

Our Progress in 2023

by



SPEAKING TRUTH. SEEKING JUSTICE.

January 2024

Compiled by

Harvey Harrison & Lori A. Young

Founder & Director

Comm. & Operations Director

www.justvoicesia.org

Executive Summary: Looking Back, Looking Ahead

Looking Back

In 2023, Just Voices had a busy year working towards our mission to build a platform that educates, advocates, and collaborates to end racially-biased policing in Des Moines and across Iowa. We made 18 requests for documents (under Iowa Code Chapter 22) for data, use-of-force documentation and more. While the process has become better with the City, there are still significant problems with transparency in the production of documents.

For example, the City is taking the position that Use of Force reports are not available for public review. We are now in court to challenge this position.

2023 saw a municipal election that changed the makeup of our Des Moines City Council and we elected a new Mayor. Just Voices, worked to make racially biased policing and excessive use of force issues in the campaigns and to compel candidates to publicly take a position on these issues.

We continue to spend much time monitoring the progress of City leadership to ACT on the dozens of recommendations made by the two independent consultants they hired to study policing in Des Moines.

We were humbled by the credibility given to our work in the public space. We are now often sought out as subject matter experts on racially-equitable policing in Des Moines. We have been interviewed and quoted by leading local media outlets, TV and in print. The 21 CP Solutions Report (21CP) made multiple references to the input provided by Just Voices.

Collaboration & Advocacy

We rely on, and work within, a growing network of community advocates and organizations which share our mission to bring about racial equity in policing. People and organizations who work to ensure the police are held accountable, that they operate with public transparency and apply resources to good data collection.

Ultimately, we continue to build alliances to build power. We are grateful for the relationships that we have nurtured toward this shared goal of racial justice.

Looking Ahead to 2024

In 2024, we join with others in the advocacy community to call for COMPLETION. It has been more than 7 years that we have been working to effect real change through education, collaboration, advocacy and community organization.

The People's History

We are especially excited about the publication of "The People's History: A Study of the Summer of 2020 Protests in Des Moines". We've been working on this intense research project since 2021. With the help of volunteers, we published several essays on *Black Iowa News* in 2023.

We are now ready to publish, in print and online, Volume 1 of our collection! We hope to release it during Black History Month in February.

Updated Data

This coming year, we will also update our data analysis and share our findings on our website. Our results will look at the years 2016 through 2023.

Speaking of data, many times the Des Moines Police department has rejected our offer to sit down and discuss our findings. They have publicly questioned our data. They have alleged that our data and analysis is inaccurate. Yet they have failed to produce anything comparable or to discuss why they make these unfounded criticisms. Our offer still stands. Just Voices would love to meet with data analysts from the city, the Chief of Police, and the City Manager to talk data. We will see.

Refresh Our Website

In 2024, we will refresh our website to be more logically organized, current, and easy to use. We launched it in the middle of the COVID pandemic in September 2020 and it's time to elevate its design and utility.

Community Education on Policing Issues

Finally, we plan to widely disseminate and uplift the the groundbreaking studies done on the Des Moines Police Dept by Public Works, LLC (2022) and 21CP Solutions (2023). We will help the public understand the many valuable recommendations each report makes. This may take shape in the form of study sessions both online and in person.

In any case, Just Voices is excited and hopeful about the opportunities 2024 will bring as we push leadership to act on the 69 "actionable" recommendations from two highly acclaimed independent consulting firms.



Harvey Harrison
Founder & Director



Lori A. Young
Communications &
Operations Director

DATA Collection is Key

A key part of our work is the collection and analysis of data on traffic stops and the resulting citations and arrests. Our data comes from DMPD records, Iowa DOT, and the Polk County Sheriff's office. We obtain the data through FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) requests.

Once collected, we utilize the expertise and skills of our volunteer PhD mathematician, who analyzes the data and creates charts and draws statistically sound conclusions that we openly share with the public, police, and City leadership.

The following chart shows the odds ratio of receiving a citation and the odds ratio of being arrested if you were driving while Black in Des Moines from 2016 through 2022. This is calculated by looking at the racial breakdown of the Des Moines population.

Des Moines Population in 2022

White	Black	Other (API & Latinx)	TOTAL
161,534	24,209	28,494	214,237

In 2022 for example, the odds ratio indicates that Black drivers were 2.7 times more likely to receive a citation than white drivers. And in 2022, the odds ratio shows that Black drivers were four times more likely to be arrested after receiving a citation versus a white driver.

