

communityworks
JUSTICE DEMANDS HUMANITY

SUMMER NEWSLETTER

JULY 2026



The Future Is Restorative: Reflections from the 2026 NACRJ Conference



This July, youth and staff from Community Works (CW) joined nearly 1,700 practitioners, educators, advocates, researchers, policymakers, and system-impacted community members in New Orleans for the 2026 National Association of Community and Restorative Justice (NACRJ) Conference. Over the past two decades, NACRJ has grown into the premier gathering for advancing restorative justice and building safer, healthier communities.

This year's theme, "The Future Is Restorative," felt especially timely as communities navigate unprecedented social, political, and economic challenges. For three inspiring days, participants explored how restorative practices can expand into classrooms, prisons, communities, and systems serving survivors of harm. Sessions examined ways to strengthen restorative justice diversion, create transformative alternatives to incarceration, elevate art and creativity as pathways to healing, and support the well-being of those doing this challenging work.

One of the conference's most inspiring themes was the elevation of youth voices. Young people, including CW's own Project WHAT! (PW), shared their lived experiences and demonstrated how youth-led leadership and advocacy can drive meaningful policy and systems change.



What Does "The Future Is Restorative" Mean?

Kevin Martin, CW Restorative Practices Team: "Being restorative is an active, daily choice to humanize people by expanding the paradigms we use to define social problems. Rather than accepting outdated punitive systems, we can choose new frameworks, shifting responses to violence from punishment toward healing. By changing the system's logic, we change its outcomes."

Laura Rubio, CW Mental Health Clinician: "We need to start moving in ways we maybe haven't moved before because the old structures, paradigms, and methods aren't working. You can see them crumbling, even in our country's foundations."



CW on the National Stage

CW was honored to lead three breakout sessions, sharing our experience and learning alongside colleagues from across the country.

Creating and Maintaining Youth Space for System-Impacted Youth featured the PW team: Jakaela Foster, Lhaga Dingpontsawa, Laura Rubio, JC Foster, Jaycia Foster, and peer mentors Owens and Sekani, who shared strategies for building spaces where young people develop as leaders, advocates, and changemakers.

Tokoro: Communities Alive, presented by Deanne Morizono Myers and Kevin Martin, explored a restorative model for rebuilding equality, connection, and belonging within and between communities.

Designing Spaces for Restorative Justice and Healing, presented by CW's Adrienne Hogg and Lucia Castello of Designing Justice + Designing Spaces, invited participants into a hands-on learning lab exploring how intentional physical spaces can support healing, accountability, and community connection.



The conference reinforced what we experience every day at CW: restorative justice is more than a practice; it's a movement rooted in humanity, accountability, and hope. The future will not become restorative on its own. It will be built by people and communities willing to lead with courage, compassion, and a belief that healing is possible. CW is proud to be part of that work.

ADVOCACY IN ACTION: ADVANCING POLICIES THAT STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES

CW has been busy all year advocating in Sacramento for legislation that protects survivors, invests in young people and their potential, and brings our loved ones home from incarceration.

All of the following bills will be heard in their respective Appropriations Committees.

- AB 464 (Aguiar-Curry) expands legal protections and remedies for incarcerated survivors of sexual assault, including changes to the statute of limitations for civil claims and prison procedures for reporting and investigating sexual abuse.
- AB 1646 (Bryan) requires juvenile detention facilities to provide and protect visitation and allow hugs between youth, their family members, and other approved visitors.
- AB 1886 (Elhawary) extends the youth probation term limit of 12 months to foster youth and young people exiting Secure Youth Treatment Facilities (SYTF).
- AB 2318 (Elhawary) makes it unlawful for law enforcement to deny, delay, or obstruct medical treatment.
- AB 2247 (Elhawary) expands eligibility for California's victim compensation program to youth who have experienced gun violence (even without a police report) and tightens referral timelines for therapy.
- AB 2428 (Rodriguez) eliminates most criminal administrative fees in California, cancels most unpaid balances of those fees, and prohibits further collection to reduce the burden of court debt on low-income people.
- AB 2434 (Bonta) improves the elderly parole process for an increasingly aging group.
- SB 1342 (Durazo) expands automatic criminal record relief by making more dismissed arrests eligible for sealing and streamlining the process for eligible records.

We are also working on the local level to ensure our program participants are considered in budget and policy decisions. In San Francisco, we recently wrapped up the budget cycle by fighting alongside our allied organizations to protect and secure funding for at-risk community programs. We are working in coalition with other youth-serving organizations in Alameda County to protect young people from increasingly harsh sentencing practices of the District Attorney.

