would be the Executive Director of this extraordinary organization.

Had Root & Rebound existed when I reentered my community after incarceration, I may have been able to envision this day.

**It is so important that we see the potential and humanity of the one in three people in this country with a record—just as Root & Rebound saw the potential and humanity in me.**

Just as R&R knew I was worth investing in, R&R sees every single person with a record as someone in whom it is worth investing.

We are leaders. We are changemakers. We are visionaries.

I'm so proud of our accomplishments in the past year, including:

- Hiring our Policy Directors, one in California and one in South Carolina, whose work greatly expands our capacity to conduct targeted policy advocacy.
- Hiring our National Director of Litigation for Economic Opportunity, who is helping R&R hold businesses and other entities accountable when they unlawfully discriminate against people with records.
- Continuing to deeply serve systems-impacted people in California and South Carolina throughout the pandemic.
- Continuing to embed deeply in our communities throughout California and South Carolina while also working with national partners on a justice reform movement across the country.
- Hiring a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion firm to facilitate workshops with our staff. We are committed to bringing more formerly incarcerated people on staff and into positions of leadership—this includes me. I'm very proud of the work of our internal DEI team in helping us grow stronger and more inclusive as an organization.

Every year, over 600,000 people are released from prison in the U.S. My vision for our work is to continue strengthening our proven model of education, direct legal services, reform, and narrative change, and fight every day for national systemic change so that each and every one of those individuals has access to the opportunities they need in order not just to meet their basic needs but to grow, thrive, and lead in their communities.

Every day, R&R transforms leadership, lives, justice, and the narrative about individuals and communities who are systems-impacted. This annual report is one way to do just that.

The importance of your support cannot be overstated.

**Your investment in Root & Rebound will have a profound and lasting impact on individuals, families, and communities that have been ignored or misunderstood for far too long.**

We must hold onto the hope that exists for all of us. We must fight to see that hope realized.

Thank you for standing with us today and every day.

With Love & Gratitude,  
Carmen Garcia



# OUR ONGOING RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

R&R has seen a surge in demand for our support during the COVID-19 pandemic as people with criminal records continue to be pushed to the very margins of the economy.

In order to meet this increased need, we have adapted our services to provide crucial legal support for system-impacted people during the pandemic. In 2021, R&R held 35 unique virtual trainings to help our communities better understand their rights and confront the challenges in reentry, from the safety of their homes.

We also held 12 virtual clinic days in order to give clients various ways to access our services safely. R&R looks forward to continuing to put forth innovative programming in 2022.

**CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY RESOURCE FAIR**

Join Root and Rebound on September 25th to receive free RAP sheet fee waiver vouchers and wrap around reentry services. RAP sheets are the first critical step in record cleaning. Various community organizations, social services organizations, and legal services organizations will come together to provide information, resources, and on-the-spot services to survivors of the War on Drugs and mass incarceration, in addition to on-the-spot record cleaning eligibility for certain counties.

**ROOT & REBOUND**

**SATURDAY** **25 SEP** **12 - 4 PM**

**SNOW PARK**  
Harrison St & 19th St,  
Oakland, CA 94612

Masks are required

# WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

The U.S. incarcerates people at a rate five times higher than any other nation in the developed world. One in three Americans has a criminal record; due to pervasive and entrenched racism and economic inequities, they are overwhelmingly people of color and low-income.

People with records become doubly or triply marginalized, discriminated against because of their race, class, and now record. With a criminal record, they encounter a web of 48,000 legal barriers—barriers to employment, housing, family reunification, and health—with no right to legal counsel to defend and advocate for their rights.

Today in this country, 50% of people coming out of incarceration will become homeless, 60% will be unemployed, and 67% will be rearrested within three years.

Every day, Root & Rebound challenges legal, social, and structural barriers to end the status quo.

*"I find hope in Root & Rebound. I love everything they stand for and they have made me feel better about my situation."*

*— Root & Rebound Client*

# OUR MODEL

Root & Rebound’s innovative, scalable model addresses racial, economic, and social inequities within the criminal justice system and the reentry process by restoring and protecting rights, dignity, and opportunities for people directly impacted by the system.

R&R dismantles racial and economic inequity at all levels through the following interconnected paths:



## Public Education

Through the creation and dissemination of free navigational reentry resources such as our toolkits, fact sheets, and our Roadmap to Reentry Guide, we have created a national hub of information related to civil rights and criminal records including in the areas of housing, employment, education, and immigration, with state-specific resources for 11 states.



## Direct Legal Services

Through our free, statewide legal hotlines, legal clinics, and direct representation in court in California and South Carolina, we have supported more than 8,900 people since our founding in overcoming the legal barriers and discrimination that stand in the way of their reentry goals.



## Policy Reform

Through policy advocacy in California and South Carolina we remove structural barriers to create opportunity for all people impacted by the justice system in housing, employment, family reunification, and more. When we encounter a lack of political will to pass needed reforms, we advance impact litigation against discriminating employers, landlords, and public agencies.



## Narrative Change

Through our Voices for Justice events, community forums, and op-eds, we share the voices and stories of our community of clients, partners, and supporters to shed light on systemic injustice, challenge societal stigma, and put forward a vision for change.

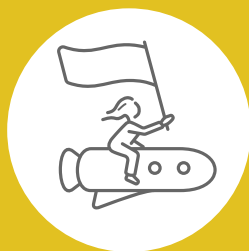
***“I’m beyond grateful for Root & Rebound. They were there for me when I had no one.”***

*—R&R client who struggled to secure stable income and housing for over a year*

Through deep direct services, R&R supported this client in finding a job, safe and stable housing, reunifying with her children, and enrolling at Fresno City College to become certified as a drug and alcohol counselor. Today, she is excited about her future and eager to spread the word about R&R to others who face post-incarceration barriers to success.



# TRANSFORMING



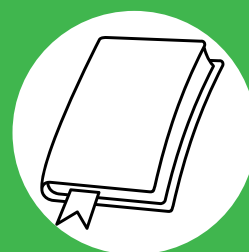
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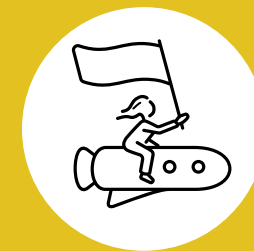
***“We are advocating for people like me to get into positions like the one I am in now. We have to give people the opportunity. I was never invested in or set up for this kind of leadership role until I joined the team at Root & Rebound seven years ago.***

***If R&R had existed when I was reentering my community, I would have had the resources and tools to overcome the barriers we are all faced with after incarceration.***

***This is why it is so important to support this work.***

***Our supporters believe in the power of hope and opportunity. They believe in the potential of everyone who needs a second chance.”***

**— Carmen Garcia,  
Executive Director**



## *Transforming* **LEADERSHIP**

Through our grassroots lawyering, we document barriers needing policy reform; amplify the voices of formerly incarcerated people; and partner with advocates, legislators, and community-based organizations to craft and advance solutions.

*Who leads the way? Those who have been directly impacted by the system we are working to dismantle.*

R&R was founded on the idea that individuals with lived experience in the justice system are the experts about their own lives. Root & Rebound serves those harmed by the justice system, and we recognize the importance of our team reflecting this population. This commitment starts at the top with our Executive Director, Carmen Garcia, and the nearly 70% of the staff who are also directly impacted by incarceration, either themselves or through a loved one.

By honoring the leadership of systems-impacted people at all levels of our organization, Root & Rebound actively undermines the rhetoric that has been used for generations to justify systemic inequities. Providing transformative leadership opportunities for systems-impacted people helps us change the narrative, and empowers advocates and legislators to do more.