Year	Black to White Odds ratio for any citation	Black to White odds ratio for being booked
2016	2.8	3.9
2017	2.6	4.2
2018	2.7	3.6
2019	2.8	4.3
2020	3.3	3.6
2021	3.2	2.7
2022	2.7	4.0

Data Shows Marijuana Enforcement/Arrests Down but Racial Disparity Still Exists

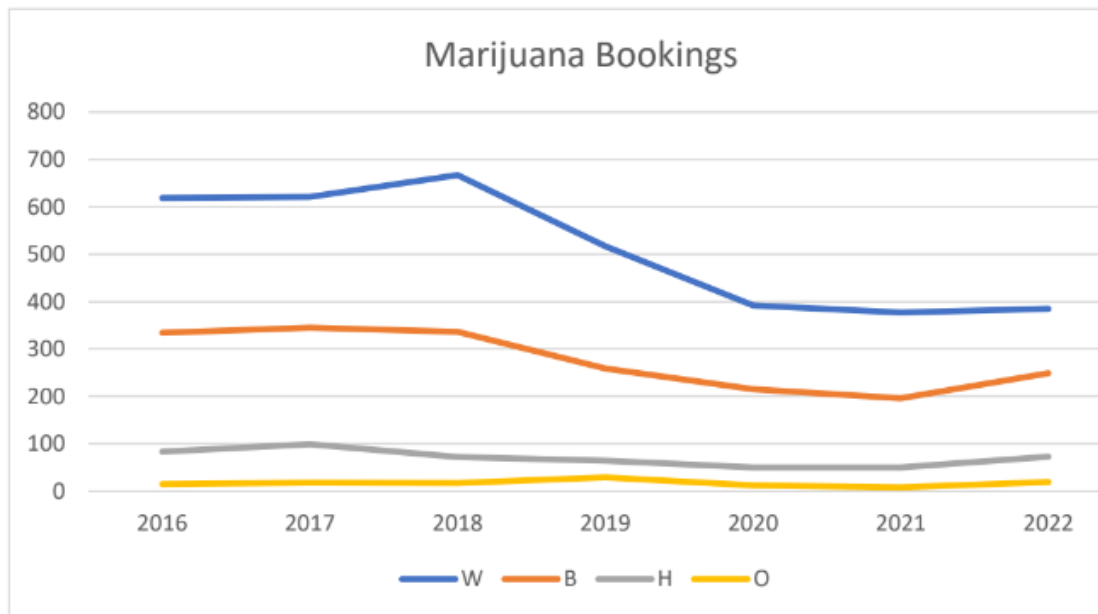
The data that we have collected on arrests and bookings for possession of marijuana reflects that, beginning in 2018, the community's demand for a reduction in enforcement for personal use of marijuana, arrests and bookings has made a significant impact. The data shows that arrests have actually declined from a high of 1,092 in 2018 to a low of 631 in 2021. **A 42% decline overall.**

Four things are striking, however;

1. The primary beneficiary of this reduction has been in the white community.
2. The arrests of Blacks and Latinos has begun to creep back up in 2022.
3. And, as the second graph shows, enforcement against our Black and Brown communities has once again began to go up in relationship to enforcement against whites.
4. Racially biased enforcement continues to be a problem!

Chart 1 & Graph 1

Booked for Marijuana Possession					
Year	White	Black	Latino	Other	Total
2016	619	334	83	15	1,051
2017	621	345	99	18	1,083
2018	667	336	72	17	1,092
2019	517	259	64	29	869
2020	392	215	50	12	669
2021	377	196	50	8	631
2022	385	249	73	19	726
Grand Total	3,578	1,934	491	118	6,121



An exciting change

In November 2022, Just Voices learned of an important policy change the DMPD had adopted and put into effect immediately: The collection of data on ALL traffic stops, even when no ticket was issued or no arrest was made. Now, for any traffic stop, the driver should receive, at least, an “electronic warning citation”. This change will ensure that data, including racial data, is collected on all stops. This is a change the activist community had been demanding for years.

As of November 2023, we have passed one year under this new policy. We will be requesting all available data to see what lessons we can learn from including this data. We have heard, anecdotally, that not all officers are following the new policy. We will study this. Once we have collected the data on electronic warning citations we will share it on our website, through our social media outlets and through all other available means.

