



#SurvivedAndPunished

Survivor Defense as Abolitionist Praxis

A Collaborative Toolkit created by
Love and Protect | Survived and Punished



Survivor Defense as Abolitionist Practice

For many survivors, the experiences of domestic violence, rape, and other forms of gender violence are bound up with systems of incarceration and police violence. Nearly 60% of people in women's prisons nationwide, and as many as 94% of some women's prison populations, have a history of physical or sexual abuse before being incarcerated.

Survivor defense committees are critical because they help to secure freedom for criminalized survivors. They can transform not only the lives of criminalized survivors but also those who come to their defense.

They are an exercise in building collective power and care against staggering odds.

Effective defense campaigns provide thousands of people with opportunities to demonstrate care for criminalized individuals through various tactics, including letter writing, financial support, prison visits, and more. They connect people in a heartfelt, direct way that teaches specific lessons about the brutality of prisons. And this can change minds and hearts, helping people to (hopefully) develop more radical politics. In the end, a practice of abolitionist care underscores that our fates are intertwined and our liberation is interconnected. As such, defense campaigns guided by an ethic and practice of care can be powerful strategies to lead us towards abolition.

#SurvivedAndPunished: Survivor Defense as Abolitionist Praxis is a collection of tools, tips, lessons and resources developed through our own experiences. It is also an effort to document and reflect on our own movement work. It is important for us to document especially because our organizing work has been led by Black women, women of color, immigrants and queer/trans people, who are so often erased from history. We hope to preserve some of these histories, build solidarity, and share hope as we continue our collective struggle.

This toolkit is a collaborative project created by members of Love & Protect and Survived & Punished.

Contributing writers: Alisa Bierria, Anoop Prasad, Ash Stephens, Ayanna Banks Harris, Colby Lenz, Emily Suh, Emily Thuma, Fátima Kabrona, Hyejin Shim, Mariame Kaba, Maya Schenwar, Neda Said, Rachel Caidor, Saira Hussain, Stacy Suh, Sumayya Coleman

Edited by: Alisa Bierria, Hyejin Shim, Mariame Kaba, Stacy Suh

Designed by: Antonia Clifford

1st edition printed June 2017

Websites loveandprotect.org | survivedandpunished.org

Twitter @loveprotectorg | @survivepunish

Facebook @loveprotectorg | @survivedandpunished

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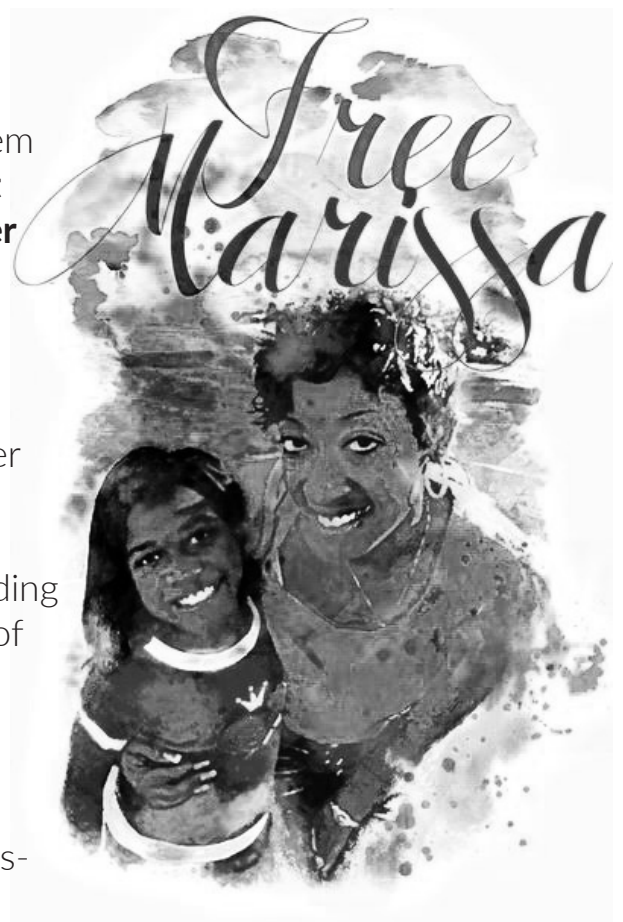
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The movement to #FreeMarissa: Building towards #Survived And Punished

In 2010, Marissa Alexander, a mother of three from Jacksonville, FL, was violently attacked by her abusive, estranged husband. Just nine days after giving birth, Marissa's husband strangled her, and tried to prevent her from escaping. Marissa was able to make it to the garage where her car was parked but could not open the garage door. Trapped, she retrieved her permitted gun from the car and re-entered her home where her husband lunged at her, yelling, "Bitch, I will kill you." At that moment, Marissa fired a single warning shot upwards into the wall, causing no injuries. Although her husband freely admitted that he attacked Marissa and other women, Marissa was arrested and charged with three counts of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. She was denied Stand Your Ground immunity around the same time a jury accepted self-defense as justification to acquit George Zimmerman for murdering a Black teenager, Trayvon Martin. Prosecuted and found guilty by a jury that deliberated for 12 minutes, Marissa was sentenced to a mandatory minimum of 20 years in prison.

Marissa, who defended herself against her abusive husband, now had to defend herself against a system that punished her for surviving violence. **She is just one of thousands criminalized for surviving gender violence.**

In early 2013, the national *Free Marissa Now (FMN) Mobilization Campaign* was launched. FMN was volunteer run and collaborated with Marissa and her mother, Mrs. Helen Jenkins. FMN modeled how an anti-domestic violence grassroots campaign could organize across movements without relying on funding that controlled our work. It operated on principles of love for our communities, accountability to Marissa and our base of support, peaceful protest, and self-sufficiency. The campaign educated communities about the intersections of domestic violence and criminalization, and cultivated a strong base of grassroots supporters. Strategies included launching a website that shared grassroots art and organizing resources; ongoing press engagements; organizing events in various cities; bridging communication between Marissa and her supporters; producing opportunities to take individual and collective action; and publishing educational materials such as fact sheets and policy papers. FMN also outreached to faith



communities, legislators, universities, and others to build coalitions. Being strengthened by an active and broad base of support allowed FMN to meaningfully influence public discourse about Marissa's case and the criminalization of survivors generally. That broad base was crucial as we brought our demands to meetings with the Office of Violence Against Women, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and various Florida-based politicians and organizations.

In December 2013, Project NIA and Love & Protect (formerly known as CAFMA: Chicago Alliance to Free Marissa Alexander) hosted its first fundraiser in Chicago for the Marissa Alexander Legal Defense Fund. In February 2014, Marissa supporters convened an art party to create hundreds of buttons, t-shirts, canvas bags and more. Brown & Proud Press created and donated Free Marissa zines. Project NIA donated hundreds of posters. The Free Marissa Store officially launched and was run out of the home of CAFMA co-founder Ayanna Banks Harris. CAFMA co-founder Mariame Kaba leveraged her social media following to solicit donations from Marissa supporters worldwide. The store and the diverse forms of support that came in through CAFMA and the national Free Marissa Now campaign provided tremendous material and emotional support for Marissa. **Moreover, it catalyzed a larger movement for Black women and women of color harmed by gender violence and criminalization.**

In the midst of a highly visible campaign that raised \$125,000 for Marissa's legal defense, Marissa's legal team successfully appealed the guilty verdict. In response, the prosecutor threatened to triple the original sentence into a 60 year mandatory sentence in a new trial. Because of this manipulative and violent threat, Marissa was coerced into a plea deal of 3 years behind bars (which included time served, but meant she had to return to prison for another 65 days) and 2 years in house detention while being forced to wear and pay for a surveillance ankle monitor. Marissa Alexander was finally freed on January 27, 2017.

Since the campaign to free Marissa, new defense campaigns have been launched and existing campaigns amplified, including organized efforts to free other criminalized survivors like Nan-Hui Jo, Kelly Savage, Ky Peterson, Cherelle Baldwin, Eisha Love, Ny Nourn, Yazmin Elias, Naomi Freeman, Alisha Walker, Bresha Meadows, and so many more. During the #StandWithNanHui campaign, organizers from SWNH and Free Marissa Now campaigns connected and shared strategies and experiences. Shortly after the SWNH campaign, organizers from FMN, SWNH, CAFMA (now known as Love & Protect) and California Coalition for Women Prisoners started the national organizing project, Survived and Punished, to build a larger movement to support survivors and abolish gender violence, policing, prisons and deportations.



