

11 Smart Decarceration

A Multi-Prong Approach to Healing With the Incarcerated

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An Introduction of Mass Incarceration

The American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare in 2009 unveiled 12 Grand Challenges for the field to address thus prompting social work researchers and practitioners to act. In recent years, the American Academy has added a 13th Grand Challenge, “eliminate racism”. As will be discussed throughout this chapter, the United States foundation was predicated on violence and racist discriminatory practices and policies. The 13 Grand Challenges requires an examination of a host of social problems in need of attention. This effort encourages collaboration at all levels to seek to resolve the identified challenges through research. Identified as one of the Grand Challenges, Smart Decarceration addresses the social justice crisis that has manifested from mass incarceration. The process in moving towards Smart Decarceration is guided by specific outcomes, which include reducing the incarcerated population and addressing racial, economic, and behavior disparities among system-involved individuals while also enhancing both public safety and community restoration.

Human Behavior in the Social Environment (HBSE): Life Course Perspective

Mass incarceration has impacted largely communities of color (Pettit & Western, 2004). By the end of the 21st century, 1.3 million men of color were held in state and federal prison (2004). The work of Freeman (1996) indicates that imprisonment has become an expected and standard experience of early adulthood for men of color. Studies explore the disadvantaged education system, deindustrialization, housing segregation, wealth inequality, low wages, high rates of unemployment, fragmented institutions, high rates of recidivism, and barriers to

community engagement; all of which are labor market consequences of incarceration that deteriorates the ability for equity to exist within urban communities (Western et al., 2001). Hayasaki (2016) also notes that brain development is impacted by housing discrimination, unsafe living environments, racism, and underfunded schools. Studies reveal that unaddressed trauma for communities of color has detrimental effects on youth and families, which then manifests itself as underachievement in schools, high rates of drug use/abuse, dangerous sexual behavior, delinquency, and violence exposure (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2017). Furthermore, the National Center of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) indicates that 30 to 35% of urban youth develop PTSD (Saigh, 1991). Further studies by Gillespie and colleagues (2009) show that at least 90% of urban, low-income residents exposed to community trauma develop a 40% higher rate of PTSD than the general population.

Unaddressed trauma can have detrimental effects on the body and overall psychosocial functioning. Recent studies show a strong connection to physiologic disruptions associated with chronic disease (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012) as a result of organ and regulatory breakdown starting in childhood. Furthermore, the work of Glaze and Maruschak (2010) highlights that individuals experiencing familial incarceration have added concern for physical and mental health issues. A high degree of stress is correlated with further adversity; therefore, it is not surprising to find that people with childhood histories of trauma, abuse, and neglect make up almost the entire criminal justice population in the United States (Jäggi et al., 2016).

Policy

Discriminatory practices influenced policies, which in turn negatively impacted communities of color. The ‘super-predator’ concept, commonly used in criminology, took the position that youth were out of control and savage-like by nature, showing no remorse as they willingly committed violent acts (Bernstein, 2014). Popular in the 1990s, this new founded myth of the super predator brought forth the rhetoric echoed by so many politicians. The type of ‘law and order’ that was born out of this discourse spearheaded a full assault on communities of color, further exacerbating what has been referred to as mass incarceration.

Discriminatory Policies

Despite a decline in illicit drug use, President Richard Nixon launched a War on Drugs in a message that was relayed to Congress on July 14,

1969 (King, 2008). Political initiatives, law enforcement grants, strategic reorientation of policing methods and punitive legal outcomes; all of which were tailored to combat the War on Drugs that largely targeted communities of color. Aggressive street-level enforcement of drug laws and harsh sentencing of drug offenders created historically high levels of prison populations throughout the 1990s (Roberts, 2004). Several of these policies (Sentencing Reform Act of 1984, mandatory minimum sentencing laws, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, and the 1994 Crime Bill) negatively impacted communities of color.

Practices

Similar to the changes that were taking place within the judicial system, law enforcement agencies adopted new policing strategies as a means to combat both the use and sale of illicit drugs on the street level. In 1984, the Drug Enforcement Agency established Operation Pipeline, which provided training to state and local law enforcement agencies to be strategic in their encounters with civilians. The outcome of such policing efforts resulted in an increase of annual drug arrests by threefold between 1980 and 2005 (Alexander, 2012). More than 31 million people have been arrested for drug offenses since the War on Drugs was launched.

