

DO I HAVE THE RIGHT TO FEEL SAFE?

A VISION FOR HOLISTIC
SAFETY IN CORRECTIONS

WRITTEN BY Dr. Nneka Jones Tapia in partnership with current and former correctional administrators, correctional staff, people formerly incarcerated, and other people in the community impacted by incarceration

**CHICAGO
BEYOND** →

I SPENT 28 YEARS IN THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS.

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

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

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

My trauma lingers even all these years later. I always think somebody has an ulterior motive. My family has told me that sometimes their friends don't like coming around because I'm not as trusting as I could be. My family having to ask me to be more approachable was eye-opening.

I AM ANDY POTTER,
A retired correctional officer.

I SPENT 27 YEARS IN THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS.

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

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

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

The trauma of prison stays within me, even 10 years later. When I'm out, I don't like people standing behind me. I don't like sitting with my back to the door. I look around incessantly. It's instinctive. My friends ask, "What are you looking for?" I have to be sure my surroundings are safe.

I AM RONALD SIMPSON-BEY,
A person formerly incarcerated.

WE ARE NATIONAL LEADERS IN CRIMINAL LEGAL REFORM.

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

We are friends. Colleagues. Allies in this movement.

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

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

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

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

**And so we ask everyone, whether I am inside or outside
of the correctional walls...**

Do I have the right to feel safe?

ANDY POTTER
Founder and Executive Director of
One Voice United

RONALD SIMPSON-BEY
Executive Vice President of
JustLeadershipUSA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY


A LETTER
FROM

DR. NNEKA JONES TAPIA



▶ DR. NNEKA JONES TAPIA

Photo Credit: Christopher Jacobs



Over the years, I have experienced correctional institutions from many vantage points.

As an 8-year-old girl visiting my father in prison, I felt powerless.

As a psychologist at Cook County jail, I felt as though I had no say as I followed rules I disagreed with.

As the wife of a correctional officer, I have lost sleep worrying about my partner's safety as he works behind the walls.

And as the warden of Cook County jail, I learned what it was like to be in a position of power—to simultaneously be an agent of change and admittedly, harm.

Now, as Managing Director of Justice Initiatives at Chicago Beyond— an impact investor fighting for justice and equity—I lead the charge for change from the community outside correctional walls.

Regardless of where I have been in the hierarchy, I have experienced and witnessed the sheer amount of harm produced by correctional institutions and observed how this harm impacts all communities, particularly people incarcerated and correctional staff. The “us vs. them” culture instilled by the system distracts both groups from their shared overexposure to violence and trauma, as well as their mutual lack of opportunities to heal or use their voice to drive meaningful reform.

Every day, the millions of people working in and confined by these institutions fight to survive the trauma that occurs inside. Trauma caused by training, policies, and procedures; trauma caused by the inherent nature of corrections.

Those who come in contact with the system deserve transformative change.

I have been a witness to the power of change—change within individuals and change within systems. However, progress does not come easy, nor without risk. The path can be messy and uncomfortable; sometimes one step forward leads to two steps backwards. I have felt the pressure of knowing lives depended on my decisions and suffered the public scrutiny when those decisions failed to meet expectations. I have also felt immense pride when my team overcame obstacles to increase safety for the lives we were responsible for—inside and outside the walls. We honored their humanity and showed them they were valued.

As a former correctional administrator, I call upon correctional administrators across the country—along with others in positions of power like lawmakers, policymakers, and funders—to rise to this challenge. The risk of the status quo—continued harm, violence, and trauma—is far too great. We can only achieve transformational change if we genuinely empower people with lived experience, those closest to the problem—people incarcerated, correctional staff, survivors of crime, along with their families, correctional unions, justice advocates, and communities.

I have written this vision for correctional administrators in partnership with leaders with lived experience, as well as many of your peers—current and former correctional administrators—to support you as you work alongside people with lived experience to make the system-level changes we need to be safe.

Together, we can shift our vision of safety from one predicated on control to one that creates the conditions for all community members—inside and outside of correctional walls—to be and feel protected, resilient, and whole.

That is *holistic safety*.

This vision for holistic safety names the five core tenets that we must address to curb violence and trauma inside and outside the correctional walls, and suggests changes related to each.

THE CORE TENETS ARE



VALUE

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



HEALTH

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



CONNECTEDNESS

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



TRUST

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



PERSONAL AGENCY

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



→ INCLUDES

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



This vision also recognizes the pathway to holistic safety can only be unlocked when we empower people with lived experience—people incarcerated, staff, survivors of crime, along with their families, their communities, correctional unions, justice advocates, and all others impacted.

Through detailed examples shared by leading correctional administrators across the country, we explain why empowerment of people with lived experience is needed, how it makes us safer, and considerations as you begin implementation.

I—along with the many others who helped author this vision—realize this is only the start. We need:

- ▶ A robust change management process that holds us accountable to the people we serve.
- ▶ Continued decarceration coupled with the development of community-based alternatives, reducing the burden on correctional staff while increasing the resilience of the outside community.
- ▶ A significant increase in investment in the neighborhoods most impacted by incarceration to ensure they have what they need to address the root causes of crime and to thrive.
- ▶ A reallocation of current correctional funding to increase support for correctional staff.
- ▶ Large-scale reform across all aspects of our criminal legal system and government.
- ▶ People to fundamentally believe that lives impacted by incarceration are worth saving.

Holistic safety cannot wait, and we all have a role in making it reality.

THIS VISION CHALLENGES

- ▶ **CORRECTIONAL ADMINISTRATORS**
To embrace the risk tied to system-change, role model the changes you hope so see, and empower people with lived experience to assist with changing training, policy, and procedure in a way that drives holistic safety while building a diverse coalition of supporters to ensure progress is sustained.

- ▶ **PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE**
To unite with individuals you share harms with to advocate for, engage with, and encourage the use of the training, policies, procedures, and resources you need to be and feel safe.

