



Khalil Halim is the 2025 Dr. Virgilio Licona Community Health Leadership Awardee

Khalil Halim is the 2025 Dr. Virgilio Licona Community Health Leadership Awardee for his work advancing health equity in Colorado. Khalil's career includes a 12-year stint at It Takes a Village and he is now the Executive Director of [Second Chance Center](#), an organization that is dedicated to helping individuals transition from incarceration to stability and success within society. Below, Khalil shares his perspective on health equity, the work of Second Chance Center and the value lived experience has in helping others thrive.

What does health equity mean to you?

A lot of the issues that we have in our society are because there is a lot of unmet needs and undiagnosed mental health problems and substance abuse problems where people just didn't have the access or the resources to actually get the service that could've helped balanced things out. So, what health equity looks like to me is that people have access to those resources on a consistent, regular basis; across the whole spectrum.

Do you have a moment in your career you're proudest of?

At Second Chance Center, one of the things I'm most proud of is we have, from scratch, created a pre-apprenticeship program for men and women coming out of incarceration. It's given those client-partners the opportunity to have lifechanging affects within their own lives, as well as different generations. It's allowed them

to earn not just a living wage, but a mortgage-paying wage. So having the opportunity to teach them a trade that allows them to not just have a job, but to have a career, a good earning career, where they are able to provide, excel and grow and eventually buy a house. We see a lot of guys now who have graduated from the apprenticeship program, they're working with the unions, they have good health benefits. You can see the progress.

How have you pushed boundaries or caused disruption for positive change?

That's a tough question because I see what I do as going out and providing client-centered services. And whatever it is that we need to do to make sure that happens for our clients, that's what we're going to do. Let's start with housing. Housing in Colorado is a problem for everybody. But it's even more difficult when you're a convicted felon, because you can't necessarily go in and apply at different apartment complexes and you don't qualify for a lot of HUD (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development) things. So we're pushing that envelope and creating and developing housing, since no one else is doing it, so our people can have housing. When we first started out the pre-apprenticeship program in the construction trades, we were trying to get the unions' buy-in as far as hiring our population into the paid apprenticeships. The unions told us, "Well, we'll help you with the curriculum, but you'll never have a direct entry agreement with us." We currently have seven with them. We didn't do that for just Second Chance Center clients, we did that for anybody that's criminal justice-involved to have those opportunities. We were just up in Capitol Hill a while ago pushing for short-term Pell grants. A lot of our clients come out and they aren't going to go to a four-year degree college, that's not really a reasonable option for some of our clients, for some it is, but being able to have that short-term Pell means they can get into a trade and have Pell grant funds to pay for it.

Why is lived experience so valuable?

Our client-partners have a sense that the people who do the work have been there, done that; they understand the system; they were probably part of the system; they know how to navigate the system. They lived it and know what's going on. It's because they're able to relate with me and my staff for our lived experience that they're able to try something they've probably never tried before. We like to call it "role-modeling the possibilities." 70% of our staff are criminal justice-involved but they are role-modeling the possibilities our client-partners can see themselves in. It gives our clients hope.

What role does racial justice play in your work?

Part of the issues surrounding the racial injustices is that communities of color have lacked the resources, the support and the things they need to be able to be productive members of society. Stemming from decades and decades and decades. It has led to a disparate number of incarcerations, there's a lot of people who have been incarcerated wrongly, and this gives society a chance to begin to try to right some of the wrong that has been done and it begins to give people an opportunity to do what they were put here to do, and that's be productive members of society. It's crazy because a lot of times when our clients come out, they don't really expect a lot because they've never received a lot. They want a lot, but they don't have the expectation they are going to get it. But when we're able to align the resources with them and they're able to actually see it, the difference is a reduced recidivism rate.

What inspires you to keep making a difference in your community every single day?

We get up and we come in and we do this work because we know it's going to have an impact on someone's life, somewhere, at some point in time. For me, it's when you've had that impact on someone and you didn't even know it. They say: "It was the hope that you guys had for me that allowed me to keep pushing through and I did get a job or I did get help with mental health." So now they're at a point where they can stabilize out. And that's what keeps me doing it.

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