



WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER

WARREN DANIEL HAIRSTON

PROJECT

2021 QUARTERLY REPORT





TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	2
WHO WE SERVE.....	3
OUR WORK	5
OUR SIX PRINCIPLES.....	6
PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES.....	8
IMPACT.....	9
TESTIMONIES.....	11
YOUR SUPPORT.....	19
WHAT TO EXPECT FROM US.....	22
ACTIONS AND COMMITMENTS.....	25

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to our supporters and donors for being an active participant in the We Are Better Together Family.

Peace Institute

Kevin Zeese Emerging Fund

Lenny Zakim Foundation

Boston Public Health Commission

Stop & Shop

MassHousing

Circle for Justice Innovations

City of Boston

Twelfth Baptist Church



INTRODUCTION

OUR MISSION

We Are Better Together Warren Daniel Hairston Project (WAB2G) connects and heals women and girls affected by homicide and incarceration to prevent the cycles of violence and victimization.

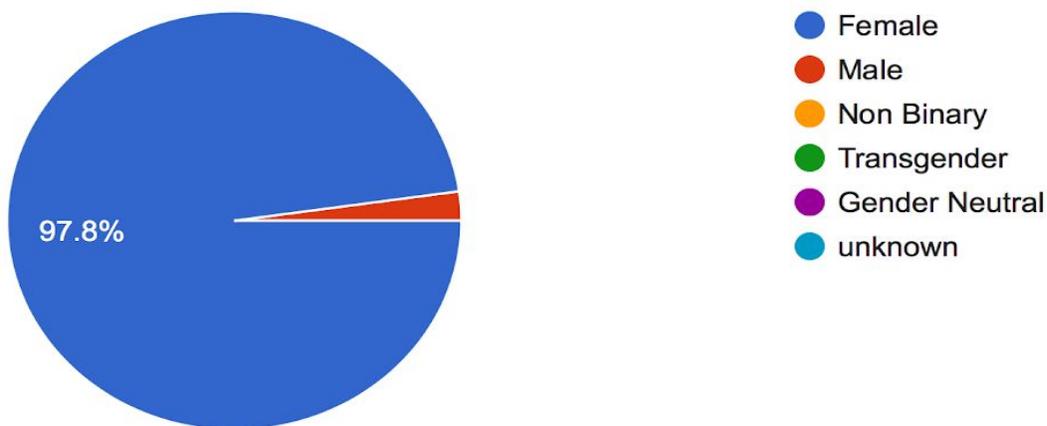
As an organization, WAB2G's purpose is to:

- **Connect** with individuals and communities to build resilience through positive engagement in the face of traumatic events
- **Heal** women and girls by supporting them to move forward, while encouraging them to become agents for change
- **Prevent** ongoing harm by challenging those actions and narratives that dehumanize and stigmatize

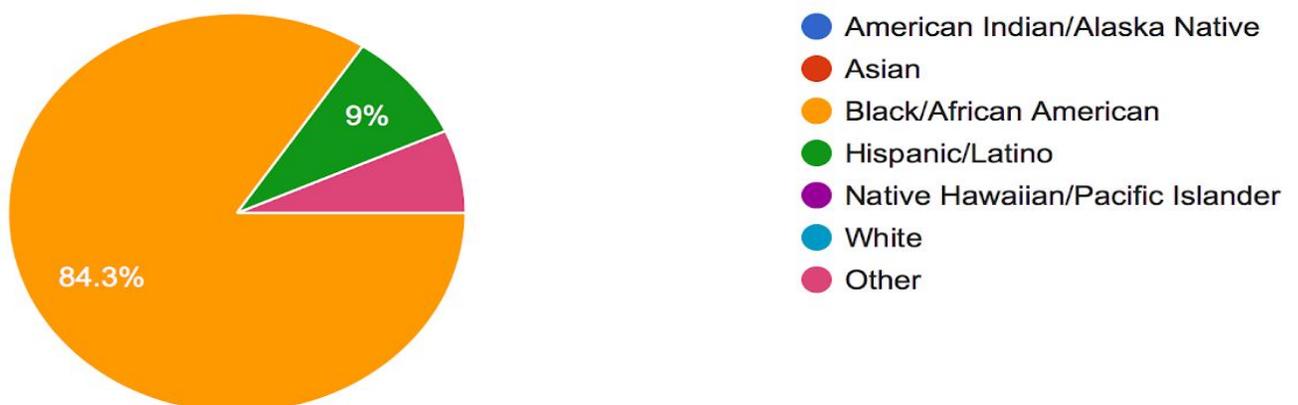
WHO WE SERVE

We predominantly serve women of color that have been impacted by community harm; 84.3% Black/African American, 9% Latinx and 6.7%. Our participants are 97.8% women and 2.2% men. We support a diverse array of age groups.