Why create a Defense Committee?

While no survivor's situation is simple, criminalization further complicates ways out of abuse, harm and trauma. Criminalization includes policing, prosecution, trial, incarceration and deportation, and fighting against criminalization requires extensive resources, support, and collaboration. Survivors – particularly low-income, Black, and immigrant survivors – often do not have access to the quality legal support, money, or community support they need to successfully fight their criminalization.

Defense committees are a way that survivors and their supporters can build collective power towards freedom.

A defense committee is a group of people that come together for the common goal of supporting and freeing a survivor. They may help recruit lawyers, raise money, provide emotional support, create art, launch (social) media campaigns, and organize communities to show up to court dates. Some defense committees use organizing tactics to pressure prosecutors or other targets on the case to drop the charges against a survivor. Defense committees might decide to organize broad-based support (national or international), to secure the survivor's freedom.

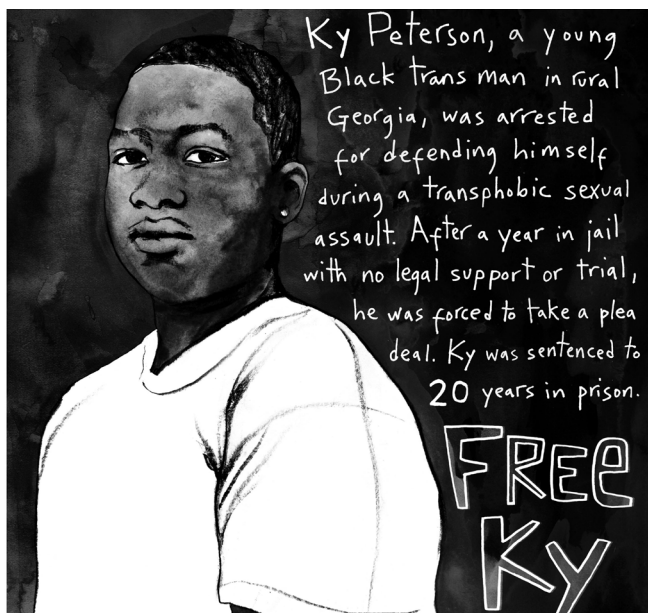
At their best, defense committees can serve a much larger range of purposes than a legal team or a domestic violence advocate acting on their own. Sometimes, advocates and attorneys can be pushed to provide more types of support, but engaging advocates to increase their direct support of criminalized survivors can require time-consuming and long-term effort. Defense campaigns allow for all of a survivor's needs to be considered, not just some. They also make space for there to be a diversity of strategies that can make huge impacts on the outcome of a case. Defense committees can help educate the public about the impacts and intersections of racialized criminalization and gender violence. Our favorite defense committees consistently make connections between individual cases and the broader forces and impacts of criminalization, including making connections between existing freedom campaigns.



Gender Justice, Criminalization, & the Anti-violence Movement

In America, three women a day are killed by intimate partners. 1 in 3 women, and 1 in 4 men, have experienced physical abuse from an intimate partner within their lifetime. According to RAINN (Rape Abuse & Incest National Network), someone in the U.S. is sexually assaulted every 98 seconds. And according to studies by the Center for Disease Control and the National Coalition on Anti Violence Programs, transgender and queer people experience higher rates of both intimate partner violence and sexual assault.

Anti-violence advocates have regularly responded to these epidemic rates of domestic and sexual violence by partnering with police and district attorneys—both to try to find protection for survivors, and to empower the criminal legal system to intervene in gender violence by treating it as a crime. However, over the past four decades, this strategy has not only failed to significantly curb gender violence; it has, in the process, made the systemic roots of this violence more difficult to perceive. In aligning themselves with a deadly and racist legal system, anti-violence advocates have indeed sought safety from the most regular purveyors of insecurity and violence against marginalized people. **The consequences of this now deeply-entrenched alliance between anti-violence advocates and the criminal legal system have fallen most harmfully on the shoulders of Black, immigrant, women of color, trans, queer, disabled and poor survivors.** Some high-profile examples include:



Ky Peterson, who, after defending himself against a brutal sexual assault, was told that he, as a transman, was not a “believable victim” of rape. He was bullied into signing a “plea deal” of 20 years in prison.

Marcela Rodriguez, who, after calling the police during a domestic violence incident, was arrested and turned over to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) by those very police. ICE detained her and forced her into deportation proceedings.



Nan-Hui Jo, who fled her abusive American citizen partner with her child to seek safety for her and her young daughter. She was then arrested for child abduction, and the district attorney who prosecuted her tried to portray her as a manipulative illegal immigrant seeking to cheat U.S. systems, calling her a “tiger mom” who was too competent to be a victim.

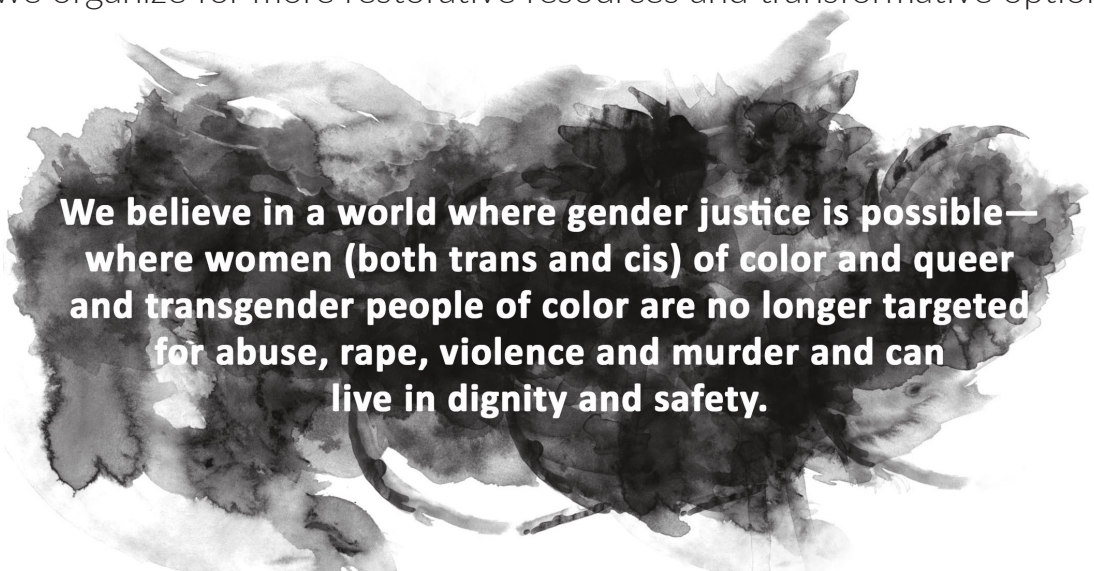
The New Jersey 4, who were called a “killer lesbian gang” by both prosecutors and media after they defended themselves against racist, misogynistic and homophobic sexual violence in a gentrified neighborhood.

Marissa Alexander, who defended her life from her abusive husband by firing one warning shot that caused no harm. She was targeted by a racist smear campaign by Florida State Attorney Angela Corey designed to frame her as an “angry black woman,” but never as a victim of domestic violence. She was threatened with up to sixty years in prison.

These and many more survivors are criminalized through policies and practices that – disproportionately and often by design – target poor communities of color, such as mandatory minimums, the War on Drugs, Secure Communities, and increased police/immigration enforcement authority. Many did not receive support from anti-violence organizations, even when they sought it out. While the anti-violence movement entrusts the criminal legal system with protecting survivors and creating safety, it does not systematically address the re-traumatization and further abuse by prosecutors, police, prisons and detention centers. Relying on criminalization to solve violence pushes many survivors further into silence, fear and isolation, and many survivors may fear the consequences of criminalization (such as police violence, deportation, mutual arrest, losing a co-parent, losing child custody) more than they fear the abuse. The institutionalization of this racialized “good victim/bad criminal” dichotomy, including within the anti-violence movement, has left a huge portion of survivors, overwhelmingly Black women, without recognition - much less support - from the anti-violence movement.