After receiving support from R&R when she was released, DeJone Watts was hired in 2019 as R&R's Women's Support and Social Services Manager for the Fresno Reentry Women & Employment Initiative. One of our clients recently said of her:

**"DeJone is one of those staff members from Root & Rebound that has completely changed my life. She has bent over backwards to not only do her job as a social worker, ensuring my daughters' safety, but she has also become a healthy mental and spiritual aid."**

DeJone shares her story of transformative leadership:

*"Not only have I grown professionally since I started at R&R in 2019 but I have also been told over and over again to trust myself, trust my authenticity, trust my testimony and the things that I went through. I've been told, 'We want to support the way you lead. Bring all of you to this job.' I know I can be my authentic self, which is what I feel has really shined in my role here, and has been the tool to help the clients.*

*I'm really proud of the way we serve our clients holistically. On paper, it's employment, legal services, etc., but really it's so much more. When our clients come in, they come in feeling hopeless, have no confidence, feeling like they're not worthy of anything. We legit walk alongside them and speak into them. As they get the support they need you see this confidence being built. The proudest moments for me are when they become advocates — not only for themselves but for other women who need our services.*

*When women come in, they feel like they've been silenced and now they have a voice, and they're using that voice and walking in a powerful way they weren't able to before. I talk about my experience of being systems impacted, being a teenage parent. I want them to understand I know what it feels like. I break it down so they know it's a person-to-person conversation. I let them know I've been to jail, I've been to prison—I let them know that right up front so they're comfortable talking with me and they know I'm not judging them. I've been there. Because they need to go into detail about their own life, I want them to be comfortable.*

*For a long time I was silenced and didn't feel like I had a lot to give. I didn't feel like my voice mattered. It wasn't until going through some healing myself and getting around all the right people and family support that I started to see my worth. But working at R&R has been a whole different kind of growth...I work with lawyers and policy advocates who I not only learn from but they also come to me for things. It feels like a level-based space where my perspective matters, and a lot of the tools that I thought I had before are recognized now and they weren't before.*

*My life has grown in such an amazing way. There's so much more that I want to do. And my ideas are being supported. I owe that to R&R being the space that it is. They really do stand by what they say they stand for. It's been a beautiful experience."*

—DeJone Watts, Women's Support and Social Services Manager





## Transforming LIVES

### R&R's Direct Legal Services, Public Education & Training

Since our founding in 2013, Root & Rebound has assisted more than 8,900 individuals through our hotline, community clinics, and embedded attorney models. From April 2020 through April 2021 alone, our California Reentry Hotline took more than 1,300 calls, providing legal services to over 900 individuals and written materials to another 400 callers.

Since our launch in South Carolina in July 2019 as the only reentry legal service provider in the state, we have provided legal assistance to over 360 clients, including clients we connect with through our partners Soteria and Triune Mercy Center. Guided by those who are directly impacted by the system, Root & Rebound transforms lives, families, communities.

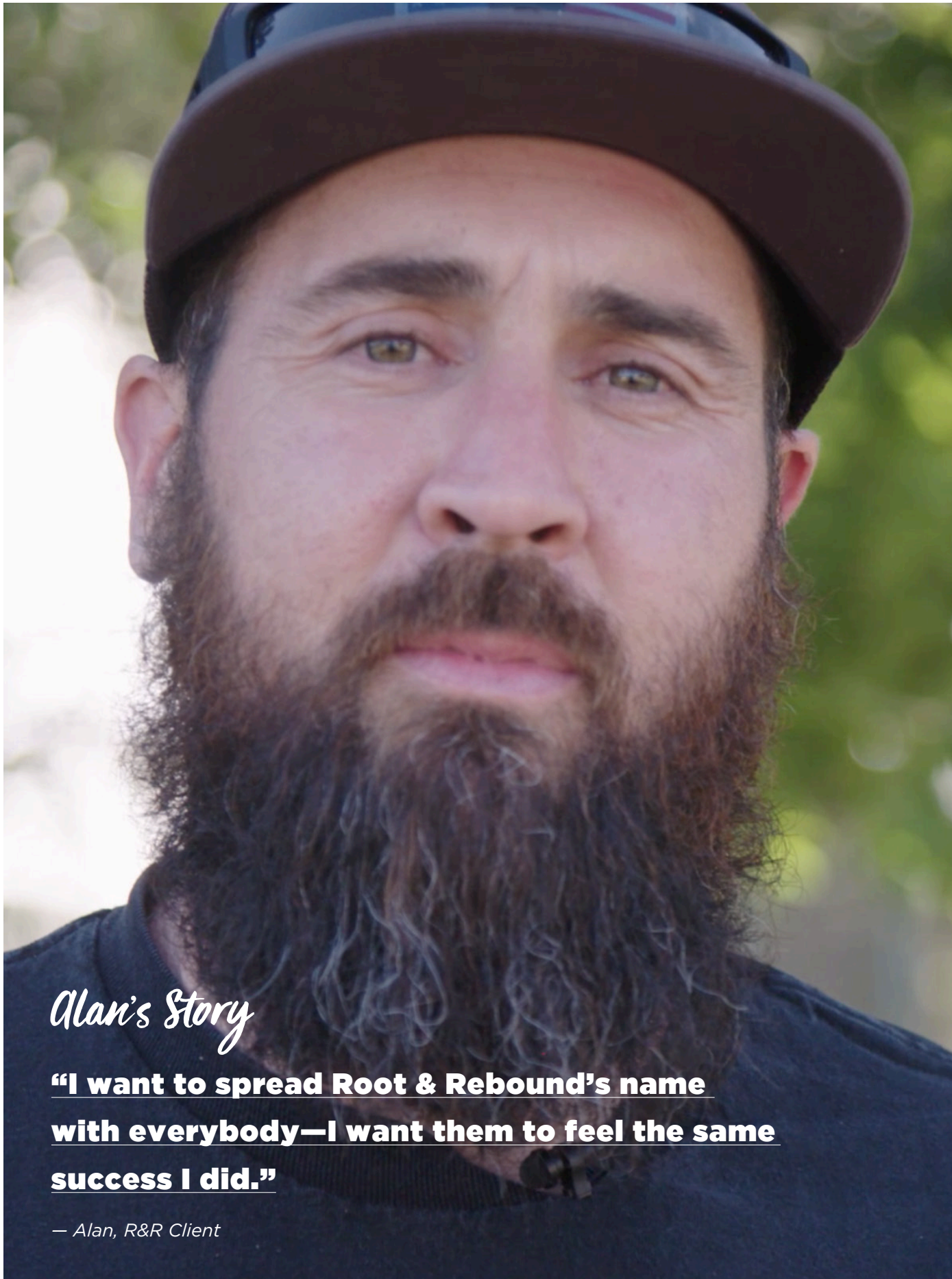
We are thrilled to share the results of our 2021 Direct Services Survey, which measures the impact of R&R's services on clients with a focus on economic wellness and mobility, family wellness and unity, freedom from system control/involvement, and self-esteem and self-confidence.



