

Obden Mondésir (00:00:00):

So I'm gonna hit play on both. And then I'm gonna give the slate. So today's date is July 12th, 2022. My name is Obden Mondésir. I also have in the room with me.

Eve Glazier (00:00:18):

Eve Glazier

Obden Mondésir (00:00:18):

and we are at Barnard College and we are with, could you state your full name?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:00:27):

Anisah Sabur

Obden Mondésir (00:00:29):

And could you also tell me the year you were born?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:00:32):

I was born in 1959.

Obden Mondésir (00:00:36):

And could you tell me about your parents?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:00:44):

My, both of my parents are West Indian immigrants. They came here from the Virgin Islands pretty much around, I think it was World War II. My dad is a vet. No, it's not world war II. I'm sorry. They came here around the Vietnam war. He's a vet. They came here with my older siblings. I actually was born here right here in New York City, in Harlem, raised in the Bronx and Queens. Yeah and I've been here all of my life.

Obden Mondésir (00:01:28):

And I guess, could you describe the first neighborhood that you remember growing up in?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:01:36):

Actually, I remember as far back as I may have been about four or five, we grew up, we were living on fifth avenue and 118. we lived in a tenement in a three story walkup. I wasn't in school, but I spent a lot of time in a community center. It was called Millbank. Um, and it was on 117, 116 between fifth and Lenox. And they had a lot of activities. One of the activities they provided was swimming lessons. My oldest siblings were awesome swimmers and they tried to teach me, but I just could not get it. I'm one person in my family who cannot swim and really have phobia of large bodies of water. But not saying that it, you know, we grew up really close knit. Both of my parents worked. My dad after the military went into cooking.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:02:48):

And he was a hospital nutritionist for many years. He retired from Woodhull Hospital in Brooklyn, but while we were here in Manhattan, he worked at Manhattan State Hospital. He worked at Sydenham Hospital on 124th street, before they turned it into the clinic or whatever it is now. And for many years my mother did a lot of work. She was a legal secretary, but she did a lot of community activism work, right. She fought for tenants rights. She created block parties and things for children in the summer, outings and things like that. She scooped up the kids in the neighborhood, took them out of the city and up into Long Island and upstate New York and really just tried to show them parts of New York that we lived in to have fun. In the seventies, we lived in a tenement here in the, up in the Bronx and it caught fire and we were burned out.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:03:53):

And so for almost a year, we lived in a hotel/shelter in the Bronx. And then my mom and dad found a small house out in Jamaica, Queens. And by then I was about 12 or 13, and then we, they moved the family to Queens. But as someone who was used to the city life, the 24 hour trains buses, you know, I, I just gravitated back to the city. I stayed in school until I completed junior high school, and then I went to high school in Queens. And so...

Obden Mondésir (00:04:31):

Do you remember the high school, the junior high school that you went to in the city?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:04:34):

In the city? Yeah, I went to junior high school 145. And back then you would graduate in the sixth grade to go to seventh and eighth grade. And so I graduated from public school, sixth grade into seventh and eighth and junior high, and then I graduated eighth grade and then my mom was like, "that's it, you're not going back to the city anymore, you're gonna go to school close at home," which wasn't very much fun. We moved at a time where racism was at its height in Queens, and the area where I went to school was predominantly white and it was a lot of throwing bombs at our buses, setting our buses on fire because we came from the east end of Queens down to the south part of Queens where, you know, predominantly it's Woodhaven.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:05:32):

What's the other part of the Queens over there? Howard Beach, you know, and those areas were predominantly white. They didn't want us going to school with their children. And so they would, you know, throw molotov cocktails at our buses. They would attack us, you know, and it was older people doing this. It wasn't groups of our age. And so it was just a lot of rhetoric. So I kind of like, felt like I didn't belong there. And I stopped going to school for a very long time. And then finally I was like, you know what? I need to get an education. So I started going to school at night and they had a night program, which was not too far from where I was going to, um, regular high school. So I decided to do both to try to get my credits together so I can get out on time.

Obden Mondésir (00:06:23):

Yeah. And the regular high school was John Adams High?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:06:25):

John Adams.

Obden Mondésir (00:06:25):

in Ozone Park?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:06:27):

In Ozone park. Yep. And, and so they had an annex over on like a hundred and 11th and right off of Rockaway mm-hmm <affirmative> between Rock and 109. And I went to the Annex at night and then the classes that I needed, which was a gym class, they didn't offer. So they sent me to Washington Irving in Manhattan. And so I went there for a semester, took my gym classes, got my credit and got my high school evening diploma from Washington Irving. So I just stopped going back to John Adams. I just didn't like the environment, but I got my diploma.

