

Confronting Racial Injustice Conference — Workshop Summary

Date: 1/24/2020

Workshop Title: Juvenile Justice Reform and Your Part in the System

Presenters: Aaliyah Ford and Marissa Long

Short descriptions about presenters:

- Aaliyah Ford is a current BSW and Legal Studies student at UW-Madison planning to graduate in May 2020. She has a passion to help reform the juvenile justice system and has spent her academic career interning at a detention center, shelter home, and eviction prevention organization. She is currently working on furthering her knowledge around the subject of mass incarceration, specifically with how it pertains to the youth of America. Her goal in life is to enhance herself as a scholar around the institutions that make the criminal system inequitable so that she can truly make an impact around reforming policies across the nation.
- Marissa Long is a current Legal Studies and Psychology student at UW-Madison planning to graduate in May 2020. Marissa has enhanced her knowledge through courses here at UW-Madison, as well as through various opportunities such as interning with the Wisconsin Department of Corrections – Probation and Parole unit, and actively assisting in research to compare past and present racial inequalities in death row cases. She is currently most intrigued by looking at how plea bargains impact both communities of color and those who have lower incomes. Her goal that she strives for in life is to contribute in reforming the criminal justice system in America through policy changes.

Summary or take-home messages of the workshop:

Throughout the 20th century the U.S. has seen a rise in institutional confinement for youth. Black youth are disproportionately involved with the criminal justice system throughout the US, including Dane County. While there has been a recent shift in the public's perception of youth incarceration, changes to the system remain slow. Youth face a number of challenges in their post-incarceration period including mental health issues, high dropout rates, substance abuse, and high rates of recidivism. The social work community needs to engage more deeply with these issues in order to affect change. Social workers should consider personal activities and interests and ways in which they can apply them towards positive change in the field of juvenile justice.

Strategies for action:

- Reflect on personal interests and advocacy needs and how they can be integrated towards positive change in juvenile justice (e.g., art therapy, animal therapy, cooking with youth).
- Contact politicians, agencies, and orgs that work with juveniles to advocate for change.
- Donate items needed by youth in the system (e.g., books, journals, hair care, food, luggage, school supplies).
- Do research on how different identities are affected by the criminal justice system.