### Those surveyed report that since receiving Root & Rebound's services:

WELL-BEING & CONFIDENCE	<b>100%</b> feel more confident that their story and experiences are valuable
	<b>96.3%</b> feel that they know where to turn for legal support
	<b>96%</b> feel more confident in their abilities
	<b>96%</b> feel more capable of reaching their goals
	<b>94.9%</b> feel more knowledgeable about their rights
	<b>92.1%</b> feel more confident navigating government systems and programs
JOBS & INCOME	<b>94.5%</b> feel more confident that they will be able to find a new or better job if they want or need to
	<b>72.1%</b> have had their income increase
	<b>64.4%</b> feel less stressed about money
FAMILY UNITY	<b>100%</b> feel that R&R will be there for them if they experience barriers or challenges because of their conviction history or past justice system involvement
	<b>91.5%</b> feel more confident in their ability to be there for their family
	<b>84.4%</b> feel more resourced as a parent
	<b>81.8%</b> feel closer to their family
	<b>81.8%</b> say their family feels safer or more secure
	<b>77.4%</b> say that R&R helped them reconnect with their family





*Alan's Story*

**"I want to spread Root & Rebound's name with everybody—I want them to feel the same success I did."**

— Alan, R&R Client

"The second anybody heard 'felony,' automatically I wasn't a good person," says Alan. "That label prevented me from being able to do a lot of good, and be part of the community."

Alan joined the Air Force soon after graduating high school. Stationed overseas at the time of the 9/11 attacks, he was sent to Kuwait, where his daily life was very difficult and he looked toward the day he would return to civilian life and could choose his own path. As life in the military intensified, Alan started drinking heavily, eventually using and selling cocaine. Then he got caught up in meth.

"And that's when everything completely spiraled... It just got away from me," he says. Arrested in 2007 with meth in his pocket, Alan was charged with possession, sales, and transportation. He was convicted of a felony and sentenced to four years probation.

"Sitting there is when I decided if I beat this, I'm done," he says. "I'm getting my stuff together. This isn't my life. I was able to get clean, get my head straight."

After he got clean and sober, Alan got really excited about sharing his love of the outdoors and fitness with others, especially young people "to keep them out of what I went through."

Yet he immediately hit a roadblock. In order to get a job or volunteer to be a mentor or even chaperone his daughter's field trips, he had to pass a background check. "If you have a felony, you can't be a part of it," he says. "And no matter how much I've given to the community—'no, you're still a felon. No love.' I had to maneuver my life around that, which was hard."

"I've been really lucky—I got out and didn't get sucked back into it," he says. "But just because I moved on didn't mean the courts and everyone else moved on and just let it go. In their eyes, I was still a felon."

Alan completed a 10-week EMT course but when he applied for the national registry, he had to answer yes to "Have you ever been convicted of a felony?" And he was immediately notified that he would not be allowed to take the test due to his felony record.

"They put you back out there and say you're free to go," he says. "But you can't do this, and you can't do that. 'Yeah, you're free but we're going to take away all your opportunities to better yourself.'"

That's when Alan contacted Root & Rebound. With our help, Alan was able to get his felony expunged. Reading the letter confirming the expungement, he couldn't believe it. "It was a choke-up moment," he says. "It changed everything immediately... After all those years of having doors shut in your face—it's something that even now gives me chills."

Alan is now pursuing his dream of becoming a firefighter. "That's why I want to spread Root & Rebound's name with everybody—I want them to feel the same success I did," Alan says. "I was just blown away to know these people I've never met did this for me, and were out there wanting to do this for me. I can't thank them enough for everything they did for me. It's something I'll never forget."



***Since 2015, Root & Rebound advocates have held over 300 in-person and virtual trainings, reaching over 15,000 attendees. We have also disseminated more than 200,000 copies of our educational materials, doing our part to inform people of their rights and empower individuals to take control over their reentry.***





## June's Story

**“I would have gotten my documents before I left prison if R&R had existed then. You can’t get a job or open a bank account if you don’t have ID.”**

— June Lee, R&R Staff Member



In the Roadmap to Reentry workshops that June Lee, R&R’s In-Prison Coordinator, co-facilitates in prisons with Jamie Popper, R&R’s In-Prison Programs Attorney, a common refrain is often heard around the workshop circle: “I didn’t know that!”

Many incarcerated individuals do not know they have the right to vote; they don’t know how important support letters are to their parole board review; and they don’t know how important it is to get their documents together before they’re released.

“There was no R&R when I was incarcerated,” says June. “And when I came out after 21 years I had some big wins but I also made mistakes. I would have gotten my documents before I left prison if R&R had existed then. You can’t get a job or open a bank account if you don’t have ID.”

“I wanted to bring to people my experience doing all that time inside, coming home, and being on parole,” says June. “Now I can give back. The people in the workshops have told me I’ve given them hope and strength. That’s one of the reasons I took this job.”

Our Roadmap to Reentry course lasts five months and covers the gamut of topics people preparing for release need to know—from how to get their birth certificate to how to clear their record.

Having gone before the parole board seven times herself, June knows exactly how to support R&R clients

preparing for parole hearings. She helps them get support letters, which are often pivotal in helping a client earn parole.

After they are given a release date, June connects them to resources for housing and other needs.

“If you don’t have housing, you can’t do anything in life,” June says. “If you don’t get a good night’s sleep, if you don’t feel safe, you can’t do anything the next day.”

“When someone has been away for 25 to 30 years,” June notes, “it’s a big transition back into their community. We help them do it in a healthy, safe way. One client who did 37 years is about to get their own apartment. The space is only big enough for a twin bed, a table, and a chair but they are so happy to have that because they’ve been living in a hotel after getting out. They’re so excited. They can lock their own door.” Now that they have a place to move into, R&R is helping the client get a bed.

“The people in the group support each other,” says June. “They share what they’ve learned with each other. With COVID it is extremely hard to be incarcerated. But they come to the group because they want this information so they can transform their lives—and not just their lives but their families and their communities, too. It’s a back and forth gift that we’re giving each other, and it’s just beautiful.”



Because reentry touches so many different people's lives in a range of domains, R&R looks at the whole picture of systems-impacted people's experience. Often we are led to collaborate with partners in order to respond to urgent needs outside of our expertise or services, like immigration, housing assistance, medical care.



**“We realize when our clients come and request our services that we are often one piece of the puzzle, and having the strong network of partners that we do in California, South Carolina, and across the country allows us to connect clients to resources that they would not have otherwise been able to access. We provide holistic representation, but we recognize that we can do that most efficiently and effectively through collaboration.”**

— Kate Weaver Patterson,  
Deputy Director of National Programs

**“Root & Rebound is the only organization that heard me out and actually helped me and my daughters avoid going back to domestic violence. R&R is equipped with professional and kind hearted staff that are hands-on and experienced at what they do. Some staff members even go out of their way to ensure their clients needs are met. All of the staff from Root & Rebound have been working together to ensure I have all needed tools for successful reentry into society.”**

— R&R Client





# REMOVING BARRIERS

Working alongside organizations doing life-changing social work and case management, R&R removes barriers to employment, education, housing, family reunification, and more by directly addressing clients’ legal needs. As three of our South Carolina partners note below, our model works to transform lives:



**“As a formerly incarcerated man myself, and someone who has been doing this work for 20 years, I understand all too well that for people reentering their communities from prison and jail, accessing basic and urgent needs such as housing and employment can come with unforeseen legal obstacles that typical legal aid organizations are not equipped to handle. R&R’s model, which is innovative both in placing lawyers in impacted communities and in training their lawyers to be holistic advocates for systems-impacted people, leads to a totally different experience and outcomes for systems-impacted people.”**

— Jerry Blassingame  
Founder and CEO, Soteria Community Development Corporation  
SCJC: Second Chance Justice Collaborative Partner



