

A STRATEGY-SHARING APPROACH TO COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING | CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM |

Unfortunately, the tradition of change-making newspapers has all but died out. In particular, there is no magazine of the kind we are particularly interested in, which is a strategy building magazine where readers and writers can share concrete ideas for implementing community programming and community organizing.

This absence is particularly felt on college campuses, where theoretical debates can sometimes distract from action. There's a missing link, a need for a forum where theory can become practice. This is what we hope "SUMMIT!" can become.

Our focus on community programming reflects our belief that community programming and organizing represents the most viable site for positive change. We believe this for several reasons. In an unequal world, providing people with equal access to fundamental needs inherently challenges those structures of inequality. Secondly, providing these community programs proves to people that your money is where your mouth is. It gives you credibility. People are a hundred times more willing to hear the theory if they've seen it in practice. Thirdly, community programming is excellent ground for coalition building. Allies are likely to be sympathetic to an organization that is providing free clothing or free housing to people in need.

In our search for a name for this magazine, we wanted to find a word or reference that would somehow be symbolic of all of these ideas. It had to reference the rich history of progressive politics and community organizing. We also wanted it to reflect the unique position Williams students are in, here in our purple bubble.

Reading through Black Panther Fred Hampton's speech, "Power anywhere where there are people", we found a phrase we felt exemplified thoughtful, accountable activism. In our inaugural edition of "SUMMIT", we wanted to print the following excerpt of the speech, in recognition of Hampton and his influence on our work and on this magazine.



**“First you have
free breakfasts,
then you have
free medical
care, then you
have free bus
rides, and soon
you have
FREEDOM!”
-Fred Hampton**

Excerpt from Power Everywhere Where there are People

BY FRED HAMPTON

I don't care how much theory you got, if it don't have any practice applied to it, then that theory happens to be irrelevant. Right? Any theory you get, practice it. And when you practice it you make some mistakes. When you make a mistake, you correct that theory, and then it will be corrected theory that will be able to be applied and used in any situation. That's what we've got to be able to do.

Every time I speak in a church I always try to say something, you know, about Martin Luther King. I have a lot of respect for Martin Luther King. I think he was one of the greatest orators that the country ever produced. And I listened to anyone who speaks well, because I like to listen to that. Martin Luther King said that it might look dark sometime, and it might look dark over here on the North Side. Maybe you thought the room was going to be packed with people and maybe you thought you might have to turn some people away and you might not have enough people here. Maybe some of the people you think should be here are not here and you think that, well if they're not here then it won't be as good as we thought it could have been. And maybe you thought that you need more people here than you have here. Maybe you think that the pigs are going to be able to pressure you and put enough pressure to squash your movement even before it starts. But Martin Luther King said that he heard somewhere that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And we're not worried about it being dark. He said that the arm of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward heaven.

We got Huey P. Newton in jail, and Eldridge Cleaver underground. And Alprentice Bunchy Carter has been murdered; Bobby Hutton and John Huggins been murdered. And a lot of people think that the Black Panther Party in a sense is giving up. But let us say this: That we've made the kind of commitment to the people that hardly anyone else has ever made.

We have decided that although some of us come from what some of you would call petty-bourgeois families, though some of us could be in a sense on what you call the mountaintop. We could be integrated into the society working with people that we may never have a chance to work with. Maybe we could be on the mountaintop and maybe we wouldn't have to be hidin' when we go to speak places like this. Maybe we wouldn't have to worry about court cases and going to jail and being sick. We say that even though all of those luxuries exist on the mountaintop, we understand that you people and your problems are right here in the valley.



We in the Black Panther Party, because of our dedication and understanding, went into the valley knowing that the people are in the valley, knowing that our plight is the same plight as the people in the valley, knowing that our enemies are on the mountain. Even though it's nice to be on the mountaintop, we're going back to the valley. Because we understand that there's work to be done in the valley, and when we get through with this work in the valley, then we got to go to the mountaintop. We're going to the mountaintop because there's a motherfucker on the mountaintop that's playing King, and he's been bullshitting us. And we've got to go up on the mountain top not for the purpose of living his life-style and living like he lives. We've got to go up on the mountain top to make this motherfucker understand, goddamnit, that we are coming from the valley!

INTRO CONT.

Our task is to ask ourselves what Fred Hampton's speech means in the context of Williams. What does it mean for Williams students to "come from the valley"? *How* can we "come from the valley"? Our personal mountains and valleys look different for each one of us. "SUMMIT!" is a place for us to struggle with these questions together.

What does that look like? "SUMMIT!" will be a monthly magazine dedicated to discussing concrete strategies of community programming. Each issue will be a step-by-step organizing and strategy guide from organizations on campus or in the area that run community programs dedicated to the promotion of equality and fundamental human and civil rights.

The magazine will feature, be edited, and be contributed to by different organizations each month, focused on a central topic. The first issue will be dedicated to organizations working for criminal justice reform in the community, including Learning Intervention for Teens (LIFT), Positive Pathways Partnership (P3), and Converging Worlds. The participating organizations will then suggest the next topic, featuring different community programs. Converging Worlds will oversee the process, but the idea is that each organization will be able to feel a sense of ownership over "SUMMIT!". The requirement to be featured in "SUMMIT" is that the organization is implementing concrete community programming.

We believe "SUMMIT" represents an opportunity, not only for these organizations to learn from one another, but for students who aren't sure how to put theory to practice to gain concrete strategies to form their own organizations and community programs. In this sense, we are building on summit's dual meanings, both as a descriptor for scaling Hampton's mountaintop, and as a word meaning gathering and discussion. "SUMMIT!" is thus also intended to be a gathering of minds, a conversation and a community where change-making is born.



