

From the Frontlines

A Personal and Professional Reflexive Analysis of the U.S. Foster Care System

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Abstract

This autoethnography offers a personal and professional reflexive analysis of the U.S. foster care system from the perspective of a former foster youth, and current social worker and kinship guardian. Through narrative and critical analysis, it exposes how the system—though intended to protect—functions as a carceral regime that perpetuates racialized surveillance, intergenerational trauma, and systemic harm, particularly for Black, Latino, and Indigenous families. The piece argues that reform is insufficient, arguing instead for a radical reimagining of care grounded in community, dignity, and restorative. This analytical autoethnography critiques the complicity of nonprofits, educators, and policymakers in sustaining harm and urges a collective shift from paternalistic intervention to solidarity-driven support. It calls for the centering of lived experience, structural courage, and policies that prioritize family preservation, healing, and equity. This is not just a critique—it is an urgent call to action for a system of care that affirms rather than erases.

Keywords: *Generational trauma, foster care abolition, racialized child welfare*

Introduction

I write this autoethnography as someone who has experienced the United States foster care system from nearly every vantage point—as a former foster youth, a professional working with vulnerable populations, and now as a legal guardian navigating that same system on behalf of a child in care. This manuscript is a very critical reflection analyzing my experiences and perspectives about the U.S. foster care system primarily emphasizing self-awareness, growth, and how my perspective has evolved. This autoethnography is a deeply personal, ethical, and political reflection on a system that

shaped my life and continues to shape the lives of millions—disproportionately Black, Latino, and Indigenous children and families (Dettlaff, 2023; Roberts, 2022; Roxburgh & Sinclair, 2024).

The foster care system in the U.S., while often framed as a protective measure for children, operates as a carceral apparatus—one that surveils, regulates, and punishes marginalized families under the guise of care (Roberts, 2022). Rather than centering healing or support, it mirrors the punitive structures of the criminal legal system: investigations, removals, placements, and reviews take place within a bureaucratic infrastructure focused more on compliance and control than on compassion or repair, and as Dettlaff (2023) noted to separate the “bad” from the “good” (i.e., good parents or children vs bad/neglectful parents or children). It has functioned as a tool of family separation, racialized governance, and state-sponsored trauma. It has been argued that the U.S. child welfare system’s foundational logic rests on surveillance and punishment, not necessarily on care, healing, and family reunification (see Dettlaff, 2023; Roberts, 2022).

This autoethnography is both testimony and analysis. It aims to amplify the voices of those most impacted and challenges nonprofits, educators, and policymakers to intentionally and proactively consider the harm this system causes, especially under the guise of child protection.

The Past: A Trauma Informed Reflective Experience

The U.S. foster care systems’ past is rooted in attempts to care for vulnerable children, but it is also filled with stories of abuse, neglect, and systemic racism. My experience, while uniquely personal, is more common than most would want to believe. Foster care agencies perpetuate and focus more on risk management rather than on family preservation. My family was “broken” and needed assistance and support. The modern foster care system, though often cloaked in benevolence, continues to replicate historical patterns of poverty management, racial capitalism, family separation, and trauma-induced care under new names and mechanisms (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2021; Fallon et al., 2013; Roberts, 2022).

From 1991 to 1993, I was a ward of the State of New York. Like many children from low-income and racialized communities, I did not enter care because my family was violent or negligent. We were poor. We were navigating housing instability. We lacked access to mental health resources. These are not moral failings—they are structural and systemic realities. Yet the system treated our family not as people facing hardship, but as problems to be managed—as contemptible, unbecoming, undeserving, and disposable. This did not feel like care or support; instead, it felt like the perpetuation of a lack of social equity and understanding of the principles of public service that reinforces the need of a public service ethics foundation in public service provisions (see Evans, 2022, Irizarry, 2023), especially in child welfare services.

What I remember most from entering care is not protection—it’s disconnection. Not safety, but surveillance. One of my earliest memories is the intake process: being taken from my family by unfamiliar adults, brought to an unfamiliar place under the guise of care, and subjected to an invasive and dehumanizing examination—stripped naked, probed, prodded, and inspected for signs of abuse and neglect. This is traumatic for any child or person, and it didn’t end with the intake process as it continued

throughout my initial placements. While thankfully I was one of the lucky few who did not get moved around every 6 months, I was cycled through at least two foster families. The initial placements were frightening and made me feel like an invader entering a new home, whose purpose was to provide some kind of monetary gain for the foster parents, rather than a child who needed compassionate care. I felt used and like my trauma wasn't even taken into consideration, as emphasis seemed to be placed on the monetary transactional nature of the placement arraignment.