“Survivors” include people with prior arrests and criminal records, undocumented immigrants, sex workers and people who work in street economies, and people who use or sell substances, so it is important to challenge the idea that “survivors” and “criminals” are two diametrically opposed groups.

We affirm the lives and self-determination of all survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Knowing that abuse and incarceration are both meant to isolate and diminish the person, we organize for more restorative resources and transformative options for survivors.



**We believe in a world where gender justice is possible—
where women (both trans and cis) of color and queer
and transgender people of color are no longer targeted
for abuse, rape, violence and murder and can
live in dignity and safety.**

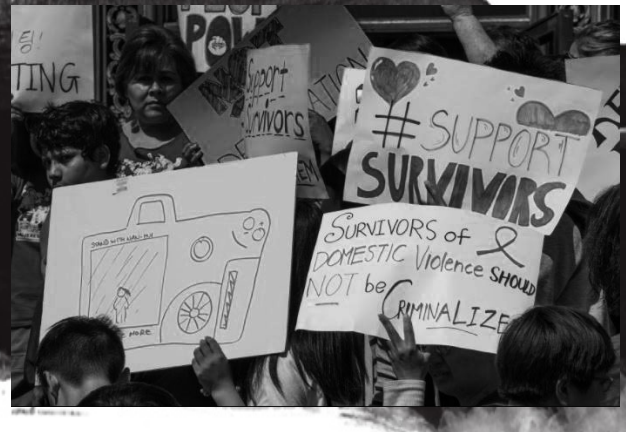
Prison Abolition as Framework & Practice

Within our current systems, punishment and imprisonment are often seen as necessary responses to the social problems of violence, poverty, and mental illness. Abolition moves us toward a world where we build alternatives that exist outside of retributive structures that see caging and isolating people as “justice.” A prison abolition framework recognizes the catastrophic consequences of gender violence and the increased destruction that incarceration causes.

An abolitionist framework recognizes that criminalization and incarceration as strategies for addressing violence usually bring more targeted policing upon Black and immigrant communities without providing meaningful safety for survivors.

When Black people are incarcerated in state prisons at 5 times the rate of white people (in some states, the rate is 10:1), and up to 94% of some women’s prisons populations are survivors of sexual assault or physical abuse, we must ask how the criminalization of our communities shape our vision of what anti-violence work should look like.

Holding an abolitionist framework is key in survivor defense campaigns because it creates more room for a survivor to be human. Abolitionism centers the fact that even if the survivor may not fit a “perfect victim” paradigm, they are still deserving of compassion, safety and respect. This framework situates the case in a broader context, facilitates solidarity with other campaigns, highlights societal patterns and their root causes, helps to build a movement, and demands that we try for larger and more creative solutions.



Anti-violence advocacy is more effective when we challenge restrictive views of what a “survivor” looks like in terms of gender, race, criminal record and so on. When running a defense campaign, it is helpful to use language that creates more space for everyone, such as all survivors deserve support, or no one is illegal. As we work to dismantle systems of oppression, including criminal punishment systems, we are also seeking to develop more creative and responsive ways to support survivors with diverse needs and contexts, transform the political conditions that uphold oppression and harm, affirm values and practices that end cycles of violence, and support people who have been abusive to take accountability in meaningful and specific ways.

For more on Prison Abolition, see:
Free Us All by Mariame Kaba (http://bit.ly/freeusall_mk)
Critical Resistance Abolition Now Reader (<http://bit.ly/CRabolitionreader>)

A History of Defense Campaigns

Defense campaigns have been an integral part of social movement organizing in the United States for more than a century. They have commonly been used as a form of resistance to governmental political repression against radical and progressive movements, including racial justice, labor, indigenous sovereignty, and anti-imperialist struggles. Social movements have a legacy of building a “people’s defense” to save the lives of their members who become political prisoners targeted for execution or incarceration. During the long black freedom struggle of the twentieth century, activists also campaigned for people facing the death penalty or life imprisonment for crimes they didn’t commit or for physically defending themselves from racial and sexual violence.

Scottsboro Boys (1931) and Rosa Lee Ingram (1948)

Two especially powerful mid-century examples include the campaign to free the “Scottsboro Boys,” a group of nine black teenagers falsely accused of raping two white women in Alabama in 1931, and the campaign to free Rosa Lee Ingram and her two sons, who were convicted of murdering a white man in Georgia in 1948. John Stratford had harassed Ingram for years before her sixteen-year-old son struck him in the head to stop him from beating and attempting to sexually assault his mother. Black women activists were at the helm of a broad, multi-year campaign that focused initially on saving the Ingrams from death by electrocution and then worked to free them from prison; the family was finally released in 1959.

Joan Little (1974)

In the 1970s, several defense campaigns built on the legacy of the mobilization to free Rosa Lee Ingram and her sons and brought even greater visibility to the ways racism, sexism, sexual violence, and state violence converged in the lives of black women, indigenous women, and other women of color. The most far-reaching of these was the campaign to defend Joan Little (1974–75), a twenty-year-old black woman prisoner in North Carolina who faced the death penalty for killing a white male guard in self-defense against his violent sexual attack in her cell. The North Carolina-based Joan Little Defense Fund served as the anchor for a nationwide movement of civil rights, black liberation, feminist, and prisoner rights activists. Little was acquitted, thanks in no small part to this coalitional effort.



Defense campaigns involve storytelling, media-making, fundraising, direct action organizing, and - perhaps most importantly - building relationships, coalitions, and alliances. The aforementioned examples were literal and urgent fights for individual people’s lives, but they were also movement-building moments. Activists used the power of personal story to communicate the racial, gender, and economic injustices embedded in the criminal legal system, and the interconnections between their respective struggles.

Tips, Tools & Skills for Defense Campaigns

This next section is dedicated to sharing some of the lessons we've learned along the way, from Marissa's campaign and beyond.

Building the actual Committee

How do you recruit people to join your defense committee?

The Chicago Alliance to Free Marissa Alexander (CAFMA) originated after a community teach-in organized and facilitated by Project NIA founder, Mariame Kaba. Mariame developed a curriculum and invited community members to attend the teach-in. At the end of the teach-in, she asked if anyone was interested in potentially creating a group that could continue to support Marissa.

Over a dozen people volunteered to meet to discuss how to work together. The vast majority of those who volunteered had never engaged in participatory/mass defense. Mariame initially told the volunteers that her limited capacity would preclude any sustained participation in forming a committee. She offered herself as a resource if needed. When it became clear, however, that efforts to form a group were stalled, Mariame reached out to a couple of volunteers from the teach-in and together they established what became known as CAFMA.

There are some important lessons to glean from this experience:

- 1 Be intentional in establishing your committee.** If you are going to use a workshop/teach-in as your way to recruit people to establish a defense committee, be explicit about this from the start. The organizers of the teach-in should treat it as an opportunity to recruit people to the committee.
- 2 Some experience in building an organization matters.** While it's possible to establish a committee without any people who've previously built organization, it is helpful if at least one person has such experience. It will make it easier to figure out what you don't know and limit some initial frustrations.
- 3 In recruiting defense committee members, focus on reflecting the diversity of your community.** This is not always easy and will mean adjusting things like meeting times, making sure to meet in accessible spaces, offering childcare at some meetings, and more. But potential members are everywhere, and it's up to you to find them and invite them to join you.
- 4 A small group is good for establishing a defense committee. Your committee doesn't have to be big.** A small group of dedicated people is always better than a big group of inconsistent participants.

There are of course many other ways to recruit people to start your defense committee.

- You can for example create flyers to get the word out about your committee and post them in public places and at other community organizations.
- You can create a Facebook invitation to let people know about what you are planning.
- You can staff outreach tables at community events and in local spaces like cafes, book-stores, supermarkets, anywhere that people gather.

Notes for your work:

What values are important to you in finding committee members?

What length and type of commitment will be asked of them?

On Supporting Survivors

Survivors who are criminalized may have spent years surviving physical, sexual, and emotional violence. Criminalization and incarceration use many of the same tactics as abusive partners do. For example, abusive partners may attempt to assert power over survivors through surveillance, limiting who they can talk to, telling them that no one will believe them, controlling their movements, and creating environments of punishment and fear. In courts, prisons, jails and detention centers, people experience similar violence through aggressive character assassinations, shackling, lack of control over one's movements, recorded phone calls, screened mail, solitary confinement, and verbal, physical or sexual abuse from guards. It is important to uplift the survivor and not to replicate these cycles of abuse.