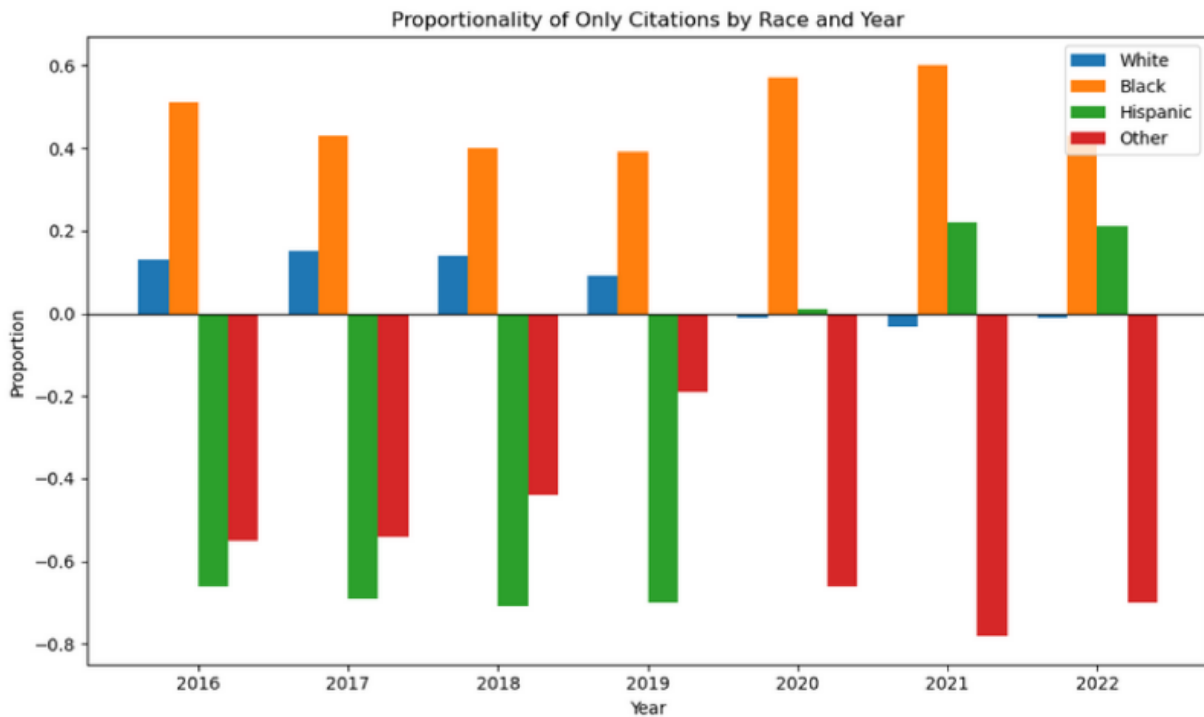
Our hope is that with this key policy change, which received no public notification, we will see a reduction in “stop & sniff”, pre-textual stops, and decrease the harassment of Black and Brown motorists in Des Moines. But only time, and the data, will tell.

