



STL Equity Matters

By Erika Whitfield • Oct 31, 2022
Smart Brevity® count: 5 mins... 1269 words

Welcome to the 15th edition of our newsletter: STL Equity Matters ...

How it works: We shine a light on how race is lived in our region.

Who is behind this: This newsletter is brought to you by the [River City Journalism Fund](#), a non-profit journalism project formerly known as [Before Ferguson Beyond Ferguson](#).

This rebranding and new collaboration brings additional resources and brainpower that will boost reporting on local government, the environment, criminal justice, the arts, the business community and more.



We held a rollout event/fundraiser on Oct. 12 where we explained everything. You can catch up by reading this story in the [Gateway Journalism Review](#).

Let's dive in.

1. St. Louisans Aid Single Mom

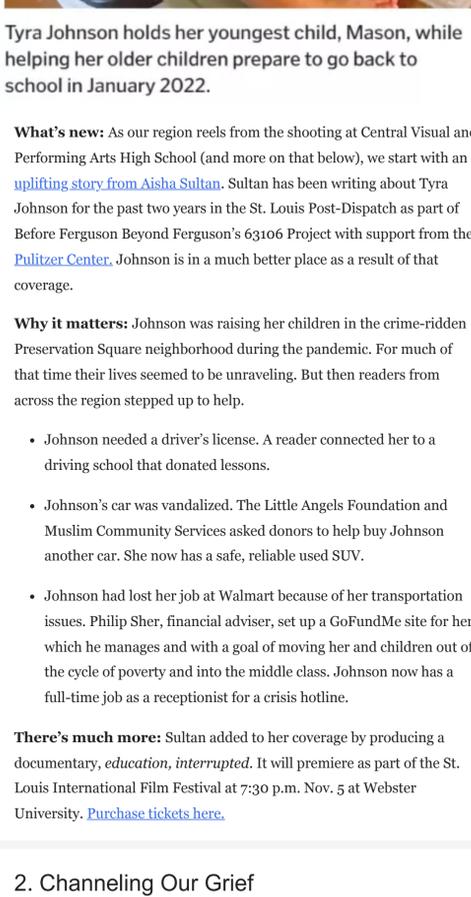


Photo by Aisha Sultan

Tyra Johnson holds her youngest child, Mason, while helping her older children prepare to go back to school in January 2022.

What's new: As our region reels from the shooting at Central Visual and Performing Arts High School (and more on that below), we start with an [uplifting story from Aisha Sultan](#). Sultan has been writing about Tyra Johnson for the past two years in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch as part of Before Ferguson Beyond Ferguson's 63106 Project with support from the [Pulitzer Center](#). Johnson is in a much better place as a result of that coverage.

Why it matters: Johnson was raising her children in the crime-ridden Preservation Square neighborhood during the pandemic. For much of that time their lives seemed to be unraveling. But then readers from across the region stepped up to help.

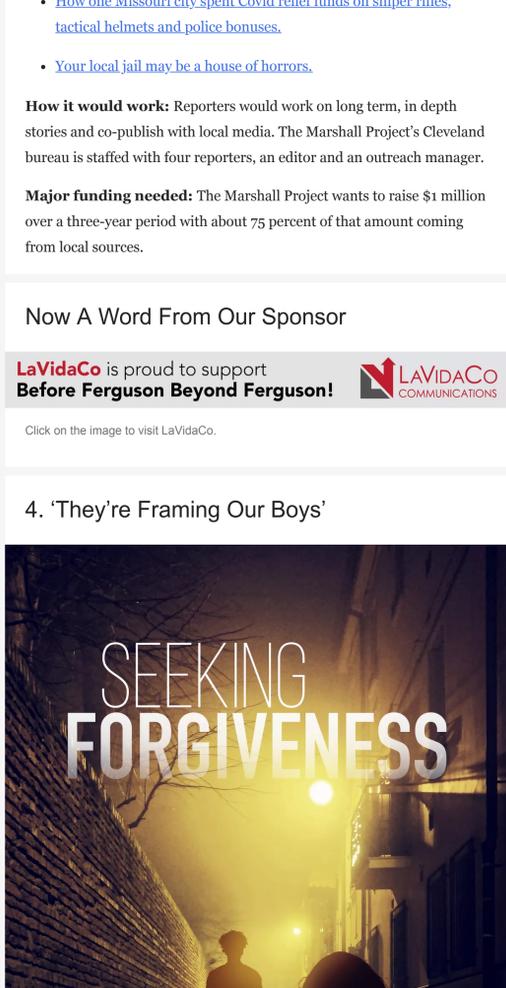
- Johnson needed a driver's license. A reader connected her to a driving school that donated lessons.

