

ROXBURY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

SOCIAL IMPACT CENTER



HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

2000 - 2023

Foundation and Forming: 2000-07

In 2000, **Rev. Hurmon Hamilton** founded the **Roxbury Presbyterian Church Social Impact Center** (SIC) as the nonprofit arm of the Roxbury Presbyterian Church's (RPC) mission. Since inception, SIC has expanded its programming to strengthen the Roxbury community in various ways (Note: tutoring was called **Learning out Loud** after Rev. Liz started and the tutoring in these years was the **Victory Generation** after school program).

Prior to this, Rev. Hamilton played a pivotal role in establishing the **Greater Boston Interfaith Organization** (GBIO) in 1998. Serving as GBIO's President from 2004 to 2011, Rev. Hamilton dedicated significant time and effort to the organization's work in improving housing, healthcare, criminal justice reform, addressing racial disparities, and rebuilding schools and neighborhoods.

During these years, SIC also formed an additional partnership with the **Black Ministerial Alliance**, creating an affiliate of their **Victory Generation After School Program**. This program provided academic support, spiritual nurturing, and professional development for children aged 5 to 14, while also supporting parents, teachers, and caregivers.

New Seasons of Leadership: 2008-12

In 2008, **Sheila Gunn** became the Executive Director of the Social Impact Center (SIC), marking a new phase in the organization's development. During this time, the After School program was phased out and the Computer Technology Center was created to meet the evolving needs of the community. Notable reports highlighting these milestones are included in the [2008 Annual Report](#), which provides more information on these and other highlights.

In 2009, the SIC launched several initiatives to further its impact. Rev. Hamilton created the **"Dream Again Campaign: The RPC Adopt a School Program"** within the church. It was established to foster relationships between local schools and community partners. The SIC joined the **Adopt a School Program** by adopting the Higginson-Lewis K-8 School and the **Dearborn Middle School**. This 'adoption' was in partnership with **RPC, Trinity Boston Foundation, GBIO, and Citizens Bank**. During the year, SIC engaged with the teachers, staff, students, and parents in a number of helpful events.

Additionally, the **Trinity Education for Excellence Program (TEEP)**, a program of **Trinity Boston Foundation (Trinity Church in Copley Square)**, was brought to SIC. It was a free summer program for junior and high school students focused on cultural and academic exploration.

Notably, in this year, SIC joined with others to partner with the Dearborn Middle School after it received a 'failing' grade. This public-private partnership continued until the **Dearborn STEM Academy** for grades 6-12 opened in 2018. Key partners in this project included **GBIO**, **RPC**, and **Dudley Street Initiative**. This partnership was another part of the "Dream Again Campaign" of RPC's Adopt a School Program as it particularly focused on raising public and political awareness as well as funding.

Furthermore, **Project MCAS Success** was established to support students in preparing for the **Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System** exams. **The Computer Technology Center** continued its operations.

See more in the [2009 Report](#)

In 2010, the SIC continued to build on its existing programs, updating the Adopt a School, TEEP, Dearborn STEM Academy partnership, Project MCAS Success, and Computer Technology Center initiatives. These updates enabled the organization to enhance its service delivery and address emerging community needs.

See the [2010 Report](#)

By 2011, the SIC welcomed a **Director of Development**, strengthening the organization's capacity to secure resources and funding. Adopt a School, TEEP, Dearborn STEM Academy partnership, Project MCAS Success, and Computer Technology Center initiatives continued to evolve and expand.

The SIC introduced tutoring services for elementary students under the name of **Saturday School**, demonstrating the organization's adaptability and commitment to meeting the community's needs.

For an in-depth look at the significant events of 2011, refer to the [2011 Annual Report](#).

In 2012, Rev. Hurmon Hamilton transitioned to a new church in California, with **Rev. Liz Walker** assuming the roles of Transitional Pastor and SIC Board President (Note: Rev. Hamilton did not provide leadership during this time). A major event was held to celebrate Rev. Hamilton's contributions to RPC Church, SIC, and community.

Despite these transitions, existing programs, such as Adopt a School, TEEP, Project MCAS Success, Computer Technology Center, and Saturday School tutoring continued to evolve and expand.