It didn't feel like protection; it felt like punishment. I didn't understand what was happening, only that something about me—and about my family—must have been wrong. That experience planted a seed of shame that I carried for years: shame for being poor, shame for needing help, shame for not knowing better. It was a moment of profound powerlessness, not just physically, but existentially. We weren't seen as people in need of support, but as cases to be processed. In that moment, I wasn't a child—they made me feel like evidence. This treatment reflects the carceral logic embedded in the foster care system—where families are assessed, judged, and sanctioned through processes that resemble criminal proceedings more than acts of care (Dettlaff, 2023; Roberts, 2022). Intake interviews mimic interrogations. Home inspections resemble compliance audits. Parents must complete mandated service plans to earn their children back, much like parolees must fulfill conditions to secure freedom. These are not neutral interventions; they are carceral procedures cloaked in child welfare. In effect, my family, already struggling, was cast as dangerous or defective, rather than in need of support and compassionate care. The system's gaze did not see our humanity; it imposed a narrative of unworthiness that took root before I could even speak up for myself.

While this was a deeply personal experience, it was not unique, it was systemic (Benson, 2022; Roberts, 2022; Roxburgh & Sinclair, 2024). This initiated the beginning of my distrust and battles with the systems that were set in place to protect me but instead began the cycle of trauma that would be passed down from one generation (me) to another (my brother). Generational foster care, a term used to describe the recurring involvement of families across generations, is a known phenomenon not limited to any particular country or region in the world. Children of former foster youth are at greater risk of entering care themselves (Fallon et al., 2013; Wulczyn et al., 2020). This is not a coincidence—it is a direct consequence of unresolved trauma, structural racism, and a system that prioritizes removal over investment.

The Present: Fragmentation and Powerlessness

From 1993 to 2013, I transitioned from being in the system to working within it. I became a professional working with foster youth and other vulnerable populations. This gave me a dual vantage point—both as someone who had once been processed by the system and later as a professional responsible for guiding others through it. This lived experience allowed me to navigate the very systems that perpetuated an unsafe upbringing for me. I saw, firsthand, how overburdened caseworkers, undertrained foster parents, and inconsistent policies created a chaotic and disempowering experience for children and families alike.

My observations were of experiences that left vulnerable and traumatized youth without the necessary stability critical to nurturing their emotional and psychological growth. Unfortunately, these observations are also systemic, as evidenced in the literature (Dubois-Comtois et al., 2021; Engler et al., 2022; Wade et al., 2022). For example, scholars have noted that “being placed in kinship care, longer stay in the same foster home, and fewer placement disruptions, all acted as protective factors limiting mental health problems of children in foster care” (Dubois-Comtois et al., 2021, p. 1). Systemic reviews and meta-analyses of the literature continue to demonstrate the importance of understanding the mental and emotional health impacts of care within the child welfare system on youth and the need for service providers and child care service administrators to appreciate and receive sufficient and appropriate training in trauma-informed care to significantly mitigate against and treat cognitive, socioemotional, and mental health impacts resulting from engagement with and care from the child welfare system (Engler et al., 2022; Wade et al., 2022). As a social worker in the nonprofit sector working with the state foster care system in the Bronx, I found myself trapped in walls of unfamiliar practices, policies that did not help the youth in care or their families, but rather perpetuated the continued separation and silencing of their voices. In my experience, it wasn’t necessarily always about the best interest of the child, compassionate care, or about trauma-informed care, but rather prioritizing the system’s and/or organization’s interests over the interests of those they were to serve and protect. In many respects, it felt more like the prioritization of the bottom line (monetary benefit to the system and/or organization) over our service population in need.

