

Annual Gratitude Report

2023

2023





Who We Are

James Bell founded the Haywood Burns Institute (BI), a **Black-led national nonprofit** in honor of his friend and mentor W. Haywood Burns. Today, BI employs a three-person Executive Director leadership structure with a diverse team of bold visionaries. Always challenging racial hierarchy and the social control of communities of color by the justice sector and other public systems, **BI employs strategies and tactics to establish a community-centered approach to transformation that is anchored in structural well-being.**



Table of Contents



1

The Introduction

3

Shared Leadership

5

The Work

Ramsey County.....	5
The City of Tulsa.....	10
Los Angeles County.....	15
Alameda County.....	20
Certificate Training Series.....	23



29

**The Future
Ahead to 2024**

35

**Financials
and Partner
Acknowledgements**

40

Donate





Introduction

It's been a long time I shouldn't have left you Without a strong rhyme to step to...



For those of you who know your hip hop history, you'll recognize Eric B. and Rakim's "I know you got soul" as a musical celebration that encourages listeners to connect with their inner self and allow their soul to move with the beat. Well, it's about that time.

It's been several years since our last annual report, and so much has happened since then. Life-altering events gave us reason to pause and reassess how we do what we do, and why we do it. As that inner-self work stirs, we prioritize well-being and align our work with our values. If the work is our beat, it must move the soul.

Like you, Covid-19 changed our world, and how we work—moving from physical to virtual offices, refining our organizational structure and approach, and most importantly, finding ways for our team to feel connected.

While America's boisterous, yet time-limited racial reckoning kept us very busy, it also sharpened our discernment as an organization—realizing the limitations of grand statements of commitment to racial justice, with unchecked and unmet investment and impact goals. Yet we found new, nontraditional partners reaching out, donating, and making shifts toward real change.

And while the ever-present "affective" political polarization has played as the primary soundtrack for far too long, it has overwhelmingly demonstrated the need for us all to re-center our humanity and lead with love.

So, while on this wild ride, we have learned many lessons and are excited to share them with you. Throughout this report, you'll hear some of our brilliant and bold colleagues discussing a range of projects, from small places doing big things to efforts sparking massive change. We have new partnerships and have launched new efforts, all of which will illustrate the depth and breadth of Structural Well-Being.

We're also going to take you behind the scenes to answer some of the many questions about our shared leadership and organizational structure. With four years under our belt, we can now share deeper insights about sharing power, building trust, making decisions, and being values-driven.

A wise colleague once told us that we should be an organization who speaks when we have something to say, so as you can see after four years, we have plenty to share. So, sit back, put your feet up, grab your favorite beverage and lean all the way in...

In gratitude and love,

Tshaka Barrows
Executive Director

Samantha Mellerson
Executive Director

Michael Finley
Executive Director

Shared Leadership

Hear reflections from **co-executive directors Tshaka Barrows, Samantha Mellerson, and Michael Finley**, about the complexity, hilarity, and rewards of sharing leadership.



Watch Now

Gratitude Spotlight

BI recognizes the numerous contributions to our ongoing growth and success: from **Annie E. Casey Foundation's** seed investment to connect us with the strategic planning gurus at **Community Wealth Partners**; to our executive coach **Inca Mohamed** who masterfully holds us in love and accountability; and to our **BI Team** of bold visionaries who keep us humble with their candor and commitment, patience and perseverance, laughter (even at us) and love.

A nighttime photograph of a city skyline reflected in a body of water. In the foreground, a calm river reflects the city lights. A rocky bluff with a walkway and lights sits in the middle ground. The background features a dense urban skyline with several tall buildings, including one with a prominent red-tipped tower. The sky is a deep blue.

Ramsey

Minnesota

The Path to Redemption: Structural Well-Being in Ramsey County, Minnesota

Ramsey County (MN), where BI has worked since 2005, has been journeying with us toward system transformation that transcends status quo, “race-neutral” approaches, tools, and technologies. We’ve done this as a Learning Community, in collaborative exploration of how racial hierarchy in the human service administration of justice and provision of human services perpetuates racial and ethnic disparities. A diverse group of public servants from some of the County’s most central departments (i.e., Public Health, Social Services, Public Safety, Housing and Economic Development, and Attorney’s Office), in partnership with community, joined us in this pioneering work when others in the national justice network, including field practitioners and philanthropic entities, would not.

