

Obden Mondesir (00:00:00):

Today's date is August 16th, 2022. My name is Obden Mondesir. I am with:

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:00:07):

Anisah Sabur

Obden Mondesir (00:00:09):

And we are collecting the second part of this oral history for the Coalition for Prisoners collection. And we are also located on 3000 Broadway at Barnard College in the Millstein center. And we are going through items within the collection to see what memories can be sparked from looking them over. And one of the first things I wanted to show you Anisah is we have this poem "To my Reconnect Sisters", and it was by you and Lorryne Patterson after the Reconnect graduation in 2005. Are there things that you remember about that?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:01:07):

I'm trying to recall...we did a lot of writing around just empowering and sharing stories with one another. As Reconnect alum, right, we wanted to leave something behind that if other members would come along, they would see something from us. Before Andrea actually started the peer leaders and engaging us in meeting other Reconnect members, she would share some of our work with them. Right.

Obden Mondesir (00:01:50):

And you mean Andrea Williams?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:01:50):

Andrea Williams, yes. Who was actually the director of Reconnect. And, and so we all, she asked us all to take on a task to write something to the class behind us. And so Lorryne and I sat together and just really talked about what it was like for us to be able to come home, find our voice and advocate for our sisters we left behind. So that's what I remember about writing the poem, but the words actually, I can't tell you exactly what we wrote. But I know it was in collaboration with the two of us talking about our Reconnect experience.

Obden Mondesir (00:02:36):

Mn, Sweet. And then, what do you remember about working with Lorryne? What was that experience like?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:02:43):

Lorryne and I, we had similar issues when we came home and one of them was medical, right. We really fought to get medical attention for women on the inside because we both had medical issues that were unaddressed while we were inside. And so as we were in Reconnect and in the Coalition, like making the coalition meetings, we kept talking about our experience with the lack of real medical care while being inside. Lorryne and I became really good friends to the point, whereas, and she used to come and complain about working at KFC and how bad some of the customers would treat her, as well as this management staff. And so I started working for a nonprofit, Goodwill Industries, and they were looking for somebody and I recommended her and I told her about it. I said, come do human service work.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:03:47):

You know, I think for us, who've been impacted by incarceration, really using our experiences to bring humanity to our communities was something that I really aspired to do and really wanted to engage others in doing it as well, but not just voluntarily, but being able to get paid a living wage to do this work, to help other people, to guide people, in the way that we wanted to be guided, right. We wanted to be educated. We wanted to be able to live and get housing, all the things that were barriers for us. We wanted to overcome the barrier to housing, employment, and education. And so we kind of worked together. Actually Lorraine went back to school after that and got her her CASAC at first, right. And she kept trying to encourage me--"Anisah go get your CASAC." "You know, we could really help people if we had our CASAC, so that we could make more money, and we could get in the bigger organizations." But long story short, I was really loving the work of working with women directly. And although some of them had substance abuse, it still wasn't as heavy as really trying to help them overcome fighting parole issues, getting, safe and affordable housing, and then getting back into school. But actually up until literally just last week, while I was away, we're Facebook friends and I posted something and she was like, "all right, sister, you gotta stop we're neighbors. We live in the Bronx together. When are we gonna get together?" <laugh> but Lorraine has grown. She went back to school.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:05:33):

I think she has her master's. I think she either her master's or her bachelor's, but she's working in direct services in substance abuse treatment in Beth Israel hospital. She loves it. She loves her job. She's always posting about the good work she's doing. We keep in touch. We haven't seen each other, but we have talked. We text, we Facebook each other. When we're traveling, we let each other know. But out of all of, we was a cohort of 16, Lorraine and Sharon White Harrigan are the two women that I stayed connected with throughout the years. And I completed, we completed the same cohort in 2005, the spring. We did the, we did the spring of 2005, and we are still in connection today in the work in community events that happen. If one of them is speaking publicly somewhere, we all go and support.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:06:41):

We still stay connected. And that's what I feel like Reconnect has done for a lot of the women. Each cohort has their small group that stayed connected, that kept doing the work, kept getting themselves up out of the hole that they were in with incarceration and becoming productive members of society and doing really good things. You know, even some of the cohorts that came behind us, I'm still connected to some of the women and, you know, they were members of the coalition as the coalition grew and started to sunset, they had an input, so I stayed connected with quite a few of them, but Lorraine and I are really close. Yeah.

