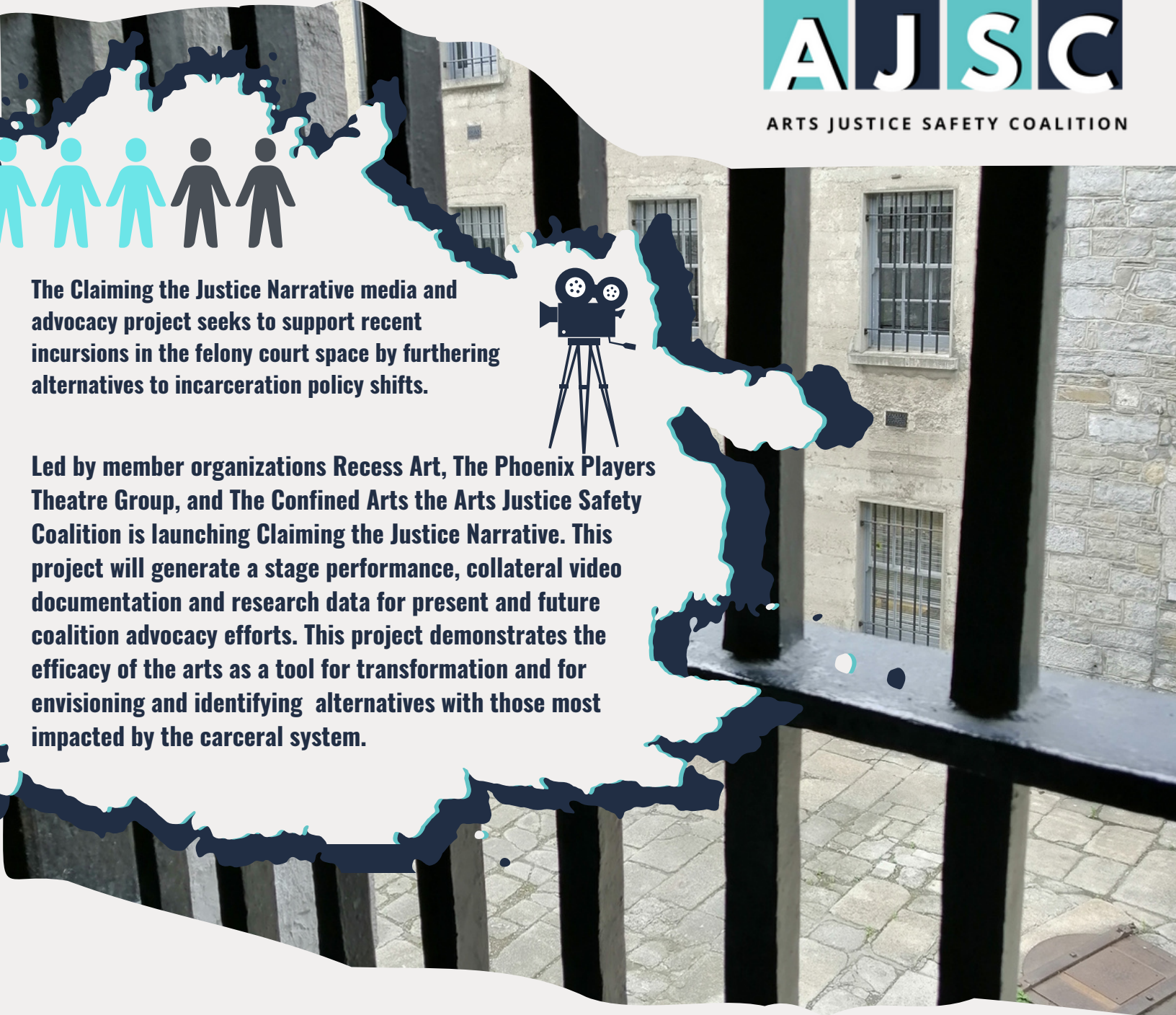


# CLAIMING THE JUSTICE NARRATIVE



ARTS JUSTICE SAFETY COALITION



The Claiming the Justice Narrative media and advocacy project seeks to support recent incursions in the felony court space by furthering alternatives to incarceration policy shifts.

Led by member organizations Recess Art, The Phoenix Players Theatre Group, and The Confined Arts the Arts Justice Safety Coalition is launching Claiming the Justice Narrative. This project will generate a stage performance, collateral video documentation and research data for present and future coalition advocacy efforts. This project demonstrates the efficacy of the arts as a tool for transformation and for envisioning and identifying alternatives with those most impacted by the carceral system.