- ▶ **EVERYONE**
To acknowledge the trauma within correctional institutions, challenge our biases and assumptions on what it means to be safe, and center and invest in the leadership of people with lived experience.

VOICES OF SUPPORT



This vision was built alongside many correctional staff, people formerly incarcerated, survivors of crime, current and former correctional administrators, community leaders, researchers, academics, lawmakers, policymakers, funders, and justice advocates.

Although we all stand united in our shared goal of holistic safety, our collaboration did bring about moments of tension and disagreement. We all did not—and do not—always see eye-to-eye. Moreover, we all carry some risk in standing together—risk to our reputations, credibility, and livelihood. But if we want to build a coalition that can further momentum and drive change, we must run toward these areas of friction and discomfort, for it is in these relationships and conversations where increased power lies.

“ Holistic safety is the cornerstone to advancing a more stable, healthy, and meaningful response to correctional systems—and why they are called that in the first place. If you are not pursuing or investing in responsive, data-supported correctional practices in a structural or comprehensive manner, you are arguably in the business of incapacitation. This document provides some meaningful examples to illustrate that there are other ways to advance our obligations to enhance public safety with an eye towards a more dignified and humane approach. We must always remain cognizant of both internal and external stakeholders in a transparent, responsible manner and with empathy.”

SCOTT SEMPLE

Former Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Correction; Senior Expert at Falcon Inc.



▶ **KEVIN KEMPF**

Photo Credit: Courtesy of Kevin Kempf

“ I love the idea of holistic safety. In order for us to improve our cultures and conditions in probation, parole, and in our facilities, we must look at all of it. Each of us, people that are incarcerated, people on supervision, and people who work in this field, have a responsibility to be better. We must provide opportunities for people to change and create environments that foster trust, care, and concern for all.”

KEVIN KEMPF

Executive Director of Correctional Leaders Association; Former Director of Idaho Corrections

“As the criminal justice system continues to evolve, it is crucial that we include the voices, perspectives, and experiences of officers, staff, and their unions, so we don’t miss out on the important insights they have to offer. We have an opportunity to learn from, rather than split apart, the two most impacted stakeholders—those who live and those who work in our nation’s correctional institutions—whose futures are inextricably linked. A vision of holistic safety that is informed by staff, incorporates staff wellness, and also does not infringe upon security is absolutely a step in the right direction toward much needed transformation. It goes without saying that unless we support staff who are struggling with depression and trauma, there is no way they will be willing or able to be effective agents of change inside the system. The practical reality is that without them, we will be hard pressed to see any meaningful progress take root. Holistic safety requires holistic stakeholder engagement.”

ANDY POTTER

Founder and Executive Director of One Voice United, and former correctional officer and union leader

“The Holistic Safety Framework is spot on—recognizing that true reforms must emerge from communities, from incarcerated people, and from correctional staff for them to stand a chance of taking hold and being durable. It also rightly points out that multi-directional trust must be the foundation for the Framework, something that is in short supply in many jails and prisons. Adopting the Framework, along with reducing the massive number of people we incarcerate, would go a long way towards healing the damage prevalent in so many U.S. correctional institutions.”

VINCENT SCHIRALDI

Former Commissioner of the New York City Department of Correction; Adjunct Professor and Senior Fellow at Columbia University Justice Lab; Senior Research Scientist, Columbia School of Social Work

“The individuals, families, and communities harmed by crime do not benefit from a correctional system that only seeks retribution. If we want to support the safety of survivors, we must listen to the call for rehabilitation. The National Center for Victims of Crime believes holistic safety and its focus on empowerment of people with lived experience is the path forward to making communities stronger and more resilient in the face of crime, especially when so many people confined and working inside the system are survivors of crime themselves.”

NATIONAL CENTER FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

An advocacy organization committed to—and working on behalf of—crime victims and their families

“ Unlike many of our oppressors, we are not immune to the mass incarceration system’s impact on all involved parties. To dismantle this failing system, we must understand all its victims. This includes the current and formerly incarcerated and their families, communities, and those responsible for their often-unsatisfactory care. The Formerly Incarcerated, Convicted People and Families Movement (FICPFM) uplifts the Holistic Safety Framework created in collaboration with formerly incarcerated activists. We are proud to continue supporting their work in our shared journey towards abolishing prison as punishment.”

FORMERLY INCARCERATED, CONVICTED PEOPLES AND FAMILIES MOVEMENT

A network of more than 50 civil and human rights organizations led by people who have been incarcerated and their family members



▶ JOHN WETZEL

Photo Credit: Courtesy of John Wetzel

“ The fate of people connected to the corrections system—those who live there, those who work there, and those who love and care for them—are inextricably linked. It’s amazing to see someone seek to build off the strengths created by this symbiosis rather than accentuating the differences. Clearly this is the only path to holistic safety.”

JOHN WETZEL

Former Secretary of Corrections for the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections; CEO of Phronema Justice Strategies

OUR COMMUNITIES ARE NOT SAFE →

The pathway to safety must include rehabilitation.

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

► **Incapacitation erodes safety.**

Advocates of incarceration for incapacitation argue crime is reduced by segregating people who commit crimes. However, the concrete walls of the facility are as penetrable to violence as they are to communicable diseases¹.

Studies have shown that incarceration not only has a negligible impact on violent crime, but also increases crime in neighborhoods with high rates of incarceration by eroding family ties, earning potential, and trust in law enforcement². This cycle traps communities, in particular Black and Brown communities, further concentrating crime and disinvestment, such as in Chicago, where over half of men returning from prison return to just 7 of our 77 community areas³.

► **Deterrence erodes safety.**

Proponents of incarceration as deterrence contend that incarceration lowers the odds that people will commit future crime. However, numerous studies that contend incarceration is actually criminogenic due to inherent risk factors like disconnection, shame, and abuse and post-release consequences like loss of employment and housing². Longer sentences show no impact on recidivism⁴, and even just pre-trial detention worsens outcomes⁵.