Converging Worlds was founded in April 2013 by Yazmine Nichols '15 and Kiyana Hanley '16. Nichols was inspired to found CW when a close friend of hers from high school was incarcerated. Her experiences writing to him both emphasized her belief in the injustices of the carceral state and demonstrated to her the profound need incarcerated individuals have for contact and community with the outside world. As a result, she founded Converging Worlds, writing "Converging Worlds is an organization devoted to inspiring a diversity of thought within the Williams College community by encouraging positive correspondence between Williams students and some of the most marginalized and alienated members of our society—criminals. The purpose of CW is to foster a sense of social responsibility, camaraderie, and social awareness through written communication."

Converging Worlds' mission and programming has changed significantly over the years, while still holding true to its origins as an organization dedicated to "convergence", the bringing together of people, resources, and places, and as an organization dedicated to the collapse of bias-driven barriers and ideologies. While we still run a letter writing program, that is now only one of our multitude of initiatives aimed at a broader goal of combating racism and other biases in the criminal justice system.

When I joined Converging Worlds as co-president in the spring of my freshman year, we were in the process of seeing how we could grow as an organization. We ran a successful letter writing program and our events on campus were well attended, but we felt a lack of connection to the surrounding community that was troubling.



Kiyana Hanley (left) and Yazmine Nichols (right), speak at a Converging Worlds event



Nichols leads a protest outside of Paresky Center

FEATURE CONT.

Current co-president Keiana West '17 had become involved in Converging Worlds as a tutor that spring. She was then a leader of a Kinetic (a cross-college initiative to get students creating solutions to local problems), working on restorative justice solutions to the school to prison pipeline in Western Massachusetts. At the same time, Pittsfield, the only city in Berkshire County, had been cited by the state for disproportionately disciplining young black students and students with disabilities. The report read "Only 3.2 percent of the school's population was given an in-school suspension and just 1.4 percent were given out-of-school suspensions. However, among students with disabilities, Pittsfield has dished out in-school suspensions to 15.4 percent and out-of-school suspensions to 8.3 percent...the second highest percent in Pittsfield is among African-Americans with 5.4 percent receiving in-school suspensions and 2.6 percent receiving out-of-school suspensions. That is compared to white students being suspended at a rate of 2.8 and 1.6 percent, in-school and out-of-school suspensions, respectively."

Newly elected superintendent Jason McCandless was committed to working on these issues, noting "The threat to us is a threat of conscience. This troubles us. So we will be keeping this in our minds and in our hearts as we press forward." Through a close partnership with Superintendent McCandless, and through connections with community organizer Shirley Edgerton and NAACP president Dennis Powell, Keiana saw an opportunity to do the work Converging Worlds was seeking to implement in the public school system. Keiana's personal connection, having been born and raised in Pittsfield, both strengthened her commitment to the issue, (solidifying CW's resolve to pursue this initiative), and provided Converging Worlds with crucial contacts in the community.

That summer, both Keiana and I took part in the Sentinel's Fellowship, a Williams College Center for Learning in Action fellowship that encourages students to research problems in the local community and come up with substantive policy suggestions. As the culmination of our research, we presented CLiA head Paula Consolini and Superintendent McCandless with a proposal for a restorative justice mentorship program, serving at-risk students and staffed by Williams College students. With Superintendent McCandless's approval and a commitment from CLiA to provide financial and logistical support, we moved forward with developing a curriculum and with finding a school location where we could freely implement our program.



From left to right Superintendent McCandless, Shirley Edgerton, and Colin Ovitsky of CLiA at the '17 Fall Final Showcase

FEATURE CONT.

In 2015, Converging Worlds and the Black Student Union held a Claiming Williams Day panel discussion with Patreese Johnson and Renata Hill of the NJ 4, four lesbian black women who were wrongfully incarcerated as a result of their self-defence when someone assaulted them outside a movie theater. After the panel, one of the audience members, who worked as an administrator at the Student Resource Center in Pittsfield, approached me about creating a tutoring program with SRC students and Williams College tutors.

The SRC's mission statement read "The mission of the Student Resource Center (SRC) is to provide a safe and secure environment in which students are provided the opportunity to fulfill their potential. The SRC is a multi-faceted initiative that provides a unique blend of services for youths who are at risk of dropping out of school, suspended, expelled, or frequently truant from school. This is accomplished by providing education, casework, counseling, and employment services to all students." However, this statement held little bearing in the facts- run by the Sheriff's office, with limited oversight from the public school system, the SRC actually operated as more of a conduit to the school to prison pipeline, not as a preventative measure. There was no curriculum plan, no restorative justice practice, and, fundamentally, a lack of a culture of caring for the students, a lack of investment in their success.

Without allies in this system, without a structure we could depend on, and importantly, due to our lack of experience, Converging Worlds struggled to implement a program we felt was meeting our goals and was fulfilling our mission statement. After the end of the 2016 spring semester, we chose to end our partnership with the SRC and pursue implementation of our restorative justice program in a more supportive environment. Shortly afterwards, the SRC was shut down and was reabsorbed into the public school system under the new title "Educational Options for Success".



Patreese (middle) and Renata (right) speak with BSU president Adrianna DeGazon (left) at Claiming Williams Day 2016



The audience poses with speakers for a picture at Claiming Williams day '16

FEATURE CONT.