**“Having R&R move into the Triune building was a dream come true. With the R&R lawyers working with our Triune social workers and case manager, we are truly a one-stop shop. Other legal providers often don’t return calls. Being in the same space with R&R has been a gift for our parishioners. A big key to transformation and justice is the right to self-determination. A lot of churches kind of force things on people but we let people make their own decisions. We say we’re walking with you regardless of your goal. Things that would normally hold people up and frustrate them so they’d let go of their goals, R&R steps in to help. Our parishioners know they’re connected with a team of lawyers dedicated to helping them resolve whatever is holding them back.”**

— Jennifer Fouse Sheorn  
Pastor/Director  
Triune Mercy Center



**“Once we identify a legal need—because of an eviction, for example—we now have a resource right upstairs where we can get an answer. The R&R team also comes down and sees the work we’re doing, and that’s more critical than anything—that they understand the layers we have to go through to help someone transform. Because Triune is a church first, we take extra steps, move a little slower, give a little bit more grace, try to give hope where others wouldn’t. And having the R&R team here allows us to take our time knowing we have someone right here in house so when we’re ready, the R&R team can assist us. For the population we serve in our community everything is about relationships so if they can know the people that are working with them—can see them and trust them— that goes a long way.”**

—Pat Parker  
Associate Director/Employment Specialist  
Triune Mercy Center



**“There is a lot of synergy in the way Triune and R&R do our work. Like Triune, we want to lift up our clients’ voices and help them once they’ve chosen the path they want to be on. Clients let us know their goals, and we say, ‘How can we help you get there?’”**

— Kate Weaver Patterson  
Deputy Director of National Programs  
Root & Rebound





# Transforming JUSTICE

Together with impacted communities, we dismantle oppressive laws and systems. Our policy work and impact litigation work are centered on one goal: to create a world where justice-impacted people have equal opportunities to advance their education, launch careers, reunify with their children, and achieve financial wellness. Our team takes on some of the most difficult policy reform campaigns and litigation alongside directly impacted people who lead the way—and our successes are proving that the law and policy can be a powerful tool for racial and social equity and empowerment.

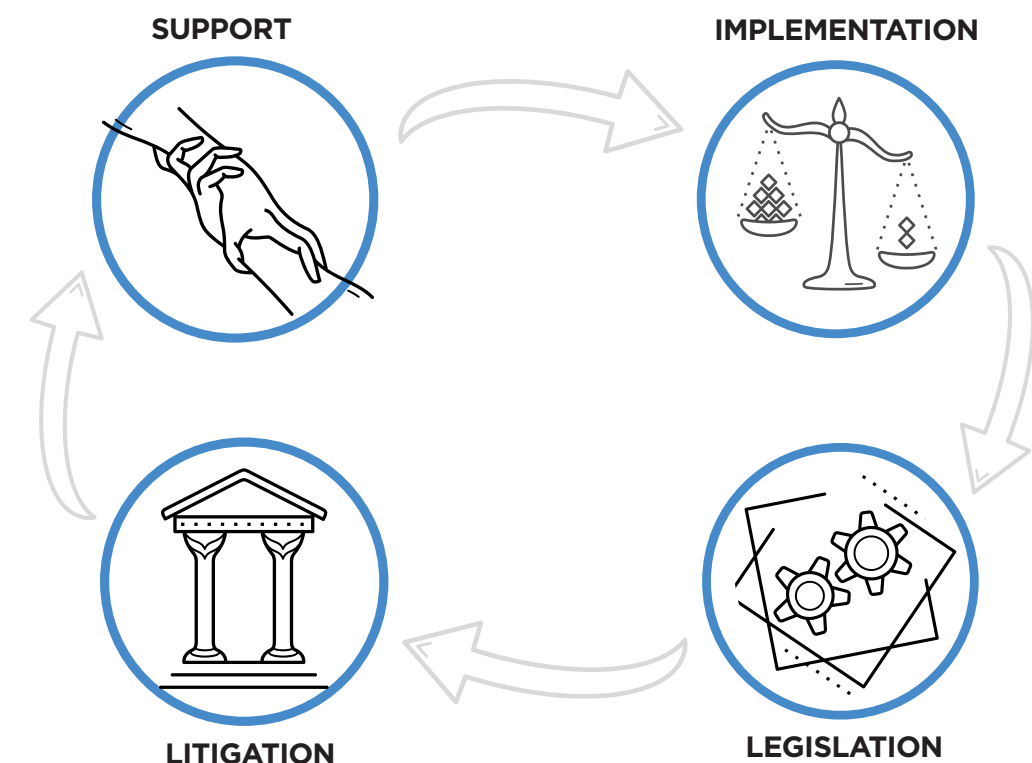
With the hiring of Joshua Kim, R&R's National Director of Litigation for Economic Opportunity, R&R has added a crucial litigation component to our work in California, South Carolina, and nationally. Since Joshua joined the team in February 2021, we have nine lawsuits in various stages of litigation in California and South Carolina. R&R has also recently added two policy/systems change positions on the ground in South Carolina and California: Alesia Rico-Flores, South Carolina Director of Policy and Systems Change and Gail Yen, California Policy Director.



*Joshua Kim,  
National Director of Litigation  
for Economic Opportunity*

Through policy teams across the organization, R&R pushes to reform laws that create barriers to reentry, such as employment, family reunification, ID and voting, and occupational licensing—and to litigate against those who do not comply with these reforms.

Our opponents have vast teams of litigators working every day to ensure that ambiguities in the law are exploited in the favor of the powerful: corporations, trade associations, and more. We have one National Director of Litigation for Economic Opportunity working every day to ensure that the law is decided in the favor of people with records who do not have benches and benches of lawyers. When lobbyists push laws that harm the people we serve, R&R will litigate and show how these powerful forces are driving forward harmful laws.







## Jamila's Story

**“Just because you are labeled as at risk,  
just because you’re labeled as a felon, just  
because you’re labeled as poor...you can still  
break the odds.”**

— Jamila, R&R Client

“I never thought that \$40 worth of marijuana could have such an impact on our lives,” says R&R client Jamila. “It’s unimaginable all the things we have had to jump through just to be able to live, just to be able to take care of our families, just to be able to be assets to the community.”

In 2012, Jamila was in the process of becoming a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) and launching an organization called Foster & Banks Walk in Faith Foundation that she founded with her husband and her mother. Their plan was to offer services to their community, including tutoring, mentoring, and food drives.

After signing a sublease with a pastor of a church in Compton, Jamila and her husband were on their way to celebrate when her husband got a call from someone he thought was a friend asking if he could sell him 40 bucks worth of marijuana. Her husband made the sale, and as they were leaving, the couple was surrounded by police with guns drawn on them.

“I was scared, I was nervous—I think I was in shock,” Jamila says. “I didn’t think it was real initially because I had never been arrested, never had any problems with the legal system.”

In court, her husband was accused of selling \$40 worth of marijuana, and was convicted of a felony. While Jamila was not accused of making the sale, just being physically present resulted in a felony conviction. Both Jamila and her husband were given three years of probation and ordered to pay cost recovery while completing 300 hours of community service. “I felt like it’s really because of where I come from and who I am and what I look like that all these things were able to transpire and happen the way they happened,” Jamila says.

Jamila reported the event to the California Board of Behavioral Sciences, the entity that approves licensure for Marriage and Family Therapists. The board did not respond to her. After she completed her probation with the state in 2015, the Board of Behavioral Sciences finally responded to her, letting her know that despite the fact that she had completed her criminal probation with the state, they were requiring her to complete their own probationary system.