Uplift survivor self-determination and create the process together

Both abuse and the violence of the criminal legal system strip people of a sense of control over their lives. Intervening in this is crucial. While it can be difficult due to many barriers to communicating with people inside, it is necessary for building trust and reducing the chances that you will re-traumatize the survivor.

- Include the survivor in as many aspects of their defense as possible.
- When possible, ask them what they want, how they want their stories to be told, if there are things they don't want shared, and what they think of certain strategies.
- Let the survivor decide the degree and type of communication they have with you.
- Be mindful of how the survivor names themselves (eg: pronouns) and how they narrate their experience. Follow their lead and use the language that they use.

Decrease isolation

Isolation is fundamental to abuse because it prevents survivors from accessing supportive people that would help interrupt the violence.

- Integrate letter writing into all events. Letters make a huge difference in reminding survivors that they are loved, believed and cared for.
- Be careful about discussing the details of the incident for which the survivor is incarcerated, as communications are monitored.
- If the survivor is interested in receiving books, consider sending ones that highlight resilience around surviving trauma.
- Several members of the committee should consistently communicate with the survivor.



Reinforce that the violence the survivor experienced was not their fault

Abusive relationships and the state maintain power and control by making survivors believe that they caused the violence to happen.

- Affirm that everyone has the right to live free of fear and violence.
- Affirm that you believe them, that the abuse was real, and that they did not deserve it.
- If the survivor expresses anger at the people and systems who have abused them, allow room for that anger.
- When self-blame comes up, let them know that there is nothing they did to deserve or bring on the abuse. Reaffirm that no one ever deserves to live in fear.

Anticipate connecting the survivor with counseling and other resources after release

Community support continues beyond survivor release.

- Consider low-cost mental health support services like counseling as a likely need.
- Help secure resources to support with housing, ongoing legal issues (such as parental rights), and other basic needs.
- Actively safety plan with the survivor if the threat of violence from an abusive person remains a factor in their lives.

Notes for your work

In what ways have criminalization and incarceration impacted your survivor? How might this mirror the interpersonal violence they experienced?

What are ways your defense committee can interrupt these dynamics, and avoid replicating cycles of abuse?

On Supporting Immigrant Survivors

Criminalized survivors who are not US citizens face indefinite immigration detention and deportation, even after serving out their sentence — and even if they are legal permanent residents (green card holders). Community organizing can help release a survivor from immigration custody. Getting media coverage, public demonstrations, call-ins, and contacting local elected officials for support can be effective. These are some considerations that address potential consequences of criminalization for immigrant survivors.



Gather information:

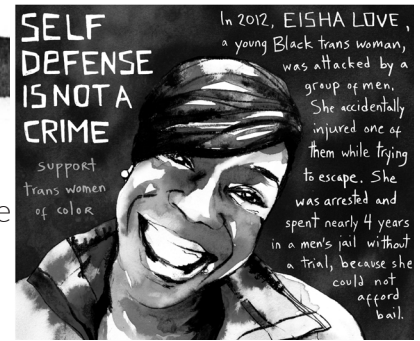
- Does the criminal defense attorney understand the immigration system? Does the survivor face potential immigration consequences for the crime they are being charged with or for the conviction? Criminal convictions and plea deals have different immigration consequences. Under the Trump regime, undocumented immigrants who have a pending criminal charge or those who may have “committed a chargeable offense” could be targeted for deportations.
- Do they have any prior criminal convictions? Even a DUI from 15 years ago could send someone into deportation proceedings.
- What is the local policy on immigrants who come into contact with the criminal justice system (arrest, criminal conviction, etc)? Does your local law enforcement hold immigrants for extra time or share booking information to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)?
- Does the survivor have an immigration attorney? If not, someone close to the survivor or an organizer should get authorization to be notified (http://bit.ly/ice_notify) if/when they are moved to immigration detention (or transferred between detention centers). What detention centers are they likely to be taken to?
- What is their immigration history? This includes: circumstances for migration, current immigration status, and prior deportation orders.
- Are they eligible for immigration relief through the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) or a U Visa?
 - VAWA allows survivors to self-petition for immigration status (http://bit.ly/uscis_vawa).
 - U Visas (http://bit.ly/uscis_uvisa) are specifically for “victims of crime” and thus require cooperation with police and prosecutors in prosecuting a “perpetrator of crime.”
 - The form(s) of immigration relief the survivor is applying for will likely impact your strategy and messaging, particularly for pressuring ICE or legal officials directly.

Take action

- Build community support. What kind of connections or network does the survivor have? Can they write letters of support for the court affirming that the person is not a threat or a flight risk? Pack the court? Write letters and provide emotional support to the survivor?
- Identify jurisdiction over the survivor’s release from immigration detention. Local ICE office? Customs and Border Protection (CBP/Border Patrol)? Has the case gone to an immigration judge yet? (Bond hearings are allowed to be scheduled for detained people at least six months after they go into custody.)
- Prepare an action plan for each scenario detailing different outcomes and targets. Depending on the charge, conviction, and sentence, the survivor may be turned over to ICE right away for detention/

On Supporting Transgender Survivors

Transgender and gender non-conforming (GNC) people experience additional stigma and oppression as criminalized survivors because systemic transphobia compounds marginalization. Transgender and GNC people face disproportionate (and often lethal) violence and criminalization, especially trans women of color. Nearly one in six transgender people in the US — and nearly half of all Black transgender people — have been imprisoned. These realities create an urgent need to organize defense committees for trans and GNC survivors.



Challenging Transphobia & Supporting Survivors

- **In the courtroom:** Trans survivors will likely face misnaming, misgendering, denial of survivor status, and victim blaming — all harms that reinforce violence against criminalized trans survivors. We recommend organizing court support as much as possible for trans survivors in order to combat the impacts of this court violence and to demonstrate strong community support and resistance.
- **Support self-determined representation:** Make sure to communicate directly with the survivor about how they want to be represented in court proceedings and in any public campaign messaging (inclusive of name and pronoun). Self-determined messaging that also challenges anti-trans criminalization can help mitigate the violence of court and other legal proceedings. A person's legal name may not be the name they go by, so supporters may need to ask/insist that the attorney bring this issue to the judge and establish that the person should be called by the name they go by. It may or may not be successful depending on the judge, but it can be meaningful advocacy. It is important to listen to and respect the person being supported — they may change their name or pronoun at any point, they may want to be referred to differently in different settings (like with family versus community, or in media versus close relationships).
- **Educating the legal team:** Provide information for the legal team to support effective and respectful communication with and in defense of trans survivors. Some legal teams will need basic info/education (like DV 101 & Trans 101), but make sure to also share information on how trans survivors are marginalized and criminalized in particular. This information can be key to a successful legal defense.
- **Accessing services:** Transphobia will likely impact survivors at all points of attempting to access safety and/or services (including possible encounters with the police, DV services, etc.). Where possible, make sure service referrals can provide effective and respectful support for trans/GNC people. We recommend that supporters offer to accompany criminalized survivors to appointments, court dates, etc. It can also be useful, when possible and desired, for supporters to communicate with service providers ahead of time to share that a trans or GNC person is coming in for services, and make requests about how they can best be treated respectfully and what should be avoided (like invasive questioning).
- **Support while incarcerated:** Trans and GNC people face severe forms of abuse, neglect and isolation while incarcerated. Transphobia can increase vulnerability to violence from law enforcement and from other incarcerated people. For these reasons, we recommend that supporters be available as much as possible to provide direct support to survivors through phone calls, social or legal visits, and letter-writing. Where possible, help connect survivors to additional resources to support their survival while incarcerated, like community organizations that advocate with and for incarcerated people. Advocates can also help incarcerated survivors get a legal name change — it takes extra work but is often possible.
- **Campaign leadership:** If your defense committee is not trans/GNC/queer-led, we recommend partnering with trans/GNC/queer local groups/organizers where possible, or connecting with groups with national reach that organize for trans liberation, like Black & Pink, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, and the Transgender, Gender-Variant, Intersex Justice Project.

Letter-writing to Incarcerated Survivors

Writing to incarcerated survivors is absolutely key for defense campaigns and any/all organizing that is in support of people inside.