Systemic Barriers and Institutional Failures

The criminal justice system is besieged with systemic barriers and institutional failures, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle of system involvement for poor communities of color. Inadequate resources restrict peoples from accessing legal representation, which can lead to plea bargains and consequently, lengthier sentences. It is estimated that 90 to 95% of federal and state cases are resolved through plea bargaining (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005). Bail practices are often discriminatory as Black and Latino men are charged 35% more towards bail payments compared to 19% of their white counterparts for similar crimes (Onyekwere, 2021). Nearly half a million people in the US are currently being detained pretrial, which means that they are awaiting trial and are legally innocent. Forty-three percent of the pretrial population is African American and the average yearly income of an individual who cannot afford bail is estimated to be \$16,000 (Ring & Gill, 2017). Poverty is not only a predictor of incarceration, but continues to exacerbate the outcome as criminal history generates debt and reduces employment opportunities (Rabuy & Kopf, 2016). It is these racist practices that continue to oppress communities of color.

In order to uplift the Grand Challenge of Smart Decarceration, it is recommended that the teaching pedagogy includes a curriculum that is comprehensive, holistic, and seeks to uncover the root causes of what has been termed mass incarceration.

Teaching Practices in One (1) of the Targeted Domains

The practice domain will serve as the platform to provide social work faculty with a hands-on experience for students so that the Grand Challenge of Promoting Smart Decarceration can be integrated into their teaching curricula. More specifically, practice-policy will be highlighted as an informed practice approach for the Grand Challenge of Smart Decarceration. To begin, the following articulation of learning objectives provides clear and specific statements as it relates to what the student will learn in the classroom setting under the practice domain for Smart Decarceration.

- Objective 1: Synthesize and integrate a hands-on, experience-based learning opportunity with knowledge gained in other domains of the course to prepare students to consider how they can contribute to the topic of Smart Decarceration.
- Objective 2: Apply and integrate classroom knowledge with community agency site visits and guest speakers centered on reentry.
- Objective 3: Examine prominent informed-practice approaches for the justice-involved population and demonstrate an understanding of their use.

Fundamental knowledge including a strong framework of historical context and theory will enhance students' understanding about the complexities of mass incarceration. Due to recent pressure placed on the government through advocacy work, there has been a shift to a *Care First, Jails Last* approach when working with system-impacted individuals. Furthermore, several practice modalities will be considered and referenced as informed practice evidence. The course should be concerned with how research has been translated into actual practices, as well as the proof of success or weaknesses of such programs when working with justice-involved individuals. The Grand Challenge of Smart Decarceration advocates for outcome goals that include reducing the population of individuals behind bars, addressing racial, economic, and behavioral health disparities amongst this population and overall community safety and well-being (Hawkins & Jenson, 2017). Exploring these outcome goals with students will allow them to

see the big picture of an agenda that seeks to champion social progress and tackle our nation's toughest social problem: mass incarceration. Additionally, the Council of Social Work Education's (CSWE, 2022) *2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (EPAS) are outlined in Appendix 11A.

Setting the stage for student engagement will consist of a brief exercise that incorporates words from renowned founder and director of Homeboy Industries, Father Greg Boyle. Homeboy Industries is the world's largest gang-intervention, reentry, and rehabilitation program for justice-impacted individuals. Through the use of short 4–5-minute YouTube video clips, Father Greg Boyle shares the “Thought of the Day” with the audience. These YouTube clips of Father Greg Boyle provide a safe space that invites students into a place of reflection with the justice-involved population. This promotes self-introspection, which allows for the viewer to challenge preconceived notions about the population. Please refer to Appendix 11B to access some of the links to Father Greg Boyle's Thought of the Day YouTube clips. The instructor can use the “Thought of the Day” video clips as a tool to facilitate a larger class discussion with students, which further promotes a healthy public discourse both about the population and the criminal system. This provides the instructor with a baseline of students' existing knowledge on the topic of Smart Decarceration, their understanding of the population, and any preconceived notions they may have about the subject matter. Appendix 11C includes a 60-minute outline of the first class session that prepares students for learning and engagement. In addition, PowerPoints for this session can be accessed in Appendix 11C (Figure 11.1).