With guidance from Shirley Edgerton, we identified Reid Middle School and Principal Linda Whitacre as potential partners. We met with Shirley, Principal Whitacre, and guidance counselor Kristen Shepardson to discuss implementation of the program. Ultimately we got our pilot program in just under the wire of the 2017 spring semester. We did 3 field trips in the span of a week, taking students to Williams College, the local Humane Society, and Jacob's pillow.

Some field trips were more successful than others, and it was an exhausting experience (and not anything close to the full three month program we had hoped to implement that semester), but it was crucial and ultimately incredibly worthwhile that we implemented this pilot when we did. It was deeply important that we prove to stakeholders that we were serious about our promise to fulfill this program, and it kept our momentum going, so that we were able to fully implement our program in the fall semester of 2017. We also learned valuable logistics and curricula lessons from the pilot program, without which we would not have been able to be as successful as we were in the fall of 2017. The Spring 2017 pilot program also gave us a name for the mentorship program. One of our students called us the "Justice League", and the name stuck.

This fall 2017, Converging Worlds held monthly letter writing meetings, hosted our Fall semester speaking event with the Queer Student Union on issues faced by LGBTQ prisoners, and ran our first full "Justice League" program. We paired 8 Reid students with 9 Williams mentors and met every thursday for two months, conducting community-building exercises, discussing community problems and solutions, and helping students self-advocate through crafting stories personal to their interests and passions. The program culminated in a "final showcase" at the Pittsfield Lichtenstein Art Center, where students showed their final stories and community solutions to a crowd including family, friends, the superintendent, state senator Adam Hines and staff, community activists, and school administrators.

The event was a success, and as we drove home we both reflected on how far we'd come and how far we have yet to go. To me, that period of reflection embodies the spirit of Converging Worlds: community organizing willing to be unflinchingly introspective and self-critical; advocacy that continues to grow and change; an organization that privileges its constituents' voices above its own.



For further questions or interest contact:
Anna Pomper, avp1@williams.edu or
Keiana West, krw1@williams.edu

Kristen Shepardson, Reid MS guidance
counselor, speaks with a student at the '17

Final Showcase

The Learning Intervention for Teens (LIFT) program is an alternative sentencing program for adjudicated youth run by the College and the Berkshire County Juvenile Court. Founded in 2009 by Alexa Lutchen '11 and Nancy Macauley, a juvenile probation officer and CSS officer at the College, the program pairs 10 Williams students, who take the program as their Winter Study course, with 10 teenagers. Teenagers reach the program via referral from the probation office, generally as the result of a delinquency charge or civil "child requiring assistance" order, and typically range in age from 13 to 18.

The program spans ten days over three weeks; each day features a mixture of both organized workshops and independent work between the mentor and the mentee on a project of the mentee's choosing. The workshops often aim to bring in other groups from campus; previous workshops have included Sankofa, improv comedy, meditation, WCMA, and the Davis Center. Teenagers might also meet with people on campus who can help with their project or personal goals; this year, for example, teenagers met with the football coach, costume shop manager, and several professors.

These two program components reflect three of the central values of LIFT: personalization, ownership, and the importance of space. Mentees are free to craft much of the LIFT experience for themselves, along with their mentor; they choose a project of interest to them, choose who to meet with, and can choose how they allocate their time over the program days. The project aims to give the mentees a sense of agency and ownership over their direction for the month.

Space is also crucially important to LIFT; we welcome the mentees onto the College's campus and into our space. Mindful of the fact that we come as learners to this type of work, and the danger of falling into a savior-type complex, we believe it is important to welcome them into our home and into the spaces we frequent. We are decisively not, nor should we ever lapse into seeing ourselves as, going into the community to save it or the teenagers we work with. Hence, we think it is valuable to work with our mentees as equals, welcoming them into this space.

To recognize our position as learners and the crucial work that so many in the community have done and will do in juvenile justice, the course also aims to teach mentors about crucial issues in juvenile justice today. We meet with probation officers, judges, and other juvenile justice professionals in Berkshire County and observe juvenile court, to hopefully give mentors a more sense of what the juvenile court system in Berkshire County looks like. Mentors also keep a journal as part of the program, to encourage reflection on their work and the broader learning on juvenile justice we do.

FEATURE: CONT.

The key limitation and challenge of LIFT, of course, is that it is an official program in a flawed juvenile justice system. Its community programming can only be so transformative as an official probation program can be. Many of the offenses that we observed when we go to watch juvenile court (as part of the course), such as school disturbances, seem things that would be better handled by the school system than the courts. Despite our belief that the LIFT program itself can offer a nontraditional rehabilitative opportunity to the involved teenagers, they can only access this program through a system that ensnares youth, disproportionately Black and Latinx youth, for crimes that are sometimes nothing more than youthful misbehavior. Regardless of what brings an individual student to LIFT, the knowledge that the system casts such a wide net in bringing youth into the court system can be difficult to reconcile with our hope that LIFT can be transformative.

I'll close with a reflection on the program from one mentor's journal this year:

"Realistically, a few sessions per week over the course of three weeks is not enough time to foster a super close relationship with our mentees, or to make a lasting impact on their life ("impact" specifically being different from the problematic phrasing of "changing their life")...If the net experience can be even a little positive, if the teens enjoyed any part of their time in LIFT, or if they did anything during LIFT they did not think they could do or did not expect to do, I would consider the program a success."