Obden Mondesir (00:07:26):

Sweet.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:07:29):

so when doing this, we reviewed it right after it was actually done. So this was, this is the strategy book, but this actually is the curriculum behind it, right. And Andrea Williams with a research professor from Columbia and I can't recall his name out the top of my head right now, actually did the curriculum, right. And then they presented it to us as alum to see if there was anything that needed to be changed, that should be changed. How did the curriculum work for us as members and cohort members of Reconnect? And so it was really empowering for a group of us who never really had any voice, right, to be able to sit

at the table and say, this worked well as a cohort member and this didn't and have someone listen to us and change the trajectory and the direction that Reconnect was going and really talking about how do we incorporate all of the cohorts into a new cohort. Right. So every time a new cohort came in, she would choose from prior cohorts, people who were available to actually do what they call peer leadership, right. And so that was something that was built in newly that wasn't in the original curriculum, right. but it really was empowering to be able to have our voices heard and to be a part of making a change that we knew would help other women coming home.

Obden Mondesir (00:09:18):

Mm. And the item that you were looking at is the Reconnect curriculum. And do you also remember, I know this is gonna be a hard question. Do you remember when this, um, curriculum was put together?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:09:35):

I'm gonna say don't quote me, but I believe 2003, because it was done before me. I don't think this is the final curriculum. The final curriculum came out--well, we did that in 2007 or eight. We did the final when we went back over, I think this is the original from what I'm looking at. It looks like the original one that we actually went through with Professor Ruggiero and Andrea Williams. And then there's a final, where she changed some of the protocol in the curriculum. And that's when she added in the peer leaders, right. But yeah, so it was either 2003 was the original curriculum, if I'm not mistaken. And 2007 or eight was when we went back and looked at it.

Obden Mondesir (00:10:39):

Okay

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:10:39):

After my cohort actually completed, and we started to talk about how do we engage the new cohorts coming in, really engaging them in coalition building. Right. And we started with us because a lot of us was really interested in the legislative work that was being done within the coalition, before we even got there.

Obden Mondesir (00:11:05):

Yeah

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:11:05):

And so then to bring our voices into it and then to encourage others to bring their voices and their experiences and how do we work together in building our policies that would really make systemic changes in our legal system. So, yeah. So 2003, if I'm not mistaken and then 2007 or eight for the final curriculum.

Obden Mondesir (00:11:30):

Okay. Sweet. And then, I mean, I think these are similar documents, curriculum unit two or three.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:11:46):

So what I'm holding in my hand is a book that was pulled together from interviews of women who were incarcerated, who were mothers and was having experiences, negative experiences with ACS and the legal system.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:12:08):

And this came out really around, to inform incarcerated individuals how to connect or reconnect with their children who were in foster care and to inform them about the laws that foster care had when it came to being disconnected from your children for a certain amount of time. So the federal government had, and still has a law, and it's called the "Safe Families"... safe. Let, let me, let me see ASFA, Adoptions and Safe Families Act, right. A-S-F, I can't pronounce it right. We called it ASFA A-S-F-A, right. Adoptions and Safe Families Act." It's a federal law that stated if your child was in foster care, and you had no contact with them for 15 out of 22 months, the agency can begin or represent your case to a judge to terminate your parental rights.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:13:22):

We found out that lots of mothers were losing their parental rights and losing contact to their children because they were incarcerated. And so in that this book came out to— it was information on how to reach out to ACS while you're incarcerated and really work to keep connected to your child. And in that, we came up with the law in New York state to change that and remove that cap of 15 out of 22 months. And so we got that passed in 2008 or nine. I think it was, I think, ASFA, let me see. It was, yeah, it was ASFA. And then no, it was HIV, Hep C, medicare, ASFA, then the anti shackling, then the DVSJA. Yeah. So I think this was like 2007, 2008, when that got passed.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:14:24):

And so this book was done by, um, in collaboration with the coalition and, the children's administration, cuz they were even members of the coalition back then, directly impacted women. Some currently incarcerated, some formally incarcerated, they were interviewed by social workers. You know, they shared their stories were shared and then they built this—it's something like a report and information session in this book, which went into every women's correctional facility to inform women on how to do what needs to be done. And then yeah, the book is called Out of Sight Out of Mind.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:15:05):

Out sight out of mind, really, and this woman, this picture was taken at Our Children. After she got out, she was able to connect with her children through Our Children. And so they used her story and her picture in this book. So she was just one of the people who actually allowed her story to be told so that the help can begin. So they can begin to help others who were fighting not only the legal system, but the family court system.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:15:38):