Even now, from 2014 to the present, as a guardian for a youth in care, I find myself fighting against the very system I once relied on to provide me with the tools and environment that would promote growth, include compassionate care, and support foster or kinship care. Despite being part of “the system,” I often feel like an outsider. The rules change. The communication breaks down. Decisions are made without including those most impacted—the youth themselves and/or their families or those caring for the youth. The cyclical and unchanged nature of the system and administrative burdens persist in parallel with my experience as a youth in care as well as now as a guardian of a youth in care (through the kinship care system). There are repeated instances when we go to court (approximately every six months) for permanency hearings and the lawyers never address me directly as a guardian or someone with lived experience in the system or as a professional social worker working within the system. Instead, they proceed without actually diagnosing or investigating the factual issues and challenges my family faces. Nor do they seem to attempt to learn about and understand the contextual and situational factors that impact us. What we experience is that the lawyers and court actors generally proceed by speaking amongst themselves as if they already “know” what’s best for our family and the “solutions” to the problems to “help our broken family.” It makes us feel invisible and almost as if everyone in that courtroom sees right through us or beyond us as if we were holograms not really in the room. The system saw us as nothing more than a docket number on the screen—or a case to be processed, and nothing more.

The foster care system does not center around the voices of children or their guardians—be they biological family, foster families, or other guardians. It manages them all. The system promotes and perpetuates the harmful assumption that families—

particularly those from marginalized backgrounds—are not competent or trustworthy narrators of their own experiences. It denies them the agency to articulate the ways in which their autonomy is stripped away and instead replaces their voices with bureaucratic interpretations of what is “best.”

The power dynamics are harsh: biological parents are often vilified, foster parents feel unsupported, and caseworkers are expected to do the impossible with few resources. Children, meanwhile, move from placement to placement, school to school, adult to adult. It has been reported that the average foster child may have disruptions in placements as frequently as three times a year, with data indicating that this pattern impacts anywhere from a quarter to half of all foster children (Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2024), and that more placements during time in care result in increased behavioral problems, emotional instability, and a host of other negative effects that are inconsistent with “the best interest of the child” philosophy (Dubois-Comtois, 2021). Rather than care and protection, for many, just entering the foster care system, as well as every move results in a new trauma.

These administrative movements are deeply traumatic. The child loses continuity, relationships, and trust every single time. The child’s voice is suppressed precisely when it should be amplified. When it is permitted to surface, it is carefully curated—muted, reshaped, and only legitimized if it serves to showcase the system’s effectiveness. In this way, children become props in a performance staged to protect institutional reputations rather than agents in their own stories. But the impacts of this system are not confined to one moment in time—they reverberate across generations, compounding harm through cycles of instability and survival.

Generational Trauma and the Foster Care Loop

The legacy of trauma in foster care is not just personal—it is generational and racialized. Disproportionality is not a statistical anomaly; it is the predictable outcome of a system rooted in racial capitalism (Benson, 2022; Roberts, 2022). Black and Brown children are underrepresented in the overall U.S. population but disproportionately represented in foster care (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2021). For instance, Black children make up about 14% of the U.S. child population, but nearly 22% of those in foster care, while 26% of all U.S. children are Latino or Hispanic they represent 22% of all children in foster care (Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2023). These disparities are not accidental. They are built into the surveillance, reporting, and intervention practices of the child welfare system (Dettlaff, 2023; Roberts, 2022).

Abolitionist scholars and practitioners argue that the system perpetuates inter-generational harm by policing poverty, criminalizing Black and Brown parenthood, and destabilizing family networks (Dettlaff, 2023; Roberts, 2022). I agree. As someone who was raised by this system, worked within it, and now supports a child entangled in its web, I believe it is time to confront an uncomfortable truth: in many cases, the foster care system does more harm than good. What we’ve been doing isn’t working. The system must be fundamentally reimaged—not just reformed—to integrate alternative models rooted in equity, care, and community self-determination. This means embracing ideas that challenge the deeply entrenched carceral logic of the foster care system, a logic built on surveillance, control, and the presumption of familial failure (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2021), as well as the “colonial and racist ends of the US government”

(Benson, 2021, p. 111). In its place, we must adopt a restorative justice lens that centers healing, accountability, and the preservation of family networks as core tenets of care. Only then can we begin to reimagine what genuine support looks like—and how it's delivered.