Goals of letter-writing to incarcerated survivors:

- Strengthen our connection to criminalized survivors and collectively resist their disappearance;
- Respect and promote the leadership of incarcerated survivors by responding to requests for information and by asking for their input in all matters of their survival and release;
- Connect incarcerated survivors with information, resources and support;
- Monitor and resist abusive prison conditions;
- Inform us of upcoming release possibilities for incarcerated survivors, including parole hearings and commutation processes, so that we can advocate with survivors for their release;
- Resist the isolation that incarceration of all forms creates, paying particular attention to how incarcerated women and transgender people disproportionately suffer the loss of outside support systems;
- Express our solidarity with incarcerated survivors.

Values that guide our communication with incarcerated survivors:

- Survived & Punished considers direct communication with incarcerated survivors to be a critical part of building a movement to release survivors and decriminalize survival.
- We offer non-judgmental support from a survivor empowerment perspective.
- We encourage correspondence that offers encouragement, validation, and concrete support.
- We believe that incarcerated survivors are the experts on their own lives. Those of us who have not survived incarceration are not the experts.
- We recognize that the violence and control used by prison staff against incarcerated survivors mirrors the abuse that many have experienced from abusive partners.
- We recognize abusive acts of prison staff as part of a system designed to oppress and control people in prison, especially people of color, immigrants, transgender people, poor people and people with disabilities.
- We are in solidarity with and support the rights of all incarcerated people. We do not support “divide and conquer” strategies that frame domestic violence survivors as “good” prisoners in comparison with “bad” prisoners who “deserve” to be incarcerated, and thus subject to state violence/abuse.

Other things to consider when writing incarcerated survivors:

- Please be aware of the scarcity of resources for incarcerated survivors and the power differential that creates — do not make commitments or promises that you cannot keep.
- Please keep in mind the mixed literacy levels among incarcerated people and try to respond appropriately — ask questions to help assess what the survivor needs and what is the most accessible way for them to receive support.
- Remember that letters will be opened by prison staff — ask survivors to let you know what they are comfortable sharing and discussing by mail.
- Please be aware of your local/state prison rules for mail sent to incarcerated people.



Navigating Relationships with Family and Loved Ones

Family and loved ones can be critical sources of trust, emotional support, connection, and advocacy for a survivor, so it is important to help maintain those bonds while they are incarcerated.

- **Connect with the survivors and their families** so they become integral to the defense campaign. Even if they do not have the capacity to take active leadership in the campaign, their insights and skills can be crucial to the strategy development. Their connection to the campaign also helps ground the organizing as responsive and mindful about the lives on the line.
- Some survivors' families/loved ones will want to be leads or participants in campaigns, so be sure to communicate about **a range of options for connection and shared leadership in the struggle.**
- **Transparency and accountability to survivors and their families is crucial** so that they do not become alienated from efforts to mobilize action. Cultivating a relationship with family members, rather than only providing them with updates, can help deepen their connection to the campaign.
- **Clarify an understanding of decision-making early on.** The campaign could co-make decisions with family members, it could create a balance of being independent from but accountable to the family, or it can manage transparent boundaries with family members. It's important to have a shared, clear understanding of the model of decision-making the campaign is following.



Notes for your work:

What has the survivor outlined about their needs regarding communication?
What kinds of communication will the campaign undertake (letter writing, visits, sending books, phone calls, etc)?

From conversations with family members or loved ones, what are their priorities in the defense campaign? What are their roles? Other concerns?

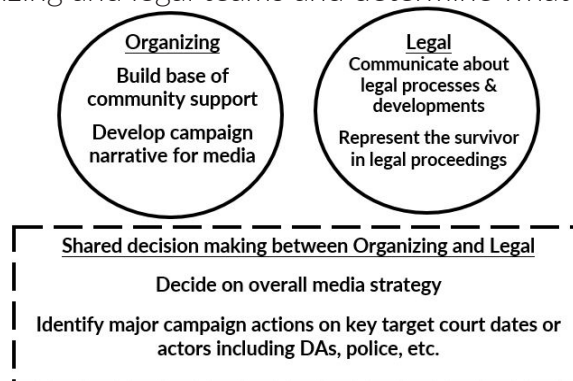
Working with Lawyers

Organizers can garner support for criminalized survivors in ways that the legal team cannot, due to constraints within the system. In defense campaigns, coordinating and aligning complementary organizing and legal strategies can be challenging. Some reasons for the challenges of working with attorneys include:

- **Fear of risks.** Lawyers may be concerned about possible repercussions on their client if they engage in advocacy strategies outside of traditional legal processes.
- **Not understanding organizing.** While you are both working to secure the survivor's freedom, lawyers may not understand how organizing can benefit their client.
- **Bad politics.** Not all attorneys prioritize lifting up and centering the experience and direction of survivors themselves and/or their closest advocates.
- **Fear of alienating judges or DAs.** They may fear that advocacy targeting judges, DAs, police, and sheriffs will harm their relationships.
- **Disagreements around the narrative of the case.** Even if the lawyer agrees with the campaign, the legal process may push them to undercut the advocacy in court.

Despite these challenges, coordination with the legal team is necessary to execute a complementary legal-organizing strategy that benefits survivors. Best practices include:

- **Empower survivors to make decisions regarding their own case.** Directly communicate with the survivor whenever possible, and if the legal team does not have experience working with incarcerated people, share best practices with the legal team.
- **Communicate directly with the survivor.** Write letters to incarcerated survivors as a first step. Find ways to call or visit in-person as an individual. Partner with a movement attorney to seek legal visit access. Let the legal team know about your direct communication.
- **Communicate about and coordinate legal and organizing strategies as much as possible.** Clarify the roles of the organizing and legal teams and determine what requires shared decision-making. This could be a model:



- Understand the legal process at the outset. Ask the legal team for the overall timeline, key dates for hearings, roles of actors in the system, and legal strategies.
- Identify tangible ways organizers can support the legal strategy. Examples include gathering community support letters for hearings, providing emotional support, or strategic communications.
- Identify concrete ways the legal team can support the organizing strategy of the defense campaign. While legal constraints exist, community based lawyering acknowledges the importance of community organizing and can advocate for the freedom of the survivor by any legal means necessary.
- Keep communication open with the legal team even if things get tense. De-escalate disagreements and operate with the assumption that everyone wants what's best for the survivor.

16 Close collaboration between lawyers and defense campaigns have lead to a number of extremely successful campaigns. Coordination is key to leverage the strengths of each strategy to secure the survivor's freedom.

Local & National Defense Campaign Organizing

The Free Marissa Now Mobilization Campaign (FMN) was a national defense campaign founded in 2013 to free Marissa Alexander. It was led by a core group of four volunteers from Jacksonville, DC, Seattle, and San Francisco, but the campaign itself included thousands of supporters around the world. Many of these supporters took action as individuals, but some were organized as local defense committees or local organizations taking collective action.

Local defense committees and organizations establish consistent networks of action and support, create local coalitional efforts across issues, and often use the politics of the case to highlight local political conditions and organizing goals. They cultivate a deep-rooted base of supporters who increase the capacity of what the national campaign can accomplish.

The national FMN campaign had four main approaches to working with local defense committees and organizations: **bridge, resource, amplify, and collaborate.**

1. **Bridge:** FMN maintained consistent communication with Marissa Alexander and her family, building trust and a working partnership that ensured that campaign efforts were transparent and accountable to the people they impacted most. As one consistent point of connection between organizers and Marissa and her family, FMN was able to bring insights and updates from Marissa and her family to our local partners, which helped organizers develop a meaningful connection to the person behind the hashtag and the people who love her. Local committees also bridged the national campaign to local efforts, helping us understand how to effectively support local organizing.

2. **Resource:** Local and national defense committees can cultivate a mutual relationship of sharing resources. FMN established a central locus of organizing that included a website with resources such as fact sheets and consistent updates about Marissa's case and the campaign, a press list to maintain a media presence, social media and an email listserv to send important updates and calls to action to thousands of supporters, and a platform to produce ongoing opportunities to take action. Local groups used resources on the website to support their mobilization efforts. In turn, local committees produced their own crucial resources and had the capacity to develop long-term resource projects. For example, CAF-MA created resources that had long-term national impact, such as the #FreeMarissa store which raised tens of thousands of dollars for Marissa's defense fund, and the No Selves to Defend art exhibit that helped situate Marissa's case in a historical context of other women of color criminalized for self-defense.

