



## **Youth Safety Awareness Initiative and Free Minds win 2021 Juliette Gimon Courage Awards**

**Global Fund for Children recognizes two organizations empowering incarcerated and formerly incarcerated youth, as well as a third organization that cannot be named publicly.**

**May 20, 2021 – WASHINGTON, DC and LONDON** – Global Fund for Children announces the winners of the 2021 [Juliette Gimon Courage Awards](#) today, recognizing the perseverance of three organizations working to advance the rights of children and young people living in difficult circumstances.

This year's winners include [Youth Safety Awareness Initiative](#) in Nairobi and [Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop](#) in Washington, DC, which are being honored for their work providing opportunities for youth who have been incarcerated and keeping young people out of jail.

For the first time, the Courage Award Selection Committee has also chosen a third winner, granting a monetary prize to an organization that cannot be named publicly due to repression against civil society groups in its home country. This organization has worked fearlessly to prevent violence against children and to promote their health and rights.

Although they work in different regions of the world, the two publicly named winners have both championed the arts and education as tools to empower young people in conflict with the law. They have also advocated for criminal justice reforms and supported young people who are directly impacted by incarceration as they lead efforts for change.

Youth Safety Awareness Initiative, popularly known by its original Swahili name, Crime Si Poa, was founded by Peter Ouko while he was on death row for a crime he did not commit. In 2014, Ouko became the first inmate in Kenya to earn a diploma in common law. After he was pardoned and released in 2016, he used his experience to support incarcerated young people and to help youth living in difficult circumstances build brighter futures for themselves and their communities.

In Kenya, where at least 70% of prison inmates are young people below the age of 30, according to Youth Safety Awareness Initiative, the organization advocates for legal reforms and works to reduce recidivism. It runs social enterprises and personal development sessions inside prisons, helping inmates improve their self-esteem and prepare for life after release. Through a youth-led

program in low-income neighborhoods, Youth Safety Awareness Initiative also empowers young people to play a central role in community safety, and uses sports, the arts, and small business enterprises to steer youth away from crime.

“This award honors and validates Youth Safety Awareness Initiative’s courage in boldly undertaking a paradigm shift on community leadership narratives,” said Ouko, the organization’s Executive Director. “We have borrowed the Global Fund for Children model of trust in localized solutions, and so by equipping and empowering children and youth – irrespective of their backgrounds – through education, access to justice, and social enterprise, we envision realizing a safe and crime-free society for all.”

Free Minds was founded by Tara Libert and Kelli Taylor in memory Glen McGinnis, a young man on death row in Texas whom they met while working as journalists. McGinnis was passionate about books and writing. After he was executed in 2000, Libert and Taylor honored his wish to help other young people experience freedom through literature by providing books to young men incarcerated in the adult criminal legal system.

Since 2002, Free Minds has served over 1,500 young people through book clubs, creative writing workshops, and community support. The organization also provides workforce development, peer support, trauma healing, and violence prevention programs to help incarcerated and formerly incarcerated youth and adults achieve their career and life goals and become community change-makers.

“We are incredibly honored and uplifted by the Juliette Gimon Courage Award,” said Libert, the Executive Director of Free Minds. “This recognition sheds light on the extreme racial inequities of the US criminal legal system that punishes children as adults and banishes them to the margins of society. This award supports our members’ work to heal the trauma inflicted by the prison system, and amplify the voices of the courageous young people who are leading the way in the struggle to build a better, more equitable future.”

Global Fund for Children gives the annual Courage Awards through the [Juliette Gimon Fund for Courageous Leadership](#) – a more than \$1 million endowment made possible by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and other donors – in honor of Juliette Gimon, who passed away in 2018. A former GFC Board Chair, Gimon helped shape GFC through her wisdom, insights, and profound concern for children, changing hundreds of thousands of young lives across the globe.

“We’re pleased to recognize Youth Safety Awareness Initiative and Free Minds for their incredible work ensuring that children and youth impacted by incarceration have the tools they need to achieve their goals and create change in their communities,” said John Hecklinger, President and CEO of Global Fund for Children. “These organizations share the brave and passionate spirit that made Juliette such an extraordinary advocate for children around the world.”

“We’re saddened that we can’t publicly recognize the third winner because doing so could put the organization in danger,” he added. “Unfortunately, closing civic spaces have negatively impacted the work of many grassroots organizations serving children and youth around the world.”

The 2021 Courage Award winners were selected from 17 finalists that have empowered children and youth to overcome tremendous obstacles, including homelessness, poverty, and a lack of access to quality education.

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## **ABOUT GLOBAL FUND FOR CHILDREN**

Global Fund for Children partners to build a world where all children and youth enjoy equal resources and opportunities in society and live free from violence, discrimination, and exploitation. To that end, GFC invests in innovative local organizations, helping them deepen their impact and build their capacity for social change. Together, GFC and its partners advance the rights of children and youth facing poverty and injustice and equip them with the tools and skills to reach their full potential. Since 1997, Global Fund for Children has invested \$46 million in more than 725 organizations, reaching more than 11 million children and youth worldwide. For more information, visit [www.globalfundforchildren.org](http://www.globalfundforchildren.org).

## **ABOUT THE JULIETTE GIMON COURAGE AWARDS**

Juliette Gimon, a former Board Chair of Global Fund for Children, passed away on February 24, 2018. GFC established the Juliette Gimon Fund for Courageous Leadership, a more than \$1 million endowment made possible by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and other generous donors. Annual awards from the fund – the Juliette Gimon Courage Awards – recognize innovative grassroots organizations around the world that are positively impacting children in especially challenging circumstances. Some recipients have overcome considerable obstacles to pioneer an innovation that transforms circumstances for children and youth. Others demonstrate the courage of resilience, thriving amid unusual contextual challenges; still others have leaders who have navigated personal hardship and channeled adversity into their organization’s cause. For more information, visit [www.globalfundforchildren.org/courage-awards](http://www.globalfundforchildren.org/courage-awards).

## **ABOUT YOUTH SAFETY AWARENESS INITIATIVE**

Nairobi, Kenya

Dedicated to reducing rates of incarceration and recidivism among Kenyan youth, Youth Safety Awareness Initiative works directly in prisons to develop young people's leadership and livelihood skills. The organization also works in areas with high crime rates to empower young people and keep them from coming into conflict with the law. Through a youth-led program, Youth Safety Awareness Initiative uses sports, the arts, and small business enterprises to steer youth away from crime. In addition, the organization advocates for legal reforms, rehabilitation, and open dialogue with law enforcement and others involved in the criminal justice system. For more information, visit [www.crimesipoa.org](http://www.crimesipoa.org).

## **ABOUT FREE MINDS BOOK CLUB & WRITING WORKSHOP**

Washington, DC, United States

Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop uses books and creative writing to help incarcerated and formerly incarcerated youth and adults realize their full potential and build connections with the community. The organization also provides workforce development, peer support, and violence prevention programs. Since 2002, Free Minds has served over 1,500 young people. The organization also raises awareness about incarceration and criminal justice issues through media outreach and advocacy. For more information, visit [freemindsbookclub.org](http://freemindsbookclub.org).