THE ART OF RESILIENCE: CREATIVE WORK BY SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE

On June 27, we welcomed more than 40 community members to our Restorative Hub for The Art of Resilience, an afternoon celebrating the creativity, courage, and healing journeys of survivors of violence.

For nearly 30 years, CW has recognized that healing happens not only through services, but also through creativity, storytelling, and human connection. Art provides survivors with a way to process trauma, reclaim their voice, and reconnect with themselves and their communities.

Guests viewed artwork created by participants in CW programs, took part in hands-on art-making activities, and experienced a moving panel discussion featuring CW artists Dee Morizono Myers and Taima Dugan. The program also included a beautiful poetry reading by Kat Sayally, CW's Advocacy and Organizing Manager.

One of the afternoon's most inspiring moments was a conversation led by Yolanda Macias, CW's longtime Survivor Empowerment Program Case Manager, with Alma, a former domestic violence survivor and program participant. She shared her journey from crisis to healing and eventually completing college, reflecting on how the Survivor Empowerment Program and creative expression helped restore her sense of agency, hope, and possibility.

At CW, we believe healing is not linear, and survivors are never defined by what happened to them. By creating spaces where art and storytelling are welcomed, we affirm the resilience, dignity, and limitless potential of every person on their path toward healing.



FOSTER YOUTH MUSEUM: ART THAT CHALLENGES. STORIES THAT INSPIRE.



This summer, we are honored to host the Foster Youth Museum at our Restorative Hub. For more than 20 years, this one-of-a-kind traveling exhibition, curated by current and former foster youth, has used art and storytelling to challenge assumptions, elevate lived experience, and inspire stronger support for transition-age youth.

The exhibition invites visitors to reflect on resilience, identity, belonging, and the power of art to deepen understanding and create social change. Whether you're passionate about youth, education, social justice, or simply appreciate meaningful art, the Foster Youth Museum offers an unforgettable experience.



In addition to self-guided and docent-led tours, the exhibition has featured several special community conversations. On July 22, CW hosted "An Intimate Conversation with San Francisco Youth and Civic Leaders," bringing together San Francisco Board of Supervisors President Rafael Mandelman, Supervisor Shamann Walton, Supervisor Jackie Fielder, and members of the San Francisco Youth Commission. Together with young people, they explored the barriers and opportunities facing transition-age youth, including preventing exploitation and trafficking through collaboration, lived experience, and community-driven solutions. The discussion also highlighted the critical need for safe, stable, and affordable housing for young people in San Francisco.

There's still time to experience the exhibit and join us for our remaining special events:

- **August 21** – Chosen Family Through Pets – Discover the important role companion animals play in the lives of transition-age youth and explore ways communities can better support both youth and their pets.
- **September 1** – Youth Voices Panel Hear directly from young leaders representing Project WHAT!, California Youth Connection, and Freedom Forward's HYPE Center as they share their experiences, insights, and vision for change.



Exhibition Dates: July 9 – September 9, 2026

Location: Community Works Restorative Hub, 986 Mission St. San Francisco

Make the Foster Youth Museum part of your summer. Bring a friend, family member, or colleague, and experience an exhibition that will stay with you long after you leave

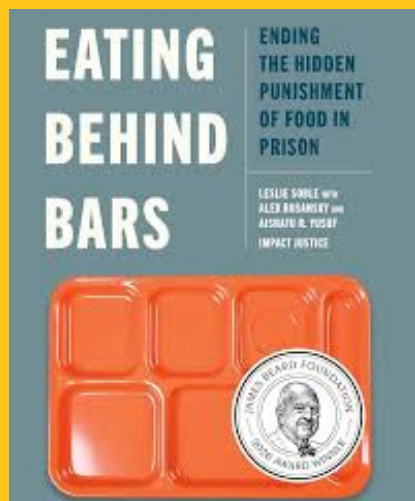
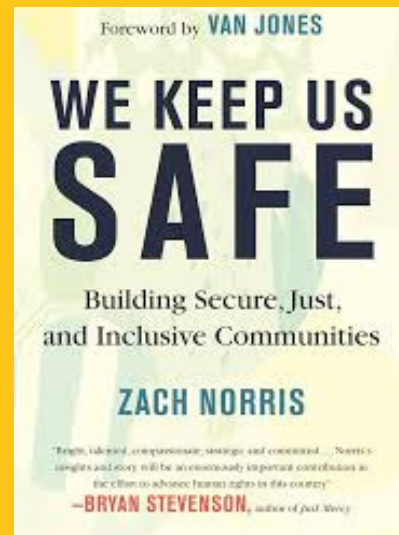
CW SUMMER READING LIST

BAY AREA AUTHORS

While there's never a bad time to pick up a good book, summer offers a chance to slow down, reflect, and explore new ideas. If you're interested in restorative justice, community safety, and reimagining our justice system, here are three thought-provoking books we recommend:

We Keep Us Safe: Building Secure, Just, and Inclusive Communities by Zach Norris

A compelling vision for creating safety through community investment, healing, and opportunity rather than punishment.

