

For the Jewish community, the High Holidays are a time of reflection and reconnection - to our values, our relationships, the things we know to be most essential. For Jewish Community Action, the past year has found us in deep consideration of what we know is essential to our work for justice - an understanding of role that race and racism play in the issues we work on, and the belief that we must continue to intentionally make racial justice a central focus of all of our campaigns.

The new year finds us more committed than ever to making deep connections between our campaign work and our racial justice focus, and we're dedicated to being as transparent and informative as possible in sharing those connections with you:

CAMPAIGN: SENTENCING REFORM

Minnesota has some of the longest and harshest controlled substance sentences in the United States, we make it harder for individuals to get out on early release, we don't spend enough on violence prevention programs, and we put barriers in the way of ex-prisoners' reintegration into society.

All of this means that we are locking up more people for longer amounts of time--even as the number of crimes committed is at a 20-year low.

Incarceration and harsh post-incarceration restrictions not only negatively impact inmates, but their families and communities, as well, by depriving them of their loved one and making it harder for them to get by economically.

Studies show such impacts fall disproportionately on Minnesota's low-income population and amongst people of color.

In our work for sentencing reform, we are building a strong intentional partnership with an African American led service organization called MAD DADS, to create systemic changes together on issues related to incarceration.

CAMPAIGN: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In suburban Hennepin County the lack of affordable housing options has a heavy burden on many communities of color:

Subsidized housing is concentrated in the region's poorest and most segregated communities, increasing the concentration of poverty in the most racially diverse neighborhoods. This current system exacerbates racial gaps in income, employment, and student performance.

On any given night in Minnesota there are 4,000 youth experiencing homelessness, with growing numbers in the Hennepin County suburbs. In the Twin Cities Metro, more than 75% of homeless youth under 21 are people of color.

JCA is working to increase the number of landlords in the suburbs who accept tenants with housing subsidies and expand a community based housing program for youth experiencing homelessness.

Through this work, we will support low-income families in enhancing housing opportunities in neighborhoods of their choice, de-concentrating poverty, and ultimately creating integrated, healthier communities.

CAMPAIGN: RESPONSIBLE BANKING

There are clear, documented patterns of racial discrimination amongst the Twin Cities' largest 20 financial institutions. Our banking system, a cornerstone of our economic system, is not justly serving all members of our community.

JCA believes there should be more small businesses and homes owned by people well qualified to be owners, particularly people who are of low-to-moderate-income or people of color. That would lead to greater self-directed economic stability in neighborhoods, families, schools, and communities in general.

Home ownership and business development are important indicators of generational wealth and asset development. Because of inequity in mortgage and business lending, people of color and low income communities are disproportionately prevented from building wealth.

JCA believes that in light of the discriminatory practices exposed by recent data, community residents, city officials of both Minneapolis and St. Paul, and banks can work together to develop goals for improving access to lending, an essential step for building wealth in Minneapolis and St. Paul.