ficient to treat drug addiction as a public health issue than it is to punish it.

Similarly, we must also accept that it makes more sense to prevent incidents of gun violence, provide treatment for high risk individuals, and change social norms. In other words, to treat gun violence like the public health crisis that it is.

An essential element to this disease-fighting strategy is to try and interrupt transmission—that is to stop potentially violent conflicts before they escalate. Interruption is achieved by having outreach workers on the streets who identify and mediate potentially lethal conflicts in the community, and who follow up to ensure that conflicts do not reignite.

These interrupters are trained, culturally appropriate activists who have a standing and a stake in their communities. Many are former gang members or formerly incarcerated individuals who are often better prepared than the police at recognizing and de-escalating a potentially violent situation. Preventing retaliation is also a critical tactic in interrupting violence. Whenever a shooting happens, interrupters immediately get to work in the community and at local hospitals where gunshot victims are taken to cool down emotions and prevent retaliations.

Finally, anti-violence workers identify ongoing conflicts by talking to key people in the community about ongoing disputes, recent arrests, recent prison releases, and other situations and use mediation techniques to resolve them peacefully.

Until we recognize that gun violence begins long before the trigger is pulled, we will never stop it from destroying our communities.

Addressing its underlying causes—poverty, lack of education, discrimination, homelessness, easy access to guns, drugs, joblessness, fear and despair—is the only way to prevent another Gakirah Barnes from making headlines ... at either end of a gun.

White House Champion of Change

Reentry and Employment



STANLEY RICHARDS Senior Vice President The Fortune Society

On June 30, 2014 Fortune Senior Vice President Stanley Richards was honored at the White House as a Reentry and Employment Champion of Change. The following was written for the White House Champions of Change Blog.

http://www.whitehouse.gov/ champions/reentry-and-employment

I am honored to be selected as Reentry and Employment Champion of Change as there is nothing I believe in more than our capacity for change. Everything I do is based on the belief that change is possible. Change in a person, change in a community, change in a system.

I am confident change is possible because I have seen it myself. I dropped out of school in 9th grade and spent my time on the streets involved in crime and drugs. As a teenager, I was sent to Rikers Island, then later ended up in state prison. I didn't think my life would ever be any different. Drugs, arrests, prison, is what I knew and was all I thought I could be.

This all changed when, after entering state prison, I was told I

should take classes to prepare for the GED. I passed it on the first try and it was like a new door had opened for me. I started college classes while still in prison (being fortunate to have that now-discontinued option) and finished my Associates degree in social science. After my release, I was hired by The Fortune Society as a counselor and began to help others make a change in their own lives. I am now the Senior Vice President of The Fortune Society, working

with over 200 colleagues helping thousands of people who have been involved in the criminal justice system.

For change to happen, we must provide systems of support. Education, employment and family are all key. Education needs to be available to all, currently incarcerated or formerly incarcerated, and I have been a strong advocate for increased educational programs in our correctional facilities. I support The Fortune Society's education department which consistently delivers outstanding results and I work closely with the David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy (DRCPP) to improve education policies locally and nationally. We must provide access to jobs. Employment allows people to rebuild lives, and The Fortune Society's workforce development and employment service programs have helped hundreds to find stable work with decent wages. Finally, you need the support of family. It can be your biological family, or the family you make attending the programs at The Fortune Society where 70% of the staff have conviction or substance abuse histories (like me). The support of people close to you is crucial.



The Reentry and Employment Champions of Change with Attorney General Eric Holder

I am proud to be a role model for those struggling with their experience in the criminal justice system. In my 23 years of this work, I have found it is possible to see the potential in anyone, often before they see it in themselves. I have also been fortunate to witness the moment, that "a-ha" moment, when someone's self-perception starts to shift, and real change begins.