

# THE PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE ON 21ST CENTURY POLICING

## **Carmen Perez**

Carmen Perez has been an activist nearly her entire life. After the death of her 19 year-old sister when she was just 17, Carmen began dedicating her life to transforming the lives of young people.

After graduating from UC Santa Cruz with a degree in Psychology in 2001, Carmen became an advocate for young men and women, and began providing comprehensive leadership training and opportunities for individuals in and out of the criminal justice system. Her work in Santa Cruz was well-known in the community and across the country. While in Santa Cruz she founded the youth leadership group R.E.A.L. (Reforming Education, Advocating for Leadership) and co-founded The Girls Task Force, dedicated to improving gender-specific services to better support girls in the community. Carmen also created and supported the “Youth Summit” concept where young people came together to discuss solutions on serious topics such as drug and alcohol reform, detention alternatives, gangs, and violence. Recommendations that came out of the group discussion were often presented and adopted by community and state-wide policy makers throughout California

In 2002, Carmen went to work for Barrios Unidos in Santa Cruz – an organization dedicated to providing non-violence training and re-entry services for the incarcerated, and establishing an Institute for Peace and Community Development in Santa Cruz and across the country. In 2005, while working for Barrios Unidos, Carmen met the man who would influence the next decade of her life – Harry Belafonte. Mr. Belafonte had just founded The Gathering for Justice, and was organizing masses of marginalized communities in non-violent settings across the country – and he invited Carmen to be a part of it. For the next several years Carmen served both organizations while continuing to build her own programs focused on young girls and youth justice.

In 2006, Carmen joined the Board of Directors of Barrios Unidos, and went to work for the Santa Cruz County Probation Department as a bilingual Probation Officer. With an all-female intensive caseload, Carmen worked tirelessly to provide appropriate programs and re-entry services for young women in the juvenile justice system. She looked critically within the system to reduce racial disparities and advocated for monolingual Spanish speaking families. She helped implement gender-specific services that incorporated sexual trauma counseling through art therapy, teen-parent mediation, and eventually co-founded an evening program for girls called Girlzpace.

In 2008 Carmen became the National Organizer of The Gathering for Justice and in 2010 she was promoted to Executive Director of the organization. As Executive Director, Carmen has crossed the globe promoting peace, interconnectedness, and alternatives to incarceration and violence while collaborating in national policy presentations. She has organized cultural, spiritual and educational events and provided support to individuals incarcerated in juvenile detention centers and inside California’s and New York’s prisons. In January 2014 she founded Justice League NYC, a task force of juvenile and criminal justice advocates, experts, artists, and formerly incarcerated individuals brought together to build “Growing Up Locked Down”

## THE PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE ON 21ST CENTURY POLICING

---

(GULD) a 3 day juvenile justice conference in September. In the wake of the non-indictment of the police officer who killed Eric Garner on December 3, Justice League NYC has become one of the unofficial leaders of the NYC protest movement, delivering a set of demands to the Mayor and Governor and Attorney General, being the first organization to be invited to meet with Mayor de Blasio, leading several successful “shut down” initiatives in the City, but also leading substantive community and city-wide discussions about real reforms for the NYPD and justice system in general. Carmen Perez has gained respect as an expert in the field of juvenile justice and system accountability, and in that capacity has recently appeared on CNN, MSNBC, NY1, CNBC, CBS and been featured in articles in the NY Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal and more.