Amanda Blasko:

Welcome to the NCJA Podcast. Listen to lively discussions with a variety of guests about promising criminal justice practices, and programs worth taking a closer look at, hear interesting ideas from around the country on a variety of important, and timely topics, and learn how you can adjust or adapt your Byrne JAG grant program for improved success. Thanks for joining us. We hope you enjoy.

Alexis Cooney:

Hello, and welcome to another episode of the NCJA podcast. My name is Alexis Cooney. I'm a research analyst with the NCJA Data Center, and the project lead for NCJA's partnership with the Justice Counts initiative led by the Council of State Governments Justice Center, otherwise known as the CSG Justice Center.

For some brief context before we delve in, the NCJA Data Center is one of the newest centers to NCJA, where we predominantly provide data-focused training and technical assistance, analysis for report writing, and dashboards regarding performance measurement tracking data for state-administering agencies, colloquially known as SAAs.

In today's episode, we'll be interviewing two members of the CSG Justice Center, Laramie and Esteem to learn more about the Justice Counts initiative, what it entails, the ultimate goals, what participation looks like, and so forth, and how dashboards can be a valuable tool for SAAs to streamline their data processes and strategic planning. Without further ado, Laramie, and Esteem, please take a moment to introduce yourselves.

Laramie Riggs:

First off, Alexis, thank you so much, and to everyone listening, thank you for listening. My name is Laramie Riggs. I'm a project manager at Justice Counts. I've worked here for a little bit over a year now. A little bit about my history, so you know who I am, and why I'm passionate about this work, former math teacher, if you could see me right now, definitely have the look of a former math teacher, and I really got passionate about data, and what data can do.

Then I moved into doing some college and prison programming, and reentry work, and saw the need for data, how data actually impacts people's lives, and how it can change communities positively. I'm excited to tell you more about this project. I will kick it over to my colleague, Esteem.

Esteem Brumfield:

Thanks so much, Laramie, and thanks for having us. We're excited to be here today to talk a little bit about the project. My name is Esteem Brumfield. I'm a project manager on Justice Counts' data team. I feel that Laramie and I are really cut from the same cloth. We got hired on the same day to join Justice Counts. I also did prison education initiatives, started in college, and became passionate about this topic.

Wanted to go into data because I felt that a lot of the communities that rely on decisions to be made wanted data to support those decisions, and a lot of agency leaders and policymakers who are making decisions needed to have robust data that they could rely on, to make the best decisions for the community, as well as for the folks who are going in and out of the criminal legal system. I came upon CSG, and that was what their mission was all about. I found a home here.

Alexis Cooney:

Excellent. Thank you. I love to be around my fellow data people. It's always just a treat for us to be able to nerd out together. Okay, to start off, just in a nutshell, can you explain what is Justice Counts?

Laramie Riggs:

Across the country, there is a scarcity of data or maybe people are recording data but not really sure what to do with it, or maybe they're just not recording data at all. One thing that Justice Counts has done is created a single language that really unites people across the criminal legal system, to help see what is happening in the system, where may there be bottlenecks, is there opportunity for growth, and how can we really represent the community? How can we make policies that reflect what's actually happening?

That's the exciting thing about this is whether you're in a rural county in Indiana, which I was literally in yesterday, or you're in New York City, you know this is a project that is available to you. I'll kick it over to Esteem to talk a little bit more about it as well.

Esteem Brumfield:

Yeah, I would just mention a little bit about the history. This initiative was started back in 2019. It is a co-led initiative, which is quite nice. It's co-led by the Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, we call BJA and CSG's Justice Center. It's facilitated by a coalition of national, state, and local leaders, including our friends in NCJA.

What we're striving to do is bridge the critical gaps in data, and understand the criminal justice system for policymakers and the public. We brought together 19 national, I would say, organizations, but really thought partners, to build out Justice Counts over several years, who came together, and thought, "What are the common set of metrics that every agency would want to track across the country?" We did it for law enforcement. We did it for jails. We did it for courts. We did it for public defense. We did it for prosecution. We did it for prisons and community supervision. Over several years, they came together and developed these set of metrics. With that we produced a Publisher platform, this suite of tools, that agencies could use to track.

