



WESTERN JUSTICE CENTER



THE ROAD TO A  
**BETTER FUTURE**



# A MESSAGE FROM ELISSA



**Dear Friends,**

**Thank you for supporting WJC.** Your dedication, generosity and faith in us mean more than we can say. I am especially grateful to the past and present members of our board of directors, our foundation grantors, our annual sponsors and all the individual donors who have invested their time and treasure with us. You are the WJC Community, and we appreciate you.

**When I began my time as Executive Director two years ago,** I had two aims. One was to honor WJC as the living legacy of the vision that our founder, Judge Dorothy W. Nelson, had when she brought us to life more than 30 years ago. The other was to set a bold new course for our future.

**I am proud to say that we have set forth on that future -- a future rooted in justice and equity.** A future that puts young people in the driver's seat to transform the culture of their schools and communities through the power of mediation. A future focused on impact.

**Why is this work so critical right now?**

**Because we are at a turning point.** Our country is increasingly divided. We have employed punitive policies in our schools and in our communities that have failed to yield justice, equity or safety. Those same policies have a disparate impact on students of color that we must not tolerate. And it is our responsibility to provide the next generation with the tools they will need to navigate the unprecedented conflicts and challenges that await them.

**That is why our schools and communities need to invest in conflict resolution education.**

When that happens, we see increased attendance, increased social and emotional learning, and increased academic performance. When students are empowered to lead peer-to-peer mediations, we see fewer expulsions and suspensions. We also see a decreased need for police on our campuses, which then frees up resources for other critical school services.

**When schools use restorative justice practices to confront bias, hate and prejudice,** we see less bullying and fewer interpersonal conflicts that spiral out of control. When schools choose conflict resolution education and restorative justice over traditional school discipline, we see improved quality of education and quality of life for students who identify as Black, Indigenous or People of Color, as LGBTQ+ and/or as differently abled.

**That is the kind of change we are seeing in Azusa,** where one WJC trained teacher and seven young mediators eliminated nearly all physical violence from their campus of 558 students in a single school year. That is what happens when we empower young people with the training, love and support they need to get into action. That is what happens when young people embrace conflict as an opportunity for ownership, reconciliation and repair.

**That is a future I can believe in.** It's a future that gives me hope when I feel daunted and strength to keep working no matter what comes my way.

**As the great Congressman John Lewis wrote in his final words to us:** "In my life I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way. Now it is your turn to let freedom ring. So I say to you, walk with the wind, brothers and sisters, and let the spirit of peace and the power of everlasting love be your guide."

Thank you for walking this path of peace and justice with us.

Elissa D. Barrett, Esq.  
Executive Director



# OUR HISTORY

**W**JC was founded in 1987 by a group of judges, lawyers, and civic leaders led by the Honorable Dorothy W. Nelson, senior judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. WJC's founding members sought innovative ways to handle conflict by using alternative dispute resolution techniques in and beyond the court system. Their aim was for WJC to serve as a thought leader, convener, and capacity builder in the field of conflict resolution education.

In recent decades, WJC has created a range of programs designed to reduce violence threatening students in school and community settings. These activities include: running and supporting peer mediation programs throughout the Greater Los Angeles Area, teaching conflict resolution skills to young parents through First 5 LA, facilitating community forums with local law enforcement, convening a Youth Mediation Summit for the City of Los Angeles, and creating School Tools, an interactive online resource for conflict resolution education geared toward grades 4-12.

In 2020, WJC enters a transformational new chapter of our history in which we will build on our roots in conflict resolution. We commit to advancing the use of restorative practices in our schools and to empowering youth to become agents of change in our communities. Through that work, we commit to addressing the disparate impact that traditional school disciplinary methods have on students of color; the increasing propensity of youth to respond to bullying, bias, and neglect by harming themselves or others; and, the negative impact of these combined ills on long-term behavioral and mental health outcomes. We make this decision with respect and humility for our place in a larger movement that is striving to move our society away from destructive methods of punishment and toward constructive investments in youth and community development.

