

# the **Stand** south side news

[www.mysouthsidestand.com](http://www.mysouthsidestand.com)

Syracuse, NY

**SEPTEMBER 2018 Issue 68 FREE**

## PICTURE PERFECT

Photo Walk saw boost  
in funding, expands  
with photo exhibition

## Parolees' Second Chance

Former case manager to continue to help locals in need

## a dad's duties

Proud father shares  
advice, reflections  
on meaning of family

## Get the Lead Out

Groups unite to educate on  
dangers of lead poisoning

## GALLERY SHOW SEPT. 6



# 2 INSIDE | SEPTEMBER

the  
Stand

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## SPECIAL THANKS THIS MONTH

DEAN LORRAINE BRANHAM,  
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KEN HARPER, BRUCE STRONG,  
EMILY DITTMAN, EMMA GEILER AND  
THE LATE STEPHEN MAHAN

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THE STAND IS BASED OUT OF THE  
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## DISCLAIMER

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**COMMUNITY** | Learn about efforts of Southside Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today, Uplift Syracuse and others to launch an awareness campaign on the dangers of lead poisoning.



**FATHERHOOD** | Meet Jery Augustin, a dad of twin boys, who believes fathers must act as role models and provide guidance for their children.



**FINDING COMMON GROUND** | This year's Photo Walk received a grant to expand. Photos will be on view in a gallery exhibit and on permanent display at five local locations.



**PHOTO WALK** | Photographers explored the South Side on the ninth-annual walk through the neighborhood, taking photos of people and places along the way.



**PHOTO WALK PEOPLE** | This year, Photo Walk participants stopped to chat with several people they met. Enjoy reading the interesting tidbits that were shared.



**PRISON TO FAMILY** | This in-depth series by Newhouse journalism students takes a look at the challenges individuals face reconnecting with family after time behind bars.

■ Cover photography by Jenn Grzyvinsky during The Stand's annual South Side Photo Walk

## CALENDAR | SEPTEMBER

**What:** 27th annual Westcott Street Cultural Fair

**When:** Noon to 6:30 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 23

**Where:** Westcott Street between Concord and Dell streets, and side streets

**Details:** The Westcott Street Cultural Fair is an annual, one-day celebration of the diversity and uniqueness of the Westcott neighborhood through its culture, visual and performing arts, food, service organizations and family-friendly activities.

**Cost:** Free to attend

**More info.:** Visit the annual event's homepage at [westcottstreetfair.org](http://westcottstreetfair.org)

**What:** Winston Gaskin Community Walk for Health & Wellness

**When:** 8:30 to 11 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 29

**Where:** Armory Square Creekwalk Trailhead in downtown Syracuse near the Museum of Science and Technology, West Jefferson Street

**Details:** This event honors Winston Gaskin, an African-American Syracuse resident, pharmacist, Army veteran and community leader who passed away in 2009. The Gaskin Walk is also dedicated to raising awareness about a variety of health issues and promoting healthy lifestyles. Proceeds benefit the 100 Black Men of Syracuse Inc.'s health and wellness initiatives.

**Cost:** \$15 registration fee will be accepted from 8:30 to 9 a.m. the day of the walk and in advance online. Visit [EventBrite.com](http://EventBrite.com) and search "Winston Gaskin." This fee includes a T-shirt.

**More info.:** Visit [100blackmensyr.org](http://100blackmensyr.org)

## ADULT ED CLASSES OFFERED

**What:** Adult Reading and Math tutoring

**When:** 9 to 11 a.m. Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays starting in September

**Where:** Center for Community Alternatives, 115 E. Jefferson St., Suite 300

**Details:** Class participants must be at least 18 years old; 16- and 17-year-olds may also participate if they are not enrolled in school.

**Cost:** Free

**To register:** Call Mike Pasquale at CCA at (315) 422-5638 ext. 261

The camera is nearly as big as her face, obscuring her expression. But her intense curiosity, that's plain as day, clearly visible. And there's no hiding that this young girl — in her blue, polka-dotted Minnie Mouse dress — is adorably cute.

Crouched beside her is Ken Harper, a professional news photographer and Newhouse School Multimedia Photography & Design professor. He's on his knees, at her level, at once trying to see the photo the young girl is composing, while focusing the lens and, no doubt, trying to ensure his camera doesn't suddenly crash to the ground.



It's impossible to pick a favorite photo from The Stand's Ninth-Annual South Side Photo Walk. We ended up with thousands of images from dozens of photographers after attracting the Photo Walk's largest-ever turnout, thanks to a new grant, amazing partners, expanded programming and the tireless work of Ashley Kang, The Stand's director.

But the image of Harper and the girl, her face buried in the camera, comes awfully close to being my favorite. See it on Page 10. One reason why I like it so much: It was captured by Dustin Bratcher, the managing editor of The Ohio County Monitor, which does an extraordinary job of covering a poor county in Kentucky that rarely gets mainstream media attention.

Bratcher was one of two out-of-town guests who came to Syracuse to take part in the Photo Walk, along with Ina Daniel, a German public broadcaster who makes powerful documentaries about immigration and displacement. Like Kang and The Stand, Bratcher and Daniel are part of projects that won Finding Common Ground grants.

The grants — funded by the Robert Bosch Stiftung ("Stiftung" is the German word for "Foundation") and administered by the University of Oregon's Agora Journalism Center — help pay for journalism projects that feature community engagement, like the Photo Walk.

The Stand is using the grant to expand the Photo Walk. This year, it allowed us to better advertise the event, one reason we packed the house despite clouds that threatened, but that thankfully only squeezed out a few drops of rain.