So that's where this book came from. And it did a lot of work. The incarcerated mothers program in the coalition, the committee, they did a lot of this organizing and advocacy around this issue and got the law passed. Okay. And so "The Real Cost of Prisons," I think this was done by our partners, I think at Odyssey. And this was done throughout, it was members of the coalition and partners. And this was something that we really tried to instill in people that they can overcome and be educated and actually get their lives back on track. But this wasn't actually a book that was done by the coalition, but in conjunction with the coalition. What's this checklist? Let me see.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:16:45):

I think this was things that we worked on in the coalition when folks needed, um, information, like when people came home, there were so many barriers to so many different things, right. People wanted to know about, you know, housing, jobs, licensing, how do they reunify with their children? So these were some of the checklists that we would do in Reconnect to actually see what, what was needed, right. A lot of people wanted to find out about the certificates of relief. And so these were entities that Andrea would actually have come in and do a session about the work and how to, how to apply for your disabilities, certificate of disabilities or certificate of good conduct to try to help people clear up their rap sheets. All of this checklist here is things that we actually had a session on. So we had 12 weeks of reconnect and every week we had some entity or agency come in and talk to us about what work they were providing for formerly incarcerated and incarcerated individuals.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:18:02):

So that's that. This is how to get family court records. Like this was one of the things that we, a lot of people came in and asked about, like, I don't know where my kids are. I don't know how to start to look for my children. I don't know if I have my rights terminated, how do I find out this information? So we had someone come in from the family court system and give us, you know, instructions on step by step, how to apply to the courts to get information, right. And to learn if you actually had lost your rights or not. And if you did, was there a way to actually try to go back and try to get your rights back? This was some mapping, what was this on? This was on reentry stuff, right?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:18:55):

A lot of the women that came home faced so many barriers to reentry and nobody really thought about looking at what the most important needs were. And so some of things that we did in Reconnect was we were able to talk about what we felt was most important for the individual, right. What was the thing that you need to get done now? What could you give a little time to and what was like the lowest level need that you had, right. And to really look at those needs and then start to map out how the system was involved in you returning to those needs and how they all intertwined, right. From prisons to jails or jails, to prisons, to homelessness, mental health, substance use, all of these played a major role in the community and you becoming incarcerated, and this is what happens after incarceration.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:19:58):

And so you have to go through all of trying to find permanent housing. Hopefully you can get, when you come home, you're truly homeless, right. And then what are you, what will happen? You go to maybe emergency housing, shelter, then maybe transitional housing, and how do you get permanent housing and how does that help you in your reentry process? So these were things that we really looked at for us coming home and helping to build out those kind of, those sessions where we had people coming in and really talking about what it was. This was people's stories about family. You know, a lot of women, like I said, this mostly looked like a lot of stuff here came from our sessions. Um, either in, in reconnect as a session or in the incarcerated mothers committee, right. And a lot of the work that they did around really figuring out how to address the court system and how to address our legislators in policies that would help alleviate some of the pressures that family court brought on directly impacted people in the community.

Obden Mondesir (00:21:14):

Um, um,

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:21:16):

It wasn't recording.

Obden Mondesir (00:21:17):

No. Oh, okay. But to reiterate, I have given you the folder from box three folder five Reproductive Injustice report from 2015. And could you tell me about this executive summary of a report from the Women in Prison Project?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:21:36):

So this report was born out of the original 2009 anti shackling law. And what happened was it was signed by Governor Patterson in 2009. It immediately went into effect, but the Department of Corrections refused to accept the law and to follow it. And in 2010 on a monitoring trip, the Women in Prison Project and the Correctional Association found that women were still being shackled to and from the hospital and during labor and delivery. And male officers was at the birthing of many of these children, of these women who were incarcerated. And so, although the law stated that they could not be in the room, they were in the room and they were shackled, even though the doctors had asked them to remove the shackles so the woman can have a birth in dignity, they refused, they kept saying it was a security risk. And so when they came back, they decided that was only one facility.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:22:49):

So they decided to do an in depth study on how many people from 2009, when the law went into effect to 2011, when they actually got all of the data together. So they made about maybe five monitoring trips, two to the furthest facility where women had given birth and their children were now either in foster care or with family members to get their experiences. They made two to Bedford Hills where the nursery was there, where the same women had experienced the same thing. Either their child was either in the nursery with them, or they were sent home or sent to foster care.