ARTS JUSTICESAFETY COALITION

ARTS JUSTICE SAFETY COALITION IS POWERED BY  
**THE CONFINED ARTS**

# BACKGROUND

In 2020 The Confined Arts partnered with the Center for Justice Innovation and Conspiring for Good to MAP, GALVANIZE AND SUPPORT artists, arts organizations, projects, and programs focused on racial justice, restorative justice, transformative justice, and Criminal Justice Reform by forming the **ARTS JUSTICE SAFETY COALITION**. Our goals are to sustain a community of individuals and organizations working at the intersection of art and justice system reform, with a focus on community resilience and prevention through advocacy and reform:

- To elevate the status of art as a tool for systemic, cultural, and social change and build power among artists who utilize their work to these ends.
- To create lasting change within the criminal legal system by utilizing art and artistry to identify and demonstrate problems and envision and advocate for solutions.
- To persuasively provide evidence to policy makers and funders that investing in the arts is investing in safety (and to create evaluative tools and methodologies for artists in the field.)
- To create relationships between artists and arts and justice practitioners to learn from each other, create shared language, tools, techniques, and make “ecosystem” progress as our society works towards non-punitive responses to trauma.

Too often, the role of strategic arts engagement as a transformative tool for social justice is overlooked and undervalued by leaders who don’t traditionally take artistic approaches to social change within their own work strategies. However, when it comes to creating more informed and culturally inclusive policies, the role of the arts in the social justice landscape cannot continue to be minimized to supplemental involvements, which only feature artistic activities as a secondary option for social engagement. Instead, art should be in every change agent’s toolbox as a means to change perception, build relationships, and foster action.

Our coalition seeks to advance alternatives to incarceration (ATI) possibilities by positioning the arts as a necessary tool in prevention, pre-trial, supervised release, and post-conviction sentencing options by utilizing trauma-informed arts practices to center the humanity of individuals who are system-impacted, opening pathways towards public safety, healing and inspired living.

The Community Enhancement Guide, which was produced as part of the Claiming the Justice Narrative project is a tool for legal practitioners, community stakeholders, and financial supporters to demonstrate how strategic arts engagement can:

1. Change public perception about people impacted by the criminal legal system,
2. Build relationships across different experiences to create more informed policy as well as strategic partnering to scale new and existing legal advocacy campaigns, and
3. Foster action toward collaborative and creative solution making for offsetting community violence, strengthening social support for families living in poverty, and fostering professional career development as a tool for community enhancement.

## ABOUT THE CLAIMING THE JUSTICE NARRATIVE PROJECT

Beginning in the fall of 2021, twenty system-impacted people participated in eight workshops led by teaching artists from four organizations: Recess, Theatre of the Oppressed NYC, Dances for Solidarity, and The Phoenix Players Theatre Group. During these sessions, participants were introduced to various performance techniques in movement, improvisation, and autobiographical storytelling.



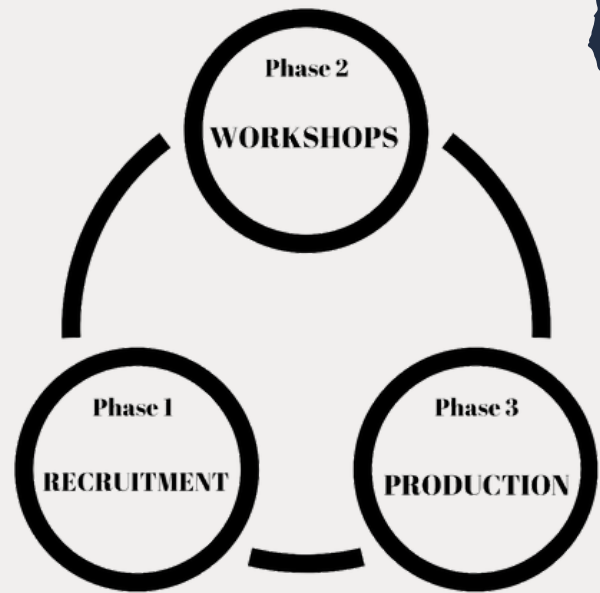
[THECONFINEDARTS.ORG/CLAIMING-THE-JUSTICE-NARRATIVE-PROJECT-OVERVIEW.HTML](https://theconfinedarts.org/claiming-the-justice-narrative-project-overview.html)

Nine individuals were available at the conclusion of the workshops to start the process of creating an autobiographical performance piece. Beginning in late January of 2022, participants met in both virtual and hybrid settings once a week, facilitated by AJSC collaborators. Through prompts, storytelling, improvisation, and written submissions, we developed a script that focuses on incarceration and its effects, early trauma, post-release issues, and the personal histories and events that lead to individuals becoming justice impacted.

