A VISION FOR HOLISTIC SAFETY IN CORRECTIONS

WRITTEN BY Chicago Beyond in partnership with current and former correctional administrators, correctional staff, people formerly incarcerated, and other people in the community impacted by incarceration.

CHICAGO BEYOND


2024 EDITION • 2024 EDITION
DO I HAVE
THE RIGHT TO
FEEL SAFE?

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DO I HAVE THE RIGHT TO FEEL SAFE?

I spent 28 years in the Michigan Department of Corrections.

I am a father, husband, advocate, and organizer.

I grew up in the 1980s in a tiny Michigan town with very few options for a good future. Many of my peers were in and out of trouble growing up, myself included. Higher education wasn't an option for us.

On your first day inside you immediately enter this very intense, heightened state of constant alertness. When you grow up in the streets, like I did, that's a familiar feeling, but it comes and goes. You can leave that situation, but in prison, you can't leave, and the anxiety eats away at you mentally and physically. You can't decompress. You sit with your back against the wall and that is not normal.

I AM ANDY POTTER

A retired correctional officer.

I spent 27 years in the Michigan Department of Corrections.

I am a father, grandfather, brother, organizer, and community activist

I grew up in Flint, Michigan. I was the oldest of five children, a high school track star, and a good student. From the outside we seemed to have a perfect family. But on the inside, I lived in a dysfunctional household marked by years of physical and mental abuse and trauma.

There was no safety inside prison. The anxiety was so thick, you could cut it with a knife. I felt the tension first thing in the morning, when I walked out of my cell, through the cell block, and when I stood in the chow line. I had to be ready for the next fight, the next stabbing, or the next meltdown. The adversarial nature of prison inherently created that tension. It was not just me feeling anxiety. It was everybody around me.

I AM RONALD SIMPSON-BEY

A person formerly incarcerated.

WE ARE NATIONAL LEADERS IN CRIMINAL LEGAL REFORM.

We travel all over the country, individually and together, speaking on these issues and building the spaces for people who have historically been without a voice to lead. We have been blessed with many opportunities and successes.

WE ARE FRIENDS. COLLEAGUES. ALLIES IN THIS MOVEMENT.

Neither of us were saints. We often talk about the risk we both faced inside. If we talked, we would have been labeled an “inmate lover” or a “snitch.” We would have been viewed with suspicion.

We must move past the stereotype that everyone working in corrections is bad and everyone inside is beyond repair.

Many people do not want to include people incarcerated or correctional officers in the criminal legal reform conversation because they feel we are part of the problem. But if we are part of the problem, then we have to be part of the solution.

Feeling heard leads to healing. And putting our ideas in action can make us all safer. It gives us a sense of agency—a sense of ownership. It gives us power and pride in a situation where we often felt powerless and ashamed.

Whether we are inside or outside the correction walls...

We have the right to feel safe.

ANDY POTTER
Executive Director and Founder of
One Voice United

RONALD SIMPSON-BEY
Executive Vice President of
JustLeadershipUSA

CHICAGO BEYOND'S VISION FOR HOLISTIC SAFETY

Chicago Beyond envisions a world in which physical and psychological safety is present in every community, including the communities that exist in jails and prisons.

A LETTER FROM LIZ DOZIER

Since 2016, Chicago Beyond has operated as a national philanthropic organization supporting solutions led by those most affected by societal issues. With an up-close and nuanced understanding of the justice system's complexities, I am deeply committed to the concept of Holistic Safety within corrections. As the daughter of someone formerly incarcerated and having witnessed the school-to-prison pipeline firsthand as an educator and high school principal in Chicago, I firmly believe that everyone, regardless of their circumstances, deserves to feel safe.

Safety in carceral facilities goes beyond physical security. It includes the wellbeing and dignity of every individual—both staff and those incarcerated. Achieving this level of safety requires a comprehensive approach that incorporates the voices of those directly impacted by the system.

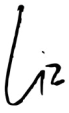
The second edition of *Do I Have the Right to Feel Safe? A Vision for Holistic Safety in Corrections* marks a significant moment in our work. This publication is a milestone in our collective efforts to redefine safety within correctional environments, driven by those most affected by the carceral system. By drawing on the experiences of correctional leaders who have implemented Holistic Safety, it provides a roadmap for creating environments where safety is intertwined with fairness, respect, and human flourishing. While written for correctional administrators, it also serves as a guide for how philanthropy can further support justice work.

I extend my deepest gratitude to Chicago Beyond's Managing Director of Justice Initiatives, Dr. Nneka Jones Tapia, for her leadership in this critical movement. I also thank our Chicago Beyond National Advisory Council for their unwavering commitment to transforming the carceral system nationwide. Finally, we are indebted to the numerous carceral facilities across the country that have implemented the Holistic Safety Framework. Their courage and determination to enact change within their institutions are commendable.

Implementing Holistic Safety requires a paradigm shift—challenging our current understanding of the status quo and embracing a multifaceted view of safety. As we embark on this journey together, we must remain committed to upholding the principles of Holistic Safety. By working collaboratively and following the framework outlined in this publication, we can create safer, healthier, and more humane correctional environments.

We all have a right to feel safe.

Sincerely,



LIZ DOZIER
Founder & CEO, Chicago Beyond

A LETTER FROM DR. NNEKA JONES TAPIA

In April of 2022, we published Chicago Beyond's Holistic Safety Framework in *Do I Have the Right to Feel Safe? A Vision for Holistic Safety in Corrections*. The framework was designed to help create the conditions for all community members—inside and outside of correctional walls—to be and feel protected, resilient, and engaged.

Do I Have the Right to Feel Safe? resonated with people across the country, who shared how much they appreciated its raw truth and saw themselves in the stories shared. Correctional leaders wanted to know how to implement the Holistic Safety Framework. With this request in mind, we sought out jail and prison administrators interested in putting the framework into practice and seeing how it could be best applied in their systems.

In February 2023, Chicago Beyond partnered with two large county jails and a state prison system to form the Holistic Safety Action Alliance. Through monthly meetings using the Holistic Safety Framework as a foundational guide, we asked our jail and state prison partners where they wanted their facilities to be in one year. Four core themes emerged across the three correctional systems. They wanted to:

- Reduce physical isolation for people incarcerated;
- Reduce emotional isolation for people incarcerated;
- Reduce emotional isolation for staff; and
- Reduce interpersonal isolation between people incarcerated and staff.

During our collaboration, these administrators showed remarkable commitment to the framework, which led to significant enhancements in health and safety in their facilities. By increasing out-of-cell time, reducing instances of restrictive housing, and expanding emotional wellness resources, our jail and state prison partners saw tangible improvements in safety and wellbeing. One system saw a significant reduction in uses of force in a three-month period. Testimonials from administrators underscored the transformative nature of this work, affirming its potential to positively impact all facets of correctional facilities.

Frankly, this is the charge for every correctional administrator— to be bold enough to acknowledge that correctional operations of the past cannot be our future; to be visionary enough to know that a facility that centers healing for each person is a facility that prioritizes the safety of every person; to be engaging enough with all key stakeholders that they see the leader's vision as their vision; and to be strategic enough to take calculated risks to create better outcomes for everyone. As one state prison director shared, "This work is going to improve the lives of everyone who works and lives in correctional facilities."

A Letter from Dr.Nneka Jones Tapia (Continued)

We write this new edition of *Do I Have the Right to Feel Safe?* for correctional administrators, but no matter your role, we all have the opportunity to ensure people feel safe. This publication is based off of the work with our Holistic Safety Action Alliance. It is updated to include new policy recommendations that emphasize how resources, supports, and connection create space for healing and safety in correctional systems. You can also find a new Holistic Safety Inventory that offers guidance on ways correctional systems can support the healing and safety of their staff and people incarcerated at ChicagoBeyond.org.

We understand that this work is not easy, but it is an important first step. Correctional administrators across the country have faced unprecedented challenges, and our partners in 2023 were no exception. Like every correctional administrator across the country, our partners faced population fluctuations, increases in the number of people incarcerated with serious mental health and substance use challenges, shortages in correctional staffing, shortages in staffing among community providers, and turnover of leadership. We believe progress is possible.

We are incredibly thankful to our partners who moved to bring the vision for Holistic Safety to life. Although there is much more work to be done, these leaders took bold action on systemic policies that have been contested for decades, and in doing so, they demonstrated that correctional safety and healing are scalable.

We hope you will join us. Together, we must forge a new path forward, because we all have the right to feel safe.

DR. NNEKA JONES TAPIA
Managing Director of Justice Initiatives, Chicago Beyond

THE PROBLEM

MANY FACTORS ERODE SAFETY

THE PATHWAY TO SAFETY MUST INCLUDE REHABILITATION.

Because the North Star of corrections is public safety, we must all challenge our assumptions of what rehabilitation methods do and do not work. This means wrestling with the fact that non-rehabilitative theories of crime reduction—incapacitation, deterrence, and retribution—have only served to make staff, people incarcerated, and the public less and less safe. There are many factors that erode safety.

Incapacitation erodes safety. Advocates of incarceration for incapacitation argue crime is reduced by segregating people who commit crimes. However, the concrete walls of the facility are as penetrable to violence as they are to communicable diseases[1].

Studies have shown that incarceration not only has a negligible impact on violent crime but also increases crime in neighborhoods with high rates of incarceration by eroding family ties, earning potential, and trust in law enforcement[2]. This cycle traps communities, in particular Black and Brown communities, concentrating further crime and disinvestment, such as in Chicago where over half of men returning from prison return to just seven of our 77 community areas[3].

Deterrence erodes safety. Proponents of incarceration as deterrence believe that incarceration lowers the odds that people will commit future crimes. However, numerous studies contend incarceration is actually criminogenic due to inherent risk factors like disconnection, shame, and abuse and post-release consequences like loss of employment and housing[2]. Longer sentences do not reduce recidivism[4], and even pre-trial detention worsens outcomes[5].

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> During my tenure at Cook County jail, I did not see incarceration as a deterrent. I personally saw countless people age as they came in and out of the institution. I grew so complacent with this churn that I found myself researching obituaries when some of the people we considered "frequent flyers" did not return as expected."
>
> **DR. NNEKA JONES TAPIA**

Others argue that incarceration deters people at large from ever coming into contact with the legal system due to fear of the potential consequences. However, as mentioned before, if this were true, neighborhoods with the highest rates of incarceration would not continuously see further increases in their crime rates.

Retribution erodes safety. Advocates of incarceration for retribution argue that punishment is what survivors of crime want. In 2016, when the Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ) conducted the first national survey of survivors, and asked about survivors' experiences with the legal system and their recommendations for justice policy, two thirds of survivors preferred a justice system that focused more on rehabilitation than punishment[6].

If the legal system aims to serve survivors, then their message is clear: **rehabilitation must be prioritized.** Correctional facilities cannot exacerbate the very conditions that lead to violence. To ensure safety after coming into contact with the system, we must create conditions that produce positive behavior.

> If prison worked or was effective, everybody who has ever been would have only been once. If the punishment and inhumanity that exists in these places worked, we wouldn't see people going in time and time again."

LISA DANIELS
Founder of the Darren B. Easterling Center for Restorative Practices

A DUALITY OF HARM EXISTS WITHIN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS.

Just as a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, the public is only as safe as its least safe community. One does not have to look far to see the community that has been failed most: the community inside of correctional walls.

If the uniforms of everyone inside a correctional institution were removed, most people would be challenged to differentiate staff from the people who are incarcerated. Both groups share the same looks of fear and dejection. Both just want to be safe and get back to their families in good condition, whether that be at the end of a shift or end of a sentence. Staff morale is a hot topic, yet there is little acknowledgement that the conditions meant to break the spirit of the person incarcerated can also break the spirit of the staff.

