“My mother, eight months pregnant, came to see me when I was in solitary at Rikers. ‘Where’s my dad?’ I asked. ‘Gone,’ she said. ‘Gone. Dead.’ I was 19. I went back to that 6-by-4-foot box, knowing my life had to change.”

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 3)
A Double Win for Justice Reform
Our long-term commitment pays off

Rikers Island is good for one thing: making inmates more dysfunctional and desperate. The board of The New York Community Trust witnessed this firsthand 17 years ago on a trip to Rikers. There, they met young women with serious mental health issues. A warden told us incarceration often made the women’s mental health conditions worse.

Back then, we helped some of these women get therapeutic counseling and drug treatment. But our criminal justice funding has always had a bigger goal: help New Yorkers who committed nonviolent crimes stay out of prison.

That’s why we’re thrilled that policymakers recently agreed on the need to close Rikers and raise the age of criminal responsibility from 16 to 18 in New York State. Our long-term efforts to reform the criminal justice system for New Yorkers has paid off.

We supported Public Interest Partners and Citizens’ Committee for Children to lead the campaign to raise the age, while backing JustLeadershipUSA to close Rikers for years.

For these reforms to work, we need real alternatives to incarceration. The Trust supported the Center for Court Innovation to create youth courts to steer nonviolent offenders toward help. We’re making sure former inmates can find work through support of the Fortune Society, the Center for Employment Opportunities, and Manhattan Legal Services. (See our cover story.)

We’re also funding college scholarships for female inmates through the College and Community Fellowship. Meanwhile, The Legal Action Center has used our grants to link substance abusers with criminal records get drug treatment.

New Yorkers who set up permanent funds in The Trust have made such long-term support possible. Come join us! There’s plenty of room over here on the right side of history.

Roderick Jenkins is a senior program officer overseeing The Trust’s youth development program.

CLOSE RIKERS: With our help, JustLeadershipUSA scored a win when Mayor Bill de Blasio announced his plans to reduce the City’s prison population and close Rikers Island in the next 10 years. Here, a rally in Astoria, Queens, marches toward the prison island entrance in 2016.

We’re making New York more just. We hope you’ll join us.
Contact Bob Edgar at (212) 686-2564 to find out how.
Everything started to go out of control when I was 14. I was hanging with the wrong crowd. One day, several of them did something wrong. I got swept up in it. I got sent to juvenile detention in the Bronx and Brooklyn for 2 ½ years. At 18, I ended up at Rikers Island. Rikers is like the National Geographic show where a pack of wolves sees a sheep and rips it apart. One afternoon in the cafeteria, someone grabbed a guy’s head and pummeled him. Another time, I saw a corrections officer stomping on a kid’s face, knocking out a tooth.

This was shortly before New Yorkers really began paying attention to Rikers in 2015, when Kalief Browder committed suicide after being bullied and beaten there.

For me, the lowest of the low came when I was 19. My mom told me my grandmother had died. My dad was very close to his mother, and I worried about him. I phoned two weeks later and my mom avoided every question about my dad. She came to visit and started sobbing. She told me he was gone: He had taken his own life.

My dad was my best friend. I think he was overwhelmed because I was locked up, he lost his mother, and very soon our family was going to have another mouth to feed. I will never forgive myself for causing him so much pain.

I had been maintaining my innocence, but with this crisis I knew I had to move on. I agreed to go to an alternative-to-incarceration program run by the Fortune Society, and in exchange my case was dismissed and sealed.

When I walked out of Rikers, I didn't have a bank account or an ID. Luckily, my counselor at Fortune mapped out a plan for me to graduate. I moved back with my mom in the South Bronx and went to my neighborhood high school with a sense of urgency. I got my diploma in six months.

Now I work part time as a project assistant at the Fortune Society, in the David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy. I know we can make the justice system truly just. I’m helping organize a conference on criminal and social justice issues. Also, I work with clients as young as 16, teaching skills for jobs. In my free time, I see plays because I’d like to be an activist who does some acting.

