

Reach Out's conference addresses social justice in Inland Empire



TODEC Legal Center Executive Director Luz Gallegos, center, shares a photo of a man who died of COVID-19 while discussing her motivation to continue social justice work at the 2022 National Innovative Communities Conference. At left is Malek Bendelhoum, executive director of the Sahaba Initiative. At right is Janice Rooths, CEO of RootWize and co-founder of Antiracist Riverside. (Courtesy of Reach Out)

By **STAFF REPORT** | The Press-Enterprise

PUBLISHED: June 28, 2022 at 8:45 a.m. | UPDATED: June 28, 2022 at 10:29 p.m.

Inland Empire leaders working on social and racial justice came together recently at the National Innovative Communities Conference.

Organized by Reach Out, the event was Tuesday, June 21, at the Riverside Convention Center.



The theme, “You Are The Fire,” issued “a call to all leaders who are united in the fight for social justice and have a shared commitment to building an impenetrable fortress of anti-racism and support for people of color, immigrants, and LGBTQ+ communities,” a news release states.



Kelli Dillon, the keynote speaker, addresses the audience at the at the 2022 National Innovative Communities Conference, sponsored by Reach Out and staged in downtown Riverside. (Courtesy of Reach Out)

Keynote speaker Kelli Dillon’s social justice work was documented in the Emmy award-winning movie “Belly of the Beast.”

Margarita Luna, of The California Endowment Center, moderated a panel discussion that posed the question: “What is your fire?” Panelist Luz Gallegos, executive director of TODEC Legal Center in Perris, discussed a farmer who had died from COVID-19, as the pandemic began.

“This farmer had to keep working during the pandemic in order to provide for his family,” Gallegos said, according to the release.

She held a photo of an older man who died of COVID-19 pictured with a young boy.

“This is my fire,” a teary-eyed Gallegos said, the release states.



From left, Kasey Knapper, Anita Bausley and Chelsi Hopkins perform at the 2022 National Innovative Communities, sponsored by Reach Out in downtown Riverside. Conference (Courtesy of Reach Out)

Other panelists included: Gabriel Maldonado, CEO of TruEvolution; Janice Rooths, CEO of RootWize; and Malek Bendelhoum, executive director of the Sahaba Initiative.

Reach Out's Civic Policy and Leadership Racial Justice Program partners were honored, as were its vaccine equity partners. The conference also included a Juneteenth observance and a performance by the Bre Dance Team.

The organization has offices in Upland, Jurupa Valley and Yucca Valley.

Information: www.we-reachout.org.

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