WJC is energized by this new direction and dedicated to successful implementation of our 2020-2023 Strategic Plan through which we build on the vision of our founders: That conflict resolution education can and should play a critical role in the creation of a more just, equitable, and peaceful society.

## ABOUT OUR FOUNDER

The story of Western Justice Center is intertwined with that of its founder, the Honorable Dorothy W. Nelson. Judge Nelson began implementing her vision for a more just and peaceful world, one achieved with the help of law, first as a young lawyer and then as professor. In 1969, Judge Nelson became the first woman dean of a major American law school, the University of Southern California Law School, where she trained future lawyers in restorative justice and the use of mediation as an alternative to litigation.

When President Jimmy Carter appointed Judge Nelson to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in 1979, she continued her trailblazing approach, initiating one of the first mediation programs for a federal appellate court. She also looked at a group of abandoned buildings next door to the court and envisioned a place where non-profit organizations could support the advancement of conflict resolution education and develop programs to empower and support youth. In 1987, the Western Justice Center was founded to carry out that vision.

Judge Nelson's idea that people in the legal community could collaboratively resolve conflicts instead of taking them to trial caught on. Soon, the model spread nationally and internationally as alternative dispute resolution became a staple of the U.S. justice system. That same idea, that conflicts can and should be resolved collaboratively, is taking hold in schools and communities on a widespread basis.

**WJC is proud to be part of this unfolding story.**



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

## OUR MISSION

WJC empowers people to strengthen their communities by growing the conflict resolution skills and capacity of youth, educators, schools, and community partners.

## VISION

WJC envisions a world in which communities are healed, united, and transformed through conflict resolution education and practices rooted in equity, justice, and opportunity.



## CORE VALUES

- ✓ **EMPATHY:** We listen with open hearts and minds, willing to be moved to action.
- ✓ **EMPOWERMENT:** We believe in and support the power of people acting individually and collectively to shape their lives and communities.
- ✓ **EQUITY:** We dedicate ourselves to fair treatment, opportunity and advancement for all, because every person deserves the chance to pursue their innate human potential.
- ✓ **INCLUSION:** We actively seek out, embrace, and elevate the perspectives and life experience of people of diverse backgrounds.
- ✓ **IMPACT:** We hold ourselves accountable for making a difference, and we do it with integrity.

# WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

Our society is increasingly divided and divisive. For decades, we have employed retributive policies in our schools and communities that have failed to yield justice, equity, or safety. Each time we choose to punish and remove people whose behavior we find aberrant, disruptive, or disquieting, we pay the price of lost human potential and of lost opportunities for healing, growth, and transformation.

We start paying that price early in life. We pay it in lost learning time, decreased academic performance, higher dropout rates, and lost earning capacity. We pay the price when traditional school discipline and policing practices land disparately on students of color. We pay it when young people direct the pain of verbal and physical abuse inward (anxiety, depression, suicide) or outward (bullying, hate incidents, homicides) with increasingly devastating consequences. And, we pay it when young people enter adulthood ill-equipped to navigate the stresses of modern life.

That is why WJC's work to support, study, and expand the impact of conflict resolution education and practices in our schools and communities is critical. Schools that consistently invest in conflict resolution practices see reduced suspensions and expulsions; decreased classroom disruption; reduced absenteeism; improved socio-emotional learning; and, even improved academic performance. With effective conflict resolution education and the support of trained adults, a small group of empowered young people can transform the dynamics of an entire school or community. What they learn about how to listen to each other and engage in difficult conversations about complex social issues can change the course of their lives. These transformative effects are far reaching, because students with increased agency and confidence use what they learn to shape their families, communities, and futures.



Our work drives students to build stronger families, communities and futures.

## WHAT WE WILL DO

Over the next four years, WJC will train and mobilize 1,000 students, educators, and volunteers with the conflict resolution skills they need to transform school culture and climate for more than 15,000 youth by building conflict resolution leadership teams at 30 schools across the Greater Los Angeles Area. We will continue to improve and enhance our conflict resolution education programs by adding opportunities for civic engagement and leadership development for youth and by adding curriculum responsive to the issues of our time for youth and adults. We will launch a first-of-its-kind in the nation five-year pilot project to study the impact of conflict resolution education on an entire school district. And, we will share what we learn in all these efforts in order to catalyze changes in how our region and state approach student discipline and engagement.