Both are told what to do, when to do it, and how to do it, often abrasively with no chance to offer alternatives. Any misstep is met with discipline. Staff are told where to work, when to leave, and are often locked in assigned spaces until someone lets them out. Overtime is often required. Similarly, people incarcerated are told where they will be confined and when and where they can move. Both are exposed to poor sanitation and haunting lighting as well as intolerable noise, rampant pests, and pathogens. Both are conditioned to look over their shoulders, fearful of when the next violent incident might occur.

The reality is that violence within correctional institutions is significant and indiscriminate.

“We get so many stereotypes about the population we work with. I’ve heard all the names like junkie and idiot. In opening up to my coworkers in the field on my background, I think that has offered a slight change in perspective. There are so many people incarcerated who leave, go on to improve their lives, and do not come back.”

THOMAS SCHOOLCRAFT
Current correctional professional in Minnesota who is formerly incarcerated.

> *Working at the Cook County jail, my indoctrination to this "us vs. them" culture started from week one when I was required to read Games Criminals Play[17], a book on how people incarcerated try to manipulate staff with every word and gesture. The message was clear—keep my distance or risk getting fired or killed. Certainly, there were times when I was manipulated by people incarcerated. There were also times when I was manipulated by staff. However, that was not my universal experience with either group. As Andy Potter, founder of One Voice United and a correctional union leader and former officer, implores, "We need to get past that everyone who works there is bad and everyone incarcerated is beyond repair.""*
>
> **DR. NNEKA JONES TAPIA**

Despite these shared harms, correctional institutions create an "us vs. them" culture where each group sees the *other* group as inherently bad. This is ingrained in people incarcerated and staff as a survival strategy and is met with serious consequences if not followed. Some consequences are by policy—in many jurisdictions, correctional officers can be disciplined or fired if they associate with anyone with a felony record outside of the institution. Other consequences are by code, such as being blackballed by peers.

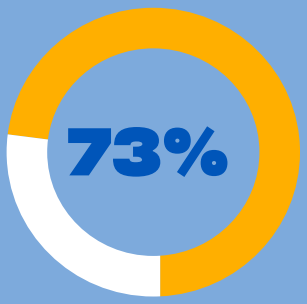
Although differences exist, the experiential similarities of staff and people incarcerated connect them in ways that are inextricable. Neither group feels safe, and neither can be safe unless both are safe.

I vividly remember one sergeant—who normally kept his distance—opening up during a Youth Assistance Program session, saying he did not want to work in this environment. However, with limited options to adequately provide for his family, he had to persevere to secure his pension. If totaled, he would eventually spend over eight years inside the correctional walls. He was serving a sentence as well. This system spares no one. We—people incarcerated and staff—share the same harm and must share the same healing."

KHALIL CUMBERBATCH
Director of Engagement and Partnerships at the Council on Criminal Justice

20 YEARS

2 YEARS



THE DUALITY OF HARM

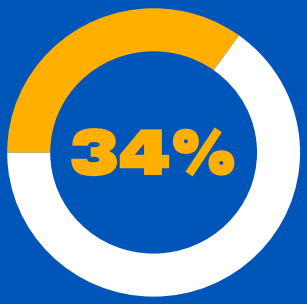
SUICIDE

DECLINES IN LIFE EXPECTANCY

Correctional officers live approximately 20 years less than the national average[14]

People incarcerated lose approximately 2 years for each year confined[13]

PTSD



OF CORRECTION OFFICERS IN SECURITY ROLES meet the criteria for PTSD, 5 times the national rate[15]

OF MEN INCARCERATED experience moderate to severe symptoms of PTSD[16]

WITNESSING VIOLENCE

OF CORRECTIONAL STAFF IN ONE OF THE LARGEST STATE SYSTEMS had seen someone seriously hurt or killed on the job[9]

OF PERSONS INCARCERATED interviewed in one study had witnessed violence inflicted on other people during their period of incarceration[10]

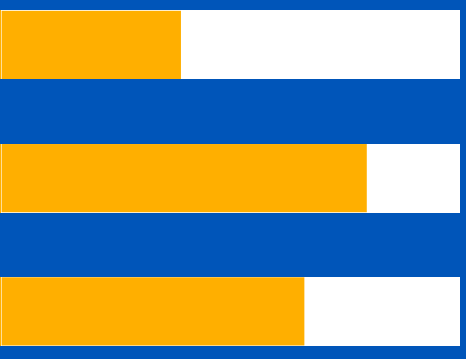
EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE

36X

CORRECTIONAL STAFF EXPERIENCE VIOLENCE AT A RATE that is 36 times higher than all other American workers[7]

35%

APPROXIMATELY 35% OF MEN INCARCERATED REPORTED being physically victimized in the previous 6 months while in prison[8]



2.5X

CORRECTIONAL STAFF DIE BY SUICIDE at a rate 2.5 times the national average[11]

3.5X

PEOPLE INCARCERATED IN JAILS DIE BY SUICIDE at a rate 3.5 times the national average[12]

85%

SUICIDES IN PRISON HAVE INCREASED 85% in the past 20 years[12]

THE PROBLEM

OUR APPROACH TO SAFETY IS INCOMPLETE

CHRONIC CONTROL AS A SOLUTION ULTIMATELY DISTANCES US FROM LONG-TERM SAFETY

Chronic control is the idea—the illusion —that people are safest when every behavior is tightly regulated.

This has led to an investment of billions of dollars to design higher security institutions with reinforced fences, watchtowers, weaponry, and restraints as well as expanded use of solitary confinement, where more than 122,000 people nationwide still reside on any given day[18] at three times the cost of being in the general population[19].

However, no matter the money spent, these measures do not work long-term. Staff still report higher risk of victimization in higher security institutions[20] and lower sense of safety when working in solitary units[21]. Moreover, higher security levels have not improved recidivism[22] and further erode mental health[21].

Control does not stop at physical security. It is a mindset. Within a facility, every decision that individuals make and every interaction they have is viewed as a risk and policed as such.

SPOTLIGHT STORY →

ALTERNATIVES TO CONTROL & ISOLATION

EASTERN STATE PENITENTIARY

A year into my tenure as warden at Cook County jail, a new gang developed in the jail with a goal to wreak havoc. Every day, they physically assaulted staff, threw urine and feces, and set fires. They even took control of a maximum-security living unit and held other people incarcerated hostage. With each incident, we tightened control. We initiated discipline, isolated them, took away visitation privileges, and even shipped them off to rented beds in facilities up to 200 miles away.

As administrators, every decision we made was met with criticism. Staff felt we were too lenient, and people incarcerated felt we were too punitive. The restrictive housing units were overcrowded and violent. People incarcerated were injuring themselves to exit restrictive housing, if only for a short ride to the hospital. Soon, I was being admonished by local hospital administrators for spreading trauma into their facility. Moreover, facilities where we had rented beds started calling us to take back the people we had sent. All our go-to solutions centered on control, and none worked for longer than a moment.

We had to try something different—our current methods carried too much risk. We started by ending indefinite restrictive housing—even for people who committed the most violent acts in the facility—by giving everyone a release date, providing them

with something to work towards. We then scaled back the number of infractions that resulted in placement in restrictive housing—applying sanctions instead—meaning more people who were in restrictive housing qualified for immediate release. Within weeks, we halved the number of people in the restrictive housing units without compromising institutional safety. By relocating people who had a propensity to engage in negative behavior into living units where they had increased access to peers who could mentor and model healthy behaviors, infractions decreased. Staff were also better positioned to manage these living units because staffing ratios were increased.

When people did act out violently, we placed them in a new living unit staffed with two officers from our Emergency Response Team (ERT) who were tactically trained to respond to serious incidents. We were intentional about the staff assigned because we wanted everyone involved to feel safe. The ERT had already been transporting the young men to court and other counties, and conversing with them along the way, so they were comfortable staying inside the tier (versus outside at a desk) and mentoring, the young men. Although conversation in the unit started out limited, it only took a week for staff to start consistently sitting next to and engaging with the men.

Lastly, we knew it was important to increase out-of-cell time and interpersonal engagement, but we needed to do so cautiously to minimize the risk of more violence. Initially, we increased daily out-of-cell time from one to three hours a day, raised the number of people allowed out at a time from one to two, expanded access to recreational activities, and added structured wellness programming. After three months, the unit was so successful that we were able to safely increase daily out-of-cell time to 10 hours per day and the number of people out at a time to six, while continuing to increase programming access and positive engagement with staff. Slowly, we transitioned the regular staff back to the unit after their ERT colleagues were able to share best practices and communication tools.

In the end, these changes did mean we lost some “control.” And they did not come without growing pains or risk. But they resulted in a significant reduction in violence and staff absenteeism.

DR. NNEKA JONES TAPIA

DO I HAVE THE RIGHT TO FEEL SAFE?

WHEN CONTROL SUBSIDES, ONLY TRAUMA REMAINS.

When individuals are exposed to abnormal levels of stress, they often attempt to cope by controlling their environment. Similarly, the persistent push for chronic control from the correctional system is a response to the heightened stress that comes from the unnatural act of locking human beings in cages*. As administrators, our attempts to control institutional stress by controlling the people within these institutions is a never-ending game of Whac-A-Mole, in which we are constantly responding to something—fires, violence, staff absenteeism, hunger strikes, and more. Until we acknowledge that all these issues are surface-level symptoms of a deeper problem—trauma—we cannot make these institutions safer.

Trauma is commonly understood as the lingering effects of a harmful or life-threatening event that is experienced or witnessed by a person[23]. Trauma has lasting consequences when it comes to a person's mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. In the case of corrections, incarceration is the traumatic event. Being locked in a cage is one of the most horrific, stressful experiences a person could endure[24]. Intense stress for prolonged periods of time overwhelms our ability to cope and rewires our brains to be hypervigilant and paranoid[25]. People incarcerated begin to process every experience and interaction, including the experience of being locked in a cage, as having the potential to bring harm, and thus become more likely to respond with aggression.

The act of locking another human being in a cage is also traumatic and poses a significant threat to the person who commits such an act[21]. Correctional staff feel this threat multiple times every day, forcing their brains to change in a way that they, too, react to the world around them from a position of fear, and thus are more likely to respond with aggression.

* "Even writing the word "cages" stings, but it is the reality. In Cook County, we used the term "bullpens" to describe the cages where people sat waiting for intake into the facility."

DR. NNEKA JONES TAPIA

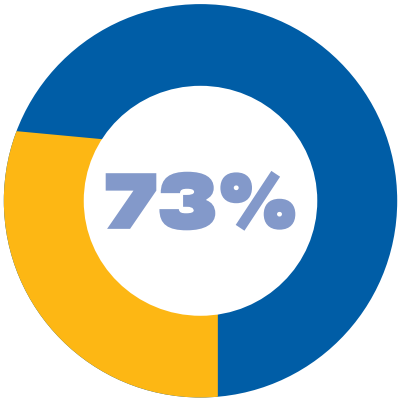
"When you are incarcerated, you have been disrespected for so long, everything seems like disrespect—someone disagreeing with you, accidently bumping into you, taking a seat you were going to sit in."

MUJAHID HAMILTON
Curriculum coordinator for Green ReEntry at the Inner-City Muslim Action Network

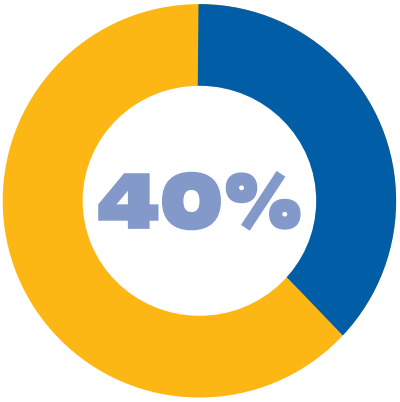
Despite trauma being inescapable in the institution, people incarcerated and staff rarely discuss it, both bound to an unspoken oath of silence. The display of vulnerability is often viewed as a sign of weakness. And so, the trauma remains.