# OUR PROCESS

WE UTILIZED A THREE-PHASE PROCESS TO ENSURE REPRESENTATIONAL AND COLLABORATIVE STORYTELLING:

1. RECRUITMENT PHASE,
2. WORKSHOP PHASE
3. PRODUCTION PHASE



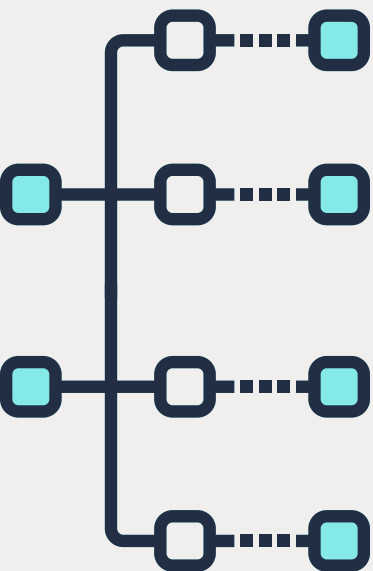
## RECRUITMENT PHASE

WE IDENTIFIED KEY ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTICIPANTS FROM THOSE ORGANIZATIONS TO TAKE PART IN THIS COLLABORATIVE PROCESS.

## WORKSHOP PHASE

THE WORKSHOP PHASE TOOK THE FORM OF A CIRCLE OF SHARING BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTICIPANTS TO CREATE A HYBRID, INTERGENERATIONAL, CROSS REGIONAL COMMUNITY. TO ENCOURAGE ORIENTATION TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF MATERIAL FOR A FINAL PRODUCT.

## WORKSHOPS



### **MIRROR/ECHO/TILT WORKSHOP BY RECESS ART**

THROUGH A CURRICULUM BASED ON VISUAL STORYTELLING, PARTICIPANTS USED PERFORMANCE TO STRIP DOWN PERSONAL STORIES TO THEIR EMOTIONAL CORE

### **RAINBOW OF DESIRE VS. COPS IN THE HEAD BY THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED NYC**

PARTICIPANTS EXPLORED HOW OPPRESSION LEADS TO INTERNALIZED SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS AND CONFLICTING DESIRES.

### **WITH AND WITHOUT BODIES BY DANCES FOR SOLIDARITY**

USING THE TOOL OF TRANSLATION, PARTICIPANTS USED TEXT THAT ORIGINATES FROM THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF THOSE PENALIZED BY THE CARCERAL SYSTEM, AND WORKED TO INTERPRET AND EMBODY THESE NARRATIVES.

### **PHOENIX PLAYERS THEATRE GROUP**

USING SCRIPT AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT EXERCISES, PARTICIPANTS INVESTIGATED HOW WE EACH INDIVIDUALLY FASHION OUT IDENTITIES AS A WAY TO CRAFT STORIES ABOUT OURSELVES.

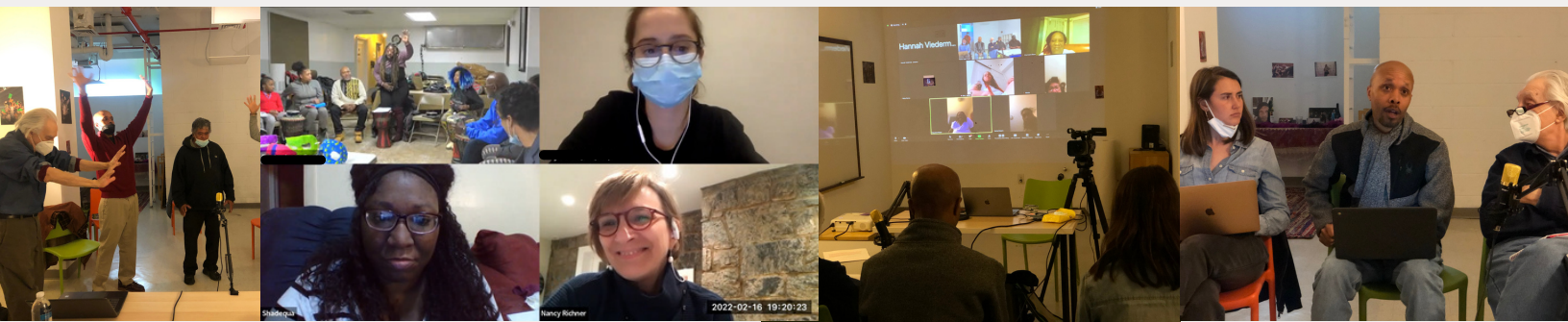


## **Production Phase**

We have collaborated with the Broadway Advocacy Coalition through its theater of Change course offer through the Columbia Law School to develop an engagement strategy for the debut of the artistic performance.