The grant also allowed us to buy new loaner cameras and for Tunura's Homemade Specialties to cater a lunch for the day's participants that included delicious empanadas. It allowed us to occupy a great space, the Eat to Live Food Cooperative, and to enjoy the graciousness of Babette Baker, an Eat to Live board member who unexpectedly helped us set up, host and tear down the event. And allowed us to print and hang photos from the event at a free and public gallery show.

Daniel and Bratcher used some of their grant money to come visit us and to see how we roll here in Syracuse! Bratcher has already reported back to us that he is planning a Photo Walk in his community.

So, for me, the Bratcher photo of the girl and Ken Harper has it all. It is a gorgeous image that demonstrates how the Photo Walk can build bridges and connect people who might not otherwise meet.

Harper is a professional photographer with an emphasis on professional. But here he is as the subject of a photo, teaching a girl who doesn't yet look old enough to go to school. And the poignant image of the two Central New Yorkers was captured by a stranger, from Kentucky, who wants to take what he learned on the South Side of Syracuse home with him, to his under-represented community.

That's the power of the Photo Walk.

I want to personally thank all of you who participated, volunteered, funded or otherwise supported this event. And I especially want to thank all of you, the people of the South Side, who took photos at the event or allowed themselves to be photographed. Your warmth and generosity in welcoming our guests makes the Photo Walk so special each summer. Thank you!

Please join me in viewing these spectacular photos in this issue; at our gallery opening set for 6 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 6, at the Nancy Cantor Warehouse; online, and on permanent display at five local community centers and businesses.

Greg Munno



ON THE SIDE

BY THE NUMBERS

- Keeping blood-lead levels of children born in 2018 at zero would generate nearly \$84 billion in benefits:
- **\$77.2B** in increased lifetime earning for the entire 2018 cohort
  - **\$1.7B** in health savings
  - **\$1.9B** in education savings
  - **\$3.1B** in quality-adjusted life years benefit

— Source: Trust for America’s Health

HIGHEST RISK ZIP CODES IN SYRACUSE

- 13203
- 13204
- 13295
- 13297
- 13208

— Source: Home HeadQuarters

GET THE LEAD OUT

South Siders work to raise awareness about dangers of lead poisoning



> The Southside Tomorrow’s Neighborhoods Today Housing Taskforce held a Get The Lead Out Block Party on July 28. In addition to raising awareness of the dangers of lead poisoning for youth, the day included games, a bouncy house, food, giveaways and music. | Charles Pierce-El, Staff Photo

By | Sara Lafkir  
Staff reporter

Southside TNT, Uplift Syracuse unite to launch coalition to address lead poisoning

As a retired social worker, Jaime Howley has seen all sorts of people in Syracuse suffer from lead poisoning: bridge painters, plumbers and even children, whose undeveloped nervous systems make them particularly susceptible to the ravages of lead.

In Syracuse, lead paint is a significant source of poisoning, according to organizers of the newly formed Syracuse Lead Prevention Coalition. Ninety percent of the housing stock in Syracuse was built before 1978, the year lead-based paints were banned, explained Fifth District Common Councilor Joe Driscoll.

That means much of the city’s housing stock is covered in this potentially dangerous paint. And that paint, as it ages and flecks off, becomes dust that painters, plumbers and children can too easily inhale, Howley said.

“It’s so small that you actually can’t see it,” said Howley, co-chair of the Southside Tomorrow’s Neighbor-

hoods Today (TNT) Housing Taskforce. “It’s invisible.”

That combination of old construction and frequent exposures made Syracuse the city with the highest percentage of childhood lead poisoning between 2009 and 2015, according to a 2016 study in the Journal of Pediatrics.

Last year, Uplift Syracuse, a progressive advocacy group, launched the Syracuse Lead Prevention Coalition.

Once again, the community in Syracuse is joining efforts to end lead poisoning, searching for funding, creating action plans, building awareness and ramping up code enforcement.

Palmer Harvey, co-chair of the Southside TNT Housing Taskforce, said that some people think that the lead poisoning issue ended. It did not, she stressed.

It is a preventable health issue, Howley added.

“We can do something,” she said. “We know what has to be done.”

Lead poisoning can have detrimental effects on everyone’s health, but it is more damaging for children under the age of 6. According to a 1990 study published in the New England Journal of Medicine that examined the long-term effect of exposure to lead, childhood lead poisoning can negatively impact



academic success and may lead to impairment of reading skills and deficits in vocabulary, fine motor skills and reaction time. Lead can be found in lead-painted surfaces (paint chips and dust), water pipes, toys, jewelry and soil, Howley said.

Every year the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development offers grants to clean up lead and other housing-related health hazards. After being denied funding for three years, Stephanie Pasquale, commissioner of the city's Department of Neighborhood and Business Development, said that they reapplied for the full amount of \$3.5 million for lead hazard remediation and \$600,000 in healthy homes supplemental funding. This year, the city is partnering with Onondaga County to apply for the grant, Pasquale said.

Home HeadQuarters, a non-profit community housing development organization, is also working on a lead poisoning prevention action plan called "Get the Lead Out" that is going to be publicly released in fall 2018.

Katie Bronson, director of the Community Housing Initiatives at Home HeadQuarters, said that the action plan is a joint effort of housing, healthcare and community organizations in Syracuse to prevent lead poisoning in the local community.

The action plan is centered around four focus areas: policy and enforcement; housing; healthcare, and community awareness.

The Syracuse Lead Prevention Coalition, in partnership with other nonprofits, is drafting legislations to strengthen the city and the county efforts to prevent lead poisoning, Driscoll said.

"A lot of what we're doing is looking at what Rochester has done. Rochester had very good results at fighting lead exposure," he added. Rochester's Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning was established in 2000 and works with a team of volunteers and local organizations to raise awareness and reduce the number of cases of lead poisoning in children.

