

Gathering strength: A journey in centering the margins in the movement to prevent and end sexual and domestic violence

Practitioners and Advocates Featured:

Beckie Masaki

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Throughout her journey, Beckie Masaki has centered her efforts on sharing power and elevating opportunities for groups who have been historically and continue to be marginalized. She believes that to truly prevent and end sexual and domestic violence, it is critical to center certain groups that are disproportionately impacted. Centering race and gender justice has been a constant thread in Beckie's journey. Beckie has put this commitment into action by supporting women of color, through forming San Francisco's Asian Women's Shelter, as well as Gathering Strength, a cohort of immigrant and refugee leaders in the movement.

CENTERING THE MARGINS AND THE CONCEPT OF "THE LAST GIRL"

Centering the margins is about focusing on those who have been marginalized based on their race, gender, sexual orientation, disability and other factors. Beckie Masaki says, "if we pivot and focus on us in these groups at the center, then all will rise up." Beckie was part of the first cohort of the [Move to End Violence's Movement Makers](#) and attended a trip to India with the rest of her cohort. While in India, Beckie engaged in a lot of dialogue around Gandhi's international framework about the need to focus on the "last person"



Beckie Masaki with members of an Apne Aap Motherhood Circle in India.

to achieve peace, justice, and change in the world. Focusing on the last person, the one who is the most invisible, allows people and organizations to create strategies that help every person. A women's grassroots organization in India called [Apne Aap](#) said, "yes, and the last person is a girl." Apne Aap has used the concept of "the last girl" as part of its strategy and political platform to end violence. For Beckie, as someone born and raised in the US and a third generation Japanese American, this concept resonated and matched her thinking on the idea of "margins to center" and the need to bring advocates and survivors who are marginalized to the center, so that "all boats will rise."

THE FORMATION OF ASIAN WOMEN'S SHELTER

Early in her career, Beckie was hired at a domestic violence shelter where she began to see how racism overshadowed the daily operations of the shelter. Beckie and her colleagues experienced racism that caused them to question whether they belonged in the domestic violence field even though they all had a strong commitment to the cause. Beckie decided to leave her job and get together with other women of color to form a women of color caucus. This allowed Beckie and others to find their belonging in the movement. Following the formation of this caucus, Beckie started [Asian Women's Shelter](#) to meet the language and cultural needs of Asian domestic violence survivors in San Francisco. It was here that Beckie found a home, a place where she could learn, grow, and evolve.



Members of the first Gathering Strength cohort focus on lifting up immigrant and refugee leaders in the movement.

At Asian Women's Shelter, Cristy Chung, one of the first staff members, and Beckie wanted to create a space to address racism and other forms of oppression like homophobia. The shelter recognized a need to provide a space for the LGBTQ community which led to the creation of the Queer Asian Women and Transgender Support component, a safe space for survivors to talk about LGTBQ liberation and rights and the implications in their communities. Through this type of work at the Asian Women's Shelter, Beckie and her colleagues emphasized that domestic violence is a community issue and helped shaped norms that can help prevent violence in the first place.

GATHERING STRENGTH IN OUR PEOPLE

The term "gathering strength" first occurred to Beckie while she was at Asian Women's Shelter. Beckie says, "there, we were gathering strength in our people." Beckie is a strong advocate of together looking inside and gathering strength within oneself in order to do the outside work and contribute to the movement of prevention. Rather than tokenizing individuals at the margins, gathering strength is first about celebrating the accomplishments of women of color and committing to an agenda that encompasses cultural practices and centering the margins. Beckie decided to put her ideas into action and formed Gathering Strength, a cohort that intentionally centers outliers as leaders in the movement. Gathering Strength includes leaders from immigrant and refugee communities with the goal of empowering them to address the

root causes of violence in their communities and to develop solutions centered around their communities.

Gathering Strength also serves as a support system for the cohort. Members share stories about similar experiences and support one another. For example, once a member of the first Gathering Strength cohort shared how she wanted to start a program focused on addressing gender-based violence and other gender



A piece of artwork from a Gathering Strength convening.

rights issues for the Tibetan community but was told that it would take away from other issues in the community center. When she shared her story on a Gathering Strengths call, many of the members had experienced similar situations and it helped them realize they were not alone and instead were a part of a larger community all working to center the margins. This empowered the member to think even bigger. She went on to create the Himalayan Sisterhood that focuses on preventing violence against women and children, and now has over 100 members.

Centering the margins, focusing on “the last girl” and gathering internal strength together are concepts prevention practitioners need to consider to truly prevent violence. Beckie's journey speaks to the power of centering the margins as well as the need to build infrastructure that supports those at the margins to lead. Working now as an independent consultant for social change and community building, she hopes to pass on this commitment to the next generation with love and intention.

Beckie Masaki, MSW, is an independent consultant for social change + community building. Previously she worked as a social justice and capacity building director at the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence. She co-founded one of the first programs in the nation that could meet the language and cultural needs of Asian survivors of domestic violence and trafficking, Asian Women's Shelter in San Francisco, and served as the founding executive director for over twenty-one years. Beckie has extensive experience in providing multilingual, multicultural services to domestic violence and trafficking survivors and their children, innovative program development, prevention, community building, policy-making and institutional advocacy.

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RESOURCES

- [Blog Articles written by Becki Masaki](#)

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