

To end domestic violence, work across generations

December 17, 2021 - 1:48pm

By: Hilary Smith (/about/staff/hilary-smith)

A Q&A with Time for Change Foundation on two-generation domestic violence prevention practices

As part of Blue Shield of California Foundation's team working to break the cycle of domestic violence (<https://blueshieldcafoundation.org/what-we-do/break-cycle-domestic-violence>), I have been involved in multiple projects, including a cohort of 12 organizations we have funded since 2020 to build evidence for community-level practices that support two-generation domestic violence prevention. The cohort was approved for one-year renewal grants in December 2021.



Recently, I had the opportunity to sit down with our partners at Time for Change Foundation (<https://www.timeforchange.org/>), which is part of the cohort. Led by Founder Kim Carter and Executive Director Vanessa Perez, Time for Change works to break the cycle of domestic violence through its Positive Family Futures and Reunification (PFFR) program for Black and Latina women and their children. This inspiring program helps reunite children from foster care with their mothers while addressing the root causes of family separation, incarceration, and addiction. It provides these families with a safe place to reconnect, heal from trauma, and build resilience to prevent domestic violence across generations.

Our conversation has been lightly edited for clarity.

Kim, how has your experience influenced the development of Time for Change Foundation?

Carter: My experiences gave me a front seat to witness the lack of support, social safety net, and the ecosystem that used to be practically nonexistent. I lived in extreme poverty, coupled with domestic violence in the home and being molested at a very young age — all conditions that basically packaged me up for incarceration and homelessness. That’s what makes Time for Change Foundation impactful and effective. I would say that my experiences with incarceration, homelessness, prostitution, domestic violence, and poverty uniquely shaped me to see where there are disparities of equal pay, where there is discrimination, where there is oppression.

I realized that our community has been exploited time and time again. I couldn’t get out of that vicious cycle until I was able to catch that one break, that one glimmer of hope, and I just took it. I grabbed the loving hand of God, and He allowed me to go from there. I was able to see where I came from and how my experiences could help people.

I’ve taken my experience and used it as a platform to help others. It gives women hope. They say, “Well, do you know what? Ms. Carter has been there, done that. If she can do it, I can do it too.” What better example for women to know that no matter how far down the scales you have gone, that there’s still hope. If you’re still alive and still breathing, you still have a chance. Let’s take that chance and grab hold.



Time for Change Foundation Founder Kim Carter (left) and Executive Director Vanessa Perez

Vanessa, how long have you been with Time for Change? What motivates you to work with Time for Change?

Perez: I’ve been with Time for Change for nine and a half years. I started as an intern in the communications department in February of 2012. I was born and raised in San Bernardino and went to school here, but I wasn’t awake to the realities of what homeless women and children were facing in the city.

Much of the staff have been directly impacted by the same things our clients face. I experienced domestic violence with my parents. They

were both on drugs and had been to jail. I can relate to what the children that come into our program face. What keeps me tied to the work is the fact that I'm empowering women like my mother. I now get to empower women to overcome violence and those cycles of abuse and help them heal. And the best thing about it is seeing that transformation, seeing the end result, because that shows the impact we're having on these lives.

Kim, how did you choose to focus on formerly incarcerated women of color, especially in the context of domestic violence prevention? Did you see a void in the space?

Carter: There's definitely a void in the space when it comes to lifting up formerly incarcerated women. Period. And because women of color are the predominant incarcerated population, it goes back to us. But what happens is that we're not monolithic. We're not just domestic violence survivors. We have survived domestic violence, the war on drugs, and homelessness. These are intersectional issues.

We had so many different things, and, so, every chance I get to enhance our core program, which focuses on the whole woman, I take it. I feed off the different sectors to bring together support for the women.

I know that when I get to the root and when I get to the core of what happened to a survivor, it always starts with violence in the home. And then the drugs and alcohol wrapped around the violence. And then the homelessness wrapped around the drugs, the alcohol, and the violence. And then the incarceration, then the child welfare system, wrapped itself around her. She is just so wrapped up with these different layers of trauma and adverse childhood experiences while encountering social services that were never designed to help us. So, Time for Change Foundation is constantly pulling these layers off to help get to her core so that she can heal, rebuild, reunify, and reach self-sufficiency.

Can you tell us what the Positive Family Futures and Reunification program is, and why Time for Change created this program?

Perez: Positive Family Futures and Reunification (PFFR) is focused on the reunification between mothers and children. These are women who have experienced cycles of violence, substance abuse, incarceration, and mental health issues. To reunify with their kids, mothers need stable housing. Housing is a core component because, without it, the courts will not give your children back. We provide a stable and safe place where children can reunite with their mothers. PFFR is designed to provide stable housing, where children can be children, and mothers can learn how to be the nurturing and supportive parent their children need.

The PFFR program was created because of Ms. Carter's story; she did not have access to a program where she could bring her daughter and they could heal together. Instead, Ms. Carter didn't get her daughter back until she was 13 years old, and missed the majority of her life. If we can prevent women from losing their kids by providing stable housing, supportive services, and therapy, then there is one less child put into the child welfare system, which retraumatizes families. Therapy is a big component of the healing process and the PFFR program. We want our families to have a positive and successful future. The healing circles, the parenting classes, the education, the trauma support services, getting them to work, the bonding between mother and child, all of that is putting them in a place where they can heal and thrive.