Obden Mondesir (00:23:34):

mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:23:34):

And then to Taconic where the same thing might have happened. So long story talks short, it took them about a good five years to gather all the data and all the information, but in the interim, working with the legislature to redo the law.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:23:51):

So this summary talks really about the inhumane practices that happened to pregnant women when they were incarcerated. This has data numbers, stories, the full report. I forgot it's maybe about 300 pages. This is just the summary, right. But it meant a lot to the women on the inside, the women who had came home, who had experienced shackling. And we continued to advocate until the governor signed it in 2015 to make sure that not only was the law strengthened, that women could not be shackled to and from the hospital, um, or during labor delivery, but that the officers needed to be out of the birthing room and that they could not handcuff a woman to an immovable object in a bus or a van. So the only way they could handcuff or shackle a woman, not shackle cause the handcuff cause the shackles are now gone, but they can handcuff a pregnant woman.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:25:00):

She has to be handcuffed in the front and in a moving vehicle, they cannot hold her down to a chair or a fence or anything like that. That's inside of these or lock her into a cage where she had no access to get out if there was an accident. So since 2015, when the law went into effect, we haven't really heard of many of the state facilities doing it. But a couple of the counties upstate New York, it was reported back to us that they were still shackling pregnant women. And so they were given information to a law firm that New York Civil Liberties Union partnered with us to take on any case that a woman said she was shackled to then sue the state. So there had been a couple, but I don't know what the outcome of the suits were, but that's what this summary is about. It's really about the healthcare in our state prisons, specifically around women who are pregnant, who are aging, women with pre-existing health conditions, HIV, Hep C, all of that was in this report. And I think that's why it took so long because it didn't just focus on the pregnancies. It focused on all health issues and the disparities of health care in our New York state prisons.

Obden Mondesir (00:26:31):

And then, maybe it might be easier to describe or discuss some of the photos that you have.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:26:38):

Oh, so this is a thank you card that we sent to our New York state legislature when we got the DVSJA passed. And so the first picture is the DVSJA committee who was actually in Albany the day it got passed. And we took this in a space. The capital is really old and the architecture is just really beautiful. So we took this right outside of the assembly, the Senate chambers, right. And then all of these are advocacy days over the years, each one of them was a different year. And this picture of sister Mary Nerney was the beginning of our advocacy for survivors. She was the lead in our coalition and she led the Violence against Women committee on the inside and outside. She brought voices from the inside to the committee, to the coalition.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:27:50):

She took our work and our drafts inside the facility so the women could read it really have an input in what it is that they wanted to see come out of the bill. And so Sister Mary was just an all amazing, she was a nun, an activist, an advocate, and just a loving woman who succumbed to cancer in 20-, I, if I'm getting it right either 2013 or 2014. And so, yeah, but she, she left the legacy and we continued and we vowed never to give up until we got the DVSJA passed, and in 2019, it worked.

Obden Mondesir (00:28:35):

And just to confirm who sister Mary Nerney is in this thank you card, she is the second photo in the second row to the right. Yes. And she's wearing a

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:28:53):

White shirt, that's a white shirt. It's a lavender, that's a lavender, 'cause that was her favorite color was lavender and a lavender it's like, it was a jacket, but she pushed it up three quarter sleeves. But yeah, that's sister Mary. And then most of these photos are just women on the VAW committee in the coalition itself. Um, this was a panel we did really trying to educate students in how they could support us. And this last one is a photo of myself, LadyKathryn Julien-Williams, LeDeama McMore, oh God, attorney General Tish James, a retired Senator. Valmanatte Montgomery, and our lead sponsor,

Roxanne Persaud on the DVSJA. And if you could see the clock on the wall, we were in Albany from like 7:30, 8 o'clock that morning and they didn't pass the bill until a quarter to six that night.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:30:10):

And we were all standing up and applauding. Well, they were actually applauding us the advocates for getting the bill that far, but all of these senators around, I think that's Senator Kennedy. I can't recall his name right now. All of the senators that really supported Senator Roxanne Persaud to get the bill passed actually got up when they passed it and started applauding. And they was like, no, you need to applaud these women, y'all stand up. And they made us stand up. We was, we didn't even know they took this picture until Valmanette Montgomery sent it to the coalition. She was a long standing coalition member and supporter in a lot of our work. She's co-sponsored all of the legislation that we put out. And she also led a lot of the incarcerated mothers committees, their work. So, the anti shackling bill, she was the lead on the ASFA bill, she was the lead on.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:31:15):

And before we got Senator Persaud, we had Senator Ruth Hassell Thompson. And the two of them were just like two African American powerhouse women in our Senate and they supported women's issues across the board. So yeah. So this picture, I really didn't want to give it up, but I was like, I can't, I have to let people know that when they see this, they need to know that we can make change in our systems. Right. And as long as we use our experiences and our voices, we can actually make some real change. And I'm gonna turn to this because this is really something that we worked on in the early stages. Um, Andrea, she actually wrote this report after doing several monitored visits and hearing from formerly incarcerated women about how they were stigmatized, how they couldn't get medication for HIV and Hep C, how the doctors were kind of demeaning to them when they told them their diagnoses.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:32:30):