Jamila says the board’s reaction conveyed the message: “We don’t care that you already served your time with the state. You need to serve more time with us.” They required her to do five more years of probation, pay \$20,000 in cost recovery, submit to random drug testing, and undergo additional supervision.

“It was very hard to be working, have extra supervision and random drug tests, and all the money I was making was basically going to my probation, and my family continued to struggle to just survive,” she says.

After Jamila abided by their terms, the California Board of Behavioral Sciences once again denied her application to be licensed. She had passed their test and the board had approved her clinical hours, and yet they denied her again. “I felt like they couldn’t hear me and I didn’t have a voice,” Jamila says. “So I emailed Root & Rebound.”

Talking with her R&R attorney Eliana, Jamila finally felt heard. Prior to Jamila contacting R&R, R&R had been supporting AB 2138, which would expand opportunities for Californians with conviction histories to get occupational licenses. The law went into effect in July 2020, so Eliana could argue in court that the law applied to Jamila. Eliana was one of the first attorneys in the state to argue this law.

“I feel like there are a lot of systems that are set up against us,” Jamila says. “Society gives up on you, and it gives up on you early. And they tell you what you can’t do and who you can’t be, and that’s what the Board of Behavioral Sciences basically did to me.”

Finally, after her R&R attorney successfully argued her case in court, the California Board of Behavioral Sciences granted Jamila an unrestricted Marriage and Family Therapist license. R&R was also able to wipe out the \$10-15,000 the board claimed she still owed in fees. “It was shocking,” Jamila says. “It felt like a weight had been lifted.”

Today Jamila is practicing as an LMFT, using her education and experience to sustain herself and her family doing work that she loves. “I am a California licensed Marriage and Family Therapist,” Jamila says proudly. “I’ve been saying that and repeating it for months...It means something. It matters. Having the freedom to build the life that my family deserves.”

Our policy work carries over into our direct services work as policies we’ve helped create—or the dismantling of harmful policies — transform people’s lives. Our New Leaf initiative removes barriers for people like Jamila who are being denied economic opportunities because of minor drug convictions in their past.

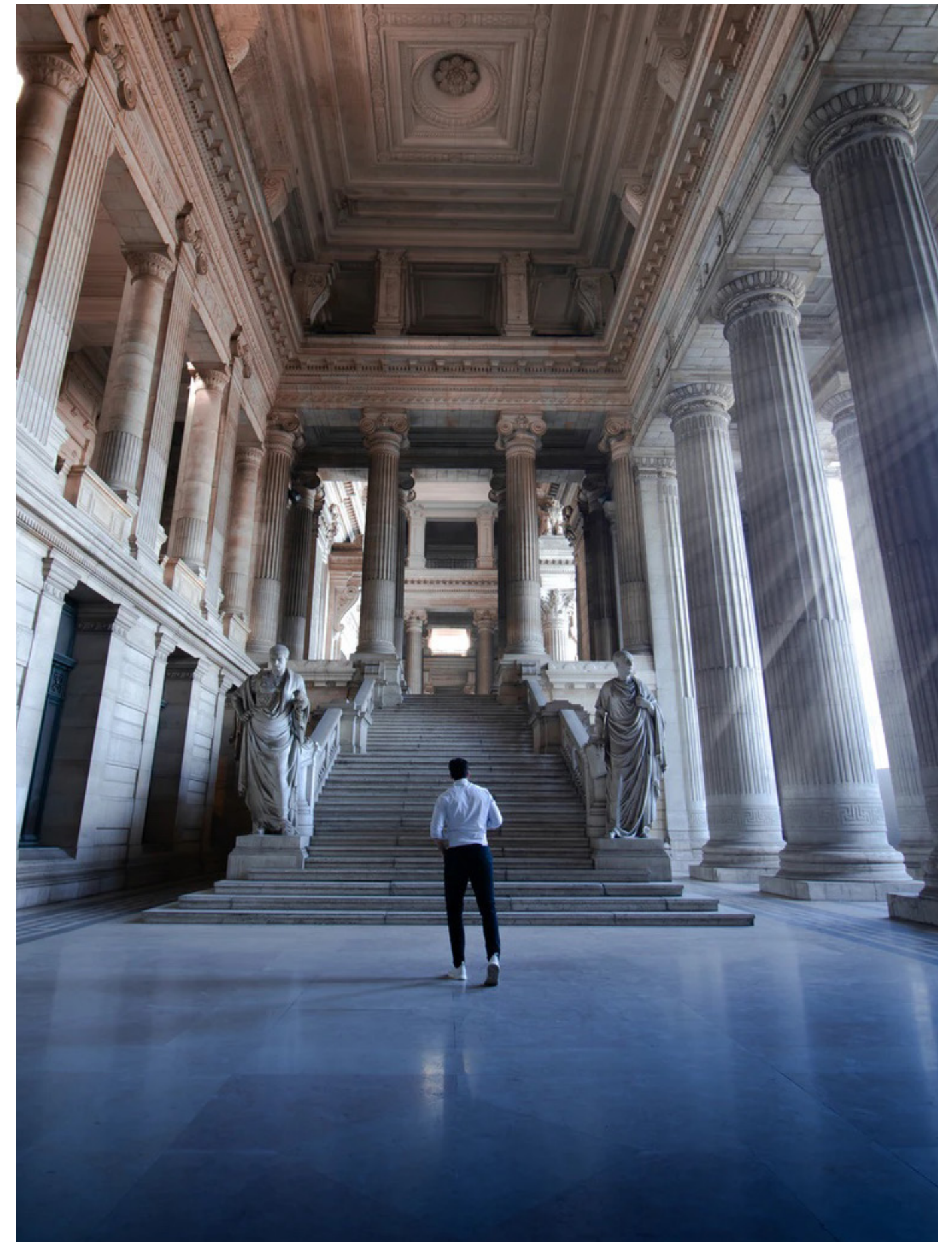
“Just because you are labeled as at risk, just because you’re labeled as a felon, just because you’re labeled as poor...you can still break the odds,” Jamila says. “You can still beat the risk factors, and that’s called resiliency.”





## Our recent policy reform and litigation successes include:

- Continuing to enforce AB 2138, which went into effect July 1, 2020, and makes the state professional licensing process fairer for people with records, and ensures that expunged, old, and irrelevant convictions are not barriers to meaningful careers.
- Continuing to help enforce California's Ban the Box Fair Chance Hiring Law as well as training both potential employees and employers on their rights and responsibilities under the law.
- A successful oral argument in *All of Us or None-Riverside Chapter v. Hamrick* before the 4th District Court of Appeal in California by R&R's National Director of Litigation for Economic Opportunity. On May 26, 2021, the court issued a remand, holding Riverside County Superior Court in violation of the statutory mandate to destroy minor marijuana records and of the rules of court prohibiting an online search of criminal records by date of birth or driver's license. This ruling will not only positively impact those with Riverside marijuana records, but also increase the cost of commercial background checks in CA, causing employers to rethink whether indiscriminate background checks make sense.
- In R&R's first impact litigation case, we successfully held Spartanburg County, South Carolina, accountable for its jail's deliberate failure to protect the people detained there from COVID-19 by denying people access to the most basic, medically required protections.
- Pushing forward our first bill in South Carolina, which would stay the accrual of child support while a person is incarcerated. Advocacy for this bill has included testimony by Kate Weaver Patterson and Alesia Rico Flores in front of the Joint Committee on Children.
- Working with the coalition that R&R launched in South Carolina to support the Juvenile Justice Reform Act and push for collaborative advocacy, including hosting the first South Carolina Symposium on Policy and Litigation in the criminal justice space.





