

SUCCESS STORY: The Hive: Creating Healing and Restorative Practices



Restorative Justice

This is the first story in a new series of success stories focused on restorative justice work. The work featured in these stories seeks to acknowledge the impact of harmful practices and creates opportunities to heal that harm between those who enacted it and those impacted by it to transform the community.

The Condition of the Community

The pandemic revealed — on many levels — how broken our government systems are and have remained across the country. From the murder of George Floyd to the uprisings and [uptick in crime and violence](#). Through the lens of my work as a credible messenger, youth development specialist, youth advocate and cultural organizer, I observed that the country lacked a plan to protect the young people that I serve (ages 15 to 21) who are navigating the juvenile justice system. This demographic of youth, who were already underserved and under-resourced was significantly neglected even more so during the pandemic. As an adult with firsthand, lived experience navigating the juvenile justice system in Richmond, Virginia, I understood that it was critical that I find a way to provide support for these young people when others would not. Quarantine reminded me of my creativity as a poet, emcee and storyteller, and the new normal had me digging deeper into the healing work of my inner child to prepare me for the work that I was about to embark on.

During my time as the engagement director at Performing Statistics, an epiphany occurred when my fellow co-director, Trey Hartt, realized that we already had the data and powerful stories from young people who knew what they needed. These young experts had radically envisioned the world they needed to stay free from incarceration and were bold enough to create a new one through artistic expression. We knew that the juvenile justice system would be slow to change based on the deep history of racism in Virginia, our advocacy efforts and my own personal experiences.

According to [2019 research](#), Black youth make up **21%** of teenagers ages 15 to 17 living in Virginia, yet, they account for:

- **57%** of the young people who were suspended from school
- **49%** of the young people reported to juvenile courts by the schools
- **42%** of the young people reported for juvenile intake
- **54%** of the young people detained in local youth jails
- **72%** of the young people held in the custody of the Department of Juvenile Justice

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Through the various exhibitions, public art, parades, workshops and training we organized with [Performing Statistics](#), we helped our partners, [RISE for Youth](#), close one of Virginia's remaining youth prisons, change policies around school suspension and create amazing artistic programs to help youth advocate for themselves. Anything you can create from your brain is art, right? Something that is carefully curated from love, care and compassion is surely a masterpiece. I am extremely grateful to have had the honor of being able to engage and connect with hundreds of incarcerated youths and those navigating the juvenile justice system. During this time, I was also doing my own healing work while trying to be a part of nurturing a village of young people who shared some of my experiences.

Wanting to do more prompted me to ask: "What happens after the art?" I've been asked by policymakers and those working in law enforcement, juvenile justice systems and government agencies, "What is the alternative to youth incarceration?" This lit a fire under me like no other. It was time to turn the art and data into an action plan. Trey and I decided to build that alternative ourselves.

The Hive Mentality

[The Hive](#)'s mission is to be a youth-centered community that holistically supports young people as they transition into adulthood. The Hive's holistic, healing-centered model challenges conventional pathways through the juvenile justice and child welfare systems by engaging in what we call 'legacy work.' This work helps emerging adults build skills and healing practices that enable them to be drivers of generational transformation. Through [Performing Statistics](#), we consulted with young people locally and nationally to get their feedback on this work and have received their support for The Hive's mission. The Hive plans to create what an alternative to youth incarceration could look like if we centered the young person, customized their experiences to address their complex needs and helped them begin their healing journey.

We hold each other accountable, and we call it The Hive Mentality. The Hive Mentality is a way of thinking that practices Ubuntu and Sawubona. Ubuntu is a Nguni Bantu term meaning "humanity." It is sometimes translated as "I am because we are" or "humanity towards others." It is often meant in a more philosophical sense to mean "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity." Sawubona is a Zulu greeting that means, "I see you." A [video](#) by Orland Bishop, the founder and director of Shade Tree Multicultural Foundation in Los Angeles, explains more in depth of what Sawubona means. The importance of being African-centered as a way to combat the Euro-centric model that has failed this demographic of young people is a huge part of our accountability measures. All staff interact with each other, our partners and every young person we encounter in this manner. You cannot begin to support a young person until you fully see each other. This

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interconnectedness helps build trust and rapport with young people. To truly be a youth-centered community, you must meet a young person where they are. This is the true definition of being youth-centered.