And then they tried to kind of whitewash what was happening and not really giving them the treatment that they deserved. And so she did some interviews and began really doing research. And because she was able to go into the facilities and talk to the women and get their input and put together this report, it helped us when we fought to get the Department of Health to oversee the Hep C and HIV treatment in our facilities specifically for women. And so it's not a law, but it's a piece of executive law that the Department of Corrections and the Department of Health work together with to be able to say, "okay, this is something that needs to be looked at and taken care of." So this is this report, which is, it got a lot of information about the, like it says on the front of "stigma, hope support, peer educators, pride, survival, confidentiality." These are a lot of things that women couldn't get inside, right. But doing this report and helping people understand the importance of that, they were able to get it inside. So that's what this folder is really all about.

Obden Mondesir (00:33:49):

Let's see. So now we're looking at "Solitary Does Not Equal Quarantine" banner from 2020, this is in box three folder three, and Anisah, I was gonna ask you, like, what do you remember about like the context around this banner?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:34:08):

So,

Obden Mondesir (00:34:14):

Just to reiterate, we are looking at "Solidarity Does Not Equal Quarantine" banner from 2020. This is in box three, folder three, and Anisah...

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:34:27):

So this banner was handmade by Andrea Williams. It was a rapid response to our ending solitary in New York city jails and prisons campaign. And this was done in maybe March 2020, not long after COVID struck, because we found out from people on the inside that they were actually using solitary cells to quarantine people who they thought had symptoms of COVID 19 instead of to quarantine individuals for COVID-19. But solitary is torture. And what they were doing to individuals were putting them in solitary cells and they were sick and giving them no attention, they were treating 'em just like they had been put there for punishment. And it was COVID instead of releasing, especially aging, ailing people back to the community so that they families could care for them, they were putting them in solitary cells and leaving them, and they were dying, dying to COVID.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:36:01):

And we started rallying outside the New York Assembly speaker's office and the Senate majority leader's office. And so we decided to do this like overnight. And so Andrea and I were on the phone talking and I was like, you know I got to go and represent the sisters. She was like, "well, what can I do to help? I can't come to New York." I was like, well, we need signs and posters, you know, saying that solitary doesn't equal quarantine. And if you're gonna actually quarantine somebody give them medical quarantine, not solitary. She was like, I'm gonna make some posters. What should I make it on? I said, I don't know how I'm gonna get it. She said, "I'll put it in the mail." I said, the easiest thing to do is cut up a sheet and make it on the sheet. And this is not the only one. She made quite a few. One of them said something to the fact of, if I could recall, "women should not be in solitary and we should freed them all" or something to that nature. She made about three or four of these.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:37:11):

So yes. So she overnighted these to me so that I would have them to go to the rally the next day. And it was a great rally. It was cold. I was actually able to take a string and put through the other ones and actually tie them to someone's car. So as, as people were coming by and driving by, and we were in front of the assemblyman's office in the Bronx, they were seeing them blow with the wind, but they was tied to the car windows. But it was just to let people know that even in this pandemic, people were still being held in places where they were not able to get hand sanitizer, mask, medical care. When they got sick, they were thrown into an isolation cell as quarantine. And so, yeah, so this banner really helped us to get them to really look at the law that we were trying to get passed in the state and give us some real traction, um, because they actually signed it into law at the end of March in 2020.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:38:32):

And it gave them a year. So we are looking at the implementation of it. Now, they haven't ended it completely, but they reduced the use of it to 15 days. And then people are put into what they call rehabilitation units to then start to rehabilitate themselves to get back into general population. But yeah, this, this quilt, this poster came from a time when people were really losing their lives. Not only incarcerated people, but people across the world, right. We lost so many lives during this pandemic. We really wanted to uplift those who were incarcerated and support them in getting the proper care that

they needed and wanted them to stop using the solitary isolation cells as medical quarantine when they weren't giving people the medical attention that they needed. Yeah. So that's what this was.

unrelated audio (00:39:34):

May I have your attention may I please have...

