

CRT LEAVES LEGACY IN SRQ STRONG

Dear Friends,

We have some exciting news to share with you! In recent years CRT has increasingly focused our work here at home. Starting in 2023, we will formalize this shift by changing our name to SRQ Strong (Sarasota Strong) and creating a new local board of directors.

Current efforts are grounded in lessons learned from our international work. We have seen firsthand the strength and resolve of people making a real difference in their communities, even without access to resources or supports we take for granted. We have witnessed the power of people

of different faiths, races, nationalities, and tribes uniting to achieve common goals. We have watched as women of all ages have supported each other in overcoming violence and oppression. Most importantly, we have learned that the “western” lens, so often influenced by professionalism and privilege, can distort our ability to see people’s innate wisdom and power. We are inspired to apply what we have learned to the very real problems facing our communities here in the United States, starting with our home base of Sarasota, Florida. Beginning next year that will be our primary focus.

In this final issue of the CRT Newsletter, we have tried to summarize our activities and accomplishments over the past 17 years, and to convey our vision for moving forward. Although we will be making some major changes, we will remain true to our roots and to all we have learned. We can't possibly thank you enough for your support over the years, and we hope you can donate generously to help us take this next big step. Help keep the legacy alive!

In Peace,
Andrea Blanch, PhD, Director



People Know Their Own Needs



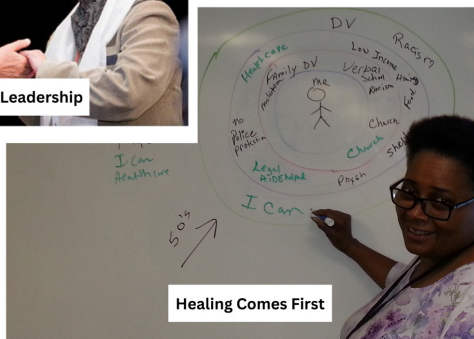
Collective Sustainability



Solutions Are Interconnected



Grassroots Leadership



Healing Comes First

Lessons Learned

1. **People know best how to solve their own problems.** While professional services are valuable, people are the experts on their own lives and communities.
2. **Social change requires grassroots leadership.** Effective social change occurs when homegrown solutions and grassroots movements drive policy.
3. **Change is messy, and solutions are interconnected.** We have to address multiple problems simultaneously rather than focusing on just one issue.
4. **Sustainability comes from helping groups – not just individuals – to thrive.** Helping entire communities grow is more likely to succeed because people can help each other make and maintain change.
5. **Healing from violence and trauma is necessary to solve our most intractable problems.** Many social efforts fail to recognize the underlying trauma that often makes it hard for people to benefit from opportunities.

Please Donate Generously!

SEND CHECKS TO:

**Center for Religious Tolerance, 520 Ralph St, Sarasota, FL 34242
or donate on our website.**

Please let us know if you would like to be removed from our mailing list.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE



Abrahamic Reunion members Rabbi Fruman and Ibrahim Abu El-Hawa

Our work in Israel began with the Abrahamic Reunion, a group of Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Druze religious and lay leaders. Walking arm in arm and sharing prayers and

practices, they were leaders of a grassroots movement that changed the international conversation about the possibility for peace in the early 2000's. Inspired by their work, Ibtisam Mahameed partnered with an Israeli Jewish feminist organization and CRT to start a women's empowerment project in her Arab village. Although Women Reborn faced early opposition, in three years it had tripled in size, won the support of local political leaders, expanded to other municipalities, and helped dozens of women go back to school or enter the workforce. Soon participants' daughters started asking for a program of their own, and Young Women's Parliament (YWP) was born. YWP brought Israeli Arab and Jewish high school girls together to learn about women's rights, discuss common issues, and learn the skills of advocacy.

YWP has been implemented in dozens of Jewish and Arab municipalities throughout Israel, and has contributed significantly to the growth of an interfaith women's peace movement.



