



Look at me 2024
Two Roads Senior Editor Evelyn
‘Qiyama’ Jackson
Exclusive interview with the
Core 5 Founders

To All Readers

Our monthly newsletter focuses on three phases: *rehabilitation, restoration, and re-entry*. These are the necessary phases of a successful incarceration and transition back into society.

Rehabilitation involves the struggle for change one confronts during incarceration.

Restoration reflects the refined version of one's self that we've become and when our restored self seeks service of self-worth to the world.

Finally, **Re-Entry** is the ultimate goal one accomplishes through class study, self-study or modification programs completed during one's incarceration.

We are TWO ROADS, and we want to be a viable resource for our readers. We serve you by sharing the honest chronicle of the stories and service of the incarcerated women and men of the Illinois Department of Corrections. Join our movement.

TWO ROADS Editorial Staff

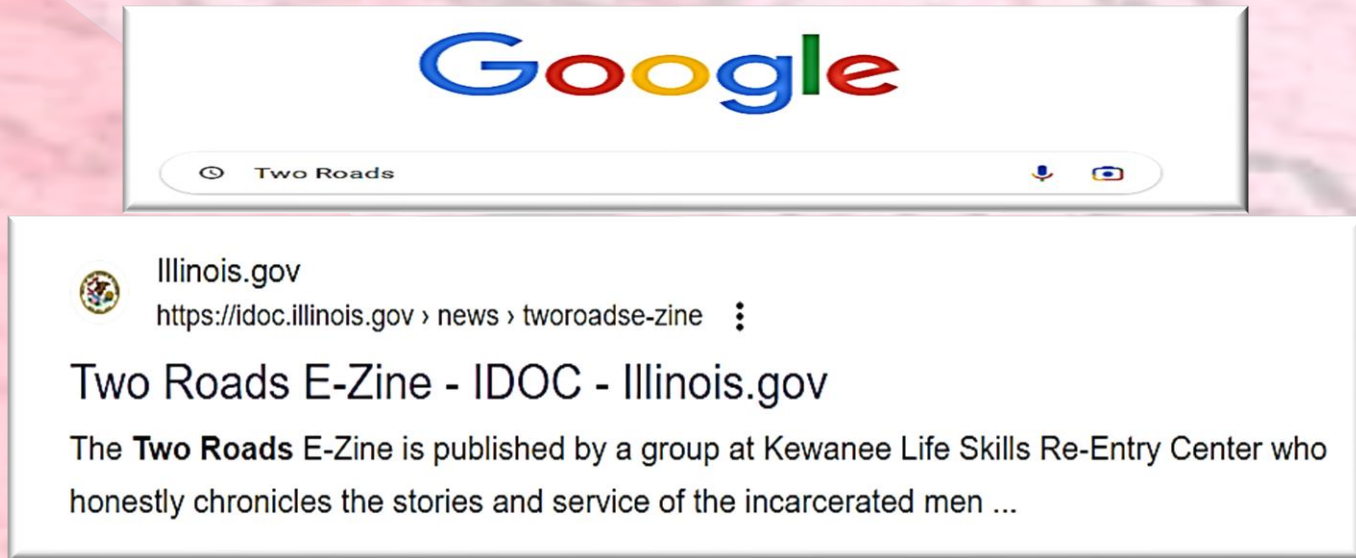
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This issue is dedicated to the hard-working sisters of the TWO ROADS staff. We here at KLSRC celebrate you all. Your input is deeply appreciated and needed as we move forward. We apologize if we have failed in any way in the past to include you. That was never our intention. We gladly accept any and all submissions and suggestions for future issues. We would like to send a special shout out to all those who share their stories of triumph, pain, and joy. We celebrate you all and share with you *all the ups and downs* we individuals in custody have in common.

Keep up the hard work. Someone will always benefit from it. Thank you all and may you all find peace.

If you or someone you know is suffering from a domestic violence situation and wants help:

Call the Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-7233

Or Text The word Begin to 88788

Things You May Not Know About Domestic Violence

- ❑ The U.S. has about 10 million domestic violence victims annually that is- 24 persons per minute
- ❑ 41% of women and 26% of men experience stalking or inappropriate physical contact in their lifetime
- ❑ To date-61 million women and 51 million men are affected psychologically by domestic violence
- ❑ 16 million women and 11 million men are first victimized by domestic violence before the age of 18
- ❑ The U.S. lifetime economic burden of domestic violence is 3.6 trillion dollars
- ❑ 20% of all homicides involve intimate partners
- ❑ 15% of all violent crimes are domestic violence
- ❑ The number of domestic violence victims increased from 8.7 million victims in 2015 to 10.1 million victims in 2025



"Count Me Out"

By Evelyn "Qiyamah" Jackson

As black and brown women and men, we are often made to suffer in silence.