Obden Mondésir (00:07:05):

And what year do you think you got your diploma?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:07:08):

I got my diploma in '79. I was actually scheduled to graduate in '76. I actually walked with my graduating class, but I still needed those gym credits.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:07:22):

So I had to do the night school in the summer at Washington Irving to get my credits. So I did that. But after that I had a child and life started to take its own shape and form. And so, yeah, I never, I didn't go back to school until 2012. So a lot had transpired in my life between 1979 and 2012, right. And so in 2000, no, I'm sorry. In 1989, I had my first interaction with law enforcement and it was around buying drugs in a community that I did not live in. And so I was arrested. I was given a bail that I could not afford. I did not wanna call my parents. And so I spent the first six months incarcerated. Um, when I found out that they were actually going to offer me a plea and that I was going to have to do some prison time, is when I contacted my family, because I had a young daughter and my mother was like, my sister had her, but she was working and she couldn't really take care of her.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:08:47):

So my mother was like, okay, do the time, don't worry about your child. I'll make sure she's okay. So I gave my mother temporary custody of my daughter and she was maybe about 11 or 12 then somewhere around in there. And yeah, so my mother took care of her, but when I came home, I came home in '91. I came home on, on parole and it was just so hard. You know, some of the access to housing, education, there was barriers around everything. You had a felony, you were finished! Not knowing that going in, right. 'Cause I would've never taken the plea for the time that they gave me. It was my first offense. It wasn't a lot of drugs. I was addicted to drugs. I would've fought for a program which would've then alleviated that felony once I completed the program, but that didn't happen.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:09:55):

I didn't know anything. And I just went with what the attorneys and the district attorneys were saying, right. Um, and so I relapsed, I relapsed, I got violated. I caught a new charge for the same issues. In 2000, I stayed home for a very long time though. I think I had maybe about six or seven years in sobriety, but I struggled so hard. And then my mom got sick. My mom came down with cancer and it was just, it was devastating for me. I had no idea what cancer could do to someone. And my mom was my best

friend. She was my guiding principle to everything and all the mistakes that I made, she stood by me. She tried to help me correct them. She made space for me when there was no place else for me to go. Right.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:10:54):

And so it just, it really took a toll on me. My mom died in 1996, and I relapsed in 97 and I just was out in the street again. I mean, my life had taken a turn for me. I think it was the worst that I could ever say any addiction had taken me. I mean, I went places that I never thought I would go. I was with people I never thought I would be with. Didn't think twice about getting arrested again. You know, when I finally got arrested in 2000, I was living in a room that we were using for a crack house. Buying, selling, and using crack in somebody else's house. And I left one day and I don't know where I wound up at, but I wound up on Canal Street barefoot and the police chasing me.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:12:01):

To this day I still don't really know. And I was with some other people, and I know they were doing stuff to get money to buy drugs, but actually what they did, I didn't know. I was in a zone somewhere. And they just came and said run. And that was the thing. When people said run, you ran 'cause you didn't know what was coming down the pipe, right. So I started running, ran outta my shoes and were tackled by two officers. And there I was again, back in handcuffs, right, not really understanding what was happening, why it was happening, didn't know what they had did. But I was a part of this group of people who had committed a crime. And so this time around, after spending about maybe two months without bail stuff started to clear up, right, and I was like, what the hell? What are they charging me with?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:12:52):

You know? And the lawyer I had, he was just like, listen, this is your second felony. You might as well just take the plea, go to prison. I was like, take what plea for what? No, I need to see all, I need to see my charges. I need to see everything. I wanna go to the law library. I wanna start seeing what's happening. I wanna talk to the people that you are telling me that are my co-defendants like, we need a co-defendant visit because I'm not trying to hear this. I didn't do anything, right. When they came running past me, I was standing in front of an outside shop, looking at some items and all I heard was run, and I was going with them, right. Long story short, they had us on, we called it jostling, stealing people's wallets out of their pockets.

Obden Mondésir (00:13:43):

Like Jocelyn, the person's name. Yeah. Or like jostling the verb?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:13:47):

The verb, right. So taking things from people without their knowledge, but somebody actually realized that somebody took their stuff and started screaming and said, pointed out a couple of the people that I was with earlier. And then they came running past me saying "run." So we all started running. Long story short, like I went out with the intention of doing something to get money to service my habit, but just wasn't in the mood, right. I really was kind of just acting like a normal tourist, shopping, looking. And so long story short, they offered me two to four and I was like, no, that's not true--they offered me a three to nine was the first offer. And I was like, you gotta be kidding me, for what? I didn't do anything. None of the people who said somebody did anything to them pointed me out.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:14:46):

They'd never seen me because I was never with them at the time that they did the action, right. Only thing the cops know is when they started chasing a group of people, I was one of the people they were chasing. So we fought back and forth. I fired my first attorney. I was like, listen, I will find my own attorney. I ain't got no money, but y'all gonna gimme somebody else. Cause I'm not working with this person. You're not taking my life from me, right, for something that I didn't even do. Like, I don't even know what happened, but I knew something happened, right. So long story short, I wound up taking a plea to two to four, which was the second offer. And I got sent upstate. But while I was upstate, I started to see an influx of young people, and my head was really clear.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:15:38):