Gender:

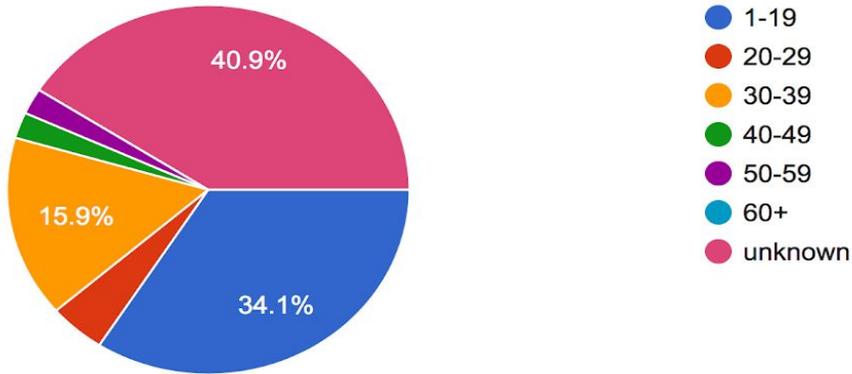


Race and Ethnicity:

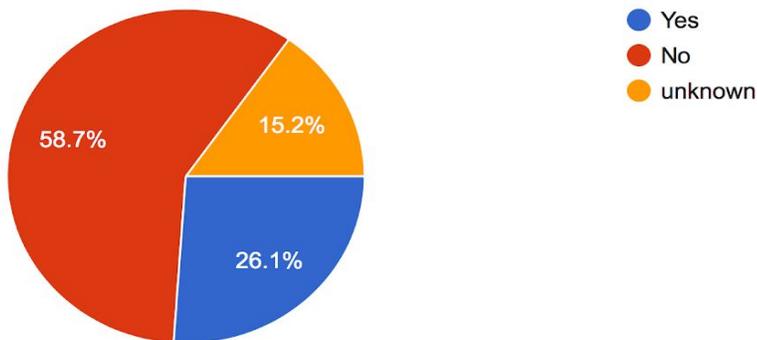


ADDITIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

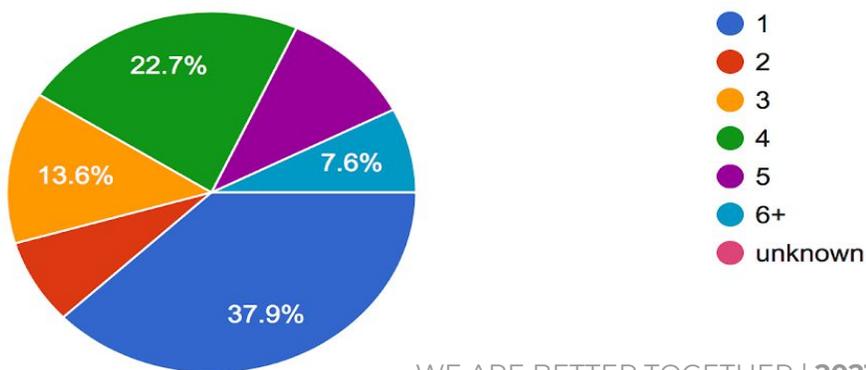
Age:



Essential Worker:



Family Size:



OUR WORK

What makes WAB2G unique is our ability to address gun violence and community harm by families affected on both sides of this issue.

We believe that we must acknowledge the humanity of all of those involved by helping everyone be accountable to their own actions and compassionately help us transform our communities by first transforming ourselves.

We believe in creating safe and brave spaces where women and families can come together and begin the process of restorative justice by empowering mothers to take control of their homes, lives, and families with healthy coping mechanisms creating healthy boundaries that can prevent behaviors that can lead to community harm.

We believe that we must be trauma informed in order to address the historical cycles of violence that our community experiences and teach each other how to break those cycles without revictimizing or re-traumatizing our community.

Change first starts with self but we also need to do this work together, because we are better together!

OUR PROGRAM IS CENTERED ON THESE 6 PRINCIPLES

Accountability

Active engagement in WAB2G's unique Six-Part Healing Sessions to identify and understand personal impacts caused cycles of historical violence and created personalized strategies for self-care and healing.

Advocacy

Inspire advocacy and engagement within our communities for change to address prevention and support legislation which provides support to those impacted by domestic violence, addiction, recovery, and gun violence.

