

Washington Defender Association – Leadership Retreat

Results from CITA supported work

Introduction: Our purpose for this event was: “Developing Defenders Into Effective Leaders, Advocates, and Agitators for Advancing Innovative Ideas for Clients and Communities.” Our principles for serving this purpose were:

- Recognize leadership in everyone
- Be Accepting and open to all ideas
- Consider those not in the room(those we represent, colleagues and communities)
- Empower with practice
- Building a plan to keep engaging and developing leadership
- Teach tools we use
- Be transparent at all stages
- Be BOLD!

From this place we developed an agenda for the event using a Storyboard format. See attached separately. This agenda included excellent race equity training, including systems-framework training, from JustLead WA, engaging in Purpose-to-Practice among the whole group to build a foundation of defender leadership work in Washington State, and then inspiration toward leadership from Ilham Askia (Gideon’s Promise).

A large and varied group of defenders from around Washington State joined the retreat this year. Below is a summary of the results of the parts of the agenda specifically supported by the Court Improvement Training Academy (CITA).

1. Shared values and core individual purpose. To begin, we engaged in exercises designed to begin the work toward shared mission. Here we asked folks to explore the question: Why is it important to develop leadership in the defender community? Each individual was interviewed by a partner (tool = “9 Whys”) on the questions, seeking to find core purpose. Each person then recorded their answer:

- Professional well-being, practice aligned with values.
- To make each other see everyone as people (including clients) – makes it harder to treat them poorly
- Because it makes my life easier.
- Hold system accountable – protect integrity of criminal legal system and society more broadly

- “Why is it important to find out how our clients would answer this question?”
- To develop support in the community who in turn support our work (especially to funders at budget time).
- Without leadership a vacuum is created that is filled by prosecutors, police, etc.
- Hope
- End harm
- Freedom
- Ensure people are treated as people
- The children are the future
- Fulfillment/happiness
- Make change in community/system
- To better leverage our power as the people who handle the majority of cases in the system, to create broad change
- Strong leadership means stronger representation
- To make the system more fair.
- Status quo is not sustainable.
- Fight systemic and government racism and classism.
- Level the playing field
- Sustain momentum for justice system reform initiatives
- Develop and sustain relationships with community-based partners providing services to mutual clients
- Value inherent dignity and worth of every person
- Identify non-traditional and informal options for young defenders to influence community - (Defense booth at the Fair!), voting, know your rights, etc.
- Effective democracy
- Provide a voice and reduce the human costs.
- Without us there is no justice
- To live in community better together
- Changing the structures in the criminal justice system that are part of keeping vulnerable and marginalized groups without power
- Stopping criminal justice system from targeting marginalized people

- Support younger/new defenders so they can stay and bring their insights and inspiration.

2. Purpose. We spent some time developing a shared mission statement for defender leadership work. The resulting statement developed by the whole room is:

Cultivating and empowering defenders and the community to achieve equity!

3. Principles. We then developed a set of principles by which we would serve our purpose:

- Leveraging power
- Ensure action steps are community centered
- Marshal community resources
- Respect leadership in everyone
- Public outreach and education
- Provide effective tools
- Lead to inspire
- Treat people fairly and equitably
- Create capacity to do more than litigate cases
- Include directly impacted people
- Increase recruitment among people of color, 1st generation immigrants, LGBTQ+ community.
- Don't presume who has answers.