'Cause then I started asking 'em, why are you here? What are you doing here? And they started telling me, that's my mom and that's my grandma, and I'm here. And I'm like, this is generations of women incarcerated, what the hell is happening? And so most of them were there for either having drugs in their house, being caught up in a sweep, buying drugs, something to do with drugs. And this was the influx of the crack epidemic. Right. And so just really looking at them and saying, my God, what's happening with my own child? She can be my daughter. She can be my daughter. She can be my daughter, right? And so that just really inspired me to start kind of journaling and writing, like, where I am, what's happening, what I'm seeing, why is this happening? You know, asking all these questions to myself, what could I do differently when I get outta here? And so it's really funny that um, when I got to the point of release, um, there was a woman who came into the facility to offer her services, right. Alexandria. And she were working with women within the five boroughs who were trauma survivors and who had a diagnosed mental health issue, substance use and a history of homelessness.

Obden Mondésir (00:17:10):

And when you say Alexandria, you mean Alexandria Fisher?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:17:13):

Fisher mm-hmm <affirmative>. And so we, you know, I went to the orientation, they called it orientation. So all of these programs came in, they would tell you what services they offered. They would, you know, agreed to in introduce you to their program. But to me, none of the programs fitted me. Right. And so when I started talking to her and telling her, you know, that I was a substance user, I was homeless for a while, you know, I was diagnosed with major depression, PTSD, and she was like, you should come to us. We give therapy, we give groups around how to deal with trauma. And then we help you try to find employment and housing.

Eve Glazier (00:18:01):

What was this program called?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:18:02):

It was called Project Caring Community, right. And it was attached to Goodwill Industries of New York and New Jersey. However, I went to the program, I think I might have completed within a year. I think it was one year. First of all, I had to fight to get to the program because I was released to Long Island parole because my daughter had moved to long island and I was using her address. And so she told me, she said, well, we can't service you because you don't live within the five boroughs. So I had to jump through hoops to get my god sister to let me use her address and move back to the city and lived with

her in the Bronx for a while. Right. And so I did that and the minute I got the approval from parole to change my address, I went to the program.

Obden Mondésir (00:19:01):

And I think you mentioned in the previous interview that space that you were supposed to go to on Long Island was also really bad.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:19:09):

Oh God, you don't want me to talk about that space. <laugh> so, and I can, you know, it was. They originally sent me, because they claimed they couldn't reach my daughter, but they refused to go there after work hours. My daughter worked, my daughter's a teacher, and she's been a teacher for God knows how many years.

Obden Mondésir (00:19:27):

Where was she teaching?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:19:28):

Public school. She's taught--she works with special education children and she teaches middle school. And so they never would go after school to try to get to her, and then they would never leave a card if they went, they just would go show up in the morning. Like, she's at work. What do you think? Her husband works. Like, I, I didn't get that. Long story short, they paroled me to Long Island, Nassau county. And then they sent me to what they considered to be a transitional house shelter in Suffolk county, which was a good, maybe about 45 minute drive from my daughter's house. Long story short, my sister took me and it was someone's garage that was actually turned into a bedroom. They had six beds in it, single beds. Um, you had to be in by nine and out by seven or you lose your bed.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:20:35):

And this was being paid for by DSS, the Department of Social Services. And I was like, are you kidding me? The place smelled like a bar, right. Like whoever owned the house, they drank and they smoked cigarettes. It smelled like a bar. Like all I had was flashbacks of walking into a smoke filled bar, smelling beer and cigarettes. And I was like, no way am I staying in here. This ain't happening. So my sister was like, listen, because the way your daughter works, let's just go to parole and tell 'em you're gonna stay to my house. She said, you, you have easy access in and out. You can, you're close to the bus. You close to the Metro north train station, 'cause she, too, also lived in Long Island. And so long story short, they accepted it. They let me stay with my sister for, I stayed there for maybe about a month.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:21:29):

And then I talked to my god sister. I was like, I gotta get outta here. It's no way I could stay in Long Island, 'cause I can't move around! I mean it, there was a bus that came into Jamaica. There's the Long Island Railroad, but with no money, how do you get around on these things, right? And at the time long island railroad has their prices. The bus had their prices. It wasn't like the city buses. It didn't take Metro cards. So you had to have cash money. It was a mess. So I talked to my God-sister. She was like, listen, I got a couch and it's just me in a one bedroom flat. If you wanna come up to the Bronx with me come. So I was like, fine. I'll do that. So I moved up to 238th in, um, Nereid avenue with her.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:22:16):

And I stayed there with her until 2006 until I finally got my own apartment. So I stayed there with her for a couple of years and um, I helped her out, you know, I didn't get a job, but I was going to program was getting public assistance, tried to apply back to school. Couldn't get in school. You know, it was really nobody looking to hire because everybody wanted to know what your felony was. As soon as you say drug related, we don't want addicts working for us, you know? And so I wasn't getting a job. And so I was on public assistance for a long while. And then in 2007, I got hit by uh, 15 passenger van and I have no teeth. I'm working on that now. <laugh> but it broke my jaw i two places. It ripped off, ripped up my rotator cuff, broke the meniscus in my knees. I had all these surgeries and things scheduled and um, I was in the process, right...I was doing my health stuff.

