

Designing Solutions That Scale

An Interview with Dr. Topeka K. Sam, TKS Ventures LLC



Dr. Topeka K. Sam (lower left), recipient of Google's Inaugural Social Impact Award at the Variety Magazine Power of Women 2023 event, with Camila Cabello, Queen Latifah, Amanda Seyfried, Kim Cattrall, and Drew Barrymore

Will you discuss your career journey?

My career has been guided by a simple belief: If we want different outcomes, we must trust different leaders. After experiencing incarceration, I committed my life to transformation – personal, systemic, and generational. I went from rebuilding my own life to founding national initiatives like The Ladies of Hope Ministries and leading ventures such as EPIC Health PBC, focused on housing, health access, and economic mobility for women and families.

Today, I work alongside governments, foundations, and private-sector partners to design solutions that scale because I've learned that compassion relieves pain, but structure creates lasting change. And every time I see a woman return home to stability, I'm reminded that when one woman rises, an entire family stands taller.

How did your personal experience with incarceration shape your understanding of justice and leadership?

Incarceration showed me how deeply policy touches real lives. I met women who wanted to rebuild but lacked housing, healthcare, or even bus fare to a job interview. That's when I understood that justice without opportunity is just a promise we never intend to keep.

Leadership, to me, means building pathways that people can actually walk. I lead with empathy because I know the weight of reentry, and I know the strength it takes to begin again because the people closest to the pain often hold the clearest vision for change.



Dr. Topeka K. Sam speaks to the women at Danbury Federal Prison Camp in Connecticut in June 2023

EDITORS' NOTE Dr. Topeka K. Sam is a social entrepreneur, speaker, advisor, and consultant. She co-founded EPIC Health PBC (epichealthpbc.com) a health-tech platform designed to make healthcare equitable, accessible and transformative for all. She is the co-founder of Music Thera-P (musicthera-p.org) whose unique program empowers incarcerated individuals and high school youth to find their voice through music. She is also co-founder and Chief Visionary Officer of MyFRSH LLC, a fintech company and mobile application designed to provide financial inclusion for the "justice-impacted" community (formerly incarcerated individuals). Sam also founded and serves as chief executive officer of The Ladies of Hope Ministries (thelohm.org) which supports women and girls impacted by the criminal legal system. Sam has an honorary doctorate degree in divinity from New York Theological Seminary.



Dr. Topeka K. Sam at Taconic Correctional Facility in Bedford Hills, New York for the first Women Over Dinner in December 2024

What is the most misunderstood aspect of the criminal justice system?

Many people believe incarceration ends when someone is released. In reality, barriers often continue – housing restrictions, employment discrimination, healthcare gaps, financial burdens. I call it the invisible sentence: Freedom on paper is not freedom in practice.

True public safety comes from stability because communities are safer when people have hope, housing, and work – not when they are locked out of opportunity.

What was your vision for launching The Ladies of Hope Ministries?

I founded The Ladies of Hope Ministries with a bold goal: to end the poverty, crisis, and incarceration of women and girls. Our mission is rooted in dignity: No woman should leave prison without a pathway forward.

We provide trauma-informed housing, leadership development, healthcare access, workforce support, and policy advocacy – because hope must be real, not rhetorical. And I believe deeply that when you invest in healing women, you strengthen the future of entire communities.

Will you highlight the work of The Ladies of Hope Ministries?

The Ladies of Hope Ministries now supports thousands of women across the country through housing initiatives, reentry navigation, leadership pipelines, and policy reform. We collaborate with hospitals, government agencies, and corporations to create real opportunity. And what we see is powerful: When a woman has stable housing, her children stay in school, her family stays together, and her neighborhood becomes stronger.

Our work is grounded in one truth: Formerly incarcerated women are not problems to solve – they are leaders ready to serve.

What are the biggest challenges for formerly incarcerated women face?

Housing instability is often the first crisis.

Without it, employment, healthcare, and family reunification become nearly impossible. Women also carry trauma, financial obligations, and stigma. I often say, you cannot rebuild a life from a waiting list.

That's why reentry must be holistic, because restoration happens when community, policy, and compassion work together.

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership?

Effective leadership requires integrity, courage, and partnership. No one transforms systems alone. The most important lesson I've learned is this: Leadership is not about being in front – it's about lifting others forward. When vision meets collaboration, change becomes sustainable.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?

Start with purpose. Ask yourself who your work will serve. I tell young leaders: your resume may open doors, but your character will keep them open.

And remember – your voice matters. Never let someone else's doubt define your direction.

When you look to the future, what excites you and what concerns you?

I'm excited by a generation that understands justice, health equity, and economic opportunity as shared responsibility.

What concerns me is complacency, because progress fades when we confuse awareness with action. But I remain hopeful. Every time a woman reunites with her children, starts a business, or becomes a leader, I'm reminded: redemption is real, and transformation spreads farther than we imagine. ●



Dr. Topeka K. Sam in Washington, DC with U.S. Pardon Attorney Edward Martin Jr. and 27 justice-impacted women seeking clemency for remission of their federal restitution, fines and fees as part of The LOHM #RemissionNow Campaign in August 2025