From my understanding, this was one of the first, and most robust initiatives under BJA to have a standard set of metrics that agencies could track, so that we have this data that, as I mentioned, policymakers, heads of agencies, and the communities could rely on to make data informed decisions for better community outcomes, better public safety, from having worked, like with you, Laramie, and listening to what agencies are wanting. Oftentimes, agencies tell us that the data is siloed, and that Justice Counts allows agencies to work across sectors within their county or even across counties, and share these important data so that data is no longer siloed, and that decisions can happen collectively.

Laramie Riggs:

Yeah, I would agree. I think the other thing that's really amazing about it is I was speaking with a commissioner today. He was mentioning, "Data, it shouldn't be partisan," right? The other thing is that this is aggregate level data. It's nonpartisan. It's just there to hopefully tell the story of the work that you're doing, and what can be done.

Alexis Cooney:

Thank you. You touched a little bit on the historical context, and how Justice Counts kind of came to be. Were there any specific gaps, or Laramie also mentioned bottlenecks that CSG Justice Center was noticing? How did these gaps influence the overall vision for Justice Counts, and how it came to be?

Esteem Brumfield:

Sure, absolutely. Yeah, it's a great question. There are several junctures at which data can bottleneck. Most recently, what we've heard in a number of states, for example, in the prosecution sector, is that different prosecuting agencies treat open cases and closed cases differently by agency. For example, if you have an individual who has gone through the courts, and is now in process of being put on probation, a prosecutor might close out that case, and say, "The individual is put on probation, it's no longer under my jurisdiction," and that case is closed out.

Whereas other prosecuting offices might say, "Actually, that individual is going to be an open case for our office for as long as they're on probation." This produces disparate data points for what does it mean to have an open case? What is your caseload for your staff at your prosecuting attorney's office? If one agency says, "Hey, I have 3,000 cases that I've been assigned, but a lot of those cases are on probation." Our agency leaders, our prosecuting attorneys, really understand how many cases that they have, and what their caseload is.

If an individual has absconded, and has a warrant for the arrest from the '90's, their case probably would still be open. But if you're a newly elected prosecutor, and your predecessor never closed out some of the cases that should have been closed out, you don't actually have a sense of whether or not your agency needs to hire one, two, three or none in terms of your staffing levels, because you don't really know what your open cases levels are.

This would be an example of how, for the prosecution sector, we have come across bottlenecks. Agencies that are undersourced, and understaffed know that they have open cases. They know that they want to close out these cases. These are the things that the public expect of them, but they don't actually know the data is reliable. This is what we want Justice Counts to be. We want it to be easy to use for agencies to make the best decisions possible.

Laramie Riggs:

Yeah. I think also, Esteem, I love how you really mentioned how we can really benefit agencies on that individual level. We've also been working in states that are taking on more of a county level. For instance, they're saying, "Okay, we know that ..." For instance, let's say I work in the jails. I know that somebody doesn't end up in a jail cell out of a vacuum. They don't just fall from the sky. They've funneled through some bit of the system, and maybe even multiple times.

What we've seen communities be able to do is take that data story, and put all of the pieces together. For instance, let's say all of your arrests or a majority of your arrests are low level drug offenses. That could give you a big data system of like, "Hey, jail is actually a really expensive form of treatment for somebody who actually needs mental health services or substance use disorder." It's another thing that can actually paint the story of a community, and help all of the different sectors of the legal system work together to tackle a problem. Instead of maybe putting funds somewhere that they could be well suited otherwise.

Alexis Cooney:

Thank you. Yes, I love that analogy of painting a story, especially when it comes to data. We think of data as just these numeric figures when in reality, there's a whole narrative behind it that we may or may not be able to see. It is very helpful to have these tools, to be able to help us see those narratives, and be able to piece them together.

Esteem, you touched on this a little bit regarding staffing concerns in some areas, and how Justice Counts can help highlight some staffing gaps. As we all know, funding and staffing are major influences in data work, and are always on the top of everyone's minds, especially SAAs. Could you speak a little bit on how the initiative is funded, and what technical and/or expert supports to CSG Justice Center supplies?