# TRANSFORMING JUSTICE

## A Sampling of Current Systems Change Work

At Root & Rebound, we eagerly take on ambitious projects, including our current policy advocacy campaigns below. We take the long view, understanding that some wins take more time than others. When our clients tell us about road blocks their records put before them, we get to work to craft a campaign to make the needed changes. The campaigns described below give a flavor of just some of the changes R&R is working to make nationwide.



## Reforming Parole and Probation — Ensuring Freedom & Opportunity Post-Incarceration

People on parole and probation face multiple issues: barriers to employment, housing, family reunification, education, fines and fees, the threat of flash incarceration, the potential for a parole agent’s abuse of discretion, and oppressive terms and conditions that are disproportionate and unlawful. R&R’s ambitious 2022 agenda includes pursuing reforms to parole to remove barriers from accessing safe housing, employment, and continuing education and training.

In California, this could include pursuing legislation that would amend the parole transfer practices for people with verified admission to postsecondary education institutions. We are also looking into legislation that would create an accountability mechanism for parole agents and their supervisors.

Additionally, R&R will spend the next year learning more about and gathering intel on how California parole departments use their funding to ensure people on parole have housing if they request it and choose it.

In South Carolina, people who are incarcerated have no right to an attorney when they go in front of the seven member parole board and advocate for their release. R&R seeks to change this power imbalance in three ways: (1) provide a self-help manual, available to all those incarcerated at the South Carolina Department of Corrections, to help people prepare for their parole hearings; (2) train pro bono attorneys to take as many parole cases as possible; and (3) directly represent people in front of the Board, and if necessary, in front of the appeals courts.

## Family Unity & Reunification — Supporting Parents and Children

R&R’s Family Unity Campaign arises out of an understanding that mass incarceration, the war on drugs, and the foster care system have separated generations of low-income families of color, causing profound, lasting harm. The ultimate outcome of this campaign will be supporting clients who face these barriers and changing the laws that exacerbate these barriers so that system-impacted parents can achieve stability and remain with or reunite with their children.

R&R will work on the enactment of additional protections so that impacted people in both California and South Carolina can access the opportunities they need in order to achieve family unity and wellness.

R&R will advocate for child support reform legislation in South Carolina’s upcoming legislative cycles, and will continue legislative education about the negative impact on families of child support debt accrual during parental incarceration. R&R will leverage evidence, data, and personal experience to educate policymakers about the harmful effects of the child welfare court and foster care systems on family wellness. In addition to creating campaign materials to distribute to policymakers and other stakeholders advocating for limiting a court’s ability to remove a child, R&R will also publish and train a range of stakeholders on a South Carolina Family Law Guide.

In California, we are active participants in the Coalition for Family Unity, a coalition led by directly impacted and system-impacted people that addresses the impact of mass criminalization on families and family reunification. Through the coalition, we were one of the co-sponsors of AB 990 (Santiago), which would establish the right of visitation as a protected civil right for people who



are incarcerated. While it was vetoed by Governor Newsom this year, the coalition plans to pursue similar legislation next year. Additionally, we are members of a newly formed coalition called the Reimagine Child Safety Coalition, whose goal is to create a world in which families are not ripped apart by the racist system of family surveillance and policing currently disguised as “child welfare.”

We are also partnering with the Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers on legislation that would modify the Welfare & Institutions Code to limit the criminal convictions used to deny reunification services in an attempt to get rid of overbroad obstacles that prevent parents with prior convictions that are not related to harming a child from reunifying with their child.



# Fines & Fees — Ending the Criminalization of Poverty

California charges poor communities of color fines and fees that it is never able to collect as part of its criminal justice scheme. In short, these fines and fees are high pain and low gain. Most departments that levy fines and fees do not include it in their budgets because they know it will likely not be collected.

At the same time, thousands of Californians are pushed into debt as a result of often minor and petty offenses, unable to rebuild their lives because of this debt and its consequences. R&R’s goal is to end the use of fines and fees as punishment and to prevent them from being levied against low income Californians.

R&R continues to participate in the Debt Free Justice Coalition which focuses on the abolition of criminal fines and fees. In its most recent success, the coalition helped pass AB 177, which builds on AB 1869 passed last year, and repeals an additional 17 criminal administrative fees effective January 1, 2022.

This new change includes repealing various victim restitution fees including the 10% restitution interest collected from impacted people, the restitution collected from people on post-release supervision, and the restitution collected from people released from jail. This repeal will have a huge positive impact on our clients, and we will continue to focus on its implementation.

In South Carolina, we are exploring possible action around the fees assessed on indigent individuals seeking an expungement and around the exorbitant fees levied upon conviction. Just like in California, thousands of South Carolinians are pushed further into debt and poverty for minor offenses. We are also pushing for alternatives to incarceration for those being criminalized simply for being poor or homeless, through the formation of homeless courts and in partnership with social service providers on the ground. Working with partners around the state, we are working to collect data on the fines and fees being assessed and the disparities of race and socioeconomic status within the system. We plan to use this data to further our campaign of reducing and eventually eliminating fines and fees as punishment.

In addition to the campaigns listed above, R&R is also advocating for reforms in the areas of occupational licensing, identification, fair chance housing, alternatives to incarceration, and juvenile justice reform.







## Transforming NARRATIVES

Given R&R's position as a prominent voice in the movement for criminal justice reform, we leverage our reentry legal expertise and experience working alongside systems-impacted people to change the narrative around the devastating impact of our country's broken criminal legal system—which has disproportionately locked Black and Brown communities into poverty for generations.

We launched an op-ed series to highlight 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 in 2021 included: Equal Justice Now: We Need to Talk About Race, Ending Racialized and Gendered Violence, Justice for Daunte Wright, and The Case for a Fair Chance Housing Act: From A Brother's Perspective.

In honor of Latinx Heritage Month, our Executive Director, Carmen Garcia, was featured as a leader **“Strengthening U.S. Latino Communities”** in the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies' blog. In the story, Carmen shares her journey as a formerly incarcerated woman, and how her experience led her to empower others and open doors for people of color who have been impacted by the legal system. She also shares how her mother, Juanita, plays an important role as a leader with deep community care and compassion.

In February 2021, Root & Rebound hosted a fireside chat with real-life legal super hero Brittany K. Barnett to talk about her book **A Knock at Midnight**. Her book details the rampant use of sentencing enhancements, three strikes laws, plea agreements, and witness manipulation to fuel a crippling system built on unequal justice. Each of these people would have died in prison for a mistake or questionable choice had it not been for Brittany's work.

Our **Voices for Justice: On Tribal Justice** event in June 2021 shared the stories of Indigenous people impacted by the justice system. Despite this country's history of brutality and oppression, the nation appears largely apathetic about the impacts to Tribal people and communities. That is why we centered, and will continue to center, the voices of those most impacted and asked them to offer their wisdom to institutions, systems, policy makers, and philanthropists through our **Voices for Justice: On Tribal Justice** event.