Through a collaborative cross-sector process of building awareness around structural racism, analyzing data, and prioritizing community voice, the Learning Community made explicit steps toward institutionalizing values that support well-being for everyone in the community, especially community members of color.

[**The Path to Transformation: Structural Well-Being in Ramsey County, MN Case Study**](#), released in spring 2023, documents the history, lessons, and future direction of this immense undertaking. To build upon this, BI is now working with a cohort of County leaders comprising the second official Learning Community. Our expectation for the spirit of this effort—in fact, all our efforts—is summed up in the final sentence of The Path to Transformation: “Being brave enough to dare and devote ourselves to change comes easier. Together.”



Being brave enough to dare and
devote ourselves to change
comes easier. Together.

The Path to
Transformation

The Legacy Museum Montgomery, Alabama

Ramsey County Learning Community
Site Visit | March 2023

Caption: A side view of The Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, captured during a site visit by the Ramsey County Learning Community in March 2023.
Photo courtesy of The Haywood Burns Institute

FROM
ENSLAVEMENT
TO MASS
INCARCERATION

The Legacy Museum Montgomery, Alabama

Ramsey County Learning Community
Site Visit | March 2023

9



Caption: From left, Raquel Mariscal, Senior Advisor, James Bell, Founding President-in-Residence, and Angelique Kedem, Senior Advisor, at The Legacy Museum, Montgomery, Alabama, during a March 2023 site visit with the Ramsey County Learning Community.
Photo courtesy of The Haywood Burns Institute.

An aerial photograph of Tulsa, Oklahoma, taken during the "golden hour" of sunset. The sun is a bright orange orb on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the city. The Tulsa River winds through the landscape in the background. The city is filled with a variety of buildings, including several prominent skyscrapers. The downtown area is densely packed with structures, while the surrounding areas show more spread-out development and parking lots. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and light blue.

Tulsa

Oklahoma



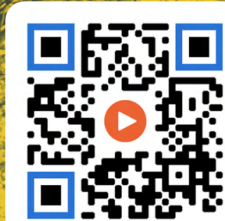
Rebuilding Greenwood: Tulsa's Journey Towards Equitable Revival



Tulsa is the site of historic racial harms and exactly where the nation must look to understand the complexity of revisiting and repairing this harm.

As one of the organizations convened by Blue Meridian Partners' Opportunity Accelerator initiative, BI helped facilitate the City of Tulsa's work with the historic Greenwood-Black Wall Street communities to address the injustice and resulting inequities arising from the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre as well as urban renewal policies that stunted Greenwood's economic growth. The transfer of 56 acres in the Kirkpatrick Heights-Greenwood districts to a community-led development is an investment in the well-being of Black North Tulsans, in particular, and a blueprint for equitable business development.





Watch Now

Rebuilding Greenwood: Tulsa's Journey Towards Equitable Revival (Visualizer)

Produced by Neek Films | *Tulsa, Oklahoma*

yet ever more of what we don't want, what we don't like, what we want to change. So for me, activism is about a spiritual practice as a way of life. And I realized I didn't climb the tree because I was angry at the corporations and the government: I climbed the tree because when I fell in love with the redwoods, I fell in love with the world. So it is my feeling of 'connection' that drives me, instead of my anger and feelings of being disconnected.



An aerial photograph of Los Angeles, California, taken during the "golden hour" of sunset. The city's skyline is visible in the background, featuring several prominent skyscrapers like the US Bank Tower. In the foreground, a complex network of multi-lane highways is filled with cars, with some vehicles appearing as streaks due to motion blur. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, with the sun low on the right horizon. The overall scene captures the bustling energy of a major metropolitan area.