Esteem Brumfield:

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Yeah, absolutely, happy to. BJA is both our funder and our partner on the initiative. It's fully funded through BJA, which means there are zero costs for participating agencies who opt in to work with Justice Counts. We provide technical support for agencies who have opted in. That technical support comes in a variety of different flavors, if you will.

We provide a suite of tools for agencies that have participated. One of the primary is what we call the Publisher Platform for agencies to log in, view their metrics, upload and view their data in data visualizations. All of this is for free. All of this is fully funded by BJA. This initiative really wanted to make data easy, accessible, and timely.

Quickly, there was a really important part that I wanted to answer in the last question. What we're learning about agencies is that a lot of agencies are data wealthy, but analysis poor. Different agencies, generally speaking, have a lot of data. It's just located in different departments of their agency, or located in an entirely different agency in the city, the county, or the state. Because agency leaders don't have access to that data in one place, it's hard to make analysis. It's hard for them to assess their program. It's hard for them to assess trends, whether in the community or internal performance evaluation, and trends.

What Justice Counts does really well is we bring all of that data into Publisher so that agencies have at the tip of their fingers the entire trend of their budget, of their expenses, of their staffing, of their caseloads, so that they can see holistically what decisions they should be making given what is happening in their communities. I want to elevate that, because I do think that there is a lot of data out there. That's what we're finding.

It's that oftentimes, it's difficult to analyze the data if it's siloed. When we talk about staffing, for example, agencies oftentimes don't have the staff to get the data in one place, which becomes a problem, and then they may not have the staff or technical ability to do anything with that data. It comes in funky reports at case level stages. It's not at an aggregate holistic dataset.

What Justice Counts does, it works in the aggregate. It says, "Okay, you are going to strike any PII from the data, get the whole numbers, we're going to help you see what the trends are, and holistically understand what your agency is doing in relationship to other agencies, in relationship to the state, to the country, so that you can make decisions that aren't in a vacuum." Kind of what Laramie alluded to.

I think that's part of the staffing that a lot of agencies are asking for, is we need the staff to be able to do our internal function of our job, to keep the lights on, literally. We also need the staffing to do the external parts of our job, which is public safety. I work a lot on the data team with the folks who are doing the internal part of the agency's work around data, and the technical assistance that we provide is to help them get that data into one place so that they can then analyze it. I do think that there are systems that have been put in place that are just legacy systems, quite old, and old practices that hinder an agency's ability to analyze it.

I do think that the agencies have experts. The people who work at their agency are the expert on their data. They know how to analyze it. They just need assistance in getting it out of an old case management system into something that is actually usable. I think that's the piece that oftentimes is missed when we talk about technical assistance, is that agencies, they're experts. They have the data. They just need support in getting it into a system that is actually usable.

Laramie Riggs:

If I can add on that with just like a short analogy, you know how they say when you're applying for a job that your employer is going to look at your resume for like literally 3.5 seconds, and then make a decision? The really amazing thing with our interactive dashboards is the moment you put all of these numbers into our interactive dashboards, it

spits out these charts that immediately, you can start seeing dips and trends. Same exact thing with your resume, when you're trying to make an impact in 3.5 seconds, while also agencies or counties are trying to make an impact or a request to their state, their commissioners, or their town hall, they're able to do that instantaneously with these interactive dashboards. Because you can tell a story with these graphs that have it broken out, instead of just throwing out a table of numbers that might be really abstract, and hard to see the trends at.

Alexis Cooney:

I guess that is a perfect segue into discussing more about the Publisher tool, and the dashboards. A quick note to listeners, this is not to be conflated with the Microsoft Publisher. This is a Publisher that CSG Justice Center built themselves from scratch. It is very impressive. If you folks could please just touch a little bit more on that, on what the Publisher tool entail, what kind of data goes into it, and how does the Justice Counts dashboard differ from other dashboards out there at the moment?

Esteem Brumfield:

Great question. Yeah, I love this. I work with agencies in supporting them with their Publisher account. Justice Counts partnered with an organization, our software developers, called Recidiviz, to build this Publisher platform from scratch. It was custom-made just for us to support agencies in visualizing data. So that the moment an agency drops and drags a CSV file or manually enters data, it's instantly visualized in bar graphs, so that they can see trends over time.

