Green Farming
Promoting eco-friendly agriculture
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FROM THE DESK OF JOSE SALDAÑA

A Second Chance for the Incarcerated

Jose Saldaña is the director of RAPP (Release Aging People in Prison). Since 2018, after serving 38 years in New York State prisons, he has led advocacy efforts to release incarcerated older adults in New York State. He spoke to our donors in a recent virtual briefing. Over the past three years, The Trust has provided $200,000 to RAPP for its work.

"At the height of mass incarceration in the 1990s, there were 72,000 people in New York State prisons. Due to an executive order by Governor Pataki, the Parole Board could not release anyone convicted of a violent crime. As a result, the Board’s release rate was less than four percent.

Imagine what that does to the families of the incarcerated, who are mostly Black and Latinx. It devastates them and their communities, trapping them in a perpetual cycle of poverty—the greatest factor that produces crime in our cities.

We must listen to those who are formerly incarcerated. I did not deserve a welcome home party, but what I did deserve was a chance. We can contribute because we realize we have a moral commitment to repair harm that we take responsibility for doing. This is who we are and what we want to be known for—not for what we did four decades ago.

Elderly New Yorkers in prison face an ongoing health crisis. We get, but are not diagnosed with or treated for, common problems such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes. Even the most serious ailments go undiagnosed for years, leading to premature deaths. In fact, for the last ten years, 700 people who died in New York State prisons were age 50 and over, and the average age at death was 58 years old.

Is it worth it, from a public-safety standpoint, to keep our elders in prison? The research says no. As a person gets older, they age out of crime. The recidivism rate for someone released at age 66, like me, is less than one percent. In my opinion, the controlling factor is that many of us dig inside ourselves to confront and gain insight about what we have done. We embrace the moral obligation to repair the harm we have caused. During decades of incarceration we become pioneers and mentors, developing the most effective therapeutic programs and self-empowerment courses to help others make the same life-changing transformation.

What gives me hope is when I see students at universities identifying themselves as abolitionists. They envision a better way of addressing violence that does not rely on inflicting more harm through perpetual punishment or revenge. Decades of incarceration harms the families of those in prison, and does nothing to help the victims. The better approach is to address the needs of those harmed and help them heal, rather than harming another family. I am hopeful that criminal justice will one day be transformed from a system of punishment and revenge to a system that values human transformation and redemption.”

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— Jose Saldaña, director of RAPP
Your Guide to Make Giving a Family Affair

No matter where you are on your family tree, philanthropy can be a powerful way to share values and connect with your loved ones. It provides a path to discussions about social issues and our collective responsibility to make the world a better place. It’s a way to learn about the world and each other. Below are tips to help you and your family discover new ways to work together and share the joy of helping others.

Establish a Family Tradition: In years that are open to donors and their guests. Host briefings on philanthropic giving throughout the year that are open to donors and their guests. For example, The Trust hosts briefings on philanthropic giving throughout the year that are open to donors and their guests.

Nurture the Youngest Donors: If young children have developed the motor skills to hold a dollar in their hands, they have the capacity to give that dollar away. Find ways to bring giving into everyday life. Have your children help you pick items for a food drive and drop them off together. Use nonprofit newsletters as conversation starters.

Invite Your Children to Give: Invite your child to identify a cause they care about and then, together, research organizations working in that area. Foster their feeling of ownership and autonomy. This is also an opportunity for children to learn how to evaluate an organization or make difficult choices among competing needs. Follow up with the organization together to see what kind of impact your gift has made. Some of our current donors create donor-advised funds for their children.

Learn Together: Organize a family documentary night or group reading on a particular issue to spur conversation about giving, or invite family members to attend events with you. For example, The Trust hosts briefings on philanthropic giving throughout the year that are open to donors and their guests.

Establish a Family Tradition: Create a family giving ritual where you come together once a year and discuss how the family will make grants in response to current needs and events. For younger children, serve a special treat as an incentive to participate fully and schedule it at the same time each year—for example, the day after Thanksgiving—so that it becomes a tradition.

Whether you’re starting out or have an established practice of giving with your family, we’re here to help. Contact John Oddy at (212) 686-2564 or jfo@nyct-cfi.org.

GIVING TOGETHER:
The Moore family believes in the power of giving. Lily Moore’s grandparents, David and Katherine Moore, created donor-advised funds in The Trust for their children and grandchildren. Lily (pictured here with Katherine) is now part of two giving circles at The Trust, including the Giving Collective and WellMet Philanthropy, and works at the Food Bank for New York City.
RACIAL JUSTICE

Supporting Asian American New Yorkers

As part of its ongoing commitment to making New York a better place for all, The Trust has made several grants to nonprofits to benefit Asian Americans, who comprise 16 percent of our city’s population. The grants address the rise of hate crimes and anti-Asian bias while working to increase civic engagement, support survivors of abuse, and improve housing security.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, Asian Americans have been the target of 1,100 documented racially motivated attacks, and many more of these attacks go unreported. Community leaders say that as many as 90 percent of victims do not report incidents because of shame, language barriers, or fear of government authorities.