Community as the Classroom

Active and experiential project-based learning allows for students to gain practice-based knowledge to enhance evidenced-based interventions and theories grounded in academia. The Association of Experiential Education (2015) defines Experiential Education as a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities (para. 2). Experiential learning allows students to expand learning opportunities from the community to the classroom. It facilitates learning by engaging with the community (Dewey, 1915), reflective thinking, and learning from experience (Dewey, 1933). Learning is fostered through didactic

presentations, small and large group discussions, videos, experiential exercises, and guest speakers. These various learning outlets provide students the ability to learn creatively, authentically, and present experiences and opportunities that integrate non-formal learning in an intentional, purposeful, and meaningful way (Dewey, 1938).

The use of field-site visits, either virtually or in person, allows students to make real-world connections (Jacobson et al., 2011) that bridge communication and connections with their local community and around the globe (Smith & Brown, 2017). Students gain insight through the interactions in the community and have the opportunity to bring back their experiences into the classroom. Students can share their experiences with other students and make further meaning while creating future content (Smith & Brown, 2017). Partnerships, specifically with community-based organizations who have an expertise in working with system-impacted individuals, provide the means to accommodate such learning opportunities. Reentry organizations such as Project Kinship, a non-profit organization in Orange County, CA that provides reentry and intervention services for individuals and families impacted by incarceration, violence, trauma, and gangs is an ideal partner for such a class. Project Kinship provides students the educational space to engage with clients and staff who have been formerly incarcerated. Students gain firsthand experience and exposure to service delivery and programming while gaining valuable life narratives of the people who have been directly impacted by mass incarceration. These educational experiences both create and further enhance rich classroom discussions. For more information on Project Kinship please refer to Appendix 11D.

Facilitating Classroom Discussions and Use of Guest Speakers

Facilitating class discussions provides students a space to expand their knowledge through the use of peer-to-peer learning and meaningful dialogue. The instructor can lead discussions or create scenarios to invite students to express their thoughts about the subject matter. These conversations allow for students to wrestle through opinions on opposite sides of the spectrum while creating the opportunity to meet somewhere in the middle. For example, after meeting with formerly incarcerated individuals at Project Kinship, students had the opportunity to engage in a facilitated discussion on controversial issues such as the death penalty, punitive and rehabilitative approaches within carceral settings, and services provided to victims. The discussion

drew from theoretical content along with practice-based approaches and field-site visits. Students were able to weave in all three variables, which enhanced and carved new avenues of learning.

The use of guest speakers provides opportunities for students to hear from individuals who challenge the dominant narrative of marginalized populations that are so often shaped by the media. Individuals from Project Kinship and other community based-organizations such as The Professional Community Intervention Training Institute (PCITI), and Champions In Service (CIS), all based in California and committed to supporting system-impacted individuals, provide education through personal stories of transformation, healing, and reintegration back into the community after incarceration. Students gain insight into personal and intimate challenges as well as barriers and roadmaps to success from the guest speakers. This valuable information and interchange of discussion humanizes the academic content and enhances practices from the community into the classroom.

Given the mission and purpose of social work, the course needs to integrate content on the values and ethics of the profession as they pertain to justice-involved individuals. Special attention must be given to the influence of diversity as characterized by, but not limited to, age, gender, class, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, disability and religion. It is recommended that the course makes important linkages between course content and social work practice, policy, research, and field practice.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The classroom can be a place where the next generation of social workers are challenged to enter the field with a heightened sense of sensitivity to the challenges of marginalized populations and a lifelong commitment to advocacy efforts geared towards diversity, equity, and inclusion. This educational space is a catalyst to future generations that will mold the direction and standard of both our community and our country. The classroom creates a community that is a melting pot of various ideas, experiences, cultures, and values. We must also recognize the need for greater diversity, equity, and inclusion of marginalized populations to be included in such spaces. Gay (2000, p. 25) joins in this respect, “If educators continue to be ignorant of, ignore, impugn, and silence the cultural orientations, values, and performance styles of ethnically different students, they will persist in imposing cultural hegemony, personal denigration, educational inequity, and academic underachievement upon them”. Accepting the validity of these

students' cultural socialization and experiences will help to reverse achievement trends. There is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes the "practice of freedom", the means by which individuals deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Shaul, 1970).

