COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS FOR YOUTH

COMING
HOME

Returning to the social justice roots of community-based mentoring programs for youth

JUNE 2022

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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We credit these amazing authors and researchers as local revolutionaries with a keen eye on what matters most when it comes to what our communities, youth and families deserve. They came to this project with overwhelming compassion and insightful guidance. Through their long-standing familial relationship to CCFY, they were uniquely suited to drive the process of collecting the various pieces for a critical journey through our own work. They tilled the soil for CCFY to engage in self-reflection, reminding us of our original identity as a community movement to create a world where there are no kids in cages. We are thankful to these experts for stepping into our private world, gently and firmly walking us down a path of exploration to reveal both the beautiful and the harsh aspects of our work. They are makers of safe space and curators of a social justice that is mindful of ALL who suffer oppression. From this place, these scholars expressed their knowledge of research, their expertise in positive youth development, and their insight into mass incarceration, gender dynamics, and restorative justice. In holding up a mirror, they reminded us of who we desire to be, and drew out the best practices that will help us and others stay faithful to the core values that give life to the mission of undoing oppression. At the same time, they added so much of their own wisdom and experience that will continue to inform our practice. This work is their gift to all who work for freedom and liberation for young people of color.

THE RESEARCH TEAM

This was a participatory action research (PAR) project conducted by youth, young adults and staff who have been involved in community-based alternatives to incarceration in New York City. The youth researchers demonstrated exceptional leadership reflective of the journey from program participant to youth leaders and peer mentors. We have not included their names in this report as these researchers were also participants of the program and of the research. While we seek to protect their identities, we want to lift up these amazing and brilliant young people and staff who offered their time, insight, care and tenacity through the many ups and downs of the process. What is shared in this report is sacred to their experiences and we hold them in the highest esteem for their offering.
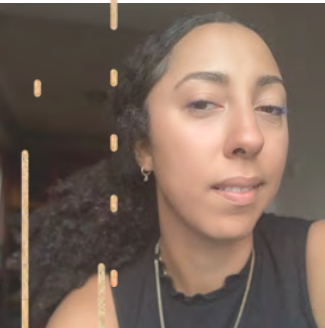
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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This is a guide. A guide to creating, thinking about, participating in, and critically reflecting on alternative to incarceration (ATI) programs for young people led by system-impacted communities, for system-impacted communities. It is a hyphenated guide that braids together positive youth development, restorative organizational cultures, Credible Messenger leadership,[1] and an ethic of decarceration. This guide is designed for community-based institutions, community organizers, and system-stakeholders that want to imagine and then build their own alternatives to incarceration.

We write this guide from the following principles, and hope that in this work, these values may continue to grow:

- **Center indigenous expertise.** Individuals and communities most impacted by the punishment system[2] are experts in creating alternatives to it.

- **Abolition is not impossible, in fact, it's the goal.** While we work hard to reform and restructure the harmful criminal punishment system, we also understand the necessity of abolishing all systems that are fundamentally inhumane, non-restorative, and that perpetuate racialized and classed inequity.

- **Youth leadership is holistic.** We believe in positive youth development; in asset-driven, justice-based, diverse definitions of leadership. Support can be addressing the immediate needs of young people, but also lifting them up to be critical thinking, emotionally intelligent, creative and compassionate agents of change.

- **Commitment to a social justice lens.** Systems of oppression are interlocking and therefore, in our change work, we must always work towards intersectional and interlocking equity for all forms of justice: racial justice, gender justice, equality for immigrants, and LGTBQ communities.

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[1] CCFY's formal definition is that, "Credible Messenger Mentoring for youth in the juvenile justice system is a transformative process through which individuals from similar backgrounds, especially men and women who were themselves justice-involved, engage youth in a caring community deeply invested in their wellbeing, helping them think differently about who they are, giving them hope for the future, and teaching them a new set of values through relationships." It should be noted that CCFY has never publicly offered an official definition of Credible Messenger, so as not to place limitations on what a Credible Messenger is and could be.

[2] We use the terms punishment system as a reference to the criminal justice system in all of its forms: systems of policing, courts, jail, prison, immigration detention and community supervision. While these are traditionally housed under the umbrella of "justice" we see them as systems that have the underlying goal of punishment. Punishment and justice are often used synonymously and we hope to interrupt this practice. We will also refer to these systems as criminal injustice system.

- **Shifts in power come from the ground up.** We believe in people power. We believe in the hyper local. And we believe that when change comes from the ground up, real change happens.

- **Culture matters.** Take the work and make it your own. Let's center the rich histories of our neighborhoods, let's build programs that honor the strength of our bloodlines, and let's see leadership in all forms: in hoodies, on street corners, behind cells, in non-binary bodies and in languages other than our own. Uplifting the diversity of culture gives us power. And reclaiming parts of our cultures that have been shunned, criminalized or dismissed makes space to see the transformative potential in all of our own stories.

As you are journeying through this guide, we invite you to take notice of the visual imagery that's intending to juxtapose city/industrial ideas against weaving, cultivating and earth. Our hope is that the reader can appreciate the ideals of Coming Home to something homegrown, indigenous, of the people, of the culture and of the land.

*COVID-19 NOTE

The research and much of the writing of this report took place before the COVID-19 pandemic that radically altered the landscape of CCFY's work with youth. While much of what is written here remains deeply relevant to community work with justice-involved youth, it would be disingenuous to pretend we live in the same world today as when this research was conducted. The pandemic changed how staff work with youth, how youth relate to youth, and how staff relate to staff. The shift from in-person to virtual connections has impacts that we are still discovering, and even as the world opens up, we are still grappling with this new reality. We stand by the ideas and values expressed in this report, but also acknowledge that as the world changes, we need to continue to engage in reflection and exploration to adapt to our changing realities.
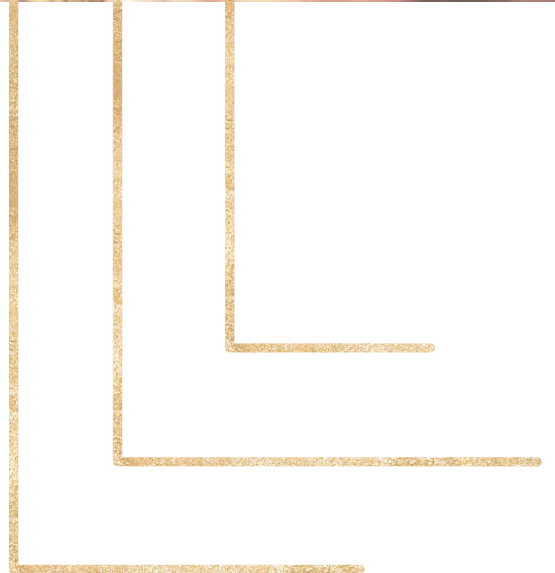
WHO
WE ARE

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS FOR YOUTH

Community Connections for Youth (CCFY) is a Bronx-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to mobilize indigenous faith and neighborhood organizations to develop effective community-driven alternatives to incarceration for youth. CCFY is founded on the belief that positive outcomes for young people are born from strong, grassroots community development. The relationships that young people need to thrive are often in their backyards, down the block, and in their local neighborhood institutions. Founded in 2009, CCFY has developed alternatives to incarceration for justice-involved youth for the last 12 years, both as a direct provider of services in the South Bronx, and across the city, state and nation as a training and technical assistance partner. CCFY implemented the first independently evaluated youth justice intervention based solely on the strengths of grassroots faith and neighborhood organizations using a positive youth development approach. CCFY went on to implement a parent peer coaching program through which family members impacted by the juvenile justice system provide support and guidance to parents/caregivers who are currently navigating the system. Another independent evaluation found that this approach decreased out-of-home placement for youth following a violation of probation, and soon became the model for a citywide replication.

Upon demonstrating that a grassroots neighborhood approach was effective in reducing recidivism and keeping youth connected to their communities for the long-term, CCFY began to field requests for assistance in replicating its approach. Believing that community-driven alternatives to incarceration needed to be grounded in the organizations indigenous to the neighborhoods they served, CCFY declined invitations to operate programs outside of its own neighborhood, but agreed to advise burgeoning community-system partnerships on developing home-grown alternatives to incarceration using a similar methodology. Since that time, CCFY has served as the training and technical assistance provider to support the development of a citywide transformative mentoring approach for justice-involved young adults in NYC (ARCHES) and a replication of this model in NYC's public housing developments (Next Steps). CCFY also serves as the training and technical assistance provider for a statewide reentry initiative for youth returning home from placement - the OCFS Community Credible Messenger Initiative (CCMI).

RESEARCH PROCESS / RESEARCH TEAM

We are an intergenerational, multi-racial, system-impacted research team. As a research team we gathered interviews from former and current employees of CCFY's mentor-led ATI programs, current and past youth participants, philanthropic funders and organizational and program directors. With the information shared and the stories told, the team interweaved the emergent themes of the research with the expertise of the community educators, system-impacted people, organizers, trainers and Credible Messengers that make up the larger CCFY community network. This guide is a result of this 360 degree review; we present both the ups and downs of our ATI work, braiding together positive youth development and anti-incarceration ethics, offering our own transparent blueprint of how to keep building the world we believe is possible for our communities, families, and youth.

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REPORT RESEARCH + METHODOLOGY

This guide grew out of a year-long participatory research project that reflected on and evaluated a programmatic initiative directly managed by CCFY: the Arches Alumni Academy for Advancement, also known as the 4As Program.[3] The research team engaged in the following steps to gather information, think deeply about the issues, and chart a way to share-back all the wisdom shared. Through each stage of our methodology we were committed to transparency, community input, youth involvement and compensation for all those involved (as researchers and participants) in the project. Participatory Action Research (PAR)[4] is an approach to inquiry grounded in shared knowledge and democratic research. It is a form of research that sees those with lived experience as the experts and pushes forward the principle that the most powerful forms of research are in service to movement making, creating change, and empowering individuals. PAR challenges the belief that only scientists, academics and/or adults can do research. Research is a curious and rigorous inquiry and we believe everyone can and should engage in this. For this project, a participatory research team made up of current CCFY employees, past youth program participants, Credible Messenger mentors, and community research consultants reflected on the highlights, challenges, and lessons learned from CCFY's own community-led ATI program.

LEARNING RESEARCH + TRAINING

The PAR team spent the first two months of the project engaged in learning about research and orienting itself around the values of PAR. In these early weeks we discussed the harmful history traditional research holds (experiments on Black bodies, the stealing of indigenous biological samples, ethical transgressions) and also thought deeply about the power dynamics that can occur through research (funding, expertise, decision making). Through our learning about research, we also explored the different methods of gathering data and information. We crafted a set of research questions, themes to be explored in the evaluation process and laid a methodological plan. Through these meetings we also recorded our own thoughts about the programs we were evaluating; as a team we had members that were past participants, were involved in program decision-making and/or part of organizational allies to ATI programs. We understood that our own experiences, ideas, and perspectives on the ATI programs were not bias, but instead, granted us with specific insight on the program, what potential questions to ask others, and what challenges might present itself in the research process.

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[3] The 4As program grew out of NYC's ARCHES program, a transformative mentoring intervention funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies and the NYC Department of Probation through which community-based organizations hired formerly incarcerated mentors ("Credible Messengers") to mentor youth, ages 16 to 24, on Probation. This program, directly operated by CCFY, would enroll graduates of the ARCHES and Next STEPS programs in a peer mentor training program seeking to help them develop into the next generation of Credible Messenger mentors. Over the course of three years, CCFY operated the ARCHES Alumni Academy for Advancement (4As), training young adults ages 18 to 24, as peer mentors, and then hiring a number of the graduates to serve as program staff for each successive cohort of peer mentors-in-training. Some graduates were hired as peer mentors by the programs where they were once participants, while others stayed on staff with CCFY as Peer Mentors. Others used the additional support to prepare themselves for employment outside the field of mentoring and youth justice.

[4] For more information on PAR, check out the Glossary and Resource section of this guide.

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ATI PARTICIPANT RETREAT

During our research members of our team helped to facilitate and plan an end-of-an ATI program retreat. The research team used this opportunity to conduct a large scale focus group and to dive into an evaluation of the program not just for the sake of the research but as an avenue for participants to reflect on their time in the program, what they learned and their next steps. We crafted the moment to simultaneously gather data but also to be useful, thoughtful, and part of the closure process for youth participants.

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FOCUS GROUPS

Six focus groups were conducted with past youth participants from various iterations of ATI programming through CCFY's history. The focus groups asked participants the same questions and engaged with 14 past participants in total.

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INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

The team conducted 9 individual interviews. These interviews were specifically designed to engage funders, organizational leaders and former program workers. We understood that focus groups could be safer and more vibrant for young people and past participants - to share collectively, to be able to riff off of each other's experiences. However, individual interviews suited talking to those in different positions of power - it allowed more space, a slower pace, and more privacy to privately reflect on decisions made, tensions that arose between leadership, and hiccups in programming. Two additional interviews were done through writing, where written questions were sent to participants and they responded with written answers. We elected to do written interviews with two participants given challenges in timing and scheduling but also the desire to listen to their very important perspectives.

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LISTENING SESSIONS + TRANSCRIPTIONS

After interviews, focus groups, and discussion sessions were done, the PAR research team listened to the recordings, noting important quotes and moments in the research. Transcriptions were made from the recordings in order to capture the words shared.
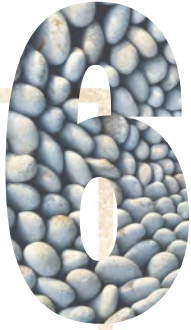
CODING + THEME GENERATION

Transcriptions, notes from the listening sessions, and those notes taken early on during Phase 1 were used to code the data and generate themes. We cross referenced our original goals in the research with the moments we noted were important in the data and then allowed these to contextualize and pick what quotes to use from the transcriptions. This is the layered and complex process of data analysis. Through this we discussed, as a research team, what themes should be elevated and what were the most salient points for the research.

WRITING THE GUIDE

There are endless possibilities to use and share information. We often felt like we were drowning in information from this process - emotions shared were intense, revisiting moments of programmatic hardship felt challenging and being driven by the hope of change work felt invigorating. How were we going to share all of this information - especially the hard things to admit and say out loud? Ultimately, as we discussed this as a PAR team, we decided that the best thing was to be honest! And to format our findings in the shape of a guide - a resource that could be used and shared with others in the trenches of this work. We needed to remind others, but more so ourselves, that we are not alone in doing the challenging work of ATI programming. Collectively we wrote this guide, attempting to piece together and honor all phases of the research methodological process.

PARTICIPATION + COLLECTIVE REVIEW

After writing the guide we shared its information with other stakeholders and CCFY leaders to edit, elaborate and collaborate on the information shared. Ultimately, this is the product of all the efforts of participation, information sharing, and collective dialogue on these issues. We believe that this process of research helped strengthen the vision of our work. It is not often that we take time to evaluate, reflect, record, and document. We hope to continue to integrate all of these practices into our larger organizational work, recognizing its value in growing ideas, honing practices and being better agents of change.

WHY ARE COMMUNITY-LED ATI EFFORTS IMPORTANT?

Currently there exists growing conversation about anti-incarceration. There are local, statewide and national efforts to decarcerate; to reduce the number of people behind bars and halt the construction of new facilities. We know that prisons, over policing, and harsh punishment do not develop people or communities. In fact, we know that the criminal punishment system disproportionately affects people of color, gender non-binary individuals, immigrants, and poor people. We also know that the swell of resources that go to lock people up, should be and can be redirected to communities that have been historically ravaged by the impact of unjust punishment. As we tackle the many layers of over-incarceration, we must build alternatives to it. We can't just stop the punishment system, we need counter models, sustainable ways to #supportnotpunish.

Historically, ATI programs were closely married to law enforcement agencies. Programs such as after-school sports, youth courts, diversion programs, and mediation became usurped by police departments under the auspices of a "community policing" agenda. As the critique against harsh policing grew and budgets for prosocial programs shrunk, police officers quickly became basketball coaches and mentors and law-enforcement hired safety agents that transform into conflict interventionists in schools. While we understand that programs such as these - community center leagues, safety in schools, and probation instead of detention - are the result of long hard fights and advocacy, we also see them lacking in an ethic of social justice and positive youth development. Things that are born from and are community-led, we believe, have different seeds of change within them. We have seen this practice. We write this guide because ultimately, ATI and diversion programs for youth should be community-based; they should be led by aunties, big brothers, cousins, formerly incarcerated people, foster mothers, and neighbors.

However, it is not enough to simply say that strong alternative to incarceration programs are grounded in their local communities. We say this from our own humble reflection and understanding that even as we do this, we could be better. As an organization and community committed to imagination and growth, we'd like to take our work a step further: the programs we develop and the alternatives we work to create must incorporate a fierce gender analysis, more rigorous restorative justice, a more robust and rooted cultural approach, and a stronger commitment to holistic, diverse, and transformative leadership not just for young people, but also for ourselves. This guide is as much for you, as it is an accountability measure for ourselves, to ensure that we are doing the work and continuously doing it better.

__We want to point out that throughout this report, we use the term "alternatives to incarceration" (ATI) to describe community efforts to keep justice-involved youth from going deeper into the system.__ For the technical purists, we are not referring explicitly to programs for which there are no other alternatives but incarceration, such as ATD (alternative-to-detentions) programs or ATP (alternative-to-placement) programs.

Some of the programs we describe are just that - a formal alternative to incarceration which, if not provided, would mean a young person is subjected to some form of confinement. In other cases, these programs are community-based diversions or alternatives to prosecution. Sometimes they are alternatives to violations of probation or the conditions of aftercare. Neither do we use the term "alternatives to incarceration" to describe system-run forms of community supervision, like probation or parole, or electronic monitoring and home confinement. We do not use the term in an overly broad sense to describe preventative efforts to keep youth from ever having system contact in the first place, such as after-school recreational programs, mental health services, or other youth enrichment programs. Instead, we use the term alternatives to incarceration to describe any intervention that explicitly works to keep youth who have already had contact with the system from going any deeper. We explicitly refer to community-driven alternatives to incarceration to denote efforts that originate in and remain with communities directly impacted by incarceration. We use community-driven in contrast to community-based programs as there are many programs located in directly impacted communities, but operated by providers with little accountability or connection to those same communities.

USING THIS GUIDE+ WHO IT'S FOR

This guide is for organizations, leaders, and community members. It is for the frontline staff that already work with system-impacted young people and it is also for program coordinators, organizational directors, funders, and system stakeholders. We know that this work takes many players and many forms: retired judges rally their former colleagues to build diversion ramps out of their courtrooms and into community centers or a small group of neighbors organizing against their local city council to invest in youth development programs instead of youth jails. Each homegrown story of change is different and therefore the information and tools in this guide are simply a starting point. What is important are the underlying values of the work, a theory of change grounded in system and community partnerships, community development, leadership from those closest to the problem, and an unwavering commitment to challenge the over-reliance on the juvenile justice system to "fix" young people.