PREVENTING VIOLENCE
To prevent violence against Asian Americans, The Trust recently gave $250,000 to the Asian American Federation for a program that includes training residents and paid “ambassadors” to defuse potentially violent situations safely, defend themselves, and protect the vulnerable. The Federation will enlist local storefront businesses to become marked “safe zones” that provide shelter to residents who are confronted by the threat of violence on the street.

A Trust grant of $60,000 to Womankind will aid older Asian American women who are survivors of gender-based violence. Womankind will use the funding to provide online counseling, wellness services, and social activities, as well as direct constituents to emergency food, healthcare, and legal assistance. The group will train several of the women to counsel peers, lead workshops, and educate the broader community about the rise of anti-Asian bias.

GETTING OUT THE VOTE
Asian Americans have some of the lowest election participation rates among the city’s demographic...
groups. The GoVoteNYC funder collaborative in The New York Community Trust is supporting the MinKwon Center for Community Engagement with a $135,000 grant to boost voting. The Center will be the lead organizer for APA VOICE (Asian Pacific Americans Voting and Organizing to Increase Civic Engagement), a coalition of 14 Asian American-led organizations.

MinKwon is training members of this coalition to explain the city’s ranked-choice voting, distribute multilingual voter guides, host candidate forums, and organize phone and text banks to reach potential voters.

COUNTERING HARASSMENT
Along with the rise in anti-immigrant sentiments, including more aggressive actions by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, some landlords have stepped up their harassment of immigrant tenants, who grew afraid of speaking out or going to authorities.

To counter this discrimination, The Trust’s Fund for New Citizens—a funder collaborative focused on helping immigrant New Yorkers—gave $70,000 to Chhaya Community Development Corporation to inform South-Asian and Indo-Caribbean tenants about their housing rights. Working from its two offices in Queens, Chhaya expanded its network of tenant associations and will offer more “know your rights” workshops and conduct additional leadership development among renters.

PARTICIPATING IN SCHOOL REFORM
With a grant of $80,000, the Coalition of Asian American Children and Families will work with 40 ethnic groups, who speak more than 100 different languages, to ensure their voices are heard in the often-contentious debates about school reform in the city. Although stereotypes persist that all Asian American students do well on standardized tests and other measures of success, some parents—particularly those who have children with disabilities, who are recent immigrants, or who live in extreme poverty—do not know how to advocate for their rights or are fearful of speaking out.

The Coalition will work with 50 nonprofits that serve Asian communities to create culturally appropriate printed materials about education rights, host meetings to discuss policy and community concerns, and testify at relevant city hearings.
Getting healthy food to all New Yorkers is no small task, but we need to do so in a way that keeps in mind the health of our environment. Trust grants are helping improve our food system across the nation.

True reform will require changing how we grow, distribute, and buy food. Our $375,000 in grants to the Health, Environment, Agriculture, and Labor (HEAL) Food Alliance are helping large cities and institutions use their buying power to drive change in regional and national food systems, and training people of color to advocate for federal and state agricultural policies that protect public health and the environment.

The rise of large-scale, industrial agriculture in the 20th century has led to the intensive use of agrochemicals and other practices that degrade soils and natural resources. And the shipping of food thousands of miles carries with it significant environmental harms and risks.

To improve the food distribution system to benefit both New York farmers and consumers, we provided the Natural Resources Defense Council $200,000 several years ago to work with GrowNYC to advocate for a wholesale distribution hub in the South Bronx. This spring, the city and state began construction on this 60,000-square-foot, cold-storage facility that will open in 2022, increasing the market for small farmers and the availability of affordable produce to New Yorkers.

RETHINKING AGRICULTURE

“The widespread adoption of agro-industrial practices in the United States produced big surpluses of agricultural commodities in the decades after World War II,” said Arturo Garcia-Costas, The Trust’s program officer for the environment. “But the economic growth and expansion in trade those surpluses created borrowed too much prosperity from the future. They haven’t been good for soil health, freshwater resources, or the global climate, and now we’re really starting to grapple with that.”

It’s an issue that Scenic Hudson plans to address with our funding. It protects farmland and promotes “regenerative agriculture,” a farming philosophy that embraces a return to age-old farming techniques such as crop rotation and planting different “cover crops” on a field throughout the year. These techniques revitalize the soil, prevent erosion, conserve water, and sequester carbon.