New Speaker (00:23:26):

And I got a knock on the door one day. And it was the warrant squad. We have a warrant for your arrest. And this is in 2008. I was like, what? I've been home since 2004, completed parole, and you got a warrant for my arrest, for what? Someone picked my picture out of a photo array and said that I assisted in a robbery. It's like, you gotta be kidding me.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:24:03):

So they arrested me, took me to court. I bailed myself out and had a court date and the next court date was a month later. So I'm on my way to court. And I find on the train there was like a clear wallet with just somebody's benefit card in it. And I said, you know what? This is needed. When I get off the train, I'm gonna put it in the mailbox. I didn't see a mailbox. So I said, okay, when I'm done with court, I'll put it in the mailbox. I go to court, they take me in the back, search me, tells me that I also stole this person's— it's like, I just picked that up off the train. It looked like I might have fell outta somebody's pocket. My intention was to put in the mailbox. But if you go on center street, you won't see a mailbox.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:25:03):

And there was no mailbox there. Right? I argued, I argued, I argued. They locked me back up and they revoked my bail. So from February, March from March 20th, 2008 to August, I fought and was fighting because they said the person didn't have a headdress. And I was like, that wasn't me. I don't care what you say. You never, every time I got arrested, the only way y'all got pictures of me without it is because I took it off to take the pictures, right. There should be pictures with me with it. And without it, even when I came home on parole, they had to take it with it. And without it, right. Long story short, they kept fighting. And so I, they put me supposedly in a lineup and they made me take it off. They told me to put on a cap, but turned the cap backwards. And I was like, that's not the same as having on a headdress long story short, I fought. And when I went back to Rikers, I was talking to the Iman and I explained my case to him. And he was like, but sister, that's not right. Ask for another lineup and get some other sisters in there. He said, I'll help you get the sisters to be a part of the lineup.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:26:24):

Everybody came in there with a headdress in a different style, tied up sideways, tied up this way, flipped over that. I mean, everybody had on a headdress, but this person couldn't pick me out with my headdress on. I was like, that's, that's unbelievable. You pick me out without it. How, because they showed you my picture without it. Now I have it on you can't pick me out. So the DA decided to drop the case, but they took eight months out of my life just about, right. Came back home in 2008 and continued to do the work, right. At this time, I had already been connected to the CA had been a part of the

coalition, had worked with them on legislation, had been to Albany. And so I used those relationships this time around and I was calling folks and telling them what was happening.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:27:19):

They had put me in a unit with pregnant women where the faucet, where you drink water from was leaking every day, it would leave a pool of water in the walkway to the shower. So women would come out of their cells, go to go to the shower and slide into the shower pregnant. I was like, this is crazy. This needs to be fixed. I said, let me fall because I'm gonna sue department of corrections. I'm not getting up. I'm going outta here on a stretcher. And I kept telling some of the women don't get up. You're pregnant. Call medical, go to the officer, call medical. She was like, "no, no, it's gonna stop me from going to court." Don't believe that. If they gotta bring the court to your hospital bed, then that's what they gotta do. Long story short, I had learned enough in advocacy to advocate for these women.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:28:16):

So I called the correctional association and the director at that time had a relationship with the commissioner of the city. He used to go in and do court pen monitoring. They wouldn't let him monitor Rikers, but they would let him monitor the court pens to make sure people were getting—and I think he was a part at that time, he was a part or a member of the board of corrections. So he was able to go in and take other folks with him to monitor the pens, to make sure people were getting to court on time, getting access to medical care. If they needed getting access to sanitary if they needed, making sure that they got hot food in the court pens. And he would do that in every borough. And so I called Bob and I was telling him, they knew I was already incarcerated.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:29:04):

They knew what had happened. And I was telling him about this leak. And he said, have you fallen Anisah? I'll send you an attorney. <laugh> I was like, no, but the women are afraid to speak out. This needs to be fixed. I don't know who he called, but a few hours later I get called. We were doing the count. I get call by the officers. I hear my cell ringing cuz it's electric. The door opens. And I'm like, look at my watch. It's not time to come out yet. We just got in here, Thompson 13, come out. So I step out and all I see is a sea of white shirts, captains, lieutenants, superintendents, all downstairs in my unit come downstairs. One of them said to me, "who do you know?" "Who are you related to?" And I said, "excuse me."

