This shit. Again. And again, and again. The police violence that Arizona and the rest of the nation has witnessed in the past month toward Black people has culminated into a collective rage, but violence against Black people is certainly not new. The exploitation and abuse of Black people on colonized Indigenous land is quite literally the foundation that this country has been built on. White supremacy is alive and kicking, and police violence toward Black people is unequivocally a public health crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic should have been a moment to challenge our systems of incarceration, housing, debt, and accessible health care. Instead, because of the valuation of property and economy over human life, more Americans are unemployed than ever before, low-wage workers are being forced into danger, our families are becoming sick in the isolation of jails and prisons, and the economic “support” that was promised has pushed so many of us into debt, precarity, and chaos. And it is Black people who, once again, are hit hardest by these inequities. The system is rigged.

Sonoran Prevention Works has perpetuated the harms of white supremacy. We have not made ourselves worthy of the trust of those working to dismantle white supremacy and anti-Black racism, and in many ways we have done work totally devoid of meaning for Black Arizonans and their families. We have put more effort into influencing systems of power than toward our relationships with Black people who use drugs, their families, and groups fighting against white supremacy. We’ve fucked up, and we’re not alone.

Overdose, harm reduction, and the war on drugs are not somehow disconnected from white supremacy, as nothing in this country is. In fact, we will not see meaningful
changes to these public health crises if we are not dismantling the systems that fuel disparate outcomes for Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color. Unfortunately, the wave of overdose death we have seen in the past ten years is nothing compared to the murder, isolation, incarceration, and disposability that Black people have suffered as a result of the war on drugs, and for many centuries before it.

We haven’t walked our talk. Since 2016, we have worked with police. We have provided overdose prevention trainings and the overdose reversal medication naloxone to police departments with the intention of ending overdose deaths. We have participated in forums with law enforcement in the hopes that we could find common ground with those who have been given so much power, in an attempt to chip away at the war on drugs. This year, after receiving repeated pressure from our landlord and after six months of conversations with unhoused people staying in our parking lot, we contacted a precinct in Phoenix to find out if they’d be able to ask people to leave without running their names - they never called us back. In these actions, our motives were disconnected from the wellbeing of Black communities.

In many other ways, we haven’t done enough to end systemic violence and injustice toward Black people. We are starting off by re-evaluating our resources and making several changes immediately to better align our actions with our values while we continue reassessing our work and ourselves. Our commitments:

- We will no longer provide naloxone or trainings to law enforcement.
  - There are many other resources available to police, we are choosing to prioritize ours elsewhere
- We will redirect our time in work groups and forums with law enforcement so we can spend more time in groups working toward transformative justice and racial equity.
- We will not call the police to respond to trespassing, property damage, theft, or non-violent conflict. We are actively navigating our processes for responding to direct physical violence at our offices without relying on police. In the event that we need to file a report for insurance purposes, we will go to the precinct rather
than invite the police to our offices, where Black people and people of color work and utilize resources.

- We are dedicating $10,000 to pay for therapy and bail funds for Black people who use drugs.
- We will work with other harm reduction organizations to reprioritize our internal racial equity committees before the end of the year, and create a toolkit to be made available to other harm reduction organizations across the country.

We understand that these statements are chump change, and that they’re hollow until we show that we are using our resources and position to dismantle anti-Blackness and white supremacy. We know there is even more that we can do. We recognize that our organization benefits from white supremacy. We welcome and appreciate ongoing discussions about our work and harm we may cause. Not only do Black lives matter, but Black POWER matters. And that means continuing to build real systems of safety, interdependence, and abundance.

Wanna do something right now? Read these:

- New York Times: How George Floyd was killed in police custody
- The Appeal: On the day of George Floyd's death, an Arizona state trooper killed a man in Phoenix
- American Medical Association: Police Brutality Must Stop
- The Atlantic: A Timeline of the Rise and Fall of 'Tough on Crime' Drug Sentencing
- Angela Davis: Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex
- Fantasy World: Mental Health Resources for Black people
- Ibram X. Kendi: Anti-Racist Reading List
- Black History Month Library
- Layla Fsaad: Me and White Supremacy
- Tatiana Mac: Save the Tears: White Woman's Guide
- Teen Vogue: How the School-to-Prison Pipeline Works
- NPR: American Police
Donate to black-led organizations and directly to black people:

- Black phoenix organizing collective
- Tucson Second Chance Community Bail Fund
- Drinking Gourd Farms
- Tucson Reparations
- Black Lives Matter Phoenix
- Black Lives Matter Tucson
- Black LGBTQIA + Migrant Project (BLMP)
- National Bailout #FreeBlackMamas
- SnaP Co
- The Okra Project

If, after reading and donating you still have questions or concerns, feel free to contact Haley Coles, Executive Director at hcoles@spwaz.org