*Ernie and Caleb Albers, Native American Storytellers*



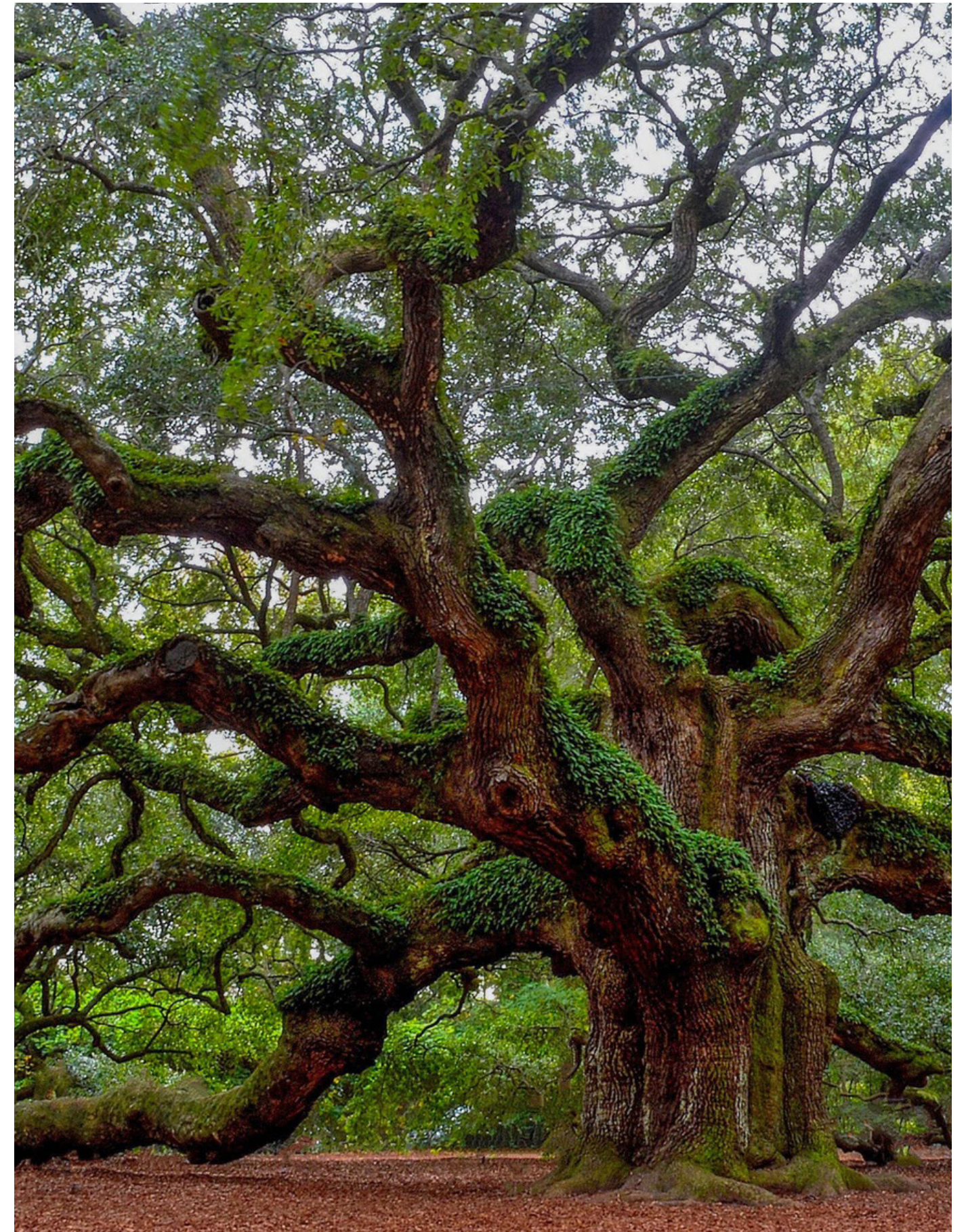
# TRANSFORMING THE CONVERSATION IN SOUTH CAROLINA

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As the only organization providing free legal services focused on system-impacted individuals in South Carolina, R&R seeks to transform the conversation about injustice within the criminal system. People and partners around the state are eager to lend their voices to the conversation R&R is proud to help lead. With lawyers and staff now spread throughout the state, we are lifting the voices of our clients and advocates to dismantle systems of oppression, push for changing the racial inequities that permeate the legal system, and build coalitions to effect long-term change.

While our South Carolina staff is small, we have grown from one to five in the two years since our launch—evidence of the appetite in the state for the work and expertise that R&R brings. Our attorneys hail from all sides of the justice system: **Kate Weaver Patterson** is a former prosecutor, **Alesia Rico Flores** is a former judge, and **Ana Walker** is a former public defender. They bring three distinct perspectives to our work in the state, including our work to transform the narrative around the criminal system. They are able to draw upon their varied expertise and backgrounds to determine where transformation can and should take place—and how. Their experiences combine with our founding partner **Jerry Blassingame's**, an advocate for reentry and social change in South Carolina for the last twenty years, to bring credibility to conversations while advocating for radical change.

Our team has been leading important dialogues across the state on the need for police reform, child support reform, dismantling systemic racism, and creating transparency within the legal system. Systems change cannot happen without narrative change, which we seek to lead and lift up with our legal colleagues, social service provider partners, and our community. We lead groups in the state of policy advocates and direct service providers, bringing criminal justice reform to the center of those conversations. We recently hosted our first statewide policy symposium around criminal justice reform, and have reached thousands over the last 18 months through our virtual programming. As our South Carolina team grows, so does our voice—a voice of change, of hope, of transformation.