We cannot “reform” our way out of systemic trauma. We must imagine something else. The cycle of trauma is at the root of the system. Families are forced to learn how to survive rather than overcoming the challenges that led to their system involvement so that they can thrive. This fosters a survivor mindset in families as a way to cope with oppression, violence, separation, and most of all, chronic instability. For these families, “success” would mean reunification not “solving” the rooted problems ascribed to them such as poverty, housing insecurity, current mental health challenges, or generational trauma. Such issues are systemic, not necessarily unique to specific families, and they are worsened by institutional neglect rather than failings attributed to the child and their families and caregivers. My family's survival mindset resulted in the transference of the same tactics, perpetuating the cycle of generational foster care where rather than “healing” the initial “problems” the impact was to reinforce a survival mindset, exacerbating the initial “problems.”

Generational foster care represents the cyclical nature of trauma within marginalized communities. Children of foster youth are more likely to enter the system themselves, perpetuating patterns of instability, detachment, and unresolved trauma. This cycle often leads to mental health issues, difficulties in forming stable relationships, and socioeconomic challenges that persist across generations. The dual cycles of trauma and generational foster care become inextricably intertwined where both trauma informed experience and survival mindsets and continued system interaction become the new reality. We must not forget that trauma affects both parents and children in different capacities, and the road to “recovery” may look different for them. Perhaps approaches in health and human services to “create a more inclusive, equitable, and culturally attuned environment” through “engagement, continuous improvement, and accountability” (Alvarez-Hernandez et al., 2026, p. 166) should be considered more intentionally in child welfare services.

The Future: Reform is Not Enough—We Need An Abolitionist Reimagination

Without significant reform, the foster care system may continue to experience the same recurring issues of instability, power imbalance, and systemic neglect. Families will find ways to cope within a system that is designed to keep them in place and without progress. However, a future where foster families are provided consistent, trauma-informed care is possible. This requires a shift in the system to prioritize permanency and stability, such as the increase of resources for caseworkers, better training for foster parents, and legal reforms that reduce the time children spend in temporary care. Based on my experience in and with the foster care system, three immediate preventative measures come to mind that would significantly help keep children out of the foster care system to begin with:

- Direct economic support for families—ensures universal basic income and rental assistance thus mitigating against food insecurity and unstable housing, two primary “problems” generally interpreted as “neglect” for communities of color that result in the separation of families.
- Guaranteed housing for families—housing first model and potentially expanding family shelter options that promote safe, affirming and non-punitive alternatives, while emphasizing family unification and community resilience rather than family separation.
- Decriminalization of poverty—end mandatory reporting for poverty-related concerns, train workers to prioritize care referrals over CPS calls.

In cases where it is actually in the best interest of the child and family separation is necessary (i.e., where they are suffering direct harm that is worse than the harms inflicted through child welfare interventions), I believe radical changes to what happens are critical. For instance, chosen kinship and child centered advocacy can crucially result in a reimagined experience for those in the child welfare system:

- Chosen kinship or community-based care first care
 - a) Prioritize chosen family, extended kin, and culturally matched community caregivers.
 - b) Let families pre-identify “safe adults” before crisis arise – this can also be presented as a preventive measure or safe guarding the child.
- Child centered autonomy and advocacy
 - a) Give children (especially teens) the platform to help decide where they could or should be placed if they have to be separated from their families.
 - b) Provide child advocates that reflect their identities, providing more culturally competent representation and guidance in advocating to protect their rights and pursue their actual best interests.

I envision a foster care system that empowers children by giving them a greater say in their futures, providing them with a platform for self-advocacy and emotional expression, resulting in their support, guidance, and empowerment. An emphasis on permanency could also mean more support for kinship care, adoption, or reunification, depending on the unique needs of each child. As someone entangled in and navigating through the current foster care system, I am informed by my prior experience as a ward of state and my professional experience working with others in the system. As a guardian in the kinship care system, I know the importance of empowerment and autonomy to provide support, safety, structure, and ending the cycles of trauma and generational foster care. Programs that address trauma and emphasize long-term emotional health could greatly improve outcomes for foster children and their families.

These proposals reflect more than abstract ideals, they are actionable shifts grounded in lived experience, abolitionist scholarship, and community-based evidence (Dettlaff, 2023; Roberts, 2022). They call for a fundamental reorientation of child welfare: away from surveillance and punishment, and toward dignity, solidarity, and com-

passionate care. To further clarify what this reimagined system could look like in practice, Table 1 contrasts key features of the current foster care system with transformative alternatives. It highlights how punitive responses to poverty, disconnected placements, and child disempowerment are not unavoidable—they are policy choices. A different set of choices is possible. One that treats housing and income as support, kinship and culture as assets, and children as experts in their own lives. Table 1 offers both a critique of systemic harm and a vision for a more just, compassionate, and community-rooted system of care.