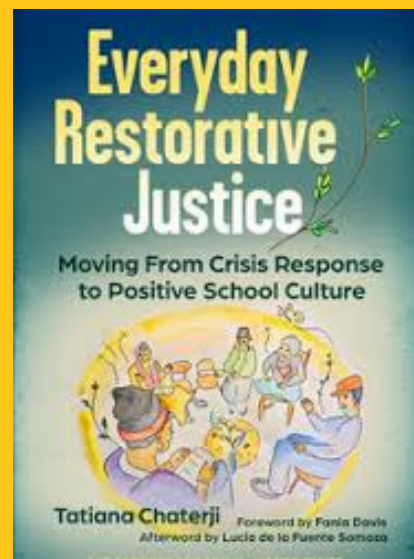


Eating Behind Bars: Ending the Hidden Punishment of Food in Prison by Michael W. Twitty and Gerrick Kennedy (2026 James Beard Award Winner)

An eye-opening look at how food, dignity, and humanity intersect within America's prison system.

Everyday Restorative Justice: Moving From Crisis Response to Positive School Culture by Tatiana Chaterji

A practical guide for educators and community leaders seeking to build stronger relationships and restorative school communities.



Participant View

Point: A Little Stability Goes a Long Way



Owens has been part of Community Works (CW) since he was 14 years old. Today, at 21, he is a college student, a peer mentor in ProjectWHAT!, and a participant in the Restorative Resiliency Fund (RRF), CW's guaranteed income program.

As a peer mentor, Owens helps guide younger participants in PW, our youth-led leadership development program for children of incarcerated parents. Between school, work, and mentoring, his schedule is full. That's why one aspect of the Restorative Resiliency Fund stands out to him.

When asked what he appreciates most about the program, Owens said, "I appreciate getting the funds with no strings attached. No hoops to jump through, no catch."

While he would have completed additional requirements if asked, Owens values the trust and dignity built into the program. The unconditional support allows him to focus on the things that matter most: school, work, family, and giving back to younger youth.

The additional income has also helped him develop important financial skills. Owens has become more intentional about budgeting, saving, and making thoughtful decisions about what his family needs versus what can wait.

One of the biggest changes has been transportation.

Before joining the program, Owens relied on public transportation to get to school, work, and other commitments. With support from the Restorative Resiliency Fund, he was

able to purchase a car nearly a year earlier than he otherwise could have.

The difference has been significant.

Instead of worrying about how he will get from place to place, Owens can focus on his goals. The guaranteed income has helped ease the financial pressure of car ownership and provided a greater sense of stability as he balances the many demands of young adulthood.

His story reflects what CW has seen throughout multiple guaranteed income initiatives: even a modest amount of flexible financial support can create opportunities for growth and stability.

Participants consistently report using funds for essentials such as housing, transportation, healthy food, savings, education, and long-term planning. The support helps people move beyond day-to-day survival and invest in their futures.

When asked what CW has meant to him over the years, Owens reflected:

"It's just a very good experience to be around a place where it's more than a job. Through grants like RRF, or college scholarships that other participants have received through ProjectWHAT!, Community Works helps you be better."

For seven years, CW has invested in Owens' growth. Today, he is investing in others.

We invite you to support programs like the Restorative Resiliency Fund and ProjectWHAT! that provide young people with the stability, opportunities, and support they need to thrive.

Your donation helps create pathways to leadership, education, economic stability, and a future filled with possibility.



Do you know a young person with leadership potential? Project WHAT! (PW) is now recruiting for our Fall 2026 cohort.

PW is Community Works' paid youth leadership and advocacy program for system-impacted youth ages 13–21 in Alameda County and San Francisco.

Participants:

- **Earn \$20–\$22 per hour**
- Build leadership, public speaking, writing, organizing, and advocacy skills
- Connect with peers and caring adult allies who understand their experiences
- Help shape local and state policies affecting system-impacted youth and families
- Receive meals, transportation support, and program supplies

Who is eligible?

