



Community Housing Model

Every year more than 37,000 Minnesota women are released from incarceration — and face significant barriers to accessing and maintaining housing. We Rise is a collective of formerly incarcerated women who are shaping and creating systems change with a transformative, restorative and healing justice lens and a commitment to leadership development. **With a belief that those closest to the issue have the knowledge and wisdom to create the solutions,**

We Rise will open its first Community Home in St. Paul in early 2020. Rather than the more traditional model of institutionally based service providers directing women in the midst of reentry, this innovative approach based on supportive and inclusive community among participants and directly address the key factors impacting women in reentry — economic empowerment, housing, healing from trauma, and family reunification — while developing the leadership of the residents.

Current Barriers

Faced with a regional housing market with plunging vacancy rates, rising rents and tenant screening practices that bar applicants with criminal backgrounds, women reentering the community are, at best, "served" by the charity of exceedingly few options in non-profit affordable housing projects, forced into substandard housing and landlord exploitation in the private market, or pressed into homelessness for themselves and their children.

We Rise will reverse the traditional model of contorting the needs of previously incarcerated women and their children into current housing models and instead center the experiences and needs of our community to create new visions for housing and community development throughout the region.

Women with experience of incarceration have specific needs that must be supported in order to achieve successful reentry which we believe is inherently based upon healing from trauma.



In addition to supportive, inclusive and welcoming shelter for women exiting incarceration, this space will create a new model with:

- Weekly healing circles; monthly community meetings; and healing justice events that will address structural issues that contribute to the incarceration of women
- Community partnerships to connect women to resources related to chemical dependency, mental health, employment and more
- A nurturing and welcoming space for the children of participants to visit and bond, while also facilitating the legal steps toward reunification

Outcomes and impact

We Rise will pilot new practices and establish new norms and leadership, including:

- Provide stable housing that allows residents to cultivate the resources and support networks to successfully reenter their community with dignity and tools to thrive and lead
- Consistently develop the leadership capacity of We Rise participants and women who have experienced incarceration to create a self-renewing well of mentors and leaders
- Identify culturally appropriate organizational partners focused on economic empowerment, healing from trauma, family reunification and leadership development
- Create and implement standard operating procedures in partnership with participants

Community Ownership

We believe these women not only deserve better but can lead and create better options for themselves and others. Through the We Rise Cooperative Housing project we will build the capacity of trusted leaders and deeply engage community members to articulate and take steps toward a vision for cooperative housing that builds ownership, agency, and support networks for and by women exiting incarceration.

Our Plan for 2020

Thanks to tremendous community response and support, **the first We Rise Community Home will open in early 2020**. Located in St. Paul, Minnesota, and owned and managed by We Rise leader, Tonja Honsey, the duplex will provide housing for as many as eight women who have experienced incarceration and homelessness.

- Providing both capital and programming resources, the project has received **funding** from A New Way of Life Reentry Project, Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and others.
- **Partnerships** have been established with New Way Training Center to provide chemical dependency treatment and Mitchell Hamline School of Law to assist residents in pursuing issues related to child protective services and criminal expungements.
- We Rise has established **proven programming** for women who have been impacted by incarceration including power building and healing circles, leadership development and Policy & Advocacy Boot Camps.

Support this Project

We believe that our work is stronger and more sustainable with community involvement. To advance this project, we are seeking support in the following ways.

- **Operations and rental supports** to subsidize the costs for residents, so that women don't have to pay to stay and can focus on building their financial foundation for success.
- Donations of **furniture** and other material needs to create a welcoming and comfortable space for women and their families.
- Ongoing donations of healthy **food** to nourish residents and program participants on their journey.
- **Fundraising** support to continue to build the financial base and sustainability of this — and future! — We Rise Community Homes in the Twin Cities and beyond

Contact

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Leadership

Tonja Honsey

is a revolutionary mother, an incarceration survivor, and a community healer. She has worked as a grassroots organizer since



2003. She uses her lived experience to advocate for the change that is needed to restore our communities from the trauma of mass incarceration. The heart of Tonja's work is to fight for women and their children who are experiencing or have experienced incarceration.

Tonja is the founder of We Rise Leadership Collective – formerly incarcerated women creating and shaping systems and policy with a transformative, restorative, and healing justice lens. Most recently she has partnered with multiple organizations including the MN Prison Doula Project, American Indian Prison Project Working Group, Minnesota Freedom Fund. She also is a founding member of the Sprouting Birth Folks Collective, where she was organized and secured funding for Minnesota's first IBPOC & formerly incarcerated focused doula training. She has facilitated trainings and been a guest speaker on a national level. Her passion and love for the community and people has been her motivation to carry this as her life's work.

Tonja is a 2019 Soros Justice Fellow, a 2019 Reimagining Communities Fellow with the National Council of Incarcerated & Formerly Incarcerated Women & Girls, and was recently appointed to the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission by Governor Tim Walz. Tonja was also named one of the 2018 Community Equity Pipeline Fellows through The Wilder Foundation, a policy and advocacy focused fellowship for people of color.