Like violence and other institutional harms, trauma is also shared between people incarcerated and staff, existing in a constant feedback loop where no one feels safe.

- Research has shown that 99% of men incarcerated and 98% of women incarcerated report exposure to a traumatic event in their lifetime[16], [27].
- In a survey of correctional officers in one state system, 73% had seen someone seriously hurt or killed while on the job and 40% reported having experienced an event so frightening that they continue to have nightmares about it[9].



73% of correctional officers had seen someone seriously hurt or killed while on the job



40% of correctional officers reported having experienced an event so frightening that they continue to have nightmares about it[9]

Current and former correctional administrators must break this feedback loop of trauma. Safety requires administrators to stem the factors that drive violence and to give people the tools and resources they need to be resilient in the face of past, present, and future trauma and engaged so they feel a sense of ownership in the safety and wellness of their community. **How do we start?**

> *"There's no person or culture that I know that has willingly submitted to subjugation. It's against human nature. People don't like being confined and constrained. It's part of why it's punishment. We're actively part of that and there's this dissonance that develops within you when you see something that's not natural happening to an individual, and it's compounded when you subconsciously know that you have a hand in it."*
>
> **SAM**
> A correctional officer who worked thirty years in the California prison system, as told to One Voice United[11].

A PATH FORWARD

HOLISTIC SAFETY

FAMILY VISITATION
© Roger Morales / Chicago Beyond

WE MUST CHAMPION HOLISTIC SAFETY

To be safer and healthier, we must create the conditions for all community members—inside and outside of correctional walls - to be and feel protected, resilient, and engaged. **That is Holistic Safety.**

Holistic Safety does not just prioritize the safety of one community; it prioritizes the safety of all communities, including correctional staff, people incarcerated, administrators, and the people outside correctional walls.

Holistic Safety includes the need for physical safety—we must be protected from violence, injury, and victimization. However, this is not the full picture. *Being* safe requires us to *feel* safe.

THE CORE TENETS OF HOLISTIC SAFETY

Chicago Beyond's vision for Holistic Safety names the five core tenets that correctional facilities must unlock to curb violence and trauma and suggests policy changes related to each.

THE CORE TENETS ARE

- **Connectedness:** The concept that we are all intrinsically bound as human beings and we are served best when our ties are positive and strong.
- **Health:** The physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing we need to thrive, not just be injury-free.
- **Personal Agency:** Our capacity to determine our own future, from making day-to-day choices to identifying and accessing the resources we need.
- **Trust:** Our earned—not blind—belief in people to not only fulfill their responsibilities but to also act in a manner beneficial to themselves and others.
- **Value:** The idea that we must respect and invest in our shared humanity and individual strengths.

The pathway to Holistic Safety can only be unlocked when we deeply engage with people with lived experience of the correctional system — people incarcerated, staff, along with their families, survivors of crime, their communities, correctional unions, justice advocates, and all others impacted. In the pages that follow, we explain why engagement with people with lived experience of the correctional system is needed, how it makes us safer, and considerations as you begin implementation.

WE MUST UPLIFT THE FIVE TENETS OF HOLISTIC SAFETY.

The next section contains more details on how to implement the five tenets of Holistic Safety inside and outside of correctional walls, as well as specific opportunities for change against each.

IMPLEMENTATION

HOW TO

COOK COUNTY JAIL

HOW TO IMPLEMENT

Correctional administrators must engage with people with lived experience of the correctional system in order to unlock Holistic Safety. This means working with them, not for them.

INCLUDES

- People formerly incarcerated
- Families impacted by incarceration,
- Survivors of crime
- Community organizations in areas most impacted by incarceration, and
- Others impacted by incarceration

START

Analyze the current state of wellness and safety

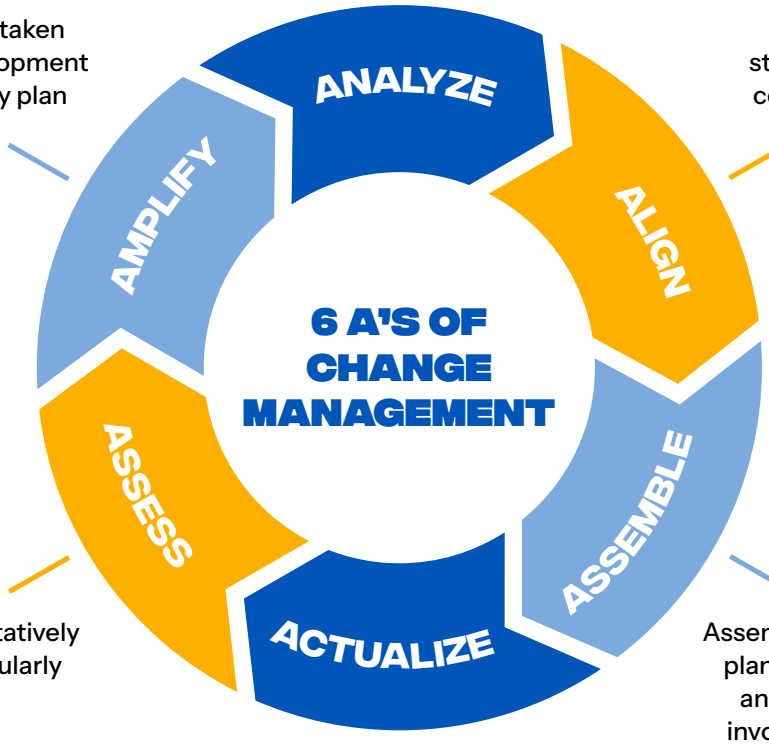
Align with key stakeholders using a collaborative model

Assemble an implementation plan centered on wellness and safety that actively involves key stakeholders

Actualize the implementation plan, focusing on shifting the conditions of systems change

Assess impact quantitatively and qualitatively regularly

Amplify actions taken through the development of a sustainability plan



HOW TO IMPLEMENT HOLISTIC SAFETY: SIX PHASES

To implement the Holistic Safety Framework, we encourage system leaders to explore Chicago Beyond's Six Phases of Implementation and Holistic Safety Policy Recommendations. While there are several resources that assist with moving from a vision to action, here we share the tools we have found particularly helpful with the understanding that we are continuing to learn alongside system partners and key stakeholders. In the pages that follow, we invite you to learn with us and take steps towards improved wellness and safety for staff and people incarcerated in the system.

Read more about each tenet of Holistic Safety.

VALUE →

Value is the idea that we must respect and invest in our shared humanity and individual strengths.

- People incarcerated and correctional staff feel valued when they can see their positive attributes and those of other people, instead of focusing on negative traits, experiences, or circumstances.
- Families of people incarcerated and organizations in communities most impacted by incarceration feel valued when they are engaged in the well-being of people entering and exiting their community, so they can create a welcoming environment that promotes healthy re-entry. The lack of a value-based approach directly impacts safety.
- Correctional officers feeling unrecognized or that their personal strengths are underutilized can drive a cycle of turnover, staffing shortages, mandatory overtime, and burnout, undermining facility operations[28].
- People seeing the worst in themselves creates a self-fulfilling prophecy that undercuts rehabilitation. Conversely, people seeing only the worst in other people are more likely to dehumanize other people[29].
- When families of people incarcerated and organizations from the communities most impacted by incarceration are not valued in the re-entry process, successful outcomes for people incarcerated can be limited[30].

“If we continue to teach officers that people incarcerated are the worst of the worst, they will not have second thoughts about using violence to keep order.”

DARREN MACK
Co-director of Freedom Agenda

PERSON INCARCERATED AT COOK COUNTY JAIL DRAWING A MURAL

Correctional administrators must affirm the strengths, voices, and interests of staff and people incarcerated to help them build upon their greatness.

Efforts may include:

- **Identifying the unique skills of staff and people incarcerated and creating opportunities for them to use those skills.** If people incarcerated show interest in teaching, put them on a path to be a peer educator. Based on their interests, give staff related training and advancement opportunities.
- **Engaging regularly with people incarcerated, staff, and other key stakeholders.** People feel valued when they feel seen and heard. Therefore, administrators must be visible and relatable. Ongoing engagement should happen through formal (e.g., forums, town halls, advisory boards), informal (e.g., sitting in on rounds, recreation), and anonymous (e.g., surveys, suggestion boxes) methods.
- **Utilizing people-first, non-derogatory language.** Train and encourage staff to refer to people by their names (and not numbers or their charges) and to employ a respectful tone and body language. Change every policy, procedure, post order, and sign to use person-first language like "people incarcerated" instead of "inmate" and "officer" instead of "guard."
- **Creating a culture of positive affirmation.** If someone is working hard, let them know their efforts are appreciated. If staff observe a person incarcerated making positive decisions, encourage them to acknowledge the person's efforts.
- **Running classes, training, and events focused on cultural diversity.** Race, gender, sexuality, class, and more impact how people see value in and react to one another.
  Hosting celebrations for different cultures can help actively create positive engagement.

HEALTH →

Health is the physical, mental, and emotional well-being we need to thrive, not just the absence of injury.

- People incarcerated and correctional staff are healthy when they can live and work in healing environments with access to wellness supports, programming, and resources that promote their ability to thrive.
- Communities—inside and outside correctional walls—are healthy when the people within them are well enough to actively participate in their families, schools, economy, politics, and more.

Diminished health directly impacts safety.

Experiencing and witnessing violence and exposure to practices that erode human dignity drive trauma. Without adequate support, people experiencing traumatic events struggle to regulate their emotions and present greater potential for violent behavior inside and outside of the facility[25].

- The risk of suicide is significantly heightened among both people incarcerated and staff. Correctional officers and people incarcerated in jail commit suicide 2.5 times and 3.5 times the national rate respectively[11,12].
- Groups impacted by the carceral system have lower life expectancy. People incarcerated lose approximately two years for each year confined[13]. Correctional officers live approximately 20 years less than the national average[14]. People with immediate family incarcerated live about 2.5-plus years less than people who do not.[31]

> I have never seen anyone enter corrections without some abuse, neglect, or addiction in their background…why not try to begin their journey toward healing while they are a captive audience."

ERIK BRINGSWHITE
Co-founder and executive director of the South Dakota-based Institute of Indigenous American Legacy (I. Am. Legacy).

Correctional administrators must address the health of staff and people incarcerated, particularly given the over-exposure to trauma that both groups endure.

Efforts may include:

- **Ensuring access and utilization of healthcare—including mental health and addiction services for people incarcerated and staff.** Beyond partnering with healthcare workers, ask community organizations for additional support. Also, invest in building capabilities among people incarcerated and staff to identify and effectively respond to people experiencing mental health crises (e.g., administering mental health first aid courses).
- **Adjusting spaces in the institution to create calming effects.** Leverage natural light, bright colors, greenery, peaceful music, access to open-air spaces, and murals with positive affirmations.
- **Investing in nontraditional wellness programming.** Examples include yoga, meditation, drumming, art, gardening, cooking, and more.
- **Creating proactive and reactive supports for direct and vicarious trauma.** Share strategies for both self-care and healing-centered engagement. Design a structured debrief process with mental health professionals for whenever people incarcerated or staff witness or experience a traumatic event.
- **Relaying sensitive or unwelcome news in private and with compassion.** Create a call line for families to relay this type of news (e.g., a family death) to the institution. People incarcerated should be able to have a phone call or special visit with loved ones as well as access to support services.

“If [correctional staff and individuals incarcerated] are not well, they are not going to be able to shift, craft, redefine the facility operations and culture. They are just going to perpetuate the system as it exists today.”

ANDY POTTER
Founder of One Voice United, correctional union leader and former correctional officer.

CONNECTEDNESS →

Connectedness is the concept that we are all intrinsically bound as human beings and we are served best when our ties are positive and strong.

- **People incarcerated and correctional staff feel** connection when opportunities are created that promote positive interpersonal interactions between members of the entire correctional community.
- **Communities inside *and* outside the correctional walls** feel connection when they are given opportunities to welcome, support, celebrate, and grow alongside each other.