- **Youth ages 13–21**
- System-impacted youth, including those who have experienced incarceration, probation, foster care, or similar systems
- Youth with a parent or guardian who is currently or formerly incarcerated and/or has experienced deportation
- Able to attend in-person sessions at our Oakland or San Francisco offices

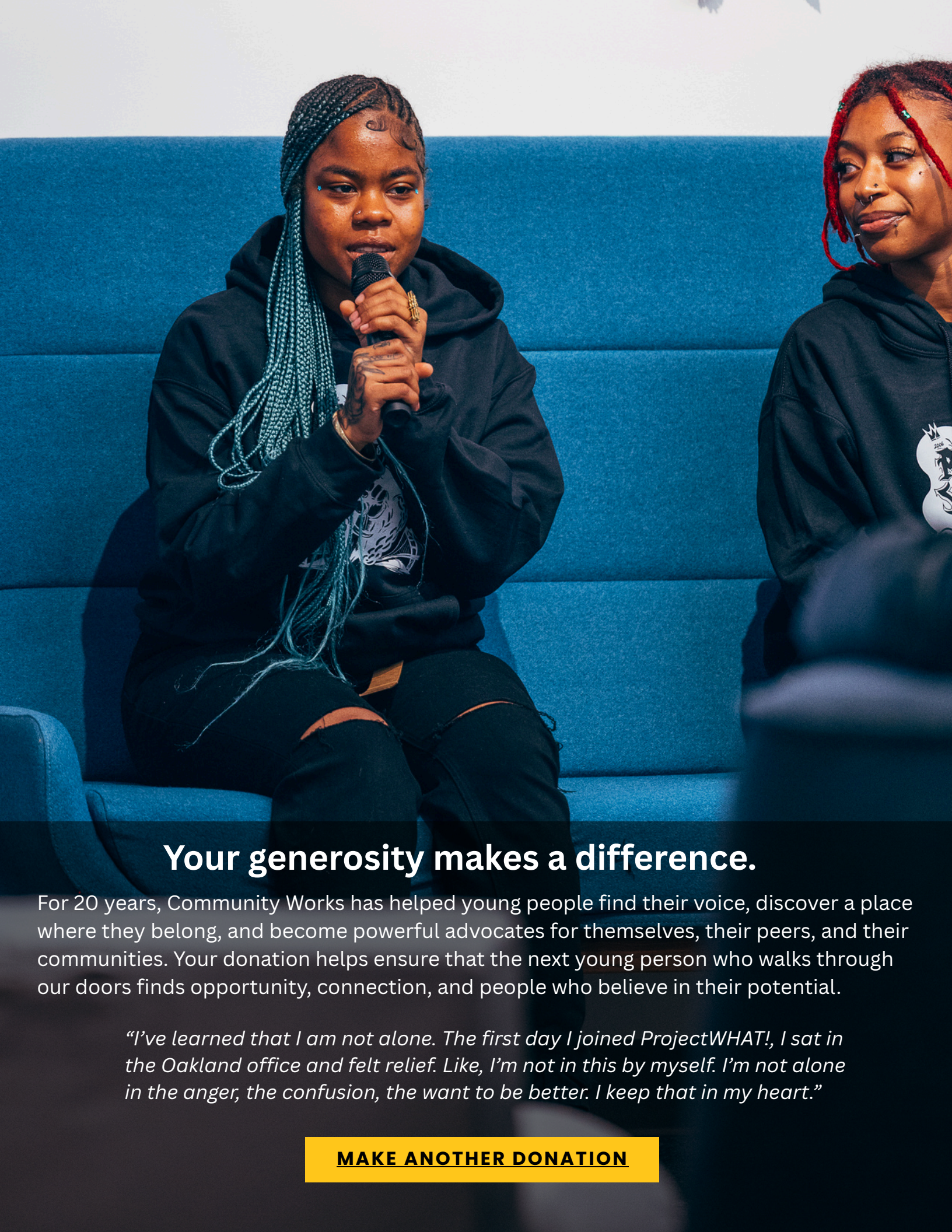
For more than 20 years, PW has created a safe, welcoming community where young people build confidence, find their voice, challenge stigma, and become leaders in their schools, communities, and beyond.

Know someone who would be a great fit? Please share this opportunity with families, educators, counselors, mentors, and community partners.

[Learn more: Youth Application](#) | [\[Watch Our YouTube Video\]](#)

Support the next generation of leaders. A gift of \$100 helps provide 10 healthy meals for PW participants during the program year.

**HELP A YOUNG PERSON DISCOVER THEIR VOICE THROUGH
PROJECTWHAT!**



Your generosity makes a difference.

For 20 years, Community Works has helped young people find their voice, discover a place where they belong, and become powerful advocates for themselves, their peers, and their communities. Your donation helps ensure that the next young person who walks through our doors finds opportunity, connection, and people who believe in their potential.

"I've learned that I am not alone. The first day I joined ProjectWHAT!, I sat in the Oakland office and felt relief. Like, I'm not in this by myself. I'm not alone in the anger, the confusion, the want to be better. I keep that in my heart."

MAKE ANOTHER DONATION