3. **Amplify:** The FMN campaign used its national platform to amplify innovative strategies developed by local committees, helping to make local strategies and resources accessible to a wider range of people. Conversely, local committees amplified organizing calls for action stemming from the national campaign through social media and their own networks.

4. **Collaborate:** Collaboration between local committees and the national campaign included coordinating to maximize impact and co-organizing events. For example, FMN organized specific days or weeks of action (usually based on meaningful dates such as Marissa's birthday or the anniversary of her trial), which created opportunities for coordinated local mobilization efforts across the country. FMN also worked together with local groups to organize events such as the Standing Our Ground Week of Action events in Jacksonville, which was co-organized with the Atlanta-based organization, Project South, and other local organizational members of the regional Southern Movement Assembly.

Growing the Visibility of Your Movement through Organizational Endorsements

One powerful way to grow support for your defense campaign is by gathering endorsements from supportive organizations. The campaigns to free Marissa Alexander, Nan-Hui Jo, and Bresha Meadows garnered support from hundreds of organizations nationwide, and all three campaigns made a strategic push to get sign-ons from anti-violence organizations.

1. Write a brief statement with the basic story and demands. Example from the #FreeBresha campaign: “Survivors of domestic and sexual violence, anti-violence victim advocates, child safety/youth advocates, and many others support the call to Free Bresha Meadows. Bresha and all child victims of violence should be loved and supported, their well-being should be prioritized, and they should be given the crucial resources that they need to recover. We endorse the call to free Bresha Meadows from juvenile detention, have all charges against her dropped, and support her safety and well-being as she is reunited with her family.”

2. Post it on your website and insert an online form

(like a Google form) for organizational endorsers to sign on.

- Name:
- Email:
- Organization:
- City, State:
- Phone:
- Website:
- Twitter:
- Facebook:



3. Outreach to all the supportive organizations you can think of, and prioritize targeted outreach to allies that would be especially strategic to have. Because criminalized survivors experience so much targeted character assassination, consider focusing on building up support from anti-violence organizations as a way of building up more institutional support for them. Sometimes prosecutors claim to be domestic violence experts; it will be harder for them to do so when hundreds of anti-violence groups, including prominent and local ones, publicly support the survivor in question.

4. Keep an updated list of endorsers displayed on your website. Make all the support visible and invite people to help grow the movement!

5. Keep your endorsers updated on actions they can take to support, or on specific requests you may have (ex: asking each organization to make 15 calls for a day of action, or send in faxes or letters to a specific office, asking local or national anti-violence organizations to be a media contact for a press release or action, etc.).

6. Organizational endorsements help ground how you define the narrative. For example, endorsements from domestic violence organizations helps strengthen public recognition that domestic violence is a critical part of the story. Use the endorsements strategically, such as naming them as a show of the broad base of solidarity in a press release or creating a poster that lists all the endorsing organizations, who can also help circulate the poster widely.

7. For reference, please see the endorsement pages of the following campaigns:

Free Marissa Now http://bit.ly/endorse_marissa

Stand With Nan-Hui http://bit.ly/endorse_nh

Free Bresha http://bit.ly/endorse_bresha



Planning and Organizing Events

Hosting events can be a good way to recruit new people to your defense committee, to bring new supporters to the freedom campaign, and to raise public awareness. Events can also raise funds but they are not usually the quickest or most efficient way to do so. If your primary purpose for hosting an event is fundraising, consider crowdfunding or other ideas first (see page 21).

The Chicago Alliance to Free Marissa Alexander (CAFMA) hosted a number of events including film screenings, panel discussions on various topics, exhibitions, art performances, art parties and more. Be creative in planning events. Enlist support from likely and unlikely allies. CAFMA had no money to plan events so we relied on volunteer labor and in-kind donations. We leveraged our partnerships and connections to secure free space, donated food, and volunteers who were willing to speak on panels or perform at our events.

As you plan your event, here are some questions to consider.

- How does the event support the goals of your defense committee?

- Will this event be part of a larger effort (like a day/week of action)?

- Are you hoping for a big or small turnout?

- What is your budget?

- Is this event in a relatively neutral space where people will feel safe?

- Is the event accessible?

- Will the event be family friendly?

Tips

- 1** Consider using your event as an opportunity to work with a group that you want to create an alliance with.
- 2** Make sure to incorporate prisoner stories in a variety of ways (read letters, show prisoner art, invite prisoners to call in to the event, enlist family members to join the event, etc...)
- 3** Always ask for money at any and every event. If the event has no cover charge, make a pitch at some point to ask for funds to support to committee or the legal defense.
- 4** It's important to have some suggestions on hand regarding actions that people can take after leaving the event.

Popular education & Consciousness-raising

One of the most important functions of a defense committee and campaign is to raise awareness of survivors' stories and also to educate the public about all of the issues that their cases raise. CAFMA hosted popular education workshops about Marissa's case in our community where we asked participants to draw on their own experiences in order to develop critical consciousness. CAFMA also used other innovative strategies to raise public consciousness such as making a community-based exhibition.



In July 2014, CAFMA created and hosted a well-attended exhibition titled **'No Selves to Defend'** at Art in These Times Gallery in Chicago. The **'No Selves to Defend'** exhibition, which has since traveled to New York, Philadelphia and Oakland, features the stories of women of color (trans & cis) who have been criminalized for self-defense. It examines the contested meanings and historical and contemporary understandings of self-defense. The exhibition seeks to locate Marissa Alexander's story within a broader historical context and legacy. **'No Selves to Defend'** also addresses the campaigns and mobilizations that emerged to resist survivors' criminalization and demand their freedom. Finally, it considers how we can support current survivors of violence who have been criminalized for defending their lives.

No Selves to Defend includes the stories of an enslaved young woman named Celia who in 1855 defended herself from her master and was hung in Missouri, Inez Garcia who defended herself from an attack in 1974 and spent two years in Soledad State Penitentiary, and CeCe McDonald who in 2011 fought for her life against a racist and transphobic attack and was forced to serve 19 months in prison.



No Selves to Defend, co-curated by CAFMA members Rachel Caidor and Mariame Kaba, asks us to really take seriously that Black women, women of color, trans and non-trans women, and gender non-conforming people of color in particular have not been protected or even afforded the right by the criminal legal system and the institutions in its web to protect themselves.

Workshops and exhibitions are essential for educating the public throughout your defense campaign. Be creative in how you share knowledge and information.

Crowdfunding Survivor Defense

For many people, prosecution is economic violence because few can afford the expense of a legal defense. Though Marissa Alexander had a pro bono legal team, her attorneys estimated that launching an effective defense would cost approximately \$250,000 in other legal expenses. To raise enough funds to offset these costs, organizers would have to sustain a long-haul campaign through small donations from many people. Using crowdfunding sites and countless small pushes, the Marissa Alexander “Freedom Fundraiser” and a final “10 Days to Black Freedom” fundraiser raised an impressive \$125,000 for Marissa’s legal defense and the cost of Marissa’s ankle monitor worn throughout her post-incarceration confinement.

A Few Quick Tips for an Extended Crowdfunding Campaign

Decide Your Ask: Decide specifically what the money will go toward, and communicate that clearly in the text of your fundraiser. Is it money to post bond? Is it money for legal fees? Is it money for commissary, phone calls, and other support for the person behind bars? [Remember that some crowdfunding platforms do not accept fundraisers for bond or legal expenses so check in advance].

Decide Your Messaging: How will you communicate your goal in a compelling way?

- In a defense campaign, narrative is key: Tell a story, and make sure you stay true to the humanity of the person for whom you’re asking for support. If the person agrees, sharing photos also helps.
- Answer the questions: Who is the person in need of resources? What kind of help is needed, and why? (Here, you may mention the inequity and violence of the system and add a few facts/statistics). Finally, answer how people can provide that help.
- A statement from the subject of the defense campaign also helps!

Decide Your Goal Amounts: Try to break a long fundraiser up into pieces.

- In addition to our store, we set up multiple fundraising pages at different stages of the campaign. Each time, a different goal was set, based on how much was needed (i.e. the amount needed for Marissa’s ankle monitor was different than what was needed for her legal fees, and we made that clear through our messaging and goals.)
- Set micro-goals -- over the course of a day or a week -- to keep people motivated. Activate people’s sense of competition by tweeting about a goal to raise \$1,000 in a day, or \$2,000 within a week. Update people as you move closer to your goal!