I have seven younger siblings and half-siblings. I tell them, “I don’t want to see you hanging with the wrong people, getting in the predicament I was in. Find your passion and just keep feeding that.”

While I was locked up, one of my younger brothers started getting derailed. Not anymore—now he’s into boxing, and I’m right there with him in the ring. He’s gonna make it.

Leviticus Mitchell, 22, works for criminal justice reform in a Fortune Society program supported by The Trust. He told his story to David L. Marcus of The Trust and Clare V. Church, a Trust fellow.
In its first few months, the new administration in Washington proposed cuts to the EPA, revived construction of the Keystone pipeline, and removed the climate change section from the White House website.

The New York Community Trust, a leader in backing environmental advocacy, wants to preserve gains from recent years. We’ve just made 10 grants to advance New York’s first offshore wind farm, nurture wildlife, and boost environmental justice organizations.

This year, offshore turbines 30 miles southeast of Montauk got approval from the Long Island Power Authority, thanks to tireless work by our grantee the Campaign for Atlantic Offshore Wind. When finished, the windmills will generate 90 megawatts, enough to power 51,000 homes.

Locally, our $40,000 to the New York Audubon Society will make sure more urban roofs are suitable habitats for birds and other pollinators. Every year, millions of birds—more than 130 species—fly through our urban jungle on migratory routes. Audubon will create a citywide database to help building owners install green roofs for wildlife.

Friends of Governors Island will use our $40,000 for new plantings and to support volunteers. Paid horticultural fellows will lead volunteers in caring for the island’s new and historic landscapes. And new pollinator gardens will be seeded; signs and seating will be installed.

Throughout the City, Natural Areas Conservancy will use $80,000 from The Trust to protect urban forests. Many of the City’s millions of trees are in areas with poor soil, water, and light. Experts will devise a plan so the trees can thrive.
As a community foundation, The Trust focuses on New York and its suburbs. But when it comes to the environment, there are no borders. That’s thanks to the family of 20th-century engineer Henry Phillip Kraft, which started a fund in The Trust to support national and global environmental projects.

Most recently, we’ve used that fund to support three clean-energy programs in the Midwest, where coal is still a major source of electricity. Burning coal releases toxins and carbon dioxide, polluting the air and increasing the greenhouse effect that leads to climate change. The cost to public health and the environment in the U.S. is estimated in the hundreds of billions of dollars.

Environmental Law and Policy Center in Chicago will use a $100,000 Kraft Fund grant to advance solar, wind, and energy storage technologies. Meanwhile, our grant of $125,000 to RE-AMP Network—a group of nonprofits and funders working in eight Midwestern states—will help low-income communities address energy challenges. And the BlueGreen Alliance Foundation, based in Minneapolis, will use $100,000 to build support for environmentally sound policies that create high-paying jobs.
IN FOCUS | ARTS AND ADVOCACY

Protecting Free Speech
Two groups promote independent voices

The First Amendment, guaranteeing freedom of speech, is at the heart of our democracy. But it’s at risk.

So far this year, lawmakers in more than 18 states have introduced legislation to curb mass protests. At the same time, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting—all of which help America’s lesser-known voices be heard—faced the threat of elimination.

“Attacks on these federal agencies have a chilling effect on freedom of expression,” says Kerry McCarthy, The Trust program director overseeing the arts.

Now we’re funding two City literary nonprofits to amplify alternative voices in this age of “alternative facts.” Our grant of $150,000 to PEN America will provide training and outlets to aspiring and professional writers marginalized by race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status.

Also, we’re giving the Asian American Writers’ Workshop $70,000 to publish works by Muslim, Arab, and South Asian writers. In response to growing violence against these communities, the group also will offer workshops on digital security and writers’ rights.

Is The Trust in your will?
The projects in these pages are possible because people left bequests. You, too, can set up a permanent fund. We’ll make grants supporting the causes you care about. Forever.