Transformational Healing Prevention

Create safe spaces for radical healing and transformation, to ensure the sustainability of the movement and develop community-driven approaches to reducing the cycles of violence and victimization. Promote communication, healing, and forgiveness among survivors of homicide, and those impacted by incarceration.

WAB2G leadership engages in advocacy and programs that recognize and demonstrate the power and influence that mothers who have been affected on both sides of violence can have when they choose to heal in the community and take collective action in order to interrupt the cycles of violence.

Compassion

Develop WAB2G's participant's ability to recognize and understand the similarities and differences in feelings, reactions, and points of view between themselves and others to create a community which accepts that loss is the key unifying tenet and that we can co-exist without retribution or further violence.

Resilience

Understand and use the Principles of Peace and Cycles of Healing to create community change agents by providing training in trauma-informed care which fosters and builds personal resilience and promotes intergenerational healing and self-care.



THE WORK WE'VE DONE SO FAR

PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES

SIX PART HEALING SERIES AND ADULT FOCUS GROUP

The focus groups are centered around common themes that impact our community. After the participants attend focus groups they are able to apply to be in the Six Part Healing series.

After completion of the focus group woman had the opportunity to register for the 6 part healing series 27.66 percent of focus group participants registered and 23.4 percent successfully completed and graduated from the six part healing series.

Participants went through the workshops reflecting on the five stages of grief in the effort to gain healthy coping mechanisms and to confront their healing process. This is for them to embrace their healing journey.

We have created an assessment survey for people that complete the process.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

We have youth programming such as gardening, girls group focused on community harm, domestic violence, personal hygiene and self esteem. Youth empowerment groups are two hours and only for girls aged 14-21. We have a cohort of 18 girls. They are all residents of Boston and the North Shore.

The youth advisory group creates youth programming, field trips and desired learning outcomes.

INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

We have an internship program with 7 interns. We have a formal partnership with Brandeis University for additional support through our internship program. We also have interns with Emerson.

WEEKLY PROGRAMMING

We have regular programming like our weekly meetings which we use for resource sharing and uplifting community leaders. This is a place for the women to learn and grow in community.

We also do a biweekly women empower series called 'Women of the Week', where we highlight leaders that are doing related work in the community.

ANNUAL RETREAT

We are preparing for our 4th Annual Healing Retreat. Last year we turned our retreat virtual due to COVID-19. Last year's theme was My Sister's Keeper: A Connection Stronger Than Distance on December 5-6, highlighting the importance of togetherness regardless of physical distance. Along with workshops and seminars led by Boston's amazing leaders in violence prevention, survivor advocacy among many more, we also put together a self care box so the participants can take care of themselves while home during the virtual retreat.

OUR IMPACT



We Are Better Together has deep ties to the community and is dedicated to addressing the inequities we see in our community.

We make sure our programming and services have a direct impact on the people and the community that we serve.

SAFETY AND EMERGENCY HOUSING PLACEMENTS

We address housing stability by doing emergency housing placements for women and families impacted by domestic violence, community violence or are in harm's way due to living conditions. This is a temporary solution that can be the difference between life and death for the women that we serve.

FOOD INSECURITIES

Food is the most basic necessity that people need to live. With the resources we have we provide gift cards to groceries stores and food vouchers. We also hosted a food shopping giveaway where we partnered with Stop & Shop for the women to pick the foods personalized to their family to bring home. We have also hosted farm to table food drives in Roxbury. The way we address food insecurities is by allowing households to dictate food that is familiar to their family. We have served over 300 families with range to 2-6 people in each family.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

We have been providing masks and PPE to the community. We have partnerships with organizations like 'Masking the Community' and 'Boston Public Health Commission' to have masks to provide to our constituency.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Through our retreats, focus groups and meetings we achieve justice in a life changing way.

Approximately 10% of the women that participated in our annual retreat were able to attest to major breakthroughs. These ranged from connecting with the mother that caused harm to their son and receiving professional mental health support.



TESTIMONIES FROM WAB2G

TESTIMONIES

FAMILIAL INCARCERATION

Our participants raised concerns related to incarceration. Participants were worried about children, brothers, grandchildren and nephews who were incarcerated. The majority of concerns were COVID 19 related in the sense that they were worried their loved ones would contract the virus. They described here from loved ones about COVID 19 cases and described concerns about their loved one's safety.

What is challenging me right now is my son. He is incarcerated and he is getting out soon. What kind of services and support will he have in the middle of the pandemic? Where is he going to live? Where will he go? I worry about this.

I have a son that is incarcerated and they are not treating him fairly. He has contracted COVID in there. They are making them wear the same masks and don't give them sanitizer. My biggest issue is how to advocate for my son.