For further questions or interest contact: Marissa Shapiro, mls3@williams.edu or Nicholas Goldrosen, ncg1@williams.edu

FEATURE: POSITIVE PATHWAYS BY JULIA MUNEMO

A partnership between the Williams College Center for Learning in Action (CLiA) and the Berkshire County House of Corrections offers tutoring in writing, reading and math to inmates planning to take the HiSET, a high school equivalency exam, in preparation for their upcoming release.

The Positive Pathways Partnership (P3) is coordinated by Sharif Rosen, a CLiA assistant director and the college's Muslim chaplain. He volunteered as a prison chaplain before coming to Williams in 2015, an experience he says showed him firsthand how important such programming is to a population he describes as "entirely forgotten."

"I helped start P3 because I wanted to think about the ways in which we in our community can write new narratives and create venues for hope where you may least expect to find them," says Rosen. "We have huge, systemic criminal injustice issues in our country, and P3 is one avenue through which we can seek local ways to become part of the change that needs to happen."

Rosen says the student inmates in the program are a motivated group, eager to get their high school diplomas and begin a new chapter of their lives. To help them achieve that goal, Williams student tutors travel to the jail once a week to work in small groups with inmates on concepts that will be covered on the HiSET.

Omar Kawam '20 has been a P3 tutor since the program began in the fall of 2016. He heard about P3 soon after arriving at Williams as a first-year student, and although he had no experience with inmate populations, he had tutored his peers in high school. "I wanted to ground my college experience within the wider community and to make a tangible difference in someone's life," he says.

Kawam took an orientation course at the jail with several other Williams students, including Diana Sanchez '17. By November they were driving to Pittsfield every Thursday to work two-on-one with a student inmate who later took—and then passed—his HiSET. "It was great to witness that firsthand," Sanchez says.

Sanchez is now a member of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, through which she serves as a re-entry coordinator in Arizona. "I wouldn't be where I am now if it hadn't been for P3," says the biology major, who is currently applying to graduate programs in public health. "I walked away from each session feeling like I made an impact, however small it might have been."

FEATURE: CONT.

Says Kawam, who tutored an inmate last academic year and through the summer, and who continues to tutor now, "P3 is one way that Williams reaches out to people in the greater community." He hopes to follow a pre-med track at Williams and go on to a career as a doctor.

"P3 has also had an effect on me personally," Kawam adds. "The experience has really grounded me, and I know I'm gaining skills that will help me interact with my patients in the future."

Another Williams student, Glen Gallik '18, is spending Winter Study in January examining best practices in adult basic education as the Berkshire House of Corrections looks to improve its tutoring programs for basic math and reading literacy. Rosen hopes to use these findings to expand P3's volunteer services in the future.

"When the right students and the right tutors come together, they create very powerful, intangible but potent, interactions," says Rosen. "Those are the kinds of connections that help inmates, however momentarily, transcend the walls of the institution." And that, he believes, will help the inmates served by P3 find a positive pathway in the future.

For further questions or interest contact: Sharif Rosen, sar4@williams.edu

Published originally on the Williams College Website.

COMING FROM THE VALLEY

BY: KEIANA WEST

Williams College and other institutions for higher education around the nation are pockets of privilege, free to interact with surrounding communities as much or as little as they choose. Many colleges and universities have bad reputations in nearby, low-income communities, and Black communities in particular, because of their historical tendency to either ignore the needs of the people at-large, or even to capitalize off of vulnerable populations by using them as research participants in a way that harms them and ultimately serves no benefit to the community. Williams, although it might not have the same toxic relationship with Berkshire County, does tend to limit its interactions with under-resourced communities in the area, such as Pittsfield and North Adams.

As a Williams College student who was born and raised in Pittsfield, I can attest to the absence of a meaningful relationship between the institution and my hometown. In fact, I didn't even know Williams College existed until I went on a college tour with a youth empowerment program for Black girls when I was in 11th grade. When I first started college at Williams in 2014, I was surprised by how far I felt from home despite the fact that I was only 25 minutes away. I had never been in a space with so many resources and so many opportunities for growth. I was grateful to be able to take classes such as those in the Africana Studies department which helped me learn more about systemic oppression and strategies that leaders in the past have used to combat this oppression. However, I was discouraged by how content most people seemed with writing papers about these topics and possibly having campus discussions or speakers to supplement our learning, without taking the lessons they learned and applying them to practical change in surrounding communities. This disillusionment led me to seek out organizations dedicated to supporting and creating programs that could bridge the gap between Williams and the surrounding community, and especially people who were willing to make the extra leap to venture outside of the Purple Bubble to build relationships with Pittsfield. Converging Worlds provided me with the opportunity to connect students with activists in Pittsfield and create programming, which I believe is the least I could do with the abundance of information, funding, and support at my fingertips.

COMING FROM THE VALLEY CONT.

Being at an institution with accumulated wealth, we have an opportunity and a duty to share our abundance of resources with those in our proximity. This requires a willingness to build relationships with people in these communities who are interested in forming a partnership with Williams and who can provide us with information about what the people truly need rather than approaching residents with ready-made solutions. Since 2015, Converging Worlds has expanded its programming on justice reform to include partnerships with individuals, organizations and systems in Pittsfield. Pittsfield is the only city in Berkshire County and has the highest population of Black people (6%) of all other towns in the county. Williams College faculty and students have especially limited contact with residents in Pittsfield, and Converging Worlds has prioritized this area as a site for coalition building and programming.