Disconnection directly impacts safety.

- When people incarcerated and staff have limited access to positive relationships with people inside and outside of the institution, they can become desensitized to violence and turn to negative coping mechanisms[32].
- Limited access to healing-centered visitation has been tied to increased misconduct and recidivism for people incarcerated and negative emotional and behavioral impacts for their children[33].
- The erosion of social bonds due to incarceration has been linked to increases in future crime in communities with the highest rates of incarceration[2].

"Hierarchical agencies stifle our ability to create relationships. If we want people to truly change, that only happens in the context of relationships."

ELAINE LORD
Retired Superintendent of Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York.

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER TALKING WITH A PERSON INCARCERATED

Correctional administrators must promote and encourage connection. Connection promotes healing which in turn promotes safety.

Efforts to build connection include:

- **Promoting positive family engagement for everyone.** For staff, this can include in-facility events for families to help them better understand the day-to-day realities of correctional jobs and support their loved ones. For people incarcerated, this can include healing-centered visitation and reduced barriers for written, electronic and telephone contact.
- **Collaborating with community on reentry.** Establish liaisons from neighborhoods with high rates of incarceration to better understand community needs and create bridges to social services. Encourage local business owners to hire people upon release by building relationships and sharing success stories.
- **Embracing the reality that jails and prisons are public institutions.** Encourage tours for families, advocates, policymakers, lawmakers, and media.
- **Creating spaces for people incarcerated and staff to engage with the outside community as equals.** For staff, this could mean partnering with community volunteers on various tasks. For people incarcerated, this can be initiatives like Program for a Calculated Transition (PACT) at Green Haven Correctional Facility in New York. PACT holds in-facility reading groups on topics of interest for people incarcerated and Yale Law School students to learn alongside each other[34].
- **Reducing barriers for volunteers.** Streamline the approval process for people to enter the facility (without compromising security) and ensure they are treated well so they continue to support the cultural shift.
- **Utilizing peer support programs.** Consider pairing new staff members with seasoned or retired employees who align with the mission of the institution. Design peer mentoring programs (coupled with training) for people incarcerated.
- **Bring people formerly incarcerated who are now leaders in the community back into the institution for speeches, workshops, or other programming.** This can help staff see the fruition of their hard work and people incarcerated see hope for their future.

TRUST →

Trust is our earned—not blind—belief in people to not only fulfill their responsibilities but to also act in a manner beneficial to themselves and others.

- **People incarcerated and correctional staff** feel trust when they believe their physical and mental well-being is supported by the actions of people inside and outside the institution, including administrators.
- **The community outside correctional walls** feel trust when community members believe that correctional institutions are returning their neighbors to the community with the tools they need to thrive and be well.

Distrust directly impacts safety.

- The *"us vs. them"* culture between staff and people incarcerated is foundational for dehumanization[29].
- Outside correctional walls, distrust can undermine the ability of people incarcerated and staff to form healthy relationships with family members, coworkers, support services, and law enforcement[14, 24].
- If communities do not trust correctional administrators to rehabilitate people who are incarcerated, they ultimately will not want to welcome formerly incarcerated people back into the community.

> *If it is 'us vs. them', 'them' gets screwed every time. This is a 'we' situation."*

JOHN WETZEL
former Secretary of Corrections Pennsylvania Department of Corrections

Correctional administrators must lead with trust and allow trust to be established and strengthened within and across key stakeholder groups to create healthy, safe environments.

Efforts may include:

- **Creating a system to consistently record and respond to asks, concerns, and suggestions from staff, people incarcerated, and external community members.** Establish clear follow-up timelines and provide detailed rationale on why a decision was made. Some mediums through which to do this are forums, town halls, suggestion boxes, surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one meetings.
- **Reducing the mass messaging that teaches and reinforces a culture of distrust among staff and people incarcerated.** This starts with adjusting training, but correctional administrators must also set an ongoing example by role modeling positive engagement with both groups.
- **Establishing transparency with the broader community and other key stakeholders.** This can allow community members to truly partner with correctional administrators in this work. Greater transparency can be achieved through increased public access to data, community town halls, newsletters, and more.
- **Giving staff training and resources to constructively coach people incarcerated.** In one Ohio prison, correctional officers carry "skill cards" to help coach people who act out.[35]
- **Enabling co-participation in programming.** Ensure some wellness programming places people incarcerated alongside staff as participants (e.g., joint yoga classes or religious events).
- **Holding spaces for people incarcerated and staff to talk about their life outside corrections and dreams for the future.** These talks can help people see other people beyond their charge, ID number, or title. Consider holding space for people to have these conversations over a meal, which research has shown is a critical window for community building.

PERSONAL AGENCY →

Personal agency is our capacity to determine our own future, from making day-to-day choices to identifying and accessing the resources we need.

- **People incarcerated and correctional staff** have personal agency when they feel they can control their actions, are working to a higher purpose, and can access the resources needed to chart their own path.
- Communities outside correctional walls have agency when they can take responsibility for preparing people to return to their communities and be welcomed.

Diminished personal agency directly impacts safety.

- Idleness—the lack of opportunity to pursue activity and mental stimulation—leads to increased stress, anger, and frustration among people incarcerated[36].
- The inability to influence facility decision-making has been linked to increased stress and job dissatisfaction in correctional staff, diminishing both job performance and retention[28].
- Increased institutional dependence erodes the ability of people incarcerated to make productive decisions upon release[24].
- Limited community input often results in people exiting without the specific skills needed to thrive[30].

> Removing the ability for people to make choices paralyzes them. We must be the authors of our own lives. If correctional leaders have human dialogues with people inside to understand what drives them and plan programming accordingly, we set them up to never come back in."

SHARON WHITE-HARRIGAN
Executive Director of Women's Community Justice Association

Correctional administrators must intentionally allow and encourage people to make choices that impact their ability to thrive, and grant access to the tools and resources people need to do so.

Efforts may include:

- **Asking people what tools and resources they need to thrive and giving them access.** For example, people incarcerated can collaborate with community members on re-entry planning to identify what they need to thrive inside and outside of the facility. Staff break rooms can be furnished with spaces for correctional officers to exercise, relax, and read books during breaks.
- **Creating opportunities for people to share institutional decision-making power.** For example, New York's *Incarcerated Liaison Committee*[37] elects delegates from each housing unit and, *New York's Grievance Committee*[38] includes two staff members and two people incarcerated. **Implementing programming proposed, developed, and/or led by people incarcerated and staff.** These efforts can build community and increase shared responsibility for safer operations. Bringing in community organizations and volunteers for programming support can be helpful in understaffed facilities.
- **Institute a comprehensive programming schedule inside disciplinary housing.** For example, in Massachusetts, the non-profit, Roca, designs housing units that are an alternative to solitary, where people spend 17 hours per day outside the cell and mostly cycle between different programming[39].
- **Implement various career tracks for staff.** Allow them to select areas of interest—including leadership development—in which they would like to grow their skills and chart a pathway for staff members to achieve their career goals.

> The community should determine what is necessary to return someone to useful citizenship. They can tell you what skills are needed, what jobs people should be trained for."
>
> **YUSUF MADYUN**
> Participant in Green ReEntry at the Inner-City Muslim Action Network

DO I HAVE THE RIGHT TO FEEL SAFE?

SPOTLIGHT STORY →

THE REIMAGINED SPACE FOR THE PILOT VISITATION AT COOK COUNTY JAIL

At Chicago Beyond, we witnessed the culture shift that can occur when correctional administrators at the Cook County jail led with Holistic Safety.

Most correctional administrators agree that visitation—especially when occurring regularly—increases safety for the entire community. People incarcerated and staff are safer due to lower misconduct; children with parents incarcerated are safer because of the maintenance of healthy familial bonds; and communities outside correctional walls are safer because they are less likely to see people released committing additional crimes.

However, many elements of correctional visitation actually erode safety. Visitor searches may limit contraband, but if searches are performed invasively, they can fuel adverse feelings towards correctional staff. Plexiglass barriers may limit the risk of unexpected behavior, but the lack of touch stifles the cultivation of familial bonds critical to re-entry. Family exposure to security procedures like searching and handcuffing—and carceral elements like uniforms, weapons, barbed wire, and bars—are common in current visitation practices, but can shame people incarcerated and intimidate visitors, discouraging future visits.

If people, especially children, experience visitation in this way, the trauma of incarceration spreads to them and their homes and communities. They are less likely

to return and the long-term benefits of their relationship with an incarcerated loved one are undercut. As one young person Chicago Beyond interviewed lamented, “As a child, [visitation] is a win-lose situation …I haven’t been to visit my only close cousin because I don’t like the process…They treat you like the criminal…I have hatred towards cops to this day because of my experiences.”

With this in mind, Chicago Beyond set out to work with administrators at the Cook County jail to build a new visitation model that prioritized Holistic Safety for people incarcerated, their children and families, and staff. To be successful, we had to challenge ourselves to ask why the current process looked the way it did. Was the rationale behind each existing policy, procedure, and practice rooted in safety or punishment? By re-evaluating our assumptions, we shifted our orientation from “this cannot be done” to “what can we do to make this work?” Instead of anticipating failure, we tried to create an environment that fostered success and a visitation process that centered Holistic Safety.

FATHER HOLDING CHILD’S HAND

When Chicago Beyond eventually launched two pilot visitations with Cook County jail administrators, Chicago Children’s Museum, and the Center for Childhood Resilience, the process was unrecognizable compared to how visitation was previously done. Fathers and children could have full contact. Plexiglass was non-existent. Bars and wires were mostly hidden. Security procedures took place outside of the view of families. Officers and people incarcerated wore plain clothing, not distinct uniforms. Visits were in open, colorful, activity-filled spaces that allowed free movement. One pilot visitation even occurred externally at Chicago Children’s Museum.

SPOTLIGHT STORY →

We knew how unconventional it was to transport people incarcerated to a museum to see their families, but we also knew it was key to reimagining what visitation could be.

Our extensive planning process did not prepare us for the wave of emotions we felt upon seeing the reactions of children, fathers, and families the moment the doors to the visitation rooms opened. Seeing a father hug his child for the first time in over a year and a daughter's face as she ran into the arms of her father was an experience that none of the Chicago Beyond, correctional, mental health, and museum staff will ever forget. Even the biggest and burliest of correctional staff members were filled with emotion. We watched dads, who in the jail presented as guarded and emotionless, shed that façade while coloring, laughing, and digging for dinosaur bones with their children. Each of us—organizational leaders, administrators, fathers incarcerated, correctional and program staff, and children—walked away from the pilots more hopeful than before.

The pilot visitations were more than a visit. They represented a shift in how key stakeholders—correctional staff, people incarcerated, administrators, and community members—perceived and engaged with each other.

For a moment, the room was not filled with correctional officers and people incarcerated; it was filled with people enjoying each other as equals. The pilots were catalysts in Cook County jail administrators transforming visitation to center Holistic Safety. In a publication for the American Jail Association[40], Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart shared, "A trauma-informed visitation program not only helps children to better cope with their incarcerated loved one, but it also supports the overall wellness of the incarcerated individuals and the safety of staff. Individuals who have the support of their family in a healthy environment are more likely to make healthy decisions and follow institutional rules...By improving the visiting experience and strengthening bonds between incarcerated parents and their children, we hope to improve the overall health and safety of everyone touched by the correctional institution."

Overall, the visits (including the one outside of the correctional institution) had no security incidents and increased the Holistic Safety of all involved. Now this healing-centered visitation model is accessible to the more than 60,000 people who pass through the Cook County jail each year.