What Publisher offers agencies, that oftentimes other dashboards don't offer, really is a common set of definitions. As I mentioned before, you can have multiple public defenders tracking the same phenomenon, but each of them track it differently. If you had a state level association of public defenders, and you wanted to understand how well is your department tracking a particular metric that is a proxy for perhaps how well you're providing constitutionally mandated support, it would be potentially difficult to do that if each of your offices aren't tracking the same metric defined the same way.

For an agency in supervision that wants to understand something like recidivism, for example. Recidivism is very tricky, a lot of different ways to define recidivism. In fact, what we see is that each of the different seven sectors define recidivism differently based on their agency requirements, and what they're required to do for the public. But within an agency, if you don't have a consistent method to track this, then you wouldn't be able to pick up the phone, call your neighbor agency, and say, "Hey, are you seeing these trends like I'm seeing it?"

What Publisher does is that we make common set of definitions across the board. I can give you an example. We have presented at a conference in org with supervision agencies. Supervision agencies were interested in tracking opioid across counties. They came to me, and they said, Esteem, could we use Publisher, and track our population trends from county to county? That is something that you could do. You would know that you're tracking the same population trends in your county as your neighbor's county, and then the next county. You could start to make assumptions about the data, and pull insights from the data.

Additionally, what oftentimes case management systems don't offer that provide dashboards is they don't provide agency leaders with funding expenses, and staffing data. Critical, critical components of decision-making. You might have metrics related to calls for service, if you're a law enforcement agency, for example. You might have metrics for arrests in your case management system. You might have even track civilian complaints. But if you don't know what your budget, your staffing, and your expenses are, it can be difficult to make decisions based on the other metrics without knowing your internal capabilities.

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Publisher offers all of those data points within a single suite of tools. The reason that we find this to be particularly important is because I've worked with law enforcement agencies across the country. Their data is housed by dispatch, oftentimes. They don't even have their dispatch data. They have to send an email, ask for their data, request it, and they can get it in time for city council updates. Their budget might be with the city manager's office. They don't have their updated budget, and they're not tracking their expenses monthly.

When you have these siloed data points in different departments or different agencies, it's difficult to make decisions. That's what Publisher does best. It provides all of these in one place. That's the value proposition that Publisher offers. In addition to that, what Justice Counts offers is our impact team. When the data is in Publisher, our impact team on Justice Counts works with agency leaders to develop reports, two-pagers, presentation material. We pull the data out of Publisher, and generate these reports for the agency to be able to tell the success stories of their agency to the reporting agency. That's another key feature of Justice Counts, is that once the data's in there, we assist agencies, for free, to tell these stories of what's working, what are the improvements, and what are the impacts of your work.

Laramie Riggs:

That was a really, really great description of what we do. The other thing that I think actually, I know, sets us apart is if you were to take a look at our website, you would see our national steering committee, you would see our national partners, you would see that all of the metrics, all of the definitions, they've been created by people who have their boots on the ground. You don't have these researchers who are just isolated in, I don't know, I'm assuming, a closet or something. They're just developing these metrics, and these definitions. "I think that's useful. I think that's useful." No, these are people who are in the work, on the ground, and saying, "This is what I need in order to do my job effectively."

The other thing that's really amazing is that whether you only have one data point right now that you're willing to start with, that's enough. You only need to be able to share one metric in order to start. We have gone into agencies, and there's no judgment in this statement. But we have gone, and spoken with agencies, and we say, "Hey, what does your data look like right now?" They open up this creaky closet. Then they pull out a stack that's like a foot big, and then they blow off some dust.

Esteem Brumfield:

And, they see a researcher in there.

Laramie Riggs:

Yeah. And, it's still got those, you know the things that you can pull off of the side of the paper from the '90's where it's got the holes in it? If you could see my hands, you would understand. Whatever your format is, it's not going to be like, "Okay, you're not advanced enough, or you're too advanced." It's, "We are going to meet you where you're at." There's that human component. Every meeting that we ever have, it's you doing the talking with us, what are your goals? What are your challenges? What do you want to see? There's that human component of, "Let's work together," and we're not going to prescribe something to you. Because I say this all the time, and it may get annoying to my team, but the people who are closest to the problem are the ones who have the solution. We need to make sure that if we're creating this incredible product, we're not forcing it upon people. But we're creating something that aligns with their needs. That they see useful, that they see applicable to their work.

