

NATIONAL JUVENILE JUSTICE NETWORK

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NEW YORK PEACE ACTIVIST WINS NATIONAL AWARD FOR HER ADVOCACY FOR YOUTH IN TROUBLE WITH THE LAW

Honored as a "Gutsy Advocate for Youth"

(Washington, DC) Carmen Perez, executive director of [The Gathering for Justice](#) (shown at right), is being recognized this month for her tenacious work on behalf of young people in trouble with the law.



Ms. Perez is one of the leaders in juvenile justice reform in the country. She takes a holistic approach to reform work, working at the grassroots level as well as at the level of state and federal policy. Last year, she led a 250-mile, nine-day march from New York City to Washington, DC to deliver The Justice Package to Congress -- three criminal justice reform bills that included the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), the End Racial Profiling Act (ERPA), and the Stop the Militarization of Policing Act. One hundred people participated, stopping in key cities along the route.

Perez is the fifth recipient of the [Beth Arnovits Gutsy Advocate for Youth Award](#), which is given annually by the [National Juvenile Justice Network](#) (NJJN) to an individual who advocates for youth justice and juvenile justice reform and embodies "the tenacity, vision, fearlessness and wisdom of Beth Arnovits," one of NJJN's founders. The award will be given July 26, 2016, at an [annual gathering](#) of youth justice advocates from across the country. This year the conference is hosted in Memphis, TN by NJJN's [Youth Justice Leadership Institute](#), of which Ms. Perez is an alumni fellow.

"Carmen was a natural choice for the Gutsy Youth for Advocate award," said Sarah Bryer, who directs the National Juvenile Justice Network. "In addition to her work at The Gathering for Justice, Carmen also founded [Justice League NYC](#), a grassroots organizing task force that held a

three-day conference on juvenile justice in New York and used high-profile media tactics to pressure city and state officials (including the Mayor of New York City and the Governor of New York) to meet on justice reform issues -- all while gaining attention and growing momentum for the justice reform movement.”

Ms. Perez uses a multi-pronged approach to advocate for reform. First, she provides direct services to youth in detention using art, culture, film, and critical thinking as tools for transformation; second, she testifies and advocates for policy and legislative reforms such as Raise the Age NY and the reauthorization of the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), and third, she coordinates rallies, vigils and protests to bring awareness to issues impacting youth in the system. One recent vigil was centered on the death of Kalief Browder, the young man held for three years in horrifically abusive conditions on Riker’s Island while awaiting trial for the alleged theft of a backpack – charges that were eventually dropped.

“I nominated Carmen for this award because she’s dedicated her life to working with youth in prisons and detention centers, advocating for policy change, and creating coalitions to build collective power to transform the system,” says Erika Stallworth, a founding member of the [Children’s Policy and Law Initiative of Indiana](#), an NJJN board member, and an alumni fellow of NJJN’s Youth Justice Leadership Institute. “To make change, she works in the community *and* connects with policymakers. By serving as a bridge between grassroots organizations and policy institutions, she’s fought to replace harmful practices and policies in the juvenile justice system and with policies and laws that support youth and families. There is no doubt that Carmen is ‘gutsy.’ She embodies all of the attributes befitting this honor and is a wonderful role model for other advocates.”



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The National Juvenile Justice Network is composed of coalitions, organizations and alumni of the Youth Justice Leadership Institute across 42 states and the District of Columbia, all of whom advocate for a fairer justice system for children and teens. For more information, visit www.njjn.org.