Working with Academia to Study Data

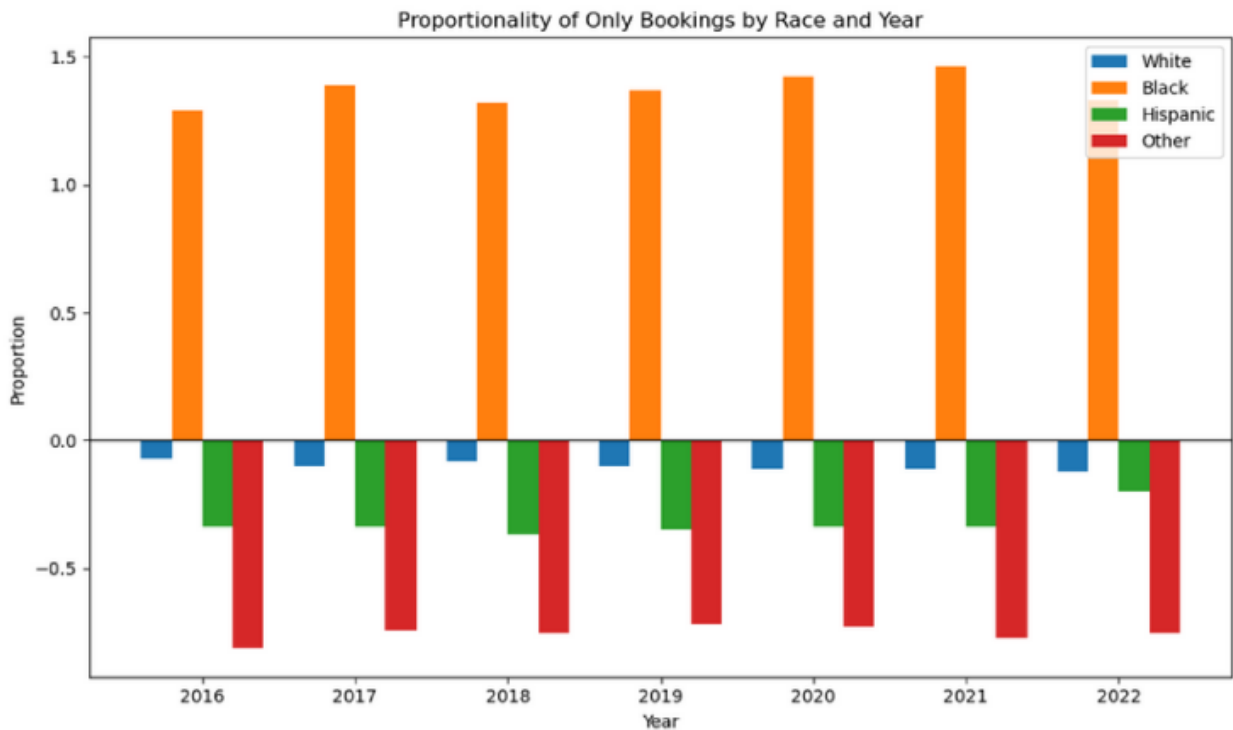
In 2023, Just Voices shared the data on citations with Assistant Professor Eric Autry of Grinnell College. He utilized the data with some of his students, who then did an independent analysis of citations issued by race. The charts on proportionality clearly reflect the ongoing issues of racially biased policing. The orange bars in the following graphs reflect the ongoing racial disparity in the probability of receiving a citation or being arrested, if you are Black.

Continued...

Analysis of Citations by Race from Grinnell College



Analysis of Bookings by Race According to Grinnell College



Autry and his students presented their findings and conclusions at the NAACP's 2023 Justice Disparity Summit in Ankeny, IA.

[View Grinnell students' analysis of DMPD policing data.](#)

EDUCATING the Community

We strive to turn the everyday city resident into an engaged, civically aware, person. To raise their awareness so they can use their voice in matters that impact their quality of life and speak to the values they hold for policing in their community. That takes education and we do that through many local and national public speaking engagements.

Advocacy & Education – 2023 Public Presentations

- Unitarian Universalist Association National General Assembly – [view our presentation](#)
- Drake Univ. Law School’s “Mass Incarceration Week”
- Grace United Methodist Church
- Iowa CCI Annual Membership Meeting
- Plymouth Church JPAN (Justice & Peace Action Network)
- - Greater Des Moines Partnership asking for support in approaching the DM business community for funding
- Des Moines chapter of SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice)
- First Unitarian Church
- Scottish Rite Park (The Breakfast Exchange)

Throughout 2023, Just Voices also met with Des Moines city leadership, including the City Manager, and select city council members. Our goal was to create dialogue and demand action on forming a Community Review Board to provide oversight of the DMPD and to demand action towards changes needed in data collection.

Allies in Advocacy

The activist and advocacy community in Des Moines is growing. Many new organizations emerged after the murder of George Floyd, others had been at work for years before. Just Voices is proud to work alongside these foot soldiers who believe in racial justice and equity in policing and incarceration for Des Moines and Iowa. When our mission talks about collaboration, this is who we mean. These are our people:

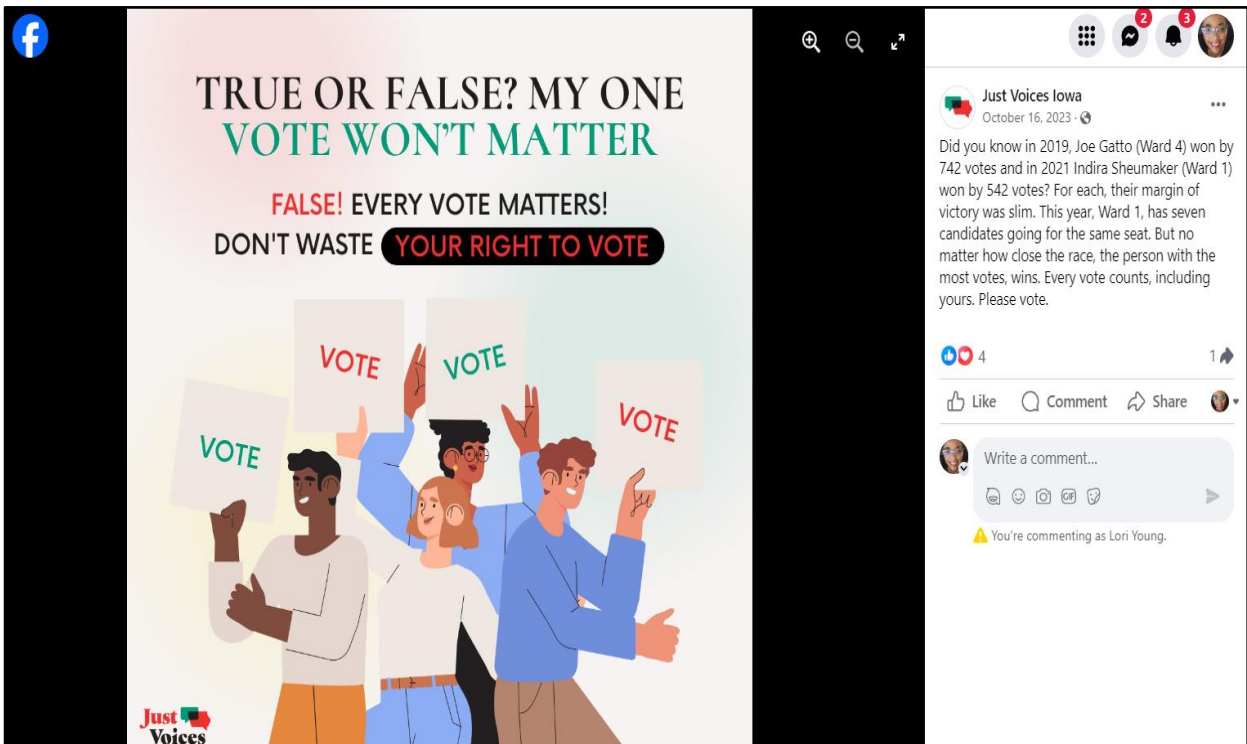
- Iowa CCI – Racial Justice Team
- SURJ – Des Moines (Showing Up for Racial Justice)
- Des Moines Civil & Human Rights Assoc.
- Des Moines Chapter of NAACP
- BLM (Black Liberation Movement) – DSM
- Cedar Rapids’ Advocates for Justice
- Des Moines City Council members Connie Boesen, Josh Mandelbaum, and Carl Voss.

The 2023 Municipal Elections

We worked in 2023 to question city council and mayoral candidates on the issue of racially-biased and unjust policing. In this way, we elevated the issue of public safety reform right along with common campaign issues such as taxes and infrastructure.

Just Voices conducted a survey of all council and mayoral candidates on police reform. Most candidates completed our written survey. Then, we shared their responses on our Facebook and Instagram social media pages so voters could review their positions. We also ran a series of "GET OUT THE VOTE" posts encouraging our followers to vote, without saying WHO to vote for.

Here's a few examples of our social media posts around the 2023 municipal election.



Take a look at the images below to see Jason Benell's responses. Get out and vote early or on Nov. 7th!

Thank you for participating, Jason Benell For Council!

JASON BENELL Ward 4 Candidate

Q DO YOU BELIEVE THAT POLICING IN DES MOINES IS RACIALLY BIASED? Y OR N PLEASE EXPLAIN:

A Yes- I wouldn't consider this a belief though. Black people in Iowa, very much including Des Moines, are arrested at a disproportionately higher rate. That is a fact. This is not to say racial bias is the only factor behind this disparity, nor is it to say that individual officers are racially biased. Poverty and systemic racism (such as redlining and economic disenfranchisement) outside of the criminal justice system also play a role, but it is a factor.

JASON BENELL Ward 4 Candidate

Q DO YOU BELIEVE THAT ESTABLISHING AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY REVIEW BOARD (CRB), WITH EVERYDAY RESIDENTS SERVING, WOULD IMPROVE PUBLIC SAFETY AND INCREASE TRUST BETWEEN THE POLICE AND THE COMMUNITY IN DES MOINES? Y OR N PLEASE EXPLAIN:

A Yes- While state law currently limits what such a board could do, I still think creating one is an important first step in making the system more transparent and accountable.