Systemic racism and other forms of oppressive actions that create a caste system for minority populations continues to rear its ugly head of injustice, oppression, and inexcusable harm in our country. We have seen this illuminated through the calling out of multiple incidents and acts of violence among marginalized populations through various media outlets. Educators hold a responsibility to facilitate and promote the integration of deeper understanding as it relates to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion through a social justice lens is essential in understanding root causes and must play key roles in molding the future of Smart Decarceration. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, we have seen the devastating impact of demonizing policies and practices that have led to inhumane treatment of individuals who enter the system. America has witnessed long-lasting systemic inequities that have created permanent scarlet letters of criminal records, thus displacing individuals long after completing their time served, whether behind bars or stipulations of probation and parole. Terrance, who is formerly incarcerated, shares that the ongoing implications of his past record affect his family and their ability to obtain equity and inclusion. He states, "My wife and children experience the same consequences I do. When I am denied housing, they are denied too" (Repairing the Road to Redemption in California, 2021). It is our hope that this generation of educators and students will advance the historical movements of equity while embracing diversity and advocating for the inclusion of marginalized and oppressed populations.

Managing Difficult Classroom Conversations

Discussing sensitive topics such as the level of disproportionality that exists within the legal system can become polarizing and uncomfortable. It is important that a safe and healthy class environment is established. In doing so, class parameters need to be created and sustained. This begins with starting on time, ending on time, and providing an agenda at the start of each class. Guidelines and expectations must be

agreed upon with the class to promote a healthy learning environment. This engenders trust, which can promote an inclusionary environment where there are opportunities for reflection. In order for this to occur, discussions need to be meaningful, purposeful, and productive. This means that it is necessary for students to voice their thoughts, and ideologies in a manner that critically analyzes the course material by incorporating data to further validate their assertions as it lessens the personalization of such topics. The instructor becomes the facilitator by monitoring the discussion closely through active listening while identifying microaggressions and dismissive content, if and when it is necessary to do so. This can be done in a way that maintains a high level of respect by asking for clarity in responses and questions rather than making assumptions. In addition to reframing questionable comments, monitoring body language and use of language is important. Follow up is also a useful strategy, which can include the utilization of office hours or key breaks to further explore disagreements to advance the classroom discussion all the while tending to individual student concern to increase safe and brave spaces for students.

Evaluation of Learning

Class discussion is an integral part of the learning process; reviewing the terminology, concepts, and frameworks and their application to the criminal justice system is a way to discover students' comprehension of the class material. This allows the instructor to provide prompt feedback to their in-classroom discussions, ensuring goals and objectives of the class are maintained and achieved. Furthermore, connections are made to the learning outcomes of each class session during these in-classroom discussions and at the close of each class session. To further enhance instructional quality, it is encouraged that all assignments be reviewed in detail with students during class sessions. Use of examples can be incorporated when reviewing each assignment with students in order to enhance their production of quality work. The use of real-world case studies, and/or situations with course material allows for students to critically analyze difficult concepts and course material in general with the ability to reflect and observe their learning process beyond the classroom setting. This allows students the opportunity to master course material and engage in group discussions and debates as well as develop a sense of leadership organically. Reflection tools, papers, in-class discussions, and presentations can serve as ways to monitor students' comprehension of the course material. Demonstration briefs and project-based presentations to key community

stakeholders can further serve as creative, innovative ways to monitor student grasp of the course content while promoting community engagement.

Conclusion and Areas for Further Teaching and Curricular Considerations

Mass incarceration is finally being recognized as a Grand Challenge that has unjustly affected communities of color. Further foundational knowledge is needed to address the social norms that continue to hold the problem of mass incarceration in place. Furthermore, the concern as to how research has been translated into actual practices as well as the proof of success or weaknesses of such programs to best serve the population must be examined. Sadly, studies do reveal that earlier engagement with the criminal justice system, especially for youth of color can end with more frequent secure placement found in confinement (Pope et al., 2002). Hinton (2016) indicates this being a prime example of systemic racism where the relationship between race and well-being is impacted, resulting in psychological barriers for the population. This in and of itself leads to the re-traumatization of the population by the retriggering of complex traumas found in the prison systems design that promotes racial disproportionality (Estrada et al., 2017). Herein lies a critical variable to address when supporting the justice-involved population: their exposure to cultural trauma, which is viewed differently from psychological and physical trauma, as it is more likely to result in a “dramatic loss of identity” (Eyerman et al., 2004). Much of the criminal justice literature neglects to examine this piece when working with the justice-involved population, which can serve as the impetus to building a successful reentry plan with the population, like what programs such as Project Kinship are attempting to achieve. Implementing a curriculum from a teaching pedagogy that is flexible and non-traditional as found in this chapter, “community-centered”, can prepare students to advance relevant practice, research, and policy when working with justice-involved individuals to assist in designing successful reentry models with the population’s voice and their experiences as the agent of change.