Carter: Can you imagine being a single mom who is trying to heal, yet you still have to put on that face and continue to show up for the world? Whether it's showing up in the court system and the child welfare department, you have to continue to show up. Where can a woman go and just heal? What about letting us just heal so that we can get that inner resolve together? We know life goes on. We have to move forward, but still recognize that some of us are moving forward, while we're still broken on the inside. Healing is a very important part. They need support to reestablish a relationship with their children.

We want them to have a healthy mother, one that shows up in the morning with their breakfast, one that gets them to school, combs their hair, washes their clothes, does reading time with them. Mommy and me bonding is so important. The bond created when she gave birth, that bond, that's a God-given bond, and it can't break. I know foster kids who leave at 18 years old and look for their birth mom because of that bond. The kids get everything they need, including tutors. They get licensed child care and Parent-Child Interactive Therapy (PCIT). PCIT helps the kids who have suffered deep emotional trauma after being separated. I see how damaging it is when these kids go through foster care. They wind up as adults going to prison. We're intervening on the cycle.

To date, we have reunited 311 children from foster care back with their moms. Once these women go through this journey with us, we become a lifelong family. At PFFR, we're helping them to heal, to rebuild, to be resilient, and to use their voice.

The Foundation funded Time for Change to implement the PFFR program evaluation to identify domestic violence prevention outcomes for the women you serve. What do the early evaluation findings tell you about the value and impact of your program?

Perez: We have a saying at Time for Change: children are the priority. This program has identified for us just how critical the children's therapy is to the whole family. By implementing children's play therapy, individual children's therapy, and group therapy, we're seeing how children are learning, growing, and communicating. With family therapy, we know that having a healthy mother is going to create a healthy family, but we've also learned when mothers see their children grow and heal from the trauma that they've experienced, it helps heal the mother as well.

We've had some women in our program who have never had their children taken away, but they've been in domestic violence situations or been addicted to drugs. There's this mental and emotional separation that happens between the mother and child. I had a mom recently who shared with us, "I've never been so close to my kids, being able to be here in the home, and do these activities, and just spend time with them, and cook them dinner, and wake up in the morning, provide for them, take them to school and all that stuff." We're providing the tools that they need to heal.

Carter: One thing we haven't talked about that is essential to the PFFR program: economic security. This is a part that keeps stress minimized and increases people's coping skills. Here, we talk about some of the habits that we have created generationally, and to how to go from being "have not" to crossing over and knowing what it feels like "to have." And when I see a woman, she says, "Ms. Carter, I have \$1,000 saved," that \$1,000 is like \$100 million because she has never had savings. This helps break the cycle of always operating from a deficit and if you're able to hold on to that \$1,000, then you can hold on to \$10,000, and so on.

So, some women have checking and savings accounts. This is important because domestic violence victims tend to go back to their abusers because of one thing: resources. Our goal is to get women in a position of economic empowerment. We're helping women so they don't need to go back to their abusers. And so, getting them to walk in their own brand of dignity and feel good about themselves, means a lot. This is one of the protective factors being assessed in the evaluation. What is most important is that they feel they can manage their own lives, handle a crisis, and manage their emotional well-being.

How has applying a two-generation approach to domestic violence prevention influenced the way you work with the women you serve?

Carter: We're a two-generation organization. A two-generation human service organization as identified by Aspen Institute and Kresge. Now, Blue Shield of California Foundation is further authenticating what we already know: with mothers, you can't treat her and not her kids. You have to serve both. I'm looking

forward to seeing the long-term evaluation of the children, especially when they have their own children, because that's going to show the healing process and the increased ability to problem solve without resorting to violence. Additionally, Time for Change Foundation is cognizant of the institutional violence that further harms our women as they navigate these legal systems while trying to remain safe.

What services and resources do you find most essential for healing when working with parents and children together?

Perez: Therapy. I can't emphasize that enough. Having these different events, like the leadership empowerment event and the healing circle event, the women share and can hear each other's stories and understand each other. They can build a sisterhood, have friends, and know that they are not alone. Other women experience the same issues. Sisterhood and camaraderie play an impact in healing. Substance abuse counseling and process groups play a significant role too. They can receive support from licensed counselors and heal. All of those are critical components when it comes to healing.

EXPLORE TOPICS :

[Break the Cycle of Domestic Violence \(/resources/tag/break-the-cycle-of-domestic-violence\)](/resources/tag/break-the-cycle-of-domestic-violence)

[Prevention \(/resources/tag/prevention\)](/resources/tag/prevention)

Get our newsletter

Sign up for our newsletter, *Intersections* (/email), for updates about the work we're supporting and how we're broadening the definition of health to explore how we might solve future challenges.

 [Subscribe \(/email\)](/email)

STAY CONNECTED

Sign up for our newsletter (/email) to get updates about the work we're supporting and how we're broadening the definition of health to explore how we might solve future challenges.

OUR MISSION

Blue Shield of California Foundation builds lasting and equitable solutions that make California the healthiest state and end domestic violence.

NAVIGATE

Home (/)

Blog (/blog)

About Us (/about)

Newsroom (/newsroom)

Grants (/grants)

Grantee Login (<https://bscf.fluxx.io>)

Resources (/resources)

Contact Us (/contact-us)

© 2009 - 2021. All Rights Reserved. Blue Shield of California Foundation is an independent licensee of the Blue Shield Association.