Los Angeles

California



Reimagining Youth Justice in Los Angeles County

Since beginning our lead facilitator role in January 2020, BI has led the community-systems partnership to reimagine youth justice in Los Angeles County. This unprecedented effort is utterly transforming youth justice, steadily increasing velocity after the unanimous approval of the report [Youth Justice Reimagined](#) and the monumental establishment of its key recommendation in 2022: the Department of Youth Development. As we continue this work, BI feels increasing confidence in this bellwether of possibilities and potential for care-first youth justice systems nationwide.

For more information about our work in Los Angeles County, [**scan the QR code.**](#)





Watch Now

Reimagining Youth Justice: BI's Transformative Journey in Los Angeles County

Narrated by Raquel Mariscal, Senior Advisor at BI | Prod. by Final Frame



Gratitude Spotlight

This monumental transformation would be impossible without bold philanthropic partners, including the **Ballmer Group, Liberty Hill Foundation, and the Reissa Foundation**, as well as **local champions, advocates, impacted community leaders, and system stakeholders**: Board of Supervisors, CEO's Office, DYD, and our close-in consultant team members: Isaac Bryan, Susan Burton, Lupita Carballo, Ruth Cusik, Danielle Dupuy, Gloria Gonzalez, Agustin Herrera, Alma Isidoro, Jacob Jackson, Garrett Jacobs, Clinton Lacey, Sam Lewis, Lisa Macaluso, Mariana Mendoza, Rebecca Renard, Anthony Robles, Saul Sarabia, Olivia Shields, Patricia Soung, David Turner, Rostin Woo, Tavia Wooley, Ray Zacarias, **and the many community-based organizations, firms, and networks lending talent and time**: Anti Recidivism Coalition, Arts for Healing and Justice Network, California Alliance for Youth and Community Justice, Designing Justice Designing Spaces, LA Youth Rise Up Coalition, Third Sector Capitol Partners, Young Women's Freedom Center, Youth Justice Coalition

Alameda





Mandating Diversion in Alameda County

Since coming together as the Free Our Kids coalition (FOK) to disrupt construction of a new \$75 million dollar prison for youth in Alameda County, community members have actively reimagined youth justice in Alameda County (CA). BI has been right there to support FOK in policy advocacy, accountability, data analysis and workshops.

Construction of the facility never moved forward, but the coalition did. Free Our Kids calls on the County of Alameda to move past the existing ineffective and traumatic punitive system in favor of a care-centered approach to youth justice that strives to support and rehabilitate our kids rather than punish them.

Free Our Kids commits to reimagining a new model for youth justice in Alameda County based on principles of health, equity, and community.

One of the most impactful laws affecting youth in California over the last couple of years is SB 823, a bill that closed the Division of Juvenile Justice, our state prison for youth. SB 823 shifts California to a locally based, health-focused approach to youth justice. Free Our Kids has been active in the local work to hold our county officials accountable to efforts to move from a system of punishment that disproportionately locks up youth of color and toward a transformative approach to youth justice.

BI worked with our Free Our Kids to draft and promote a proposal for a community-led workgroup. This workgroup would have Alameda County partner with directly impacted youth and youth advocates to design and deliver a plan that transitions the County from a punishment focused, law enforcement response to children. This plan would build the capacity of community-based organizations to serve youth outside the current justice system; result in a significant reduction in youth contact with the justice system; prevent the prosecution and incarceration of children in the adult system; and explore a rehabilitative, health-focused, and care-first model of youth justice.





Certificate Training Series



Caption: Co-executive directors Tshaka Barrows, Samantha Mellerson, and Michael Finley, along with BI founding president-in-residence James Bell, at the closing ceremony of the first certificate training series cohort, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 2023. Photo by Clearshot Productions, LLC.
Courtesy of The Haywood Burns Institute

Launching the James Bell Racial Justice and Structural Well-Being Certificate Training Series

A Transformative 8-Module Journey

When James Bell founded BI as a declaration of his unwavering commitment to racial justice, there was little philanthropic giving or charitable donation-making for nonprofits explicitly focused on race, and very few for justice. We laugh now, but he couldn't have chosen a tougher mission for which to fundraise. James never looks for the easy path, only the right one.

His relentless pursuit of justice, fairness, and equity flows from the love of our people. And as Tshaka, Mike, and I began to share leadership, we wanted BI to honor James and his name, carrying it into our everyday work and into the future, just as he's done for Haywood.