Obden Mondesir (00:39:36):

So the image that we're looking at is from the, um, it's marked as a 2005 Reconnect graduation and the in the metadata, the folks that are described are yourself, Anisah and Tina Reynolds. So like, what do you remember in regards to the context of this photo?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:39:57):

So that photo was the full session of Reconnect, which you see most folks got on a coat. But that was me just supporting the new cohort. right. I went to just about every graduation afterwards, every completion, and I'm looking at this photo and just earlier this year, we lost one of our Reconect sisters--Maxine, and she's in this picture, and I haven't seen a picture of her in a while, but I think one of the pictures that they used for her services was her graduation picture without her coat from Reconnect.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:40:56):

But yeah, that was, that was a fun night. Like, we had the executive director of the Correctional Association there. We had board members there. We had the director of the Women in Prison Project, Andrea, as our leader. And it was just a really empowering and enlightening night to see others do what I did a couple of months earlier, right. And then connect with them. And so Maxine and I, when Bob left, he started his own organization, police, oh God, prop--P-R-O-P. I forgot what the acronym stands for, but it's really to hold police accountable for all of the police violence that was happening in New York City. Maxine and I both kind of joined their coalition really, supported, the work that they were doing around the city level work, getting council members to really see and hear from people who had been arrested and been abused by the police and things like that. And so, yeah, so I'm actually still in close communications with Tina Reynolds. Although our work went in two separate ways, but we wound up coming back and connecting through the work of philanthropy. And so we sit on an advisory circle to the New York Women's Foundation together. Myra, I don't know where Myra is. I think she moved back to the Dominican.

Obden Mondesir (00:42:39):

Republic?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:42:40):

Yeah. And Maxine is no longer with us. So Tina, Myra, Maxine and myself are all Reconnect alum. The other three people, one of them is a board member. And the other two were the directors of the projects and the executive director.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:42:57):

Okay. Well, so the next thing I wanna show is this image titled 2005, Who Will I Be Stage Shoot. And could you provide more context to like this image and what you remember from that night?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:43:14):

Okay. So in this image is myself and two women from my cohort, Lorraine Patterson and Kathy, what is her last name? I can't think of her last name right now. And Kathy, and then, oh God, I see her name and I can't pronounce it. What's her name? Then there was two women from Reconnect, 2003, Stacey Thompson, God, she gonna kill me. I can't think of her name. Okay. And what we were doing as a coalition, we were actually trying to help raise funds to keep Reconnect going. And so we, we sat together with, I don't remember her name. This woman is a musician, and she's playing an African instrument.

Obden Mondesir (00:44:10):

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:44:11):

I don't know what it's called, but it sounds like, almost like moroccas, right? It's this, it's this beaded material inside this, it looks like a fruit <laugh>, but it's actually an instrument.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:44:27):

And we, we actually wrote a poem together. So the five of us got together and we wrote a poem and it was about our transition back into society. Like, who will I be? Right. Do I have, do I know where a Metro card is, right? What is this cell phone? Right. Oh, you know, we asked a lot of questions to ourselves and who will I be? Was—we would ask ourself this question, who will I be? And then we would make this sound. And then we would read out from a line of the poem that we put together, right. So the five of us did that and she was making a noise with the, not a noise. She was making music with this thing and we were making a noise with our breath [breath sounds] to a beat to the—it was really amazing.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:45:28):

I wish we could have actually recorded that because we really needed to hear the sound. And all we were doing was breathing. She taught us how to breathe to the beat of the music that was coming from the instrument. And we were reading in between the music and each one of us had a script from the poem. It was really amazing. We did a, we did good. We did that at HBO. We had a nice size audience and we raised a good dollar. And people really came to us in the end. It was like, "listen, you know, we understand, we really want to support you guys. So whatever we can do," like write a check and give it to the Correction Association and help us to keep Reconnect going so that people behind us can actually have these same kind of experiences.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:46:21):

So that's what that was. And everybody, everybody, but Kathy, I've been able to either get some updates on, or have some contact with. So you asked me about Lorraine Patterson. She's sitting to the left of me in that picture. This is how we wanted to be together. We sat next to each other on that one. Yes. I don't know what happened to Kathy. Kathy, I don't know where she went after our last group together. Why am I not—Carol dam it, her name is Carol. Carol moved to North Carolina. No, Carol is here. That's the one I couldn't. Her name is Carol. It'll come to me, her name is Carol. Yeah. This is Stacey, Stacey, Lorraine, and me. We really stayed really close. I still talk to both of them today. Stacey was in the first Reconnect class.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:47:30):

And so her and Carol were reconnect alums in that class. Me and Lorryne came from my class and Kathy came from the fall. She came in the year after us. Well, the session after us. But she's the only one that I don't have any contact with. I heard some stuff some years later, but I'm not really sure it was never verified, but there was someone that said she passed away, but I'm not sure. So I don't know if that's actually true or not, but I just haven't had any contact with her since maybe like 2010, maybe. Yeah. Since 2010 about, but yeah, that was a fundraiser and we was fundraising 'cuase we wanted Reconnect to continue.