Use our key! Because we know this work takes a village, we have marked out places that we think might be particularly relevant to frontline workers, leadership staff of organizations, funders, and system stakeholders. We think of these roles in the following ways (although we know that people can occupy multiple roles at different times and there is overlap):

💪🏿 **Frontline Workers:** Individuals that work directly with young people. These are the first responders to conflict and often the primary support for youth. They can be formal employees of an organization and/or program and be seen as Credible Messengers, community organizers, teachers, or mentors. They can also be informal like family, elders, neighborhood leaders, interventionists and big homies.

🗣️ **Leadership Staff**: People that work to support/supervise frontline workers and also shape and support programs. They can be program directors and/or organizational leaders. People in these positions deeply shape, maintain and model organizational culture through their behavior, ideas, visioning and priorities. Leadership holds decision making power and can have financial access with the organization through grant writing and relationships with funders and donors.

💰 **Funders:** People that work for philanthropic and other fiscal bodies that give money to organizations, programs and ATI initiatives. These individuals are not directly connected to the day-to-day work but hold immense power given their decision making capabilities around current and potentially future funding streams.

⚖️ **System Stakeholders:** These individuals work within the criminal injustice system: probation workers, lawyers, police, judges, correctional staff, court mandated counselors, etc. These individuals can support young people and be involved with ATI efforts, but they also work under the umbrella of criminal injustice departments.

Look out for the icons that help navigate through the different roles that can be needed in this work.

As you weave between these pages, we want to highlight a few ways to digest and metabolize what is shared.

- **Process the information in community.** This is not an academic report or a data dump of information. While the guide grew from research, what became clear during the PAR project was the need for intentional communication and consistent relationship building between those engaged with ATI programs. Discuss the information with colleagues, use the activities in planning meetings, and use this to grow strong and sustainable teams.

- **Balance the action + the critical thinking.** Action creates change. But so do radical, new ideas. We offer both a lens to think about the larger values, ethics, and dreams of anti-incarceration work and youth development, while also suggesting ways to tie those items into actionable steps.

- **Dive into the Glossary and Resource List.** Our work stands shoulder to shoulder with many others engaged in change efforts. And we all stand in a vibrant lineage of movement makers. And the work we do helps shape a different future. We know that there are endless examples, words, stories, and pieces of history that inspire us. We offer just a small selection of that endlessness and suggest that resources, new words and ideas be further explored.

Ultimately, take the information here, remix it, and make it your own!

STRUCTURAL CHANGE + INDIVIDUAL TRANSFORMATION

Before we begin, here's an important note we'd like to say loudly:

Change comes both from individual transformation and structural change.

What do we mean by this? And why is this important? Let's break it down.

The criminal punishment system holds tightly onto a narrative of individual deficit: someone made a bad decision and broke the law and therefore the individual needs to be punished. We are all familiar with the slogan of "Do the crime, do the time." Individuals are labeled criminals, offenders, convicts. Labels such as these create cascading consequences: "convicts" are discarded in hiring processes after background investigations are run, "offenders" can be barred from social services such as affordable and/or subsidized housing, and "criminals" are denied rights to political and civic engagement like voting or running for elected office. Individuals are continually punished and a narrative of individual deficit reigns.

Structures also have power, however. Scaled up, the criminal punishment system is not only looking for "bad people," but instead, has historically worked to forge together the labels; dangerous and Black, illegal and immigrant, punishable and queer, morally corrupt and poor. Structures are containers that devise policies and impact countless individuals. Creating alternatives to incarceration demands of us, structural change too.

Supporting young people looks like helping meet their immediate individual needs (i.e. wrap-around services, housing, mental health, safety, economic stability, etc.) while also being acutely aware that structures and systems must be transformed. ATI programs can easily and dangerously adopt a similar language of "individualism" that the criminal punishment system utilizes; hinged on a belief that all young people must do is change individually - make better decisions, develop stronger job skills, finish their educational pathways. However, this is an immense amount of pressure to put on young people. While their individual transformation can be supported and celebrated, job skills, emotional intelligence, and character development are only small antidotes to the challenges of income inequality, the racialized, gendered pay gap, fast moving gentrification, and rising police violence. We must do more than change the individual.

There are interlocking systems and structures that work to oppress individuals, so we must work on interlocking levels to transform them. We must incorporate this into the programs we create, the dynamics we build with co-strugglers, the relationships we have with participants, and the way we each individually carry ourselves. It is not either/or. It is both/and. The most transformative programs we can build are tunnels away from incarceration and towards alternative futures for young people and alternative, more equitable futures for our communities, institutions, and shared ideologies.

Turn to the Interactive Section on page 51 of this guide for exercises around balancing these two critical elements.

Cost
AND
POSSIBILITIES

The staggering costs of youth incarceration continue to climb. In 2020, the average daily cost per youth in secure detention was $2,068 per day, which annualizes to $754,280 per year. The daily cost per youth in a secure state facility was $2,612 per day, which annualizes to $953,533 per day. New York spends close to $1 million per year on each incarcerated child on facilities alone (not to mention the additional costs incurred through court appearances, aftercare services, and probation supervision). What could a community do with $1 million to keep one child out of jail?

THE FOUR STRANDS

"Coming Home" is organized along four thematic strands. When woven together, they become the basis and consideration for ethical youth programming. We delve into the strands, providing guidance and recommendations for each, which we hope will support value-based cultural shifts. Shifts that uplift the necessity of restorative justice, collective care, an analysis of gender, and vulnerability. As we integrate these strands into one, we seek to offer a truth that may be against something that encompasses the norm. We reject criminal punishment as the norm. We offer an inclusive way of determining the truth, to make space for all of us, to have our voices heard in reshaping and reimagining the ways we understand justice.

We wrote this report and guide with the wholehearted intention of reflecting the lessons gleaned directly from the wisdom of our communities. In highlighting these voices, we bring to the forefront key values and ethics to re-harness and reorient the work to its social justice roots. It is about a return. It is about coming home.

We are accountable to the individuals that shared their knowledge and insight with us. You may see certain themes highlighted multiple times, from different entry-points and angles. This reflects what was shared with us, sitting in circles, one-on-one, documented with trust and transparency. It emphasizes the significance of these themes in the lived experiences of those with whom we spoke.

Our report is for frontline staff, organizational leadership, funders, system leaders, and movement builders open to examining the deep structural shifts necessary to bring programs back to home plate.

As you read, we invite you to take in this context, allowing it to bring the flavors of coming home into your work in the future, seasoning everything as you go.

STRAND 1:
SOCIAL JUSTICE IMAGINATION

The practice of fighting for the values of equity and future freedom for people and our communities.

Topics

◣ Restorative Justice in Organizational Culture

◣ Centering Gender + Toxic Masculinity

◣ Organizing for Change

STRAND 2:
POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

A strengths-based way of engaging young people…it rebuffs the notion of "at-risk" youth of color to be saved by privileged saviors on the outside.

Topics

◣ Weaving Positive Youth Development with a Social Justice Lens

◣ Thinking Beyond Youth Mentorship

◣ Radical Distribution of Power

STRAND 3:
ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE + STRUCTURE

An organization's culture asserts its values and fiercely embodies its own convictions as it faces the world.

Topics

◣ Articulating Values + Vision

◣ Collaborating + Unified Growth

◣ Investments of Time, Energy + Mental Wellness

STRAND 4:
FUNDING

Structural change is a financial game. Part of our work is to stop dollars from going into prisons and to redirect them into repairing and uplifting communities and young people.

Topics

◣ Sustainability

◣ Diversity Funding

◣ Dollar Driven vs. People Driven

SOCIAL JUSTICE IMAGINATION 💪🏾🗣️

"In order for us as poor and oppressed people to become a part of a society that is meaningful, the system under which we now exist has to be radically changed. That means we are going to have to learn to think in radical terms. I use the term radical in its original meaning - getting down to and understanding the root cause. It means facing a system that does not lend itself to your needs and devising means by which you change that system. That is easier said than done. But one of the things that has to be faced is, in the process of wanting to change that system, how much have we got to do to find out who we are, where we have come from and where we are going. ... I am saying as you must say too, that in order to see where we are going, we must understand where we have been." —Ella Baker

In 1964 the civil rights leader and organizer Ella Baker spoke to the legacy of change that oppressed people walk in; a trail of power and resilience that teaches people about who they are and also helps to imagine a new future forward. This is a social justice imagination, an anchoring rope in the work for alternatives to incarceration and a rope we must unravel.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Social justice can mean many things and take numerous forms: protests, campaigns to change policies, teach-ins, community programs to empower families, ideals of equality, human rights, and fairness. Too often, in systems and institutions towards incarceration, the notion of justice is used to mean punishment. It is wielded as a weapon rather than leveraged as a tool to imagine a better future. Social justice for us is this alternative tool. It is the history, the action, the practice of fighting for the values of equity and future freedom for people and our communities.

SOCIAL JUSTICE + RESEARCH…DOES IT REALLY MATTER?

In our PAR project, we critically examined how values of social justice impacted (or did not!) the experience of participants and staff. Ideally, social justice values are deeply embedded in our work. We hope to transform lock up! We want to change our communities! However, the day-to-day work of this is often hard, confusing, and messy.

First, we believe that this is true: incorporating social justice as a value in programming makes a difference in the lives of young people. Past participants of CCFY's 4A program spoke to the transformative power of learning about the legacies of activists and the power of learning about their own history of creating change. It helped them feel connected to a larger movement beyond themselves and beyond the scope of their specific ATI programs. Reflecting on his time in a one-year ATI program one participant remarked:

> *"The stuff they were teaching was more about roots – we learned about the Black Panther Party, we learned about restorative circles, we learned about the guy John Augustus – the first person who started probation."*

Another participant built on this information, speaking to how this learning creates choice and possibility for thinking about the future. He said that the best types of programs teach young people how to wear a suit and "get the job" but also how to be like "Malcolm the disrupter" (Malcolm X). He spoke passionately that young people get to decide what road they get to walk down and that the power is in having a choice. Learning about social justice means learning about possibility for the self.

Another former participant reflected on how learning about the history of social change and the Black leaders that contributed to it impacted his perspective on his own life:

> *"I made the choice to give back to the people who were behind me, next to me, and who were coming up and I'm happy because I feel like I'm rich. I may not be financially rich but I get to give back."*

Often, as young people are involved in punishment structures like probation, police contact, or supporting a family member behind bars, they are exposed to the messages like: people inside are not leadership, communities impacted are limited, and the young people themselves are "at-risk." The deficit-oriented talking points of punishment structures can be detrimental. Social justice values are an antidote to this.

Studies indicate that engaging young people with social justice and community organizing experience increases social emotional learning, stronger academic outcomes, and critical thinking and analysis.[5] Programs that want to invest in the leadership of young people must connect participants to examples of social change movements and leaders that reflect back the reality young people live in. Youth must see themselves as able to create change not just on an individual level, but in a broader more powerful scope as well.

It's not just for the youth…

Creating programs is a challenge. Creating programs that combat mass incarceration is even more of a challenge. Our communities and our youth can sometimes be in dire situations. Programs must balance the day-to-day needs of young people while also promoting larger ideas, values, and real alternatives. It can be overwhelming.

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5 http://www.research2action.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2018-Powerful-Youth-Powerful-Communities-Final-Research-Report-4dist.pdf
   Rod Watts article on international youth organizing

This is where strong organizational leadership and institutional commitments to social justice are key. Keeping young people out of jail while also supporting them to be powerful leaders does not happen overnight. It takes thoughtful commitments from people in power and already in leadership. An organizational leader interviewed in our research spoke to this hard task:

> *"I think [our program] fit into [our social justice] vision and values, carrying the tension between the need for ongoing personal development and system analysis to shut the whole damn thing down. [But] the tension is even more real with young people still on Probation. How do you teach young people to successfully get off Probation by complying with system demands, while still teaching them to think critically about the entire system?"*

The criminal justice system does not embody an ethic of social justice. It does not sit on a foundation of freedom. And yet still, in commitments to ATI programs and supporting youth through the system, we must balance the desire for larger system change, individual growth, and navigating the regulations and rules of the very system we are attempting to change. What a tall order!

The same organizational leader continued to say,

> *"I've always felt that the message needs to be both/and not either/or. We should be able to say 'the system is entirely messed up and needs to be held accountable AND we need to operate at the highest level of integrity and excellence regardless of how messed up the system is.' I think the underlying values need to be consistent: what is good, right, honest, healthy, liberating, true, pure and loving? And then giving young people the tools to look at the system in that light, to look at themselves in that light, and to look at programs in that light."*

With these words, on the following pages, we offer some practice-based stands for the hard balance of building up a Social Justice component in ATI programs.

SOCIAL JUSTICE IMAGINATION: STRANDS

Social Justice Imagination 💪🗣️
Strand 1: PRACTICE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative Justice (RJ) is a philosophy and practice of building community and addressing conflict in transformative, non-punitive ways. It sees harm (violence, rule breaking, mistakes) beyond an individual error, and instead, as a hurt towards a larger community. Therefore, to heal and repair harm, there must be a dedication to addressing it collectively and healing collectively. Implementing clear, structured, and consistent RJ practice within ATI programs and within larger organizations helps build up alternative models of handling conflict. It establishes a space where youth, staff, and leaders can learn from and practice tools of de-escalation, accountability, and mediation.

Our research shows that a lack of RJ in ATI programming increases conflict between staff and results in a sense of confusion for youth participants. Young people lamented that when there weren't clear systems of accountability for participants and for staff, that "street justice" or "street rules" took over. Celebrating hyperlocal leadership and building a Credible Messenger ethic is a dance between celebrating the wisdom people have while also collectively reflecting that we all have space to grow and new skills to practice. Restorative Justice is an avenue for this. An organizational leader spoke to using RJ in an ATI program with Credible Messengers and youth:

"You're trying to create this new ethos of empowerment, of coaching vs. supervision, and progressive discipline. You were trying to really shift those norms and I think that we are shifting, I think that we can do that, but at the same time, I think that the timing of the feedback, and this is what I've learned, that that has to be consistent.

Like you have to create a culture of giving and receiving feedback. If you're going to try to create a leadership environment for Credible Messengers, that doesn't matter at what level. And its not easy to do. Takes courage. Most people, feedback, they don't take it well. And so it's going to take courage and patience to see through the visceral reactions and get to the heart of the matter and stay true to the cause and really the purpose of this, is for you to do more and better." - Organizational Leader

Restorative Justice allows us to do more and to do better. It is a concrete step not just towards feedback but towards building alternative models of leadership and community. For more information on RJ resources please see the Resource Page in the back of this guide.

Social Justice Imagination 💪🗣️💰⚖️

Strand 2: CENTER GENDER INCLUSIVITY + CHALLENGE TOXIC MASCULINITY [6]

Gender matters. Young femme participants interviewed in our research were outspoken about their experiences in ATI programming. They expressed not having many mentors to confide in, particularly about their own experiences with gender based trauma. They had to navigate the sexual and intimate advances of not only male participants but also from male staff and mentors. Young women in ATI programs felt as is if they were foreigners in a space that was supposed to support them and guide them through navigating the already challenging and violent criminal justice system. One young femme participants stated:

> *"The group was male dominated, you didn't really see any females and that didn't feel right. That didn't put the fear in me. I have all male siblings and relatives."*

And later, as she went on to describe a challenging and harmful relationship she had with a male mentor in the program, she reflected poignantly:

> *"They should've made [the boundaries] very very clear, from the jump."*

These accounts should not remain unheard. As young women are underrepresented in ATI spaces, their low numbers can result in male-centered programs, male-dominated social expectations, and a potential for toxic masculinity to go unchecked. Simply stated: women and young girls are afterthoughts in conversations around the criminal justice system.

Across the world, women's treatment is a measuring stick for equality. The more access women have to education, health care, affordable housing, and employment, the more equitable the larger society is. This is no different in our neighborhoods, organizations, families, and programs. Young women of color are some of the fastest growing numbers within the criminal punishment system. We can no longer leave their experiences or wisdom behind. Re-centering gender equity is an important step towards embracing a social justice perspective in programs and in organizations. Interrupting toxic masculinity fights against a narrow understanding of manhood defined by violence, sex and strength, in favor of one that embraces emotional vulnerability and care.

Incorporating and centering gender inclusivity begins with acknowledging that women are impacted and thus must be part of organizational leadership, frontline work, and they must be participants in ATI programs. Gender inclusivity requires that toxic masculinity be challenged - this looks like addressing issues of sexual harassment, male exclusion of women's perspectives, defensiveness around speaking about gender and LGBTQ concerns. And gender inclusivity and challenging of toxic masculinity must occur whether there are female participants in programs or not. Discussing, critically thinking about, and learning about diverse gender expression, gender norms and gender expectations is critical to building leadership and developing stronger emotional and practical learning. Creating programs that uplift gender creates stronger programs for everyone involved and pushes teams to think more critically about their social justice lens.

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[6] See glossary for definition of toxic masculinity and other gender-justice related terms.

In our Resource Guide, find organizations and collectives doing impactful work around gender equity. In our Interactive Section, find some exercises to do with your team to explore how people think about and experience gender. We recommend that these conversations happen in leadership and amongst staff!

Social Justice Imagination 💪🏾🗣️

Strand 3: CREATE ORGANIZERS

What defines a successful young person? What are the roles, jobs, and opportunities that system impacted young people can aspire towards? When do we stop seeing young people "at risk"? Or, perhaps, how can we begin to see them "at risk" for creating change - at risk for transformation - at risk for becoming leaders?

What defines a successful young person? What are the roles, jobs, and opportunities that system impacted young people can aspire towards? When do we stop seeing young people "at risk"? Or, perhaps, how can we begin to see them "at risk" for creating change - at risk for transformation - at risk for becoming leaders?

ATI programs can focus heavily on eliminating additional system contact and helping support the day to day needs of participants. These are foundational pieces of program development. We understand that there needs to be a simultaneous stop to the over-policing and over-incarceration of youth and also a serious development of opportunities for those that are system-impacted.

However, the work towards a stronger future for system-impacted communities occurs through the long stretch of community organizing, civic engagement, leadership and courage from those closest to the issue. Social justice is an investment in hope. It is the practice of believing in a radically different future. Leadership for young people, for staff, and for all those involved in ATI visions means that we must build our own change agents. Young people derive power and hope for themselves when they are able to look in the mirror and see a community organizer - a person that has the power to create change around them. This must be the metric we work around. The goal for programs cannot only be to undo those labels that have been tossed onto us by criminal justice systems. We must create our own labels, our own identities that reflect back the commitment to work for change alongside others.