JASON BENELL Ward 4 Candidate

Q DO YOU BELIEVE THAT ENFORCEMENT FOR POSSESSION OF RECREATIONAL LEVELS OF MARIJUANA SHOULD BE A LOW-LEVEL PRIORITY FOR DES MOINES POLICE? Y OR N PLEASE EXPLAIN:

A Yes. To preface, I think marijuana should be legal nationwide. Until it is legal in Iowa though, it should be a low-level priority for the DMPD. We have limited law enforcement, time and resources that should be spent addressing issues like violence, crime and mental health.

JASON BENELL Ward 4 Candidate

Q DO YOU BELIEVE THAT DATA ON ALL POLICE STOPS SHOULD BE COLLECTED AND SHARED BROADLY WITH RESIDENTS OF DES MOINES REGULARLY? Y OR N PLEASE EXPLAIN:

A Yes. I believe that sharing evidence and data broadly can help make government more effective, and that also includes policing. I also believe that informed, oversight involvement is broadly a good thing for local governments in general and that you can not have central have accountability without transparency.

JASON BENELL Ward 4 Candidate

Q PLEASE NAME 3 ACTIONS THAT YOU WILL SUPPORT IN ORDER TO IMPROVE POLICING IN DES MOINES? +2

A Support the creation of a community review board. Support efforts to track and analyze data. Work with other groups to make the DMPD more accessible and transparent.

Document Requests filed by Just Voices Iowa in 2023

In the continuing absence of public accountability and a continuing resistance to transparency, Just Voices, along with other advocacy organizations, continues our work. Our efforts are an attempt to provide community oversight of the police to increase accountability and to require them to operate with as much transparency as possible.

We continued to file requests concerning the ongoing litigation against the CITY OF DES MOINES for police misconduct. In addition, we received the amount of judgements and settlements entered against the City since January 1 2018.

Date	Name of Claimant	Amount
03/20/18	Est. of Ryan Bollinger	225,000
08/24/18	Jared Clinton/Montray Little	75,000
09/05/18	Daniel Robbins	125,000
09/28/18	Lonnie Porter	25,000
10/15/18	DeJuan Haynes	45,000
12/19/18	Dustin Burnikel	800,000
03/19/19	Kyle Weldon	35,000
09/25/19	Jason Hunt Estate	90,000
05/18/20	Jared Clinton #2	95,000
02/19/21	Lourdes Hadenfelt	25,000
01/17/22	Logan Villhauer	3,000
01/19/23	Crystéal Davis, et. Al	875,000
02/02/23	Trenisha Webster	150,000
08/20/23	Van Luong, et al	3,000
	Total	2,571,000

- We discovered that the city had paid \$352,011 to private attorneys the help the city defend claims of police misconduct.
- Finally, we found that, since January 1, 2018, the city paid outside “experts” \$228,165 to analyze cases involving the police.
- **The grand total, to date, being \$3,151,176.**
- We will continue to file multiple document requests regarding the actions of the police department during the Summer of 2020
- After multiple attempts, we finally received a series of PowerPoint presentations prepared and presented by the police department during the Summer of 2020 protests. The existence of these documents and other documents reviewing the performance of the DMPD had previously been denied by the city.

We will continue to challenge the city’s statements on the availability of documents and include those in future publications and reports.

Borealis Grant Comes with Valuable Technical Assistance

In May of 2022, Just Voices received a \$150,000 grant from Borealis Philanthropy through its `Communities Transforming Policing Fund'. The grant is paid in three installments of \$50,000 paid each May. Our last injection of \$50k will come in May 2024.

In addition to the much-needed financial support, Borealis also provides free technical assistance from experts in finance, city budgeting, communications, and more.

Our Communications Director, Lori Young, applied to be part of a special 2023 cohort sponsored by Borealis with the leading-edge consulting firm Resonance. She was accepted into the cohort entitled, *Narrative Power Building*. The capacity-building offering was designed to support organizations in boosting their narrative power-building, identifying audiences, crafting winning messages, and developing a powerful communications strategy for organizing and advocacy.

Lori participated in six 2-hour sessions, completed 10 hours of homework, and received support and one-on-one coaching from Resonance experts. And the experts were so impressed with the work of Just Voices, Lori was asked to share a Just Voices case study on how we tell victims stories in our work.