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:30:01):

"Yeah. Who do you know? That's what we wanna know." I was like, I don't know what you're talking about. He said, you called in a complaint about this water faucet. I said, oh yeah, the water's up now. 'cause they made me mop it up before I went into cell. But it's a swimming pool over here. It really is. And it's dangerous. He got on the radio, called maintenance. They came, took the sink apart. They said, "oh we need a part." Turned the water off, came back two days later with the part and the sink worked and they claimed the officers that they had been putting tickets in for months. I don't know why I was in this unit. I was the only unpregnant person. I think I was the oldest person <laugh> in this unit and not pregnant, right. This was supposed to be the unit for the women who were going back and forth to court, but also had applied to be in the nursery. Some of the women had already got the city sentence and was waiting for the nursery, waiting to have their child to then go to the nursery. And so this unit was, everybody was pregnant either very, very pregnant or just newly pregnant, but they were



pregnant. And so I don't know, I guess I became the voice for them, the women in there, and used the relationships I had on the outside to get that fixed.

Eve Glazier (00:31:22):

Mm. Could we maybe back up a little bit and talk about how you initially got involved in this advocacy work with the CA and the CWP.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:31:31):

Yeah. And so it goes back to Project Caring Community. After doing a lot of therapeutic work on myself, you know, I started going to events around reentry. Alex would always share, um, different organizations sending her emails. You know, if you have participants and they're interested in reentry services in employment readiness and this and this and this, you know, housing, they would send it to her and then she would share it with us as clients. And I would go to practically every last one of them. And so I said to her, I said, listen, some of this work these people are doing, I can do right. I really need a job, right. But I don't mind coming back and sharing with the group. Like a lot of times I would go to places and they would tell us about these lottery apartments and we could apply for them and I would go and I would apply for them.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:32:25):

And then I would bring back the applications and say, here, look, they gave out all these applications apply for an apartment. You know what I'm saying? And I would share it with the rest of the women in the groups. Long story short, She got a email about Reconnect. Reconnect is the leadership development program that was formulated by the Correctional Associations's Women in Prison Project, and the coalition. And so it was you do leadership development, you become a member of the coalition. You work with the women in Prison Project, you know, voluntarily to help build advocacy around issues that come out of women from state facilities, from the city jails and from substance abuse treatment programs. And so long story short, she looked at it and she said, you know, Anisah, you might do good with this. And literally all I seen was that it was a stipend at the end of the 12 weeks of the training. And I was like, is that paid? She said yes. I was like, okay, I'm gonna fill out for it. And so I actually filled out the application and Alex, uh, faxed it in for me.

Eve Glazier (00:33:31):

Do you know around what year this was that you first got connected with Reconnect?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:33:35):

Yeah, it was, I am an alum of the spring 2005. Spring 2005 is when I joined them, and we did our 12 weeks, we graduated, and then I just started doing all of the work around the coalition, going to the coalition meetings. I started like really speaking out about the issues that I seen when I was inside my own experience, other people's experience. And they was like, Anisah, we are looking for somebody to lead the reentry and conditions and you can talk a lot to your own experience of the conditions, but also other peoples would you lead that committee in some work? And I was like, sure, why not? You know, most of the people who came into the coalition were either formally incarcerated or community members interested in learning what happens to women on the inside. And so, yeah, so I did the conditions and reentry.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:34:38):

And the first thing we worked on was medical care for women. And it really focused on HIV and Hep C treatment and confidentiality and all the things that women were really afraid—testing, they were afraid to do on the inside because they were afraid of the stigmas, right. Really working on making sure that the department test and kept confidential who they tested, but also offered treatment in a confidential way that they wasn't calling "HIV Med line," "Hep C Med line," 'cause that's what they would do. You know, so everybody know that this line is for Hep C this line for HIV, this line is for mental health. You know, this line is for diabetes, they gave each line a title, right. Which was so horrendous because people judged you, you know, they didn't care that, you know, we were all women, they didn't care that we, we all had some type of trauma in our life.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:35:40):

We all came from the same communities that were impacted. You know, they didn't know all of these things. They didn't care about these things. They just knew that, "oh, there's a stigma around HIV, stay away from her." You know, "there's a stigma around mental health, stay away from them." And so really making sure that women were respected when it came to their medical and physical and psychological diagnoses. And so we were able to fight and get the first thing passed was the Hep C, HIV treatment for women on the inside. And the second thing was Medicaid, right? Um, because we were waiting 120 days or more after incarceration to get help from department of social services to get a medical exam. And that's the first thing, anybody that did any long period of time, especially in a state facility, is to get a medical. People, came home with all kinds of undiagnosed ailments from cancer to diabetes, to high blood pressure, to kidney failure.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:36:58):

I mean all types of ailments that was undiagnosed and untreated for as long as they were incarcerated, right? The healthcare system in there is the worst, and, you know, finding out for my own experience about how they treat people who are incarcerated. Even the medical staff was like treating us like you're less than. I was someone who suffered with fibroids and I bled profusely on my cycles. And in order to get extra sanitary napkins a month, I had to go to the hospital, to the inside hospital, bring you sanitaries in a plastic bag to show them that I was bleeding like a cow and I needed more for them to give me what they called a medical pass for sanitaries.