The James Bell Racial Justice & Structural Well-Being Certificate Training Series is our opportunity to share our best thinking, ideas, and lessons from the field,



in a space to shower our people with love, thought partnership, trust, support, and connection.

Launched in 2023, we accepted 20 participants from an impressive pool of 70+ applicants. After nine months and eight modules (January-September), in a special in-person ceremony in Albuquerque this October, the series graduated its first cohort of racial and social justice advocates across nonprofit, government, and philanthropic sectors. They came from all over the nation, including Dallas, Brooklyn, Washington, DC, Los Angeles, Baltimore, Albuquerque, and Asheville (NC), and are at various stages in their careers and vocations.

Witnessing their incisiveness, spirit, and vision has been inspirational. We can't wait to see how far they go, how they flourish. In the meantime, our goal is to grow the ranks of graduates well into the future. **The application process for the second cohort begins in January 2024.**

Scan the QR code to listen to testimonials from participants from the inaugural cohort the James Bell Racial Justice and Structural Well-Being Certificate Training Series.



Watch Now

BI's Inaugural Certificate Training Series Cohort Reflects on a Transformative Experience

Produced by Clearshot Productions, LLC | *Albuquerque, New Mexico*



Caption: The inaugural class of the James Bell Racial Justice and Structural Well-Being Certificate Training Series, known as 'Disruptors', gather in Albuquerque, New Mexico, for their closing ceremony, 2023. Photo by Clearshot Productions, LLC. Courtesy of The Haywood Burns Institute



Caption: The inaugural class of the James Bell Racial Justice and Structural Well-Being Certificate Training Series, known as 'Disruptors', gather in Albuquerque, New Mexico, for their closing ceremony, 2023. Photo by Clearshot Productions, LLC. *Courtesy of The Haywood Burns Institute*

Gratitude Spotlight

Expressing the immense gratitude we feel for you, our first inaugural class of **DISRUPTORS**! But we'll begin with a special shout-out for your fellowship, trust, vulnerability, and love.
#inspiration

Julia Baez, Holly Child, Andrea Calderon, Serita Fontanesi, Albino Garcia, Jr., Sylvia Garcia, Fernando Giraldo, Cherrell Green, Leslie Gross, Loren Gomez, Tiffany Iheanacho, Alani Jackson, Zachary Markovits, Sefanit Mekuria, Samatha Nemanu, David Onok, Jennifer Park, Candace Reyes, Erik Rivera, Jason Szanyi, Danielle Torain...**this group will always be legendary!**



Watch Now

The Future

Ahead to 2024

Hear our foremost goals in three areas:
our work, our culture, and our sustainability.

Narrated by BI's Executive Leadership Team | Produced by Final Frame

Gratitude Spotlight

BI recognizes the numerous contributions to our ongoing growth and success: from **Annie E. Casey Foundation's** seed investment to connect us with the strategic planning gurus at **Community Wealth Partners**; to our executive coach **Inca Mohamed** who masterfully holds us in love and accountability; and to **our Board** and **BI Team** of bold visionaries who keep us humble with their candor and commitment, patience and perseverance, laughter (even at us) and love.

Our Work

Learning Exchanges. We'll be increasing the frequency and depth of these exchanges which are paramount in vitalizing our interpersonal relationships and surging the direction of our work alongside current or prospective partners. The absolute highlight of our 2022 staff retreat in Puerto Rico was an exchange with the feminist nonprofit organization [Taller Salud](#). Located in Loiza (roughly 30 minutes from San Juan), a town settled by formerly enslaved Blacks in the 16th century and now the present-day Black epicenter of the island, Taller Salud enhances women's health care access, promotes community violence reduction, and fosters economic development through education, organizing, and advocacy. In our time together at the Loiza Community Center and at Rancho Amor Mio, where community violence interrupters led us in horseback riding, and we drank from coconuts, we bonded over our shared missions promoting well-being and safety through community-centered dialogue.