Converging Worlds has engaged in various community service efforts with youth in Pittsfield to combat the school-to-prison pipeline, the process by which school zero-tolerance policies and teacher or administration biases lead to excessive disciplinary action against students within the education system, ultimately leading students on a path towards prison. In 2016, Pittsfield Public Schools received a notice from the Massachusetts Department of Education for disproportionately high suspension rate of Black males. Although community activists in Pittsfield such as the Berkshire County NAACP have been advocating for discipline reform in Pittsfield Public Schools for years, this notice by the State encouraged members of the community to re-vamp youth programming and advocate for alternatives to punitive discipline.

In Fall 2016, Converging Worlds began partnering with community activists and administrators at Pittsfield Public Schools to create what we consider to be the most successful of our community initiatives, called the Justice League. Justice League is a restorative justice mentoring program formed through a partnership with Williams College and Reid Middle School in Pittsfield. It works to combat the school-to-prison pipeline by providing students with an after-school program dedicated to self-empowerment and community problem-solving. Williams College students travel once a week to Reid Middle School to mentor the students and facilitate activities that allow the students to “change the narrative” by reflecting on their own passions and interests throughout the program. Specifically, we encourage individual advocacy and community advocacy through storytelling, field-trips, and community problem-solving.

Below is an excerpt from our Justice League program brochure, to give a better idea of what the program entails.

EXCERPT FROM JUSTICE LEAGUE BROCHURE:

What we do:

The "Justice League" is a club founded on principles of Restorative Justice, a practice that advocates second chances and community building. We want to emphasize the idea of "changing the narrative" or "reclaiming the narrative" by giving students the space to tell their stories and to reflect on their own passions and interests throughout the program. We also want to encourage students to take stake in their community by creating strategies to "change the narrative" in Pittsfield through community advocacy and service.

Encouraging Community Advocacy:

We encourage our students to advocate for themselves as responsible community members by being HEROes. This means remembering to Hold-up, Empathize and Express, Restore, and finally, take the Opportunity to learn and Overcome. We also encourage students to self-advocate by telling stories about who they are: their passions, identities, and hopes.

Encouraging Individual Advocacy:

We encourage our students to think critically about how to improve and strengthen the Pittsfield community. Our students' age and perspectives are invaluable in crafting effective solutions to relevant problems.



FALL '17 PROGRAM:

Storytelling:

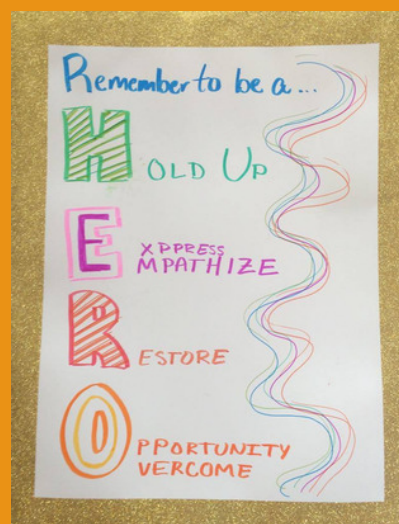
This year students worked on stories (about any topic they wanted) that were important to them in some way: whether they were about their passion for dancing, their determination to succeed, or their love of making people laugh. Students made videos, choreographed dances, painted and wrote creative works.

Fieldtrips:

An important component of Justice League are field trips intended to build connections between students and the community. This year we took a field trip to Williams College, where students took a tour of the campus, did a dance workshop with the Williams step team "SanKofa", and worked out with the Williams basketball team.

Community Problem-Solving:

Justice League is committed to helping students become informed, active community members. This year we hosted A.J Enchill, an aide to state senator Adam Hinds and Reid middle school alumn. He worked with students to brainstorm strategies about how to "make change" for issues students selected: improved police accountability and oversight and a re-vitalized mall.



COMING FROM THE VALLEY CONT.

We consider Justice League to be the most successful of our community initiatives due to the strength of our partnership with the school and the program's sustainability. Thus, we would like to offer some of the steps we've taken to create and maintain a successful partnership with Pittsfield Public Schools for this youth empowerment program in hopes that it can serve as a useful guide for community programming in the future.

1. Find a campus liaison. Once you have an idea of the kind of work your group would like to do in the community, reach out to someone on campus who can connect you with people in the community who are doing similar work or who may be interested in forming a partnership with your group or organization. This liaison can be a student from the town of interest or a staff/faculty member who does work in the community or who lives in the area. As a student who is originally from Pittsfield, I was able to introduce Converging Worlds leadership to people in Pittsfield whom we needed to build relationships with in order to address the school-to-prison pipeline (superintendent, school administrators, community activists, school consultants, etc.) This is an important step in getting acquainted with the community, and in making sure your organization is aware of other people on campus with similar interests with whom you can build coalition.

2. Do your research. Make sure to do some research before meeting with people from the community to get a sense of what they have done that is relevant to your initiative, and to learn about any significant events related to the initiative. This research will most likely include informational interviews with your campus liaison or other people who know about the community, online searches for relevant websites or news articles, and searches for community members' professional background to get a sense of what work they have done that is related to your initiative.

3. Meet with party of interest. As soon as possible, arrange to meet in the community with an individual or group of people who are potentially interested in working with you. If your campus liaison has a significant relationship with the community member or if they are interested in getting involved with your initiative, it is wise to have this person with you at the first meeting. Although not necessary, this may give more credibility to your group or make people less skeptical about your genuine interest in partnering with the community. It is okay to have an idea for a program but avoid coming with a full proposal to the first meeting. This is because your first meeting should be an opportunity for you to listen and to get a feel for what the different people at the table think is important to the community. You will also be able to determine whether you think a partnership with this person or group in particular is advisable, or whether there might be someone else who can better help you address the issues you would like to address.