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

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

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

LISA DANIELS

Founder of the
Darren B. Easterling Center
for Restorative Practices

► **Retribution erodes safety.**

Advocates of incarceration for retribution argue that punishment is what survivors of crime want. Doris Hernandez, an Illinois mother whose son was murdered, does not share this view, attesting the following in an interview with the Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ):

“ Three days after my son was killed, I publicly forgave the perpetrator...I did not want to provoke violence or retribution...we need more focus on rehabilitation to help people turn their lives around.”⁶

While it must be recognized that the path to healing is different for each survivor, Hernandez is not alone in not seeing “an eye for an eye” as justice. In 2016, when ASJ conducted the first national survey of survivors, asking about survivors’ experiences with the legal system and their recommendations for justice policy, the vast majority of survivors (about two-thirds) preferred a justice system that focused more on rehabilitation than punishment⁶.

If the legal system aims to serve survivors, then their message is clear: rehabilitation must be prioritized.

As correctional administrators, we cannot exacerbate the very conditions that lead to violence. In order to ensure safety after coming into contact with the system, we must create conditions that produce positive behavior.



A duality of harm exists within correctional institutions.

► THOMAS SCHOOLCRAFT
Photo Credit: Carson Almquist

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

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

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

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

”

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

THOMAS SCHOOLCRAFT
A current correctional officer in Minnesota who was formerly incarcerated

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

Working at Cook County jail, my indoctrination to this “us vs. them” culture started from week one when I was required to read *Games Criminals Play*¹⁷, a book on how people incarcerated try to manipulate staff with every word and gesture. The message was clear – keep my distance or risk getting fired or killed. Certainly, there were times when I was manipulated by people incarcerated. There were also times when I was manipulated by staff. However, that was not my universal experience with either group.

As Andy Potter, Founder and Executive Director of One Voice United and a former correctional union leader and officer, implores, “We need to get past that everyone who works there is bad and everyone incarcerated is beyond repair.”

Although differences exist, the experiential similarities of staff and people incarcerated connect them in ways that are inextricable.

Neither group is safe, and neither can be safe unless both are safe.



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

KHALIL CUMBERBATCH

Director of Strategic Partnerships for the Council on Criminal Justice

Photo Credit: Chase Gaewski / New York Daily News

In Numbers: The shared harms felt by correctional staff and people incarcerated

▶ EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE

36x

CORRECTIONAL STAFF EXPERIENCE VIOLENCE AT A RATE that is 36 times higher than all other American workers⁷

35%

APPROXIMATELY 35% OF MEN INCARCERATED REPORTED being physically victimized in the previous 6 months while in prison⁸

▶ SUICIDE

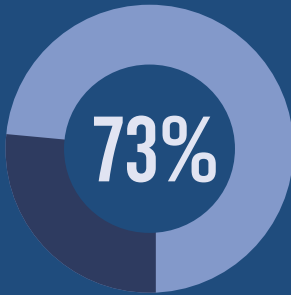
3.5x

PEOPLE INCARCERATED IN JAILS DIE BY SUICIDE at a rate 3.5 times the national average¹²

2.5x

CORRECTIONAL STAFF DIE BY SUICIDE at a rate 2.5 times the national average¹¹

▶ WITNESSING VIOLENCE



AMONG CORRECTIONAL STAFF IN ONE OF THE LARGEST STATE SYSTEMS, 73% of correctional staff had seen someone seriously hurt or killed on the job⁹



EVERY PERSON INCARCERATED who was interviewed in one study witnessed violence at some point during their incarceration¹⁰

▶ PTSD

34%

OF CORRECTION OFFICERS IN SECURITY ROLES meet the criteria for PTSD, 5 times the national rate¹⁵

60%

OF MEN INCARCERATED experience moderate to severe symptoms of PTSD¹⁶

▶ DECLINES IN LIFE EXPECTANCY

2 YEARS

People incarcerated lose approximately 2 years of life for each year confined¹³

20 YEARS

Correctional officers live approximately 20 years less than the national average¹⁴



**— OUR APPROACH —
— TO SAFETY IS —
— INCOMPLETE —**



Chronic control as a solution ultimately distances us from long-term safety.

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

This has led to an investment of billions of dollars to design higher-security institutions with reinforced fences, watchtowers, weaponry, and restraints, as well as expanded use of solitary confinement, where **80,000** people nationwide still reside on any given day¹⁸ at three times the cost of being in the general population¹⁹.

However, no matter the money spent, these measures do not work long-term. Staff still report higher risk of victimization in higher-security institutions²⁰ and a lower sense of safety when working in solitary units²¹. Moreover, higher security levels have not improved recidivism²² and further erode mental health²¹.

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

- ▶ EASTERN STATE PENITENTIARY,
A former prison in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Photo Credit: Jonna Algarin Mojica



▶ ANDY POTTER
Photo Credit: Amari Kelley

“Staff would question me for even asking for a roll of toilet paper. I’m not asking you to bring me a pound cake with a hack saw in it. I just want a roll of toilet paper. That psychologically keeps people off balance in a way that we start to think that we are distrustful people. No one will ever believe that what we are sharing is the truth,” recounts Shaka Senghor, a *New York Times* best-selling author and President of Shaka Senghor, Inc.

“There was a terrible assault where someone was stabbed in the abdomen. Every second the situation looked worse. I called to activate 911, but my captain resisted—he wanted to see the situation first. I thought I was well respected, but when I had a life in my hands, my credibility was put in question,”

recalls Andy Potter, Founder and Executive Director of One Voice United, and former correctional officer and union leader.

This level of control does not make any of us safer. *It is unrealistic.*

“Everything in our training seems to be about controlling outcomes. But how am I supposed to control the behavioral outcomes of 50 to 60 people every day? The best we can hope for is to manage these situations and behaviors the best we can,” concurs Schoolcraft, a Minnesota-based correctional officer.