The most recent awareness effort here in Syracuse

was held by Southside TNT. On July 28, the group hosted a "Get the Lead Out" block party to raise awareness about lead poisoning and ways to prevent it. Around 400 to 500 people attended, Harvey said. Parents need to be aware of lead poisoning and its impact before their children get poisoned, she added. The nonprofit is also giving out 1,600 "Lead Safe by 2025" bracelets for free to promote face-to-face awareness.

Besides parents, landlords are also responsible for providing lead safe living environment for children, Harvey said. Lead paint abatement is the ideal, but it can cost around \$50,000 to \$65,000 per household, Driscoll said.

In early 2018, Home HeadQuarters introduced the Syracuse Landlord Property Improvement Loan Program to provide landlords with loans of up to \$25,000 for code violation and/or lead remediation improvements. Around 40 landlords applied to the program funded by the Community Development Block Grant Program, Bronson said.

Expensive house maintenance is not the only solution, Howley said. "It's good parenting, good schooling, good nutrition and good maintenance of the housing," she added.

The Onondaga County Health Department advises parents to protect their children from lead poisoning through simple tips. Keeping them out of the house when painted surfaces are being worked on, wet mopping floors and wiping window sills, washing the child's hands often, especially before eating and napping, washing their toys often, using cold water for cooking and mixing formula and promoting high in iron and calcium food such as peas, beans and dairy products.

Children are the most vulnerable population, Howley said.

If they don't get early interventions, she stressed, the damages they get from lead will follow them through the rest of their lives. "The children are worth it," she said.

## TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Keep children away from paint chips and lead dust
- Keep children out of the house any time paint is being sanded or scraped, or when painted surfaces are being worked on
- Wet mop floors and wet wipe window sills to remove lead dust
- Wash your child's hands often, especially before eating and napping
- Wash toys often, especially teething toys
- Use cold water for cooking and mixing formula

— Source: Onondaga County Health Department



> Bright orange bracelets were distributed in July to promote Southside Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today mission to reduce lead poisoning in local youth by 2025. | Sara Lafkir, Staff Photo

# Jery Augustin

*Nominated by Quante Wright*

By | Lianza Reyes  
*Staff reporter*

**Q: What did it feel like when you became a father?**

A: I felt joy, but also that feeling that my life was going to change ... that I had to be a little more responsible. I had so many mixed emotions with thoughts of the future. And when I found out it was twins, I thought “oh shoot.” But full of love and joy. It was a second instinct. As soon as you see them, you have that love for them right away.

**Q: What can you share about your twins?**

A: They're amazing young men. And although they were born at the same time, they're two different people, two different personalities. One [Jelani] is more adventurous and a daredevil. The other [Jaleel] is more quiet and artistic. They're both smart in different ways, but they also have a strong bond. If they weren't twins, I would think they were friends. They want to be around each other all the time. It's amazing watching them grow up, fight and make up.

**Q: Are they identical twins?**

A: No. Jelani looks more like me; Jaleel looks more like his mother. And Jaleel is older by three minutes. He's proud of that. He likes to say “I'm the oldest.”

**Q: What was your relationship like with your dad?**

A: I had a relationship with my father until I was about 4 years old, then he kind of disappeared. I'd see him periodically, here and there, but I didn't really have a relationship with him. I still don't.

**Q: Any advice for first-time dads?**

A: Don't have twins! (laughs) But one thing I can say is have patience. Have patience, especially with the mother after pregnancy. Sometimes we forget what they're going through. We have to understand that postpartum is real. Patience is needed with mothers too. Another thing is that your kids are your future. Whatever they do, good or bad, you're going to feel it. You have to try your best to give your kids the proper tools to succeed in life. You make the effort of teaching them at



**MEET FATHER JERY AUGUSTIN:** He is 33 and has twin boys. Augustin grew up on the South Side, still calls many South Side residents friends and now works as a real estate investor. | Provided Photo

home what they're not going to be taught at school, like financial literacy or your own history. You never know what can happen to you, so think about life insurance. You need to make plans for your kids to be productive in the long-term.

**Q: What is unique about the father's role?**

A: Both roles are unique, because we're alike and different. There are some things women bring to the table that men can't. There are some things men bring that women can't,



or it may be harder for them. I think women are better at emotional support. I think men are better at being disciplinarians. But both play an important role in raising a child. That's why people need to learn to co-parent, even if the relationship (between parents) may not work, to get that balance a child needs.

*Q: As a father, is there anything that you do that would surprise people?*

A: They may be surprised when I say I didn't have a father in my life. And society stereotypes black men as not being present in their children's lives. They might be surprised to see that, but I see a lot of black men who are present in their children's lives. Most of my friends are fully involved.

*“You have to give your kids the proper tools to succeed”*

*Q: What is your opinion about commonly held stereotypes about black fathers?*

A: I can see where it comes from. I think the media plays a major part in it, especially messages we get from television and rap music. But you also see it a lot too in my environment, where kids grow up without a father, so some of it is a reality. I don't want to deny that. The reason behind it is a long conversation about poverty to lack of self-awareness, since our history was stolen from us, so we had no identity. We don't do a good job on showing the other side. Racism does play a factor. It puts some reality into it.

*Q: Can you share a teachable moment you've shared with your sons?*

A: It's always a process. Recently, I had my kids watch TV about Martin Luther King and other leaders. They learned about hate and love, and how to separate those two. For financial literacy, I teach them that when they get \$2, they have to put \$1 to the side. I always tell them that.

*Q: Final thoughts?*

A: Teach your kids about your history. Not just about the negative things — talk about the positive things too. Show them all aspects of life, and start them at a young age. Then they'll make the best out of it when they're older.