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Appendix 11A

EPAS Addressed in Grand Challenge #10

Promote Smart Decarceration

Competency 2: Advance Human Rights and Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice. Social workers share a close relationship with human justice as the profession itself adheres to values such as respect, dignity, and social justice. This illustrates that all human beings are deserving of fundamental rights regardless of their social, racial, economic, or environmental status. Mass incarceration and its long-standing effects threatens every facet of human experience, which further accentuates that social workers apply the life-course perspective to interventions and the way in which system-impacted individuals are treated. To forge the process of Smart Decarceration, social workers must address the racial, economic, behavioral, and environmental disparities that are present amongst system-impacted individuals.

Competency 3: Engage Antiracism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) in Practice. Social workers consider how intersectionality is a driving force in determining an individual's experience of oppression and discrimination. When social workers champion for equity for all human beings, it is of equal importance that marginalized populations who have faced systemic injustice are brought to the forefront. The Grand Challenge of Promoting Smart Decarceration includes looking at minority populations that have consistently been overrepresented in the United States Criminal Justice system. To have a society that promotes antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion means to both challenge and dismantle any practice that is intended to keep oppressed populations further bound.

Competency 4: Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice. Social workers often commit to lifelong

learning, which incorporates looking at evidence to inform both new and current practices. When social workers evaluate their own practices and conduct program evaluations, it leaves room to improve practice, policy, and service delivery. Due to recent pressure placed on the government through advocacy work, there is a shift in the way the carceral system views punitive and rehabilitative approaches. With this shift, social workers must look at what has been successful and unsuccessful as research will continue to translate what will lead to evidence-based practices.

Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice. Like how the War on Drugs and the War on Terror birthed several policies that have led to an over-inundated carceral system, there are a number of policies that make it difficult throughout the process and thereafter when an individual is attempting to reintegrate back into society. Social workers can advocate for policy change to dismantle the carceral system as it exists. Social workers take on the commitment to combat injustices that impact various populations at the macro, mezzo, and micro level. Policy reform makes it possible to affect change as policy often informs the quality, accessibility, and delivery of services.

Competency 6: Engage With Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities. Social workers realize a holistic perspective on the needs of the populations that they serve and a part of this comes from ensuring meaningful engagement with communities. System-impacted individuals are not solely affected by mass incarceration; we see the continuance of intergenerational trauma when minority populations are disproportionately impacted by mass incarceration. At the end of the 21st century, 1.3 million men of color were imprisoned in state and federal institutions (Pettit & Western, 2004). What isn't highlighted in that number is the families of those that have been incarcerated; therefore social workers are implored to consider ways in which the field can engage with not only the families, but the marginalized communities in which these instances occur.

Appendix 11B

Integrating the Grand Challenges Content Into the Social Work Curricula and Classroom

Smart Decarceration: A Multi-Prong Approach to Healing the Incarcerated

Teaching Tools

Thought of the Day with Father Greg Boyle of Homeboy Industries

<https://youtu.be/T1kU-v0O5N0>

<https://youtu.be/xYFCDOV4HVg>

https://youtu.be/jXM_rO-ktp8


<https://youtu.be/3S4CDiKPWos>

<https://youtu.be/PfV27HovIIM>

Appendix 11C

- 0:00 to 0:05 minute YouTube video clip – Father Greg Boyle’s “Thought of the Day”;
- 0:05 to 0:15 Students, reflection, and feedback regarding Father Greg Boyle’s “Thought of the Day”;
- 0:15 to 0:30 Discussion, common perceptions about justice-involved individuals;
- 0:30 to 0:50 Scope of the problem – ethno-historical considerations, demographic data-sharing highlighting the population, impact of prisons, and disproportionality that exist within America’s prisons;
- 0:50 to 0:60 Position the following question, what is mass incarceration?