Obden Mondesir (00:48:22):

Mmm. Do you remember like the feelings of that night? What did it feel like performing?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:48:27):

We were nervous. All of us. We'd never, well, I don't know about anybody else, but I know I never had talked or sat or anything in front of anybody except for a little group of Reconnectors that we were connected to. And I think that was really my first, my first outreach kind of like in public speaking and sharing my incarceration experience, because everything we wrote was about incarceration and coming home and reintegrating, right. But yeah, it was an amazing feeling, right. And to know that people came up to me afterwards and said, you know, we're glad you're home. You know, we are glad you're working to try to get some help for other people. This coalition means a lot. And to have you guys and your experience lead in the way is what we need to change policies. And so, yeah, so it, it felt really good even though we were nervous. Cause I don't know <laugh> we were all nervous, every last one of us, but yeah, we did it though. And we got some money 'cause we were able to get Reconnect for the next year.

Obden Mondesir (00:49:47):

Fully funded for the next year with that evening?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:49:49):

Fully funded with that evening, that evening a couple of other like small individual donors, like talking to people, 'cause that was the first of one of our interactions with donors, right. And really sharing our experiences with them to see why it was so important to fund a project like that.

Obden Mondesir (00:50:13):

Mm. This s from 2015 and entitled "Anisah opening chant for the anti shackling rally." So this is about seven years ago. Do you remember where this is?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:50:31):

Yes.

Obden Mondesir (00:50:31):

What was happening at the time? And in the photo you have your hands in the air. So like, do you remember anything about that?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:50:40):

So I didn't even know they took this picture. When I saw it. I was like, oh my God!

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:50:47):

We were at Governor Cuomo's Manhattan office, third avenue and 40th street, 40, 41st street. And we set up across the street from his office because we had passed both houses, passed the anti shackling, the new law, right. And I call it the new one because it was expanded. And so we were waiting for governor Cuomo to sign it into law and he was taking his time. And so this was in October, mid October, I think, or late September of 2015. And we rallied up our partners in the coalition, all of the organizations that serviced women in New York. And we went and we rallied outside of his office. And so they asked me to lead the chants and the Chant, we, I was doing right there is "the chains are inhumane". And so I threw my hands up in the air to make people really feel it, that we needed to have the chains broken.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:52:05):

We had all kinds of posters and signs and fake handcuffs and fake pregnancy bellies people had on them and was holding the handcuffs up in one hand showing like releasing, you know, the other hand. So there's no cuff. Um, that was really, that was the first year that I was leading the coalition in a big rally like that. And that rally actually, if you could see a picture of the whole space, we rallied about maybe 200 to 300 people as partners. But then as pass-bysers was coming, they was joining to listen in because we were speaking, we had press out there. And it just looked like just a big crowd of people. And we were handing out call cards, telling people to call Cuomo and get him to sign the bill. And it took another about month or so. And then right before the Christmas break, he signed it.

Obden Mondesir (00:53:11):

Mm.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:53:12):

Yeah.

Obden Mondesir (00:53:13):

And in regards to organizing and, and like doing these rallies, like, it sounds like it's very different from like the general work of Reconnect--not different, but like, you know, there seems to be like a different skill set in this kind of work

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:53:30):

So yeah. So, so it is different from just being a member of Reconnect, but organizing other folks. And that's something that I actually learned through reconnect is how to organize, right. How to base, build, how to reach out to people, do outreach and do outreach educational wise, like tell people like, why am I talking to you? Like this is what's happening. And this is my experience, and I'm needing support. And can you support me in this? And if you can, can you show up at this time at this location? Or can you come to a meeting? Can you see what we are really working on and help us work on it, right? Can you go with us to Albany? Organizing people to go to Albany to advocate for an issue, it's a task, right. But it really is having the ability to, to build relationships with communities and then getting them communities into action. And so it's a little different from Reconnect. Reconnect was the space where we trained and we learned how to do all of that. And then actually doing it is what you see me doing there in that picture.

Obden Mondesir (00:54:49):

And then like, I guess in this moment, do you remember what it felt like to like one lead the chat and then this being your first one?