There was a major development as the Dearborn Middle School partnership helped bring about a City of Boston and Massachusetts state commitment to pilot a 9th grade in the future Dearborn STEM Academy.

Sheila Gunn leaves as Executive Director after over 5 years of exceptional leadership. Aarti Miller is hired as Program Director and joins with Nancy Kilburn, Director of Development, to replace the Executive Director role.

Additionally, the SIC was a recipient of the **White House Together for Tomorrow School Impact Champion Award** given by the U.S. Department of Education. At a White House event, RPC, the Dearborn STEM Academy project, received recognition for its impactful work, acknowledging its contributions to the field and the positive influence it has had on the community. This prestigious honor underscores the project's significant achievements and serves as a testament to its success in promoting education and opportunity in the Boston area.

For an in-depth look at the significant events of 2012, refer to the [Annual Report](#).

New Core Programming is Born: 2013-14

Moving on to [2013](#), the SIC continued to evolve its programming. The Saturday School was renamed **Learning Out Loud**, reflecting a renewed focus on engaging and dynamic education. The Dearborn project saw significant progress, and Rev. Liz's **antiviolence work** was recognized with the **Crimefighter of the Year award**. Rev. Liz became the new RPC Pastor and the Executive Director of SIC.

Additionally, SIC gained a new focus in response to the traumatic impact of urban violence on youth, women, and men in the greater Roxbury area. This led to the 2014 launch of the **Cory Johnson Program for Post-Traumatic Healing** (CJP), named after a young father and church member who was murdered in 2010. CJP fosters connection and empowers community members to take an active role in helping themselves and others heal.

Throughout [2014](#), the SIC saw significant developments in its programs. **Learning Out Loud** grew to serve 35 students, **brought students grades up by nearly a full grade and standardized test scores by 12%**, while the **Dearborn** project celebrated a groundbreaking ceremony for the \$72 million STEM school. The organization also launched **Common Unity Nights for Youth Peace**, an initiative designed to promote nonviolence and foster community engagement.

The Cory Johnson Program for Post-Traumatic Healing (CJP) was founded by Reverend Liz Walker, Pastor of the Roxbury Presbyterian Church, who also served as Executive Director of the Social Impact Center until June 2024. CJP offers traumatized and grieving people a place to participate in the healing power of the community through groups, receive individual support, and learn about trauma and the recovery journey.

The initial CJP team was comprised of church members assuming various roles and a **Licensed Mental Health Clinician**, reflecting the desire for the church and Social Impact Center to connect in living out social justice work in the community.

Partners HealthCare played a crucial role in the program's establishment by providing essential funding for the first two years.

The signature program of **CJP, Can We Talk...(CWT) Community Sharing on Trauma & Healing** (originally called Our Voices, Our Stories), was introduced as a safe and sacred space for individuals to share their stories of trauma, loss, and healing. First held on Sept. 11, 2014, CWT is a free monthly drop-in, anonymous, and no referral-needed place that encourages participants to increase trust, foster connection, and reorient their sense of meaning and purpose.

Program Expansion: 2015

In [2015](#), the SIC built upon the progress made in previous years. Updates to Learning Out Loud, **Dearborn STEM Academy finally saw construction begin due to successful community organizing**. Continued efforts through Common Unity Nights for Youth Peace demonstrated the organization's ongoing commitment to education (**4 of the high school students became tutors in Learning Out Loud tutoring program**), youth workforce development, community development, and nonviolence.

In 2015, CJP at the Roxbury Presbyterian Church Social Impact Center underwent significant expansion, offering a broader range of support services beyond the CWT initiative. These additional services were designed to **respond to the diverse needs of the community**, ensuring **comprehensive support** for individuals dealing with trauma and loss.

CJP introduced:

- *Individualized community systems support.* This supportive assistance was tailored to each participant's unique circumstances. It went beyond regular business days, ensuring **accessibility** and **flexibility** for those seeking help.
- *Drop-in support groups.* To create safe spaces for people with shared experiences
 - 1) **Mothers group:** for mothers who lost children in any way
 - 2) **Men's group:** for men dealing with trauma and recovery

These offerings facilitated a sense of community and mutual understanding among participants, promoting healing and personal growth.