Unable to express our feelings and emotions. Many of us regained our voices through our traumatic life experiences and support of others.

Often, as incarcerated women and men, society counts us out; as if we are just a number, as if we don't matter, as if we deserve to suffer through the abuse that has happened and is still happening to us daily, as if the crime of which we were convicted defines who we are as a person. Recently, I had the honor of being invited to participate in the annual domestic violence awareness production (Look at Me 2024). This platform has existed for several years with the assistance of the Women's Justice Institute. This was my first year attending, which led me to sit down with the Core 5 Founders of this much needed platform. Janine Elam, Erika Ray, Debraka Harris, Stephanie Bonds, and Latrell Miller. I'm honored to call all of them my sisters and brothers. Yet, I'm ashamed of not knowing where the root of these productions stemmed from, the roots that built the foundation of this platform.

Domestic violence comes in different forms. Domestic violence may show up through physical, verbal, sexual, financial, or emotional behaviors. All of which are learned behaviors. These behaviors can result in one becoming the abuser or the abused. As victims turned survivors your cries for help may fall on deaf ears and many turn a blind eye. Then you find yourself in an unfortunate situation and you are feeling “it was me or them.”

Every emotion been deprived. Even my Strong point couldn't survive.

If I didn't Learn to love myself, forgive myself 100 Times.

I love when you count me out. ”

From the song: Count Me Out (Kendrick Lamar)

I was unaware of where this quest for awareness originated. To my astonishment, years before the first filming, Janine was writing her screen plays to different organizations in order to help rouse awareness for domestic violence within the penal system. To give survivors a platform to express themselves freely through song, dance, poetry, and short skits. After years of going unanswered, finally, Janine received a response from MK Pritzker (Governor Pritzker's Wife); she had extended her hand to help provide an outlet for Janine to write and direct the filming of “Never No More” in 2019 .

Janine reached out to her fellow cofounders Erika, Debra, Stephanie, and Latrell (who are all survivors). They collectively created arts to depict true events. MK Pritzker sent her camera crew into Logan Correctional Center to film these unforgettable performances by the core 5 founders as well as other sisters and brothers here at Logan. These performances were viewed by other jails & prisons, even the public.

Just as Janine was in the clouds from that production, in 2020 Alexis Manfuld from the Women's Justice Institute contacted her to write, direct, and film another production that would be viewed online by the public which gave them a broader audience. Once again, the Core 5 did what they do best, "Look at Me" was brought to life. The feedback was so positive, here we are five years later. Look at Me 2024 was their largest production. After the public viewed the performances of the survivor's and supporters expressing themselves through song, dance, poetry, and acting out short skits; there was an unbelievable outpouring of love and support.

During this year's production of Look At Me 2024 the vibe was so positive. This helped others express themselves freely without judgment. The Core 5 founders open the doors to promote self-healing through years of speaking, acting, dancing, and most importantly; sharing a common ground with so many survivors. The group of women and men I spoke with are true examples of trend setters. They provide a platform to help raise awareness and end this vicious cycle of domestic violence.

This can all be done from the confinements of prison. I'm more than humbled to have the opportunity to experience the level of commitment they put into helping others heal. In turn they heal themselves. They feel they will not be silenced any longer.

The following is an interview between myself and the Core 5 founders.

Question:

Qiyamah - What inspired you to help raise awareness for domestic violence within the prison system?

Answer:

Debraka – I felt I needed a safe space to share my truth. I no longer felt alone. Although every person is different, their stories are similar.

Frika – I wanted to shine a light on why, as survivors, we respond so cautiously to the unknown. As black and brown women, we are treated as if we deserve to be abused from the stereotype that all black and brown women are ratchet, ghetto, or combative. Also, knowing the cycle of abuse can possibly carry on to the daughters of survivors, with this platform we help end this vicious cycle and save some lives. We need to raise awareness daily. Domestic violence is not just during the month of October, it's everyday.

Stephanie – It's liberating! We needed to create a platform for our huge population of survivors to speak their truth.

Fatzell – I wanted to help victims transfer into survivors through comradeship.

Janine – It also was liberating for me. People need to understand domestic violence comes from different sources other than intimate partners. It could be a family member or friend. It could be physical, sexual, emotional, or mental. **Raising Awareness** also helps wake up the abuser to their wrong doings.

Question:

Qiyamah **What was your most exciting or frustrating moment during Look at Me 2024?**

Answer:

Debraka – I was taken aback by all of the talent people have that goes unnoticed.