The Stats: Young People Can't Wait on Systems to Change

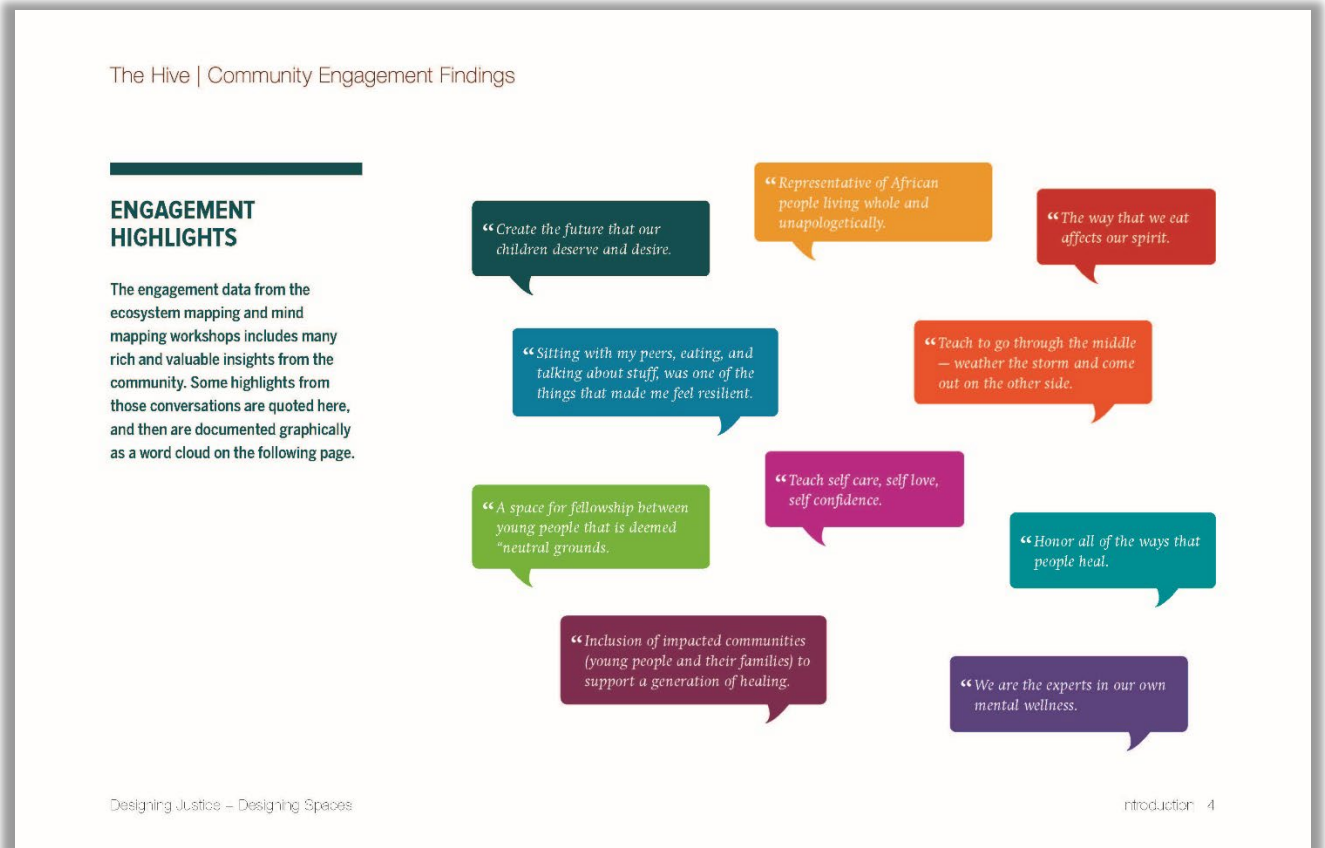
Today, Virginia schools refer students to law enforcement at a rate (14 per 1,000 students) [more than three times the national rate](#) (4.5 per 1,000 students). It costs roughly [\\$148,000](#) per year to incarcerate one youth versus \$12,146 to educate a young person in Virginia. Community-based alternatives are necessary to help move away from the idea that youth prisons should exist.

Even though The Hive only recently launched in October 2021, our data show that although 73% of young people referred to our program are referred by the justice system, we have a 0% recidivism rate for young people in our program for up to three months. (Note: We are working on tracking recidivism data for up to 12 months, at the least.) The average length of time a youth spends in our program ranges from one to eight months, and a participant can stay in the program for up to three years if necessary. Our future campus-like space will locate all the supports that young people will need in one place to thrive with an intersectional approach. To assist young people in successfully transitioning into adulthood without incarceration or community violence, we focus on six core areas that young people told us they needed: housing, education, employment, entrepreneurship, restorative practice, and arts and culture.

Intentional Community Engagement Is Essential

This year, [Designing Justice Designing Spaces](#), an architectural firm based in Oakland, California, created The Hive's first community engagement report. We learned that space design is more than just concept development, site acquisition and construction. Being intentional about environmental and architectural designs should support the program if the program truly intends to heal and restore the people in their own communities. There are many organizations that do their best to protect the integrity and confidentiality of the people they serve, and community engagement can sometimes be a challenge for those reasons. It can be so complex that the organization must make the best decision for the safety and well-being of their participants. Our community engagement event was led by young people, and the audience consisted of select community members and trusted adults.

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Snapshot of Engagement Findings from the report DJDS created for The Hive

Healing and Restorative Practices

I believe that restorative and healing practices should be embedded in the fabric of any human centered organization, and that healing is a lifelong journey. It should be weaved not only into our daily lives but into our work with others as well. The earlier you start practicing healing, the healthier you can be. We are attempting to restore hope to young people that have been shown time and time again that they do not matter. The world wants the youth to have regard, yet we don't lead by example. Our youths deserve to see this manifested in their lifetime. My motto is that if I can reach just one young person, I may just reach future generations.