The People's History: A Study by Just Voices of the 2020 Protests in Des Moines

In 2023, our research on the protests held in Des Moines during 2020 made good progress. Just Voices has obtained video footage, audio records and testimony that gives witness to the actions of the Des Moines Police Department.

2020 Protests in Des Moines, Iowa What We Know

40+ Protests

208 people arrested & charged

281 protest-related offenses

Top 3 charges: failure to disperse, criminal mischief, and rioting

8 active lawsuits representing 23 people in progress *still*.

**Based on independent research by Just Voices.*

The first weekend of protests following George Floyd's murder, the DMPD was unprepared and lacked any documented crowd control policies and procedures. In fact, their policies and procedures for this scale of engagement hadn't been updated in 30 years at the time. The result was an over-militarized response and unjustified force used on innocent protestors, even passersby. We know there were 40+ protests in Des Moines, overwhelmingly protestors were peaceful. There are several lawsuits pending against the city for Police misconduct and many should be decided upon in 2024.

The People's History study is a huge and labor-intensive effort, but with the help of volunteers, we are approaching the next phase of this research.

Our Essays Tell the First-Hand Stories

Just Voices Iowa entered into an agreement with *Black Iowa News*, an online media outlet in Des Moines to publish a series of essays to share our research and first-hand stories of the 2020 protestors with the Des Moines community. Rather than wait until all research is fully completed in a nice, tidy report, we decided to release our findings and protestor interviews exclusively to *Black Iowa News*.

To date, we have published 10 riveting essays and will publish more this year. Here are the essays to date. We encourage you to read each riveting story/essay.

- [Article 1 \(intro to series\): : "The People's History: What happened during the 2020 protests in Des Moines"](#)
- ["Like pulling teeth: Nonprofit group faces resistance from Des Moines to provide police 'use of force' data from 2020 protests"](#)
- ["When a kettle becomes a crucible: The lasting impact of Des Moines police response to the 2020 Protests"](#)
- ["That's when I was hit by a baton,' trauma lingers for George Floyd protestor"](#)
- ["The Pascha Morgan Story-Wrongly Arrested After 2020 George Floyd Protest"](#)
- ["When Doing Right Results in Being Wrong: Blazing Saddle Arrests"](#)
- ["The People's History: The Andrea Sahouri Story, former Des Moines journalist arrested at 2020 Protest"](#)
- ["The People's History: In the midst of assault & trauma, protester Denver Foote helps others"](#)
- ["The People's History: The First Weekend of Protests – From Calm to Chaos"](#)
- ["Des Moines police used tear gas on peaceful protesters in 2020 — Kerwin Dobbins was there"](#)

The People's History - Volume 1 Publishes in 2024!

As the research on the volatile protests of 2020 continues, there is still much to uncover and share. Just Voices has decided to publish online and in print "Volume 1" of our research and essays thus far. Rather than waiting until we feel we've exhausted our study, we will offer the public this initial collection.

Our hope is that Volume 1 of The People's History will be released sometime in February 2024 (Black History month). Readers can engage with the collection online and in a printed color magazine. Printed copies may be obtained for a small fee, just to cover the cost of printing.

Just Voices Contributes to 21CP Solutions Study of the DMPD

After much pressure from the activist community about the toxic culture and regressive policies of the DMPD, the city hired another consulting firm to study its policies, practices, training, and culture. At a cost of about \$243,000, 21CP Solutions (21CP) began its research in November 2022 and issued their report about a year later in 2023.

Just Voices, in a preemptive move, reached out to the consultants of 21CP early on, offering to share our data and findings with them. They were happy to talk with us and welcomed our input. We also participated in focus groups as they did their data gathering.

After about a year of work, including meetings with the community, and intensive interviews, surveys, and document review, 21CP released its report and their recommendations.