POWER IN
OUR PEOPLE: PROFILES 💪🏾🗣️💰⚖️

As you begin to take practice-based steps towards incorporating social justice into your ATI programming, reflect back on the history of change agents that helped build the fight against mass incarceration. Below, we share a short profile of four leaders from diverse backgrounds that are all connected to the history of imagining alternatives for young people beyond imprisonment. Our power is in our history. Share these stories in your programs or work together in your own contexts to find the leaders that walk behind you!
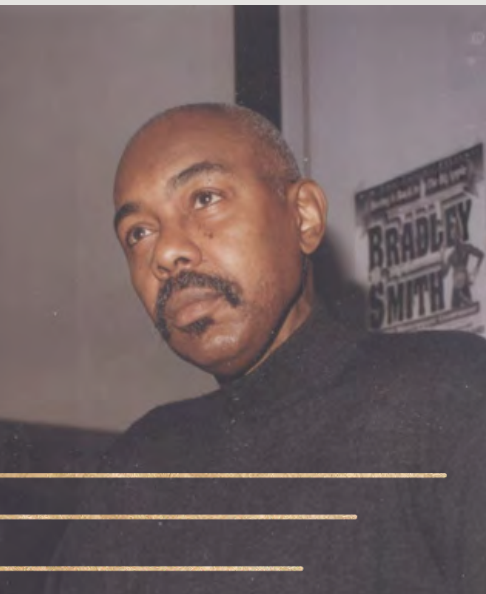
EDDIE ELLIS

Eddie Ellis was a visionary leader who worked tirelessly for justice both inside and outside the criminal punishment system. Eddie was born in 1941 in Harlem, NY and by 1967 had become the Director of Community Relations for the New York City branch of the Black Panther Party. In 1969 he was targeted by the FBI's Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) and convicted for murdering a man he had never met. He would ultimately serve 25 years (1969-1994) in the New York State prison system for a crime of which he maintained his innocence until his death in 2014.

While serving a prison that spanned three decades, Eddie Ellis continued to organize and advocate on behalf of the growing numbers of Black and Latino prisoners. A survivor of the 1971 Attica insurrection, Eddie was at the forefront of calling for more humane conditions of confinement in New York State Prisons. He devoted himself to education; earning a bachelor's degree from Marist College, a master's degree from New York Theological Seminary, and a paralegal degree from Sullivan County Community College. While at the Green Haven Correctional Facility, he formed a Think Tank with other scholarly-minded prisoners called the Community Justice Center. They conducted research demonstrating that more than 75% of the people incarcerated in New York City came from just 7 neighborhoods in New York City. Their analysis was published under the title "The Non-Traditional Approach to Criminal Justice" which later became more commonly known as "The Seven Neighborhood Study." That research, which drew parallels between community conditions and incarceration, would become seminal in the movement for decarceration and community reinvestment. While steadfastly advocating for the rights of people behind bars, Eddie nonetheless maintained a laser sharp focus on the community.

> *"Prisons and prison populations are a reflection of what takes place outside of the prisons. The direct relationship constitutes the basis by which we propose that there are no prison problems, only community problems. Once we begin to address community problems, prison problems will also be addressed."*

In the years before release, Eddie grew increasingly concerned with the new generation of young people entering the prison system during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Always a believer in human potential, he was nonetheless dismayed at the lack of community consciousness:

> *"The best and the brightest and the smartest and the toughest of our young people are in prisons… And I say that they're the best because… they have rejected I think the idea that they will allow the social and economic conditions to beat them down. So what they did is to defy the law, they became outlaws. I think in them you see a warrior spirit, a spirit of rebellion, a spirit of resistance, but it's misguided spirit. A spirit that's very destructive, an anti-social spirit and it's the kind of energy, that instead of blossoming into something magnificent, has turned inward in a very pathological kind of way. And has been at the same time, self-destructive as well as destructive of the community around us."*

Eddie and his peers were committed to redirect that spirit towards community healing and the movement for justice, beginning with the younger generation in prison. At the same time, they realized that these young people had grown up largely without the elders in the community who should have shown them the way - in no small part because so many of their elders were incarcerated. He began to exhort his fellow prisoners to return to the neighborhoods they grew up in to engage young people before they wound up in prison. He stated they had a moral responsibility to become "Credible Messengers" to a generation targeted by the criminal punishment system, and often abandoned by mainstream community institutions.

After his release in 1994, Eddie continued to dedicate his energies to the struggle for human justice. He formed the [Center for Nu Leadership](#) with other highly educated former prisoners to advance a practical vision of criminal justice reform. He believed that he and his peers were just as intellectually and academically capable as the current "experts" on criminal justice research and policy, but maintained a distinct advantage because of their lived experience within the New York State prison system. His "Open Letter to Our Friends on the Use of Language" which urged humanizing language for people in the criminal justice system remains influential today, and the 7 Neighborhood Study continues to influence criminal justice policy today. The Arches Transformative Mentoring Intervention and the NYC Department of Probation's decision to invest in Neighborhood Opportunity Networks (NeONs) are the direct result of Eddie Ellis' influence.

THE YOUNG LORDS

The Young Lords were a militant movement of Puerto Rican youth in the United States that began in 1960 as a street gang in Chicago. By 1968, under the leadership of José "Cha Cha" Jiménez, the Young Lords were re-conceived as a social and political movement to fight for Puerto Rican self-determination, embracing the twin goals of independence for their homeland, and neighborhood-controlled development for Puerto Rican communities in urban centers on the US mainland. Inspired by Chicago Black Panther leader Fred Hampton, Jiménez sought to turn the Young Lords into "the Puerto Rican counterpart of the Black Panther Party." [7]

While Chicago remained the national headquarters of the Young Lords, the New York City chapter rose to prominence in 1969 through several high profile actions. The leaders of the NYC chapter were college students whose parents had migrated from Puerto Rico to NYC's barrios: the Lower East Side, Spanish Harlem, Williamsburg, and the South Bronx. These young activists had aspirations for revolutionary mass education for Puerto Rican communities in NYC, but were challenged by people in the community to do something practical, like cleaning up the garbage rotting on the streets of East Harlem. The Young Lords began with a community cleanup, sweeping up garbage and piling it on on the sidewalks for sanitation pickup. When the NYC sanitation department failed to remove the garbage, the Young Lords piled the garbage up major intersections along 110th street and set it on fire. The action forced a response from the city, which included more equitable sanitation schedules and the introduction of alternate side parking to facilitate street sweeping. The action also won over community members who now saw the connection between revolutionary ideology and practical neighborhood improvements.

The Young Lords would continue to fight for Puerto Rican rights in El Barrio and beyond through other major actions, including an 11-day occupation of the First Spanish United Methodist Church in East Harlem, during which they established free breakfast and clothing programs, health services, a day-care center, a liberation school, community dinners, poetry and films.[8] In 1970, after learning that Lincoln Hospital was failing to notify patients who had tested positive for tuberculosis, the Young Lords conducted door-to-door TB testing across East Harlem and the South Bronx and commandeered a TB X-Ray truck to test 770 people over 3 days. On July 28, 1970, the Young Lords took over Lincoln Hospital for an 11-hour occupation to demand "door-to-door preventive health services, maternal and child care, drug addition care, senior citizens' services, grievance table, and increased minimum wage for hospital workers." The modern Patients Bill of Rights is a direct result of the Young Lords actions.

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[7] Quote is from Johana Fernandez on a podcast, cited in this article: https://sum.cuny.edu/young-lords-puerto-rican-activists-shook-up-nyc/

[8] http://palante.org/AboutYoungLords.htm

The Young Lords were also one of the first revolutionary movements of the 1960s to explicitly challenge male chauvinism and uplift the role of women in the struggle. Female members of the party formed a woman's caucus to demand an end to sexual discrimination and the full inclusion of women into the leadership of the Central Committee. When the Young Lords updated their 13 point platform, point 10 was revised to read: *"We want equality for women. Down with machismo and male chauvinism."*

As the movement expanded In the 1970s, the Young Lords became a target of the FBI's COINTELPRO program.[9] Strategic differences between the Chicago headquarters and the NYC Office caused a schism that was heavily exploited by law enforcement who used tactics like "rumor campaigns and pitting groups against one another to create factionalism, distrust and personality conflicts." José "Cha Cha" Jiménez was indicted 18 times over a six week period on felony charges and would ultimately serve a 1 year prison sentence. By 1976, the Young Lords Party was disbanded, although many of its members would continue their activism in community organizing, media, health care, politics and law.

RED FAWN + THE DAKOTA ACCESS PIPELINE

Red Fawn is an indigenous Ogalala Lakota Sioux indiegnous water protector and is currently a political prisoner. Red Fawn was a part of a vibrant movement to protect the water reserves and land at threat by the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline - an oil pipeline that would cut across the geography of the midwest, move through Indigenous Reservations, and put at risk all ecosystems in its path. The #NODAPL (No Dakota Access Pipeline), also known as Standing Rock movement involved activists, indigenous communities, and environmental justice advocates from across the United States. They highlighted the need to protect and preserve the environment not only as a means to combat issues of climate change, but also to protect and preserve the indigenous communities that rely on and live in relationship to the land. In 2016 Red Fawn was part of a mass movement by the FBI and the United States government to arrest and dismantle Standing Rock activists, particularly those of indigenous descent. As hundreds of law enforcement officials descended upon a Standing Rock camp, Red Fawn was arrested and charged with firing a gun at officers and is facing multiple years in prison. Through her arrest and court proceedings it was revealed that the FBI sent informants and disruptors to unravel the Standing Rock movement and the lives of its activists who call themselves water protectors.

9   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young_Lords

Red Fawn's incarceration is a byproduct of a coordinated effort to suppress a movement for the rights of indigenous people and their lands. This is why we see Red Fawn as a political prisoner and a fighter against mass incarceration. Native Americans, Indigenous people, and First Nation individuals have been incarcerated at some of the highest rates across the country. The legacy of colonialism and genocide against indigenous communities is intimately tied to the United States' addiction to punishment. Thus, we see the movement for indigenous sovereignty to be in close alignment with the movement to end mass incarceration. The current epoch of mass incarceration has deep and long roots and we believe it is critical to understand the long legacy of punishment and how it has been used as a tool to colonize, grow economies, develop cities, and even put in oil pipelines. Movements for change require solidarity across race, gender, citizenship, age and geography. Standing Rock and activists like Red Fawn say Mni Wiconi in the Lakota language, which means "Water is Life," a call to action to protect the sacredness of water, but also as an outcry against the clash of value systems: one system that values profit over one that values life; a way of interacting with the world based on greed rather than leaning into reciprocity; a vision of a movement of law breakers rather than a sacred gathering of protectors. Teaching young people and ourselves about the values we want to see in the world is just as critical and important as being critical of systems, institutions, and programs. Values are the seeds we hope to plant and blossom in the new vision of the world.

MOTHERS RECLAIMING OUR CHILDREN (Mothers ROC)

Mothers Reclaiming Our Children was an organization founded in 1992 to combat false and exaggerated charges against Black and Latinx men in the Los Angeles jail and policing system. Mothers ROC was founded by Barbara Meredith and Fancie Arbol and its members were mothers of the accused and incarcerated men. As mothers losing their sons to the punishment system, Mothers ROC collectively organized members of the public to challenge the militarization of the Los Angeles Police Department, fight against

prison expansion across California, and reveal the harsh and unjust sentencing practices against communities of color.

We salute MothersROC and their members as freedom fighters because of their lived experience as system impacted people and the ways in which this fueled their work. Incarceration does not just impact people behind bars. Contact with police, traumatic court experiences and lock up ripple back to touch the lives of family members, communities, schools, and social ties. While it is often believed that incarceration is the most vicious for Black men, it is critical to understand that it is often mothers, wives, femme partners, and femme family members that support those behind bars. Mothers ROC centered their experiences and claimed their own narrative in the story of incarceration, using it to propel forward many years of testimonies, demonstrations, campaigns, and pressure towards system stakeholders to change the punishment system. Incarceration impacts all of us. And in imagining alternatives to it, we must also include the diversity of people that are in its net. Through learning about collectives such as Mothers ROC we open up a door to envisioning and strengthening our own capacity to support families and uplift their (and our own) struggles towards liberation.

Learning about the history of anti-prison activism works to empower and illustrate models of leadership to system-impacted young people. However, embracing a framework of justice is not only for youth - it is for organizational leaders, frontline staff, funders, and system stakeholders. We encourage buy-in from all parts of ATI programming because all of us must continue the legacy of liberation.

The Interactive Section contains some prompts that can help spark conversation between all people involved in ATI programming. Gather people within organizations, institutions, and collectives and discuss how themes of social justice impact you.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Positive youth development embodies a strengths-based way of engaging young people in their own growth and agency. It rebuffs the notion of "at-risk" youth of color to be saved by privileged saviors on the outside. We believe that shifting the conception of leadership development in ATI programming will result in confident, knowledgeable, and activated young people fortified with critical skills, relationships, and information to break down the carceral state as we know it. In present-day ATI programming, the language of positive youth development is still burgeoning, but the concepts and the philosophy associated with it underlie many of its foundations.

In this section, we examine how positive youth development functioned in the context of CCFY ATI programs and offer practice-based strands that support in incorporation of positive youth development principles.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: CORDS

Positive Youth Development 💪🗣️⚖️

Strand 1: Weave Positive Youth Development With a Social Justice Lens

The way that we frame the concept of positive youth development uses an expansive approach, based on a social justice lens. In a 2002 article entitled "New Terrain in Youth Development: The Promise of a Social Justice Approach," Shawn Ginwright and Julio Cammarota expose the limitations of a positive youth development structure that is limited by "[promoting] youth assets [at] the risk of dismissing serious, social, economic, and political influences in the lives of urban youth" and with "a universalistic, white middle-class" conception of youth.[10] They go on to advocate for:

> ***"Expanding the current terrain of youth development to include practices that encourage youth to address the larger oppressive forces affecting them and their communities… [offering] a more complete model of positive youth development, because it examines the processes by which urban youth contest, challenge, respond, and negotiate the use and misuse of power in their lives."*** [11]

This broad, intentional approach provides a landscape to acknowledge and address the factors present in the lives of young people impacted by the criminal punishment system in urban areas including, but not limited to, the effects of poverty, discrimination, drugs, gender-based violence, homophobia and transphobia, police violence, and financial pressures to support families. We believe a positive youth development approach with a foundation in social justice can shift how power materializes in ATI programming, agitating negative or toxic dynamics, and empowering the young people within the programming themselves.

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[10] "New Terrain in Youth Development: The Promise of a Social Justice Approach," Shawn Ginwright and Julio Cammarota (pgs 84-85) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young_Lords

[11] "New Terrain in Youth Development: The Promise of a Social Justice Approach," Shawn Ginwright and Julio Cammarota (pg 87)

Positive Youth Development 💪🗣⚖️

Strand 2: Design Curricula with Intentional Values

When designing the first version NYC-based ATI program, a founding staff member stated: "The values were about positive development. It's about bringing the different crews and gangs of New York together and learning together and then going back to those same neighborhoods that they're from and each one, teach one" and that "the underlying value was to develop what the goal or the mission was – to develop peer credible mentors, that was the goal."[12] Whereas that staff member saw these as parallel values that intertwined with each other, we learned from other interviews, that the two often conflicted and dimmed the clarity of program's purpose. In our interview a philanthropic funder for the same ATI program said,

"There was always this debate: is this a leadership development program or a mentor training program for those who are really ready and engaged and wanted to do this work? Was it more of a next step of a mentoring process that would be a form to keep kids – continue to keep them engaged as they developed? And I think there's always been a tension in those two purposes and I don't think we've landed on what the best approach is." [13]

Ultimately the goal of our work is to design curricula that can help develop young people into healthy adults. Sadly, funding streams have allocated resources for positive youth development opportunities for the "good kids" who already "behave well," while simultaneously responding to youth with behavioral challenges with police, probation, prosecutors and prison. As a result, most positive youth development programs find themselves unequipped to deal with youth who are system-involved and bring with them all of the trauma, rage and stress of that experience. This is where Credible Messenger mentors become so important. Envisioning programs that highlight building relationships with credible messengers can bring an inherent understanding of who these young people are to the experience, because the credible messengers were once these young people. Not only can they relate to the trauma experienced by youth, they also know the path to healing.

12   Program Leader 1
13   Program Supporter 1

Positive Youth Development 💪🗣️

Strand 3: Think Beyond Peer Mentorship and Activate Leadership in Young People

A peer mentorship approach may have a sense of transaction. You attend this program, we train you in the principles of peer mentorship, you go back to your community and mentor individuals that are currently in the position that you once were. Often times, that results in a new cohort of young people aiming to be a peer mentor themselves, continuing a cycle of ATI programming, which undoubtedly is an affirmative departure from more young people becoming incarcerated. However, the goal of prison abolition is diluted. We want instead to elevate a body of youth that understand the structural underpinnings of oppression bolstering the criminal punishment system, have the lived experiences and intimate knowledge of its breadth, are self-possessed and view themselves as capable leaders, and have a loving community of support to stand beside them. A positive youth development approach would combine skill building, political education, interactive learning, storytelling, healing, and restorative justice.

Some youth interviewed posited that other programs in which they had been involved, outside of CCFY had a different approach. Instead of feeling like activated leaders in other programs, the young people felt exploited for populating the program. One remembered being referenced by a staffer as "the money," and expressed how that left him feeling used and unvalued.[14] In a separate interview, another CCFY ATI program alum probed his understanding of Credible Messengering through this lens saying, "[Credibility is] showing me what you're worth: showing me you're about this. That it isn't just a job, it's a lifestyle. Dealing with the kids like you care and not like it's a business."[15] The implementation of positive youth development methodologies rebuffs the notion of the young people as commodified bodies, and instead views them as active agents of their own transformation and growth. A seasoned staff member reflected that it took trial and error in many versions of ATI programming to finally "get" a positive youth development culture:

> ***"From a youth development perspective, they were feeling connected. They were feeling like they belonged. There was a relationship that was building. We can speak to like to healthy or unhealthiness of it, based off of whatever, but I do think that the young people were feeling like they belonged."*** [16]

A large part of this feeling was the room for the participants to share themselves with their peers, and observe the transformation in themselves and in each other. At a culminating retreat that took place at the end of an ATI program, one participant said, "that's why people tell you their stories…so, I could know about you and you could know about me and we can relate and build on and network from that," while another expressed, "Being here today and you know just listening to everybody, it was just like…I see a difference in everybody regardless if I was around them or a long time or not. Like, you see and you hear a change in the person when they speak." [17]

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14   Program participant 1 with program participant 2, focus group
15   Program participant 4, interview
16   Person 4, retreat audio
17   Person 2, retreat audio

Participants and alumni of CCFY ATI programs that were interviewed valued the explicit language of leadership development in programming. They expressed feelings of empowerment, excitement, and motivation from being in spaces that posited them as leaders in their own right, elevated their leadership qualities, and exposed them to leaders across industries, challenging conversations, and new perspectives. One participant noted that it was important to value both the "revolutionary" within him and the "suit wearing business-man" that he had the potential to be.[18] A majority of participants that we spoke to expressed a desire to share what they learned with individuals in their lives outside of the program. This echoed the spirit of the program at its onset - an acknowledgment of how relationships and a sense of collectivity in leadership can unsettle the cyclical nature of system involvement or proximity to incarceration.