Throughout this period of growth, the SIC maintained its focus on the **tutoring program**, ensuring a consistent and valuable resource for local students needing academic support.

Pivotal Growth: 2016

The Cory Johnson Program for Post-Traumatic Healing introduced three new initiatives in 2016 to better serve the community and meet its needs:

1. **trauma education**
2. **art & writing**
3. **body movement programs**

Trauma education content was developed to increase awareness and understanding of trauma among participants. Through monthly evening programming and occasional workshops, community members learned about the effects of trauma and gained valuable skills for fostering healing and recovery.

Introducing art & writing nights provided an outlet for creative expression, allowing participants to engage in therapeutic artistic activities to process emotions and experiences.

Body movement sessions promoted physical activity and mindful movement as a means of healing and stress relief.

In addition, the SIC launched the **Common Unity Summer Intensive Program** (CUSP) in 2016 to foster personal growth, social engagement, and community involvement among the youth participants during the summer months. The CUSP curriculum was divided into the themes of Self-Awareness/Personal Responsibility, Personal Accountability and Community Service.

The Roxbury community also continued to benefit from the **tutoring program**, which provided academic assistance to local students.

Trauma Healing-Centered: 2017

As its leadership and programs continued to evolve and positively impact the community, the SIC experienced a year of growth and development.

Leaders of the Cory Johnson Program furthered their professional development and received **Certificates of Traumatic Stress Studies** from Bessel van der Kolk's Trauma Center at the Justice Resource Institute. This advanced training enabled the CJP team to enhance their knowledge and skills in addressing the impact of trauma within the community.

CJP organized and hosted its first local conference, **"Abide and Persevere: The Spiritual Essence of Post-Traumatic Healing."** This event offered CJP's psycho-spiritual framework for understanding the trauma healing process. Experiences of CWT as a trauma healing program were shared along with implications and best practices for individual and community healing.

An [initial program evaluation](#) was conducted during this time to assess program effectiveness. The findings demonstrated alignment with the needs of the Roxbury community and contributed to further program improvements.

Tutoring and CUSP programming continued to support Roxbury's youth and families, promoting academic achievement and fostering community engagement.

Milestones and Celebrations: 2018-19

In 2018, the **Dearborn STEM Academy**, a collaborative effort fostered by the Roxbury Presbyterian Church (RPC), the RPC Social Impact Center, and many other community partners since 2009, opened its doors to **580 students**, marking a significant accomplishment.

In 2018, the SIC demonstrated growing influence and expertise in trauma intervention:

The Licensed Mental Health Clinician became the first Director of the Cory Johnson Program.

CJP's impact extended beyond its local community as the first **CWT** replication site was established in Gary, Indiana, followed by the formation of another site in South Boston.

CJP representatives were invited to present their community-based trauma intervention model at **Bessel van der Kolk's Boston trauma conference**.

CJP also conducted its first national-level conference, "**Abiding in the City: A Faith-Based Response to a Neighborhood in Pain**," sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Region 1.

A major funder, **Imago Dei Fund**, made a large increase to its yearly grant that has continued through 2025 so far.

Fundraising efforts played a vital role in community building, as the church collaborated with CJP to launch a joint fundraising effort called **Faith in Fashion**. This successful event brought together local designers and businesses to raise funds and awareness for SIC. A year later, it was equally successful in showcasing SIC's commitment to community partnerships and community healing.

In 2019, the SIC's dedication to community health and well-being was acknowledged with several prestigious awards, including the **William Boyan Award for Excellence in Community Health** from Boston Children's Hospital. This recognition highlighted the center's commitment to improving health outcomes and addressing the unique needs of the Roxbury community.

Integrating content from the monthly trauma education into the art & writing evenings, CJP developed a nine-month curriculum for assisting the community in understanding the impact of trauma and providing resources for the healing journey.

SIC started a collaboration with **Mass General Hospital's Center of Excellence for Psychosocial and Systemic Research** to survey the program's impact and quality of responsiveness to the community's trauma healing needs.

The SIC hired a program and development assistant.