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:54:56):

I was nervous. I was nervous because I felt like, although I felt supported, I felt like, oh my God, this is my first—cause they just gave me instruction. They was like, we need you to organize this rally. We need you to get the permits. We need you to, you know, talk to the police for barricades. We need you to do. And I mean, I had to do it all and it was me. I was facilitating and organizing the whole rally, right. We need you to reach out to press and tell them what we're doing. And I was like, okay, but I was nervous <laugh> it was my really first time like stepping up and leading, right. But after it was all said and done, although we didn't get the bill signed that day, it still felt good to be able to have people—and if you see it surrounding me on the podium later on, and, and actually all of us doing this chanting together, right. Holding up signs, standing side by side with, directors of women organizations like New York Women's Foundation and NOW, the organizations that all looked at women's issues in New York city, all of them, we were all on this, this platform, and all surrounded by coalition members, formerly incarcerated women, women who experienced shackling, all of us on that stage together, it just made me feel really comfortable. So I was happy that it worked out like that. And I was, I was fully supported in doing that work.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:56:40):

Sweet <affirmative> mm-hmm <affirmative> so yeah, this is a document or image titled tears of joy of LadyKathryn.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:56:51):

So that was the day that the, we were in Albany. We were up there advocating to push the bill to come to the floor to get it voted on, and we got it passed. And so right as we were leaving the chambers and we were in the, no, we were in the Senate's office in her conference space and she came in and said, "it's done, the bill has been passed." We need to go to chambers now, so we can do it officially. And LadyKathryn just broke down and cried, and I just hugged her. I said, "we did it." because we had been working on it for 10 years. And LadyKathryn was a survivor who kind of, sort of got the DVSJA, but didn't because it wasn't a law at the time. But because of the work that sister Mary Nerney did on her case, she was able to get that alternative.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:58:03):

Although she wound up spending about three years on Rikers going back and forth to court, she wound up getting an alternative at the end of those three years with the help of sister Mary Nerney and her program at Greenhope, 'cause that's where she started from. She started from Greenhope, and she just, when we talked about the bill in the coalition, even though she was not a Reconnect alum, she was a coalition member and she sat to the very end in the VAW committee, right. And she worked really close with me. Actually, I just spoke to her. She called me Sunday, spoke to her Sunday. That's why I asked her because she has a poster that she made when she was deep in the advocacy, trying to get this bill passed. We were doing petitions and having people sign saying to the legislature.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (00:59:09):

And she would go out on her weekends and join tabling events. And she made a poster and she made cards and just letting people know that we need to fight for this issue. And she still has the poster, and

she wants to donate it to the CWP. But I haven't had a chance to get it from her, but we are supposed to meet up this Friday. If she gives it to me, I will get it to you. Okay. And she said, definitely she'll give us anything we want to say she's donating it. But it's a picture of her. And at the time, our lead sponsor, Ruth Hassel Thompson and our assembly lead sponsor, Jeffrion Aubrey, and they started with us. Jeffrion stayed with us to the end, and he's still there, but Ruth Hassel Thompson moved on and that's how Roxanne Persaud got the DVSJA legislation.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (01:00:10):

But that's when we knew that it was passed, and she just broke down. I mean, I wasn't criminalized as a survivor because I didn't fight back, but my coercion got me incarcerated. And so I did other things and that's what caused my incarceration. LadyKat fought back, and she killed her husband, her father's children. She had two kids and she killed him because of the abuse. And so to know that she was facing life in prison, and that to know that there were women already doing life in prison because they fought back. She fought really hard for that. And so that emotion is really tears of joy knowing that we got it passed. And now just following with the implementation and the tracking. We've done pretty well. Right now we have 30 individuals who have been resentenced and more are applying, and three of them are men.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (01:01:22):

So, you know, in the law, it talks about exclusions, but the abuse could come from a family member and people are really looking at childhood abuse that led them to a life of crime. So their cases are being looked at. As a part of the survivor justice project, I'm able to receive letters from people on the inside who want to know more about the law and how do we apply? So we did a guide, so I'm sending them the guide so that they can then read through it to see if it really applies to them and then how to submit the form for re-sentencing. So, yeah, so she's really happy that this law has passed and that people are now being able to utilize it to get re-sentenced because the sentences were really harsh for most people who have either seriously injured or killed their abusers. So that's what that picture is about. And this really is this joy. Mm. We were so happy. We had no idea it was gonna pass that day. We just went up because we knew it was a session day and that we were close to the end of session and we really wanted to push to make sure that they got it done. So it was about maybe 25 of us that went up. And, yeah, it was a surprise, but we got it done. And that was the joy.

Anisah Sabur Mumin (01:03:01):

And actually, my husband took that picture. He said, "I thought this was the best picture that anybody could take." He took a picture of me and her, and the picture of me and one of the former directors, the assistant director of the Women in Prison Project. She too was also in tears because she started with us, but then they moved on and we kept going, you know, and then to be up at the end, she too was overjoyed that it had gotten passed. So yeah. So that was a very emotional time for all of us. Yeah. And picture just says a thousand words. They do. Yeah.