Unyielding control is not necessarily the best solution, just the perceived path of least resistance.

As correctional administrators, when our only way of maintaining safety is through chronic control, we expose ourselves to danger when that control inevitably subsides. What happens when a lock breaks or a rule is broken?

Alternatives to Control + Isolation

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

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

We had to try something different—our current methods carried too much risk. We started by ending indefinite segregation—even for people who committed the most violent acts in the facility—by giving everyone a release date, providing them with something to work towards. We then scaled back the number of infractions that resulted in segregation—applying sanctions instead—meaning more people who were segregated qualified for immediate release. Within weeks, we halved the number of people in segregation without compromising institutional safety. By relocating people who had a propensity to engage in negative behavior into living units where they had increased access to peers who could mentor and model healthy behaviors, infractions decreased. Staff were also better positioned to manage these living units because staffing ratios were increased.

When people did act out violently, we placed them in a new living unit staffed with two officers from our Emergency Response Team (ERT) who were tactically trained to respond to serious incidents. We were intentional about the staff assigned because we wanted everyone involved to feel safe. The ERT had already been transporting the young men to court and other counties, and conversing with them along

the way, so they were comfortable staying inside the tier (versus outside at a desk) and mentoring the young men. Although conversation in the unit started out limited, it only took a week for staff to start consistently sitting next to and engaging with the men.



► EASTERN STATE PENITENTIARY,
A former prison in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Photo Credit: Jonna Algarin Mojica

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

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



► MUJAHID HAMILTON

Photo Credit: Roger Morales /
Chicago Beyond

When control subsides, only trauma remains.



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

MUJAHID HAMILTON

Curriculum Coordinator for Green
ReEntry at the Inner-City Muslim
Action Network

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

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

Trauma is commonly understood as the lingering effects of a harmful or life-threatening event that is experienced or witnessed by a person²³. Trauma has lasting consequences when it comes to a person's mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. In the case of corrections, incarceration is the traumatic event. Being locked in a cage is one of the most horrific, stressful experiences a person could endure²⁴. Intense stress for prolonged periods of time overwhelms our ability to cope and rewires our brains to be hypervigilant and paranoid²⁵. People incarcerated begin to process every experience and interaction, including the experience of being locked in a cage, as having the potential to bring harm, and thus become more likely to respond with aggression.

The act of locking another human being in a cage is also traumatic and poses a significant threat to the person who commits such an act²¹. Correctional staff feel this threat multiple times every day, forcing their brains to change in a way that they, too, react to the world around them from a position of fear, and thus are more likely to respond with aggression.

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



There's no person or culture that I know that has willingly submitted to subjugation. It's against human nature. People don't like being confined and constrained. It's part of why it's punishment. We're actively part of that, and there's this dissonance that develops within you when you see something that's not natural happening to an individual, and it's compounded when you subconsciously know that you have a hand in it."

SAM

A correctional officer who worked 30 years in the California prison system, as told to One Voice United¹¹



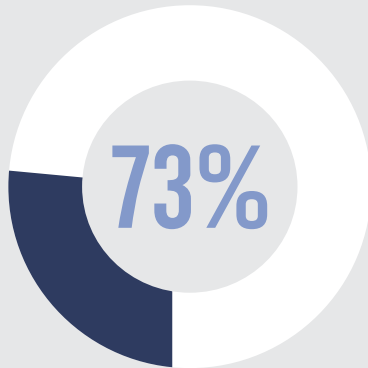
The culture is tough and macho, and any sign of vulnerability, especially a mental health diagnosis, carries stigma. Officers can never be weak. [People incarcerated] can never be weak. It's its own world."

BRIAN BAISLEY

The head of the medical evaluation unit at Riverhead jail in New York said to The Guardian²⁶

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

▶ IN A SURVEY OF CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS IN ONE STATE SYSTEM



Had seen someone seriously hurt or killed while on the job⁹

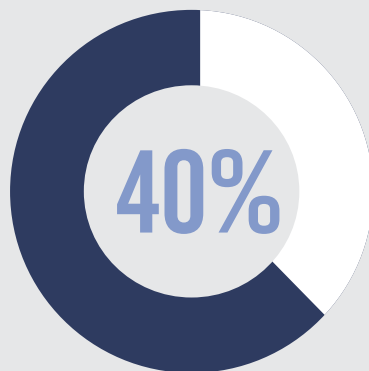
▶ RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT AMONG PEOPLE INCARCERATED

98%

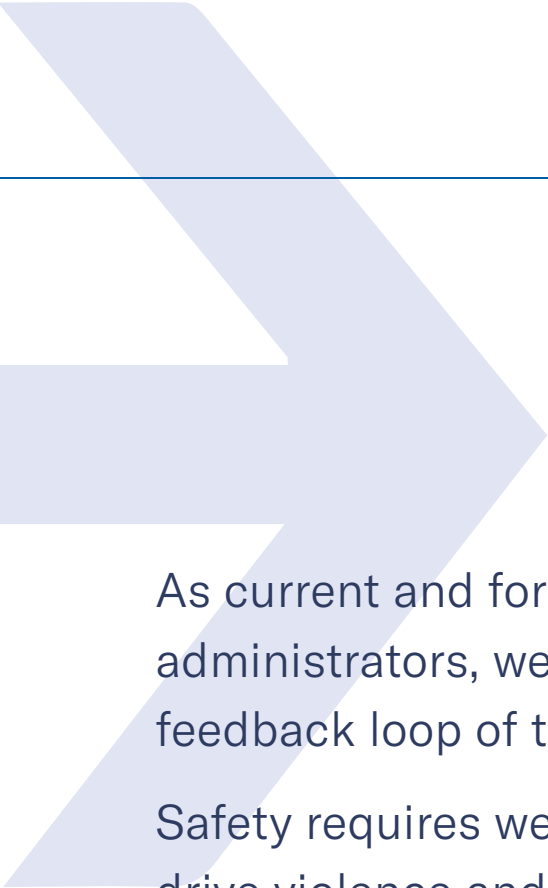
of men report exposure to a traumatic event in their lifetime^{16, 27}

99%

of women report exposure to a traumatic event in their lifetime^{16, 27}



Reported having experienced an event so frightening that they continue to have nightmares about it⁹



As current and former correctional administrators, we must break this feedback loop of trauma.