> Last December, Augustin traveled with his two sons to Disney World.  
| Provided Photo



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## WHERE TO SEE

VISIT THESE 5 LOCATIONS OR ATTEND EXHIBIT

**1 Blue Brothers Barbershop,**  
2036 S. Salina St.  
Displaying a photo by Jordan Larson

**2 Beauchamp Library,** 2111 S. Salina St.  
Displaying photos by Justine Fenu, Jeff Perkins, Robert Schulz and Kate Collins

**3 Cut Kings,**  
2850 S. Salina St.  
Displaying a photo by Jenn Grzyvinsky

**4 Elks Lodge,**  
3815 S. Salina St.  
Displaying a photo by Annaliese Perry

**5 Colonial Laundromat,**  
3901 S. Salina St.  
Displaying photos by Bob Gates, Charles Pierce-El and Sarah Pralle

# Expanded Photo Walk

*Project receives engaged journalism grant to share even more photos*



> These images taken by 2018 Photo Walk participants are now on permanent display at five local locations.

### Staff report

## Stories of the South Side told in photos now on view downtown and throughout the community

In March, the South Side Newspaper Project was one of seven awardees of the Finding Common Ground grant. The selection committee reviewed more than 50 proposals to narrow down the winners, which received \$11,000 each for efforts to increase trust between media organizations and communities.

With The Stand's success in completing eight walks, the grant sponsors felt our event helped to unite our newspaper with residents.

The Stand used these funds to expand our Ninth-Annual Photo Walk offered this past July. Each summer, our Photo Walk brings together people at all skill levels, ages and from both the neighborhood and surrounding area to explore and document a typical Saturday on the South Side. Thanks to this additional funding, we were able to add a gallery exhibit to showcase images to the wider Syracuse community and place a collection of photos on permanent display starting at five locations.

It was thanks to the efforts of Newhouse photo

### OTHER GRANT WINNERS

**Community in Unity** — Organizes conversations between Alaskan residents and prisoners

**Community Storytellers** — Works to expand local coverage in rural Ohio County, Kentucky

**My New Homeland—Your New Homeland** — Connects German senior citizens displaced during WW2 with recent refugees for discussions

**No Refuge Tour** — Furthers dialogue on domestic violence by staging eight theatrical shows across the U.K.

**NYLA Live** — Launches a series of live debates on cultural and political issues in Lithuania

**The View From Here: Place and Privilege** — Holds dialogue circles to discuss the housing affordability crisis in California's capital

### SPONSOR A LOCATION

If your business, nonprofit group or center would like to cover the cost to print and hang a photo, contact Ashley Kang at (315) 882-1054 or [Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com](mailto:Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com)





> Syracuse University Art Galleries digital archivist Emma Geiler volunteered her time Aug. 20 to help The Stand's Director Ashley Kang hang 30 images for the expanded Photo Walk gallery show currently on display at The Link Gallery located in the Nancy Cantor Warehouse in downtown Syracuse.  
| Emily Dittman, Staff Photo

graduate students Emily Elconin and Todd Michalek to secure the five spots. The pair scouted South Side locations for interest and space in displaying an image or two permanently.

We hope more images can pop up in the future, but for now funding only covered the cost for these five locations.

Grant funds were provided by the Robert Bosch Foundation, the News Integrity Initiative, Zeit Online and administered by the University of Oregon's Agora Journalism Center. This funding made it possible to print 30 images for the gallery show and the cost to print, frame and hang 10 images permanently.

If local businesses, residents or organizations would like to see an image or collection showcased, contact The Stand to learn about sponsorship opportunities. New locations will be promoted and shared in future print issues and online.

In addition to the grant money, additional funding was provided for The Stand's new faculty advisor Greg Munno to attend April's International Journalism Festival held in Perugia, Italy. This one-of-a-kind conference has been held for the last 12 years and brings together top minds in journalism. In April, a focus of several panels was on how to build trust and connections with readers. Munno's presentation on The Stand's Photo Walk and our community news project resonated with many in attendance and expanded the reach of our community paper to a world audience.

The grant aims to also promote cross-border collaboration by sending grant winners to visit one another in order to directly learn from a similar engagement project. Ina Daniel, a freelance journalist from Germany, and Dustin Bratcher from Ohio County, Kentucky, both visited Syracuse in July to participate in our Photo Walk. And The Stand's Director Ashley Kang traveled to Alaska at the end of August to observe the Community in Unity project.

Daniel shared that she was impressed with the openness of South Side residents to tell their stories, share their perspectives and welcome a large group of photographers into their community. While in Syracuse, Daniel also met with Interfaith Works of Central New York to learn about the nonprofit's dialogue circles that offer a space where small groups of people from diverse backgrounds come together to share their personal thoughts on cultural clashes — an effort similarly aligned with the project Daniel runs in Germany.

Bratcher, who runs a newly launched community news website, The Ohio County Monitor, visited to meet the staff of The Stand and see the Photo Walk firsthand. While his website covers a widespread, rural area, he became inspired by taking part in our annual Photo Walk. Upon returning to Kentucky, he collaborated with one of his community contributors to put together a plan for his project to host a Photo Walk as part of a larger community festival, which will coincide when a grant winner from the U.K. visits his project.

## GALLERY SHOW

**WHAT:** South Side Photo Walk Exhibit

**WHEN:** Exhibit is on display throughout the month of September, with a special reception scheduled for **6 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 6**

Free refreshments will be provided during the reception. The Stand T-shirts will be available for purchase and orders for image reprints will be taken.

**WHERE:** The Link Gallery at the Nancy Cantor Warehouse, 350 W. Fayette St.

**DETAILS:** View 30 images captured by Photo Walk participants during the annual Photo Walk held July 28

**ACCESSIBILITY:** The Link Gallery is accessible to wheelchair users via a street-level power-assist door adjacent to The Window Projects Gallery on West Fayette Street. For more information or groups with special needs, call Greg Munno to make arrangements at (315) 730-4621.