"Once you have an idea of the kind of work your group would like to do in the community, reach out to someone on campus who can connect you with people in the community who are doing similar work or who may be interested in forming a partnership with your group or organization."

COMING FROM THE VALLEY CONT.

4. Devise a proposal. After meeting with people in the community and hearing their vision or ideas, you might want to start writing up a proposal. Even if the person or organization is not necessarily asking for a proposal, it is a good way to articulate for your group what goals you have in mind, why it is important, and steps you may take to implement your program or initiative. This will also help you keep a record of what you initially set out to do so that your group can stay on track or recalibrate in the future. You can send this to your community contacts when you have a polished draft so that they can see in writing what you hope to accomplish and suggest any revisions to the plan, if necessary. The proposal will help them better understand what support you need from them.

5. Recruit and build support on campus. If your proposed program requires the help of additional people on campus (students, faculty, staff, etc.) start reaching out to people once you have a final proposal and approval from your contact in the community. If you have not already identified an adviser or department on campus that will act as your primary support, brainstorm who might be in the best position to help and start telling them more about your program, offering your proposal if necessary. For example, the Center for Learning in Action has been a tremendous system of support for us for Justice League by providing funding, technical assistance, materials, publicity, and eventually institutionalizing the program.

6. Pilot your program. As soon as you have a detailed plan and the support from the community and from campus that you need, start implementing your program as soon as possible (although preferably not before a major break). Even if you don't feel ready, it is important to know that you will probably never be ready! Prolonging the start of a program when you have what you need to start can cause you to lose momentum from your support systems on campus and in the community. There WILL be mistakes and WILL be poor decisions made, but it's best to make these mistakes as soon as possible so that your organization can learn and make improvements.



The Justice League Pilot Program at a fieldtrip at Jacob's Pillow

"It is important to know that you will probably never be ready! Prolonging the start of a program when you have what you need to start can cause you to lose momentum from your support systems on campus and in the community. There WILL be mistakes and WILL be poor decisions made, but it's best to make these mistakes as soon as possible so that your organization can learn and make improvements."

COMING FROM THE VALLEY CONT.

7. Evaluate. Even if your group has not created a specific plan for quantitatively or qualitatively evaluating your program, make sure to check in with your group and the community about what is working and what is not. It might be hard to see the impact that your program might be having, but communicate well with everyone involved with the program and make adjustments as necessary. If it turns out that the program is not working as planned and if the community has other ideas, don't be afraid to expand upon your original goals in order to make a program that is more suitable for the community or that addresses the issue in a more effective way.

8. Plan for sustainability. Being in a college organization, the original leadership will inevitably change as people seek new opportunities or graduate. If the program is successful, it is important to take the steps necessary to ensure that your program does not fade out with the evolving leadership. Your group and the community should have a discussion about the best way to make the program more sustainable, if it is not already. This may entail making the program exist outside the leadership of college students so that community members take primary responsibility of running this program. This might also include finding a way to institutionalize the program through the college. For example, as the Center for Learning Action is the center at William College with most experience connecting students with the broader community, and considering that they already acted as the backbone to Justice League, Converging Worlds decided to institutionalize the program starting in Spring 2017. Specifically, mentors and mentorship coordinators will be paid through work study in partnership with the Center for Learning in Action for their work with Justice League. Not only will this ensure that Williams Students have more time to devote to running the program, but it will also ensure that campus leadership for this program will be solicited by the college each semester. Ultimately, there are pros and cons to both of these methods of achieving sustainability, so it is crucial that you thoroughly discuss the advantages and disadvantages of your chosen method.

"Being in a college organization, the original leadership will inevitably change as people seek new opportunities or graduate. If the program is successful, it is important to take the steps necessary to ensure that your program does not fade out with the evolving leadership. Your group and the community should have a discussion about the best way to make the program more sustainable, if it is not already."



Four members of the current CW board have a board lunch, clockwise
Christine Tamir '18, Keiana West '18, Emma York '17, Maria Hidalgo
Romero '20

NEW MOUNTAINS, NEW CHALLENGES

BY: EMMA YORK, ALLY ALVAREZ, and ELI
CYTRYNBAUM

As an organization, we are grateful for the opportunities we have to evolve Converging Worlds and the Justice League into a more stable and sustainable program. Moving forward, we have ideas of how to further improve the Justice League and strengthen the relationship between Williams College and Berkshire County At-Large. On February 1st for Claiming Williams Day, we will be hosting a panel called "Act with Us Now! How to support and create community programming in Berkshire County." Activists currently leading various initiatives and running programs in Berkshire County will offer the Williams community an opportunity to get involved with these initiatives through individual volunteer work and organizational collaborations. Panelists come from diverse backgrounds and address issues including but not limited to racial justice, criminal justice reform, youth empowerment, and immigrant support. They will focus especially on concrete strategies and tactics that students and community members can use for effective community organizing, program development, and sustainable collaboration.

More prospective goals and projects include:

1. Giving mentors more responsibilities and leadership roles in the Justice League program.
2. Creating a community garden at Reid MS to address food insecurity, nutrition education, and issues of food justice.
3. Establishing SUMMIT! as a campus and community wide publication.
4. Finding more ways for CW members to become involved, both on the board and actively within the organization.
5. Securing longevity for CW and the Justice League by filling leadership positions and building a strong membership community of support.
6. Celebrating our five year anniversary!