Safety requires we stem the factors that drive violence and that we give people the tools and resources they need to be resilient in the face of past, present, and future trauma and whole so they can thrive in their community.

How do we start?

DON'T
KEEP NEW
YORKERS
SAFE

SAF

#BEYOND

— WE MUST —
— CHAMPION —
— HOLISTIC SAFETY —



▶ SHARON WHITE-HARRIGAN

The Executive Director of the Women's Community Justice Association at a #BEYONDrosies campaign rally advocating for the women and gender-expansive people at the Rose M. Singer Center jail on Rikers Island

Photo credit: Jennifer S. Altman on behalf of the Women's Community Justice Association

We must create the conditions for all community members—inside and outside of correctional walls—to be and feel protected, resilient, and whole.

That is holistic safety.

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

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



WE MUST UPLIFT THE FIVE TENETS OF HOLISTIC SAFETY.

VALUE (pgs 34-35)

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

HEALTH (pgs 36-37)

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

CONNECTEDNESS (pgs 38-39)

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

TRUST (pgs 40-41)

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

PERSONAL AGENCY (pgs 41-42)

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

This section contains more details on the impact of the five tenets of holistic safety inside and outside of correctional walls, as well as specific opportunities for change against each.



Person incarcerated at Cook County jail drawing a mural ◀

Photo Credit: Cook County Sheriff's Office



People feeling like they can be more, can be the impetus for them to make better decisions. They must believe they have an intrinsic value before they reach out for support.”

ROB YANTIS
Commander of
Pennington County Jail in
South Dakota

VALUE

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

- ▼ People incarcerated and correctional staff feel valued when they can see their positive attributes and those of others, instead of focusing on negative traits, experiences, or circumstances.
- ▼ The community outside correctional walls feel trust when community members believe that correctional institutions are returning their neighbors to the community with the tools they need to thrive and be well.

The lack of a value-based approach directly impacts safety.

- ▶ Correctional officers feeling unrecognized or that their personal strengths are underutilized can drive a cycle of turnover, staffing shortages, mandatory overtime, and burnout, undermining facility operations²⁸.
- ▶ People seeing the worst in themselves creates a self-fulfilling prophecy that undercuts rehabilitation. Conversely, people seeing only the worst in others are more likely to dehumanize others²⁹.
- ▶ When community expertise is not valued in the re-entry process, successful outcomes for people incarcerated can be limited³⁰.

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

EFFORTS MAY INCLUDE

| | |
|---|--|
| Identifying the unique skills of staff and people incarcerated and creating opportunities for them to use those skills | If people incarcerated show interest in teaching, put them on a path to be a peer educator. Based on their interests, give staff related training and advancement opportunities. |
| Engaging regularly with people incarcerated, staff, and other key stakeholders | People feel valued when they feel seen and heard. Therefore, administrators must be visible and relatable. Ongoing engagement should happen through formal (e.g., town halls, advisory boards), informal (e.g., sitting in on rounds, recreation), and anonymous (e.g., surveys, suggestion boxes) methods. |
| Utilizing people-first, non-derogatory language | Train and encourage staff to refer to people by their names (and not numbers) and to employ a respectful tone and body language. Change every policy, procedure, post order, and sign to use person-first language like “people incarcerated” instead of “inmate” and “officer” instead of “guard”. See the Criminal Justice Reform Phrase Guide for more detail ³¹ . |
| Creating a culture of positive affirmation | If someone is working hard, let them know their efforts are appreciated. If staff observe a person incarcerated making positive decisions, encourage them to acknowledge the person’s efforts. |
| Running classes, training, and events focused on cultural diversity | Race, gender, sexuality, class, and more impact how people see value in and react to one another. Hosting celebrations for different cultures can help actively create positive engagement (e.g., Stafford Creek Corrections Center in WA put on a daylong Black History Month event with speeches, performances, and music) ³² . |



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

DARREN MACK

Co-Director of Freedom Agenda



Therapy dog assisting with visitation at Cook County jail

Photo Credit: Gracie Hammond

HEALTH

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

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



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

ANDY POTTER

Founder and Executive Director of One Voice United, and former correctional officer and union leader

Diminished health directly impacts safety.

- ▶ Experiencing and witnessing violence and exposure to practices that erode human dignity drive trauma. Without adequate support, people experiencing traumatic events struggle to regulate their emotions and present greater potential for violent behavior inside and outside of the facility²⁵.
- ▶ The risk of suicide is significantly heightened among both people incarcerated and staff. Correctional officers and people incarcerated in jail commit suicide 2.5 times and 3.5 times the national rate respectively^{11,12}.
- ▶ Groups impacted by the carceral system have lower life expectancy. People incarcerated lose approximately two years for each year confined¹³. Correctional officers live approximately 20 years less than the national average¹⁴. People with immediate family incarcerated live about 2.5-plus fewer years than those who do not³³.

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

EFFORTS MAY INCLUDE

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



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

ERIK BRINGSWHITE

Co-Founder and Executive Director of the South Dakota-based Institute of Indigenous American Legacy (I. Am. Legacy)



Librarian Jeanie Austin of the Jail and Reentry Services program of the San Francisco Public Library works with a person incarcerated inside a San Francisco jail

Photo Credit: San Francisco Sheriff's Office



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

ELAINE LORD

Retired Superintendent of Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York

CONNECTEDNESS

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



People incarcerated and correctional staff feel connection when opportunities are created that promote positive interpersonal interactions between members of the entire correctional community.