Parenting, Grandparenting and Family Dynamics

Participants described many stressors related to parenting and grandparenting in the context of COVID 19. Many found balancing self-care, parenting and family dynamics while also managing the complexities of the pandemic (e.g., safety, quarantine, financial strain, etc. to be extremely challenging. This was particularly true when navigating resources for children and family members with health issues or for those who are systems-involved. These multi-level strains on the women left them feeling further isolated and exhausted as reflected by one grandmother's comment.

There needs to be a way to communicate without going crazy. Before COVID my daughter resented me so much and then when her son got murdered she went off the deep end...I had to struggle to connect with her. Now since COVID we talk all the time. In the community we need to focus on stigma related to therapy. Communication, God and Therapy. It has also been challenging since my son has been murdered. It is difficult and I have one son home... When I try to talk to him he just shuts me out. It is hard because I miss his brother. What do you do? Do you talk to them about it? Do you talk them about their brother? Finding that balance is really hard. Then there is the pandemic and the isolation... I want to see my kids but should they come over? Is it safe?

In addition to communicating with children and grandchildren, participants also described stressful family dynamics with adult siblings, partners and loved ones. One participant captured this theme here:

Incarceration of my nephew and his brother who is awaiting trial. Now, I am challenged because my partner is really sick with ALS. It is hard, I am taking care of him. This is hard and emotionally challenging. Also, one of my sisters is challenging me. We had a fight a few months ago and I got locked up and we are both over 50. I let her push my buttons... I really need to take care of myself so I can take care of others.

COVID-19

COVID 19 has impacted participants in a number of ways. Some have had COVID 19 themselves, many have lost family members and loved ones due to COVID 19, and all are feeling isolated in the context of the pandemic. In addition, many are or have family members who are frontline workers and are concerned about their exposure. Others still have lost their jobs and are experiencing serious financial hardship. However, it is important to note that COVID-related concerns are in addition to a myriad of challenges that are impacting the women. Despite the substantial stresses they outline, they end many of their statements with a strong display of faith and report being very thankful for one another. These expressions of trauma and loss, resilience and hope are illustrated in the quotes here:

Challenge? ...life in general, work on the frontline... having to go home to 5 kids and it's a struggle, having just lost my father to COVID. The biggest challenge I have is that back in January COVID almost killed me and I am still dealing with the after effects trying to get my body back. And I am unemployed and can't get my health [never fully recovered from COVID] back. I too have a nephew -- my only nephew that is incarcerated. He has 15 years now...I have isolation and depression. I am having rental problems and high bill problems and I have close friends in ICU and have lost loves...It is so overbearing but I keep praying.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Women described a number of resources they have engaged with. These included: WAB2G, the Peace Institute, support groups, Facebook groups, church, family members, self-care and counseling. Women across groups described the benefits of being able to come together in community with other women who had similar experiences and struggles. Being in community with other women, working with recovery-specific programs, and spiritual resources have been invaluable to the participants.

My resources that have helped me are WAB2G - even being in this group. It helps me to be able to get it out. I appreciate you all. It has really helped me to grow spiritually and to heal.

The resources WAB2G and peace institute have helped me to get counseling and self-help. The network has been very helpful. I still need to get family therapy. WAB2G, Lipstick, stop rock recovery support system, NA, Zoom meetings, sponsor Therapist, reading the bible with my husband now that we are staying home, zoom meetings, spiritual recovery the step program...I'm learning a lot and I am grateful

Therapist at Mattapan Health Center, I am in a group called Building Our Lives together SPEAK. I agree about the Corey Johnson group at the church. ...A resource that I am thankful for now is the Social Worker at the young parents' program, she has helped me tremendously, she checks in daily and helps us find resources.

RESOURCE PRIORITIES

Participants outlined a number of resources they believe are needed in their lives and in the broader community. The women were engaging with a number of resources, but at the same time felt that supportive services and specifically access to counseling support were limited. Across groups, there was an overwhelming call for Black therapists, specifically therapists and counseling services for Black men that understood and were able to connect to this community.

I agree with (the need for) therapy for Black men. We definitely need that and to overcome the stigma of getting therapy.

The resources WAB2G and peace institute have helped me to get counseling and self-help. The network has been very helpful. I still need to get family therapy. WAB2G, Lipstick, stop rock recovery support system, NA, Zoom meetings, sponsor Therapist, reading the bible with my husband now that we are staying home, zoom meetings, spiritual recovery the step program...I'm learning a lot and I am grateful

I need help with for my two nephews is some resource that will help them second and third chance employers...It is hard to get a job because of their record. I need someone to hire them so they don't have to go back to life of crime.