In one focus group, a young woman intimated, "You can change your life at any given point in time. You don't have to wait for it to be given to you, you can do just one little thing, and your life is changed. So basically I could just bring knowledge to my community."[19] The young man with whom she was in dialogue agreed, saying, "[The ATI program] gave me skills that I can apply to life. Skills I've seen leaders like Barack [Obama] and other leaders show."[20] The sentiment of seeing other leaders that reflected their own identities as providing insight into their own potential was a theme that we frequently heard. In another focus group, a participant expressed this, reflecting on his time prior to his involvement to the program,

> *"Honestly the program changed me a lot. I didn't do anything. Before I had seen this program, I had never had a job, I've never met professional people...It was really interesting to see, we would go to cohort trips and see these people."* [21]

That same participant remembered learning biology with his mother when he was younger, but was unsure how he could translate his passion for that subject into a career. After his involvement in an ATI program, he confidently asserted "when I started to see African American doctors or lawyers I was like 'ok this is possible.' I wasn't thinking about any of this before this program." He is now taking steps to carry out his aspiration to be in the medical field someday, specifically as a doctor in his community.[22]

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18 Retreat Audio
19 Program supporter 2, focus group with program leader 2
20 Program leader 2, focus group with program supporter 2
21 Program participant 1, focus group with program participant 2
22 Program participant 1, focus group with program participant 2

Positive Youth Development 💪🗣️💰⚖️

Strand 4: Radically Distribute Power and Disrupt Existing Dynamics

As aforementioned, a critical aspect of positive youth development approaches is the way that they may reimagine power dynamics in enacting social change. We asked the funders and leadership of CCFY to offer their perspectives on how power manifested in the programming space and learned quite a bit about the direct correlation between that and the youth experiences of empowerment. A funder said,

> *"Some of the kids were taking the curriculum and really making it their own and owning it and riffing on it and developing on it. That was really exciting to see! And then they could share it with other cause they went through this process of learning it but adapting it."* [23]

This viewpoint is somewhat reflected in the below quote posited by a member of the leadership team, however the latter provides an additional layer to consider when distributing power among staff and participants alike. He affirmed:

> *One of the positives was that 4As staff and participants were given lots of power to create the program, define its norms, develop curriculum, plan events, etc. The downside was that the program in many ways grew its own culture and identity without the same high level of expectation and accountability.* [24]

From this quotation we learn that while positive youth development allows for dispersed ownership of program content and allows participants the space to have a voice in crafting their own experiences, this must come with strongly realized measures of accountability and parameters for operation.

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[23] Program supporter 1
[24] Organizational leader 2

When it comes to ATI programming, having a foundation of positive youth development ensures that we center the most significant voices among stakeholders - that of the youth themselves. A positive youth development approach affirms the value that comes from each individual young person with their own narratives and rejects the existing archetypes of those deserving of growth and change. It sees all young people as capable of making change in their lives and communities. Unfortunately, this is not yet part of the paradigm of ATI programming, but there is great potential of actualizing that shift. As one young woman participant said,

> *"I didn't expect to see the youth there that I saw. I expected to see them on the streets hustling. But no they wanted change. They wanted to do better. It made me feel like I can help change other people."* [25]

Ultimately the goal of our work is to develop young people into healthy adults. Sadly, funding streams have allocated resources for positive youth development opportunities for the "good kids" who already behave well, while simultaneously responding to youth with behavioral problems with police, probation, prosecutors and prison. As a result, most positive youth development programs find themselves unequipped to deal with youth who are system-involved and bring with them all of the trauma, rage and stress of that experience. This is where Credible Messenger mentors become so important. They bring an inherent understanding of who these young people are because they were these young people. And not only can they relate to the trauma experienced by youth, they also know the path to healing.

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[25] Program supporter 2, focus group with program leader 2

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE + STRUCTURE

An organization's structure allows for efficiency and productivity; Its culture is what transforms it from a place to get work done, to a place where self-determined people come together around a shared goal. Investing in your organization's culture transforms colleagues and participants into a community. An organization's culture asserts its values and fiercely embodies its own convictions as it faces the world. It can show staff, participants, and all others in their community that they matter and what they are building together matters too.

In this section, we examine organizational culture and structure and lay out key foundational activities and principles that are critical to value-based ATI programming.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE + STRUCTURE: STRANDS

Organizational Culture + Structure 💪🏾🗣️💰⚖️
Strand 1: Articulate Consistent Values + Vision

One of the major aspects for a healthy organizational culture is a sense of shared values and having clarity of vision across programs. From our PAR work, we learned from a wide range of stakeholders – staff, funders, participants, and alumni that there was a lack of understanding of the overall mission and goals of the programs they were a part of. Without a stalwart vision to refer to and rely upon, the programmatic space mushroomed into a climate weighed down by confusion over roles, conflicts, misunderstandings, blurred boundaries, lack of accountability structures and curricula that constantly changed based on what coordinators identified as pressing issues to address. One of the former staff members who is no longer affiliated with the programs remembered at the onset, "...they didn't have a real vision of what was to be done. Some had thought that they would just reiterate some of the [chosen curriculum] and stuff like that but there wasn't a real plan."[26] Oftentimes, in lieu of strong curricular practice and content, warm food, stipends, and relationships were the draw of the program for some.[27] One youth alum reflected that there "really were no boundaries. Mentors would come in with drugs or gang affiliation. Not all mentors but some didn't care. How can you mentor someone if you're doing the same thing as your youth?"[28]

A telling indicator of this lack of vision was the disparity of experiences between current participants and alumni, showing that there was not a consistent thread across cohorts over the years the program took place – from values, understanding of the mission of the program, responsibilities and roles for mentors, or the metrics of success. Despite this oblique vision, through the commitment and passion of dedicated individuals, many participants still viewed the experience as positive and transformative.[29]

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26 Program Leader 1

27 Retreat Audio

28 Program supporter 2, focus group with program leader 2

29 Retreat Audio

While each organization and community is different and has different needs, prior to the start of program, each will need to set time aside to discuss the vision and values of the program. A transformative ATI program is one that values the humanity of staff and participants alike, committing to support and professional development in staff, positive youth development, social justice training and political education for participants, an analysis of gender equity, uplifting of marginalized identities, and processes for accountability stemming from restorative justice.

Organizational Culture + Structure 🗣

Strand 2: Develop a Clear Conception of Credible Messengers

Also among these values is a unified understanding of the role of a Credible Messenger in this work. In our conversations, we found that while there were common themes and qualities that individuals associated with Credible Messengering, there wasn't one clear manifestation of it and perhaps most significantly, the viewpoint was not articulated to the youth in a way that was collectively grasped. A funder stated, "in the justice system, a Credible Messenger would be somebody who has lived experience in the justice system,"[30] while a member of CCFY's leadership reflected on hearing a staff person describing, "someone who has one foot in the street life and one foot in the straight world."[31] In our series of focus groups, we directly asked the participants to contemplate on how they defined a Credible Messenger and characteristics they associated with credibility. An alum of programming and current CCFY staff member said,

> *"[A Credible Messenger is] someone who wants to facilitate change in a young person. Someone who understands that you're not end all be all... It's not you who makes yourself credible, it's the young person who make[s] you credible by allowing you in their space."* [32]

Another mused,

> *"If I need help with something and I come to you, can you get it done and I come back and you help again? That to me is credible. I can go to you for anything and I know you'll keep your part up... Someone who knows what path I'm going down and help me not go through it but still show me the path like this is why you don't want to go through it."* [33]

While speaking in theoretical terms, the participants were comfortable in conceptualizing their own perceptions of Credible Messengering. However, when asked if they believed that all current and former staff could be considered Credible Messengers, they were hesitant to respond in the affirmative. Oftentimes, they described their relationships with various staff in a way legitimizing a lack of boundaries, expectations, and measures of accountability.

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30 Program supporter 1
31 Organizational leader 2
32 Program leader 2, focus group with program supporter 2
33 Program support 2, focus group with program leader 2

Organizational Culture + Structure 🗣️⚖️
Strand 3: Invest Time and Energy in Your Staff

Part of having clear expectations of boundaries is demonstrating that you value the humanity of your community. For one, crafting nurturing environments for all to feel safe in who they are, learn together, have the room to make mistakes, and learn some more. In our focus groups with participants and alum, time and time again, they would reference specific staffers as being key to their transformative experiences. While we are hesitant to categorize these positive, affirming relationships as the intervention themselves, any successful ATI programming will find its roots in building powerful, mutually respectful and challenging relationships. In order for frontline staff to be in a position to foster these types of healthy relationships with participants, organizational support structures, professional development opportunities and systems for accountability need to be in place. As one current CCFY staff member noted,

> *"The work won't suffer as much as the people. When you have people that are so connected and passionate about what's happening, they'll make it happen. But like the people will suffer. And so it's like we have to create time where people feel supported. They feel connected."* [34]

Other staff agreed, expressing the worth of professional development and regular check-ins for mentors. Explicit time to reflect, grow skills, and execute and plan programming helped mentors feel equipped for the implementation of their ATI programs, strengthen their language around major concepts and issues that arose during the program, and see themselves as an essential component of the program's success. From our research, we learned that while professional development and training often took place prior to the first day of program – these were seen as piecemeal opportunities that were not followed up with or cultivated into a larger catalogue of skills and knowledge.[35] Desired topics for professional development trainings include: facilitation and curriculum development skills, conflict resolution and restorative justice, and deeper conversations around boundaries and positive youth development.

For guidance on supporting your staff in developing healthy practices of self-care and self-preservation, check out page 66 of the Interactive Section.

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34   Program leader 2
35   Program leader 2
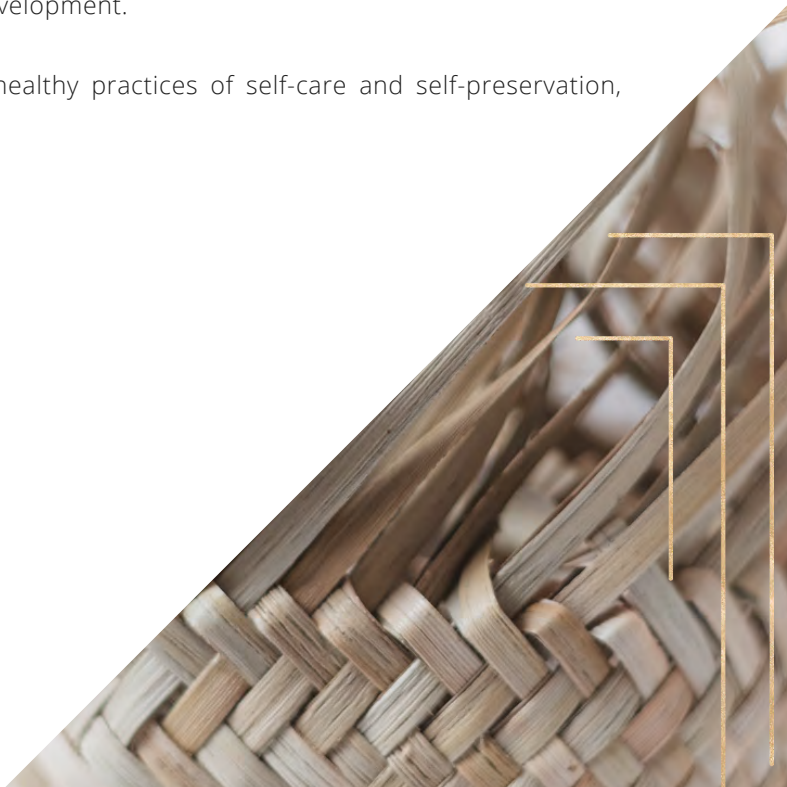
Organizational Culture + Structure 🗣️

Strand 4: Collaborate and Grow Together

Providing ongoing chances for professional development creates more potential for collaborative trainings with staff across programs. This includes mentor training done collectively across sites before the onset of programming in order to build community and generate a shared ethos and set of values. This will help ensure common standards and language that can then work for accountability later on in the program between staff and across sites. Support should continue throughout the program and can be strengthened by mechanisms for peer-to-peer support across sites. Professional development trainings must occur in partnership with regular, normalized program management and supervision. In our research, we have found numerous examples where consistent direction and clearer understandings of expectations and resources available could have disrupted unhealthy dynamics or conflicts that arose earlier on.[36]

A related note with reference to healthy organizational culture around staffing is understanding the capacity of individuals and the substantial demands of implementing this type of program, at all levels. Perform a comprehensive analysis of the various tasks and requirements associated with the program and account for spaces for healing, processing, and self-care when developing job descriptions and hiring individuals for particular roles. Consider how the pressures of meaningful ATI work can be allayed by the proper supports and incentives like supervision and benefits.

Organizational Culture + Structure 💪🏾🗣️💰⚖️

Strand 5: Gender + Sexuality Are Always a Part of the Conversation

A clear majority of probes into the criminal punishment system and associated programming – state-funded, community-based, and otherwise, are focused on the image of a heterosexual cisgender young man of color. We reject this. There is a very critical need for more supportive and nuanced programming that is safe for intersectional identities. The dialogue around the criminal punishment system necessarily must stretch itself to accommodate the existence of system impacted individuals that belong to marginalized identities, including femmes and young women, both cisgender and transgender, non-binary youth, gender non-conforming individuals, and those that belong to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Some argue that ATI programs themselves are populated primarily by heterosexual cisgender young men of color and the curricula reflect that.[37] We reject this as well. All programs should prioritize and incorporate a gender equity analysis regardless of the gender identities and sexuality of those in attendance, to shift and dismantle the damaging and erroneous assumptions of the criminal punishment system and who it "affects the most." CCFY itself has been a forerunner of bringing this perspective into the public lexicon with its **G.I.R.L.S. N Da Hood Presents 7 Generations of Bronx Femmes: A Community-Based Report.**

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[36] Program Team Meeting

[37] Program supporter 1

In speaking to self-identified young women participants, we learned of their experiences with certain iterations of the program, namely that it was very male-centered, did not address the challenges they faced specifically for being feminine of center, were sexualized by mentors without the knowledge of supervisors, and that they were compelled to provide traditionally feminized supports to their peers, including performing emotional labor.[38] The young women also expressed concern about values of gender equity and safety within the larger Credible Messenger community and programs. Staff agreed, with one stating that,

> *"At the time that I became the supervisor, I was the sole female staff for the program, but I was not tasked with providing direct service. I was concerned that there were young women in the program without representation in the staff so I made arrangements for another CCFY female staff to provide support for the weekly groups and I also prioritized attending the weekly groups for one of the two sessions. Given all the issues that took place in the past, I recognized the power of having that female presence for the young women, as well as the young men in the program."* [39]

Programmatic spaces must also establish themselves as a welcoming environment for young people and staff across the spectrum of sexuality, and open to ongoing dialogues as young people develop their personal understandings and relationships to their sexuality. And in addition to hiring practices reflecting a range of gender identities mirroring that of participants, engage staff and participants with trainings on gender equity and structural gender-based oppression, furnishing them with the analytic and organizing skills to name and interrupt these dynamics as they may appear in program and in their communities.

38   Program participant 3

39   Organizational leader 1

Organizational Culture + Structure 🗣️⚖️

Strand 6: Young People Value Their Mental Health, Do You?

We asked former and recent participants what their ideal version of the program would entail. A majority of them included some version of mental health support for participants. We need to listen to them. One reflected,

> *"I used to deal with a lot of stuff to the point where I felt like I was always fighting a battle by myself…like it was always me against a bunch of other people, like nobody understood me or where I was coming from."* [40]

The same participant continued to say,

> *"…we would have groups like this where people… you know would come in and talk to us and we would tell our stories. But I would always be the last one because I was always listening to other people's stories."* [41]

If we want these young people to engage in a truly transformative process, it cannot come in the absence of nurturing their mental health and well-being. Many organizations outsource their mental health services based on capacity. We cannot determine what will work for everyone however, finding trusted providers to offer dependable, stable support that is aligned with organizational mission and values are paramount. Inviting young people to be transparent and open about their needs, checking in on their well-being regularly, following-up, and designating specific time for healing and wellness are all practices that can and should be integrated into program design.

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[40]   Person 2, Retreat Audio

[41]   Person 2, Retreat Audio

Organizational Culture + Structure 💪🗣️💰⚖️

Strand 7: Practice Restorative Justice

In the field of ATI and ultimately the goal of prison abolition, restorative justice philosophy and practice are essential to address harm and maintain the health of a community. We found that overall, there was a lack of understanding on the structures of accountability within our own ATI programs, among staff and between participants. In some instances, participants were not sure if the program used RJ practices and/or philosophy. Participants in the research also vocalized the desire for clearer accountability structures for conflict and breaches of community between fellow staff and **mentors.**[42] Questions posed were: What does restorative justice look like beyond sitting in circle? How can individuals truly engage in a restorative justice approach but still hold individuals accountable? (i.e. how to balance allowing individuals to remain in the program/organizational community and also potentially recognizing when individuals may need to be removed from the community without engaging in an overly punitive approach).

Organizations should set the expectations and the practical norms around restorative justice early on with all involved, and revisit and evaluate consistently. Further, as one staff member noted, a single individual should not be seen as a "holder of restorative justice," but rather, an organizational shift needs to take place, where everyone carries the mantle of restoration and building community together in the face of harm. An organizational leader elaborated on the evolution of accountability practices in the program saying,

> *"We were permissive about a lot of situations where there should have been much more accountability, and only exercised holding people accountable when things got really egregious...Then, when action was taken, it was very top down and quick, without really DOING WITH (emphasis theirs) or helping the entire community process the harm."* [43]

Thinking about where they would like to see the organization adjust and transform with regards to restorative justice, they went on to say,

> *"In the next iteration, I would like to see ALL the people involved in the programming (supervisors, mentors, participants) go through the process of setting values, and receiving training on RJ practices that promote accountability and restoration. In the last year or so, we've had a number of opportunities to practice this more authentically, and the results have been better."* [44]

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42 Program Team Meeting
43 Organizational leader 2
44 Organizational leader 2

Organizational Culture + Structure 💪🗣️

Strand 8: Be Participatory - Ask the Youth What They Envision

Creating options together as a community spreads power and control in the situation. An organization that lends itself to participatory culture creation is one that emboldens a sense of ownership and belonging across the community. When given the chance, both staff and participants had ideas on what could strengthen program, and when these were put into place, the motivation to execute them successfully gave space to demonstrate leadership and skill. Alternatively, when ideas were produced, but stifled, investment and engagement suffered.[45] An organization's culture should be decentralized and reflective of the wants and needs of the community of which it is part, evolving with time and changing public discourse, and engage individuals from a variety of roles and lived experiences and types of contact with the criminal punishment system.

