

People.Power.Change! has brought together regional cohorts of leaders invested in addressing challenges faced by their communities across a range of issues including Food Justice and Poverty Reduction. As we move to our statewide forums, we wanted to hear from some leaders in the area of Economic Justice to provide their thoughts and perspectives about reducing poverty, social movements, health, and the year ahead.



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Highlights:

1. What do Poverty Reduction and Economic Justice mean to you and your work?

AS: Because I work in a rural area of northern California, much of my work is focused on how rural schools can be drivers of rural economic development. If we provide teachers and students with agency and voice, schools can be places to create new opportunities and structures that lead to opportunity, prosperity, and hope.

SC: Poverty has direct impacts on access to housing, quality education, and participating in a healthy lifestyle (nutritious foods, physical activity, etc.). Justice and Equity are rarely given to communities, rather they are mainly achieved through community action.

2. What makes working in the area of Poverty Reduction unique in 2017?

AS: In an age of rapid increases in technology and job automation, schools must prepare students to learn how to learn, rather than preparing them for jobs of the past. Creativity and innovation are going to be critical qualities in imagining new approaches to education and to poverty reduction.

SC: As our cities are changing, it is crucial to advocate for anti-displacement measures, affordable housing, as well as inclusion of the needs of existing residents in future plans and developments so that they too can enjoy the benefits of development...There is [also] currently a significant amount of fear and uncertainty among the immigrant community where we live and work...Our work has thus expanded to providing support and information to community members on their rights and available legal services.

3. From your perspective, how does Poverty Reduction connect to broader movements for social justice (e.g. Fightfor15, #BLM etc.) and bridge to traditional health efforts?

AS: Given what we now understand about intersectionality, we can never think of justice movements as separate and distinct from one another. Humanity is complex, learning is multidimensional, and change is complicated. The challenge is to continue to acknowledge the connections between and among the movements in order to support progress in all of them.

SC: Social movements have encouraged public health professionals to engage in a more critical analysis of health disparities between different racial and ethnic groups. The more silos we can break down with multi-sectoral approaches to public health problems, the more long-term solutions will emerge.

4. What do you see as the role of community leadership in this work?

AS: A strengths-based approach requires that leaders do not see their community (or the youth in it) for only what it lacks, but for what opportunities and assets can be harnessed to reimagine hope.

SC: ...True justice will not come without community involvement, mobilization, and action. Leadership in the grassroots is key to develop and organize advocates from the community.

5. What do you see as the most critical points of action in the year ahead to advance/support Economic Justice issues?

SC: Ensuring affordable housing and rent stabilization in our communities threatened with displacement. Increasing opportunities to support high school graduation among our young men of color. Advocating for policies to end the school to prison pipeline.