

Annual Programmatic Summary

*of what's been happening across the country
and at our Bronx Neighborhood Center*

In 2025, more than 3,000 community members engaged in Justice for Families' programs, services, trainings, technical assistance, and community-led activities. Many participants were returning "regulars," reflecting the trust, consistency, and relationships built through our work. Countless more were reached indirectly through family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers who carried this work back into their homes and communities.

Throughout the year (and always), our work centered on wellness, healing, and connection—to cultural roots, to community, and to collective power. We focused on strengthening community capacity; helping individuals and families feel grounded, supported, and affirmed; and identifying and building on individual, family, and community strengths. Our approach remained trauma-responsive and relationship-driven, ensuring that people felt seen, supported, and prepared to advocate for change.

In partnership with youth and adult community members and allies of all ages, J4F continued to work throughout the year to challenge and dismantle systems that harm families, including the school-to-prison pipeline and over-reliance on child welfare and carceral systems. We also supported others' efforts to improve access to quality education, stable housing, meaningful employment, and comprehensive health and mental health care—laying the groundwork for long-term community healing and self-determination.



Transforming Systems

Authentically Engaging Youth & Families

Building Community Capacity

Promoting Intergenerational Healing & Wellness

Celebrating Cultural Roots





FAMILY RESOURCES

In April, members of our national family leadership network facilitated a webinar in recognition of *Child Abuse Awareness Month* and launched a new resource for families designed to increase awareness of sexual abuse in facilities and rights outlined by the Prison Rape Elimination Act.



POLICY ADVOCACY



Every Child Has the Right to be Free from Sexual Harm
EVEN IF THEY ARE BEING HELD IN CUSTODY/ SECURE FACILITIES

What are we talking about?
All people held in secure facilities (detention, residential placement, lock-ups, jails, prisons, etc.) have the legal right to be free from sexual harm including, but not limited to, sexual exploitation, coercion, sexually harassing words, phrases, gestures, touching, rape and all other sexual acts whether performed willingly* or not.

It Can Happen to Anyone..
Unfortunately, sexual harm happens at both male and female facilities, by other youth residents and staff. Often times, predatory grooming tactics are used to manipulate others into thinking that they're "friends" or in a "relationship". People do not always realize the impact of what's happening to them.

It is wrong.. It is an abuse of power.
There is zero tolerance for sexual activity of any kind: "No" means no; and "Yes" is not allowed.

Reporting sexual harm is the right thing to do!
Holding people accountable for causing sexual harm to others is NOT snitching! The abuse needs to stop; awareness of the real problem is the first step. No one should ever feel badly for making a report of sexual harm.

You can make a report for your facility or community law facility:
PREA Coordinators
or the PREA Compliance Manager
You can also reach out to directly to who you need to be notified: Child Welfare
Your child's Lawyer
Counselor or Community Advocate

*There is an imbalance of power whenever someone is held in custody that does not allow for the possibility of legal consent.

Sexual harassment and abuse, in any form, can have long-term, traumatic impact.

If you even think something isn't quite right, and there might be any possibility that your child (or someone else's) may be at risk of sexual harm... **REPORT IT!**

Saying something could make a BIG difference.

Federal law requires facilities to investigate all allegations.

J4F families, staff and volunteers continued to center policy advocacy as a critical tool for lasting change, ensuring that families most impacted by harmful systems had a voice in shaping the laws that affect their lives. J4F supported key NYS efforts including *Solutions Not Suspensions*, the *Child and Family Well-Being Act*, *Communities Not Cages*, the *CARE Act* amongst others. Parents and caregivers traveled together to Albany—riding vans and buses, meeting face-to-face with legislators, and sharing personal stories that made clear why current systems fail families and why laws must be different. This work affirmed that real policy change is strongest when it is led by those with lived experience.



BRIDGES TO THE LAND



In 2025 this initiative expanded its land-based healing and cultural reconnection work through ongoing partnerships with community gardens in the Bronx and increased intergenerational programming. Community members engaged in hands-on growing rooted in ancestral practices, including planting the “Three Sisters”—corn, beans, and squash—from seed, nurturing the soil, and harvesting fresh vegetables to prepare and share meals directly from the ground to their own dinner plates.



The initiative also deepened regional connections through collaboration with Black Farmers Fund, supporting community workdays alongside farmers of color upstate, as well as healing retreats and overnight camping on raw land that created space for rest, reflection, and reconnection to the land.