THE APPLICATION OF THE FIVE TENETS OF HOLISTIC SAFETY IN THE COOK COUNTY JAIL VISITATION PILOTS

HOLISTIC SAFETY WORKSHOP SERIES VISIT, 2024/NORTHWEST STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY, VT

VALUE →

Design elements that fostered value included:

- → Both fathers incarcerated and officers were able to wear plain clothes.
- → Officers referred to fathers by their names in lieu of terms like 'inmate' or 'offender'.

Examples of the impact of greater value:

- → Officers could better relate to fathers. As Lieutenant Angela Lewis, who oversaw the development of the current jail visitation program, puts it, "After listening to [people incarcerated] more, I realized similarities in our backgrounds and wanted to help more."
- → The experience allowed people to see both the humanity and the best in each other. As one jail staff member explained, "Discussing trauma and family-wide impact helped officers change perspective."

SPOTLIGHT STORY →

HEALTH →

Design elements that fostered health included:

- All staff received trauma training to better understand trauma held by themselves, participating fathers, and children.
- Bilingual mental health clinicians were situated onsite to support families through difficult moments.
- Spaces were made child-friendly—colorful, few carceral elements—and searches were trained to be trauma-informed by connecting with the person and explaining the procedure prior to action.

Examples of the impact of increased health:

- Participants felt safe enough to process their emotions. As mental health staff observed, “Both fathers and staff were comfortable enough around each other where they felt like they could cry.”
- Fathers felt comfortable discussing sensitive topics, such as their incarceration, with their young children.

CONNECTEDNESS →

Design elements that fostered connectedness included:

- All participating fathers completed parenting classes together prior to the visits.
- Parents who had not seen or touched their children in months or years could interact with them more authentically by playing games, taking photos, and sharing gifts.
- Staff were allowed to encouraged to engage with the fathers and their families.

Examples of the impact of greater connectedness:

- Participating fathers called themselves a “cohort” and they, along with their families, gained a support network to process their shared experiences. As one CCM staff member attested, "Seeing the dads introduce one another to their families felt good. There was real community amongst the families.”
- The CCM pilot helped fathers envision what life could look like outside and allowed museum staff to see how they could welcome people incarcerated back into society.

TRUST →

Design elements that fostered trust included:

- → Allowing fathers to move freely through the designated areas while officers watched at a distance.
- → Allowing touch by removing barriers between fathers incarcerated and their children.
- → Administrators asking staff and fathers incarcerated what they needed to feel safe and following up on recommendations shared.

Examples of the impact from increased trust:

- → Families started to actively ask correctional officers for assistance. As one correctional officer noted, "The visit helped combat the stigma and bias associated with law enforcement."
- → Fathers seeing officers help their families and officers seeing fathers make constructive decisions gave each group more faith in the other, positively shifting future interactions between both fathers incarcerated and the officers.
- → Increased support from staff and fathers incarcerated for continuing the expansion of the pilot visitations.

PERSONAL AGENCY →

Design elements that fostered personal agency included:

- → Fathers could choose what activities they wanted to do with their children.
- → Staff had the opportunity to freely interact with fathers and their families without feeling judged.

Examples of the impact of increased personal agency:

- → Participants felt more inspired to better themselves, with one father proclaiming, "Seeing my kid and being able to have this opportunity motivates me to be a better dad."
- → Staff members took more initiative to help people incarcerated, such as when an officer took it upon himself to personally drive a family experiencing last minute transportation issues to the visit.

SOME OF THE COMMON CHALLENGES CORRECTIONAL ADMINISTRATORS WILL FACE INCLUDE:

Political pressure: Limited tenure makes it hard for administrators to take on challenges with no clear end point and fickle short-term results, so we must invest in the next generation of leaders to sustain change. "Tough on crime" arguments can stifle progress, so we must proactively address them with data and transparency.

Limited human capital: Balancing this work while managing fire-drills and day-to-day administrative duties can be daunting, especially with staffing shortages. We must streamline the work of our team—eliminating tasks that do not drive safety—provide people with with the space they need to assist in managing daily operations and supporting the envisioned culture shift.

Turnover: Maintaining positive relationships and institutional knowledge is difficult with high staff turnover. By prioritizing culture change and employing the tenets of Holistic Safety, we can proactively create conditions that promote staff retention.

Funding: Budgetary constraints require great creativity to overcome. However, many steps do not incur added cost. As Richard Van Wickler, board member of the Law Enforcement Action Partnership and retired Superintendent of Cheshire County in New Hampshire, said, "We may not have adequate resources, but we can always have the right attitude. That [in] itself can improve lives." When funding is needed, we should consider ways to reallocate existing funding to fully invest in staff and people incarcerated and effectively partner with community organizations who are better equipped to address identified needs.

Time: Change takes time and progress can be incremental and inconsistent. Still, we can maintain near-term motivation and momentum by prioritizing small-scale pilots to get results quickly. It is also crucial to use data and individual storytelling to illuminate the impacts of changes before they are widely observed.

Complexity of multi-stakeholder engagement: At the heart of this work are staff and people incarcerated. Although they share many of the same sources of harm and healing, the deeply ingrained mindset of "us vs. them" may be the toughest to budge. We must lead by finding common ground ourselves with others.

THE JOURNEY TOWARD HOLISTIC SAFETY WILL NOT BE EASY.

Systems are stabilizing forces that do not welcome change. This is not as simple as creating a program, shifting a policy, or changing a paint color. Systems-level change requires a fundamental shift in how everyone thinks about jails and prisons and the people in them. When it comes to changing centuries-old mental models, there are no quick fixes, no finite list of boxes we can check off. Progress will not be linear.

Correctional administrators must get buy-in from divergent stakeholders and weather criticism along the way. As Chief Deputy Kevin Fisher-Paulson of San Francisco County jail puts it, "You can't just solve the person incarcerated; you can't just solve the deputy; you can't just solve the program coordinator; you have to work on the entire ecosystem. Everyone is under extreme pressure, and when there is extreme pressure, people blame each other." Therefore, we must be prepared for difficult days if we are to disrupt the status quo.

In the visitation work with the Cook County jail, the multi-agency leadership team faced resistance on various fronts. Jail security staff were not initially supportive as they made clear in our early meetings. Also, an investigative reporter reached out to us planning to tell an unfavorable story about our museum-based pilot. In both cases, we diffused tension by genuinely hearing concerns and responding with research, data, and stories on the value of positive family connection. However, these situations are difficult and there is no blueprint to managing every scenario.

Current and former correctional administrators must rise above the tension and keep the collective of stakeholders focused on our common goals, not on demonizing each other.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

ENSURING SAFETY IN AMERICA'S JAILS AND PRISONS REQUIRES AN APPROACH THAT ADDRESSES POLICY CHANGE.

The following section includes policy recommendations on:

- Reducing physical isolation for people incarcerated.
- Improving the emotional wellness of people incarcerated in correctional systems.
- Improving the emotional wellness of staff working within correctional systems.
- Improving the us vs them culture that exists between staff and people incarcerated within correctional systems.

HOLISTIC SAFETY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOUR KEY POLICY ISSUE AREAS

1. **Reduce physical isolation for people incarcerated.** The goal for every correctional administrator should be to allow more hours out of cell than in cell for people housed in areas outside of restrictive housing, to allow several hours out of cell for people housed in restrictive housing and to work collaboratively with their staff and people incarcerated to prioritize physical and psychological safety as they do so.

Explanation: To truly support the health and safety of staff and people incarcerated, we must shift the primary practice of the correctional system from isolation to connection. Research has shown that isolation and disconnection from others results in increased anxiety, depression and aggression.[41,42] As a result of the pandemic and staffing challenges, many facilities have reverted to keeping people locked in cells for most of the day. While this may seem like a viable strategy to maintain safety, it actually compromises safety by increasing the likelihood that the person behind the cell door has exhausted internal resources to manage rising anxiety and aggression. By the time the cell door finally opens, both people on opposing sides of the door have been set up for failure. Thus, the practice of keeping people locked in a cell decreases health and safety for staff and people incarcerated. With this understanding, correctional administrators must work with their staff and people incarcerated in the system to get people out of their cells.

It is important that we begin this work with the fundamental understanding that it is the practice of locking people in cells that creates the most significant risk to the safety of staff, people incarcerated and the public. We must also understand that because we have locked people in cells for so long, people have developed behaviors that are unsafe. Therefore, correctional administrators should not simply open every cell door today. Instead, they must significantly increase resources, supports and opportunities that focus on healing and develop plans with their staff and people incarcerated to safely increase the amount of time people get out of their cells, and restrictive housing cannot be an exception to this practice. Restrictive housing, administrative segregation, or disciplinary segregation is the designated housing for people who have broken institutional rules and who system leaders feel cannot be safely housed in the general population of the correctional system without significant risk of them causing harm or being harmed. To effectively shift towards a holistically safe correctional system, facility leaders must be intentional about creating a restrictive housing environment that prioritizes accountability and healing and not punishment.

2. **Improve the emotional wellness of people incarcerated in correctional systems.** Correctional administrators must work collaboratively with people incarcerated in their facilities to increase and improve mental wellness resources and expand the support system for people incarcerated.

Explanation: Being confined in a correctional institution is one of the most isolating experiences a person can endure. The number of people incarcerated with serious emotional and mental needs is increasing. Research shows that 98%[27] of women and 99%[16] of men entering correctional institutions have been exposed to at least of one traumatic event in their lifetime, yet resources within these systems are often limited to the people with the highest mental health and medical needs. Although untreated trauma is at the root of many problems that arise in correctional institutions, it is rare for trauma support services to be rendered broadly, consistently, and effectively to individuals confined in a correctional institution. Because approximately 95% of people incarcerated return to their communities, it is a moral and public safety imperative for system leaders to work meaningfully to improve the emotional well-being of all individuals in jails and prisons.

3. **Improve the emotional wellness of staff working within correctional systems.** Correctional administrators must work collaboratively with sworn and civilian staff working within their facilities to increase and improve mental wellness resources and expand the support system for staff.

Explanation: Working in corrections is one of the most isolating professions in the US. With staffing shortages, many sworn and civilian employees are working with smaller numbers of colleagues in the immediate area. And because so much of the job is indescribable to people who haven't witnessed it firsthand, staff often isolate themselves from family and friends.

Additionally, the default us vs. them culture of corrections creates a relationship chasm between staff and people incarcerated that often prevents members of both groups from recognizing their common humanity and shared responsibility to work together to create safer and healthier working and living environments. For these reasons, correctional administrators must invest in comprehensive emotional wellness resources for all staff, from the point of hire through retirement.

4. **Improve the us vs them culture that exists between staff and people incarcerated within correctional systems.** Correctional administrators must create authentic opportunities for frontline staff and people incarcerated to humanize each other and to be humanized.

Explanation: Traditional correctional training, policies and culture emphasize an us vs them culture within facilities where staff and people incarcerated are socialized to believe that the other group is the enemy. This indoctrination is the foundation for acts of dehumanization that erode safety for everyone. When we view another person as the enemy and do not link human qualities to them, it becomes less difficult to cause harm to them. The reverse is also true. When we view another person as a part of our community and assign real human qualities to them that explain how every person can act in good and bad ways and how we have the power to influence those actions, we are more likely to engage with each other in positive ways.

SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EACH ISSUE AREA

Note: Essential recommendations are critical to Holistic Safety. Important recommendations should be taken under consideration and implemented when possible.

REDUCE PHYSICAL ISOLATION FOR PEOPLE INCARCERATED

1. People housed in the general population within a facility should have access to more time out of cell than in cell daily (Essential).

2. People housed in restrictive housing should receive as many hours out of cell as possible each day with the goal of achieving several hours out of cell daily (Essential).

3. Every person incarcerated, including people housed in restrictive housing, should have daily scheduled access to outdoor recreational activities to increase exposure to sunlight and fresh air (Important). Research has shown that exposure to sunlight helps to keep people calm and improve their mood by increasing serotonin levels.[43] Thus, it is important that staff understand how access to outdoor activities supports safe operations.