Plan a Variety of Ways to Ask: CAFMA fundraised from all directions: through Twitter power-hours, Facebook appeals, events, donation jars, selling drinks, and, of course, through our now-famous #Free-Marissa store. We also sent personal email and Facebook appeals to friends, family and colleagues, invoking our personal involvement in the campaign and how much it meant to us. Talking about your own involvement in the campaign helps you connect with potential donors who may not be as familiar with the issues, but care about you -- so they give!

Keep Up the Momentum: Devise strategies for ensuring that money is coming in regularly, and that your “thermometer” continues climbing!

- Before you launch a campaign or a micro-fundraising day, have some “plants” on hand--people who have committed to giving during the fundraiser, and are also ready to spread the word about your campaign. You may ask them to donate at specific, strategic times, to boost the fundraiser’s momentum.
- If you know anyone who can give a “matching grant” of \$200 or more, ask them! Then promote a “match day,” when “every dollar will be matched up to [X amount].”

- Create a variety of memes and graphics (easily done on Canva.com), and space out their usage over the course of your fundraiser, so people regularly see something new.

Thank People: Don't forget to express your gratitude once the fundraiser has ended. Email and/or post a thank you note, describing how grateful you are, how grateful the recipient of the funds is (a statement from them is a good idea!), and how much they have contributed to the movement.

Crowdfunding Survivor Defense Pt. II: Creating an Online Store

In December 2013, the Chicago Alliance to Free Marissa Alexander hosted its first fundraiser – Dance Fundraiser for Marissa Alexander. In addition to the suggested admission fee, we sold t-shirts, posters and buttons to raise additional funds for Marissa Alexander's Legal Defense Fund. As we posted images on Twitter, supporters who didn't live in Chicago asked if we planned to make those items available. From there, the idea of having an online store was sparked.

1) Team Determine who within your organization has the capacity to maintain the store, including taking pictures of products, adding products to the online store, determining shipping costs for each item, shipping items, updating spreadsheet of funds raised, fielding emails from customers and transferring funds to the legal defense fund. Though we shipped products daily, this isn't necessary. Create a schedule that's feasible, minimally 2-3 times a week and stick with it. Ensure you publicize the days of the week shipping occurs so that supporters have an idea of when to expect their packages.

2) Online Store/Website Research an online marketplace with minimal monthly fees. CAFMA used Zibbet.com. Additionally, create a short link to be used on all marketing materials and in social media posts.


3) Inventory While CAFMA co-founder Ayanna Banks Harris began the process of opening the online store, fellow co-founder Mariame Kaba and CAFMA co-organizer Sarah-Ji Rhee hosted an art party assembling supporters to create t-shirts, buttons and zines that became the first items within our store. Additionally, supporters from throughout the world donated items to the store including Brown & Proud Press who printed zines. What proved most profitable was the No Selves to Defend Anthology conceived and edited by Mariame that placed Marissa's story in the historical context of women of color being criminalized for self-defense. Its success was due, in part, to it being a limited edition item. As a result, it was one of our more expensive items in the store yet it sold out within two weeks, raising thousands of dollars for the legal defense fund.

4) Marketing Create social media graphics using user-friendly websites like Canva.com. Use these to publicize new products, update supporters of funds raised, promote sales and more. We correlated sales with events related to Marissa's case to ensure supporters were also staying apprised. Always include your store's short link and campaign's hashtag on all marketing materials.

5) Transparency This is key to hosting a successful online store. CAFMA kept a running spreadsheet that was shared with the Free Marissa Now National Mobilization Campaign (FMN). Additionally, we regularly updated supporters via social media about how much had been raised. Since FMN hosted an online fundraiser for Marissa's legal defense fund, supporters could see us transfer funds from the store directly.



22 The running of an online store is no easy feat. It takes a committed and consistent team to ensure its success. Please research tax information in your state.



The dominant media usually do not act in the service of grassroots movements, and that's especially true in the case of the criminalization of women of color. With Marissa's case, we found that most media were consistently — and loudly — getting her story wrong. So, we decided we needed to take a direct role in pushing Marissa's true story into the public eye. The Free Marissa Now campaign learned to become an official source for journalists who were covering the case. Because we sent regular press releases to a press list we developed, we were understood as an official source and were contacted for quotes and angles from both mainstream and left media outlets. As a result, press coverage began incorporating the fact that many believed prosecuting Marissa was wrong, which put the prosecutor on the defense in the media. Press releases were also connected with organizing strategy and leveraged resources such as high-profile endorsers or widespread actions to help drive the narrative that the demand for Marissa's release was broad and powerful. Which it was!

CAFMA also made its own media. To keep Marissa's name in the spotlight, we planned a mix of long-form media publications and social media posts and events, as well as print publications, to ensure no one could forget about Marissa's case!

1. Partnerships with media outlets

- We partnered with Truthout, a social justice news organization, to produce a series of stories. These stories were written by people involved in CAFMA. Each person wrote about a different angle of Marissa's case.
- After each story was published, Truthout interviewed the activist who had authored the piece, producing a separate video feature — another piece of Marissa-related content that could be shared, discussed, and used to boost the defense committee's message on social media and beyond.
- Pitching a series to a likeminded media organization isn't always an option, but if we hadn't worked with Truthout, we could have produced these pieces on someone's blog — the more related content, the better. Each of these content pieces is an opportunity for countless new social media shares and tweets, and to bring in new supporters.
- We also produced print media related to Marissa's story. Mariame Kaba produced an anthology of poetry, essays and art that provided historical context around the concept of "No Selves to Defend," which describes how throughout history and in the present day, women of color are criminalized and punished for self-defense. After the anthology sold out in just a few days, Mariame curated a poetry zine around the same theme. Both were sold in our store, so they served as both an educational tool and a fundraising tool.

2. Social media

- Facebook and Twitter proved to be essential to CAFMA's work. The organization's page served as a central hub for Marissa-related updates, and individual CAFMA members continually appealed to their friends and connections on Facebook to support Marissa's campaign. On Twitter, CAFMA members tweeted ongoing updates, related news, and fundraising appeals. One key way in which CAFMA engaged its community was through Twitter power hours.



How to hold a Twitter power hour:

- a) **Pick a theme.** Each power hour should have a specific focus that ties in with your overall campaign. Examples: remembering incarcerated moms of color on Mother's Day, the criminalization of Black women's acts of self-defense, the intersections of reproductive justice and incarceration.
- b) **Devise a hashtag,** or decide which existing hashtag(s) you'll use. Make sure the hashtag is unique, catchy, and as short as possible. Examples: #FreeMarissa, #ForgottenMoms, #UntilMarissasFree, #31ForMarissa. Do a search to see how/if your hashtag has been used before and how.
- c) **Choose an optimal time for the power hour.** Early afternoon on a weekday is usually a good time, but make sure to pick a time that will work for several people in the group.
- d) **Decide who your primary tweeters will be and what they will do.** These people will be responsible for tweeting throughout the power hour. If you choose to ask questions during your power hour (a good strategy for encouraging people to engage), a primary designated tweeter should ask these, numbering their questions as they go. A new question can be tweeted every 10 minutes over the course of the hour.
- e) **Devise a simple image and tweet to share** that has the time and date of the power hour, as well as the hashtag(s) and what accounts to follow for more information. Images or "memes" can be created easily via Canva.com. Share the image regularly on Facebook and Twitter in the days and hours before the power hour.
- f) **Write 5-10 sample tweets, and create at least a couple of memes** that can be shared during the power hour. Store these in a pastebin (www.pastebin.com) account or on your organization's blog, and tweet out the link ahead of your power hour, so people can simply tweet out the sample links and images if they wish.
- g) **Enlist "power tweeters"** — people who are active on Twitter and have large followings — to participate in your chat.
- h) **Don't forget to thank people at the end!**
- i) **See this link** for more info on structuring and promoting your power hour: <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/twitter-chat-guide/>

Notes for your work: Twitter Power Hour

Theme:

Hashtag(s)

#

Primary Tweeters:

@
@

Time & timezone:

Example Tweet:

- **Get creative!** For example, throughout October 2014, CAFMA encouraged people to share videos of themselves on social media reading Nikky Finney's poem, "Flare," about Marissa Alexander. In October 2013, we partnered with Esther Armah for #31forMarissa, a letter-writing effort by people who identified as men to share their thoughts about domestic violence.