Table 1

Reimagining the U.S. Foster Care System: From Control to Compassion

Vision Element	Current System	Reimagined System
Direct Economic Support	Means-tested benefits with limited rental assistance; poverty-related neglect leads to removal	Universal basic income, rental support, and direct cash assistance to prevent family separation
Guaranteed Housing	Unstable or punitive shelter options; homelessness penalized	Housing-first approach; safe, non-punitive shelter with a focus on stabilization and reunification
Decriminalization of Poverty	Mandatory reporting often treats poverty as neglect; CPS involvement triggered unnecessarily	Train workers to prioritize service referrals over surveillance and punitive action
Chosen Kinship / Community-Based Care	Placement often with strangers; limited recognition of kin or cultural matches	Pre-identified, trusted adults prioritized; culturally responsive community placements
Child-Centered Autonomy & Advocacy	Children have minimal input in placement or planning	Children (especially teens) help decide placements; advocates matched by cultural identity and lived experience

Note. Table summarizes proposed changes to foster care policy and practice based on abolitionist and restorative justice frameworks (see Dettlaff, 2023; Roberts, 2022).

I am sympathetic to—and increasingly aligned with—the abolitionist movement in child welfare (Dettlaff, 2023; Dettlaff & Boyd, 2021; Roberts, 2022). The goal of abolition is not chaos or neglect; it is radical and compassionate care. Abolition means we invest in communities so that families are not separated and thrown into the chaos of the foster care system in the first place. It means we encourage easy accessibility to funding for housing, mental health services, food access, and income support—not surveillance, removals, and court hearings that perpetuate harmful practices and worsens mental health difficulties faces by children, families, and kinship care providers. It means we stop asking why a parent missed a case plan milestone and start asking why the system set them up to fail.

While I don't think we should throw out the tub with the bathwater just yet, I believe we need a reenvisioned system where kinship care, family preservation, and community-led supports are the norm. Where the guiding question is not "How fast can we place this child elsewhere?" but "How can we stabilize and support this family now and for the future?"—questions I wish would have been at the forefront when I began my journey as a guardian for my brother—and perhaps even when I entered care the first time. Such abolitionist reimagining is not a utopian dream—it is a practical necessity if we truly value children's well-being. It is important to acknowledge these challenges, it is also crucial to handle the topic with care, being mindful of the deep trauma associated with the foster care system. The stories of those who have survived the foster system deserve to be heard, but we must ensure that the retelling of these stories does not cause further harm to the individuals involved. We need to make sure that the stories are kept pure and genuine without involvement from others who may want to warp the process of storytelling. This reimagination requires nonprofits, caseworkers, educators, and policymakers to unlearn paternalistic models and embrace models of solidarity, healing, social welfare, social justice, empowerment, and community.

Call to Action: From Complicity to Courage

To those working in nonprofits, academia, and public administration: your work matters—but only if you're willing to take a step back and take another look through a restorative justice and reimagined lens. This is consistent with critical theories, such as CRT, feminist theory, social equity, and queer theory, that promote the scholar as activist (Irizarry, 2025; Irizarry et al., 2025; Ladson-Billins & Donnor, 2005; lisahunter et al., 2013; Mason et al., 2019; Mirabella et al. 2022; Meyer et al., 2024, 2025). It is not enough to manage systems. We must transform them. Start by listening to those who have lived the realities of foster care. Fund organizations that promote inclusivity of those who are former foster youth and host families who can provide insight, lived experienced, and the opportunities to tell their stories of navigating systems. This consistent with programs such as Kinship Foster Care and Guardianship Assistance Programs (KinGAP) emphasizing placing youth under the care of known adults, rather than total strangers (Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina, n.d.; Office of Children and Family Services, n.d.), thereby respecting and supporting their familial and tribal customs, norms, practices, beliefs, and autonomy. Finally, challenge the assumptions that equate removal with protection. Embrace abolitionist frameworks that ask us to build systems of compassionate care rather than control.

Children are not checkboxes on a case plan. Families are not contemptible, unbecoming, undeserving, and disposable. And service providers are not neutral actors. We must all choose a side: complicity or courage. Courage demands we listen, we invest, and we radically reimagine a system of care rooted in equity, solidarity, and healing.