Some of the exciting ideas the young people of CCFY's ATI program brainstormed included: 1:1 meetings in addition to group sessions, work readiness workshops, a space that belongs to the program with room to execute these things properly, trained mentors that are properly vetted, retreats and bonding opportunities for youth, tangible next step achievements like internships, and more chances to learn about often hidden histories like Black Wall Street and prison abolition.[46] An organization whose culture validates the process of idea generation and explores options toward application is one that is truly participant-centered and empowering.

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[45] Program leader 2
[46] Program participants 1 & 2, focus group

FUNDING ⚖️💰

Here is a hard conversation to have: MONEY!

Funding is part of the game of program design and implementation. While ideas to throw a wrench into the criminal justice system are critical, so is thinking through how to fund your toolbox. In this section, we outline some ideas on how to be thoughtful about funding ATI programs for young people - especially hyperlocal programs run and created by system impacted people. These issues are not just for frontline workers - they are for funders as well. The gap between on the ground work and the offices of big foundations can feel vast. And sometimes they really are. But there are opportunities for intentional bridges to be built.

In this section, we will make recommendations to funders and how they, in their critical roles and decisions-making, can steer Credible Messenger based ATI programming in a direction that is congruent to social justice values and the sustainability of the work.
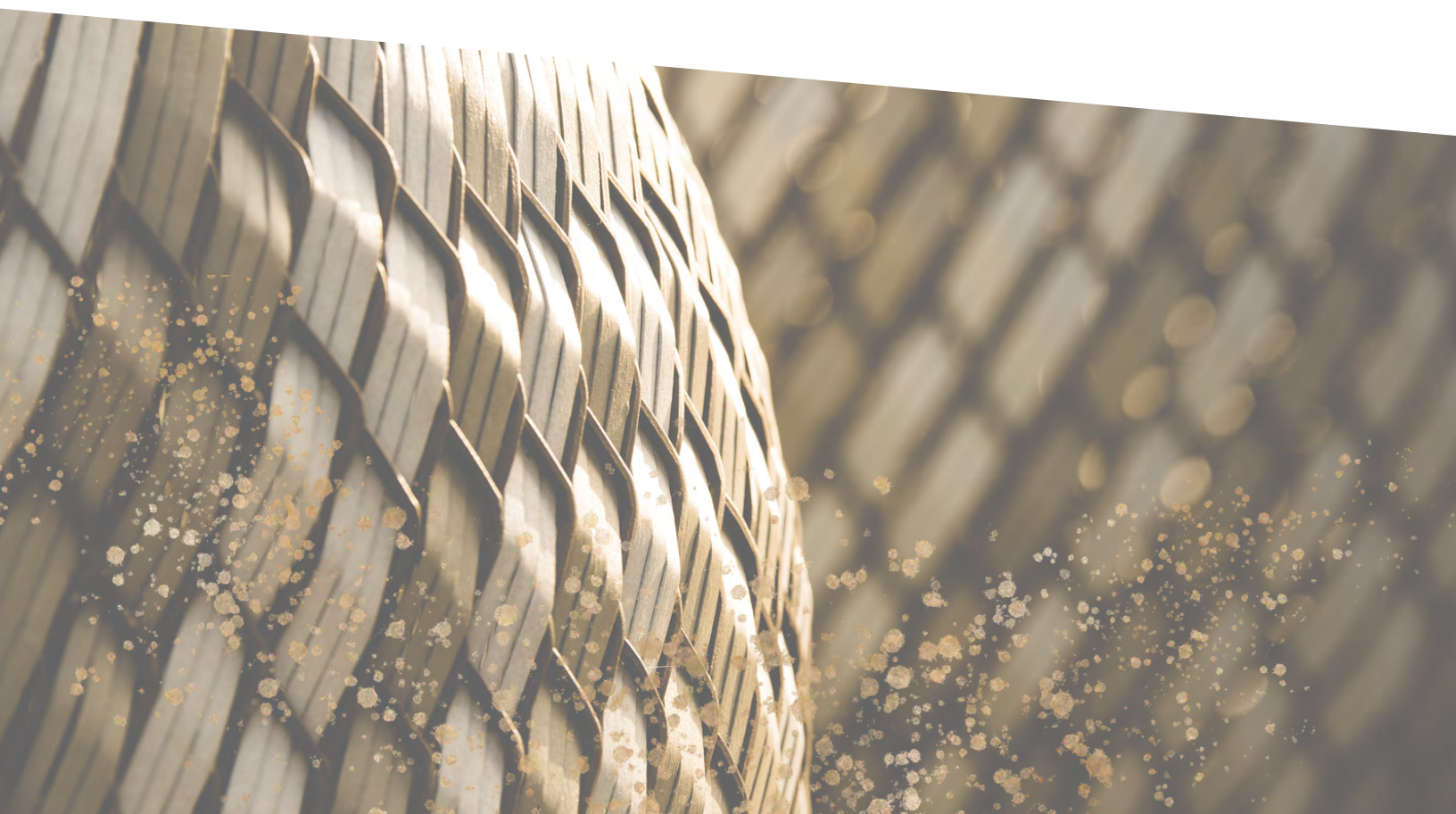
⚖️💰 FUNDING: RECOMMENDATIONS

Funding

Recommendations Part 1:
Let's talk sustainability

Sustainability can mean many things. We hope that the movement to stop the lockup of young Black and brown people eventually means that not one more person is put behind bars. We want this work to be long lasting and strong. It is a marathon, not a sprint. To sustain the work of ATI programming and the Credible Messenger ethos there needs to be thoughtful and consistent streams of funding. This can be overwhelming, but here are our suggestions to think about how to plan for strong, resourced programs.

- **Pay frontline workers a strong living wage:**
  The people on the frontline of supporting system-impacted youth are individuals that often have their own experiences within punishment systems. We see the transformative possibilities and true change that comes when mentors are local leaders. This means though, that these same leaders have navigated their own stories with police contact or potential incarceration. Their very expertise is also the very aspect of them that can prevent other employment, access to education, or even being seen as employable. Our first responders deserve to be full time employees and to get paid a living wage.

  Many former mentors and frontline staff interviewed in our research were driven to do this work because of a desire to give back. They did not want other young people to "go down the same road," or to "make the same mistakes" that they did. They were committed to their jobs because of the hardships that they had endured. Their work went beyond the 9-5 schedule - it was lifework. And yet, they still struggled to pay bills, support their families, and continue to transform their own lives.

Creating sustainable programs requires sustainable leadership and sustainable equity. When planning ATI programs, create budgets that are fair and that support those individuals that are the closest to the issue. Other forms of compensation should be options too: certificates, degrees, school credit. We must uplift all those committed to this work.

- **Lives move beyond programs:**
  Programs are containers. Young people arrive at ATI programs from a variety of different avenues: school, probation, court, from their neighborhood friendships, or even their family. They also bring with them a host of needs. Programs are not the full solution to supporting system-involved youth. Programs have specific start and end dates, while the development of young people's skills, lives and opportunities is ongoing. Sustainability asks that we balance creating realistic goals for programming while also knowing that the needs of young people will stretch far beyond the program. Plan for this - create outcomes that are specific, support that is ongoing, and pathways for continued involvement.

- **Diversify Funding:**
  ATI programs are closely associated with the fight against mass incarceration and challenging the criminal punishment system. We can often seek funding that aligns with those goals. However, it is also important to remember the many strategies, tactics, and approaches that are taken in ATI efforts. Keeping young people out of jail, away from police sweeps, and beyond the reach of courts is about engaging youth, providing young people space to explore, mess up, grow and learn. That means that ATI efforts are also educational efforts, they can involve art, explore housing opportunities, they can build particular job-related skills. ATI programs are about leadership, about youth safety, they touch on issues of identity, mental and physical health, and community development. This means that you should approach all buckets of funding across all issue areas. The best antidote to incarceration is revitalizing communities and individuals with resources, support, and opportunities. Our funding strategies and streams should reflect this.

Funding

Recommendations Part 2: Dollar Driven VS. People Driven

While reflecting on the role that funders play in ATI movements, a staff member said in an interview,

> *"[T]he shifts that can happen [in philanthropy] can fund a movement, like that's great. But at the same time, is [the work] being led by the people or is it being led by the dollar?"*

There is a long history dissecting the nonprofit industrial complex and the extreme challenges of philanthropic organizations setting the agenda for movements. Funder-led initiatives are not bottom up organizing. And yet, ground-up movements need financial support. While we do not have an answer to this delicate balancing act, we do believe that it's critical to have ATI work that is people driven. Communities, families, and young people are the experts in their lives and can help shape the structure of programs that support them.

In our research we asked youth participants in a program to describe what they would do for the program if they had one million dollars. Below are some of their answers—take them and let them drive and inspire your work!

- **Learning how to be mindful**
- **Defining and understanding wealth, especially how to give back**
- **Mental health support and services for young people**
- **Classes on how to be a better parent**
- **More staff and mentors that are women**
- **Practicing work etiquette vs. social etiquette**
- **Learning how to manifest: a plan, a vision, a journey**
- **Being an example to others from your actions, not just your words**
- **Practice in listening to others and being able to see what you have in common**
- **Educational classes**
- **Discussions on current events**
- **Access to job fairs**
- **More outlets for self expression like art and music**
- **Opportunities to practice youth facilitation**
- **Specific girls groups**

To be people centered means to listen. It means being willing to be led by young people. The ideas are there - it is a responsibility to build a platform in which to hear them and allow them to grow!

Remember divestment needs to be part of the game.

Even though "crime" has gone down, police and prison budgets have exploded and expanded over the last two decades. The money poured into criminal punishment infrastructure is astounding (See XX)

In your ATI program, elevate the need for fiscal divestment away from prisons, Advocate for the dollars spent to lock up young people, to be reinvested in youth development. Learn from the many campaigns and efforts of justice reinvestment happening around the country. Structural change is a financial game too. Part of our work is to stop dollars from going into prisons and to redirect them into repairing and uplifting communities and young people.

If you're a funder, think critically about your role.

Funders are in unique positions. Their bold ideas and advocacy create meaningful change. They can be magnificent allies in the creation of programs and ATI efforts. However, there are blind spots too. Frontline workers interviewed during this research spoke to this dynamic: the necessity of having strong relationships with trustworthy funders, and the discomfort that comes from knowing that falling out of favor with a funder could have devastating impacts on program sustainability. Frontline workers and staff had moments of feeling insecure about the year-to-year nature of funding, and worried about making internal program decisions that might alienate funders. They spoke of the tension of desiring authentic communication with funders but also worried about funders getting too close to the work and feeling the need to perform to keep funders happy.

These are difficult and nuanced lines to walk and it takes courage to express these perceptions.. Moreover, conversations between staff and funders are laden with power dynamics and differing levels of access to money and decision-making authority.

If you are a funder, how can you balance your excitement and enthusiasm for the work while remaining mindful of the delicate power dynamics inherent in relationships with grantees? How can you support efforts for change without overstepping your role in the tender and sacred community built within programs and organizations? We suggest taking a step back and looking around: philanthropy and systems of funding are also fertile grounds for making change. We encourage you to continue to leverage your position to change philanthropy, engage in conversations with your peers about the materials in this guide, and advocate for continued funding for grassroots leadership in this work.

CONCLUSION

Now What? Next Steps?

This work is a humble attempt to lift up what we believe to be the higher purpose of community-based alternatives to incarceration for youth - not simply programs that reduce recidivism but processes and practices that change the world we live in for the better. So often we exist under the pressure to achieve concrete, measurable short-term outcomes to demonstrate our effectiveness. How many young people were re-arrested? How many young people successfully completed probation? How many went back to jail? There is nothing wrong with tracking these outcomes, but we encourage you to disrupt the idea that these metrics alone are what constitute success. Individual growth is central to this work, but it doesn't end there. Even the most effective alternative-to-incarceration programs that transform lives aren't going to enact structural change. We are still yearning for a world where alternatives to incarceration are unnecessary and where young people have the freedom to grow and thrive apart from a system of punishment and social control. We believe it is our responsibility to use our programs not only to help young people become free of the criminal justice system, but to develop the tools they need to be agents of change in a world that desperately needs a new paradigm of safety, freedom, and justice. We encourage you to use this report as a tool to engage in critical reflection among staff, as well as to engage young people in dialogue about their experience in your program. We urge you to use your program as an opportunity to strengthen young people's skills in the area of critical thinking, analysis, communication and social justice praxis that prepares them to exercise world-changing leadership. Behavioral change, self-improvement, and even peer mentorship are all parts of this process, but they are not the final destination. We hope that we live long enough to see a world where there are no kids in cages, but we may not get there ourselves. The most important thing we can do then is to pass on this vision and the tools to work towards it to our young people so that they can carry the movement forward. We hope you will join us in continuing to strive towards this transcendent vision, and humbly offer these materials as just a few tools to help us all get there.
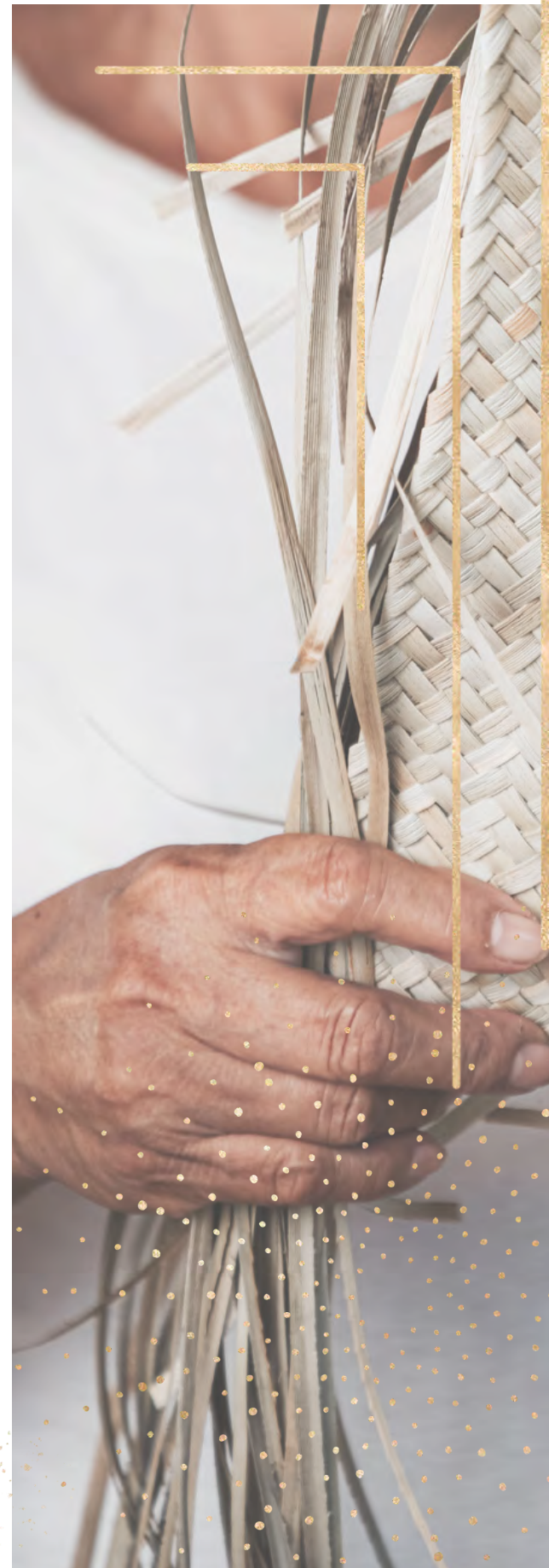
INTERACTIVE ELEMENTS + SKILLS TOOLKIT

The following pages offer support in bringing the themes and reflections in this report to life as you implement them in your community and workplaces. Having an interactive approach encourages participation that prioritizes engagement and accessibility. This collection of activities, tools, resources, and frameworks are presented as suggestions, and should be remixed to fit the needs of your organizational contexts.

Feel free to highlight specific topics or questions that may be especially relevant to the landscape within which you work and live, and the people in it.

TOOLKIT SECTIONS

Program Structuring

THE PRE-WORK

Imagine the first day of your program. How do you want to feel on this day? What will help you get there? The work starts long before you set foot in the meeting room.

Below, we provide guidance on preparatory steps you can take to ensure a smooth start and set yourself and your participants up for success. From logistics, like clarifying roles and setting a thoughtful meeting place, to crucial content pieces that deserve deliberate attention like setting goals, acknowledging existing dynamics, preparing staff, and establishing collective accountability measures -- opening up discussion and encourages a transparent space for collaboration and planning. These practices can then be carried and referenced throughout the lifetime of your program.

Check out our backward planning tool on page 79 for further support on how to plan the implementation of these pieces.

☑ Land on Leadership and Roles

One of the most integral pieces to running a successful ATI program is to have an unambiguous leadership structure. People need to know who they can count on, who is accountable for what happens to them. Failing to secure consistent leaders with cohesive understandings of the criminal punishment system and its impact can have serious consequences for the participants. When you have a revolving door of personnel and/or no clear guidance on what you're doing, the program suffers from a lack of vision, and participants are unable to trust or rely on the process. Don't just say you're a Credible Messenger-run organization, but amplify Credible Messenger leadership by investing in proper support and training. Administrators and organizational leadership need to have the capacity to regularly reflect, evaluate, and communicate about the program with staff. Clear job descriptions and considered division of tasks across roles - facilitators, supervisors, social workers, mental health providers, restorative justice coordinators, among others - lead to more efficiency, healthy collaboration, and a holistic approach in providing a thoughtful and evocative ATI space.

☑ Set Goals and Objectives

Well before the first day, start thinking of the answer to the question – **What is it all for? Then, what do I hope participants will gain from the experience? How can I get them there?**

If the point of the program is to provide an intentional alternative to incarceration space for young people where they can activate their own leadership, learn about the structural conditions that have led to the current criminal punishment system, and forge powerful, intergenerational bonds rooted in restoration and accountability. YOU are in the critical, exciting position to set the stage for that to happen.

Setting clear goals for the program provides the foundation upon which organizationally, you all will build out your plan. It gives staff and facilitators concrete objectives to which they can return, if they ever feel a little lost or off-track along the way. Along with the importance of clear objectives is the communication of these ideas. Goals need to be able to be understood by all involved, from administrators and fundraisers, to frontline staff, community stakeholders, and perhaps most significantly, the youth themselves. What is this all for? This should be a question that everyone is able to answer!

☑ Acknowledge Dynamics

Your program will not exist in a vacuum. You will be stepping into existing dynamics and creating a space with individuals that have informed and developed perspectives and worldviews. Throughout this document, we've considered the experiences of the young people impacted by the criminal punishment system against a holistic landscape acknowledging structural oppression, interpersonal dynamics, conflicting interests, distribution of power, perceptions of gender, and more. Situate your program within the community and context within which it will be taking place. **What are the relationships of which you should be mindful? How can you ensure that each participant can engage in the program with an equitable sense of belonging and ownership? How can you acknowledge and neutralize potential conflicts?** Consider the specific needs of your community, what has worked and has not worked in the past, and the resources available to you. Think about the meeting location, preferable timing, community organizations to collaborate with, experiences or voices to boost, and other ways to honor these dynamics.