Communities inside and outside the correctional walls feel connection when they are given opportunities to welcome, support, celebrate, and grow alongside each other.

Disconnection directly impacts safety.

- ▶ When people incarcerated and staff have limited access to positive relationships with people inside and outside of the institution, they can become desensitized to violence and turn to negative coping mechanisms³⁴.
- ▶ Limited access to trauma-informed visitation has been tied to increased misconduct and recidivism for people incarcerated and negative emotional and behavioral impacts for their children³⁵.
- ▶ The erosion of social bonds due to incarceration has been linked to increases in future crime in communities with the highest rates of incarceration².

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

EFFORTS MAY INCLUDE

| | |
|---|---|
| Promoting positive family engagement for everyone | For staff, this can include in-facility events for families to help them better understand the day-to-day realities of correctional jobs and support their loved ones. For people incarcerated, this can include trauma-informed visitation and reduced barriers for telephone contact. |
| Collaborating with community on reentry | Establish liaisons from neighborhoods with high rates of incarceration to better understand community needs and create bridges to social services. Encourage local business owners to hire people upon release by building relationships and sharing success stories. |
| Embracing the reality that jails and prisons are public institutions | Encourage tours for families, advocates, policymakers, lawmakers, and media. Open meeting rooms for local non-profits to use. |
| Creating spaces for people incarcerated and staff to engage with the outside community as equals | For staff, this could mean partnering with community volunteers on various tasks. For people incarcerated, this can be initiatives like Program for A Calculated Transition (PACT) at Green Haven Correctional Facility in New York. PACT holds in-facility reading groups on topics of interest for people incarcerated and Yale Law School students to learn alongside each other ³⁶ . |
| Reducing barriers for volunteers | Streamline the approval process for people to enter the facility (without compromising security), and ensure they are treated well so they continue to support the cultural shift. |
| Utilizing peer support programs | Consider pairing new staff members with seasoned employees who align with the mission of the institution. Design peer mentoring programs (coupled with training) for people incarcerated. |
| Connecting with people formerly incarcerated who are now leaders in the community | Invite such leaders back to the institution to deliver speeches, workshops, or other programming. This can help staff see the fruition of their hard work and people incarcerated see hope for their future. |



A correctional officer and person incarcerated conversing at Cook County jail

Photo Credit: Cook County Sheriff's Office

TRUST

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



People incarcerated and correctional staff feel trust when they believe their physical and mental well-being is supported by the actions of those inside and outside the institution, including administrators.



The communities outside correctional walls feel valued when they are engaged in the well-being of people entering and exiting their community, so they can create a welcoming environment that promotes healthy reentry.

Distrust directly impacts safety.

- ▶ The “us vs. them” culture between staff and people incarcerated is foundational for dehumanization²⁹.
- ▶ Outside correctional walls, distrust can undermine the ability of people incarcerated and staff to form healthy relationships with family members, coworkers, support services, and law enforcement^{14, 24}.
- ▶ If communities do not trust correctional administrators to rehabilitate those who are incarcerated, they ultimately will not want to welcome formerly incarcerated people back into the community.



If it is ‘us vs. them’, ‘them’ gets screwed every time. This is a ‘we’ situation.”

JOHN WETZEL

Former Secretary of Corrections for the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections; CEO of Phronema Justice Strategies

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

EFFORTS MAY INCLUDE

Creating a system to consistently record and respond to asks, concerns, and suggestions from both staff, people incarcerated, and external community members

Establish clear follow-up timelines and provide detailed rationale on why a decision was—or was not—made. Some mediums through which to do this are town halls, suggestion boxes, surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one meetings.

Reducing the mass messaging that teaches and reinforces a culture of distrust among staff and people incarcerated

This starts with adjusting training, but correctional administrators must also set an ongoing example by role modeling positive engagement with both groups.

Establishing transparency with the broader community and other key stakeholders

This can allow community members to truly partner with correctional administrators in this work. Greater transparency can be achieved through increased public access to data, community town halls, newsletters, and more.

Giving staff training and resources to constructively coach people incarcerated

In one Ohio prison, correctional officers carry “skill cards” to help coach people who act out³⁷.

Enabling co-participation in programming

Ensure some wellness programming places people incarcerated alongside staff as participants (e.g., joint yoga classes or religious events).

Holding spaces for people incarcerated and staff to talk about their life outside corrections and dreams for the future

These talks can help people see others beyond their charge, ID number, or title. Consider holding space for people to have these conversations over a meal, which research has shown is a critical window for community building.



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

SHARON WHITE-
HARRIGAN

Executive Director of Women's
Community Justice Association



The community should determine what is necessary to return someone to useful citizenship. They can tell you what skills are needed, what jobs people should be trained for,"

YUSUF MADYUN

Participant in Green ReEntry
at the Inner-City Muslim
Action Network

PERSONAL AGENCY

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



People incarcerated and correctional staff have personal agency when they feel they can control their actions, are working to a higher purpose, and can access the resources needed to chart their own path.



Communities outside correctional walls have agency when they can take responsibility for preparing people to return to their communities and be welcomed.

Diminished personal agency directly impacts safety.

- ▶ Idleness—the lack of opportunity to pursue activity and mental stimulation—leads to increased stress, anger, and frustration among people incarcerated²⁸.
- ▶ The inability to influence facility decision-making has been linked to increased stress and job dissatisfaction in correctional staff, diminishing both job performance and retention²⁸.
- ▶ Increased institutional dependence erodes the ability of people incarcerated to make productive decisions upon release²⁴.
- ▶ Limited community input often results in people exiting without the specific skills needed to thrive³⁰.

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

EFFORTS MAY INCLUDE

Asking people what tools and resources they need to thrive and giving them access

For example, people incarcerated can collaborate with community members on re-entry planning to identify what they need to thrive inside and outside of the facility. Staff break rooms can be furnished with spaces for correctional officers to exercise, relax, and read books during breaks.

