

**Department of Philosophy  
College of Arts and Letters**

**ELENA RUIZ**



**W.H.E.A.T.:**  
**MELVENNA FANT-JONES**



**Sara's House:**  
**GENEVA JACKSON**



Dr. Elena Ruiz's partnership with Melvenna Fant-Jones, Geneva Jackson and their respective organizations strengthened services and wraparound care for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking in Detroit. They worked together to deliver public health services responsive to the cultural and Healing Justice needs of survivors while improving community health infrastructures for violence prevention across Detroit.

Dr. Ruiz holds a tenured faculty appointment in philosophy (with a joint appointment in the College of Arts and Letters Dean's Office, Research and Scholarship unit) and has affiliations in American Indian and Indigenous Studies, Chicano and Latino Studies, The Research Consortium on Gender-Based Violence, and The Center for Gender in a Global Context at MSU.

Her research focuses on policy and community-based solutions to gender-based violence, including sexual assault, rape, interpersonal violence, stalking and cyberstalking, and trafficking. Her work has had a broad-ranging impact across fields by illuminating how systems-level interactions and the colonial histories of the built environment shape population health and the structural determinants of health for populations of color, particularly for women of color survivors of sexual violence. Through the Research Institute for Structural Change (RISC), she trains the next generation of structurally responsive community health advocates and policy leaders committed to structural change.

Dr. Ruiz's anti-violence work has been supported by major grants and fellowships, including the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, and appears in dozens of

peer-reviewed publications. In 2020, she was named principal researcher on gender-based violence for the MeToo organization led by Tarana Burke, and she continues working with national stakeholders in the Survivor Justice movement to end sexual violence.

The four-year research-practice partnership between Ruiz, Fant-Jones, Jackson and their organizations significantly expanded community-led services in low-income Detroit neighborhoods. RISC raised more than \$400,000 through local, state and federal grants to support community partners and conduct evidence-based research to improve service delivery. These resources enabled the expansion of trauma-informed, culturally specific programs for survivors and their families.

RISC performed all services for free while training graduate and undergraduate students in research ethics and culturally responsive research-practice partnerships to support the work of violence prevention and victim service nonprofits in Michigan.

According to Fant-Jones, RISC's mentorship strengthened the organizational capacity of Women Healing Eternally and Transforming (W.H.E.A.T.), helping secure funding, improve sustainability, and advocate for policy changes that benefit survivors. The collaboration empowered the organization to expand services and envision new possibilities for survivor support.

This collaboration is strongly worthy of the Michigan State University Community Engagement Scholarship Award and represents MSU's deep commitment to communities and the mission to serve the public good.