A legal advocate who knows the law. We need lawyers. I volunteered with DCF and DCF needs to make sure families have equitable legal representation. Families are traumatized. DCF has attorneys but families do not.

INCREASING ACCESS TO WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER

Overall, women reported the WAB2G should continue doing what they are doing with respect to outreach and calls. There was also a sense that resources related to computing and internet connectivity would help to increase access.





WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

WHY DO WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT?

We need your **support, funding** and **partnership** to embolden our commitment to the vulnerable population we serve.

We hope to use funding to pay staff, specialists and mental health professionals to make sure that this organization is sustainable.

We want your support in connecting with other agencies and organizations that are doing the work in the community.

Most importantly we need your help empowering and addressing the needs of the women and families we support.

POLICY PRIORITIES

EMERGENCY HOUSING

Community harm can have a deep impact on an individual's housing situation. Women, particularly, are affected in ways that are often not acknowledged, and while there are many resources available for women impacted by domestic violence, there are very few supports to help someone leaving an unsafe living situation. Although we recognize that there is a shortage of Section 8 vouchers and shelter availabilities, individuals impacted by community violence should have support to transition to safer environments.

Policy option one would be to expand the definition of domestic violence within priority eligibilities to further emphasize the various forms it can take. Being coerced into buying or holding guns or participating in other unsafe activities by family members or significant others is a form of domestic violence that is not currently understood or recognized either by housing authorities or by women seeking safe housing. A second policy option would be to add community harm to the list of priorities for emergency housing shelter and subsidies. Community Harm as its own category would be defined as exposure to dangerous or life-threatening situations in one's residence. A third policy option would be to create a new category, that would encompass domestic violence and community harm, without using either term so as to decrease any associated stigma.

POLICY PRIORITIES

GUN VIOLENCE

Gun violence has always been an issue in the U.S. from mass-shootings to community harm involving firearms. Despite the fact that gun laws on the federal and state-level have steadily become stronger, crime, especially in urban areas involving firearms, is a serious issue. There are loopholes in the law that allow people who are not permitted to own a firearm, to possess one, and those firearms come from many different sources.

We are advocating for three main actions to take place in order to directly address the root causes behind straw purchasing.

- First, increased education around the illegal trafficking of firearms, specifically focusing on straw purchasing and its long term consequences.
- Second, making mental health services more accessible and mental health less taboo is a priority. This can help address some people's feelings that they need to straw purchase in order to fulfill a deeper need. Mental health services can and give individuals strategies to deal with their emotions, so that violence and actions that can contribute to it does not feel like the only answer.
- Lastly, we are advocating for increased investment in community harm intervention organizations that are led by members of the community the organizations aim to target.



WHAT TO EXPECT FROM US

UPCOMING PROJECTS

Training



Additional virtual trauma training; we will be allowing anyone that wants to be trained in trauma response to be trained. Having people that are qualified to deal with mental health situations are vital.

Youth Curriculum



We currently have a youth focus group that is about 5-8 children. We hope to expand our capacity and include more young people in the decision making process. We will also have a youth member on our board.

Annual Retreat



We will have our annual healing retreat in person this year at Rolling Ridge Retreat Center.

UPCOMING PROJECTS

Vaccine Outreach



We hope to help vaccinate BIPOC communities by raising awareness on the vaccine and helping people sign up for appointments. Providing lyfts to and from vaccination sites.

Policy Change



Emergency housing & Straw buying will remain a primary issue that we would love to address and want to work with our legislator and community advocate to address the gaps we see. These issues add to the harm cycle of violence in our communities and can be a solution to some of the recurring issues we see.

Lyft Partnership



We partnered with Lyft in 2020 but we will be having a partnership with Lyft in the coming months to provide transportation. We provide transportation to the following situations, but aren't limited to; to work, to school, to pick up children, doctor appointment, food shopping and many other things. We want to make sure that the women have access to the things that make their lives manageable.

UPCOMING PROJECTS

Outreach



We look to partner with the Neighborhood Trauma Team. We plan to do trauma response in our catchment area. This is coupled with canvassing, preventative outreach and much more..

Volunteer Opportunities



We Are Better Together plans to offer volunteer training opportunities to help more people turn their pain into purpose through activism and community service

Men's Programming



We look to support more men in our community. We want to strengthen our reentry services, job readiness and housing resources.

ACTIONS AND COMMITMENTS

We need your letter of commitment and support to help We Are Better Together receive funding and donations that keep programming, staff and services going!



Scan here to donate!

