

Organization Name: [Arms Around You](#)

Date of Interview: 19 April 2024

Organization Interviewees: Avon, Sophie

Impact 100 GRT Interviewers: Heidi Narayan, Lisa Boyapati

Application Link: [Click here](#)

Organization Mission: The mission of Arms Around You is to partner with and support individuals as they reintegrate, heal, and build their lives after experiencing incarceration, domestic violence, substance abuse, and homelessness.

What are the compelling reasons for Impact 100 to partner with this organization?

Avon Curtis, Arms Around You's founder, cycled in and out of incarceration and homelessness for over a decade before being offered a way out. She founded Arms Around You to offer her community an alternative to the violent cycle she herself had experienced. The stakes for our formerly incarcerated community are high – a history of incarceration has been linked to high rates of early death, homelessness, and re-incarceration.

A staggering 86% of incarcerated women have experienced either physical or sexual violence prior to their incarceration. Arms Around You is seeking to make transformative change by breaking the cycle of incarceration to reentry followed by subsequent domestic violence/substance abuse/homelessness to incarceration for black women. Arms Around You serves the currently and formerly incarcerated community in Washington State's King County and Pierce County through comprehensive reintegration services. Arms Around You's Foundational Homes for women are an example of how they combat inequity in reentry. The foundational homes model, developed by A New Way of Life Reentry Project, has a success rate of 80%. They anticipate an investment of \$100,000 would increase their capacity by 15% by serving 30 more community members in 2024. That is 30 more community members who will have a chance at moving past survival and harm, to heal and flourish.

Culturally-relevant, gender-responsive and trauma-informed re-entry services have been proven to be the most effective intervention for preventing these outcomes – but programs that provide these services are few and far between. Arms Around You disrupts cycles of harm by building systems of care in their place. They provide basic needs services, skill development programs and communal healing to increase the capacity and ability of our community to heal from harm and thrive after incarceration. They envision a world where individuals and communities are supported and resourced to meet their diverse needs and provide accountability and healing when harm occurs.

Do you have any reservations about this organization as a potential grantee partner for Impact 100? None.

What does the organization do?

AAY Community Resource Navigation and Case Management Programs connect participants to stable housing, living wage employment, mental and physical health care, public benefits, substance misuse support, and other basic needs. In 2023, these programs served 166 community members. In 2024, AAY plans to implement a Workforce Development Program. This program will offer individualized case management, employment planning, skill development via further education and training, and job placement. Their Seeking Safety program is an evidence-based counseling program designed to support individuals navigating PTSD and substance misuse. Starting in the Spring of 2024, AAY will also offer their community the opportunity to heal fractured familial relationships through a Family Reunification Program. In Washington state, incarcerated parents are twice as likely as the general population to lose custody of their children. This program will support formerly incarcerated parents in establishing trusting relationships with their children and navigating

the legal system to establish custody or visitation rights. AAY Foundational Homes for women combine these functions of basic needs, skill development and healing into one program for women returning to community from incarceration. Supportive housing not only directly prevents homelessness, but also increases success rates for reintegration – one study found supportive housing programs for the formerly incarcerated community reduced re-incarceration rates by 61%. In 2023, they served 10 women in these homes. They currently have the capacity to serve 14 women concurrently in their supportive housing program.

Who does the organization serve?

In 2023, Arms Around You provided direct services to 200 individuals, alongside their active participation in community events such as Seeking Safe workshops and health fairs. Their aim for 2024 is to extend their support to 250 individuals.

Access to Arms Around You's services is facilitated either through a case manager for individuals within the correctional system or via referrals from community sources, word of mouth, and occasionally through online searches. Everyone undergoes an interview process to ascertain compatibility with Arms Around You's services. In cases where individuals require a higher level of care or face mobility issues beyond the organization's scope, efforts are made to connect them with suitable alternative resources; abandonment of individuals is not within their practice. Arms Around You is looking for a growth mindset when they connect with individuals.

How does the organization reflect, maintain proximity to and stay accountable to the community it serves?

The challenges and barriers that the formerly incarcerated community face are complex and numerous. They believe that people with lived experience are the most qualified and knowledgeable to determine what it looks like to address these barriers. They center the voices of the currently and formerly incarcerated community in their decision making and implement community-driven interventions and support through sustained relationships with the women incarcerated at Washington Corrections Center for Women, the staff with lived experience, and the voices of the community members who come through their doors.

Avon prefers meeting people face-to-face because it helps build a stronger connection and understanding. Most of the Arms Around You team are Black women, and a lot of them have been through similar experiences as the people they're helping. Plus, almost half of them have been through the program themselves. (70% of staff are black women and 70% have lived experience and 40% are former participants of Arms Around You).

What inequity is your organization addressing and what do you think is the root cause of that inequity?

How is the organization addressing this?

Programs designed to address the multitude of barriers the formerly incarcerated community face to access housing, employment, health care and opportunity are crucial for successful reintegration. These programs, however, are few and far between. The programs that do exist are often tailored to meet the needs of men returning to community. This lack of services designed for women, coupled with the high rates of negative outcomes for formerly incarcerated Black women, is why Avon Curtis founded Arms Around You. As an organization by and from formerly incarcerated Black women, Arms Around You provides gender-responsive, culturally relevant and healing-centered care with Black women at the center of all of our program models. They know the challenges that Black women face in this process because their team has lived through those challenges and come out the other side.

How is the organization collaborating with other community-based organizations?

AAY really values partnerships and breaking down barriers. Avon discussed (as an example) a close partnership with Fresh Start (FSP) (they focus on men) where they work on a digital stewardship program - to get computers and digital skills to formerly incarcerated men and women. AAY is also planning a healing collective just for the healing organizations -a place to network in a place where people can relax and then hold each other accountable - how can they be connected to serve their community better.

What is the vision for the organization in 5 years?

The organization is currently in the process of developing both a growth plan and a strategic plan. The overarching objective is to establish a mixed-use space that serves as a community hub, offering comprehensive resources while also accommodating residential units on the upper floors. The aspiration is to acquire a sizable property to realize this vision. In alignment with organizational values, there is a focus on integrating diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-oppressive practices, and fostering radical belonging. To facilitate long-term growth, there is consideration for engaging a consultant specializing in these areas. Diversifying funding sources is identified as a key initiative to sustain and expand organizational operations.

What is the organization's area of greatest need? T

he organization's most significant area of need lies in board development. They have a community-based board and development of a highly functional and motivated board is crucial for driving the organization's progress. This involves exploring strategies to cultivate a robust board, understanding what characteristics and commitments contribute to its effectiveness, and ensuring alignment with the organization's goals and mission.

Highlight a story of impact.

When the women's home first opened in Seattle's South Park area, a resident arrived feeling extremely fearful. Using the inhale/exhale breath model, the staff provided support as she struggled with mental health and substance issues. Over time, they witnessed her transformation into a more empowered individual, offering continuous support and understanding as she navigated her fears of change. Gradually after trust was built, "Candice" was ready to start discussions about career goals and resume-building. Because of regular connections with the staff and being able to talk and check in regularly she had secured employment and became ready for permanent affordable housing within a year. "Candice" came back after some time and expressed a desire for career advancement rather than just job placement.