But the best way to glimpse what lies in store for Converging Worlds, however, is to talk to the people who will be leading it in the future! To give an idea of how Converging Worlds will continue to grow moving forward, current and future leaders of Converging Worlds also weighed in on visions they have for the future of Justice League and Converging Worlds. Check out the Q&A below to see what's in store for next semester and beyond!



Ally Alvarez '20



Ely Cytrynbaum '20



Emma York '19

NEW MOUNTAINS, NEW CHALLENGES CONT.

Q&A with future leaders

Q1. Do you have any new ideas for Justice League next semester? (Themes, activities, field-trips, speakers)

Q2. Are there any initiatives, organizations or programs in the community that you think CW should collaborate with in the future? Any additional programs we should create?

Q3. How do you envision your leadership in Converging Worlds helping the organization grow?

Eli Cytrynbaum '20, Events Coordinator, Mentorship Coordinator

A1. "It could be cool to pursue the theme of trying to claim the community more. This would entail speakers who were involved in just that, through community centers and programs, local governance, and all the like. We could visit local government, soup kitchens, soul fire farms, the Brien Center, and any similar places."

A2. "I would like to find ways for Converging Worlds to be more of an abolitionist force by politicizing our activities and reaching out to more off campus groups."

A3. "A first useful step might even be to map out what exists, such as the bail fund, nurses union, and who knows what other movements exist in the area."

Ally Alvarez '20, Mentorship Coordinator

A1. "I definitely think we should try to bring more speakers from Williams, specifically student speakers. There are students from Williams that are familiar with the type of experiences that Reid Middle Schoolers will definitely relate to and learn from. I think Williams is a wonderful resource that should not only benefit Williamstown, but its surrounding communities, especially the ones that need it most."

A2. Maybe [Justice League students] can collaborate with other children-oriented organizations on campus and interact with the children of the Williamstown community or even North Adams. It's a good way to connect these children from nearby communities to each other so they can create connections with children from different backgrounds that they otherwise wouldn't be able to meet."

A3. "I think Converging Worlds has so much room for growth and I am so excited to contribute to it. My experiences coming from a low-income community will help me better understand the sorts of people and students we're trying to help, so after this first step of understanding, I will help contribute to the leadership of the organization through my background."



Alvarez (left), with Tricia De Souza '21 (right), also a mentorship coordinator, at the Fall '17 Final Showcase

NEW MOUNTAINS, NEW CHALLENGES CONT.

Emma York '19, Co-President in Training, JL Mentor

A1. "One idea is to have students co-create expectations for us and for them on the 1st day. Survey the students about what their interests are before the start of the program so that we can connect them to people on campus who do what they want to do (ex: connecting Steve to Jamal who also dances freestyle for NBC) and create field trips that are related to what they want to do. Another thing we could improve upon is families in the Justice League before the Showcase (maybe have a potluck?/phone call check-ins). In addition, we could also make it a pre-requisite that mentors have to commit to missing no more than the equivalent of 1 meeting with the students because consistency is key to trust building. We should also come up with a shared sign for refocusing (whether that's a song, a chant, a silly saying), or introduce a talking stick (it can be something silly like a stuffed platypus) so that students respect each other's commentary and questions."

A2. "Converging Worlds was started as one student's response to the lack of concrete action around incarceration on campus after she experienced a loved one being locked up. I think that it is crucial that we continue this legacy: connecting what we do to tangible change and remaining unafraid to respond to the lack of action on our campus and in our communities. After all, prison abolition, which is at the heart of what we do, is something unfathomable to many, so it is only by making its possibility concrete and imagining programming in places where it does not yet exist that we can begin to reach toward the things we ultimately want to achieve."

A3. "As co-chair in training I have been soaking up the expertise of the current co-chairs (Keiana and Anna) - incorporating Keiana's knowledge of the community and Anna's emphasis on the concrete application of theory into my own approach. As someone who attended a failing public school I hope to add my lived experience and deep commitment to addressing educational inequity to improve the restorative justice program at Reid Middle School. I joined Converging Worlds because I was searching for a way to practice what I preach, escape the Purple Bubble, and connect back to my community. Pittsfield, a small post-industrial city struggling to combat poverty, shares many similarities with my own city and so I see my work with Converging Worlds as an extension of the work I have been doing, and hope to continue to do, at home in NB. I am a strong believer in the idea that we are best equipped to create change in our own communities and communities that share similarities with these communities, partially because a direct connection imbues the work we do with a certain gravity that means we are likely to continue to do it even when it is not easy, readily accessible, or "rewarding." All too often, we engage in "activism" that is easy - piloting our programs in schools that already have ample programming, the ability to accommodate our activities, and exist within reach of our "regular" activities. So something that I hope to bring to the organization is a commitment to doing the uneasy, exhausting work that Anna and Keiana have already been doing."



Clockwise, York, Maria Hidalgo Romero '20 (mentor), Claudia Reyes '18 (mentor), Louisa Kania '19 (mentor), speaking with Paula Consolini (CLiA Director) at the '17 Final Showcase

LESSONS LEARNED

BY KEIANA WEST AND ANNA POMPER

We thought it would be nice to end our inaugural issue of SUMMIT! by mingling future and past. Just as we've heard from Converging World's future leaders about their forthcoming plans and hopes, we'd like to end by reflecting on some lessons we've learned during our work over the past couple years. We hope they can be helpful to you as you find your own mountain to summit!