## WHO WE WILL SERVE

WJC believes that the road to a more just and equitable society starts with youth and the culture around conflict we create in our schools. In addition to supporting local schools with existing peer mediation programs that anchor our field, we will expand equitable access to conflict resolution education and restorative practices by focusing on: (1) schools where the prevalence of multi-generational poverty and structural inequities lead to higher levels of trauma, and familial and/or communal dysfunction; and (2) schools where a mix of students from a diverse set of backgrounds (socio-economic, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, and abilities) frequently leads to increased interpersonal and intergroup conflict. Together, these two types of schools represent a cross-section of socio-economic, racial, and ethnic communities in our region that, when unified, will have the power to make the kind of change that efforts in our field have heretofore failed to achieve.





# IN EVERY CRISIS THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES

In these unprecedented times, WJC is doing work that makes an impact. Our work will help schools and students recover from social and emotional impacts of the pandemic. It will advance racial equity goals that move our communities away from incarceration and toward care. And, by collecting and analyzing critical outcome data, WJC will catalyze a larger conversation about investments in restorative practices in our schools.

## POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY

Psychologists predict that it may take years for students to recover from the impacts of pandemic-related traumas, such as increased exposure to domestic violence; increased alcohol and drug use; loss of access to food, housing, and other essentials; family separation; loss of learning time due to the digital divide; prolonged social isolation from peers; increased cyber-bullying and bias incidents; and, increased feelings of grief, loss, anxiety, and depression. Expressions of trauma, social aggression and other behavioral issues are arising already in virtual learning environments and will surely surface once students return to in-person education. With proven capacity-building programs that prepare schools to address these trauma-driven conflicts when they arise, WJC is ready to help the healing begin.



## INVESTMENTS IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

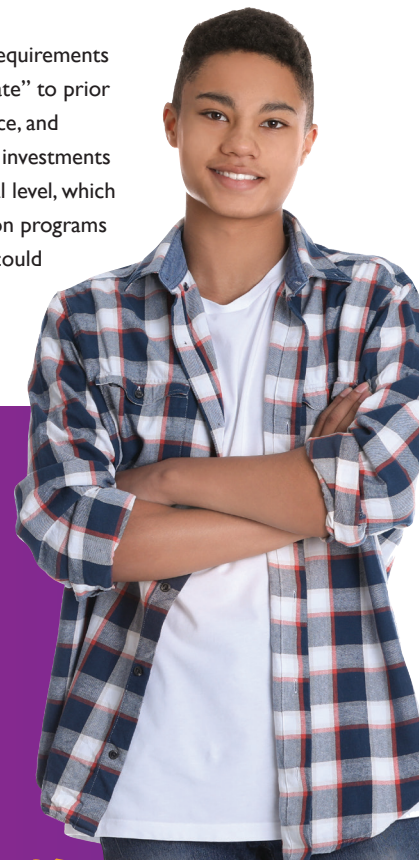
Before the pandemic hit, LA County was already in the midst of a multi-year campaign to shift government funding away from youth incarceration and into pre-diversion, diversion, post-incarceration, and general youth development services. As that effort accelerates and is further spurred by social protests against systemic racism, government and philanthropic leaders are taking a fresh look at conflict resolution education and peer mediation as critical pre-diversion intervention strategies. With existing partnerships in a range of school districts throughout the County, WJC is ready to help translate that interest into action.

In addition, WJC's unique legal, business, and civic connections present us with a chance to create jobs and leadership experiences for advanced student mediators. Those experiences will then serve as bridges to higher education, greater civic engagement, and increased economic opportunity.

## DATA DRIVEN FUNDING & POLICY

New state accountability standards have added data collection requirements for "social and emotional learning" and "school culture and climate" to prior reporting requirements around academic achievement, attendance, and disciplinary outcomes. These reporting requirements are driving investments in information systems and professional development at the local level, which can be leveraged to demonstrate the impact of conflict resolution programs and practices. WJC has a key role to play in collecting data that could be used to increase resources for, and equitable access to, those programs and practices.