Erika – I was excited by the size of this year's production. My frustration was people not being serious. I could've been more stern and cut people from the performances as one of the directors. Not having enough time for practice, I should've conducted this as more of professional setting and not tried to please everyone.

Fatrell – I was excited to see more of the guys (trans men) participating. They've overcome the stigma of being weak if you share your experience of being a victim of rape or molestation. I understand how hard it is to tell your story to the masses.

Janine - I share the same frustrations and excitement as Erika – especially not having enough time for practice. The lack of seriousness. I love the number of participants this year. These acts are real life events. These productions we put together are very near to my heart. Listening to them, I put myself in their shoes and feel their pain; which helps me to understand them as a person. We put on a great production.

Stephanie – I was excited by all of the 1st time participants, as well as the unity they portrayed with authority figures that were unseen.

Question:

Qiyamah - As survivors, directors, and co-directors, what are your future goals upon release with these experiences?

Answer:

Debraka – My future goals are to help other domestic violence survivors and their children. I need to be present for them because I can relate to their experiences.

Stephanie – I would actually like to open domestic violence shelters. To continue to open up platforms for women who want to share their stories and create safety for those who live in fear.

Latrell – To work with youth. Sexual abuse and physical abuse are things that I experienced when I was young. I want to share the stories and lives of other survivors with the youth to let them know they are not alone and that it is okay to speak up.

Janine – Wow, great question. As a survivor it is my duty to continue offering a platform for victims and survivors to gain healing through speaking or expressing their truths through the arts. I plan on collaborating with outside organizations who fight for the rights of victims and survivors of domestic violence.

Frika – My future goals after release will start with building and rebuilding relationships with my family and friends. As I build with my family, I want to build community through my organization, "Hear Her". I hope to provide civics classes, classes that teach people about their rights when dealing with the criminal system and working with community to build economic power through investing.

Question:

Qiyamah - **What was your favorite scene in Look at Me 2024?**

Answer:

Debraka – The Mister and Celie scene. It showed a woman regaining back her power, dignity, and integrity.

Stephanie – I acted out Nettie and Mista inside of our production. Giving a nod to Alice Walker's "The Color Purple". To tell Mista no in that scene and the world understood it, brought me happiness. Shout out to "Mista" Rayonna Jones-Snow.

Latrell – My favorite scene was the 2Pac scene. Thank Pac for giving women/survivors their flowers. As we all sang along with 2Pac we looked at each other and felt celebrated.

Janine – I have a few favorite scenes, it's hard to narrow it down. I loved to watch Nettie/Celie take her power back from Mista. I loved all of the dances of course. The trans piece was phenomenal as well. It has gotta be the 2Pac piece. They brought Pac to life, showing he was more than a thug that many assumed he was. He was a poet as well as a protector. Erika Ray and Mishunda Davis displayed that through their original pieces as well.

Erika – My favorite scene in this year's program was the interaction between (Nettie) Stephanie Bonds and (Mista) Rayonna Jones-Snow. I believe Nettie was able to give her power to other women who could relate to her.



Do You Know The 15

Warning Signs Of Domestic Abuse?

- 1) Tells you that you can never do anything right
- 2) Shows extreme jealousy of your friends & time spent away
- 3) Keeps you or discourages you from seeing friends or family members
- 4) Insults, demeans, or shames you with put-downs
- 5) Controls every penny spent in the household
- 6) Takes your money or refuses to give you money for necessary expenses
- 7) Looks at you or acts in ways that scare you
- 8) Controls who you see, where you go, or what you do
- 9) Prevents you from making your own decisions
- 10) Tells you that you are a bad parent or threatens to harm or take away your children
- 11) Prevents you from working or attending school
- 12) Destroys your property or threatens to hurt or kill your pets
- 13) Intimidates you with guns, knives, or other weapons
- 14) Pressures you to have sex when you don't want to
- 15) Pressures you to use drugs or alcohol

Question:

Qiyamah - What's the one thing you'd express to staff, Women's Justice Institute, and the public to help keep these productions a successful platform?

Answer:

Debraka – That women in domestic violence situations need community. We need to hear other women's experiences and methods of coping, so we don't continue to feel the isolation that we felt when we were going through domestic violence. We need to be surrounded by love, no judgment, and other women who can relate to each other. Our community during the productions are surrounded by love, laughter, compassion, empathy, and much needed understanding.

Stephanie – It's nice when we can all work together. Domestic violence is not an easy subject to discuss. We need to express a little more sensitivity when women and men are sharing pieces of their lives that make them hold guilt and shame.



