



Ameca Reali and Adrienne K. Wheeler

Founders, Justice and Accountability Center of Louisiana



CHERYL GERBER PHOTOGRAPHS

LINDSAY MACK

While students at Loyola College of Law in New Orleans, Ameca Reali and Adrienne K. Wheeler got into a discussion (or, more correctly an argument) about the New Orleans justice system. After examining the problems, they decided to focus on the topic of expungement, which allows people who have been arrested for a non-violent crime to remove their arrest records from public view.

Reali and Wheeler submitted a business plan to Echoing Green, a global nonprofit that provides funding to emerging social entrepreneurs. Furthermore, Reali and Wheeler were awarded a SENO Propeller Fellowship for their social entrepreneurship. When Propeller Incubator offered co-working office space on 4035 Washington Ave., near the courthouse and bus lines, Reali and Wheeler secured office space there as soon as possible.

As Reali and Wheeler gathered advocates for their cause, The Justice and Accountability Center of Louisiana (JAC) quickly grew from an idea into a thriving startup organization.

The JAC aids the incarcerated and ex-incarcerated population in Louisiana, and addresses deficiencies in the post-conviction phase of the criminal justice system by creating a supportive, collaborative space for attorneys and advocates. It is the only organization delivering pro-bono services such as expungement in New Orleans. Furthermore, the JAC tries to reach citizens after they've been impacted by the criminal justice system to help propel them forward into a more productive future. Going forward, the JAC plans to address the issues of reentry and conviction.

Reali and Wheeler note that you must be bold to create a startup. Due in part to JAC's difficult subject matter, the organization had no existing models to follow. However they've enjoyed the opportunity to collaborate with many energetic, caring members of the New Orleans community.

What asked to describe the most rewarding aspect of their work, neither Reali nor Wheeler hesitate before answering.

"Clients," they agree.

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“When clients are happy to see you come through the door, it’s rewarding. It is great to get people back with their families and jobs,” Reali says.

They agree that their work with JAC is important for the entire community. Expungement is a community health issue that enables members of the community to care for themselves.

The Justice and Accountability Center of Louisiana welcomes your support and donations. For more information, visit JACLouisiana.org, email info@JACLouisiana.org or call the expungement hotline at 345-8911.

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