WJC plays a key role in collecting data that could be used to increase resources and equitable access to conflict resolution programs for all youth.





# EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS

4 Years



1,000 Leaders



15,000 Youth



In the next 4 years, WJC will train and mobilize students, educators and volunteers - empowering them with the conflict resolution skills they need to transform schools and communities in our region.

## YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

WJC puts students in the driver's seat at their schools – as community leaders and builders. Our youth empowerment programs teach students how to become peer mediators and lead restorative justice circles. WJC challenges students to link their work as mediators to movements for social change, encourages them to initiate student engagement projects at their schools, and connects them to careers in mediation.

With WJC, students learn core social and emotional skills, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building and responsible decision-making. These skills are critical building blocks to success in school and in their careers.

Students also delve into issues of equity and justice underlying the social, political and civic roots of conflict. Through the arts, WJC invites students to reimagine their classrooms as peacemaking spaces, to see themselves in places the world tells them they do not belong, and to own their power as mediators, artists and activists.

WJC youth empowerment programs include **Mediation Boot Camp**, a six-week conflict resolution education (CRE) class offered throughout the school year; **Peer Mediation Invitational**, a youth mediators summit that brings together students from across the region in the common pursuit of equity and justice each spring; and **Careers in Mediation**, a paid internship and leadership development program offered during the summer.



Putting students in the driver's seat to transform the culture in their schools and communities.

## ADULT EMPOWERMENT

**ABCs of Conflict** is a CRE program that provides training and coaching to educators, counselors, administrators, parents and other adults in how to teach conflict resolution skills, how to create and sustain a student-led peer mediation program, how to address implicit bias, bullying and inter-group conflict, and how to use restorative practices in and beyond the classroom. Graduates join the WJC Community, which provides continuing education, early access to new curriculum and peer support for those seeking to transform their school environments.

**Rewired** empowers retired professionals who have lived through decades of struggle for racial and economic justice to share their unique and rich perspectives with the next generation. WJC provides them with training and matches them with schools looking for support in implementing peer mediation and restorative justice circles. Rewired volunteers also join the WJC Community.

## COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

**Re-Imagining Our Schools** is a five-year partnership with the Azusa Unified School District designed to build the district's capacity to deliver conflict resolution education, support peer mediation programs and employ restorative justice conferences to the district's nearly 8,000 students. The effort is part of Azusa's effort to reshape the role of local police on and off school campuses. WJC and AUSD will study the impact of these efforts on attendance, dropout rates, academic performance, and student leadership development.

**LA vs. Hate** is a parallel partnership with LA County Human Relations Commission's Community Schools Initiative to bring what WJC learns in Azusa to schools throughout the County, including in Baldwin Park, Little Rock, Lynwood, Montebello and Norwalk-La Mirada.

**School Tools** is an open online portal for CRE curriculum designed by WJC staff, volunteers and community partners. School Tools is accessed by nearly 50,000 unique users annually from more than 100 countries worldwide.



