

October 24, 2019

Statement by Juan Gomez, Executive Director, MILPA

“If there was any confusion, let me make it clear: MILPA, and I, as Executive Director, of MILPA, do not promote violence, illicit or gang activity. We believe that we can heal our community of trauma inflicted by all types of violence, including systemic violence that is rooted in racist ideology. Our mission as an organization is to promote healing, restoration, safety, and well-being in our community.

We’ve always been transparent about the fact that we are an organization led by people who have been incarcerated and previously involved with gangs and that we work with people at all phases of their re-entry. When people are willing to participate and engage in their own healing and bring healing to their families, then they are ready to become leaders and ultimately transform their communities and neighborhoods. This framework and approach directly addresses the systemic root causes of violence and racial injustice and makes our communities safer. We understand there are risks in working with formerly incarcerated and system impacted people, and we take on this risk because it is critical to the safety and well-being of our community. The work we have done has contributed to the improvement in safety in Salinas, including an 89% drop in homicides. This year alone, MILPA interns have gone on to further their education at Yale University, University of Southern California, and UC Santa Cruz.

In addition to supporting people on their individual healing journey, we also work to transform punitive and racist systems by adopting racially equitable policies and practices. We have a proven history of working with community partners and directly with systems, including: the Salinas Police Department, Monterey County departments of probation and public health, California Division of Juvenile Justice, and prison systems across the country.

We are a welcoming space for everyone who is ready to take the courageous step to heal and build up their leadership to transform their community. The allegations that MILPA has been taken over by any organization are unsubstantiated and untrue; as Executive Director I would never allow that to happen, ever.

I also want to make it clear that MILPA and I strongly support the actions taken by our fiscal sponsor Action Council – Mr. Villa has been placed on leave.

The life experiences of our staff enable them to do the critical work to build community safety and reduce violence. However, if a staff member is determined to be an active member of a gang--they cannot be employed by MILPA. This has always been and will continue to be our policy. When an individual is ready to set their life on a different path, we will be here to support them.

Community building and healing is difficult work, and we have taken on this challenge because we have seen the power in personal and community transformation. We welcome everyone in our community to come learn more about the lifesaving work we do.”

###

MILPA

MILPACOLLECTIVE.ORG ✦ FACEBOOK.COM/MILPAEASTSALINAS
339 MELODY LANE ✦ SALINAS, CA 93901

CULTIVATING CHANGE MAKERS FOR THE NEXT SEVEN GENERATIONS