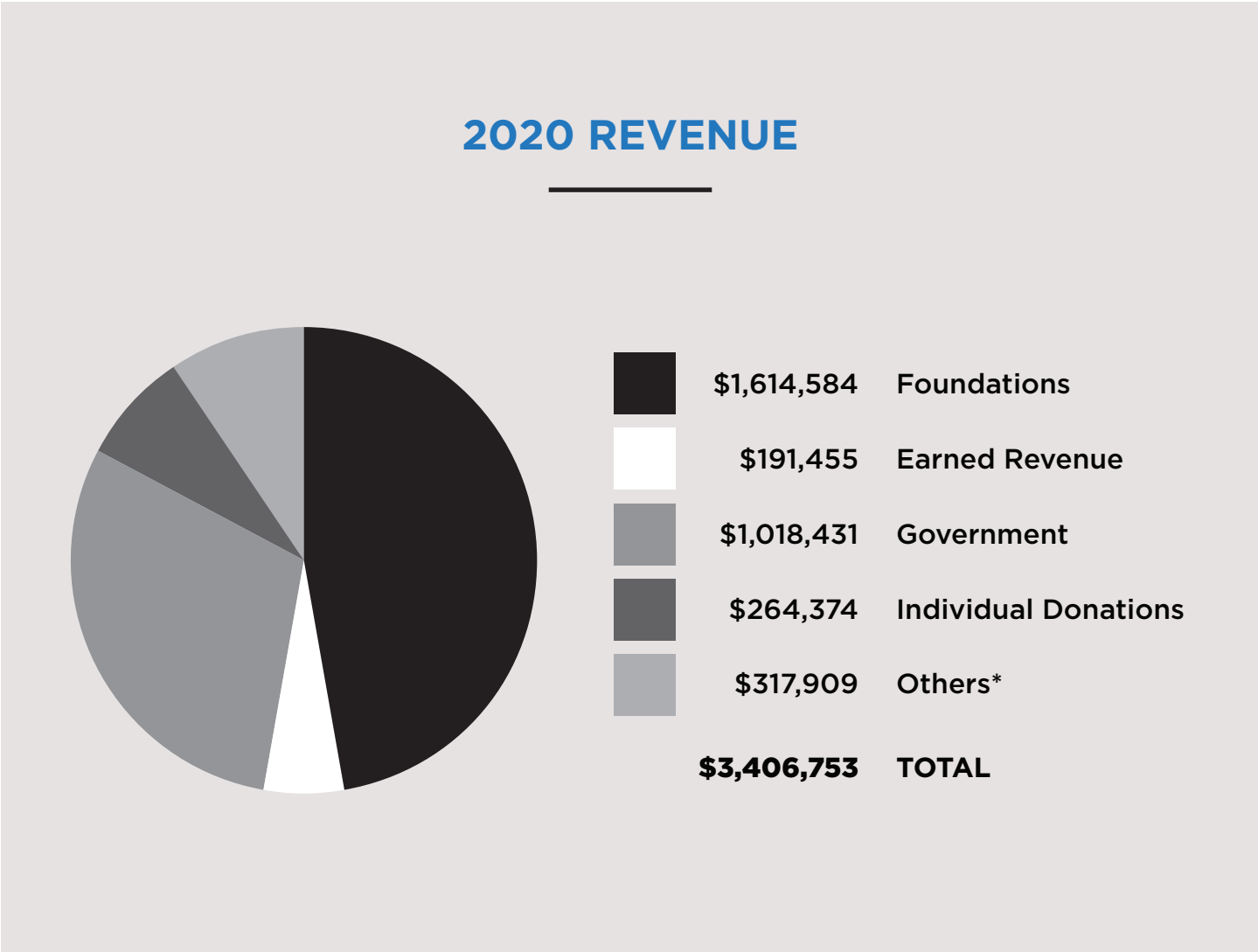


*Angel Oak Tree, Johns Island, Charleston South Carolina*

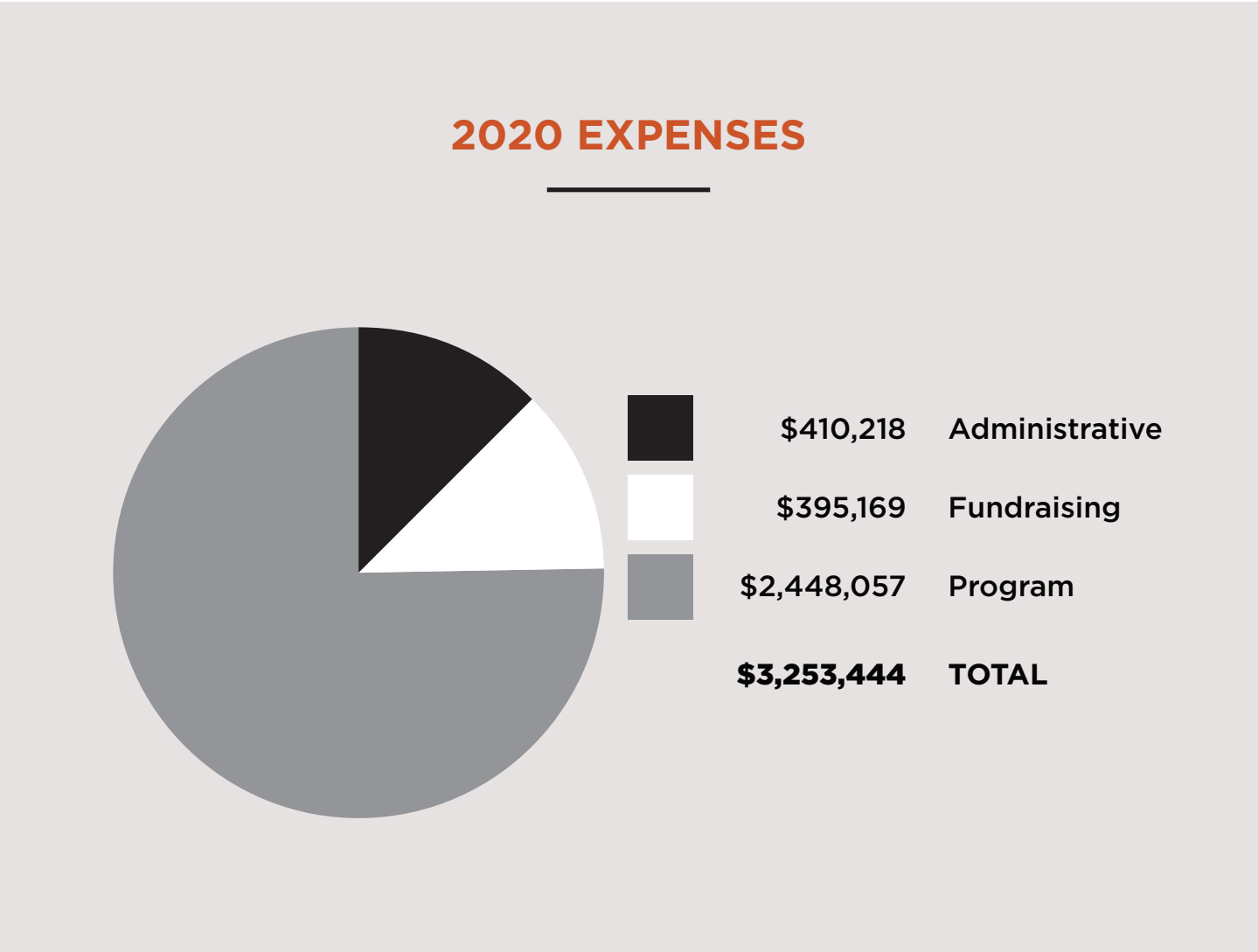


# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

*Below is a snapshot of R&R's audited revenue and expenses for the 2020 calendar year.*



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







## Donate

Visit [www.rootandrebound.org](http://www.rootandrebound.org)  
or send your contribution to:

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### R&R's Team

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**Rebecca Berry**

*Hotline & Direct Services Attorney*

**Judy Burden**

*Programs Coordinator*

**Amanda Carlin**

*Staff Attorney - San Bernardino/  
Riverside Counties*

**Jane Commerford**

*AmeriCorps Data Analyst VISTA*

**Eva DeLair**

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*Staff Attorney*

**Allison Elder**

*South Carolina Equal Justice Works Fellow,  
Sponsored by the Leonard & Robert Weintraub  
Family Foundation*

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*Head of People, Culture & Operations*

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*Director of Institutional Partnerships*

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*Executive Director*

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**Claudia Gonzalez**

*Policy Advocate & Economic Security Coach*

**Veena Gursahani**

*Deputy Director of California Programs*

**Daniel Halpern**

*Senior Paralegal*

**Rashida Harmon**

*Bay Area Regional Director of Advocacy*

*"Root & Rebound has pushed me to strive for a better future. They've connected me with the proper tools and resources to improve my life. I've met amazing women since starting off with them just months ago. My confidence and self-esteem is higher than ever and I am grateful for all their hard work."  
—R&R Client, Fresno*

**Nicole Jeong**

*Southern California Regional Director  
of Advocacy*

**Joshua Kim**

*National Director of Litigation for Economic  
Opportunity*

**June Lee**

*In-Prison Program Coordinator*

**Rona Navales**

*Development Assistant*

**Misty Oka**

*Equal Justice Works Fellow,  
Sponsored by Akin Gump Strauss Hauer &  
Feld LLP and AT&T*

**Zachariah Oquenda**

*Policy & Public Education Attorney*

**Jamie Popper**

*In-Prison Programs Attorney*

**Alesia Rico Flores**

*South Carolina Director of Policy &  
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**Leah Smith**

*South Carolina AmeriCorps VISTA*

**Taylor Smith**

*AmeriCorps Client Liaison & Social  
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**Bailey Strelow**

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**Ana Walker**

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**Kate Weaver Patterson**

*Deputy Director of National Programs*

**Gail Yen**

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