SIC decided mid-year to suspend its Learning Out Loud tutoring program and work towards developing other youth support programs.

CUSP continued reflecting an ongoing commitment to foster the academic success and personal growth of local youth.

COVID Response and Post-Pandemic Trauma Support: 2020-22

In 2020, facing the unprecedented challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, SIC demonstrated **strength** and **adaptability**, delivering essential programs and services to the community.

CWT transitioned to an online format, ensuring continued access to vital resources and support for participants.

CWT further launched a drop-in Zoom series called “**Coping in the next season of the COVID-19 pandemic.**” Prominent guest speakers offered insights and guidance, including Dr. Anthony Fauci and Rep. Ayanna Pressley.

The center’s dedication to serving the community was recognized with the prestigious **American Psychiatric Association Foundation Award for Advancement of Minority Mental Health**. This accolade highlighted SIC’s commitment to addressing the specific mental health needs of minority populations within the Roxbury community.

Partners HealthCare funded a new full-time **Community Trauma Healing Specialist** position for two years.

The third annual Faith in Fashion event adapted to a virtual environment to raise crucial funds.

New CWT replication sites in Lowell, MA and Chattanooga, TN

In 2021, CWT continued to deliver its impactful programs online, ensuring that the community could access essential resources and support despite the ongoing challenges of the global pandemic.

A significant milestone was the launch of The Liz Walker Legacy Fund, which generated over \$2 million in donations. This provided CWT with crucial financial resources to invest in its future and sustain its growth.

Mass General Brigham provided additional funding for the **Community Trauma Healing Specialist** position funded for an additional five years.

SIC's partnership with Mass General Hospital continued by implementing the program impact survey to ensure that CWT programs were evidence-based and responsive to community needs.

eCratchit was contracted to implement a new accounting and financial system to streamline administrative processes.

CWT launched more replication sites, in-person, in Providence, RI, Lowell, MA and Chattanooga, TN and online in Dorchester, MA.

Throughout 2022, additional programming was sustained, including the **Can We Talk...** program.

CJP marked a new chapter with the launch of the Support Group for Young Black Men and The Exchange, a teen drop-in group held at the Roxbury YMCA. These programs addressed specific needs within the community and offered safe spaces for young men and teens to connect and heal.

A 10-year grant from the Cummings Foundation further strengthened CWT's financial sustainability. This funding enabled CWT to expand its reach and impact, offering vital resources and support to a broader audience.

CWT established new sites in Lynn, Dorchester, and Saugus, MA, bringing its trauma healing-centered support program to additional communities.

CWT underwent staffing changes to support this expansion and ensure strong leadership, hiring a new full-time Director of the Cory Johnson Program and transitioning the previous Director to the Associate Director of SIC. Additionally, a new part-time position called the Expressive Arts Coordinator was created.

Louise Packard became the Chair of the SIC Board.

Post COVID Emergence: 2023

As 2023 dawned, the SIC emerged from the challenges of COVID-19 and embraced a year of growth and development. SIC focused on strategic planning by hiring SEED Impact and developing a new mission statement to guide its future efforts. Leadership enhancement included hiring a full-time Director of Operations and searching for a new Social Impact Center Executive Director. The idea was that in 2024 Rev. Liz Walker would step down as ED and transition to a Founding Director role. Colleen Sharka, LMHC, shifted from SIC Associate Director to new position of Director of Replication & Trauma Education.

SIC secured a significant funding commitment from a major donor who gave a million dollars.

CWT successfully transitioned back to in-person meetings, taking place twice per month while offering twice-monthly Zoom sessions.

The CWT replication sites significantly expanded, supporting additional communities such as Brockton, MA; Boston, MA; Providence, RI; Sarasota, FL.

CJP also expanded with the launch of a second Exchange program at the Dorchester YMCA.

LEARN MORE!

[The final evaluation report](#) provided by Mass General in July 2024.

Can We Talk...® Network (CWT): www.canwetalknetwork.org

Cory Johnson Program (CJP): www.coryjohnsonprogram.org

Roxbury Presbyterian Church Social Impact Center (RPCSIC): www.rpcsocialimpactctr.org