Creating opportunities for people to share institutional decision-making power

For example, New York’s Incarcerated Liaison Committee³⁹ elects delegates from each housing unit, New York’s Grievance Committee⁴⁰ includes two staff members and two people incarcerated, and Wyoming’s Prison Community Partnership Committee⁴¹ convenes local community members, including people formerly incarcerated.

Implementing programming proposed, developed, and/or led by people incarcerated and staff

These efforts can build community and increase shared responsibility for safer operations. Bringing in community organizations and volunteers for programming support can be helpful in understaffed facilities.

Instituting a comprehensive programming schedule inside disciplinary housing

For example, in Massachusetts, the non-profit, Roca, designs housing units that are an alternative to solitary, where people spend 17 hours per day outside the cell and mostly cycle between different programming⁴².

Implementing various career tracks for staff

Allow them to select areas of interest—including leadership development—in which they would like to grow their skills and chart a pathway for staff members to achieve their career goals.

**CORRECTIONAL
ADMINISTRATORS
HAVE A UNIQUE
PLATFORM TO
DRIVE HOLISTIC
SAFETY** →

As current and former correctional administrators, we have a unique vantage point to see the full tapestry of our institutions—not only the pervasiveness of harm, but also the pockets of healing.

We must use our perspective AND platform to enact policy changes that center holistic safety and thereby change the institutional culture. Change cannot happen on the floor without buy-in from the top.

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

Next, we must articulate a vision of hope that encourages staff, people incarcerated, survivors of crime, their families, and other key stakeholders—including lawmakers, policymakers, and funders—to see beyond the current circumstances and to take ownership of the power that they have to change and to inspire change.

By articulating our vision, everyone knows what to expect and can picture the role they can play in support.



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

ELAINE LORD

Retired Superintendent of Bedford Hills Correctional in New York, discussing how she prioritized connecting with others during intake for people incarcerated and when hiring staff



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

RICHARD VAN WICKLER

Retired Superintendent of Cheshire County in New Hampshire and current Board Member of the Law Enforcement Action Partnership

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

► The reimagined space for the pilot visitation at Cook County jail

Photo Credit: Gracie Hammond

CORRECTIONAL ADMINISTRATORS HAVE A UNIQUE
PLATFORM TO DRIVE HOLISTIC SAFETY



- ▶ ABOVE, Father and child hold hands during visitation at Cook County jail

Photo Credit: Roger Morales / Chicago Beyond

- ▶ RIGHT, A message written by a visiting child during the pilot visitation at Cook County jail

Photo Credit: Gracie Hammond



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

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

For a moment, the room was not filled with correctional officers and people incarcerated; it was filled with people enjoying each other as equals. The pilots were catalysts in Cook County jail administrators transforming visitation to center holistic safety. In a publication for the American Jail Association⁴³, Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart shared,



A trauma-informed visitation program not only helps children to better cope with their incarcerated loved one, but it also supports the overall wellness of the incarcerated individuals and the safety of staff. Individuals who have the support of their family in a healthy environment are more likely to make healthy decisions and follow institutional rules... By improving the visiting experience and strengthening bonds between incarcerated parents and their children, we hope to improve the overall health and safety of everyone touched by the correctional institution.”

Overall, the visits (including the one outside of the correctional institution) had no security incidents and increased the holistic safety of all involved.

This trauma-informed visitation model is now accessible to the more than 60,000 people who are admitted to Cook County jail each year.

In Detail: Application of the Five Tenets of Holistic Safety in the Cook County Jail Visitation Pilots

VALUE

DESIGN ELEMENTS THAT FOSTERED VALUE INCLUDED:

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

EXAMPLES OF THE IMPACT OF GREATER VALUE:

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

HEALTH

DESIGN ELEMENTS THAT FOSTERED HEALTH INCLUDED:

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

EXAMPLES OF THE IMPACT OF INCREASED HEALTH:

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

CONNECTEDNESS

DESIGN ELEMENTS THAT FOSTERED CONNECTEDNESS INCLUDED:

- ▶ All participating fathers completed prerequisite parenting classes together prior to the visits.
- ▶ Parents who had not seen or touched their children in months or years could interact with them more authentically by playing games, taking photos, and sharing gifts.
- ▶ One visit occurred externally within the setting of Chicago Children's Museum (CCM).

EXAMPLES OF THE IMPACT OF GREATER CONNECTEDNESS:

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

TRUST

DESIGN ELEMENTS THAT FOSTERED TRUST INCLUDED:

- ▶ Allowing fathers to move freely through the designated areas while officers watched at a distance.
- ▶ Allowing touch by removing barriers between fathers incarcerated and their children.

EXAMPLES OF THE IMPACT FROM INCREASED TRUST:

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

PERSONAL AGENCY

DESIGN ELEMENTS THAT FOSTERED PERSONAL AGENCY INCLUDED:

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

EXAMPLES OF THE IMPACT OF INCREASED PERSONAL AGENCY:

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

Other correctional administrators across the country are leading with holistic safety.

SCOTT SEMPLE

Retired Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Correction

Retired Connecticut Commissioner of Correction, Scott Semple, **adopted an emerging adult response model influenced by restorative justice practices** in the German justice system⁴⁴. This work was done in collaboration with the Vera Institute of Justice and received national attention as a first of its kind in the United States. The TRUE (truthful, respectful, understanding, and elevating to success) unit was launched

in 2017 for young men incarcerated in the maximum-security Cheshire Correctional Institution. This unit emphasized **health** by emphasizing brain development, restorative principles, healing from past trauma, conflict resolution to handle in-unit harm, and skill-building to inspire hope and prepare young men to make appropriate decisions. The setting changed too—one cell was transformed into a yoga studio with a colorful mural painted on the wall. **Connectedness** was encouraged as staff consistently communed with people incarcerated, often playing board games. There was also collaboration with community organizations to create success plans for young men upon release that included employment, educational, and supportive service pathways. Building on their **personal agency**, older men incarcerated were selected, trained, and trusted to serve as mentors. By the



▶ TRUE UNIT

A cell in the young adult T.R.U.E. Unit at Cheshire Correctional Institution with a personal chalkboard that people can decorate with positive affirmations.