Working with farmers to adapt their current methods of farming will take time, though Scenic Hudson has found that working through peers has been effective. The organization will create forums where farmers learn from others who have adopted regenerative practices and also learn about how they can save money, increase their yields, and boost profitability.

A NATIONAL MOVEMENT

A $300,000 Trust grant over three years will allow the organization to continue this work while bringing together stakeholders to advocate to improve the next federal Farm Bill.

“Industrial farms in the Midwest have had the biggest voice in Washington,” said Ned Sullivan, President of Scenic Hudson. “We have an opportunity now through The Trust’s grant to unite states and farmers to become advocates for sustainable agriculture practices so we can have a stronger voice in Washington.”

On Long Island and In Westchester

Our suburban divisions are cultivating a food system that’s better for farmers, consumers, and the environment

The Long Island Community Foundation, in partnership with All for the East End, made grants in five towns totaling $1,397,400 to address food insecurity by connecting organic farms with local pantries in need of healthy food during the pandemic.

Friends of Hilltop Hanover Farm was awarded a $32,000 grant from the Westchester Community Foundation for equipment costs and a coordinator to make sure that fresh produce grown by volunteers and farm staff goes to food pantries.
FIRST PERSON: PLAYWRIGHT EBONI BOOTH

The Bronx-born playwright and actress Eboni Booth is one of the 2021 New York Community Trust’s Helen Merrill Award for Playwriting recipients, selected by an advisory panel of theater professionals. Her award came with a $25,000 cash prize. Booth’s Off-Broadway playwriting debut came in January 2020 when Paris was staged at the Atlantic Theater Company.

W WHEN I was about ten, my mom saw an ad about auditions for a Lehman College production of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory—and I got the part of Charlie. There was something about that communal experience that has kept me attached to theater: being in such close proximity, physically, artistically, and emotionally. I just love the power of the group.

After I finished college, I came back to New York to pursue acting and it just took forever. I waited tables and bartended for so long. As thrilling as it was to be able to fall into a community Off and Off-Off Broadway, it wasn’t quite enough to sustain me.

A NEW CAREER

A friend suggested that I try playwriting. I began writing plays and applied to Juilliard and didn’t get in. Two years later, I got in and it was a real shift for me. It changed my life.

It was a practical decision to have this other career option of writing, but then I felt that it was a different kind of ownership that I hadn’t realized was so important to me. It was completely thrilling.

I want to be able to write what I want to write. Sure, it would be fun to write Cats 2 or Jurassic Park 10, but I also feel beholden. I want to write the stories that are alive inside of me and that are born of my joy, my pain, my sadness, and my questions, and that’s very much informed by being Black and by being in this world.

I’d love to find a way to keep toggling between acting and writing, but one thing the Helen Merrill Award will give me is financial flexibility: to not feel like I have to run for the nearest dollar coming my way.

I wrote Paris [a play that focuses on underpaid workers at a big box store] because I really wanted to write about a certain kind of financial strain that felt all encompassing, so I really know the power of the gift of this money and how it can help you stay ahead, and just alleviate so much stress. It’s truly transformative.

To be recognized by my peers at a time when I felt adrift because of the pandemic and so far from the world of theater gave this so much more meaning to me. It feels like a community gift. To have folks say: ‘We’re still listening, we’re still paying attention; we believe in you, and we think you should keep writing’—I think this message came just at the right time and was unbelievably generous and meaningful.”

The Power of Playwriting

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Eboni Booth in the Atlantic Theater Company’s world premiere of Paris in 2020, written by Eboni Booth and directed by Knud Adams. Photo by Ahron R. Foster

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Providing everything from daycare and job training to cooking classes and virtual yoga, our city’s 42 settlement houses have been a valuable resource for New Yorkers for over a century.

These community anchors undertook the herculean effort of responding to clients’ emergency needs during the COVID-19 pandemic with little additional government funding. Now they are adapting services to reflect the longer-term realities of the pandemic, with older adults increasingly staying home.

To assist, The Trust has made grants totaling $250,000 to Lenox Hill Neighborhood House to offer technology classes and connect more older adult clients to virtual services, and University Settlement Society of New York to expand and enhance a program for homebound Chinese and Latinx older adults.

These grants are made possible by funds in The Trust created by donors who cared about older adults: The Rhodebeck Fund for the Elderly, the Samuel and Thomas Pringle Memorial, the Katharine Park Fund for the Elderly, and the Attillo and Myrtle Jackson Fund. The legacies of their fund founders live on through these grants that are making our city a better place to grow old.