Expanding our [Certificate Training Series](#). We intend this successful new initiative to increase the accessibility and availability of our Structural Well-Being approach. To date, participants have come from throughout the US, including Baltimore (MD), Austin (TX), Washington, DC, Asheville (NC), Santa Cruz (CA), Boston, and Albuquerque (NM).

Navigating through political shifts. We expect that the upcoming

national elections will influence the field of racial justice and system transformation, as well as philanthropy's major role in seeding, supporting, and increasing mainstream interest in this sector through their vast networks of influence and social capital. Long-standing race-based political strategies intended to foment tensions, divide citizens, and mobilize party membership have silenced many philanthropic partners. Consequently, philanthropic institutions increasingly adopt a "bipartisan" approach to advance policy priorities and charitable giving—shifting away from an explicit focus on racial equity—to appear neutral, avert potential political pitfalls, and maintain their "big tent" approach. This often involves avoiding any explicit language used in political rhetoric regarding race, racial justice, and references to power-shifting/sharing and community organizing.

As a racial justice organization that receives and relies upon philanthropic giving, we know that this silence is harmful and hurtful. While we recognize the need to develop and maintain partnerships across the political party spectrum, we believe those relationships must always be anchored in the well-being of all people, while shaping a more honest and accurate discussion of the very issues these partnerships must consider to achieve universal well-being. We know to expect upheaval, partisanship, and change, and will remain vigilant in our commitment to centering people's well-being. This is what steadies us.

Our Culture

Team-building in a virtual world. How can we foster a cohesive team virtually? How do we see, acknowledge, and take care of one another? How do BI's staff policies and practices reflect the well-being model we promote nationally? The questions are endless, and finding the answers takes a serious, ongoing commitment.

Every day, on every call, in every in-person gathering. We don't avoid complexity, we embrace it. Seeing and appreciating each person's full humanity is our aspiration. Our diversity is our strength, and conflict—loving conflict—comes with it. As we institutionalize ways to address these questions, these aspirations, we'll share them and encourage others to as well.





Our Sustainability

We recognize that well-intended organizations like ours, with hardworking and dedicated staff, often face significant financial challenges that lock them into a perpetual state of reacting instead of moving forward in an intentional and deliberately planned manner. Every day, we work to ensure that BI is viable and effective for decades to come. To achieve financial stability and sustainability as thoughtful stewards of our resources, we establish philanthropic partnerships that align with our values and mission and engage in creative strategies to maximize our resources and develop revenue streams, such as the Certificate Training Series which will reduce our reliance on foundation grants.

We also actively engage our current Board of Directors, benefiting from their decades of professional and personal experience, while recruiting new Board members who possess the skills to support and maintain our organizational stability for years to come.

Gratitude Spotlight

The path ahead looks promising in many ways, but we know that challenges await us—all of us: our partners, champions for racial justice, the communities we love, care about and respect, and those pushing for change within the very institutions we seek to transform.

