

TAKE ACTION

Get Connected

If you're new to community organizing or the fight to end mass incarceration and are looking for a way in, the best advice for how to get started comes from Rabbi Michael Lezak: Talk to—and learn from—everyone. Though his passion was ignited by reading *The New Jim Crow*, he really began to get traction after spending a flight from San Francisco to New York picking the brain of an expert in criminal justice reform. When he got home, he started talking to everyone she had recommended, not only asking them what they do and how he might help but also whom else he should talk to. Following up from one lead to the next opened some incredible doors for him, leading to amazing opportunities for him and his congregation to get further involved.

The second piece of advice is to find out what grassroots organizing is already happening near you and then to join in.

Nation Inside (www.nationinside.org) is one online platform

that keeps a national list of local campaigns against mass incarceration; scroll down on their homepage to find the map and see if there is a campaign near you. Another option is to look at the websites of the major organizing networks (e.g., PICO, IAF) to see if they have a local affiliate. If they are not running an active campaign on an aspect of mass incarceration, they can likely connect you to someone who is. We at T'ruah also want to know how you're getting involved and may be able to connect you to local organizing. Email us at office@truah.org.

We learn from our colleague Rabbi Susan Talve that, when the moment of crisis comes, it's too late to reach out to other communities. We need to be building relationships across racial, economic, cultural, and other lines, so that when the crisis arrives, the collective response arises out of existing

bonds. Of the Ferguson protests in the wake of Michael Brown's shooting, Rabbi Talve writes, "The faces I saw on the street of the young black men and women helping and organizing are the wonderful friends I have marched with from fast food chain to fast food chain" in the Fight for \$15 campaign. These connections can be built on so many levels, in simple ways. Rabbi Talve encourages us: "Mentor—not once a month, every week—and cross the divide.... It's not scary. Even now. Go to shops in neighborhoods you don't usually go to. Support the stores and businesses that are making a difference in these communities plagued by economic disparities." Conversely, another way to cross lines

GET A LOCAL SNAPSHOT

The Vera Institute of Justice has an online database with incarceration statistics and trends for each county in the United States. As part of your local organizing campaign, look into the state of your county jail population over the last 40 years.
<http://trends.vera.org/#/>

is by opening your building to outside groups. For instance, Rabbi Ari Lev Fornari notes that it's common for churches to host AA meetings but much less common for synagogues.

Another way to get connected is by volunteering in a

restorative justice program. Sometimes these organizations are free-standing and other times they are incorporated into the formal criminal justice system. Sometimes they operate solely with professionals, but other times they rely heavily on volunteers—and religious leaders can play an especially useful role. The website **Restorative Justice on the Rise** (<http://restorativejusticeontherise.org>) lists programs across the country (scroll down to bottom of the homepage for the map). Participating in a restorative justice program as a community member can have benefits in multiple directions. It's a way for you to actually contribute to an alternative, more just form of responding to harm in a community. It's a way to learn more about ending mass incarceration. It's a way to meet people you might otherwise not meet, and it's a signal to their communities that you care about what happens to them.