Complementing this work, the *Bridges and Banderas* project invited participants to create natural dyes from locally grown flowers, plants, and vegetables and design personal flags representing themselves, their families, and the West Farms neighborhood—honoring land, culture, and creative expression as tools for healing and community identity.





FAMILY-BASED ACTIVITIES



Throughout 2025, Justice for Families hosted intergenerational dinners, family field trips, cooking classes, arts and crafts activities, *Know Your Rights* and financial literacy workshops, voter registration drives, block parties, and gender-focused groups that centered on connection, joy, and cultural tradition—demonstrating what is possible with limited resources and deep community care. These gatherings created space to celebrate relationships and mark meaningful moments, including a Mother’s Day luncheon, Community Thanksgiving Dinner, Epiphany Day, Juneteenth, Kwanzaa, end-of-school-year and graduation celebrations, birthdays, and other milestones. Each event reinforced belonging, honored culture, and strengthened bonds across generations, reflecting J4F’s belief that consistent, community-rooted moments of care can have lasting impact.

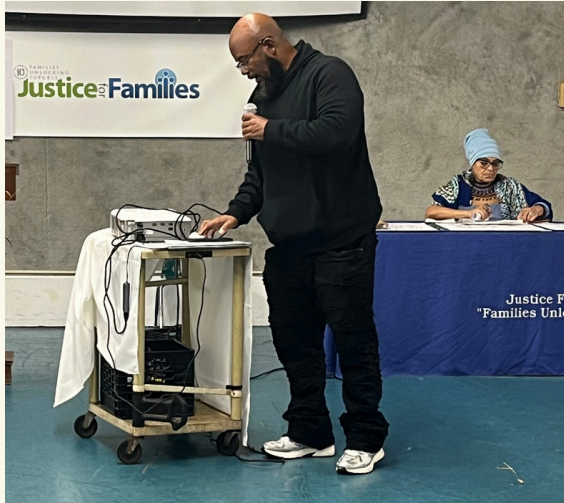




FAMILY LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE



In October 2025, Justice for Families convened our annual *Family Leadership Institute* in Detroit, Michigan, bringing together 25 family justice leaders from across the country. The Institute provided hands-on training in restorative circle keeping, advocacy and systems navigation, understanding the impacts of trauma, and authentic family and community engagement. Grounded in shared learning and relationship-building, the 2025 FLI also honored the life and legacy of Deshawn Leeth—a Detroit native and member of the J4F National Family Leadership Network—whose memory was held with care and reverence following his tragic passing in the spring.



SUPPORTING LOCAL WORK ACROSS THE COUNTRY



J4F supported the work of members of our Family Leadership Network in several states, including Iowa, Missouri, Michigan, New Mexico, and Puerto Rico through technical assistance, resources and/or support. We also hosted dear friends and colleagues from Texas, Georgia, Oklahoma, Maryland, and Washington, DC so they could learn about J4F’s philosophy, approach, and impact first hand.



Family leaders from California, Indiana and North Carolina (along with others from the states listed above) also joined J4f’s Virtual Healthy Cooking Classes, led by professional chefs from the Sylvia Center .



* STEPPING UP FOR COMMUNITY

In the Springtime, J4F hosted an in-person *Child and Family Well-Being Listening Session*, where community members could openly talk about issues of concern, ideas, and recommendations for change. We also celebrated the contributions of neighborhood women and the many hats they wear in families and communities at a community luncheon.

And when community members faced moments of crisis and uncertainty, our staff and volunteers rose to the occasion. Local families were displaced by a building fire, and J4F provided a welcoming space for shared family dinners and game nights, along with essential resources such as food, personal hygiene items, and cleaning and laundry supplies. In mid-October, when federal SNAP benefits were cut and federal workers experienced delayed paychecks, J4F responded by preparing and distributing home-cooked meals to address growing food insecurity throughout November and December. These community care efforts continue into 2026, reflecting Justice for Families' ongoing commitment to showing up when families need support most.

Additionally, Justice for Families and community members came to a powerful realization that an African ancestral burial ground exists within our neighborhood. In response, J4F engaged young people and families in public education and advocacy efforts to ensure the space is honored, protected, and treated with the dignity it deserves. This work culminated in a community ceremony and celebration in November, honoring African and Indigenous ancestors through collective remembrance, led by Dr. Drum and the young people he worked with, whose drumming grounded the gathering in culture, reverence, and intergenerational healing.

