TAKE 5: YOUTH WORK & RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

YouthREX's second Knowledge to Action Exchange included a screening of *Circles*, an honest and intimate documentary following the life of Eric Butler, a father, educator, and restorative justice practitioner based in Oakland, California. After the screening, Eric and director Cassidy Friedman were joined onstage by YouthREX's Travonne Edwards and Peacebuilders International's Rachelle Bloomfield for a discussion. Here are 5 key messages from their talk:

01. "I'm still learning."

Ongoing learning is part of the restorative justice process. When youth workers acknowledge that they're still learning and growing, it encourages young people to engage with "change work," and participate in restorative justice processes.

02. Lived experience = evidence.

We understand youth work through the stories we share. These narratives are a critical form of knowledge that can be mobilized. They are a way of sharing expertise, lessons learned, and best practices. Youth are the experts of their own lives. Understanding their stories and lived experiences as evidence is crucial to developing programs that meet young people where they are and meaningfully respond to their needs.

03. Power matters.

Transformative restorative justice circles ask, who holds the power in a room? They explore silences created by power and consider short- and long-term implications.

04. Deficit-based frameworks undermine trust.

It's important for youth workers to critically interrogate frameworks and principles guiding their practice. Deficit-based models and negative assumptions further marginalize vulnerable youth. Additionally, using deficit-based models can result in isolation and disengagement from programing.

05. Re-invent what's broken.

A failure to integrate critical approaches in youth work can result in the maintenance of systems that further marginalize vulnerable youth and re-enforce poor outcomes (e.g. absenteeism). Integrating intersectional and critical evaluation approaches can help youth workers and young people to identify what isn't working, why it's not working, and what can be done to make change.