Again, that human component, you're going to be meeting with Esteem directly. You're going to be meeting with me directly. You're going to be meeting with a team person directly, and not a robot to try to make sense of your data.

Alexis Cooney:

Thank you. As a researcher, I can confirm. I've had a couple of offices in my career that were very close to closet-like quality, so very on the nose analogy there.

From what I hear from a lot of conversations with talking with you folks today, and just other conversations I've had around Justice Counts, is that a main tenant seems to be sustainability, being able to sustainably maintain your data work, be able to upload to a Publisher, and to be able to communicate with each other on a data front in a sustainable fashion. What could state level organizations such as SAAs or statistical analysis centers, SACs, expect participation with the initiative? It can be regarding time commitment, or perhaps how the data preparation goes. What is the general timeline of first to last interaction when choosing to participate in the initiative?

Laramie Riggs:

I can briefly start, because my team often does that first point of contact. Then I'd love to kick it over to Esteem. As I mentioned, and I'll say it again, we try to do our research. We talk to the community. We talk to the states, and say, "Where do we need to go? Guide us." This could be an opportunity for us to speak with SAAs, and say, "Where do we need to go? What is the community saying? What do they need? Guide us."

We have a recruitment team. I actually don't really like the name recruitment because it feels like I'm selling something, and you can't really sell something that's free. But what we're trying to do is go out, and provide this resource, get to know people's needs, share trends that we're hearing nationally. Like when Esteem was mentioning what he was talking about in Oregon, and their needs in community corrections, probation, and parole.

I was smiling because we hear that in other states as well. I can bring those stories with me to the field. But oftentimes, again, what we do is in recruitment, we ask the state, "Where do we need to go? Where are we most needed? How can we be a resource, and an asset?" Then we go and talk with agencies.

Oftentimes, I'll speak with one agency, and then I say, "Okay, who do you need me to talk to next?" For example, we were in one state. We were speaking with a police department. They said, "You know, our population center is one of the highest population centers in the state. If you go to a city next door, they have a lower population center, lower crime, but their budget is much higher than ours. How can we reconcile that?"

Again, I'm taking that information, and saying, "Okay, we have a product that we can support you with that. How can we advocate to show that you do need more resources, to put you on a more even playing field?" Because I know there's that saying like apples to apples, apples to oranges, but oftentimes, we have agencies that are being compared like apples to watermelons or I can't think of another random object.

What we're trying to do is come into the field, and not prescribe our work, but say, "What do you need?" Then once we talk to them, and say, "What are your goals? What do you want to achieve? If you could wave a magic wand, and achieve one thing, what would it be?" Then we pass them over to the data team.

The data team is like your data therapist where they're just going to talk to you, "Tell me about your problems, your goals, and where do you want to be in five years or whatever that may be." They help you accomplish that in a way that you are able to do it. Because here's the thing. If we have a data product, if we have all these resources, but it's time-consuming, it's complicated, it's not accessible, then what are we doing? That's where I really appreciate our

data team. Again, that human aspect. They're going to say, "Where are you at? Where can we meet you? Where can we make this accessible?"

Esteem Brumfield:

I really love the way you described that. That's so right. The agency is in the driver's seat. We're there to support the agency, and what it is they want to accomplish. In my meetings with the agency, we'll spend a little time talking about, "What is it that you're trying to accomplish as an agency?" As we're having that conversation, I'm thinking through ways to map data onto that goal so that we can track it.

We have a separate conversation, "What challenges and successes have you had around data?" Because oftentimes, those could be quite different, what you're trying to do with your agency versus what do you want to do with data. Those are the two tracks that I oftentimes take with an agency.

Then sometimes, an agency needs technical support around actual data. Maybe the agency switched over to a new case management system. They've lost data points for a year. Maybe they were on a fiscal cycle, and now they're moving to a calendar cycle. Or maybe they're receiving multiple funding sources quarterly, and data is getting lost.