EXPAND

SUSTAIN

EVALUATE

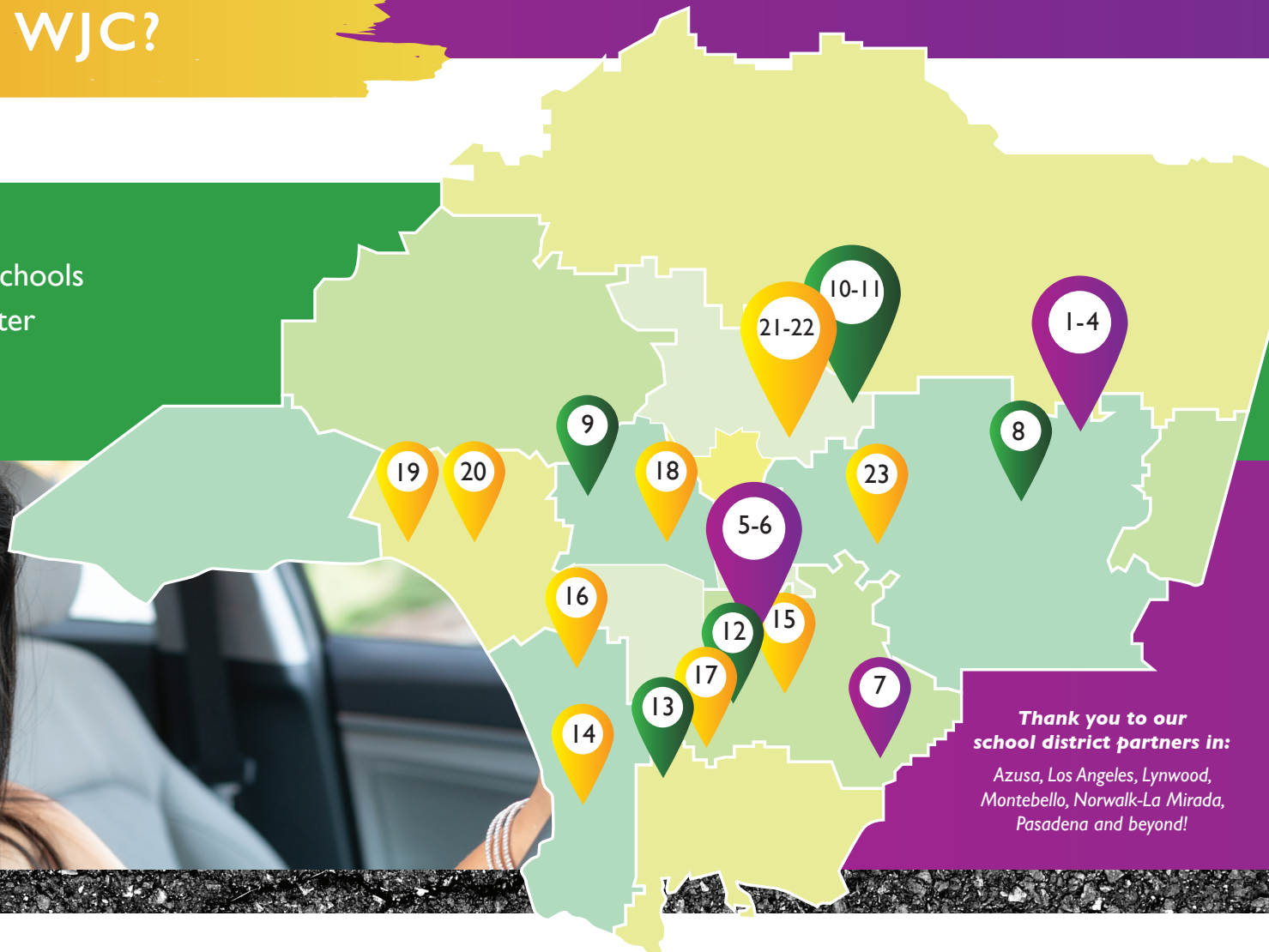
IMPLEMENT

TRAIN



# WHERE IN LA IS WJC?

WJC serves students, educators, schools and districts throughout the Greater Los Angeles County area.



**Thank you to our school district partners in:**

Azusa, Los Angeles, Lynwood, Montebello, Norwalk-La Mirada, Pasadena and beyond!

## READY TO ROLL

WJC partner schools with new Conflict Resolution Education Programs in.

1. Azusa High School
2. Center Middle School
3. Foothill Middle School
4. Gladstone High School
5. Montebello High School
6. Vail High School
7. John Glenn High School

## REVVING UP

WJC partner schools launching Conflict Resolution Education Programs next.

8. Alice M. Ellington Middle School
9. Fairfax High School
10. Pasadena High School
11. Rose City High School
12. Fremont High School
13. Lynwood High School

## ON THE ROAD

WJC school partners with long-term Conflict Resolution Education Programs.

14. Leuzinger High School
15. Aspire Centennial College Preparatory Academy
16. Crenshaw High School
17. King Drew Magnet High School
18. Miguel Contreras High School
19. Palisades Charter High School
20. University Charter High School
21. South Pasadena High School
22. South Pasadena Middle School
23. San Gabriel High School

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