☑ Secure a Thoughtful Meeting Location

Where you plan to meet has a deep effect on your program. From recruitment to retention, the participants that you engage with will be impacted by the location of your program. There are various and somewhat conflicting perspectives on this. On the one hand, finding a location that is seen as "neutral" can free up the affiliations and the effectual dynamics of having program in a certain neighborhood. However, hosting a program off-site from the operational headquarters can normalize an environment with a lack of oversight and insight into the program's implementation. You don't want to be too distanced to know what's going on. If your meetings are held at a site with multiple programs, pay attention to how you coexist, understand that participants can and may communicate and have relationships, and address any sense of competition or comparison that may arise - for leadership, resources, or support. Even if your program is taking place in a pre-selected location, we encourage the consideration of the significance of place, how to communicate in recruitment to mitigate hesitation based on affiliations and engaging in frequent cross-site collaboration to create a wider sense of community and inclusivity in the program experience.

☑ Prioritize Staff Support and Training

Your program will thrive by feeding the minds and spirits of your staff. People are hungry for more knowledge and more skills. During program, staff should be able to exhibit comfort and skill in engaging with participants and facilitating potentially challenging dialogues. **How can we ensure that organizations feel supported and prepared for this endeavor?** Identify the crucial areas and plan to host or attend trainings or workshops to address them AND prioritize follow-up time to process and reflect what was learned. Plan for these trainings to occur both prior to the start of program to provide expansive knowledge base as well as throughout the programmatic year, to continue the learning journey. *Potential areas for training are: facilitation skills, restorative justice, healthy relationships, boundaries, power and oppression, feminism, and identity including but not limited to race, class, gender, LGBTQ+, immigration status, etc.*

☑ Discuss Expectations and Establish Measures for Accountability

Before the first meeting with participants, have a conversation where stakeholders can share their expectations for and from the program (this should also be done with participants once you begin). This will be a collective effort, so having a collective understanding of what individuals expect and need in order to work together and flourish in this venture is important. Providing early chances for open collaboration and communication yields to stronger chances of enacting that as a norm as the program progresses. In tandem to setting expectations, establish restorative practices for accountability and confirm that all are aware of and accept these practices. The more folks are involved in a participatory process of co-creating the terms of engagement, the more effective we'll be in managing complex situations that may arise. Make sure to address the following question: **How can you balance allowing individuals to remain in the program/ organizational community and also potentially recognize when individuals may need to be removed from the community without engaging in an overly punitive approach?**

We know that the pre-work of creating programs can often get lost in the shuffle of deadlines, funding and/or low capacity. However, investing in this process creates more ease, clarity and stronger programs later on down the line. Have fun in modeling intentionality!

Program Structuring 💪🗣️

PROBLEM SOLVING

So program has started, and things are going smoothly... until they're not. Below we explore some potential responses to challenges that may arise and sharpen the facilitator problem-solving skill set.

Pushback from Participants

What happens when you've done "everything right" but your participants aren't buying what you're selling? Maybe they seem disinterested and are resisting your efforts, or have vocally critiqued the activities. Be transparent and acknowledge the dynamics and check-in with your participants. Ask them how they feel things are going, identify some of the challenges you've noticed, and what they would like to see happen. This can be as a group, or on an individual basis. Ask them for suggestions on what can encourage more genuine involvement and generate excitement about what you are doing together. This can be in dialogue, written feedback, brainstorming session, or another method. Share the facilitation responsibilities and have some of your participants lead an activity or a discussion themselves, on a topic they prepare and plan for with the facilitator's input.

Disconnects between Real Life and Program

Participants might struggle to understand the relevance of some of what you are discussing versus issues they view with immediacy in their day-to-day lives. Draw connections between more abstract topics and participants' real lives. Use storytelling and narrative to bring richness to your discussion. If you are exploring generational trauma and the cyclical nature of system involvement in families and communities, don't just talk about it as an issue, you can bring in a speaker, ask the participants to reflect on their own lives and share themselves, and identify how this plays out in the everyday - make sure you aren't losing the humanity of the conversation. Don't just talk about the "what," but the "why." To do this, highlight how growing our knowledge, learning concepts and language, and building organizing skills empower us with tools to enact change and address the realities of oppression that we can take a part in dismantling. Explore the tension between speaking to the realities of structural oppression and legacies of resilience and movement-building into which they are stepping.

Relationships/Blurred Boundaries/Sex

In sharing our stories with each other, we are encouraging vulnerability among our participants. We value empathy and authentic connections but recognize how they can cause boundaries to be blurred and relationships to be complicated. If participants are around the same age, live in the same neighborhood, have existing relationships or shared experiences with each other or with staff, it can be really hard to have strict boundaries. Sexual relationships can and have happened when the age gap is not so wide. Participants and staff have also engaged in recreational activities with each other that are inappropriate and make it hard to effectively run program. It must be stated clearly before program even begins that sexual relationships between staff and participants are prohibited. Create strong expectations relating to recreational activities (partying, socializing, substance use, etc.), and hold people accountable when needed. Be explicit and direct and make sure everyone knows the potential consequences of these blurred relationships. Lead trainings on gender equity and sex, examining the impact of power dynamics as embodied by the criminal punishment system, and how it relates to what is playing out in the program space. Create practices around restorative justice that don't compromise accountability – circles, open communication, trauma-informed healing work - and if there is conflict, address it as early as possible. Put these practices to use and don't be afraid to follow-up and have continued conversations on how to rebuild and restore trust or remove someone from the space if needed for the health of the community.

Feeling Isolated

A lot of times in this type of work, we can feel as if we are operating in a silo and that our challenges are ours, and ours alone. While the specificities of your program have the flavor and the goodness that make it all its own, there are listening ears and knowledgeable peers all over the country with their own version of challenges. For some New York City-wide programs, you might have the advantage of having counterparts across the five boroughs – communicate with them! Make the most of the planned city-wide gatherings, set up additional check-in times, build relationships with individuals at other sites through consistent meet-ups or calls, and interrupt feelings of isolation by seeking community and collaboration.

Limited or Lack of Resources

Planning your curriculum and general outline of your program in advance will help you anticipate and prepare accordingly with the necessary resources. In this work, things are constantly evolving and changing, and you might find yourself having to be flexible and working with less than or different resources you thought might be previously available. In these situations, take a deep breath and be creative. Brainstorm the expertise and knowledge you have access to at your site, your organization, your community, your life. Think about your participants, who they are, what they do, and who they know. How can you engage this? In NYC, you can find an abundance of low to no cost knowledge and interactive possibilities - speakers, community elders, organizations, walking tours, performances, art shows, games - just be willing to put yourself out there and ask.

Sexism, Heteronormativity, Homophobia

Much of the existing ATI programming is crafted with a heterosexual, cisgender young man of color participant in mind. This limited vision marginalizes the experiences and realities of anyone whose identity is outside of these parameters and these programs can be plagued with sexism, heteronormativity and homophobia. Gender must be discussed and interrogated even if young women are not in programming. There should be an explicit belief that healthier relationships to masculinity and femininity are integral to a transformational experience for all individuals. Have these conversations early on and consistently. Challenge interpersonal interactions of sexism, heteronormativity, and homophobia in the moment or follow-up with participants afterwards. Use clear language in support of femmes, trans and gender non-conforming participants, and/or LGBTQ+ participants, and reiterate the importance of this with your group. Create affinity groups for participants (i.e. based on age, race, gender, etc.) to have intentional space for identity-specific programming and/or support.

BALANCING THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE STRUCTURAL

This activity encourages participants to come together and develop a shared language to help describe different forms of change, power, and oppression. Using a problem tree can widen the conversation around power and oppression beyond personal responsibility, to consider the structural roots of our experiences as individuals and in a society.

The 4I's of Oppression

1. Share and read through Grassroots Fundraising's definitions of different levels of oppression. Brainstorm the following with youth, staff, and or other members of your organization/collective: What is internalized oppression? Interpersonal? Institutional? Ideological? Discuss as a group examples of each of these levels of oppression, how they relate to each other, and refer, perhaps, to how they impact your lives, your work, the program, and the organization.
2. Together, also reimagine what liberation and freedom look like across all four of these levels. What does internal freedom mean? How can we have transformative interpersonal relationships? How do institutions need to change in order to promote this? And ultimately, what ideological/ideas should be centered in our world in order to support this?

Problem Tree

1. Draw an image of a large tree on a big surface. Include roots, a truck, and branches. Pass out cards to participants and have them write down individual problems. This can be in their lives, in schools, at home. Make the directions specific to your program and the topic of discussion. Ask the individuals to come up to the tree and put their individual cards on the branches - these become the leaves.
2. Have a group discussion - what do you notice on the leaves? What is similar? What resonates? What underlies these leaves? Write in the trunk the ideas that are generated -- these are the underlying issues to our individual problems (for example: bullying in school can be caused by large classroom sizes).
3. Discuss what is at the root of the tree -- what are the things that support the issues outlined in the trunk? (Big classroom sizes may come from lack of funding, or rather, devaluing education in certain neighborhoods, for example). Give several roots to the tree. Ask yourselves: how are the roots, trunk, and leaves all interconnected? What waters them?

Ultimately, if we do not address the roots, the leaves and the trunk will keep growing back!

http://www.coloradoinclusivefunders.org/uploads/1/1/5/0/11506731/the_four_is_of_oppression.pdf

GENDER BOXES

This exercise can be a lead-in for discussion around multiple issues. The facilitator could concentrate on sexism and its relationship to domestic and sexual violence or use the exercise to look at how sexism, heterosexism and transphobia are related to one another.

Also explain that while we are looking at the dominant mainstream ideas of gender we want to acknowledge that gender roles may vary depending on ethnicity, culture, class, ability and family etc. Let participants know that in this exercise we are going to ask them to say words that are offensive to some people.

Draw two boxes on the board.

1 "Act Like a Man" Box

Ask if anyone has ever been told or heard someone being told to "act like a man".
Write "Act like a man" on top of the first box.
Ask "What does it mean to 'act like a man'" – What are the expectations (which may not be the reality)?

Participants can be invited to come to the board and fill in the boxes or you can do it as a brainstorm. Participants can also do the handout as individuals or in pairs/small groups first. Remember that this exercise seeks to look at stereotypes, not at individual behavior.

- How are men supposed to be different from women? - *stronger, tougher, in control*
- What feelings is a "real man" supposed to have? - *anger, superiority, confidence*
- How do "real men" express their feelings? – *yelling, fighting, silence*
- How are "real men" supposed to act sexually? - *aggressive, dominant, with women*

2 What are the names applied outside to persons of the box?

Wimp, fag, queer, pussy, gay
Note: *These words are important to say and to write down, but ask participants to answer this question calmly and respectfully as possible.*

3 What are the things that happen physically to people outside the box?

Fights, beat up, harassed, teased, abused, ignored

GENDER BOXES

4 "Act Like a Lady" Box

Ask if anyone has ever been told or heard someone being told to "act like a lady".
Write "Act like a lady" on top of the second box.
Ask "What does it mean to "act like a lady" – What are the expectations (which may not be the reality)?

Participants can be invited to come to the board and fill in the boxes or you can do it as a brainstorm. Participants can also do the handout as individuals or in pairs/small groups first. Remember that this exercise seeks to look at stereotypes, not at individual behavior.

- How are women supposed to be different from men? - *nicer, weaker, more gossip*
- What feelings is a "real woman" supposed to have?- *fear, sadness, low self-esteem*
- How do "real women" express their feelings? - *crying, screaming, hysteria*
- How are "real women" supposed to act sexually? - *follow the man, don't sleep around*

5 What are the names applied outside to persons of the box?

Dyke, tomboy, slut, ho, whore, lesbian
Note: *These words are important to say and to write down, but ask participants to answer this question calmly and respectfully as possible.*

6 What are the things that happen physically to people outside the box?

Harassed, abused, ignored, raped, bad reputation

---

7 Reflection Questions: Homophobia/Heterosexism

(You could also use some of the questions in the next section)
1. What do you notice about the influence of male and female stereotypes on sexism, heterosexism, and transphobia? (You may want to break this into three separate questions.)
2. How do the stereotypes listed from the boxes relate to stereotypes for straight and queer people?

8 Reflection Questions: Sexism and Domestic and Sexual Violence

1. What is the implication of the names that men get called?
2. How many men here are in the box all of the time?
3. How many of the women here are inside this box all of the time?
4. What should a "man" do if he gets called these names? Would that put him back inside the box?
5. If a man stays inside the box does he generally avoid getting called names and harassed etc?
6. If a woman stays inside the box does she stay safe safe? Are women inside the box ever raped or abused by their partners? (Yes) What does that say about the suggestion that women stay inside the box? Does it really bring them safety or power?
7. Which box has more power?
8. How do these boxes contribute to the existence of domestic and sexual violence?
9. How do we change these societal expectations?

GENDER BOXES

Key Points

- These are expectations by society and are not realistic.
- Men that stay inside the box are generally (though not always) safe from the harassment that occurs outside the box.
- Men who leave the box are accused of being "women" or "gay"
- Men who are accused of being outside the box could retaliate in an aggressive fashion and then put themselves back into the box.
- Women who stay inside the box are not "safe" as promised but are raped or abused as often as women outside the box. The only benefit being that they may be believed by society more often than women outside the box.

AFFINITY GROUP SOCIAL JUSTICE PROMPTS

Affinity groups allow individuals to process and share around commonalities. This can be identity-based, neighborhood, or positions within this work. We suggest creating affinity groups within organizations to strengthen teams, allow for honest conversations with individuals without it feeling like supervision, performance, or evaluation.

Below are a few questions around social justice that can be asked in affinity groups:

Youth

What legacy do you want to leave behind? What do you imagine your ancestors (your grandparents, grandparents, grandparents) wanted to change for you and your life? When do you feel the most powerful to create change in your life, in your neighborhood, in your state, in the country, and in the world?

Frontline Staff/Credible Messengers

What are hardships you have endured in your life? What are ways you can perpetuate those onto others? What is a blindspot you have for creating change? What groups and communities outside of your own, do you feel inspired by and why? What needs to change in order for you to feel secure, stable and able to create the most change possible in your community?

Directors/Organizational Leaders

What values are you bringing into the organizational space? What do you know about the values of your staff or supervisees? How do you want people to feel in your workspace/What role do you have in crafting that feeling? How do you actively engage in a wider distribution of power?

AFFINITY GROUP SOCIAL JUSTICE PROMPTS

Funders

What inspires you about this work? How do you relate to the individuals and organizations with whom you work? What do you want your legacy to be? What is your definition of wealth and how can it be apportioned out to benefit those pushed into the margins?

Community Leaders

What moves you the most about your community? What are the areas of abundance and possibilities in your community? How do you want to collaborate or connect with folks from other spaces and places?/How can you foster that? What changes do you want to see happen in the next 5 years? 10 years? 20 years?

System Stakeholders

What does a world without prisons mean to you? What do you think are the most significant impacts of the criminal punishment system? How do you and your loved ones talk/think about the criminal punishment system?

Family

What does love look like at home? What are the connective threads that keep your family together? How do you work through conflict in your family? How do your relationships impact the way you see and experience the world?

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROMPTS

While restorative justice is a philosophy and deep practice to resolve conflict, sometimes the simplest way to incorporate it is to ask questions and allow everyone to answer. Below is a list of amazing questions developed from the Oakland Unified School District's Racial Justice Restorative Justice's guide. Below, find their questions:

The following questions can be used to both design and facilitate your circle. These questions are grouped by category. Choose questions based on your participants needs—you can choose **three** to **five** from one section, or **one** question from each section.

community activity

- What is a value you bring to a space?
- What value can you bring that would help us work through this conflict successfully?
- When are you at your best, what value defines you?
- What is something you value about...?
- What is a value you hope to share with others in your life?
- Share your name and something about your name.
- What do you appreciate about...?
- What is your passion?
- What touches your heart?
- What gives you hope?
- What are you thankful for today?

guidelines

- What agreements would you like for our circle to make you feel that you can speak honestly and respectfully

community building

- What did you dream about when you were younger? what do you dream about now?
- What is a goal you have for yourself? How will you celebrate yourself when you accomplish it?
- What is one obstacle that gets in the way of your reaching your goals? What is your plan to overcome this obstacle?
- What are you honestly looking for in your life right now?
- What are you really trying to learn at this point in your life?
- When you are hurting, how do you heal?
- What is your cultural heritage, and what role does it play in your life?
- If you could talk to someone from your family who is no longer alive, who would it be and why?
- What is the best thing that happened to you this week?
- What is the most important lesson in life you have ever learned? What made it so important?
- What do you think other people see as a quality that you need to work on?
- What changes would you like to see in your community? What can you do to promote that change?
- Share something that you like and something that you do not like about your neighborhood and why.
- If you could change or overhaul two things in our community , what would they be and why?
- What is the most important quality to you in a relationships with someone else? How and why is it important to you?
- Talk about a relationship between people you know that you admire or look up to?
- Who is someone in your life that has helped you to grow? How have you grown? How did they help you to do so?
- Who was a teacher who influenced you in positive ways? In what ways did they influence you?
- In what social situation have you felt the least powerful? What was it that caused you to feel that way?
- What person or people know you the best?
- What do others want from you? What do you want from others?
- What do you appreciate about someone who is important to you in you life?

Adapted from The Circle Keeper's Handbook (2017) by Kay Pranis.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROMPTS

storytelling

- A time when you had to let go of control.
- A time when you were outside your comfort zone.
- An experience of letting go of anger or resentment.
- A time in your life when you experienced justice.
- An experience of feeling that you did not belong.
- A time when you were in conflict.
- An experience when someone harmed you. An experience when you harmed someone.
- Something that makes you angry. How do you deal with anger?
- A time that was one of your most difficult challenges. How did you deal with the challenges?
- When was the last time you said "yes" and would have liked to say "no"? Why did you say, "Yes"?
- A life experience when you "made lemonade out of lemons."
- An experience where you discovered that someone was very different from the negative assumptions you first had about that person.
- An experience of transformation when, out of a crisis or difficulty, you discovered a gift in your life.
- A time when you had to hear something very difficult from someone and afterward were grateful it happened.
- An embarrassing moment you can laugh at now.

brainstorming solutions

- How will you know things are better?
- In your experience, what supports healing?
- What change would you like to see in this group? What can you do to promote that change?
- What can be done now to create healthy community?
- What do you expect to do differently as a result of this circle?
- What do you expect to be different after this circle?
- What will you do to make sure these agreements are followed?

exploring conflict & harm

- What happened, and what were you thinking at the time of the incident?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected by what happened and how?
- What has been the hardest part for you?
- What do you think needs to be done to make things as right as possible?

taking responsibility

- What are three things you did to make the situation worse? What are three things you can do to make the situation better?
- What do you need to clear with someone else in the circle?
- What is unspoken in the circle that is blocking progress?
- What needs to be done to repair the harm and make sure it doesn't happen again?

reflection

- What would you like to leave behind?
- What are you taking from this circle that supports you?
- What have you learned?
- How will these insights help you in the next two weeks?
- What wisdom did you learn from others?
- Finish the sentence, "Today I am reminded..."
- What do you appreciate about each person in the circle?
- Name one thing about yourself you would like to improve upon.