At peace rally in Jerusalem



MULTI-NATIONAL

One of our first international efforts was hosting a peacebuilding workshop for women of faith in the Middle East,



Making Covid masks in rural Kenya

where women from Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon helped us reframe the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a regional issue. A project in Honduras provided insight into how Western financial supports – even those designed to help developing countries – can distort the empowerment process for women in collective societies. We attended the World Parliament of Religions in Barcelona, facilitated the development of Cooperation Circles for the United Religions Initiative, and were recognized by the United States Institute of Peace. When we began to see similarities between projects in different countries, we held a series of online conversations between young participants from Israel, Kenya and the U.S. Most had never traveled outside their own town or city, and were inspired and motivated by connecting with their counterparts in

other countries. When Covid disrupted lives across the globe, we immediately reached out to work with our partners in Israel, Kenya, and the U.S., sharing best practices and keeping existing networks engaged.



Honduran women's workshop

RURAL KENYA

CRT's mission has always been to help others solve their own problems. When

we met Jackie Ogega and her mother Marcella, we knew we had found partners who understood exactly what the women in their home village of Kisii, Kenya, needed. We helped Jackie start

a non-profit, Mpanzi, and we funded their first activities – a workshop to prevent tribal violence that often follows elections, and a project to end violence against women and girls. When the women recognized they also needed a means of earning income to achieve independence, we supported the development of a micro-lending system owned and run by the village women themselves, and we helped raise money to launch a sustainable livelihoods program. The women learned how to raise and care for livestock, then received a young female goat with the understanding that the first healthy offspring would go to another villager. Today Mpanzi is a successful, independent organization helping hundreds of women and girls in Kisii and in a neighboring Masai village achieve better lives.



Marcella and Mpanzi women in Kisii



UNITED STATES

Here at home, we focused first on educating the public about grassroots peace movements. We organized workshops, participated in activist forums,

wrote articles and book chapters, hosted a bi-monthly radio show, and sponsored U.S tours for peacemakers. We had the amazing good luck of partnering with a professional photographer who spends 2 months every year capturing incredible images in Israel and the West Bank – an invaluable tool for raising public awareness about the possibility for peace. We were a founding member of the Alliance for Middle East Peace, advocating for legislation establishing an international Israeli/Palestinian peace fund. After years of advocacy on Capitol Hill, the Nina Lowey Partnership for Peace in the Middle East Act was signed into law in 2018. We also began to bring the lessons we were learning home. We saw that the barriers to peaceful co-existence are the same everywhere, and so are the solutions. Impressed by the women's interfaith work in Israel, we initiated Women's Interfaith Networks in Sarasota



Teaching Tolerance at Sarasota High School



WSLR Let's Talk about the Middle East

and Tarpon Springs. Recognizing the power of youth involvement, we launched our own programs, including "Teens Talk it Out" at Sarasota High School and an international student internship program. In 2010, CRT was listed in the U.S. Peace Registry, honoring individuals and organizations for their anti-war and peace-related activities.

WHAT'S NEXT? SRQ STRONG BUILDS RESILIENT COMMUNITY

Starting next year, SRQ Strong, our trauma-informed community initiative, will become our primary focus. We want to remain true to our roots, so we plan to continue working with and through faith communities, and to keep our international network alive. Consistent with the principle of grassroots empowerment, before we started SRQ Strong we spent 6 months exploring local interest. We hosted conversations and created safe spaces to talk about trauma and resilience, asking people if they wanted to learn more. The answer was a resounding YES – people not only wanted us to continue, they volunteered to get involved. Before long, we had a name, a vision – “To create a community that cares for itself” – and a theory of change that

centers empowerment and healing. SRQ Strong activities include monthly community conversations about trauma-related topics, followed by “deep dive” sessions to help us get into action. Recognizing that every person

has a gift to give, we provide support to help community members make their vision for the community a reality. We amplify our impact by working with and through existing organizations – freely giving our knowledge and tools away. And whenever possible, we focus on sustainable collective change.



Forum at Community Bible Church

Our approach to community work was inspired by the Trauma Informed Community Development (TICD) model pioneered by Father Paul Abernathy in Pittsburgh. The TICD model reflects the lessons we learned in our international work, and adds an emphasis on the historical trauma of racism and ongoing oppression. Our strategy is to work neighborhood by neighborhood, block by block, to build trust, provide opportunities for healing, and support people in building better lives and stronger communities.

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TICD in the Park East Neighborhood

A heartfelt thank you to all who have supported us over the years!