



COMMUNITY WORKS WEST

# Summer Training

*2026 Support and Program Stories*

## ProjectWHAT! – The Summer Cohort

Every summer, a new group of young people walks through the doors of ProjectWHAT! carrying a mix of hope, uncertainty, and courage.

*Most arrive quiet and guarded, unsure if their stories matter.*

For many, it feels a little like the first day at a new school or job. They wonder: Will I fit in? Will people understand me? Will I be accepted for who I am? Alongside the normal anxieties of being a teenager, these young people are also navigating the challenges of having a parent who is incarcerated, an experience that often brings isolation, shame, and silence.

*Over the course of the summer, something begins to change.*

Through twice-weekly sessions, ProjectWHAT! participants build skills in public speaking, group facilitation, leadership, curriculum development, civic engagement, and organizing. They learn about the history and impact of incarceration and explore the Children of Incarcerated Parents Bill of Rights. Most importantly, they begin telling their own stories, often for the very first time.

In a supportive community of peers with similar lived experiences, young people slowly begin to find their voice.

For Loriele, a 7th grader, the experience helped her realize the power of her own voice:

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*“I usually let my siblings or other family members speak for me because I get nervous or embarrassed talking in front of people. Being part of a group with others who have had similar experiences showed me that my voice matters too. It helped me realize that my voice is more powerful than I thought.”*

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By the end of the summer, participants present personal projects rooted in their lived experiences, an act of vulnerability, leadership, and courage that many once thought impossible.



Charmaine, 17, described what that transformation looked like for her:

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*“One of the skills I improved on is public speaking. Presenting something personal and vulnerable can be challenging, especially in front of peers. At first, sharing my story felt intimidating, but the workshops, icebreakers, and practice opportunities helped me build confidence. Through this experience, I learned how to express myself more effectively and became more confident in sharing my ideas and personal experiences with others.”*

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At ProjectWHAT!, young people are not defined by incarceration or stigma. They are seen as leaders, advocates, artists, mentors, and changemakers.

Your support helps create spaces where system-impacted youth can heal, build confidence, develop leadership skills, and discover that their stories, and their futures, matter.





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