**EVENT PARKING:** Limited parking is available in The Warehouse Lot (WHSE); call SU Parking Services for details at (315) 443-4652. The gallery is on the Connective Corridor Free Shuttle Route, see Centro #543.





INA DANIEL



| HEATHER ALLISON WATERS



| DUSTIN BRATCHER



| SAJIDA AYYUP

The Stand's Ninth-Annual Photo Walk on July 28 welcomed nearly 40 participants, who broke into three groups to explore the neighborhood and practice photography skills. To start the event, professional photographers Bob Gates and Kate Collins reviewed basic photography tips such as composition, the rule of thirds and how to capture emotion. Collins provided a short lesson on best practices for taking photos with a smartphone. Bruce Harvey, a historian and documentation photographer, set up his old-school 8x10 studio camera for true vintage-style shots.

This year's event was held at the Eat to Live Food Cooperative during its transition into the Cafe Sankofa Cooperative. Board members of the co-op served coffee and smoothies before participants scattered. Some completed a full circle, moving down South Salina into Kirk Park and back to the co-op, and others ventured only a few blocks, snapping pictures at a community block party.

The Stand's summer intern Lianza Reyes joined the walk to interview people whom photographers met along the way.

Photo Walk participants included: Jessica Dapson, Michele Abercrombie, Aran Wonders, Jeff Perkins, Sajida Ayyup, Dave DiRoma, Rachel Burt, Jordan Larson, Charles Pierce-El, Janice Carroll, Reggie Seigler, Della Branch, Bruce Harvey, Annaliese Perry, Leilani Perry, Lenora Monkemeyer, SJ Harris, Ken Harper, Amie Harper, Jack Strong, Bruce Strong, Joy Pople, Elizabeth White, Robert Schulz, Rio Harper, Heather Allison Waters, Jenn Grzyvinsky, Justine Fenu, Deb Putman, Sandra Patnode, Teresa Letkiewicz, Sarah Pralle, Hanz Lionel Valbuena and Miguel Balbuena.



| TERESA LETKIEWICZ





| JENN GRZYVINSKY



| SARAH PRALLE



| ANNALIESE PERRY



| REGGIE SEIGLER



| KATE COLLINS



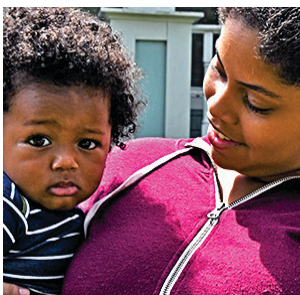
| ROBERT SCHULZ



| DEBORAH PUTMAN



| RACHEL BURT



| SANDI PATNODE



| DELLA BRANCH



| AMIE HARPER



| MIGUEL BALBUENA



| JESSICA DAPSON



# CONNECTIONS MADE

**PEARL WILLIS**

Photographers met Pearl relaxing on her front porch in a teal bath robe. She graciously served as a model for a small group of Photo Walk participants. They learned, after a traumatic car accident, that Pearl now walks everywhere she needs to go.

— Compiled from Photo Walk participants

| SARAH PRALLE



| JUSTINE FENU



| JEFF PERKINS



| EMILY ELCONIN



| BOB GATES



| DEBORAH PUTMAN





## CLIFFORD MENIFEE

Meniffee's roots on the South Side date back nearly 20 years. But now, he's dreaming of taking flight to North Carolina to join his family. He currently has 14 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

— Lianza Reyes

| JORDAN LARSON

## JAMELLE WILLIAMS

Williams has only lived on the South Side for a year but has lived in Syracuse for the past decade. Before that, he lived in Alabama. He thinks Syracuse is better in some ways than his former home state. "I feel like you have more freedom here. It's harsher down in the South. It's better up here for you in that way." — Lianza Reyes



| JUSTINE FENU



| JEFF PERKINS

## SOUTH SIDE KIDS

Mona Lisa, Jasmin, Adeline and Trey all live on the South Side. Mona Lisa, 9, and Adeline, 10, are best friends while Jasmin, 5, and Trey, 7, are Adeline's younger siblings. Their favorite activity to do in the summer? Going to the pool. Eating ice cream! — Lianza Reyes



# Forging Ahead

Five share stories of finding — and offering — support in and out of prison



> From left to right, Charles Rivers, Karen Loftin, Shallah “Brooklyn” Beal, James Rivers and Carole Horan all have connections to the prison experience. This group understands how invaluable support can be, both while an individual is incarcerated and once they are released. | Zachary Krahmer and Saniya More, Staff Photo

By | Ashley Kang  
*The Stand* director

Our new series offers a look at how difficult life after incarceration is, especially without help

When Karen Loftin’s mother died, she was in prison. Her prison sentence even took her away from her children when each was learning to walk and talk. Now she has a college degree and a passion for helping others stay out of jail.

Loftin’s story is a moving and powerful one about cycles of abuse, the ravages of drug abuse and the power of community to save lives. Her account is shared on the following pages as part of our series on how individuals reconnect with family after being released from prison.

In May, we published an in-depth look at a state-funded program to reunite parolees with their families. Co-run by two ex-offenders, the program helped ex-cons move back home. Loftin worked with 17 men over the course of a year as

their case manager at PEACE Inc., offering support not only for each but their entire family unit during the transition.

While most case managers have similar educational training, the majority are white, suburbanites with no direct knowledge of street life. Loftin’s past combined with her educational degree made her uniquely qualified to connect with grant participants, believes Mary Beth Welch, director of family services with PEACE Inc. Welch saw first-hand Loftin’s ability to recruit participants and sustain their re-entry because Loftin herself grew up in the neighborhood, related to their prison experience and saw their future potential.

Now pursuing a master’s degree at Syracuse University, Loftin is a fulltime student with hopes to open her own youth center one day to keep local teens on the right path.