- Johnson's car was vandalized. The Little Angels Foundation and Muslim Community Services asked donors to help buy Johnson another car. She now has a safe, reliable used SUV.

- Johnson had lost her job at Walmart because of her transportation issues. Philip Sher, financial adviser, set up a GoFundMe site for her which he manages and with a goal of moving her and children out of the cycle of poverty and into the middle class. Johnson now has a full-time job as a receptionist for a crisis hotline.

There's much more: Sultan added to her coverage by producing a documentary, *education, interrupted*. It will premiere as part of the St. Louis International Film Festival at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 5 at Webster University. [Purchase tickets here](#).

2. Channeling Our Grief



Rabbi Scott Shafrin of Kol Rinah speaks at the interfaith vigil at Mount Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, 1600 Bell Avenue, St. Louis. (Photo by Philip Deitch)

What they're saying: On Tuesday, Oct. 25, the day after the tragic shooting at Central Visual and Performing Arts High School in St. Louis, law enforcement officials joined Mayor Tishaura O. Jones and faith leaders for a vigil at Mount Bethel Missionary Baptist Church. The event had long been on the calendar to honor 100 young people lost to gun violence in St. Louis since 2019. But then there was one more, 15-year-old Alexandria Bell, who was killed at CVPA.

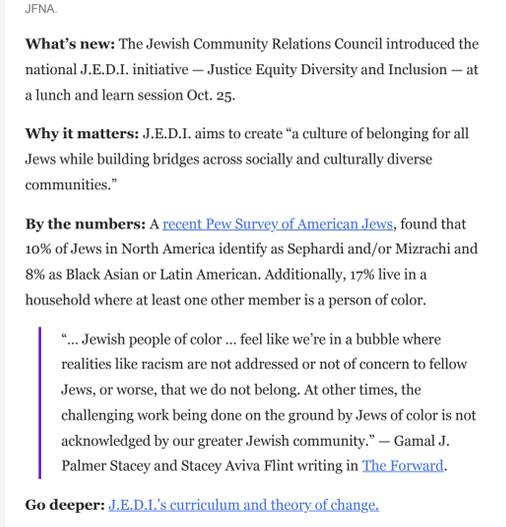
Thoughts-prayers-action: Speakers identified concrete steps — gun safety measures — that could be taken even in a region and state that is politically polarized.

Participating faith leaders announced they will begin distributing gun locks and will have access to programs and materials from Everytown for Gun Safety and the Stop, Lock and Drop It initiative developed by the St. Louis Violence Prevention Coalition.

Go Deeper:

- [Learn more about the Stop, Lock and Drop It Initiative](#).
- [Read Post-Dispatch columnist Tony Messenger's commentary on the interfaith initiative](#).
- [Missouri gun laws some of the weakest in the country: Riverfront Times](#)
- [School shooter failed a background check, but police couldn't confiscate the weapon: Post-Dispatch](#)

3. The Marshall Project Wants A Bureau In St. Louis



Carroll Bogert, president of the Marshall Project, appeared on Donnybrook Next Up. Click on the photo, then scroll down to watch the broadcast from 10/20/22.

What's New: The Marshall Project, a non-partisan, non-profit news organization that provides deeply researched criminal justice stories, wants to establish its second local news bureau in St. Louis in 2023.

Why it matters: Established in 2014, the Marshall Project has won two Pulitzer Prizes and already has partnered with local media on stories.