Janine – The one thing I would express to staff, Women Justice

Institute, and the public to help keep these productions alive is that the Look at Me series is not a performance for people's entertainment. Look at Me allows the much-needed healing that this institution fails to offer. There is unity in telling their stories, growth, and release. It's a building of self-esteem and power – power that has been stripped away by things they have endured in life. Look at Me allows personal safety, but most of all it exhibits love. This is why we need these programs. It is self – rehabilitation at its finest.

Frika – We must remember why we do this program every year. If we stay true to the foundation of the origins of the program, we will always find success.



Qiyamah - In closing I was asked how I felt after participating

for the first time. This experience gave me a different outlook. I've never been a victim of abuse. I witnessed it throughout my childhood. I vowed to never be that woman on the other end of a fist. I, in turn, became the abuser. I had the mindset of "I'm gonna get you before you get me". After hearing the stories of these survivors I'm committed to change and advocate for all victims. Although I don't share the same experiences; I see how I mistreated, hurt, and broke down others through the eyes and hearts of the survivors that I've come in contact with. Nobody deserves to suffer in silence at the hands of another who projects their personal insecurities on those they claim to love. Survivors are not the only ones that suffers. Your children, grandchildren, family, and friends suffer as well, so in the end who really wins?

If you or someone you know are suffering from a domestic violent situation and want help call the
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Or Text The word Begin to
88788

*"I got things, deep regrets, some things I can't forget.
Lord knows I tried my best, you said it's not my best.
I came up out my flesh, some thing I must confess,
spoke my truth paid my debts. Can't you see I'm a
wreck. Let me loose, I digress, This is me and I'm
blessed. This is me and I'm blessed. This is me and I'm
blessed. Anybody fighting through the stress."
(Song: Count Me Out, By Kendrick Lamar)*

The staff here at TWO ROADS would like to thank the women at Logan C.C. for sharing with us this interview and allowing us to witness what you have going on. We do appreciate your participation in the TWO ROADS platform, sharing your joys, pains, and allowing your voices to be heard . Once again we encourage you all to share with us any and all suggestions on topics you would like to address in the future. Keep writing! May you all remain humble and peaceful.

Volunteer Banquet - by: Sarah Mecum

I am so grateful to have been able to be a part of the Logan C.C volunteer Banquet. I was asked a month in advance if I would like to paint a small picture to be framed and given away to a volunteer who participates in our extracurricular activities. I happily said yes. It was a day of appreciation to those that come in for no other reason than to give back to our community of individuals in custody and show us love while being behind bars, away from family and our loved ones. At this event I heard several testimonies of grace found through the men and women who come in to teach us and also from the ladies who do the paperwork making it all possible. I was moved to tears by one in particular who found strength and salvation because of the Volunteer of the Year.

So many women came together to make the amazing hand-crafted gifts and decorations to be sent home with those that came to be honored. There were paintings framed with hand crafted boxes, papier-mâché, flowers, birds, angels, motorcycles, beautiful flowerpots, and arrangements thanks to the Horticulture Department. The Choir sang a few selections, the praise dancers performed, and we feasted. It was a very heartwarming event, and I hope to participate again next year but will be happy if all I can do is send my art to such a great cause.

My art stated: "You reap what you sow, thank you for planting the seed: and you are the key to the door of success"

Sarah Mecum

Domestic violence is not isolated to intimate relationships. Domestic violence can also show through family relationships, brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, roommates, and other close relationships. In its simplest definition it is the inflicting of injury by one family or household member on another.

As we read above, it is not isolated to physical violence. A perpetrator of domestic violence will expose themselves through emotional, financial, sexual, verbal, and physical violence. As we have seen, domestic violence has psychological, financial, physical, and numerous other effects on the direct victim, children, other family members, and our economic situation. The victims suffer the most, yet the perpetrator also needs help, or they may continue to harm others. Someone who causes harm to others can get help too. At all times, all parties need seek help outside of themselves and their harmful relationship.

A photograph of a woman with dark hair, looking down with a somber expression. She has a visible red, bruised area on her right cheek. She is wearing a dark top. The background is a textured, light-colored wall.

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...wants you to submit articles, or short poems, to our E-Zine on the following subjects:

- ◆ Safe Places (The space you find Peace)
- ◆ Life after Prison (Your experience with ATC or MSR)
- ◆ Wrong Side of the Argument (A time when you were on the wrong side of the argument)
- ◆ Physical Health/Fitness
- ◆ A topic that is important to you
- ◆ Addiction (Your experience or how you deal with it)
- ◆ Provide us with your picture if you want it featured as well

We believe that by sharing our stories we can empower and inspire our fellow men and women in prison to become dynamic leaders and agents of change in our journey of Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Re-Entry.

**Remember, your family and friends can see
TWO ROADS online!**

Outsiders, Staff, and individuals-in-custody

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