LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

As we near the end of 2019, we reflect on a year full of growth, laughter, impact, and community. Some of our highlights from 2019 include: introducing our first-ever Learning Fellows, Mark Clements and Gregory Banks, to the CTJC staff team; launching an inside/outside book club, Breaking Down Walls, and reading the powerful Invisible No More book by Andrea Ritchie with incarcerated survivors; developing our very own protest anthem with survivors and families as part of the Freedom Songbook program, a collaboration with Old Town School of Music; embracing Justice for Families into our community; and welcoming six survivors home from 20+ years of incarceration.

We believe joy is an act of resistance, so we will celebrate our victories and each other—at Saturday’s annual holiday party (everyone is invited!), and each and every moment we can.

We also draw inspiration from the visionary Reparations Ordinance that directly led to CTJC’s birth, by knowing that we accomplish transformative change not just by fighting against, but by fighting for and by naming—loudly and proudly—our visions for ourselves and our communities and moving towards those with every step and action we take.

This last week, CTJC staff, Board of Directors and Survivor and Family Advisory Council came together for a two-day strategic planning retreat—an opportunity to dream the future(s) of the Center.

As our north star, we used the following question to guide our work together. Over the next 3 years, how can CTJC build a sustainable infrastructure that can:

1. Address the impact of police violence in its various forms for survivors of police torture and people impacted by state-sponsored violence;
2. Forward CTJC’s revolutionary model of Politicized Healing as a resource for what is possible toward individual and collective healing; and
3. Name, challenge and transform systems of harm and oppression with a goal of developing local, national, and global movements to eradicate all forms of police and state violence?

In 2020, and beyond, we commit to fighting alongside you all every day for a world free from ALL state violence where our full dignity and joy is visible, our wellness is valued and prioritized, abundance is the default, and transformative accountability is the practice.

Thank you for standing with the Chicago Torture Justice Center community.

With Love and Gratitude,
Cindy Eigler and Aislinn Pulley
Co-Executive Directors
As the year comes to a close, we are saying goodbye to two beloved members of our community, Helina Haile and Dr. Nate Gilham. Nate served as the Center’s Clinical Director for the past two years and brought so much love, commitment, and grace to his role. While we are currently on the search for a new Clinical Director, his shoes can never be filled. Helina came to the Center as part of her placement completing a Masters in Peace Studies at Notre Dame. She has spent six months at the Center, and her thoughtfulness, kindness, and sharp curiosity and analysis will be missed. Below are parting words from both Helina and Nate.

Dear CTJC Family,

Thank you for providing me the chance to share this transformative space with you all! The last six months have been deeply impactful on a personal and professional level. It has been an honor to bear witness to all the amazing work. I feel grateful that my path has crossed with you all. I will carry what I’ve learned from you all with me moving forward.

Until we meet again, may you all be well!

With Radical Love,
Helina

It has been a wonderful experience working with all those who make up CTJC. I am indebted for the experience of working here and will be forever grateful for the opportunity to give back to my community.

All of the lessons learned have been invaluable but three stand out to me. The first lesson is importance of “organizing”. When we organize and speak as one voice nothing is impossible. The second is to know and articulate your history accurately. Our oppressors are always attempting to provide an alternate narrative of our history in order to conceal our truth, therefore, we must understand how the systems of harm operate and its origins. The last lesson is to identify and celebrate your victories. This work exposes the wounds of police torture on survivors and their families, however, we should always find innovative ways to express the victories of survivors and their constituents— they’ve changed laws, rid our city of corrupt people in power, and they continue to elevate the resilience of Black and brown people. I will remain involved with CTJC and look forward to the future we create.

Love Always,
Nate