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Addressing Barriers to Funding with Innovation

As we focus on scaling up our direct services, we are simultaneously working on fundraising to bring this physical space into reality. I would be remiss if I did not bring to light the challenges that we have faced getting funding because The Hive is led by me, a Black and formerly incarcerated woman. In working on fundraising, we learned that:

- [Only 4% of all philanthropic dollars went to Black and Latine-led organizations in 2020.](#)
- [Only 1.3% of venture capital dollars went to Black founders in 2021.](#)

Because of these alarming stats, we are shifting our fundraising strategy to be more innovative and to bring this awareness to funders and the philanthropic world. We are focusing our efforts on major donors, private philanthropy, earned income, impact investing and traditional grant making. We believe that this model will set The Hive up for success for many generations to come and is sustainable enough to have a huge impact nationally. While we are in the early stages of this shift, we know it is vital if we are to create a sustainable future for The Hive.

Note for funders: If you provide grants, make charitable donations or fund any causes, your general operating support allows recipients to focus more on the work. Too many deliverables can be harmful micromanagement of funds for communities that already have limited resources and capacity. Think about how intention versus impact affects the outcomes of people's lives. Removing these barriers are an equitable practice that is just as helpful as the funding itself. In the Hive spirit of Sawubona, "I see you and recognize your worth and dignity."

The Future of The Hive

Our immediate aspirations are to finish the programmatic and financial model for The Hive campus. Through the initial design of The Hive, we hope to grow our proof of concept and build a network of public and private partners who will help expand The Hive's capacity and impact. Over time, we plan to work to attract values-aligned investors across the philanthropic, private and public sectors to support the longevity and future goals of The Hive.

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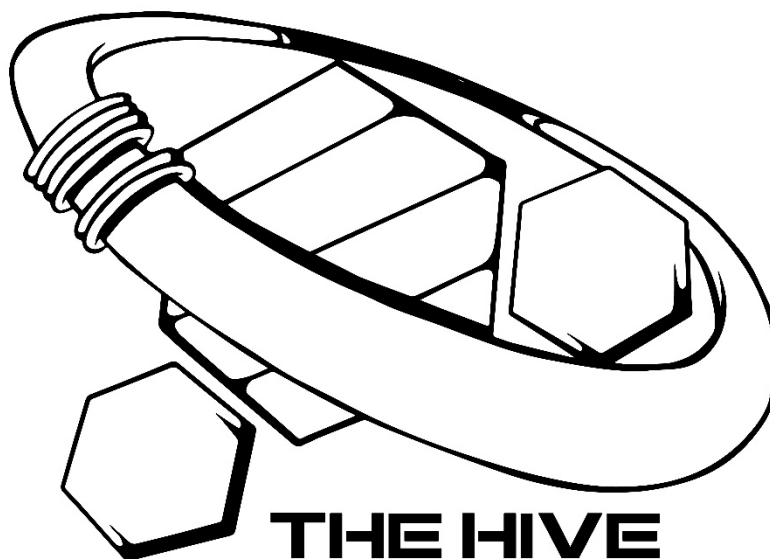
Acknowledgments

Author:

[Gina Lyles](#), Founder & Executive Director, The Hive

The Hive is a Black-led, intergenerational and multi-racial community that believes in a world where all young people feel like they belong and have the resources they need to become independent, healthy and thriving adults. Its model challenges conventional pathways through the juvenile justice and child welfare systems by engaging legacy work, where helping emerging adults build their skills and healing practices enables them to be drivers of generational transformation. The Hive believe that tangible investments in the diverse needs of young people can reverse the intergenerational trauma caused by systemic racism and solve our community's most pressing issues.

Watch [Freedom Constellation](#), The Hive's most recent artistic collaboration with Performing Statistics and Rise for Youth, created in the summer of 2021. The short film was included in the "Futures" exhibit at the Smithsonian in 2022.



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About AEP Success Stories

The Arts Education Partnership at Education Commission of the States is a national network of more than 100 organizations dedicated to advancing arts education. AEP has been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education since 1995 and is administered by Education Commission of the States. AEP is the nation's hub for arts and education leaders, building their leadership capacity to support students, educators and learning environments. Through research, reports, convenings and counsel, leaders gain knowledge and insights to ensure that all learners — especially those that have historically been marginalized — receive an excellent arts education. To achieve its goal to expand access to high-quality arts learning opportunities for all learners, AEP gathers detailed information on success stories with the potential to be replicated in communities across the country.

The Success Stories project collects submissions from organizations that highlight successful arts education programs. These stories demonstrate the benefits of arts education and promote continued collaboration and learning for individuals and organizations working toward student achievement and success. This story is part of a new initiative that highlights restorative justice work that seeks to acknowledge the impact of harmful practices and creates opportunities to heal that harm between those who enacted it and those impacted by it to transform the community.

Are you interested in sharing your arts and restorative justice work for a future success story? Please reach out to AEP policy analysts [Krystal Johnson](#) or [Cassandra Quillen](#) to share your story.