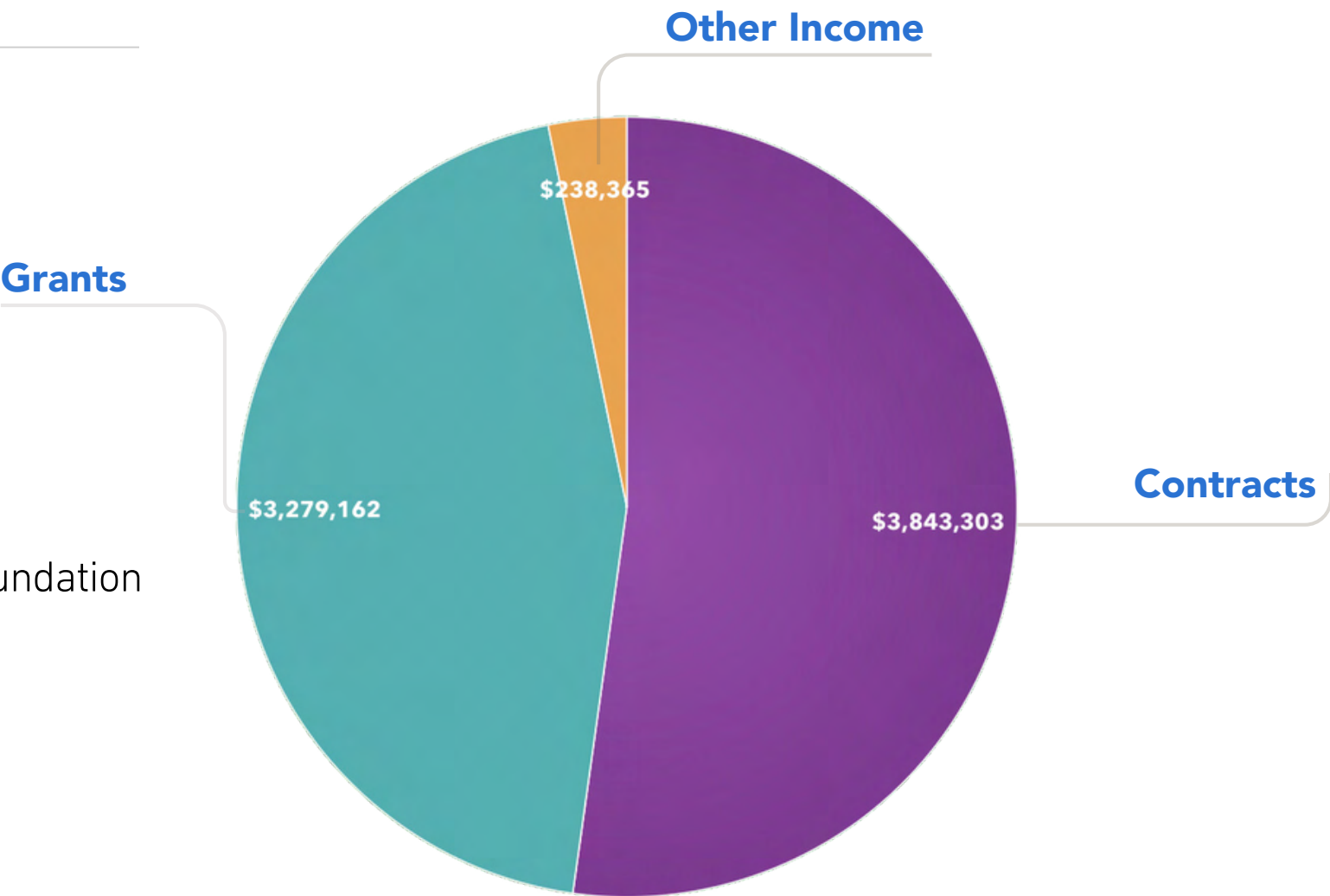
So, as we step into 2024, we must see each other, lift each other up, and our efforts to **disrupt** the status quo, **dismantle** structural inequity, and **rebuild** a better path forward. For those who boldly walk with us, hand in hand, **we're grateful for you!**



Financials and Partner Acknowledgments

Major Contributors

- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Ballmer Group
- Black Administrators in Child Welfare
- Contra Costa County
- Ford Foundation
- Heising Simons Foundation
- Kansas Department of Corrections
- King County
- Liberty Hill
- Los Angeles County
- National Association of Counties Research Foundation
- National Women's Law Center
- Opportunity Accelerator
- Pew Charitable Trust
- Prevent Child Abuse America
- Ramsey County
- Solano County Probation
- The Children's Partnership
- Ventura County
- Zellerbach Family Foundation



Gratitude Spotlight

A special thanks to: **Burlington Charitable Foundation, Capital Group's Nathan Scott** and **Universal Music Group's Task Force for Meaningful Change.**



Media Partners



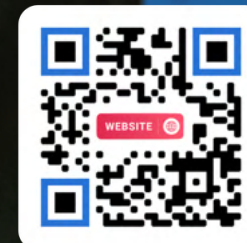
Gratitude Spotlight

A special thanks to:
Carlos-Fernando Hurtado Photography
Clearshot Productions, LLC
Creamy Animation
Final Frame
Neek Films
PJ Interactive

Justice Is Reimagined With Every Donation

Your contribution in any form helps us sustain our work.
Thank you for your generosity and support!

burnsinstitute.org/donate



[View Online Report](#)