3. Communicating With Mainstream Media

- When it comes to legal defense committee work, you'll want to make sure any communications with reporters are on point, as cases are frequently distorted and misrepresented. Therefore, it's a good idea to develop a set of basic talking points to respond to questions from reporters (and from others in your community)! It's also important to communicate with other members of the committee to decide whether or not to speak with members of the media if an interview is requested.
- You can often forestall negative media coverage by getting ahead of the curve. This means writing and distributing press releases about events and developments in the case (so your message is out there, alongside whatever else happens to be written). Of course, press releases are also important for positive reasons: to promote your campaign and communicate the importance of freeing someone!

So, how do you write a press release? Here's an example press release that can be used as a template, written by Chicago's activist PR guru, Rachael Perrotta:

Subject line: MEDIA ALERT - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: [fill in topic]

Contact: [name, email, phone] Jane Doe, 773-555-1234,
jdoe12345@gmail.com

[date] Friday 2/26: Chicago Students March Against Budget Cuts

WHO: Students from Chicago public schools across the city will participate. This action is organized by the Chicago Students Union and other groups.

WHAT: Students and supporters from all over the city will speak out, rally and march in solidarity with the schools who will be hurt the most by budget cuts.

WHERE: The Thompson Center, 100 W Randolph.

WHEN: Friday, February 26th at 4:30 PM.

WHY: Because CPS budget cuts will inevitably have the greatest impact on the learning environments of students in less affluent communities.

[fill in event page or website] Facebook Event Page:
<https://www.facebook.com/events/174742592901812/>

Follow on Social Media: #WheresTheFunds and #FedUpFriday

When Do You Stop?

How do you know when a campaign is over? These decisions must always happen on a case-by-case basis, but it helps if, when a defense committee initially convenes, the members have a common goal in mind: a sense of what they agree that “freedom” would mean for the person they are supporting.

For example, the work of CAFMA was not over when Marissa Alexander accepted a plea deal that would allow her to serve two years on home confinement. Instead, it was necessary to continue raising money for the expenses involved in her home confinement. To do that, CAFMA and FMN had to keep Marissa in the forefront of people’s minds until she was actually home through a sustained social media campaign.

In the words of CAFMA co-organizer Ayanna Banks Harris:

We were committed to supporting Marissa until her life was restored as much as possible following Florida’s relentless prosecution. This commitment was made when there was no end in sight. When Marissa was forced into a plea deal in November 2014 and re-incarcerated to serve an additional 65 days, Mariame [Kaba] and I agreed that we would hold another fundraiser to secure the funds for Marissa’s two-year home confinement to cover the cost of her ankle monitoring. It was imperative for us to raise those funds prior to her release, as we knew it would be more difficult to do so upon her release. As supporters were angry and feeling helpless upon Marissa’s reincarceration, creating this fundraiser provided an opportunity to channel that anger into something tangible Marissa could receive upon her release.

We firmly believe that when deciding to organize as a defense committee, the group must agree upon the end goal.

For CAFMA and FMN, the goal coalesced around the concept #UntilMarissasFree -- the final hashtag employed in the campaign. Freedom meant not only a release from incarceration, but also the means and support necessary to endure the monitoring and confinement that followed.

Of course, some defense committees continue indefinitely, as long as the person they are supporting is still behind bars. For example, Leonard Peltier has now been in prison for over 40 years, and the work of the International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee continues.

Notes for your work:

What does Freedom mean for your survivor?

abolition: a political project that seeks to create the conditions for dismantling prisons, police, and surveillance. It seeks to build new institutions that ensure actual safety. An important abolitionist insight is that most prison reforms tend to actually entrench the prison system and expand its reach. 19th century reformers, for instance, created women's prisons to ameliorate the brutal conditions faced by women who had to share quarters with men in prison. But the result was that exponentially more women were incarcerated. Consequently, it is important to develop strategies that actually reduce the number of people being incarcerated. (Adapted from Free Us All by Mariame Kaba)

carceral feminism: a feminism that identifies criminalization as the most legitimate “solution” to gender-based violence, and is then used to justify prisons, policing, and war as “feminist” and pro-human rights institutions.

criminalization: the structures and procedures that construct certain actions and identities as criminal actions and identities, sometimes through creating policies that make something “against the law,” and sometimes by unevenly distributing blame or unjustly using legal structures to enforce social expectations. Examples: racial profiling, laws that criminalize sex work, the arrest of sex workers far more often than clients of sex workers, etc. (Adapted from Something Is Wrong curriculum, Project NIA)

intimate partner violence/domestic violence: acts of abuse or harm or pattern of power and control exercised by one person over another within an intimate relationship (such as people who are dating, living together, married, formerly in a relationship, heterosexual or queer). This can include:

- Physical abuse including threats and threats to harm others, pets, or self
- Verbal abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Isolation
- Sexual abuse/assault
- Economic/financial abuse
- Threats or use of other systems of oppression to gain power/control such as ICE, queer outing, etc.

(Adapted from Something Is Wrong curriculum, Project NIA, referencing INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence)



prison-industrial complex (PIC): a massive multi-billion dollar industry that promotes the exponential expansion of prisons, jails, immigrant detention centers, juvenile detention centers, and policing. The PIC is represented by corporations that profit from incarceration, politicians who target people of color so that they appear to be “tough on crime,” and the media that represents a racist view of how crime looks in our communities. In order to survive, the PIC uses panic propaganda to convince the public how much we need prisons; uses public support to strengthen harmful law-and-order agendas such as the “War on Drugs” and the “War on Terrorism”; uses these agendas to justify imprisoning disenfranchised people of color, poor people, and people with disabilities; leverages the resulting increasing rate of incarceration for prison-related corporate investments (construction, maintenance, goods and services); pockets the profit; and uses profit to create more propaganda. (Adapted from CARA: Communities Against Rape and Abuse).

sexual assault: any unwanted physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual violation of sexual boundaries. A sexual interaction in which consent is absent or lacking. (Adapted from Philly Stands Up)

transformative justice: an approach to violence which seeks safety and accountability without relying on alienation, punishment, or state or systemic violence, including incarceration or policing. The goals of transformative justice include:

- 1) Safety, healing, and agency for survivors;
- 2) Accountability and transformation for people who harm;
- 3) Community action, healing, and accountability;
- 4) Transformation of the social conditions that perpetuate violence. (Adapted from GenerationFIVE)



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Resources

The following is a brief list of resources, including domestic violence training, projects, websites, articles, and books. Visit bit.ly/SPResources for the longer list and links!

Campaigns

- Chicago Alliance to Free Marissa Alexander
- Free Bresha Meadows
- Free CeCe!
- Free Cherelle Baldwin
- Free Marissa Now
- Stand With Nan-Hui
- Women's Prison Activism Archives (an archive of activism from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s)

Projects, Toolkits, Curricula

- No Selves to Defend
- Creative Interventions Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence
- Law Enforcement Violence Against Women of Color & Trans People of Color: Organizing Toolkit, INCITE!
- #FreeBresha Curriculum
- No Selves to Defend: Curriculum for Marissa Alexander Teach-In, Project Nia
- INCITE! / Critical Resistance Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex (includes workshop curriculum)
- Transformative Justice: A Curriculum Guide

Selected Books & Articles

- Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence & America's Prison Nation by Beth Richie
- The Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology by Incite! Women of Color Against Violence
- Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex by Eric Stanley and Nat Smith
- Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States by Joey Mogul, Andrea Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock
- Free Marissa Now and Stand With Nan-Hui: A Conversation About Parallel Struggles
- 'Free Joan Little': Reflections on Prisoner Resistance and Movement-Building by Mariame Kaba

Articles & Fact Sheets

- Fact Sheet on Domestic Violence and the Criminalization of Survival
- Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex, INCITE! Critical Resistance Statement
- "#SurvivedandPunished: Criminalizing Survivors of Violence," by Mariame Kaba
- "Against Carceral Feminism," by Victoria Law

References and Further Reading from A History of Defense Campaigns

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WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly 43:3-4 (fall-winter 2015): 52-71.



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2017