1. Community Ties are Crucial

Community programs run by or in partnership with college students are always difficult for a variety of reasons, one being that its leaders, while genuine and committed to helping the community, are not always from that community originally. This means that it's super important to connect with community members in the very first stages of brainstorming a program so that the process of organizing is more efficient, and more importantly so that you know you are doing work that's called upon by the community. It can create issues when people are well into starting initiatives but have not been in contact with a particular organization or group in the area who would certainly be able to help guide or support them. If you are interested in starting a program but don't yet have direct ties to the surrounding community, don't let that discourage you! Just be prepared to find the right people on campus and working on the ground in the community before proceeding with your proposal.

2. Be Cautious...but Also Give People a Shot!

When we were approached by the Student Resource Center, we jumped into a program with them without really knowing the motives at play or the structure of the center, which was a mistake. Be cautious- take time to talk to people, ask them hard questions, and don't commit yourselves to a partnership you can't depend on or feel confident in. The stakes are high, particularly when you're working with kids. This is work worth taking the time to do well. Take the time to make sure you're making the right move and that you're partnering with the right people.

At the same time, don't make assumptions about who your allies will or won't be. Give people a chance to surprise you. You may find support in the unlikeliest of corners, and we need all the help we can get! Don't count any one out prematurely.

LESSONS LEARNED CONT.

3. Know Your Audience

This tip is especially important for those running programs in which services are provided to a specific demographic. In Justice League, we work with 7th graders, which means that they're in a stage of awkwardness, energy, attitude, curiosity, and have a no-bullshit state of mind. This is something we have to constantly keep in mind while coming up with activities and events for the children, which I will admit is definitely not my strength (hipness creds go to Anna). We have certainly made mistakes in inviting speakers or doing workshops with people who are used to working with college students or adults, and this backfired when students lost interest and weren't able to take much away from that particularly activity. This is an easy thing to forget especially when we're wrapped up with coursework and constantly speaking with students and professors, but it could be the factor that makes or breaks your program. So, no matter what demographic you're working with, just make sure that you're stepping outside your own world view and thinking about the interests and needs of the community members.

4. Don't Make Promises you Can't Keep

There is an enormous amount of trust building that goes into community programming. There's also an enormous amount of trust building that goes into working with kids. Particularly coming from Williams, it takes a lot of time and commitment to prove to a community that you're not wasting their time. Similarly, kids have long memories, and particularly if they've had poor experiences trusting people, you really can't and shouldn't break a promise with them.

Do not make a promise you can not keep. Do everything in your power to keep your word and fulfill your commitments. Extenuating circumstances happen of course, and sometimes you can't control the fact that an event gets canceled or a speaker doesn't show up. But a surprising amount of the time, things are only extremely difficult to accomplish, not impossible to accomplish. In those moments, going the extra mile can make the difference between a promise kept and a promise broken. For example, when we ran our pilot program it was in the middle of finals and we took the kids on three field trips in the span of about 7 days. It was extremely challenging, but we did it, proving to the school and to the students that we could be trusted to fulfill our commitments. It's doubtful if we had broken that promise we would have been invited back to run the Justice League program this past fall semester.

LESSONS LEARNED CONT.

5. Delegate

Our board is amazing, committed, and hardworking, and they're always having to remind us to remember to delegate! (They're also incredibly patient, kind hearted souls). Just as trust building is important in communities, trust building is crucial within organizations. Build a community of people you believe in, and then trust them to do the work. This both evens the workload and builds bonds among the organization and community members. Furthermore, an organization is stronger, smarter, and more innovative when people collaborate. So let people collaborate! Delegating today ensures strong, dedicated leadership into the future.

6. Have a Plan For Now and a Plan for the Future...but be Flexible

When running any type of community program, it is crucial to have a step-by-step plan for the present as well as a vision for the nearby and long-term future. This, again, can be difficult for college students, who often have trouble thinking past their next assignment, and for whom the future is usually blurred. Therefore, your group should try to get ahead by planning things out thoroughly in advance to the start of the program and making adjustments as necessary. Justice League runs by the college semester and the public school schedule, so we always try to have a skeleton of the program before the semester starts, incorporating lessons learned into the next iteration of the program. In hopes of creating sustainability for the program, the Converging Worlds board has worked with the Center for Learning in Action in order to make mentorship and coordination of the Justice League paid positions, which will hopefully prevent the program from dissolving once Anna and I and the rest of the board move on from Williams.

Of course, planning for the future is not as linear and straight-forward as I may make it seem when explaining how Converging Worlds as approached this issue. Unforeseen circumstances (or perhaps very foreseen depending on the situation) has made planning for the Justice League seem like a very roundabout and drawn out process. However, no matter what obstacles come your way, always stop to make sure the decisions you are making are going to help the successfulness of the program and benefit to the community in the long run!

LESSONS LEARNED: A CONCLUSION

7. It Can Always Be Better

This is the beautiful and soul-crushing truth of community programming. There is always room to grow, to be better and to build on success. If you think you're doing everything perfectly, you're doing it wrong. There have been so many times we have been flying way too high and a board member, mentor or student has given us a much needed reality check. We are so deeply grateful for those moments, because they keep us as an organization honest, thoughtful, and ethical. Those ego-checks remind you that you're not a "savior", you're not a "hero", and half the time, you're doing it wrong. Listen to your community. You can always be doing better by them.

This doesn't mean that you need to constantly reprimand yourself! On the contrary, take pride in the moments when, against all odds, everything has gone right. Similarly, take the time necessary to lick your wounds when everything goes wrong. Then, after you've patted yourself on the back or you've laid at the bottom of the stairs, ask yourself this question:

What can we do better?