Working With the Justice-Involved Population



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Workshop Overview

- Thought of the Day
- Stereotypes of Formerly Incarcerated Individuals
- Historical & Structural Forces
- Scope of Problem
- Holistic Community-Based Model
- Implications for Practice

“Thought of the Day”

Father Greg Boyle
Homeboy Industries
Repentance is Moving Beyond the Way You Think
<https://youtu.be/T1kU-r0O5N0>


Stereotypes

WHAT ARE COMMON PERCEPTIONS OF THE INCARCERATED?

Possible Inaccurate Assumptions


- Society as a whole, along with law enforcement may place assumptions on adolescents' ethnic identity.
- Racial profiling practices by law enforcement.
- Misperceptions of non-white youth and adults as VIOLENT criminals based on their ethnic identity.

Ethno-Historical Considerations



Institutional Failures

Historical Structural



Systemic Breakdown

When families, schools, churches, and communities do not meet the needs of “OUR” youth, street models can become more attractive, leading to adolescent social issues of delinquency, gangs, drugs, teen pregnancy, survival sex, street life, homelessness, and despair.




Figure 11.1 PowerPoint of student engagement – Session 1

The Problem Prison population

- **1 in every 100** people living in the US is in prison
- **1 in every 45** is either in prison, on probation, or on parole
- **Blacks make up 40%** of the 2.3 million in US jails and prisons but are only 12% of the US population
- **Latinos and Blacks make up 60%** of the US prison population, but only 25% of the US population.
- **700%**: The increase in California's prison population from 1984 (24,000 prisoners) to 2009 (173,000 prisoners)
- **\$11 billion vs \$300 million**: Current CA Department of Corrections budget vs its 1984 budget
(Statistikopoulos 2004, 2015)

Juvenile Justice Youth Snapshot

- 40% of youth are in lock-up facilities for not just low-level offenses but very low-level offenses: truancy, shoplifting, loitering, disturbing the peace.
- Only about a quarter of youth are there for violent crime index offenses, which include rape and murder but also robbery and aggravated assault.
- We imprison our children at seven times the rate Great Britain does and 18 times the rate of France.
- Housing our kids in prison — \$88,000 to 300,000 a year.
- Roughly \$13,847 investment in our youths' public education (elementary & secondary) per public school for student enrollment for fall of 2018.
(O'Connor, and National Center for Education Statistics, 2008, 2010)

California: **#1** in prison spending **#50** in education spending

California used to be #1 in school spending and had one of the best school systems in the world. Now, California is #1 in prison spending, and with this year's budget cuts, dropped from #47 to #50 in school spending! South and East L.A. lead the nation in school overcrowding, low test scores and drop-out/push-out rates with only 48% of students graduating.
(CAIWC, 2018)

What Is Mass Incarceration?

END SEGMENT

Figure 11.1 (Continued)

Appendix 11D

Project Kinship

Project Kinship is a non-profit organization in Orange County, CA that provides reentry and intervention services for individuals and families impacted by incarceration, violence, trauma, and gangs. Reentry services are grounded in trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practices. Project Kinship's mission is to provide support and training to lives impacted by incarceration, gangs, and violence through hope, healing, and transformation. Project Kinship envisions a world where hope lives and the cycle of despair ends and works to promote hope, encourage healthy life decisions, lower recidivism, provide education for re-employment, and offer rehabilitation services that seek healing and restorative justice in the community. Project Kinship is currently one of the leading agencies in Orange County serving as a drop-in reentry center for those being released from jails. Project Kinship's services include Medi-Cal/CalFresh Enrollment Assistance; Job Employment Program for reentry transitional-aged youth (16–26 years old); School-Based Restorative Practices and gang intervention; recovery and community support services for reentry adults; and mental health services, advocacy and training services.

Over time, Project Kinship has earned a reputation for excellent programming and has been able to expand its services growing from what was initially two staff members to now over 60 employees within a six-year span. In addition to the need for services, there are four core areas that have contributed to the accelerated growth of Project Kinship, which include the hiring and training of formerly incarcerated individuals to provide service delivery and shape programming, inclusion of trauma-informed care, community of kinship and inclusion, and self-care.