Adapted from The Circle Keeper's Handbook (2017) by Kay Pranis.

SELF CARE, HEALING JUSTICE + MENTAL HEALTH

In a nutshell, a focus on self-care and healing is necessary to be good at this work.

To be a supportive presence and influence on the lives of individuals, families, and communities impacted by the criminal punishment system, as well as program participants, staff, and other stakeholders, you must pay particular attention to calls for healing and tending to one's mental health and wellness.

Self-care can manifest in many different ways – it is not just bubble baths and spa days. Caring for yourself requires that you reserve time that is for you to recharge, seek healing, reflect. It is an opportunity to care for your mind, body, and spirit. Your mental health is as important as your physical health, and deserves to be tended to with time and energy.

Having a healing justice approach to alternatives to incarceration and prison abolition, allows us, as individuals and as a community, to always remain connected to the humanity of this work – interrupting harmful dynamics that cause us to forget ourselves, our bodies, our needs. It encourages us to operate from a place of abundance and not scarcity – to see the possibilities of healing and growth, and not be beholden to the toxic systems of oppression and the carceral system.

Materials:
- Grassroots Fundraising's definitions
- Chart Paper
- Markers
- Speakers + Music

Suggested Time:
- 2 Hours

Preparation:
Label individual pieces of chart paper with self-care prompts and hang them around your meeting space.

1 Go around and have everyone complete the prompt...

"CARING FOR MYSELF LOOKS LIKE..."

2 Have an open discussion about self-care and mental health.

- How often do people make time to care for themselves? What may be some barriers to it?
- How is mental health viewed in their community? Talked about in their homes? What are their own perceptions and experiences of mental health and wellness?

SELF CARE, HEALING JUSTICE + MENTAL HEALTH

3 Explain that oftentimes self-care and healing is seen as individual work, and can put a lot of pressure on a single person to be responsible for their own mental health and healing. But we know that there are a lot of factors and the power of the community is essential in healing. So we will take some time to think more broadly about what can prevent us from being able to care for ourselves and each other.

4 As a group, review Grassroots Fundraising's definitions of the 4 I's of Oppression. Together, brainstorm:
- What is internalized oppression? Interpersonal? Institutional? Ideological?
- How do we see it play out in our lives and work? How can it interrupt our self-care or the health of our community?

5 Explain that as a group, we are going to think about how self-care and healing can be an antidote to oppression at each of these levels.

6 Draw the group's attention to the chart paper hanging around the room, each labeled with one of the following prompts:

HOW CAN I SHOW CARE FOR MYSELF? (INTERNAL)
- EX: BREATH WORK, JOURNALING, COOKING.

HOW CAN WE SHOW CARE FOR EACH OTHER AND/OR SOMEONE IN NEED? (INTERPERSONAL)
- EX: MEAL TRAINS, SKILL-BUILDING SESSIONS.

HOW CAN WE SHOW CARE FOR OUR COMMUNITIES - WHERE WE LIVE, OUR COLLEAGUES, ETC.? (INSTITUTIONAL)
- EX: SUMMER FRIDAYS, SELF-CARE PAID HOUR AT WORK, MENTAL HEALTH STIPEND, PAY EQUITY.

HOW CAN WE SHOW CARE FOR OUR SOCIETY? (IDEOLOGICAL).
- EX: ABOLITION, UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE, ETC.

7 Pass out markers and play music as participants walk around and add their ideas to each of the prompts.

8 After some time has passed, allow participants to walk around, this time reading what everyone has shared.

SELF CARE, HEALING JUSTICE + MENTAL HEALTH

9 Lead a group discussion asking about what they observed from this collective brainstorm.

10 Assign someone in the group the role of typing up the brainstorms and come up with a commitment plan on how you want to ensure that self-care and healing is prioritized moving forward.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

- As a group, read through page one of **"Healing Justice Practice Spaces: A How-To Guide*** - *What is a Healing Justice Practice Space?*

- Have a discussion. Some helpful guiding questions include:

  - *Have you heard the term "healing justice" before?*

  - *What stands out to you from this description? What do you still have questions about?*

  - *How does healing justice connect to prison abolition and/or alternatives to incarceration?*

  - *Have you ever been part of a healing justice practice space before? What was it like?*

  - *How can you establish a healing justice practice space in your organization? What might be some obstacles to it? How will you overcome them?*

- Read the remainder of the resource and create an action plan for how you may create a healing justice practice space in your organization.

BOUNDARIES EXERCISE

This activity encourages participants to come together and develop a shared language to help describe different forms of change, power, and oppression. Using a problem tree can widen the conversation around power and oppression beyond personal responsibility, to consider the structural roots of our experiences as individuals and in a society.

1

- Lead 2 group brainstorm questions and write answers on a large piece of chart paper.
  - **First Brainstorm**: *How can you build strong relationships?*
  - **Second Brainstorm:** *What is meant by "having boundaries?"*
- Ask the groups:
  - How are the two brainstorms questions related?
  - Is it possible to do both?

- -

2

Pass out an index card to each participant, each written with one of the below scenarios **or ones that you have come up with yourself**. Make sure it is indicated on the card if the scenario is between two staff, two participants, one of each, etc.

- Smoking weed together
- going to a participants' house
- getting drunk together
- meeting someone's significant other
- giving out a personal phone number
- following someone on social media

- dating a participant or staff
- having sex with a participant or staff
- lying to cover for someone
- letting someone borrow money
- going on an overnight trip with someone

- -

3

Give participants time to think about how their scenario relates to building relationships and/or boundaries.

- Are boundaries being respected, broken, blurred?
- Are relationships being strengthened? Are they healthy?

- -

4

After some time to think through, go around the circle and have each participant share.

BOUNDARIES EXERCISE

5

- Make sure to encourage participants to be realistic.
- Push back (play Devil's Advocate) to illustrate how easily boundaries can be blurred. Examples:
    - "So a mentor smoking weed with a participant is breaking a boundary, but isn't that also a way that you can get someone to trust you and open up to you?"
    - "How do you know when to make an exception or push the limit a bit?"

Potential Discussion Questions:

6

- How was that?
- What are your thoughts on the scenarios described in this activity? Are they realistic?
- Do you think boundaries make it harder for people to be honest and share with each other? Do they prevent you from really knowing or being real with someone? Why or why not?
- Do you think there are any situations where not having boundaries is actually the healthier option? Why or why not?
- If you felt that a boundary was being crossed in one of your relationships here at _____, how would you handle it? Who would you go to?
- If someone came to you and expressed that a boundary had been crossed here at _____, how would you address it?
- How would you respond if you observed a situation where you think a boundary may be being crossed or blurred?
- We've talked a lot about boundaries on a personal level, but how do they show up outside and in your community? How can having healthier or firmer boundaries in your personal life impact your community? What does it look like to have boundaries as a community? (ie: organizing against gentrification, or building resistance movements to defund police, etc.) What does it look like to have healthy boundaries with your community?

7

At the end, have participants revisit their scenario and each share how a boundary could be set in place to make for a healthier relationship.

Youth Involvement and Engagement Assessment Tool

A key component to positive youth development is to make sure youth not only have quality experiences, but are also fully engaged as active participants. However, this process takes time. It is suggested that organizations and community-based partnerships should assess their programs every six months. Please take a moment to respond to the statements below. Please indicate at what level you agree or disagree.

Youth Involvement

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Youth take lots of initiative working on projects.	O	O	O	O	O
2. Youth are always busy with things to do.	O	O	O	O	O
3. Youth arrive to meetings/events on time.	O	O	O	O	O
4. Youth take ownership when responding to specific tasks.	O	O	O	O	O
5. Youth rely on themselves to make key decisions.	O	O	O	O	O
6. Youth always share ideas about things that matter to them.	O	O	O	O	O
7. Youth help one another learn new skills.	O	O	O	O	O
8. Youth are fully committed to their duties.	O	O	O	O	O
9. Youth are very excited about their involvement with this project.	O	O	O	O	O
10. Youth are involved at all levels of program development.	O	O	O	O	O

Youth Engagement (within the Community)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
11. Youth display a willingness to accept leadership responsibilities in their community.	O	O	O	O	O
12. Youth have full access to information that is needed to make decisions.	O	O	O	O	O
13. Youth express a genuine interest in the community.	O	O	O	O	O
14. Youth display a desire to help others in their community.	O	O	O	O	O
15. Youth display a desire to mentor other youth.	O	O	O	O	O
16. Youth take part in discussions at community forums/hearings.	O	O	O	O	O
17. Youth are applying what they learn by getting involved in other community activities.	O	O	O	O	O

1

Adapted from Jones, K.R. (2006). *Youth-adult partnerships: Are you there yet? How to evaluate your youth development program*. Cooperative Extension Service. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky.

18. Youth take pride in their community.
19. Youth seek the advice of adults in the community.
20. Youth come up with their own ideas for improving the community.
21. Youth are involved in several community-based projects.
22. Youth express a sense of belonging toward their community.
23. Youth are very concerned about community change.

Youth Retention

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
24. Youth are recruiting their peers to join the program.	○	○	○	○	○
25. A majority of the projects are led by youth.	○	○	○	○	○
26. Youth consult with adults on project activities.	○	○	○	○	○
27. Staff/volunteers (adults) have the skills to serve as mentors to youth.	○	○	○	○	○
28. The ideas of this project were generated mostly by youth.	○	○	○	○	○
29. Most youth have no difficulty in getting to the meetings.	○	○	○	○	○
30. Adults feel comfortable working with assertive youth.	○	○	○	○	○
31. Youth make decisions based on their own experiences.	○	○	○	○	○
32. Some youth have been involved in this project for one year or more.	○	○	○	○	○
33. As older youth leave the program, they are replaced by their younger peers.	○	○	○	○	○
34. Youth see this experience as a chance to socialize with friends.	○	○	○	○	○
35. Youth choose to work on this project instead of other activities (playing sports, watching TV).	○	○	○	○	○
36. Youth are routinely recognized for their accomplishments.	○	○	○	○	○
37. Youth make efforts to attend every meeting.	○	○	○	○	○
38. Most of the youth return to this program year after year.	○	○	○	○	○
39. Youth are passionate about the issues addressed through this project.	○	○	○	○	○
40. Youth recognize their strengths in working as a member of the team.	○	○	○	○	○
41. Youth feel challenged to do their best.	○	○	○	○	○

2

Adapted from Jones, K.R. (2006). *Youth-adult partnerships: Are you there yet? How to evaluate your youth development program*. Cooperative Extension Service. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky.

Instructions for Using the *Youth Involvement and Engagement Tool*

1. **Youth development professionals (e.g., youth workers, teachers, 4-H agents/educators) who work closely with youth should complete the *assessment tool*** after the group has been working together for awhile (i.e., near the middle of the project/program). This will give those completing the assessment an opportunity to more thoroughly examine the extent to which youth are involved as leaders. Administering the scale too soon will not allow for accurate perceptions or experiences.

2. **Examine the computed mean scores (averages) to determine whether there are high or low levels of youth involvement or community engagement, and whether retention of youth is at risk.** The items on the scale are grouped accordingly.

   The scale ranges from 1(strongly disagree) to 5(strongly agree), indicating whether the program provides positive or negative experiences within each of the three areas. A mean score for each category between 1 and 2.4 would be classified as "low", while scores between 2.5 and 3.4 could be considered "average" and 3.5 or above would be classified as "high". Compare these scores to the table below to determine which areas may need improvement. The arrows in the table only signify whether levels are "low" (↓), or "high" (↑).

   Descriptions of high levels of youth involvement, community engagement and youth retention are provided below the table. Low levels would be the opposite of these descriptions. Details on the potential causes of low or average levels are also explained.

**Level of Youth Involvement, Community Engagement and
Youth Retention existing within Community Programs**

Youth Involvement	Community Engagement	Youth Retention	Description
↑	↑	↑	This is the optimal result for positive youth development. It indicates a program that is youth-driven, being led by young people who are empowered to promote change. They are beyond mere involvement, and are putting into practice those leadership skills that have been developed and mastered over time. Programs reflecting youth participation at this level are likely implementing practices that are not episodic, but instead are consistent and sustained. This is apparent due to the high number of youth willing to remain active in the program. Youth are able to assume roles as decision-makers, and therefore have opportunities to develop their skills and abilities.
↑	↓	↑	Low engagement. See tips on increasing community engagement among youth.

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↓	↑	↑	Low levels of involvement. See tips on increasing youth involvement.
↑	↓	↓	Low engagement and youth retention. This could be a situation where most of the youth participants are younger and the older youth are leaving for various reasons. Take time to determine if the youth are disengaged because of bad experiences. At the same time, be sure to focus on the youth who are involved, and build their skills in hopes of preparing them for deeper engagement.
↓	↑	↓	High engagement only. This is what can happen when older youth are leaving the program and are getting involved in broader roles throughout their community. Follow up with them to determine if your program had a role in their desire to pursue higher levels of community engagement. If so, take pride in knowing that this is truly a major goal of positive youth development, especially if youth are serving in leadership roles within other groups and organizations.
↑	↑	↓	High involvement and engagement, with low retention. This can occur when youth are forced to choose other options (e.g., jobs, organized sports, graduation), despite having positive experiences within a particular program.
↓	↓	↑	This can occur when youth are allowed to serve as only passive participants. They may be a part of a program, but they have no role in decision-making. This is most common with a younger audience. Teens would rarely settle for and remain in such settings. It may be time to get on board with new strategies! Form community collaborations to determine what youth in the area really need. Solicit the help of caring adults willing to mentor and partner with youth. Most importantly, ask youth for advice!
↓	↓	↓	It may be time to get on board with new strategies. Form community collaborations to determine what youth in the area really need. Solicit the help of caring adults willing to mentor and partner with youth. Most importantly, ask youth for advice!

Note. ↓ (1-2.4) = Low; ↑ (3.5 - 5) = High. A score from 2.5 - 3.4 is considered "average".

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High Youth Involvement: Youth demonstrate high levels of active participation. They are willing to work with others while also taking on leadership roles. They feel a sense of belonging and are therefore at ease in sharing their ideas, while welcoming the opinions of others. At high levels of involvement, youth have full access to details that assist in their social, intellectual and leadership development. Also, programs with high involvement are not controlled by adults, but foster a youth-led approach, allowing young people to take ownership. Youth are intrinsically motivated to embrace the responsibilities of projects and take advantage of the opportunity to have their ideas heard, considered, and implemented.

Low or average *youth involvement* scores (1 through 3.4)

Youth development programs may be designed with the best intentions, but youth play a critical role in determining the success of their involvement level. Often they may be excited to serve as community leaders, but are lukewarm towards a project idea. On the other hand, youth may be the driving force behind a new concept or initiative that can benefit the community. However, the demands on their time due to school, other extra-curricular activities, or work may inhibit their participation.

These and many additional factors can contribute to a mediocre or average rating for youth involvement. This is common when programs/projects are new or if youth are just beginning to gain first-hand experiences as engaged citizens. They may not feel comfortable taking the initiative to lead projects or rely on their own capabilities to make key decisions. Therefore, youth development practitioners must decide if this outcome appears to be only temporary, or if it is time to move forward with implementing strategies to support and encourage youth in this area of their development. A few techniques are listed below that may help address low to average youth involvement.

Steps to improve *youth involvement*:

- Recruit youth who are experienced leaders and pair them with those who are younger and less experienced.
- Make sure youth are afforded opportunities for independence. Give them chances to make decisions and express their opinions.
- Whenever possible, allow youth to decide what project they want to implement. When they have ownership, commitment levels increase.
- Have adult support in place to assist when it is solicited. Despite their independence, youth still want help from adults when needed.

High Youth Engagement: Youth Engagement refers to youth contributing to their own development by applying learned life skills and being afforded the chance to function as effective decision-makers. Youth have the confidence to take on leadership roles and the competence to make informed decisions. Therefore, they seek out opportunities to participate in youth-driven programs and initiatives. Youth are also applying their skills by getting involved in other organizations, participating in civic affairs and serving on boards and councils.

Low or average *youth engagement* scores (1 through 3.4)

Perhaps the youth participants need more training in this area. Don't get discouraged if they seem disinterested in promoting change. It takes time for young people to develop the unique, transferable skills required to

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function effectively as confident and competent leaders. Less than desirable results may be revealing an opportune time to provide training on basic principles of needs assessments (what does our community need?), asset mapping (what resources do we already have?), or how to facilitate meeting discussions. Youth, as well as adults, should be knowledgeable on these topics if they are to develop a stronger sense of community.

It is also important to nurture skills and attributes that promote goal setting, communication, critical thinking, and the ability to manage conflict. All are necessary if youth are to perform efficiently within the realm of civic engagement. Unfortunately, these are not typical lessons that are always taught to young people in formal educational settings (e.g., school). However, with some assistance from caring, more experienced adults, and those youth who are more engaged, youth can emerge as leaders who are equipped to serve and be valued for their efforts and opinions.

Steps to improve *youth engagement*:

- Take time during program meetings to discuss issues affecting the community. Both youth and adults should bring topics to the meeting. One way to stimulate discussion is to have everyone bring a copy of the local paper (no more than two weeks old), then identify pertinent articles and discuss the topics in detail, including a discussion on whether the group can address a topic of interest and how.
- Invite community leaders to come and speak to youth about issues in the community.
- Let youth decide if they want to develop action plans to address any specific concerns. This allows the youth to have ownership from the very beginning. If they are not passionate about a particular issue, their willingness to become engaged decreases substantially.
- Youth-adult partnerships are very useful in promoting youth engagement. A partnership can provide youth with several adult mentors who may have a better understanding of the community and can impart this wisdom to youth. On the other hand, youth can provide their expertise on those issues that are important to them and their peers. Also, social change can be a daunting process for those new to community organizing. Partnerships can balance the responsibilities between youth and adults as they strive to make a difference.
- In some cases, youth may not be ready to take on issues on a broader scale. If so, don't force them. It may be wise to spend more time developing their leadership and social skills, through involvement, in order to equip them for civic engagement.

