

Questions and Answers with A Long Walk Home

Why and how did you get involved in responding to and preventing gender-based violence?

The mission of A Long Walk Home, Inc. (ALWH), an organization led by women of color, is to end violence against women and girls through the use of art therapy, and the visual and performing arts. The history of ALWH begins with the story of the organization's co-founders, sisters Scheherazade and Salamishah Tillet. Salamishah was sexually assaulted as a teenager. As a college student, Scheherazade began to photo document the impact of sexual assault on Salamishah's life. Including the photography of this project and other forms of art, Scheherazade developed the awarding winning Story of A Rape Survivor (SOARS), a multimedia performance that travels to colleges and universities around the country. Over the last eleven years, ALWH's SOARS College Campaign has reached over 300 colleges and served as an essential bridge between traditional victims' advocacy groups and students of color.

In 2009, the co-founders expanded the organization's programming to include the Girl/Friends Leadership Institute at North Lawndale College Preparatory Charter High School, as well as comprehensive youth leadership development programs for teen girls of color in Chicago communities. These expansion programs were built on ALWH's model of art, advocacy, racial justice, and women's leadership and expertise in the national movement to end violence against women and girls.

"A Long Walk Home is a gift. It doesn't just stand on the bank of the river, rescuing those who are drowning; it also goes to the head of the river to keep others from falling in. Co-founders and sisters Salamishah and Scheherazade Tillet beautifully blend art, policy, and grassroots organizing to empower our most vulnerable and voiceless Americans."

Gloria Steinem, feminist author and founder of Ms. Magazine

What are some challenges and successes you've experienced in doing this type of work?

One of the challenges ALWH faces is limited funding, which affects its ability to address social change advocacy and build organizational capacity. Less than seven percent the world's foundation funding goes to aiding girls and 50 percent of that figure funds organizations abroad. As a result, we seek unique partnerships and rely heavily on grassroots fundraising strategies.

A Long Walk Home has also had many successes. The NoVo Foundation recently selected ALWH's co-founder and executive director, Scheherazade Tillet, to be one of the 20 new leaders joining its groundbreaking Move to End Violence program. This is a 10-year, \$80 million program to strengthen leaders and organizations, and build a breakthrough movement to end violence against girls and women in the United States. In addition, *Safe*, the new magazine by the organization, Together for Girls, named co-founder Salamishah Tillet number one of the "Top 50 Global Leaders Ending Violence Against Children" (others included Jennifer Buffett, Hillary Clinton, and Nancy Schwartzman). In 2014, ALWH received considerable national recognition from the media. It was featured on CNN and MSNBC's Melissa Harris Perry Show, in the online publications, *The Nation* and *Colorlines*, and at the women's empowerment conference, *TedxWomen*.

What do you consider the most important aspect of your work/advocacy?

One of the most important aspects of ALWH's work is inspiring survivors and their allies in the fight against gender-based violence to become powerful leaders in the movement. We encourage this through activities, such as having our teen girls and college students lead their own anti-violence campaigns in their communities.

What would a violence-free world look like to you?

A violence-free world would have all girls and women thriving to their full potential. Families and communities would flourish. We would not have wars, poverty, mass incarceration, gender violence, and other systems of violence and control. We would be able to focus on building relationships and spiritual growth, rather than building peace.

How can others get involved in preventing gender-based violence?

A Long Walk Home inspires individuals, schools, and communities to become leaders in ending gender-based violence. We believe that small changes can create a domino effect that promotes non-violence.