Eve Glazier (00:37:51):

Could you talk about when you initially started leading the committee, like sort of what was the makeup of the CWP and who was, who were the leaders? Who was really involved at the time?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:38:01):

So, yeah, so the CWP, when I joined it was, it was really facilitated by the women in Prison Project. The Women in Prison Project when I joined, was led by Tamar Kraft-Stolar and Jaya Vasandani, those two women, were two women that I grew to love because of their passion for supporting directly impacted women and elevating them into leaders, right. And so when I joined the coalition, it was huge. They had at least 1800 members in their database. It was one of the largest coalitions in New York city, right. And it consisted of faith-based organizations, community based organizations, along with specific service providers who provided services to just women. And there were some men, we had former parole officers who were members of the coalition. We had teachers, we had students, you know, when I say teachers, teachers, professors, universities were all a part of the coalition. We would actually go out to all the universities in the city. And then we started going abroad to really share about the impact of

incarceration around women and the importance of policy changes that could help women survive incarceration and reentry. And so when I started leading the, um, reentry and conditions committee, the committee was about maybe 25 strong and out of that 25, it was about maybe 16 formerly incarcerated women.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:40:00):

Two of them are deceased right now. It may be more, maybe more, but who sticks out in my mind the most is Rusti Hiller-Mill—Rusti Miller-Hill, said her name wrong. And she actually was the person who was my co-chair. She was the chair when I got there and she needed help and they made me her co-chair. So instead of having a chair and a co-chair, they called us both co-chairs cuz we both were leading, right. And so it was just, it was so many people, so many organizations, and just, just thinking about it, STEPS to End Family Violence, GreenHope, these were women-led and women founded organizations that focused on women inside and out.

Eve Glazier (00:40:55):

Can you talk a little bit about, you mentioned there's a really strong presence and emphasis on having formerly incarcerated people at the center of the organizing. Can you talk a little bit about why you feel like that was important for the CWP or how you think that impacted the CWP advocacy work?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:41:12):

Yes. Okay. So a lot of the work came from women sharing their own experiences, right. Telling folks about their lives and what it was like before incarceration, during incarceration and the struggles of reentry. And so for people to really get the gist of what the impact was really like, we needed those stories, right? We needed those women. And so that to me helped me to elevate into a leader and I kept passing it on. So come on in lead this, this meeting, share your experience, let's get this done. Let's talk about what it is we wanna see changed and let's be that solution, right. And that's what the CWP allowed us to do, right. As directly impacted women, sharing our experiences, but also sharing the solutions that we thought would help other women who were still incarcerated, and those coming home.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:42:12):

And so coming together, collectively sharing our stories, sharing the solutions that we felt would be best suited for those on the inside and those coming home, and then taking those to the legislature and then sitting down across the table with policy makers and saying, this is what we want to see. We don't have the exact language that would make it a piece of law, but we know you do. And this is what we would wanna see. This is the law we wanna see on the books that would help the women on the inside. And so really that's what the coalition did. And, and it just, it just brought so much life to the women who had these experiences, right. Honestly, I'm one of them. I never thought that I would be sitting, having conversations like this with you or electeds, right, sharing my life experience and sharing the impact incarceration had on my life, my family and my community.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:43:12):

But doing that, I learned that, okay, this is what we need to do. And not only just hear my story, but others, because I may have a story that may say, you know, the system is horrifying. But there may be people that come out and say, my experience wasn't that bad, but I can see a change in this and this and this, right. And so just really allowing people the space to share that and to grow. Like so many—I look back now, okay, my Reconnect class was 16 in size. By the time we graduated, it was only 12 of us. And

right now I'm trying to think myself, Lorryne, Sharon White Harrigan. I think we are the only three that have really stayed connected to the point. Whereas we can pick up the phone and call each other right now, something is going on and it's still doing some form of the work. Sharon is now the executive director to Women's Community Justice Association.

Obden Mondésir (00:44:24):

What's Sharon's full name?