Others in the series include Shallah “Brooklyn” Beal who continues to move forward despite several setbacks.

Readers will also hear more from Charles Rivers, who was featured on the summer cover and meet his uncle, James Rivers, who shares what over a decade off of parole looks like.

Lastly, learn how Carole Horan provides support through letters to a current South Sider behind bars since 2014.





> Former re-entry case manager Karen Loftin, 52, was hired by PEACE Inc. in February 2017 to work with ex-offenders. She is now pursuing a master's degree at Syracuse University. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photo

By | Saniya More  
Staff reporter

### Former parolee returned to Syracuse for her own second chance and to help others

**K**aren Loftin sits on the edge of the park bench. She tucks a strand of hair back behind her ear, her long, perfectly-manicured nails shining in the afternoon sunlight. A gold chain clinks around her neck. She wears a shirt embossed with one bold word — Confident.

Turning to the camera, she smiles unwaveringly. After the shutter goes off, she stands up.

“Take a photograph of me near the tree!” she says, her face lighting up with childlike energy. She runs towards a trunk covered in vines.

Karen’s warm demeanor is one of her most striking traits. I first met her at PEACE Inc.’s Emma L. Johnston Southside Family Resource Center. PEACE is a non-profit organization that provides services to the community, one of which is re-entry support for former prisoners and parolees.

Before I met Karen, I was aware she had served some jail time on drug abuse and prostitution charges,

but that was the extent of what I knew about her.

A few days after our first meeting, Karen told me about her involvement with PEACE. Over banana bread and coffee, she told me that after being off parole for 16 years, PEACE hired her to work under the Family Reunification Pilot grant. Her job was to work with each former prisoner and parolee and give them specialized support to smooth their transition from prison to family life.

On our way to the center that morning, Karen told me she was HIV positive. She said she had discovered her status more than 25 years ago after the birth of her second child. She told me in the most matter-of-fact way, but shared talking about her disease hasn’t always been this easy because of the stigma that surrounds her condition.

A regular volunteer at the center, Karen helps people in the community living with HIV by showing them how they can effectively manage the disease and stay positive throughout it all.

“Society says once you’re something, you’re always going to be that. There’s no room to change,” Karen said. “That was one thing I have always had to fight through.”

### A TROUBLED PAST

Karen was born in 1965 on the southwest side of

## KAREN SPEAKS

To hear Karen Loftin open up with reporter Saniya



More about her personal experiences

growing up in an abusive home, using drugs and being incarcerated, visit [MySouthSideStand.com](http://MySouthSideStand.com).

More’s video “Behind the Bars,” gave Karen a chance to open up about going into recovery, becoming a mentor and enrolling in college.

Karen, the first one in her family to earn a college degree, is now pursuing a master’s degree from Syracuse University.

# HIV FACTS

More than 1.1 million people are living with HIV in the United States today. Gay and bisexual men, particularly young African-American men, are the populations most at risk of the disease. Over the last few years, the number of HIV cases has decreased by 18%.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), African Americans make up a staggering 43% of the number of people living with HIV in the country.

In 2016, the CDC found that out of the nearly 40,000 new cases of HIV, women made up 19% of the cases. Injection drug users made up 12% of cases among women. And, from the total number of women living with HIV at the end of 2015, 59% of cases were African Americans.

— Source: HIV.Gov

Syracuse to a family of seven children. From a young age, she was rebellious and outspoken. At 12, she was smoking marijuana and constantly getting suspended from middle school.

Her childhood was an unstable one. Her father was abusive toward her mother, but Karen often found herself taking his side when the police showed up at home. “I was a daddy’s girl,” she said.

This caused deep cracks in Karen’s relationship with her mother that never fully healed. Her mother passed away while Karen was in prison.

“One of my biggest regrets is that I never got the chance to fix things with my mom. No matter what good things I do in my life, that’s one thing I can’t ever fix,” Karen told me in her apartment one rainy afternoon. She pointed to a picture of a serious woman with steady eyes. An uncanny resemblance.

“When I look back on my life, I realize she loved me, she cared for me, she supported me, but because of how I was internalizing things, I couldn’t see it that way,” she said.

A few years later, Karen’s mother sent her to live with her dad and his new family in Puerto Rico. Although passing in school was an effortless task for Karen, she felt undermotivated and abandoned.

“I was searching for something. I felt so abandoned at home. I was always in the streets, searching and searching,” she said. “Finding a place where I could be me.”

Karen says she has seen children in her neighborhood who have gone through similar experiences because they feel so misunderstood and neglected.

“The kids internalize these perceptions of who they are and how the world looks at them,” Karen said. “I was one of them.”

After graduating from school with no foreseeable plans for the future, Karen took to the streets. It was there at age 19 that she got into a relationship with a man 10 years her senior.

Karen’s relationship with the man quickly turned abusive after she discovered he was a heavy narcotics user. It was out of shame that she stayed with him, she said.

It was around that time that Karen went to jail for the first time for stealing and cashing checks. She got probation, but violated it at 21. By then, she was doing cocaine, working as a prostitute, cashing checks and doing whatever else she could to support her drug habits. she said.

In 1985, Karen went to county jail, and three years later, served her first prison term. What followed was a series of back-and-forths that found her in and out of jail. In 1990, Karen’s father passed away and she violated parole. She took off with a man to Connecticut. He ended up becoming the father of her two children.

Karen gave birth to her daughter in 1991 at age 25, and her son in 1994. During this time, HIV was tran-

sitioning between gay, white men to intravenous drug users, spreading primarily through shared needles and syringes. Because she was still an active drug user, Karen got HIV tested after each of her pregnancies. The first time, the results came out negative. But the second time, she tested positive.

It was a result that turned her world upside down.

## PRISON TAKES

After discovering her status, Karen had another prison sentence waiting for her. She found herself behind bars, yet again.