4. Administrators should explore alternatives to restrictive housing, such as a temporary loss of privileges, restorative justice sessions, and behavioral improvement plans to ensure the behavior is addressed in the least restrictive means (Essential).

5. Policies and procedures for out-of-cell time in general population and restrictive housing should be developed jointly with frontline security and civilian staff, and people incarcerated (Essential).

6. The root cause(s) of an individual's rule-breaking behavior should be identified before or immediately after placement into restrictive housing to ensure appropriate housing, treatment, programming, or resources are available (Essential).

7. A multidisciplinary behavioral improvement plan should be developed for every person housed in restrictive housing (Essential). It keeps key stakeholders involved in the person's plan for healing, safety, and return to a lesser restrictive setting. It also presents an opportunity for facility administrators to address the tendency for some people to use restrictive housing as a means of protection and solitude that other areas of the facility are not perceived to offer. In these instances, the leadership team can work with the individual to understand the needs that are believed to be met through restrictive housing and identify alternative placements and resources that can meet the person's needs. For example, when a person has legitimate concerns about their safety in the facility, alternative housing units with a smaller number of people incarcerated within it or an alternative facility may be viable options.

8. Every person placed in restrictive housing should have access to medical and mental health care and program services (Essential). Enhanced programming, such as educational and skill-building programs, may be essential to promote healing, and tablets may be an effective tool.

9. Every person housed in general population and restrictive housing should be allowed to regularly engage in social interactions with other people incarcerated, correctional staff, behavioral health staff, peer mentors from the community, community organizations, and spiritual leaders (Essential).

10. Frequent and regular interviews and multidisciplinary reviews with people in restrictive housing should be conducted to identify when they can be safely transitioned to less restrictive units, even before their assigned day of removal (Essential).

11. Every person in restrictive housing should be provided with a target date they will be removed with completion of the multidisciplinary behavior improvement plan (Important). Indefinite or unknown release dates exacerbate hopelessness, desperation, and mental health breakdowns, which can increase violent or disturbing behavior.

12. Individuals should not be released from restrictive housing to the public, particularly without connection to healing resources and supports (Essential).

IMPROVE THE EMOTIONAL WELLNESS OF PEOPLE INCARCERATED

1. Develop a collaborative approach where facility administrators and a group of people currently and/or formerly incarcerated meaningfully engage and work together to specifically address the wellness and safety of people incarcerated in the system (Essential).

2. Improve communication between people incarcerated and facility administrators (Essential).

    a. Develop a robust communication plan that includes regular opportunities for engagement with people incarcerated, allowing messaging to come directly from the administrator to people incarcerated and from the people incarcerated to the administrator (Essential).

    b. Ask people incarcerated what they want and need to be emotionally healthier and safer (Essential).

    c. Administrators should provide a clear explanation why they are asking for feedback and what they intend to do with the information shared (Important).

    d. Establish communication channels with all people incarcerated in their system that allow them to remain anonymous (Important). This may include comment cards with drop boxes located throughout the facility or an anonymous culture survey administered by a third party.

e. Develop a plan for tracking concerns and recommendations and the follow up actions taken in response to those concerns and recommendations (Essential). Action is critical, but communication with people incarcerated about those actions is equally important.

3. Increase mental wellness resources for all people incarcerated (Essential).

   a. Implement a variety of mental health resources for all people incarcerated based on the needs they identified (Essential). Resources should include initial and ongoing screening and assessment for diagnosed mental health needs, general wellness programs focused on reducing the impact of trauma related to incarceration and effective engagement with people exposed to trauma, and crisis interventions.

   b. Establish a system that encourages and allows for peer support programs and regular positive engagement with individuals currently and formerly incarcerated (Essential).

   c. Develop a plan to provide mental wellness programming during times of crisis, such as pandemics, natural disasters, and staffing challenges (Essential). These resources are critical to supporting the institution's overall health and safety.

Expand the support system for people incarcerated (Essential).

   a. Develop a family engagement program that centers healing for the family unit, inclusive of:

      - Healing-centered contact visitation (Essential);
      - Access to family engagement through telephone, written and electronic communication (Essential);
      - Family-centered reintegration planning (Important); and
      - Educational opportunities for families of people incarcerated to understand the experiences of people incarcerated, their own experiences with having a loved one incarcerated, and the supports that will be important to seek out for themselves and to provide to their incarcerated loved one while incarcerated and upon release (Important).

   b. Encourage and allow correctional staff, community members, organizations, and businesses to provide programming, networking, skill development and strengthening, and employment preparation in the facility with the intention of creating normative experiences that prepare people for successful integration into communities (Essential). This should include programming provided by people formerly incarcerated.

c. Facilitate opportunities for people incarcerated to build community amongst each other through positive social activities (Essential).

d. Create policies and procedures that articulate how staff should engage positively with people incarcerated and reinforce this through an incentive program that highlights staff exhibiting desired behaviors (Essential).

IMPROVE THE EMOTIONAL WELLNESS OF STAFF

1. Develop a collaborative approach, where facility administrators and a group of sworn and civilian staff work together to specifically address employee wellness (Essential).

2. Place individuals with relevant background(s) and firsthand experience(s) into employee wellness leadership positions (Important). Ideally, qualified individuals who have risen through the ranks and possess a deep understanding of personal and professional challenges faced by staff should be selected.

3. Improve communication between all levels of staff—from frontline employees to the administration—by shifting from top down to multi-directional communication strategies (Essential).

    a. Develop a robust communication plan that includes regular opportunities for engagement with all levels of sworn and civilian staff and union leadership, allowing messaging to come directly from the administrator to staff and from the staff to the administrator (Essential).

    b. Ask staff what they want and need to be emotionally healthier and safer (Essential).

    c. Administrators should provide a clear explanation why they are asking for feedback and what they intend to do with the information shared (Important).

    d. Administrators should establish communication channels with all sworn and civilian staff that allow them to remain anonymous (Important). This may include comment cards with drop boxes located throughout the facility or an anonymous culture survey administered by a third party.

    e. Develop a plan for tracking concerns and recommendations from staff and the follow-up actions taken in response to these recommendations and concerns (Essential). Action is critical, but communication with staff about the action is equally important.

4. Increase mental wellness resources for all staff (Essential).

    a. Implement a variety of mental health resources for all staff based on the needs they identified that includes training on emotional wellness, training on effective engagement with people exposed to trauma, proactive mental health support, peer support, crisis interventions, healing or relaxation rooms, and faith based or chaplaincy programs (Essential).

b. Ensure emotionally supportive resources are offered to the staff person throughout the disciplinary process and make those resources separate and distinct from the disciplinary process (Essential).

c. Employ a community engagement strategy that enlists the assistance of local businesses and educational institutions to offer free or discounted services to staff (Important).

5. Expand the support system for staff (Essential).

a. Implement education and training opportunities for families of staff to understand the nature of the correctional environment, the potential impact that working in corrections can have on staff, ways families can be supportive of their loved ones and ways families can support their own mental wellness (Essential). Family training should occur during preservice and be followed with at least annual offerings.

b. Facilitate opportunities for staff to build community amongst each other through positive social activities while both on-duty and off-duty (Essential). By increasing, encouraging, and/or sponsoring opportunities for staff to engage with each other in positive activities, facility administrators acknowledge the importance of positive social support.

c. Offer pre-retirement planning to all sworn and civilian staff (Essential).

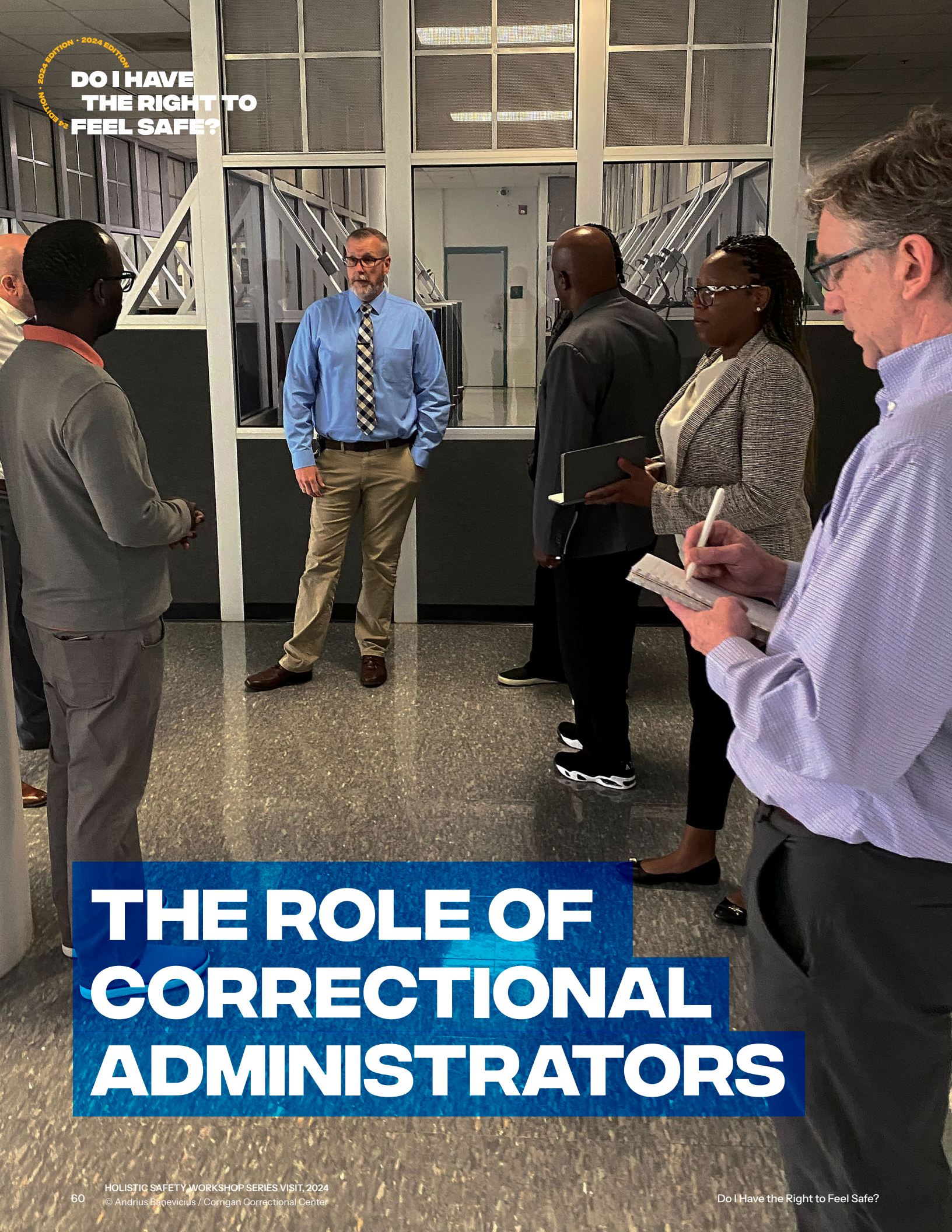
d. Develop a plan and provide opportunities for retired staff to receive counseling and/or to keep them engaged with each other (Important).

e. Develop a volunteer mentorship program coupling active staff with retired staff who align with the organization's mission (Important). Such a system should entail ongoing peer-to-peer mentorship to foster a greater understanding of the job's expectations, teaching effective and healthy ways to manage challenges that arise, and learning to strengthen positive relationships.

IMPROVE THE US VS THEM CULTURE BETWEEN STAFF AND PEOPLE INCARCERATED

1. Implement policies that allow staff and people incarcerated to work together to address the safety and wellness of both groups (Essential).
2. Develop policies that allow and encourage staff to engage with people incarcerated as mentors (Essential).
3. Develop an internal and external communication plan that highlights positive activities by staff and people incarcerated (Essential).
4. Establish policies that allow formerly incarcerated individuals to provide programming for staff and people incarcerated (Essential).
5. Develop training protocols that allow currently and/or formerly incarcerated individuals to provide instruction during preservice and inservice training to promote safe and healthy interactions between staff and people incarcerated (Essential).
6. Ensure all policies, procedures, training and communications include person-first language when referencing people incarcerated and staff (Essential).