Call Jane Wilton at (212) 686-2563 to learn more.

HISTORIC PLACES
Bringing the City’s LGBT History to Life
New map catalogs sites

We all know that our City is a wellspring of historic and cultural sites. But what about places associated with the history of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender New Yorkers?

Identifying and celebrating them is important because this community’s contributions are often unknown and unrecognized.

To bring these storied sites into the spotlight, in 2015 NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project began identifying more than 500 relevant sites, with the help of Trust funding.

The sites range from the Liberation House in Greenwich Village, which provided health services to the LGBT community in the early 1970s, to a Staten Island home where the black lesbian feminist, writer, and activist Audre Lorde used to live.

So far, 100 of these sites are now online on an interactive map, with additional places coming in the near future. The Trust is giving $100,000 to document and publicize the project.

Excerpt from Asian American Writers’ Workshop participant Eric Tang’s “A Society Gone Mad on War”, The Enduring Importance of Martin Luther King’s Riverside Speech”, an article published in the Nation on April 4, 2017.
Getting Out the Vote for Local Elections
Creative strategies for nonprofits and Asian organizers

Anything public—schools, parks, transportation, libraries—is affected by whom we elect. But “many low-income New Yorkers don’t feel their votes make a difference,” says Louisa Hackett, executive director of Community Votes, a Trust grantee.

The nonprofit group targets neighborhoods such as Cypress Hills and East New York, where the voter turnout was only 15 percent for the last mayoral election.

A few voters can have a real impact, especially in City and State elections, where some candidates win by a minuscule margin: A candidate won the 2014 State Assembly District 86 primary election in the Bronx by six votes.

With a Trust grant of $60,000, Community Votes is working with nonprofits to find creative ways to turn out the vote. At social service providers, for example, receptionists register people to vote as they wait for appointments; after-school staff inform parents about upcoming elections while enrolling children.

“Our job is to find out what residents care about and explain how elected decision makers impact those issues,” continued Hackett.

One group that lags behind on voter rolls: Asian Americans. Minkwon Center for Community Action is working to change this. Last year, with our grant of $100,000, Minkwon led a coalition of 18 groups that registered 6,000 new voters in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, Chinatown in Manhattan, and other neighborhoods with a high concentration of Asian New Yorkers.

The coalition held candidate forums, distributed voter guides in five languages, and did exit polling. Another Trust grant of $100,000 will continue to boost civic engagement.

“It’s crucial to motivate low-income New Yorkers to vote.”
—Patricia Swann, senior program officer, The Trust

SMART PHILANTHROPY: Get our free Guide to Giving, and share with friends and family. Send us your address at info@nyct-cfi.org, and we’ll mail them to you.

HITTING THE STREETS:
Volunteers organized by Trust grantee Minkwon Center for Community Action knock on doors and register Asian New Yorkers to vote. Below: This poster, which won a Community Votes contest, appeared in the group’s promotional materials.
A New Yorker who went blind helps others with vision loss

Dixie Sanderson, a bookkeeper in Guilford, Connecticut, lost her sight at age 41. She wanted to continue at her job, but the QuickBooks software she used didn’t work for people with visual impairments.

Enter Albert Rizzi, an entrepreneur who became blind mid-career, then founded My Blind Spot. The nonprofit ensures digital accessibility for people of all abilities—by promoting inclusive technologies and corporate culture.

After Rizzi met Sanderson, My Blind Spot got Intuit to make QuickBooks fully accessible.

Fortunately, David Warfield, a vaudeville actor, created a fund in The Trust in 1951 to help those with visual disabilities.

Today, we’re using his bequest to fund My Blind Spot to train many people like Sanderson.

Sanderson is on the job again. And because of David Warfield’s generosity, more New Yorkers will join her.

Set up a fund to keep your passions alive—forever. Call Jane Wilton at (212) 686-2563