High Youth Retention: Success in retaining youth in programs is demonstrated by youth consistently returning to the program on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis. It should be clear that they are making a choice to participate when they have other options to choose (i.e., serving in this program in lieu of sports or going home to play video games). Key factors that foster retention include, but are not limited to:

- Caring, supportive adults;
- Opportunities for youth to connect/socialize with peers;
- Recognition of youth for their efforts;
- Opportunities for youth to make decisions;
- Youth enjoyment of the challenge of serving and being recognized as community decision-makers;
- Genuine youth interest in the issues being addressed; and
- As older youth leave the program due to graduation, jobs, etc., other youth are encouraged to join the team to sustain efforts.

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Low or average *youth retention* scores (1 through 3.4)

This can be interpreted in multiple ways. It could reflect weaker relationships and a disconnect between those involved. At times, the strategies adults put into action to recruit youth may not be the most effective. That is why it is important to solicit the advice of youth, inquiring what they believe to be useful in recruiting others. Youth want to be amongst their peers, and working within the community can serve as an ideal setting.

Retention rates could also be influenced by a low sense of camaraderie between youth and adults. Although youth have a strong desire to associate with peers, they need to form affirming relationships with adults as well. Youth development practitioners must always realize that some youth may have limited encounters with positive adults and are looking for those with whom they can form a bond. Occasionally, they may deem a relationship to be threatened or non-existent if they don't feel a supportive connection with adults, or if adults seem too preoccupied with other youth or responsibilities. As a result, a young person may decide that the only option is to seek the desired attention elsewhere. Although it is critical that youth learn to deal with community issues, it is equally important for them to be comfortable forming friendships with adults who are willing to stand in as mentors and role models.

Another cause for low to average retention could be related to some lack of a vested interest. Adults may be passionate about a project that is of no relevance to youth. This could also hold true for youth who want to implement an idea, but who have little support from skeptical peers or adults. In both scenarios, those with no interest may begin to feel pressured to get on board or they may become convinced that they have no say in decision making. The end result in both cases is that participants eventually abandon the program or project. This, in turn, causes disappointment among the leaders of the group, who ultimately shift their energies elsewhere.

Lastly, location of programs and events can affect retention. It may be a challenge to consistently attend meetings or events if a youth lives several miles away. Often, changing meeting locations periodically to accommodate participants may help address issues with attendance.

Steps to improve *youth retention* may include:

- Allowing time for socializing among peers. Youth need to recognize the program as a venue to *have fun*. The news will spread quickly when a group of youth can tell others about opportunities that build confidence while having a good time.
- Giving youth a chance to get to know adults and form trusting relationships with them. Bonding time can occur during field trips or other scheduled events.
- Being sure youth are involved from beginning to end. This contributes to feeling valued.
- Being assertive in recruiting younger participants who can gain experience while being mentored by older peers.
- Using the expertise of adult volunteers by allowing them to work with youth to help create and enhance programs that are more appealing.
- Recognizing youth for their efforts on a regular basis, both formally and informally.

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- Considering the location of the program, and making sure all youth feel as though the meeting place is a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment.

- Trying not to demand too much or expect too little from young people. Heavy demands can cause stress and frustration. Asking too little can be perceived as a waste of their time.

- Changing the focus. If the youth keep changing (coming for a short time and then leaving the program), then it may be time to change the program or project!

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BACKWARDS PLANNING AND END GOALS

Sometimes the most helpful way to start a program or a process is to think about where you'd like to be when it ends. This is called backwards planning. When you plan backwards, you start with the goals you hope you achieve by the end of your process or program and then identify the steps, resources, and people to help you get there.

Step 1: Define your goals : What do you want to accomplish?

A helpful way to set goals is by using the S.M.A.R.T. framework, ensuring goals that are:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**ttainable
- **R**elevant/Realistic
- **T**imebound

Goal: To launch my organization's new Credible Messenger Training Program with at least 15 participants by July of next year!

Step 2: Identify the steps needed to achieve the goals

- Brainstorm all the steps necessary to accomplish your goal.
  - This should range from bigger picture steps (ie: develop recruitment plan) to smaller steps (ie: verify contact information for recruitment sites).
- Then, organize steps under each major goal.
- Finally, sequence the steps in order to develop a starting outline for your timeline.

Step 3: Set a realistic timeline

With your sequenced steps, create a timeline for all of your major goals and supporting steps with specific deadlines for each. Keep the backwards plan in mind here by identifying:

- The date by which your goal should be accomplished
- The last step you must complete before the goal's deadline.
- The next to the last step, the third to last step, and so on, until all the steps have been inputted into the schedule in reverse order. (you may need to have some flexibility here as you finalize your plan).

Step 4: Identify helpful resources and available support

- Who is responsible and accountable to making sure these goals are achieved?
- Who is best situated to provide insight, feedback, or a helping hand
- What resources - other organizations, websites, readings, trainings, etc. can you bring into the process?
- Brainstorm resources and supports that may be relevant or helpful in achieving your goal.

BACKWARDS PLANNING AND END GOALS
TEMPLATE

STEP ONE: Define Your Goals

What are you trying to accomplish? Is it Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant/Realistic, Timebound?

🌟 **Goal 1:**

🌟 **Goal 2:**

🌟 **Goal 3:**

🌟 **Goal 4:**

STEP TWO: Identify Steps Needed to Achieve Your Goal

Brainstorm All Steps	Organize Steps by Goal	Sequence Steps
	Goal 1:	
	Goal 2:	
	Goal 3:	
	Goal 4:	

BACKWARDS PLANNING AND END GOALS
TEMPLATE

STEPS THREE AND FOUR: Set Timeline and Identify Resources and Support

GOAL	DEADLINE FOR GOAL	STEPS	DEADLINE FOR STEPS	SUPPORT	RESOURCES
💎					
💎					
💎					
💎					

VALUES EXERCISE

Values and mission are critical touchstones in an organization's culture and function, but creating space to have these conversations in different or even smaller contexts is important too. Consider leading this activity as a team or program discussion to understand what folks are bringing into the space in terms of their own values, and linking that with their experiences at your organization.

Materials:
Post-It Notes
Chart paper
Markers

1. Ask if anyone knows what is meant by the term "values?"

If necessary, offer up:
Values: ideas or principles that guide your thinking or actions, how you understand and determine what is important to you.

2. Explain that each organization, each community, each relationship has its own set of values within which it operates.

Ask for relatable examples that people can see in their lives (ex: "Example: my friends and I value honesty etc.). How do values show up in an organization?

3. Give participants 1-2 Post-It Notes to respond to the following question using descriptive adjectives:

"I think that (Organization Name) values..."

4. Once everyone has completed their post its, have them hang them up on a wall and then have everyone walk around and read through all the organizational values.

If there is overlap or commonality, ask participants to create a cluster to show that that value is strong in the community.
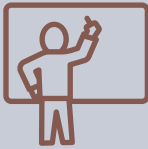
5. After participants have had a chance to read through what everyone came up with, pass out a marker and ask a volunteer to write on chart paper a numbered list capturing the main values that were brainstormed.

VALUES EXERCISE

6. **Divide participants into small groups and assign each group 2-3 of the values on the list.**

7. **Give each group chart paper and markers and ask them to discuss and write down:**
   - How do we see this value in the _____ space? (ex: Social Justice shows up in the space through the racial justice training we all attended in September)
   - Ways that the organization can continue to uplift or embody this value in the space? (ex: We can have a social justice discussion group that a different staff member leads on a topic of their choice once a month).

8. **After 20-30 minutes, bring everyone back to the circle and have each group present and hang up their chart paper next to the original numbered list.**

9. **Once everyone has shared, read the entire list together and if anyone has anything additional to add that is of major importance, they can add it at this time.**

10. **Close out by having each participant select one of the values and complete the sentence...**

    "Valuing _____ is important to me because..."

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

There are many ways in which you may engage the families and friends of your participants, growing your community together, and strengthening relationships both old and new. Good music and food are critical for any of the below to succeed!

Orientation and Open House

Have participants invite their loved ones and community members for a "Getting to Know You" event at the beginning of the programmatic year. Use part of the time for everyone present to introduce themselves and share what brings them to the space, as well as explain the specific program and what the goals are for what we all will accomplish together. Use the rest of the time for icebreakers and to play games.

Game Idea: Have participants move around the room silently but in accordance with the different prompts (move around the room... like you are on a runway, like you just won a million dollars, like you're trying to catch the train before the doors close, etc.) and yell freeze in between. During the freeze, have them find a partner and share answers to icebreaker questions (what's your favorite movie, what food can't you live without, etc.)

Game Night or Movie Night

Anytime during the year, invite family and community members into the space to HAVE FUN! This cultivates a sense of access, availability, and togetherness. Think about having a democratic way of selecting the games/movie to be played!

Response to an Event

Bringing people together when an event occurs that affects some or many in your community can be an impactful way of collective healing and self-expression. This can include a world event, community occurrence, or something that takes place in the program itself. Establishing your organizational space as a "home" where folks may process together, build, bond, and/or come up with action plans is a special way of developing powerful, healthy relationships with your young people and those in their lives. Think about incorporating restorative justice practices or questions, art, movement, etc.

Presentation/Celebration

Having young people share their accomplishments doesn't just have to happen at the end of a program! Find ways to weave celebration and family engagement throughout their program experience, to make sure that families are aware, involved, and excited about all that the incredible young people in their lives are learning and doing.

CHECK-INS/ SUPERVISION

When leading supervision sessions and check-ins, you are creating space to be responsive to the specific needs of each employee and the organization itself. It can be helpful to have certain topic areas that you discuss regularly, creating a sense of consistency and welcoming a wide range of dialogue. Here are some suggested topic areas and related questions.

Programming: Curriculum and Content

- What workshops/sessions have you had so far? What topics were addressed?
- How did participants seem to respond to the topics?
- Was there anything that went particularly well? Why do you think it worked?
- What topic seemed challenging or difficult for participants to understand? What is your follow-up plan?
- Have you thought about _____ resource (books, film, speakers, org, etc.) that could be helpful or relate?

Relationships and Personal Dynamics: Interpersonal Interactions

- What have you noticed about the relationships between the participants? Are there any people that are getting especially close? Any issues between participants? Anything that is concerning you?
- How are your relationships with the participants (specify individuals if necessary)?
- Follow-up on any known issue or event.
- Tell me about how things are going with your co-facilitator, co-staff, administrative support, etc.

Relationships and Personal Dynamics: Interpersonal Interactions

- First session: Set 3 goals with on how staff will practice self-care during the program.
- Every subsequent session: follow-up on these goals in your supervision check-ins. (Ex: have you been taking time to meditate, do yoga, get your nails done, etc. as a means of self-care? What's preventing you from doing so? How can I support you in making it happen?)
- I know _____ was a lot, how did you take care of yourself afterwards?

Support and Next Steps: Answers, Structures & Collaboration on Work Plans

- First session: Ask your staff member how they prefer to receive praise.
- Big Ups: Champion and celebrate specific events and achievements made by your staff since your last check-in.
- How can I support you in _____? Address any concerns that came up prior in the session. Then offer up some ideas of your own.
- Next Steps: Follow-up on anything that came up prior in the session that may necessitate next steps
- Ex: creating a work plan for an imminent project, a communication or RJ plan for a conflict or boundary issue, etc.
- Confirm the date for the next check-in.

RESOURCE GUIDE

The Non-Traditional Approach to Criminal and Social Justice (1997) by the Prisoner's Alliance with Community. Available online under its title.

- Also known as The Seven Neighborhood Study, this is the paper researched and written by prisoners at the Green Haven Correctional Facility in New York which analyzed the population of New York State Prisons and made the connection between neighborhood conditions and incarceration.

Arches Transformative Mentoring Intervention: An Implementation and Impact Evaluation in New York City (2018) by the Urban Institute. Available at:
https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/96601/arches_transformative_mentoring_program_0.pdf

- This is the independent evaluation of the New York City's Credible Messenger Mentoring Initiative that found statistically significant reductions in recidivism among youth who had Credible Messenger Mentors.

Credible Messenger Mentoring for Justice-Involved Youth (2017) by Ruben Austria and Julie Peterson. Available at:
https://cmjcenter.org/documents/Pinkerton_Papers_credible_messenger_monitoring.pdf

- A short paper on Credible Messenger Mentoring and its specific application to justice-involved youth.

Positive Youth Justice: Framing Justice Interventions Using the Concepts of Positive Youth Development (2010) by Jeffrey Butts et al. Available at
https://positiveyouthjustice.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/pyj2010.pdf

- A report by the Coalition for Juvenile Justice which presents the concept of Positive Youth Justice and advocates for a positive youth development approach for youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

The Little Book of Restorative Justice (2002) by Howard Zehr.

- An introduction to the practice, beliefs and methodology of Restorative Justice.

Circle Keeper's Handbook (2017) by Kay Pranis. Available online under its title.

- A short guide to circle process and the essential tools for circle keepers.

GLOSSARY

Alternative to Incarceration (ATI): A consequence or punishment for a crime or illegal action other than imprisonment or jail-time OR a means by which to prevent involvement in the criminal punishment system.This may include: time-served, community service, social services, drug and mental health treatment programs, probation, and alternative-to-incarceration programs. ATI programs may be focused on leadership, Credible Messengering, art therapy, mentorship, job readiness, skill-building, etc.

Circle(s): A dialogue process originating in Indigenous cultures that works intentionally to create a safe space for discussion in order to improve relationships, resolve differences, and demonstrate accountability. In a circle, participants may find resolutions that meet the needs of all present.

Cisgender Person: Someone who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth. For example: your birth certificate says female, and you identify as a woman.

Classism: The institutional, cultural, and individual practices and beliefs that assign value to people according to their socioeconomic status. Classism may also refer to the systematic oppression and targeting of poor and working class people by those who control resources.

Credible Messenger Mentor: Mentors that have passed through the criminal punishment system and want to give back to help others in their communities. Guided by their own life experiences, Credible Messengers connect with younger, system-impacted individuals, validate the existence of transformative resources within a community itself, and in theory, offer an example of hope and aspiration.

Crimmigration: The convergence of criminal and immigration law. Criminal law and procedure is used to determine who is "desirable vs. undesirable" among newcomers to the United States, making the act of immigrating to the U.S. a potential criminal act within itself.

Gender Binary: The idea that there are only two genders and that all normative people are one of the two.

Heteropatriachy: A colonial construct and concept that defines both masculinity and femininity in narrow and limiting ways to maintain a binary distinction between male and female, dominant and subordinate.

Heteronormativity: A worldview which frames heterosexuality as the standard and superior sexuality, leading to the invisibility and stigmatizing of other sexualities.

Homophobia: Hostility or opposition towards people whose sexuality is not heteronormative, often based on the assumption that monogamous relationships between one man and one woman is the traditional, superior, and only legitimate form of sexuality. Shifting the use of "phobia" (as in homophobia), to the use of antagonism can better illustrate the violence that is perpetrated.

Injustice system: A radical renaming of the range of bodies and processes involved in responding to crimes and criminalized acts and behaviors, including police, the courts, prisons, probation and parole officers and more (the criminal "justice" system), that highlights the reality of injustice and structural violence inherent to this system.

Latinx: An all- gender term used to describe anyone who identifies and has native ancestry in Latin American countries.

Non-binary Person: Someone whose identity does not adhere to or identify with the gender binary.

Oppression: Power built into institutions like government and education systems that is historically formed and perpetuated over time, allowing certain 'groups' of people to assume a dominant position over 'other groups', maintained and continued at an institutional level.

Prejudice: A preconceived opinion or assumption about something or someone rooted in stereotypes, rather than reason or fact, leading to unfavorable bias or hostility toward another person or group of people.

Positive Youth Development Programs: Justice-related youth development programs support the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young people. Moreover, these programs build the strengths that youth, their families, and their communities bring into the justice system.

Prison Abolition: A political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, detention, policing and surveillance while creating lasting alternatives to punishment and incarceration.

Punishment system: A radical renaming of the range of bodies and processes involved in responding to crimes and criminalized acts and behaviors, including police, the courts, prisons, probation and parole officers and more (the criminal "justice" system), that highlights the system's dependency on punishment and structural violence as a false equivalent to justice.

Racism: The combination of prejudice and power that benefits one group of people over another based on perceived racial identity. In America, this is white people having power over people of color that gives them an advantage socially and economically in this country.

Restorative Justice: A theory of justice focused on repairing damage and restoring relationships. Restorative justice practices encourage constructive responses to wrongdoing by bringing those who have harmed, those harmed, and affected communities into processes often – "circles" – that help youth take accountability for their actions, repair the harm they have caused, and rebuild relationships with those who have been harmed.

Sexism: The combination of prejudice and power that benefits one group of people over another based on perceived gender identity and/or biological sex. In America, this is cisgender men having power over people with non-dominant gender identities or biological sex including trans individuals, non-binary individuals, genderqueer individuals, cisgender women, intersex individuals and more - giving cisgender men an advantage socially and economically in this country.

School Pushout: Factors that prevent a young person from completing their education in a timely manner.

Social justice: A process and worldview that challenges the origins of systemic oppression and justice, seeking fair (re)distribution of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities, the empowerment of all people to exercise self-determination and realize their full potential. Social justice builds social solidarity and community capacity for collaborative action.

Structural Violence: Violence that is deep seated into the structure of American society and can lead to violence and discrimination that occurs in institutions and interpersonal interactions. Examples of structural violence include: racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, xenophobia, etc.

System stakeholders: A person that has a vested interest in a system or enterprise, or is involved in or affected by a course of action. System stakeholders in the criminal injustice system include police officers, judges, probation officers, parole officers, correctional officers, lawyers, court personnel, elected officials, the media, victim advocacy groups, etc.

Toxic Masculinity: Narrow and repressive description of manhood, where it is defined by violence, sex, status, and aggression – valuing strength over emotions as the cultural ideal of manliness and associating emotional vulnerability with femininity.

trans*: An umbrella term covering a range of identities that transgress socially-defined gender norms. Trans with an asterisk is often used in written forms (not spoken) to indicate that you are referring to the larger group nature of the term, and specifically including non-binary identities, as well as transgender men (transmen) and transgender women (transwomen).

Transgender: A gender description for someone who has transitioned (or is transitioning) from living as one gender to another; or an umbrella term for anyone whose sex assigned at birth and gender identity do not correspond in the expected way.

Transphobia/Transantagonism: Hostility, opposition, aggression and/or violence towards trans people. Shifting the use of "phobia" (as in transphobia), to the use of antagonism can better illustrate the violence that is perpetrated. Transantagonism reflects a hatred of those who do not fit easily into the gender binary.

Xenophobia: Any attitude, behavior, practice, or policy that explicitly or implicitly reflects the belief that immigrants are inferior to the dominant group of people. Xenophobia is reflected in interpersonal, institutional, and systemic levels of oppression and is a function of White supremacy.

The following sources were used in the creation of this glossary:
- Anti-Violence Project (AVP),
- Center for the Study of Social Policy, Girls for Gender Equity (GGE),
- It's Pronounced Metrosexual,
- Learning For Justice,
- National Conference for Community and Justice,
- Sylvia Rivera Law Project,
- Transform Harm

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