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MEDIA ADVISORY

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**Re: The Essence of Black Girlhood**

**Sacramento CA.** On June 12th, 2023, the Justice2Jobs Coalition (J2J) was one of 26 regional organizations awarded The Arts, Culture, and Creative Economy Commissions' Capital Region Creative Corps Grant, an initiative dedicated to connecting art with public health, health equity, and social justice.

The Justice2Jobs coalition is launching a narrative campaign culminating in an exhibit showcasing multi-media art forms related to the marginalization and associated harms experienced during Black girlhood. The project includes placemaking—fostering communities for healing and support—as well as documenting the lived experiences of Black women and girls through oral history, expressed in various art forms to be developed over several months.

The project emerged from the lived experience and passion from J2J's community organizer and the project's creative director, Sade Ajayi. Born and raised in Sacramento, Sade grew up witnessing how power, poverty, and policy moved in the lives of marginalized communities. Seeing the disparities of her community and those alike, she grew passionate about liberation, diversity & inclusion, and the redistribution of wealth.

“This issue is very dear to me. As a little Black girl, born and raised in Sacramento, I lived in a cycle of invisibility in which I had to seek nurturance. I always had to know better, and there was no room for mistakes. In turn, my emotional wellbeing, tenderness, and humanity was marginalized. I am now a Black woman, and nothing has changed. I work with Black girls every day in my role as Program Founder and Director for United College Action Network's Girls Empowerment Mentoring and Support Program, or GEMS. Every day, I see the harms Black girls have experienced because of these perceptions. Justice2Jobs has been so aligned, I knew that we as a coalition could create a narrative campaign that could impact generations. I am super thankful to the Capital Region Creative Corps Panel for selecting J2J. Let's tell our stories!” —Sade

This public awareness campaign is timely as it comes during Sacramento County's Probation Department's new partnership with Vera Institute of Justice and CA's Office of Youth & Community Reinvestment to end girl incarceration—a relevant outcome of adultification bias.

Central to J2J's narrative campaign is an understanding of research on the marginalization of Black girlhood through adultification and criminalization. Dr. Joy DeGruy, author of the book, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, posits that this treatment of Black children is a result of multigenerational trauma, a form of "appropriate adaptation when living in a hostile environment" dating back to the efforts of enslaved women to try to protect their children from being sold. Many girls and women from Black communities live with silent resentment that exacerbates the impacts of generational and situational trauma rooted in the development of girls.

Using facilitation, storytelling, and other artistic mediums, this narrative campaign frees that resentment and interrupts a process of systemic harm, offers a starting point for healing, and transitions to further education that informs the greater community. Restoration is often found where buried truths can be revealed.

The *Essence of Black Girlhood* will use the power of storytelling, with its rich, authentic legacy within the Black community, and the additional creative contributions of local Black artists to amplify oral histories, to strengthen education and engagement work, and help diverse audiences understand this crisis and begin to address it. By using art to surface the various stories and identities imposed on Black girls by their families and the broader society, this project can help parents, educators and school administrators, law enforcement personnel, social service providers, and other system actors see how their perceptions, expectations, and actions toward Black girls have been shaped by these false and harmful tropes.

The campaign is beginning with engaging authentic voices in geographically based Story Circles in Del Paso Heights, Oak Park, and Meadowview to learn and document oral histories. Story Circles are an opportunity to share and discuss personal stories about experiences as Black girls through a facilitated and safe space.

The project launch is in August and community engagement via the Story Circles will be held in-person and virtually from September through November. The project's culmination of stories and art will be shared with the public in summer of 2024.