> *"The policy recommendations in this document, crafted through the Holistic Safety framework, provide a tangible roadmap to implementing achievable, yet transformational changes to correctional facilities nationwide. Through these key target areas of emotional wellness, reducing isolation, and building bridges between staff and individuals incarcerated, correctional systems have the opportunity, and the obligation, to make lasting improvements to the experiences of those who live and work in correctional systems."*
>
> **NICHOLAS J. DEML**
> Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Corrections



THE ROLE OF CORRECTIONAL ADMINISTRATORS

HOLISTIC SAFETY WORKSHOP SERIES VISIT, 2024
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CORRECTIONAL ADMINISTRATORS HAVE A UNIQUE PLATFORM TO DRIVE HOLISTIC SAFETY.

Current and former correctional administrators have a unique vantage point to see the full tapestry of institutions—not only the pervasiveness of harm but also the pockets of healing. Administrators must use perspective AND platform to enact policy changes that center Holistic Safety and thereby change the institutional culture. Change cannot happen on the floor without buy-in from the top.

The first step in this journey is recognizing that administrators share responsibility for the current culture of control and prevalence of trauma. Taking responsibility is difficult because it requires humility, but it is also empowering. If we accept that we have contributed to the harms that exist in the institution, we also accept that we can improve the situation.

Next, we must articulate a vision of hope that encourages staff, people incarcerated, their families, survivors of crime, and other key stakeholders—including lawmakers, policymakers, and funders—to see beyond the current circumstances and to take ownership of the power that they have to change and to inspire change. By articulating our vision, everyone knows what to expect and can picture the role they can play in support.

I respect you. Our relationship can go up or down, either I can let you down or you can let me down. But we are starting from a place of respect."

ELAINE LORD
Retired Superintendent of Bedford Hills Correctional in New York

This shift is not going to happen on the floor if correctional leaders do not believe it. People often do things wrong in practice that they would never get wrong on a quiz. That is the difference between training and culture. Training means nothing if you do not have a culture that manages it."

RICHARD VAN WICKLER
Retired Superintendent of Cheshire County in New Hampshire and current board member of the Law Enforcement Action Partnership.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

NEW GRADUATE FROM THE CCSO MENTAL HEALTH TRANSITION CENTER

HOLISTIC SAFETY CANNOT WAIT: OUR COLLECTIVE CHALLENGE.

For every day that goes by without transformational change, correctional staff, people incarcerated, and our external community members will continue to suffer from harm, violence, and trauma.

We all have a role in realizing Holistic Safety, in creating the conditions for all community members—inside and outside the correctional walls—to be and feel protected, resilient, and engaged. Correctional administrators can lead this charge, but only if they work alongside people with lived experience of the correctional system.

While there is no one-size-fits-all operational plan for Holistic Safety, there are some immediate actions we can take, irrespective of budget, as we begin to lay the groundwork in our respective jurisdictions.

CORRECTIONAL ADMINISTRATORS

1. Embrace the discomfort and risk that comes with system-change.
2. Be visible inside and outside the walls so you can genuinely engage and support the communities you serve.
3. Role model the changes you hope to see, starting with positively engaging people with lived experience of your correctional system.
4. Engage people with lived experience of your correctional system to assist with changing training, policy, and procedure in a way that bolsters their health, connectedness, value, trust, and personal agency.
5. Build a diverse coalition of supporters to ensure change is adopted and sustained.

CORRECTIONAL STAFF, UNION LEADERS AND PEOPLE CURRENTLY AND FORMERLY INCARCERATED

1. Acknowledge your shared harms as well as your core disagreements.
2. Commit to uniting with people you disagree with to work toward a shared vision of Holistic Safety.
3. Advocate for the training, policies, procedures, and resources you need to be and feel safe.
4. Utilize—and encourage the use of—available resources, particularly those that help address trauma.

EVERYONE

1. Acknowledge the trauma that exists in correctional institutions and our role in maintaining the status quo.
2. Challenge our biases and assumptions about each other and what it means to be safe.
3. Center—and increase investment in—the voices and leadership of people with lived experience.
4. Recognize the different perspectives in this work, while uniting in our shared goal for Holistic Safety.

HOLISTIC SAFETY CANNOT BE ACHIEVED ALONE. WE MUST ENGAGE PEOPLE DIRECTLY IMPACTED BY THE SYSTEM.

The ills of the correctional system, full criminal legal system, and other interconnected systems do not start and end with the correctional facility. It is unfair—and impossible—for correctional administrators to do this work alone. Speaking as a former correctional administrator, many of us who try, burn ourselves out attempting to keep up with the demand.

The good news is there is a community of people who already have the knowledge, skills, capacity, and drive to ease the burden on correctional administrators and help lead the journey toward Holistic Safety: **People with lived experience of the correctional system.**

This group includes the individuals closest to the harms of incarceration, people incarcerated and correctional staff. Outside the correctional walls, this includes people formerly incarcerated, survivors of crime, families of people incarcerated and correctional staff, community organizations in areas devastated by incarceration, correctional unions, justice advocates, and all others hurt by the status quo.

For too long, these groups have only been on the edge of discussions on reform, cast aside not only by correctional administrators but also by other powerful stakeholders like lawmakers, policymakers, and funders. As Khalil Cumberbatch, Director of Engagement and Partnerships for the Council on Criminal Justicee, notes, this would be surprising in any other field. “You absolutely cannot discuss LGBTQ rights without LGBTQ people or reproductive rights without women. And you cannot discuss criminal legal reform without people who are closest to the problem, including people formerly incarcerated, and even staff who walk the same halls,” he said.

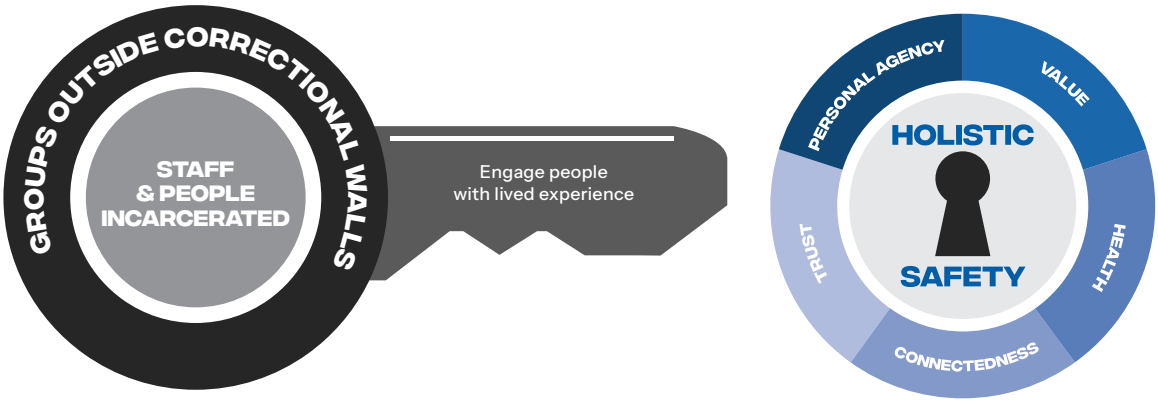
To be clear, people with lived experience of the correctional system have always been engaged and effective in fighting to make institutions safer. Unfortunately, they often have had to work against, not with, the system.

HOLISTIC SAFETY WORKSHOP SERIES VISIT, 2024/CHESHIRE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION, CT
© Joshua Muketha/Chicago Beyond

ENGAGING PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM IS KEY TO UNLOCKING HOLISTIC SAFETY.

Holistic Safety requires

- **Value:** Recognizing the expertise of people with lived experience of jails and prisons
- **Health:** Giving people what they need to be well enough to engage in these efforts
- **Connectedness:** Bringing together all these groups, not just one or two
- **Trust:** Listening and sharing visibility and power in decision-making
- **Personal Agency:** Letting people play key roles in putting their ideas into action



INCLUDES

- People formerly incarcerated
- Families impacted by incarceration,
- Survivors of crime
- Community organizations in areas most impacted by incarceration, and
- Others impacted by incarceration

CELIA COLÓN

ENGAGING PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE MAKES COMMUNITIES SAFER IN MANY WAYS

Shared responsibility: "When people own things, they tend to take care of them better," explained Sharon White-Harrigan, Executive Director of the Women's Community Justice Association. When correctional administrators give people with lived experience a larger role in how the institution is run, they become invested in its improvement and help operations run under less strain.

Mutual respect: "When we let people incarcerated partner with administration, their relationships with staff improved," explained Vivian Nixon, Writer in Residence at The Square One Project and the former Executive Director of College and Community Fellowship. Working together lets groups see the best in each other, increasing mutual respect and decreasing tensions.

More effective policies: "People with lived experience can tell us what it is like to go through the system, where gaps are, and how things we do will impact others," attested Elias Diggins, Sheriff of Denver County. Including people closest to the problems gets leaders closer to the solutions.

Practices following policies: "If you create policy without line staff, they are put in positions where they have to implement rules they do not believe in or cannot explain," claimed Richard Van Wickler of the Law Enforcement Action Partnership. Engaging people with lived experience helps move policies from words into actions.

Individualized resources: "We do not need evidence-based studies to tell us what people need to be well. We just need to ask people themselves," said Celia Colón, founder and CEO of Giving Others Dreams. Nobody knows what a person needs to be safe better than the person themself—if they are given what they need, safety follows.

DO I HAVE THE RIGHT TO FEEL SAFE?

HOLISTIC SAFETY WORKSHOP SERIES VISIT, 2024
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Engagement can take many forms, such as...

Formal conversations through town halls, advisory boards, focus groups, union meetings, and in-service training where people can raise concerns and be asked for input in a public forum that creates accountability.

Informal conversations during rounds, roll call, programming, recreation, shift changes, mealtime, and open-door time where people can get more authentic and dedicated attention.

Anonymous methods like suggestion boxes, surveys, and call lines where people feel like their ideas can be heard without judgment or retribution.

However, as correctional administrators, we must keep some things in mind to best engage people with lived experience:

- **A seat at the table is not enough:** Listening is important, yet insufficient without action. The information and recommendations provided by people with lived experience of the correctional system must be used to shift policies and practices. Not all people will want a seat at the table: Each person has unique experience with this system. Some people do not believe change is enough. Some people are still processing their pain. In providing opportunities to collaborate, we must respect a person's decision if they do not want to participate.
- **Not all people will be ready to help right away:** It may be unrealistic to expect people suffering from significant trauma to successfully engage in sensitive discussions without preparation and ongoing support. If someone has the ability and drive to help, we must invest in them so they can.
- **Security decisions are not out of bounds:** Consulting people incarcerated and staff on security policies (e.g., searches and discipline) is critical, because every policy has the potential to cause harm and diminish safety. To be clear, this does not mean all security details must be discussed with everyone—some things will have to stay private—but collaboration can help improve certain policies.
- **People who have experienced the most difficulty may give the best input:** It is important to not only engage people with pristine records. Both people incarcerated and staff who have had trouble should be consulted as they can provide valuable insight into where the current system is failing.

- **Groups with lived experience of jails and prisons are not monoliths:** It is important that representation across groups is diverse, such as across different levels of incarceration or staff assignments. It is also important to recognize that groups can overlap. For example, many people incarcerated and staff are also survivors of crime.
- **The conversations may be difficult:** We must be prepared for difficult dialogue and commit to authentically hearing people, understanding their pain, and identifying pathways to healing. "When people talk about their harms, they are talking about their everyday lives. Correctional leaders must be ready to hear some agitation, some things that may not be civil," confirms Willette Benford, Senior Advisor, Office of MK Pritzker.