I've met with agencies that use a pen and paper to keep records. I've met agencies that use Excel. I've met agencies that have multi-million dollar case management systems. Wherever they're at is good enough for me. I support them in getting them to where they want to go. Try to remove any barrier to entry. There is no requirement that they need in order for us to work with them. It's just the willingness, and say, "Yeah, you know, I think this is a good initiative."

I work with a lot of agencies who don't know what they want to accomplish for the department. They don't know what challenges they have with their data. They just know that, "We think data is the future. We don't want to get left behind. We want to make the best decisions possible for our community." We help them get the data into Publishers so that once they see the data, then they can start to make decisions about it. That's perfectly fine too.

Essentially, a lot of my work is being their thought partner, helping them through that, getting the data in there, reliable, and automated. That's another big initiative of Justice Counts, is that it has to be easy. It has to be simple, and easy to get this data for you, for you to make a decision. We work around automation for agencies so that they don't have to manually enter, week after week, day after day, or month after month, and the data is there for them to then make their decisions. That's a lot of the work that the data team does.

Laramie Riggs:

I wanted to make one quick correction. I know I'm taking up a sharp U-turn. But the one thing that I always want to correct agencies on is they'll say something like, "Okay, I can give you my data." That's actually not what this is. You're not giving your data to us.

We've created this really beautiful platform that we find helpful, and agencies find helpful. I think SAAs will also find helpful when they're thinking about how can we distribute funds, how can we support communities better. But, again, we're not doing anything with it.

As Esteem said, I love that terminology of thought partner, but we're not manipulating your data. We're not touching your data. Again, we're just a support system. I also want to make sure that when you leave listening to this, that you're not thinking, "Oh, I'm just shoveling my data over to this third party." That's not the case at all. Again, we're thought partners. We're your data therapists. But we're not your data manipulators, your data warehouses. We're not trying to get something out of this, if that makes sense.

Esteem Brumfield:

Yeah, thank you so much for that. To your other question you had, we provide support forever. This is not a one and done. It's not an, "Okay, great. I put my data in Publisher. You supported me on a couple of calls, and then that's it." We provide technical assistance for ... This is a lifelong partnership that we're trying to build with our communities. We want to be around forever. We want to not just be around forever. We want to be around forever for every agency in the country, so that everyone knows Justice Counts.

In my experience, particularly with a background in community work, that's the difference between initiative that succeeds, and one that fails. Were you co-building with the community, and were you planning to stay? That is what I truly appreciate about this initiative is that we're trying to co-build, and that we're here to stay.

Laramie Riggs:

I love that word co-build. That's really beautiful. Another thing that will exemplify that is if you were to go on our website right now, and look at our metrics, you can see the tier one metrics. Those are the entry-level metrics that are available to every single sector on the legal system, any point of contact somebody could have with it.

We've seen such great success with those metrics that were built by the field. We said, "Wait a minute. We don't want to stay stagnant. We don't want to only provide a resource, and then leave it be." We need to listen to the field, exactly like Esteem was saying, we need to co-plan.

We had this whole entire public feedback phase of saying, "What do you need? We've got our tier one metrics. We know you're saying that these are helpful, but what else?" The world is changing, the environment is changing, what do you need?

If you were to go to our website right now, which I believe will be linked in the show notes, you'll see that there's tier two metrics now. While they're not fully published yet, and we don't have our technical implementation guide yet, that does define we're working with people on the field to set those definitions. But that's what excites me about this project is it's going to continue to grow, and reflect the needs of the field, which is so important. Because what's happening in community supervision, in prisons, or whatever it may be in 2025, is not going to be the same as what's happening next Monday. We need to continue evolving with the field, but we need to listen to the people who are going to be using it, and benefiting from it as well.

Alexis Cooney:

Thank you. That was beautiful. We, here at the NCJA Data Center, fully agree with your overall mission of we're here to support, we're here to be adaptable for agencies, SAAs, and other criminal justice organizations. That's kind of the glue feel that keeps us together. That brings us all the Justice Counts is this notion of support, and wanting things to be optimal, not just for SAAs, but for criminal justice agencies across the country.