- [How one Missouri city spent Covid relief funds on sniper rifles, tactical helmets and police bonuses](#).
- [Your local jail may be a house of horrors](#).

How it would work: Reporters would work on long term, in depth stories and co-publish with local media. The Marshall Project's Cleveland bureau is staffed with four reporters, an editor and an outreach manager.

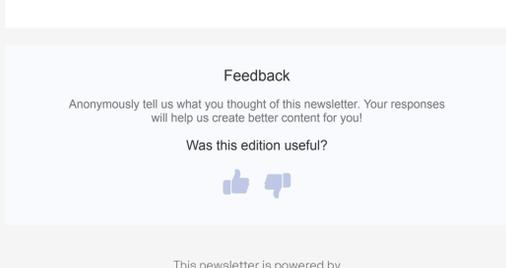
Major funding needed: The Marshall Project wants to raise \$1 million over a three-year period with about 75 percent of that amount coming from local sources.

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4. 'They're Framing Our Boys'



What's New: Lea-Rachel Kosnik shares Chapter 22 in a semi-autobiographical novel we are serializing. The story is about white parents who have adopted a Black child.

In Chapter 22: Rachel learns that her African-American son Miles and his friend Desmond were arrested at a house party with mostly white students. Initially, they had no intention of attending, but a phone call had drawn Miles to the home. Within minutes after their arrival, the cops were on the scene. Desmond said a white student hid a stash of drugs in Desmond's pocket.

“They’re framing our boys,” Rachel said to Miles’ attorney. “That’s what they do at that school, frame our boys for everything that goes wrong.”

Go Deeper: [Find all 22 chapters here](#). Note: Each chapter takes less than five minutes to read. You can download and print the chapters as a PDF.

Even Better: [Buy the book](#). It's available now at Amazon.

Read A Review: [In the St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#), Dale Singer praises *Seeking Forgiveness* “for the power of its message.”

5. Many Expressions of Jewish Identity

From left, Stacey Aviva Flint, director J.E.D.I. education and community engagement, Rabbi Isaiah Rothstein, rabbinic scholar and public affairs adviser for Jewish Federations of North America and Nate Looney, director of community safety and belonging for JFNA.

What's new: The Jewish Community Relations Council introduced the national J.E.D.I. initiative — Justice Equity Diversity and Inclusion — at a lunch and learn session Oct. 25.

Why it matters: J.E.D.I. aims to create “a culture of belonging for all Jews while building bridges across socially and culturally diverse communities.”

By the numbers: A [recent Pew Survey of American Jews](#), found that 10% of Jews in North America identify as Sephardi and/or Mizrahi and 8% as Black Asian or Latin American. Additionally, 17% live in a household where at least one other member is a person of color.

“... Jewish people of color ... feel like we’re in a bubble where realities like racism are not addressed or not of concern to fellow Jews, or worse, that we do not belong. At other times, the challenging work being done on the ground by Jews of color is not acknowledged by our greater Jewish community.” — Gamal J. Palmer Stacey and Stacey Aviva Flint writing in [The Forward](#).

Go deeper: [J.E.D.I.'s curriculum and theory of change](#).

6. Clayton Revisits Ralph Clayton

What's new: Clayton officials and civic leaders gathered Oct. 12 at the Clayton Community Center to introduce an exhibition featuring founder Ralph Clayton and a plat map from the late 1880s.

Why it matters: Along with many other communities nationwide, Clayton leaders are coming to terms with a slaveholding past. Ralph Clayton was a slaveholder and though he was an important figure in the town's history, many believed it was inappropriate to have his portrait hanging in the municipality's aldermanic chambers and without any mention of his transgressions.

Steps taken: The portrait was removed at the behest of the [Mayor's Commemorative Landscape Task Force](#) and the [Clayton Community Foundation](#) and made part of the exhibition that puts Clayton's life and the city's history in context. The exhibition will be at the Center for about six months. Clayton's portrait will then return to City Hall, but will not be in the aldermanic chambers.

Mayor Michelle Harris introduces the new Clayton history exhibition in the foyer at the Clayton Community Center.

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