Many correctional administrators have started to prioritize engaging people with lived experience of jails and prisons.

The Cook County visitation program would not have been successful without engaging people with lived experience of the system. The multi-agency leadership team (including leaders from Chicago Beyond, the Cook County Sheriff's Office, Chicago Children's Museum, and the Center for Childhood Resilience) worked closely with key stakeholder groups to identify what they needed to feel safe in this new model.

- By talking with young adults whose parents had been incarcerated, Chicago Beyond pinpointed harmful parts of the visitation process. The young adults' insights validated our belief that visitation models based on Holistic Safety could lead to stronger family bonds.
- After correctional staff voiced concern on engaging potentially agitated participants, the leadership team worked with them to streamline their responsibilities to only support people incarcerated (with program staff taking on the support of participating families) and put in place resources—like transport cars and private de-escalation rooms—in case anyone needed to be removed from the space.
- When one father shared that he feared having to tell his child he was incarcerated during the visit, the leadership team partnered with a community mental health provider to facilitate parenting classes and guided telephone calls that helped all the fathers develop the skills they needed to deliver sensitive news.
- Chicago Children's Museum used their unique expertise to help build child-friendly visitation rooms within the museum and the jail.
- All groups helped develop new, trauma-informed visitation policies, procedures, and training.
- After the pilots, we made sure to re-engage the groups to get feedback. One thing that we wished we did better was seek insights from survivors of crime to better enrich the experience, though we recognize the possibility that many individuals we engaged could have been survivors themselves.

SPOTLIGHT STORY →

REDUCING INTERPERSONAL ISOLATION IN ACTION: BARRIERS TO BRIDGES PROGRAM

WRITTEN BY

Simon Greer and Corey Post of One Voice United

BARRIERS TO BRIDGES PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Our nation's system of incarceration, since the beginning, has been rooted in a model where the two largest stakeholders, people confined and people working inside facilities, have been seen only as adversaries resulting in damaging and lasting ways. This culture, and the harmful patterns and habits that have ensued are deeply ingrained in institutions across the nation and perpetuated daily. Seeking to bridge this gap, JustLeadershipUSA (JLUSA) and One Voice United (OVU) partnered to design a multi-day convening with a small cohort of correctional staff labor leaders and formerly incarcerated reform leaders to partake in a confidential exploration of the trauma, tragedy, racial inequity and toxic culture in corrections and together contemplate potential pathways for creating a better system. From conceptualization, the convening was curated in a way that allowed for trust, value, and connectedness and unearthed a model of partnership across differences that is far from the norm in today's culture.

MODEL

A thoughtful, patient, and strategic planning process was essential to making this program a success. It started with recruitment efforts and continued until the post retreat evaluation was complete. We engaged two co-hosts, one a leader who was formerly incarcerated and one a union leader and former correctional officer, who were each trusted in their sectors and who trusted each other. We asked each of them to lead the process of inviting their own constituency, leaders they know, and to conduct targeted outreach to secure a thoughtful group of people from each of their constituencies who would be willing to join this effort and understand the expectations. In the recruitment of participants, we acknowledged the potential risks and difficulties of bringing together individuals who have low levels of trust, and negative past experiences, and therefore may not be willing to speak their truth and be open to hearing the perspective of others. We worked together to craft recruitment language that clearly articulated the convening purpose and expectations of participants.

We were committed to creating a confidential, off-the-record environment, where participants would feel comfortable speaking freely without fear of public scrutiny or political pressure. As such, all participants agreed to keep conversations confidential and any public reference to our convening would not reveal participant identities and would not attribute quotes to specific people. We were also committed to keeping the group size small enough to feel intimate yet large enough to reflect a diversity of perspectives. We also were deliberate about ensuring that this gathering would be facilitated in a way that served the interests of both co-hosting organizations, while understanding the unique experiences and needs of these two constituency groups that are rarely, if ever, brought together. To address this concern, we chose to have the retreat co-facilitated by two trusted allies who have worked closely with both organizations for several years and have extensive leadership and facilitation experience, Dr. Nneka Jones Tapia and Simon Greer. Once participants were confirmed by the hosts, we fielded a pre-convening survey for all participants to understand their experiences, their hopes for the future, and their goals/intentions for participating in the program. We then facilitated pre-convening introductory interviews with each participant, to inform the agenda design process, cultivate openness among participants, reconfirm the goals and expectations, and to understand participants' hopes and fears for attending.

The program elements were carefully curated to allow participants to bring their whole selves to the convening and maximize the unique opportunity. The agenda design was based on surveys and interview learnings. A venue was selected that was remote, private, retreat-like and not affiliated with either of the hosts, their organizations or sectors. The remote location offered ample nature and open space and was also small enough to feel intimate, still offering enough space to have various meeting rooms and meal settings so we weren't "stuck in a conference room" the whole time. As one participant said, "The space had to be outside of a conference room, a place that provided

opportunity for everyone to explore the outdoor space but could still feel connected as a group; a place that provided peace and quiet and also allowed for group activity and community building."

The agenda started with relationship building activities so that participants could connect on a human level by exploring values and stories as well as engaging in activities and shared experiences before getting labeled as one "side" or another and before digging into the more difficult and divisive work. We didn't avoid the hard stuff, but we timed it right. We recognized that real bridging work must include engaging with the hardest topics and not just the lowest common denominator. Foreshadowing early for the group what these topics were and when they would come up was key. And, signaling to the group that we must build our common ground and trust before going there was also good practice. We also kept people in motion. By moving people in and out of working in pairs, in small groups, with different configuration of people and having them walk outside, build with their hands and shifting dynamics and energy we created the possibility of individuals, and the full group, literally moving through tension and allowing places they might feel stuck to shift and move as well. Throughout the convening we incorporated opportunities for self-care and healing, space for deeper introspection, and time to have fun together in between the heavier sessions.

IMPACT

By the end of the convening, the impact was palpable and spanned a continuum from identifying common ground and collaborating to developing deep connections and committing to transforming the correctional system as a collective.

Although there is a general perception that the relationship between the two most impacted stakeholders in the correctional system, people formerly incarcerated and correctional professionals, is adversarial, we found that the two groups have much more in common, and that it is the system, and its culture, that are responsible for pitting one group against the other. The pre-convening survey responses illuminated 5 key priority areas that everyone, from both sides, agreed needed attention and are evidence that the experience, health, and well-being of people incarcerated or working within correctional facilities are inextricably linked.

- Preparing people for successful return to community
- Staff health and wellness resources
- Staff training
- Programming and education during incarceration
- Mental health services and treatment for people incarcerated

Great potential developed from building relationships and creating more opportunities for collaboration among these two constituencies. The group is committed to syndicating the Barriers to Bridges narrative broadly through a white paper and video to inspire stakeholder participation and public support of the creation of a unique Barriers to Bridges model for correctional systems change. And there is a plan for a follow-up with another in-person convening to broaden stakeholder engagement and grow the movement. The group expressed a shared commitment to create change together and is willing to collectively take a hard look at restrictive housing in this country.

"This convening made me realize the importance of fully listening to people, to other perspectives, even if your perspective is different and you may not agree. There is power in people and in difficult conversations, especially when united by a common cause, even if from different ends of the experience spectrum." Barriers to Bridges participant.

CONCLUSION

A CLOSING LETTER FROM HOLISTIC SAFETY PARTNERS

FATHER HOLDING CHILD'S HAND

What started out as chance encounters led to an unlikely coalition representing the voices of people most impacted by correctional systems—people currently and formerly incarcerated, current and former correctional staff and union leaders, and current and former correctional administrators.

Each of us had a different pathway to this present moment, where we recognize the correctional system is failing all of us. Those pathways led us towards a calling to be instrumental in changing the conditions that exist within jails and prisons. Each of us is leading critical change in our separate organizations, and we come together to be transformative.

Together, we are committed to supporting each other to strengthen our respective communities, because we understand that to shift systems, we need the power of the collective. We reach across dividing lines to heal each other with the foundation of truth and love.

Together, we are working to build one community. We understand that the issues that impact one group, impact the entire group, and we work to resolve them together.

Together, we are committed to helping jails and prisons shift from systems that punish to systems that support people to fulfill their responsibilities in our social network. We understand that a history of pushing people out into the margins of society, void of community and access to resources to be well, pushes people to act in ways that hinder the safety of all of us. Together, we must create a system that pulls each of us into the social fabric, where we can have access to the resources and opportunities that allow all of us to be and feel protected, resilient, and engaged. That is Holistic Safety. Together, we can achieve it.

Let us go forward together.

CHICAGO BEYOND **JUSTLEADERSHIP USA** **ONE VOICE UNITED**

GLOSSARY

Change management: A systematic approach to supporting involved stakeholders through the transition to new policies, procedures, practices, and cultures (from us vs. them to a more collaborative relationship).

Community impacted by incarceration: Everyone in our society, including people currently and formerly incarcerated, correctional staff, their families, survivors of crime, advocates, unions, their families, and their communities.

Community inside correctional walls: Everyone who is confined by or works inside correctional institutions, primarily people incarcerated and staff.

Community organization: A local organization aimed at improving the health, well-being, and functioning of their community.

Community outside correctional walls: Everyone who consistently is not inside correctional institutions, including the general public as well as people with indirect association to incarceration like survivors of crime, the families of people incarcerated and correctional staff, people formerly incarcerated, and more.

Connectedness: The concept that we are all intrinsically bound as human beings and we are served best when our ties are positive and strong.

Correctional administrators: Senior leaders who oversee individual correctional institutions or entire correctional systems (e.g., sheriffs, wardens, directors, commissioners of corrections, superintendents).

Correctional institutions: Jails, prisons, juvenile centers, and detention centers. For the purpose of this piece, the focus is on adult jails and prisons.

Correctional staff: People who work within corrections including correctional officers as well as program staff, healthcare staff, and more.

The criminal legal system: The collective institutions—law enforcement, adjudication, and corrections—through which people accused and convicted of crimes are managed.

Harm: Anything that impairs or adversely affects the safety (e.g., physical, emotional, psychological) of an individual.

Holistic Safety: Creating the conditions for all community members—inside and outside of correctional walls—to be and feel protected, resilient, and engaged.

Decarceration: Reducing the number of people held in custody or custodial supervision.

Deterrence: Theory that incarceration reduces crime by making individuals less likely to commit crime due to fear of punishment.

Healing: Identifying and addressing toxicity developed from physical, emotional, social, and structural harm.

Health: The physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing we need to thrive, not just be injury-free.

Incapacitation: Theory that incarceration reduces crime by removing the people who commit crimes from the general population.

Lived experience: Knowledge about the world gained through firsthand involvement in certain events. In the context of this work, we look at lived experience with incarceration and/or the criminal legal system.

Trauma: Lingering effects of a harmful or life-threatening event that is experienced or witnessed by a person.

Trust: Our earned—not blind—belief in people to not only fulfill their responsibilities but to also act in a manner beneficial to themselves and others.

People incarcerated: People who are confined within correctional institutions, including individuals detained pre-trial and individuals convicted of crimes.

Personal agency: Our capacity to determine our own future, from making day-to-day choices to identifying and accessing the resources we need.

Rehabilitation: Theory that incarceration reduces crime by changing the behavior of individuals who commit crimes.

Retribution: Theory that incarceration is meant to give survivors of crime and the general public the satisfaction that individuals who commit crimes are dealt with commensurately.

Segregation: The confinement of people incarcerated in special units separate from the general population within the correctional institution; this is often used as a disciplinary measure.

Restorative justice: A system of criminal justice which focuses on the rehabilitation of individuals through reconciliation with victims and the community at large.

Value: The idea that we must respect and invest in our shared humanity and individual strengths.

Visitation: Processes through which families, friends, and other parties can visit a person who is incarcerated inside a correctional institution.

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