Karen wasn’t HIV tested when she entered prison and didn’t end up sharing her status until two years into her sentence.

“I felt like if I could just smoke marijuana in jail and stay under the radar, I’d be fine,” she said. “Telling people about my status would have made me vulnerable. I couldn’t deal with that.”

Karen says during the 1980s, the HIV epidemic was growing at a much faster pace than people could handle. She says she remembers sitting in prison with other women and wondering how they would protect themselves, considering many high-risk groups go to jail.

Shortly after this, the prison Karen was at started



> In the future, Karen hopes to help troubled youth in the community by opening her own resource center. | Saniya More, Staff Photo



a program to educate and empower women coming in. Karen and her inmates wanted to quell fears about HIV, so they pushed legislation from inside the prison.

Through a close friend she made at the program, Karen met her “guardian angel,” Kathy Boudin, another prisoner and social activist. Boudin pushed Karen to disclose her HIV status to the other inmates, as well as become a peer educator for the HIV program.

“It was just so funny because I’d grown up being such a black radical — black power this, black power that,” Karen said. “And here was this white Jewish woman from Brooklyn telling me all I had was a big mouth, and that I should use it for something good.”

Under Boudin’s guidance, Karen became an educator in the program. She helped develop workshops for new inmates. She grew into her position and says she found her calling. But there were difficult times.

Karen recalls one particular support group for female inmates she spent a great deal of time organizing. But when it came time to talk about HIV, the women weren’t interested. They told her they’d rather watch a movie.

“I was so hurt,” Karen said. “I asked them, do you not want this information? And they were like, no, because we got you for that!”

Karen says she remembers going back to Boudin and crying. Through her tears, Karen had an epiphany.

“You can set everything before some people and they still wouldn’t know what to do with it. Working with the women, I realized because of their circumstances and how they were raised, they actually didn’t know any better,” Karen said. “They needed someone to speak for them. They needed me.”

Karen says forcing people to speak up about what they are facing is not social advocacy.

“I don’t have a problem speaking up and talking about my status because I know people out there that are afraid and they look to me and people like me for empowerment,” Karen said. “But that doesn’t mean they have to pick up a microphone and declare they are positive themselves.”

## RETURNING HOME

A few months after her epiphany, Karen finished her prison sentence and was able to go back to her family.

By this time, her children were already walking and talking. But from the first day, Karen felt an utter disconnect from her son and daughter. Karen says she remembers her children crying because they didn’t want to leave their old home and family behind.

“They might have assumed that everything they learned from the people who had them when they were young was what they should go by,” Karen said. “I felt like any of the values and standards that I was implementing in my household were kind of overlooked, like I was this lady that just came home and got her kids back.”

Time has helped Karen’s relationship with her children, she says. But there are times when she feels like they don’t know each other as a family.

“I still feel like my incarceration is playing a part in our relationship. If I could, I would love to go to therapy with my children, because we never sat down and talked about how me not being in their lives affected them,” Karen said. “We just never had those conversations.”

Bruce Western, author of “Homeward: Life in the Year After Prison,” examines how incarceration

impacts the individual and the family. His recently released book shows how failures of social support trap many fresh out of prison in a cycle of vulnerability despite their best efforts to rejoin society.

The perspectives of women are unique to this study, the author says, with each sharing their specific challenges in reestablishing connections with family, particularly on bonding again with offspring.

“When women enter prison, they have accumulated long histories as victims of sexual and other violence and are also more likely than men to have serious drug problems,” Western writes in his book. “After prison, they were much more likely than men to be living with family. Finding work was a leading challenge for men after incarceration, but for women employment often took a backseat to staying clean and rebuilding family relationships.”

A few weeks after Karen and I started talking, I met her 23-year-old son Joshua Loftin. I wondered if he felt the same disconnect with his mother.

We meet on the first floor of Bird Library on the Syracuse University campus. He’s wearing a Syracuse sweatshirt and tells me Karen dropped him off. He has her smile.

*“I felt so abandoned at home; I was always in the streets, searching and searching.”*

— Karen Loftin

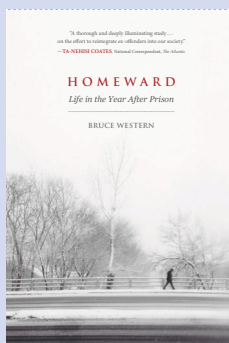
## NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

**HIV Stops With Me** is a multifaceted, national social-marketing campaign that aims to prevent the spread of HIV and reduce the stigma associated with the disease.

The campaign features real HIV-positive people talking about real issues.

**To Hear from Karen:** Visit <http://hivstopswithme.org/spokesmodels/karen/>

## STORIES SHARED

**“Homeward: Life in the Year After Prison”****Author:** Bruce Western**Pages:** 224**Released:** May 15**Cost:** \$29.95

The book examines how failures of social support trap many people fresh out of prison in a cycle of vulnerability, despite their best efforts to rejoin society.

The perspectives of women are unique to this study, the author says, as they shared specific challenges in re-establishing connections with family, particularly bonding again with their children.

Accounts from 107 men and 15 women released from the Massachusetts state prison system were part of the study, along with interviews from each probationer's family members.

He tells me about finding out his mother is HIV positive.

“We were in the car, I was about 9 or 10. My mom was talking to my older sister about it, but I didn’t understand what was doing on, so I asked,” he said. “I remember feeling like nothing had changed in that moment. It didn’t matter. This was the only mother I was gonna get, and this was the only mother I wanted.”

Karen says her relationship with her parents has, more than anything, shown her what kind of parent she does not want to be. Raising children after going through incarceration presented its own challenges, though, and Karen rarely discussed her prison experiences or her status with her children.

“I didn’t want to overwhelm them,” she said.