Throughout the workshop phase, participants shared in a cross-generational dialogue, which centered healing and the undoing of narratives surrounding the 'criminal' by Exploring various artistic mediums. the group collectively conveyed truer, more complex, personal stories that portray their humanity and express their desire for public safety and community intervention to circumvent crime and subsequent incarceration.

We are working with an intergenerational cohort of artists, law students, and advocates who have been directly-impacted by the criminal legal system for the development of material, policy mapping, and an engagement strategy for a premier in the Fall of 2023.



The resulting short film, **Before Time/After Time**, takes the audience on a journey through the lives of nine returned citizens. They share with us fragments of their lives before and after incarceration. These fragments explore turning points in the lives of our collaborators, beginning in childhood, that, when viewed from the perspective of the present, create a direct line to the events that lead to system involvement. Other segments of our piece make evident the remorse felt by those who have done harm and the redemption they seek. The piece delves into the challenges of “coming home” and the effort it takes to survive “on the outside.” The piece is a tribute to the resilience, compassion, and generosity of those whose stories make up the devised text. And finally, the piece, and the process that created it, is an example of the kinds of communities that the arts can create at almost any age—communities where self-realization, shared goals and transformation are made possible.

## **FOSTERING COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS FROM LIVED EXPERIENCES**

WATCH PROJECT TRAILERS AND STAY UPDATED ON OUR WEBSITE

[www.theconfinedarts.org/claiming-the-justice-narrative-project-overview.html](http://www.theconfinedarts.org/claiming-the-justice-narrative-project-overview.html)

# COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT GUIDE SUMMARY

**This document has three functions.**

1. To inform district attorneys offices and legal stakeholders on alternative strategies for addressing crimes related to poverty and lack of social support.
2. To inform community-based organizations, community members and practitioners on strategic arts engagement tools to enhance communication and methods.
3. To guide philanthropic support toward restorative approaches to safety and harm.

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- Problem statement
- About the coalition
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- Statement of purpose for guide
- Claiming The Justice Narrative (CTJN) advocacy project

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### **Section II: Strategic arts engagement**

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- Public service learning
- Juvenile justice
- Cultural representation
- Participatory action research
- Relationship & capacity building
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- Civic engagement
- Public arts
- Engagement strategies for policy impact/Campaign Development
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- Legal presentation + storytelling

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Organizational needs

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# REQUEST FOR SUPPORT

The most compelling reason that we as a nation must abandon the punishment cycle and create alternatives to incarceration for every person, especially for those who are convicted of violent crimes, is because violence only begets violence. Responding to a person who becomes violent by placing them in a violent system has proven to be a recipe for disaster. Research shows that the negative psychological effects on those incarcerated include (but are not limited to): a dependence on institutional structure and contingencies; hypervigilance, interpersonal distrust and suspicion; emotional over-control, alienation and psychological distancing; social withdrawal and isolation; incorporation of exploitative norms of prison culture; diminished sense of self-worth and personal value; and post-traumatic stress reactions to the pains of imprisonment. Every year, hundreds of thousands of people enter the New York state prison system and are left to live with the remnants of the psychological aftereffects of incarceration.

Recycling punishment is not the solution—prevention is. If we truly want public safety, then we must begin providing preventative harm-reductive solutions in four significant areas: mental health in order to prevent the incarceration of people who would benefit from medical support; social support and wellness in order to provide more therapeutic and intervention work for struggling families; educational support to foster knowledge, access, capacity, and opportunity amid difficult living circumstances; and finally, economic support to address poverty and food insecurity. Until then, we will continue to be a nation reliant on incarceration. Preventing incarceration by addressing the socioeconomic issues that lead people to commit crimes is a leap toward human justice and the thoughtful abolition of our current criminal justice system.

Art is at the forefront of change. The process is twofold: art allows us to collectively imagine a new world, one that is devoid of stigma and inequality, while at the same time, empowers the individual to imagine themselves in circumstances different from those that create conditions which lead to incarceration. Resourceful artistic creativity within social change is one of the most influential and sometimes overlooked methods of problem solving. When rational thought(s) are not enough to change people's minds, attitudes, and behavior, art and popular culture have the potential to touch people on deeper levels of consciousness.

Contributions to The Confined Arts go to financially support the directly impacted artists and teaching artists whose stories and creativity, when shared with the world, foster change. Your contributions will also support the core team dedicated to supporting and amplifying the work of these individuals. If you are interested in being further involved with TCA by connecting with us to contribute your skills or connecting us to artists, advocates, or potential partners, please let us know. We believe that relationship-building is the essential, yet often overlooked tool, to achieving justice and equity.

LEARN MORE AND DONATE AT:

[WWW.THECONFINEDARTS.ORG](http://WWW.THECONFINEDARTS.ORG)