New Speaker (00:44:25):

Sharon White Harrigan. Okay. And she's in a lot of the coalition stuff. Right. Um, Lorryne Patterson is now a supervising counselor at Beth Israel hospital for substance use and treatment, right. And so everybody took their experience and moved into a field that could then help people, right. And that's what we tried to do with everybody. I don't know where some of the others are, right. But one of the people who was instrumental in, in the coalition and a lot of his work was the coordinator before me, which was Jacquie Velez, and she took on the position around in 2010, I think.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:45:19):

And before her, it was Stacey Thompson. Stacey was there when I got there in 2006, Stacey was one of the first alum to Reconnect. Her group in 2003 were the first group to graduate. And then she took on the coalition's coordination under the Women in Prison Project. And so her and I became really, really close. Stacey got sick. She developed cancer. She developed some mental health issues from trauma. Stacey was a survivor of violence. And so we still keep in touch. And before I became, before I changed my name Islamically, my last name was also Thompson. So we told people we were sisters and they believed us. We did so much together in my early release days in the coalition's work. And just volunteering to be a part of all the work that the coalition was doing. I was going out and doing, um, advocacy, outreach and workshops with Stacey educational and, and, and, um, uh, legislative workshops, like talking about civic engagement and how important it was and things like that.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:46:41):

And really encouraging people who could vote to vote and things like that. We did all of that together. And then in 2010, when she got sick, she quit and Jacquie took over, and Jacquie is now in Massachusetts leading, I forget the name of her org, she's working with her org, but she's one of the lead organizers in a campaign in Massachusetts around housing and formally incarcerated people in Massachusetts. And so people are really continuing to do this work in a way that, you know, their life experience has led them, right. And so for me, the coalition was where my life really began, because if I look back to before the coalition, I really had no direction. Honestly, I didn't know where I wanted to go with my life. I didn't know if I could even make it past that point, right. And, and I was really heavily into substances because I felt like that was the only way that I can guide myself, I can maneuver through life, I can, a lot of stuff. And substance use played a major role in my life.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:47:57):

And when I was able to get past that and know that I can get past it, it was like, okay, now where do I go? But all the things that I learned in the coalition, being a part of the Women in Prison Project, you know, knowing that they were going into the prisons to see the women, to talk to them, that inspired me. I was like, okay, I didn't have this opportunity, but I know if I can get in to talk to these women, I know I can get them to speak to me the way I'm speaking to the coalition now, right. Sharing my true

experience, wanting to work and be a part of making a change for the women on the inside. And so I continue to do this because of them, right. And because I know that without our voices on the outside, the women on the inside will continue to suffer. And so, yeah, so that's what the coalition has done for me and many others and how we have worked together collectively to make change in our society around incarceration, around reentry and all of the good stuff.

Eve Glazier (00:49:09):

Are there other major campaigns or organizing initiatives within the CWP that you were involved with?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:49:18):

We did. I started with Hep C. We did the Medicaid expansion. We did the ASFA law. And when we did it, we were thinking about people who were losing the right to their children.

Eve Glazier (00:49:38):

Could you just clarify what the ASFA the acronym is?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:49:42):

ASFA stands for Adoptions and Safe Families Act, it's a federal law that puts a cap on a person's—weah. A-S-F-A, ASFA, yeah. Adoptions and Safe Families Act. And so it puts a cap on a person who has been out of contact with their child that is in a foster care system. So our ACS system has a cap. They can hold a child for 15 to 22 months without contact before initiating termination of parental rights.

Obden Mondésir (00:50:24):

And this is in the state of New York?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:50:25):

Of New York. This is in the country, this is a federal law, right. However, we got our state to remove that cap. And because we did our research and we found out that most folks sentences were 36 months. So, and in those 36 months, they were not able to see their children or communicate with them because of what they call "lack of funding" for foster care agencies and all of the things that the kinships and things like that, that they provided, but they couldn't provide the access to visits and traveling to and from these far facilities. And so people were incarcerated without contact of their children, and then not wanting to give them locations where they could write, excuse me—phone calls, numbers, where they can call. So they was disconnecting the families totally once a person was incarcerated.

Eve Glazier (00:51:35):

And around what year was the ASFA organizing?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:51:37):

ASFA started in 2007, eight, 2007, I think. And it, it didn't take long to process because most of the legislators got it kind of quickly. Why would you know that somebody's minimum sentence is 36 months, and if they're in treatment, it's 24 months, right. And when you go to treatment, let me say this, they totally disconnect you for the first, at least six months. You are no contact with the outside world because you are getting treatment. Been there, done that. So yeah, it was a no brainer that this 22 months needed to be lifted. So New York state lifted the cap. Each state can do what they choose with

it, right. So they decided to come together and lift the cap, right. And the cap was lifted and expand, I think, to the 36 months.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:52:51):

But in that time, it also says in the law that if your child is in foster care, that it's on the agency to find you, to connect you, to make sure that you got visits, phone calls, letters, and all of the above from your child. And that was put on the agency, not the parent, because that's what they wanted the parent to do. Knowing that once you're in inside of department of corrections, you are disconnected. If you don't make a list of people that you need to call and give it to the department, their numbers are not inputted into the system and you are not allowed to call. And if you tried to call someone, threeway like, I call you and ask you to call Grace, they listen in, oh, you made a threeway call, come on down to the in department, come on down and go to solitary confinement. And you can be in solitary for up to six months behind a call like that, right. Long story short is it just was a way of them to disconnect the families, keep them disconnected and parents really losing access to their children. And so we fought for that, that got passed in 2009. That got passed in 2009, and so did the first anti shackling law in 2009.