For me, personally, in my involvement in Justice Counts, it's been a great avenue to get to know SAAs and SACS better, especially because my jobs before were more legal, and academia oriented. I didn't really know the practicality of how data moved through the system. I was using data in my reporting, but I didn't know how it actually evolved, moved, and how it was utilized in so many different manners, as you mentioned earlier, in funding, and staffing. It's not just the general like crime rates that we tend to get to know when we first become involved in criminal justice studies.

I appreciate Justice Counts for opening my eyes to a lot of criminal justice data, how it communicates, how it moves to the system, and also different manners of visualizations, and how we can have real time access to them nowadays. Looking forward, what are you folks most excited about when it comes to Justice Counts?

Laramie Riggs:

First off, I love how you describe that. I think you really hit the nail on the head of what we're trying to do here. I appreciate that description. When I started this work here, I think we were in maybe 19 states, not exactly sure on the exact number. Now, we're expanding across the country, and really starting to see impact. Like I already mentioned, I think the thing that excites me the most is you we're working on tier two. I'm hoping that when I'm here later on in my tenure, that there'll be a tier five.

I'm excited to see a system that is so reliant on the closeness, and the teamwork, but seems to be so siloed. I'm so excited to have a resource where people can actually begin working as a team, not only on a city to city level, county to county level, state to state level, but like nationally.

Esteem Brumfield:

It's such a packed question. There's so many things I'm excited for. I am excited by every time I talk to an agency, and they have an aha moment where they feel like their job is a little easier. I know for me, personally, coming from a neighborhood, and a background in which I don't feel like a lot of people listened to anecdotes, and took it as seriously as if you had raw numbers, that I really wish that we had something like Justice Counts in the neighborhood that I grew up in. Where I was a public health commissioner trying to work with government agencies, but only had anecdotal evidence of how many people were dying from drug overdose, from substance.

While anecdotal evidence is arguably qualitative data, what I needed to convince folks in the legislature is that this was a trend, that it was being tracked and monitored so we could get the resources that we needed for our community to support people that were going through substance use, and incarceration. People were dying. It was on the news. It was frustrating. It was difficult work. I knew that everyone was really trying to make the best decision possible, but they just didn't have access to this type of storytelling.

I'm most excited by the lives that could be saved, by the lives that could be enhanced when decision makers have the best informed information to do it. I think that's what excites me the most.

Alexis Cooney:

That was very impactful. I really appreciate that. Thank you so much for sharing. Is there anything else you folks would like to share or plug as we come to the end of the episode?

Laramie Riggs:

I have lots of plugs, but I will try to keep them very short. I'm a relationship person. I don't want to impose this work onto communities. I'm praying, hoping, crossing my fingers, I'm sending out all of the positive energies that this show will result in people reaching out, and saying, "How can we bring Justice Counts to our community?"

You'll be able to go on our website. It's very, very easy. You can book a meeting with us. Even if you're like, "I don't even know. There's so many questions I still have. That was very abstract," it doesn't have to end at one meeting. As we mentioned, we want to make sure that this is a good fit for you, that you feel heard, that you feel seen, and that you feel excited after you leave a meeting with us. Because we know you're busy. We know in most agencies, you're

understaffed, overworked, underpaid, all of those different things. Just my big call to action is please email me. Anyways, I'll kick it to you, Esteem.

Esteem Brumfield:

We're always looking for guidance from folks who, as we mentioned, are practitioners in doing this work. If you want to partner with us, hit us up. If you just want to tell us what you think the direction of an initiative like this should be, we survive off of that type of feedback. That would be my plug.

Laramie Riggs:

If I may do a quick shameless plug to Maddie Roman-Scott, who actually really has helped build these initiatives, but her big plan is, I'm going to plug it here because I think it's really effective, if you have a friend, tell a friend who can then tell another friend. Shoutout to you, Maddie, in this podcast. Hope you're listening.

Esteem Brumfield:

We love you, Maddie.

Alexis Cooney:

Thank you both, Laramie and Esteem, for joining us today, and for such a great conversation.

If any of our listeners would like to know more about Justice Counts, please feel free to contact either the NCJA Data Center via datacenter@NCJA.org. That's our email account. Or, you can also contact the CSG Justice Center using any of the links in the description for this episode. Thank you. Hope to see you next episode.

Esteem Brumfield:

Thanks you, guys. That was great.