Joshua said Karen only really started to open up about her experiences after he started going to community outreach events with her.

After discovering his mother’s status, Joshua went through a period where he blamed himself for it. Because Karen found out she was HIV positive after he was born, he felt like it was his fault she was living with the condition. He has gotten over it over the years, he says, but it’s still hard sometimes.

“She would sometimes come to our school and talk, and she’d ask my sister and I, ‘am I embarrassing you at all?’ We would always say ‘not at all. This is what helps you. You’re teaching others. Teaching us; teaching yourself,’” Joshua said. “I don’t want her to feel like she can’t tell her story because of the way I felt back then.”

Karen says one of the hardest things about parenting has been to ensure her children don’t take to the streets like she once did. At the same time, Karen is wary of stopping them from living their own lives.

“I never wanted my children to think I was afraid of them turning out to be like me,” Karen said. “I want them to grow into themselves.”

Joshua says that at times, he feels like Karen expects unrealistic things from him — expectations he doesn’t think he can live up to, like getting a specific job or living life a certain way.

“She pushes and pushes and pushes,” he tells me. “Growing up, I felt like I wasn’t the golden child that she wanted me to be.”

But Joshua says he understands where his mother comes from. He says he is incredibly proud of how far she has come, even if they bump heads often.

“She can heat up quicker than me,” he says with a laugh. “I know she’s been through way more though, that’s probably why.”

**FACING THE PUBLIC EYE**

When Karen left prison about 20 years ago, she faced a lot of stigma, especially when it came to job-hunting.

Since then, she says society has become much more understanding of a person’s criminal history, even though people like her still face discrimination every day, particularly because of their race, gender and HIV status.

“The African-American community continues to dominate the top of every negative list,” Karen said. “Local leaders are somewhat negligent when it comes to addressing the needs of black people.”

Karen says state-funded grants like the one PEACE received and that is still awaiting the state’s review for renewal aren’t always designed to help the community.

“It all comes down to politics,” she said.

She says working in some sort of human service capacity is the perfect job for someone who has just left prison, because many organizations are looking for people who can form meaningful connections with members of the community going through similar problems. It is also a way for ex-prisoners to redeem themselves by improving their community.

“We need to be willing to seize whatever opportunities we can find, rather than wait to be given them,” Karen said. “By being the generation before them, we started this problem and it’s going to take us to fix it.”

Structural reform is a much-needed development in Syracuse, particularly when it comes to prison management and community outreach, Karen says.

“There is a need for therapeutic assistance, community outreach and counselling, especially for young adults about to move away from home,” Karen said. “This is when they develop their perceptions of the world and their place in it. After that, their way of life is set and it’s harder to change them.”

**GIVING BACK**

A couple of weeks after I met Joshua, I visited Karen at her home. The rain outside didn’t seem to dampen her cheerfulness. As she bustled around her kitchen, washing dishes and cleaning up, she told me she couldn’t talk for too long today. She was heading to New York City in the evening to attend a conference for women living with HIV.

Conferences and community outreach events have dominated Karen’s schedule ever since she left prison 20 years ago.

Karen’s first job out of prison was at AIDS Community Resources, a local service organization in Syracuse.

Because of her tense family life, Karen often found herself tempted to go back to her old habits and relapsed a couple of times. But with the help of work colleagues, Karen did a recovery program which helped her immensely. She continued working for AIDS Community Resources for the next eight years.





> Karen says she first started getting in trouble in the seventh grade and was a rebellious young person. In her teens, she says she felt like she was searching for something because she felt abandoned by her family. Her search took her to the streets, where she found crime and addiction. | Saniya More, Staff Photo

Not too long after that, Karen enrolled at Syracuse University and graduated with a bachelor's degree in child and family studies in 2017. Her degree sits in her living room, illuminated by the lamp next to it. It's a source of great pride for her.

Karen hopes to use her degree to start her own youth center in the future. She believes there needs to be more centers that provide emotional support and resources for Syracuse's youth — a place where children from troubled households can feel safe and appreciated.

Through her youth center, Karen hopes to instill a renewed sense of togetherness in her community. Her primary goal is to focus on youth and family development — strengthening relationships between children and their parents.

Gazing at the hail that has unexpectedly started to fall outside her window, I ask Karen if she plans to stay in Syracuse forever.

She smiles for a moment. "I'm here for now," she answers.

"I recently asked an old friend of mine who owns a business here, why are you still here?" she shared. "You know what he told me? If everyone left, there'll be no one to keep this town running, and the kids in this community are going to suffer," she said.

## FINDING HERSELF

When Karen was little, she struggled with her dark complexion. It was a source of great insecurity for her.

"One of those days, I remember my grandma pulling me onto her lap and telling me 'God makes no mistakes. No one is better than you in the eyes of God, but always remember, you're not better than anyone either,'" she said.

Karen's confidence is something she has developed over time, and she is well aware that people have judged her and will perhaps never stop judging her.

One of the last times we meet, I ask her what she would say to people who made assumptions about her. She doesn't think twice before responding.

"I probably wouldn't say anything," she said. "I've never been one to try and convince someone that I'm someone I'm not. I've definitely made some mistakes in my life, and I might agree with some things people say and disagree with others, but I'm not going to have that conversation. It'd be a waste of time."

Instead, Karen has a message for the whole world.

"If you come into contact with young people that are struggling, and their dreams have somehow turned, just encourage them to not give up," she says, looking directly into the video camera recording her. "I think that's an important thing we can all do."

## NEXT IN SERIES

Meet **Shallah "Brooklyn" Beal** in the October print issue who opened up about the slow process of getting back on one's feet.

Despite being guarded, Beal met with reporters Sarah Perkes and Alexis Scott to share why he joined as a participant in PEACE Inc.'s family reunification grant program and the daily challenges he faces to carry on.



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