Reimagining Care, Service, and Welfare

The harms of the foster care system are not incidental—they are structural, racialized, and deeply embedded in the very policies and institutions designed to help. To move beyond this, we must confront four interlocking failures: (1) the criminalization of poverty and trauma; (2) the complicity of nonprofits in upholding punitive logics;

(3) the exclusion of youth and families from decision-making; and (4) the continued erasure of community-based, culturally responsive practices. These failures reveal the urgent need for a care system rooted not in management or metrics, but in dignity, solidarity, and structural courage. In what follows, I outline how nonprofit leaders, educators, policymakers, and service providers must shift from paternalism to partnership—and from complicity to courageous reimagining, consistent recent calls about the future of public service education (Evans & Knepper, 2025; Evans et al., 2023; Guy, 2025; McDonald et al., 2024; Mirabella et al., 2025; Rios et al., 2026; Stewart et al., 2025). True care demands we challenge the carceral norms embedded in our institutions and build a system where equity and healing—not control—are the foundation, along with attempts to keeping families safely together.

Nonprofits are increasingly the primary service providers in the foster care system. Yet many operate within frameworks that, while well-intentioned, reproduce harm. Human service providers, particularly nonprofit leaders and frontline practitioners, must address how organizational goals, funding mechanisms, and compliance pressures often align more with bureaucratic control than with helping and serving families and community empowerment.

Those in positions of power or positions of leadership must question policies and practices that treat systemic hardship as personal failure. These leaders should provide guidance, necessary information, and meaningful support to direct care workers and policy makers to help them understand that poverty and need should not be criminalized, that facing hardships and being in need is not a moral failing but a structural reality that demands a compassionate, justice-centered response—one that invests in families, restores dignity, and seeks to transform systems rather than manage symptoms. They must recognize how neglect is often poverty misnamed, and how policies designed to monitor can easily become tools of exclusion. Change begins with shifting the narrative: from fixing “broken families” to addressing broken systems that criminalize those most in need of care.

Leadership in this space requires more than programmatic innovation—it demands moral imagination and structural courage. It challenges us to redefine what service truly means, and to whom it is accountable. It compels us to reimagine systems that perpetuate imbalances of power, knowledge, and authority. Too often, the system rewards complicity: child welfare workers struggle to distinguish between neglect rooted in poverty and situations of actual harm. As a result, surveillance and punishment are routinely directed at marginalized families. Institutional loyalty is upheld over ethical discernment; those who follow policy without questioning harmful practices are often—intentionally or not—turned into agents of state-sanctioned violence.

For policymakers and administrators, reimagining the system means rethinking legal frameworks, funding priorities, and accountability structures that favor removal over prevention, monitoring over mentoring, and punishment over possibility. A just child welfare system would invest in building capacity within families—not extracting children from them. This requires shifting funding away from reactive systems and toward programs that address root causes like poverty and structural racism. Laws and policies must be grounded in an understanding of how systemic oppression disproportionately harms families of color in marginalized communities. Preventive, restorative, and rehabilitative services can help break cycles of trauma and generational foster care.

Crucially, the policies that affect children and families must be informed by those with lived experience—youth, parents, kinship caregivers. When those most impacted are excluded from decision-making, the system silences innovation and reinforces top-down control.

For educators and scholars, this work requires amplifying lived experiences like mine—not as anecdotal, but as analytical. These stories carry both urgency and insight by centering lived experience in research and pedagogy, and helping to develop more accurate and equitable tools to assess child welfare concerns such as neglect and abuse. Educators are often mandated reporters, and without trauma-informed training, they may conflate poverty with neglect—leading to unnecessary system involvement. This inability to distinguish structural hardship from actual harm can lead to unnecessary removals and reinforces racial and socioeconomic biases within the system. When educators and scholars operate without a trauma-informed lens—or fail to interrogate the biases built into their assumptions—they risk perpetuating the very harms they are positioned to prevent.

Community members themselves must be empowered as co-creators of care, especially those directly impacted, because they should reclaim their voices, spaces, and power. Mutual aid networks, traditional kinship practices, and culturally grounded support systems offer sustainable, dignified alternatives to state intervention. Public education that challenges stigma and promotes community healing is vital in helping communities to build trust among each other and reintegrate transformative practices within communities.

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