[Read the full 21CP Report](#)

Just Voices applauds the great work done by 21CP in producing an exhaustive report offering 46 actionable recommendations on improvements the DMPD needs to make. In fact, 21CP mentions Just Voices several times in its report to the city and acknowledges our research. *"Finally, in community stakeholder meetings, 21CP learned about the work of Just Voices, which obtained citation and arrest data involving stops by DMPD officers from the Iowa Department of Transportation and the Polk County Sheriff's Office. Just Voices analyzed records from January 1, 2016 - December 31, 2020, by race and from a number of perspectives..."*

The 21CP goes on to say, *"CCI and others were successful in urging DMPD to document all stops they make, rather than only making a record when a citation is issued or an arrest is made. CCI and Just Voices argued that documenting all stops is necessary for the collection and analysis of such data to determine if Blacks or other minorities are stopped more frequently than would be expected given their representation in the local population."*

The experts at 21CP, recommend that the DMPD try to reboot the broken relationship it has with Iowa-CCI and Just Voices. They said, *"...two particular community groups, Just Voices and Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (CCI), and several smaller groups with which they worked, sentiment was highly critical of the DMPD and its practices. While this is not abnormal—to have highly critical activist groups within a community—the breakdown in conversation with DMPD was notable. On several occasions, members of these groups and DMPD leadership cited the inability to have a constructive dialogue as a block to improving police-community relationships."*

It Takes a Village – We Thank Our Team & Volunteers

Volunteers

We thank these generous people (and all those who are not named) who have given their most precious resource: their time. These volunteers have helped us in real and tangible ways because they want a more just Iowa.

Tom Rendon	Brad Titus	Kathy Ferguson
Michael Danos*	Lora Fraracci	Heather Brady
Robin Madison	Susan Barnes	Jane Alderman
Karen Downing	Brian O'Donnell**	

*Michael was a senior at Valley High School in West Des Moines. He's now a freshman at the University of Iowa. His work researching and interviewing people around protests held in West Des Moines the Summer of 2020 was impressive and we were grateful to partner with him.

**Brian deserves special recognition as our volunteer PhD mathematician and data analyst who pours through thousands of data points to create the charts and graphs we update yearly on DMPD police stops, arrests, and bookings.

Our Professional Advisors & Vendors

We hire experts and professionals of color, whenever possible, for our professional service needs. They understand oppression and lived experience and culture of Black America and their perspective is priceless in living out our mission.

Jonathan Zanders – owner of Vertical Marketing Solutions – is our Facebook account and advertising manager. He also handles our Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter pages. He's an expert at web design and usability, so he also helps with our website maintenance and analytics.

Carlos Anthony - owner of Carlos Anthony Photography – is responsible for all the custom portraits of racial profiling victims and staff and JV team photos you see on our website.

Gina Messamer, Attorney-at-Law. Gina is with the Parrish-Kruidenier Law Firm and has represented several plaintiffs suing the DMPD for police misconduct. Her record of victories is outstanding. But more importantly, Gina believes that just and racially-equitable policing is needed in Des Moines. Just Voices will consult with her and seek her input in reviewing victim's stories of mistreatment or unjust policing presented to us. We value her expertise on law, state and federal.

Robert Jackson, Jr – owner of IM Pros and Political Persuasion – was our Instagram account manager and our video creator. Unfortunately, our hearts were broken when Robert suddenly passed away in June 2023, in the Philippines, where he had been living for about 18 months. Robert contributed his creativity and content creation to our social media marketing strategies. His talent, creativity, and passion will be irreplaceable. You'll find Robert created some of our most moving videos on our YouTube page. Here's a few:

- Meet Just Voices (our identity video): <https://youtu.be/sV6UxyNYrPA?si=AYaweSj6rVdKdYb>
- A Dark Day in American History: Jan 6, 2021: <https://youtu.be/-sa3kg60qOc?si=peoIPRYLHhasOqja>
- The People's History of the 2020 Protests in Des Moines, Iowa: https://youtu.be/N_YkaGCRpcU?si=Oc62mrzv1TRxViMS



Robert Jackson, Jr.
R.I.P.

Please GIVE to Just Voices

In 2023, we received another (our second) \$50,000 grant injection from the Borealis Foundation's *Communities Transforming Policing Fund* (CTPF). We are so grateful for this generous funding, but 2024 will be our last grant allocation from CTPF.

We are also pleased to announce that we just won a grant from Unitarian Universalists Association's *Just Society Fund*. As Unitarian Universalists, the fund for A Just Society Panel supports innovative campaigns boldly organizing for systemic change and justice in our economic, political, and social structure.

But despite this funding, we still need more donations to meet our \$115,000 annual budget. Grants for this type of social justice work are hard to find.

If you can spare a monetary gift to the work of Just Voices, please give whatever you can. It's easy and safe [to give online at our website](#).

Or you may mail a check, made payable to Just Voices, to:

Harvey Harrison
Just Voices
680 Harwood Drive
Des Moines, IA 50312

Thank you in advance!