Obden Mondésir (00:54:15):

So I'm just gonna pause there. Just 'cause I kind have to take a break, and yeah, this is a good pausing point. So, um,

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:54:32):

And so, yeah, so they, they, it came out of a monitoring visit to Bedford Hills, and they found out that women were being shackled during pregnancy to and from medical appointments and during labor and delivery. And so, women were getting hurt. Couple of women had miscarriages, 'cause they had fallen with the shackles. And they didn't have any compassion. They just was shackling them around their waist with a big waist, a big chain that held their their handcuffs connected to their waist to their stomachs. And then they shackled their feet. So they couldn't walk properly. So women were getting hurt. And they were sharing that experience with the women on the visits, who did the monitoring, and they brought that issue back to the coalition.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:55:30):

And one of the things was they brought it to the conditions and reentry committee and they were like, this is a condition that they are holding women under, and we would like to see it change. Can we kind of come up with a solution of how best to get women out of these shackles? And I said, you know, even people who weren't pregnant were shackled like that. And it was, it was hard on us, right. I remember taking that trip shackled like that from Bedford Hills, I think like six to eight hours up to Albion, which is way up in, what the heck is the county now? Orleans county, which is way far north, we were, it's like 30 minutes off the Erie Canal, which is just about into Canada, right. And swelling my hands and my ankles. By the time I got off the, the bus, I could barely walk, right. And just imagine, and being pregnant and having to do that to a 45 minute hour drive to a, a hospital or a clinic to get your prenatal checkups, because the facility couldn't provide it, right. And so, long story short, we started talking and we was like, we need to not have them shackle pregnant women. We need to find a way to get rid of this practice. Long story short, we took it to Senator Montgomery. I'd never forget when we started talking to her about it, she showed us some pictures of slave women and how it brought back memories for her of her family members who were slaves and brought here. And this is how they brought slaves to the United States. And she was like, "no, we are gonna do something about this." And so she began with her

staff to draft the law to say that women cannot be shackled, but how are we gonna get them transported? Because we still had to think about their safety and the safety of other people.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:57:40):

So they kept saying that it was a security risk to unshackle them. These women are in labor. And that was our fight. They are in labor, they are in pain. What are they gonna possibly do? How could they run from anything like this. Long story short, we fought it. We started it. It was first introduced in 2008, quickly gained support in the state Senate. And the assembly passed through both houses and governor Patterson on his way out, signed it into law 2009. 2010, the Women in Prison Project goes back in on a monitoring visit and meets some women who had recently had children to find out what their experience were like. One of the women was coming home and a couple of them were coming home. 'Cause Miyhoshi came home, oh God, Tina came home...Miyhoshi, Tina, Bridget came home. It was three of them that came home and really talked about being shackled in 2009.

Eve Glazier (00:59:03):

Do you know what the full names of those people?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:59:08):

Miyhosi Benton, still have some contact with. Bridget, I don't remember her last name. Tina Tinan which her real name is Laura. Laura Tinan. I haven't had contact with her for a while, but she's still around. But yea, they actually came out and did a media blitz and shared their experience, right. And this was after the 2009 law was supposedly implemented. They were still shackling them. They were actually shackling pregnant women to a bar in the prison van taking them to and from doctor visits. So in the event that the van flipped over or was into an accident, these women were trapped. They could not help themselves. And so these were the stories that women were telling. And these were the stories we brought back to the legislature. They was like, no, this can't be, we need to abolish this.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (01:00:13):

This needs to stop happening altogether. And so we had to fight and we fought from 2010 to 2015. The Women in Prison Project decided to do a report that took about five years 'cause they did it in-depth. They did monitoring visits, surveys in and out of the prison, really looking at every aspect from reproductive health and all of that. They put it into a report. And Andrea might have given you one of the reports. I think I tried to give everybody the reports when we were leaving STEPS, but it just really talked about the horrific practices of the medical staff and the Department of Corrections around women. When that report came out and it got to the public, people were actually appalled and the legislature was like, "that's it! We are gonna ban shackling." So they got the law to ban shackling.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (01:01:23):

So there's no more waist chains. There's no more ankle bracelets. You only can handcuff a pregnant woman. From the moment of arrest, if a woman says she's pregnant, they need to handcuff her in the front and they need to get her to a hospital to prove it, right. If it's noticeable, then you must handcuff her in the front and you must not handcuff her to any immovable object in a vehicle. So in the event something happens, she's able to at least try to get herself to safety if she's not, you know, incoherent or knocked out anything like that. So that passed in 2015, that was a lot of advocacy.