Photo credit: Harford Courant / TCA

accounts of both staff and young men incarcerated, the atmosphere was markedly different and felt both safe and humane. Since opening, the model has doubled in size and has been expanded to a female facility in Connecticut. While the prison itself continued to experience incidents of violence, the TRUE units have not had a single fight or a staff assault since inception. To date, several jurisdictions across the country have, or are in the process of, adopting aspects of the concept, namely in South Carolina, Middlesex County Massachusetts, Colorado, Idaho, Washington D.C., New York City, and North Dakota.

VINCENT SCHIRALDI
Former Commissioner of
the New York Department
of Corrections

Faced with alarming levels of violence among youth at Rikers, Vincent Schiraldi, former Commissioner of the New York Department of Corrections, worked with staff and people incarcerated to encourage them to use their **personal agency to jointly model a new young adult unit**. The unit's aim was to help both sides be and feel safer by improving **connection** between young people, their peers, and staff and bolster **health** by increasing access to resources like vocational, educational, and wellness programming. When asked about outcomes—, as well as **value** and **trust**—shown in the new unit, former Commissioner Schiraldi shared, “In a three-month review of the unit, there were no fights or assaults on staff. We only found one shank—which by the standards at Rikers was a victory—and remarkably, after holding a peace circle with youth, the young man who made it admitted to it and apologized. The warden said she had never seen an admission and apology like that in 30 years on the job.”

JEANNE RUSSO
Commander of Kendall
County Jail

Commander Jeanne Russo of Kendall County jail in Illinois shared that despite being in a small facility, her staff still identifies ways to utilize a person's **value** and **personal agency** to help people incarcerated find their strengths. She noted, “One time we had a contest for [people incarcerated] to draw the cover art for their handbook. Everyone was invested in the contest. If [people incarcerated] were not participating, they were giving feedback to their peers.” Commander Russo summarized the eventual impact, stating, “When [people incarcerated] have more positive interactions, the atmosphere changes. Staff are happier because their jobs get more pleasant.”

ELIAS DIGGINS
Sheriff of Denver County

Sheriff Elias Diggins, head of the Denver Sheriff's Office, is **creating a mental health team to work alongside security staff** to address the mental health concerns of people incarcerated⁴⁵. The goals of the team are threefold: to establish **connectedness** with individuals in custody to prevent crises before they occur; to de-escalate situations involving individuals in mental health crises; and to connect people with resources in the community to help them thrive after release.

However, the journey toward holistic safety will not be easy.

Systems are stabilizing forces that do not welcome change. This is not as simple as creating a program, shifting a policy, or changing a paint color. Systems-level change requires a fundamental shift in how everyone thinks about jails and prisons and the people in them. When it comes to changing centuries-old mental models, there are no quick fixes, no finite list of boxes we can check off. Progress will not be linear. Correctional administrators must get buy-in from divergent stakeholders and weather criticism along the way. Therefore, we must be prepared for difficult days if we are to disrupt the status quo.

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

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



You can't just solve the person incarcerated; you can't just solve the deputy; you can't just solve the program coordinator; you have to work on the entire ecosystem. Everyone is under extreme pressure, and when there is extreme pressure, people blame each other."

KEVIN FISHER-
PAULSON

Chief Deputy of
San Francisco County jail

Some of the common challenges we as correctional administrators will face include:

POLITICAL PRESSURE

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

LIMITED HUMAN CAPITAL

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

TURNOVER

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

FUNDING

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

TIME

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

COMPLEXITY OF MULTI-STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

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



▶ NEW GRADUATE FROM THE CCSO MENTAL HEALTH TRANSITION CENTER

Cook County Sheriff's Office staff member at their Mental Health Transition Center—a program that develops a community support system for people incarcerated with substance use and/or clinical mental health disorders—congratulates a new program graduate.

Photo Credit: Cook County Sheriff's Office

**HOLISTIC SAFETY
CANNOT BE
ACHIEVED ALONE**

**WE MUST EMPOWER
PEOPLE WITH LIVED
EXPERIENCE** →

HOLISTIC SAFETY CANNOT BE ACHIEVED ALONE;
WE MUST EMPOWER PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Correctional administrators cannot do this alone. We must empower people with lived experience.

The ills of the correctional system, full criminal legal system, and other interconnected systems do not start and end with the correctional facility. It is unfair—and impossible—for correctional administrators to do this work alone.

Speaking as a former correctional administrator, many of us who try, burn ourselves out attempting to keep up with the demand.

The good news is there is a community of people who already have the knowledge, skills, capacity, and drive to ease the burden on correctional administrators and help lead the journey toward holistic safety:

People with lived experience with our correctional system.

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



► STAFF EMPOWERMENT TO LEAD NEW PROGRAMS

Cook County Sheriff's Office Lieutenants Angela Lewis and Jacqueline Pullums, who are responsible for leading the new visitation program at Cook County jail, greet each other.

Photo Credit: Roger Morales / Chicago Beyond



For too long, these groups have only been on the edge of discussions on reform, cast aside not only by correctional administrators, but also by other powerful stakeholders like lawmakers, policymakers, and funders. As Khalil Cumberbatch, Director of Strategic Partnerships for the Council on Criminal Justice, notes, this would be surprising in any other field.

“You absolutely cannot discuss LGBTQ rights without LGBTQ people or reproductive rights without women. And you cannot discuss criminal legal reform without people who are closest to the problem, including people formerly incarcerated, and even staff who walk the same halls,” he said.

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

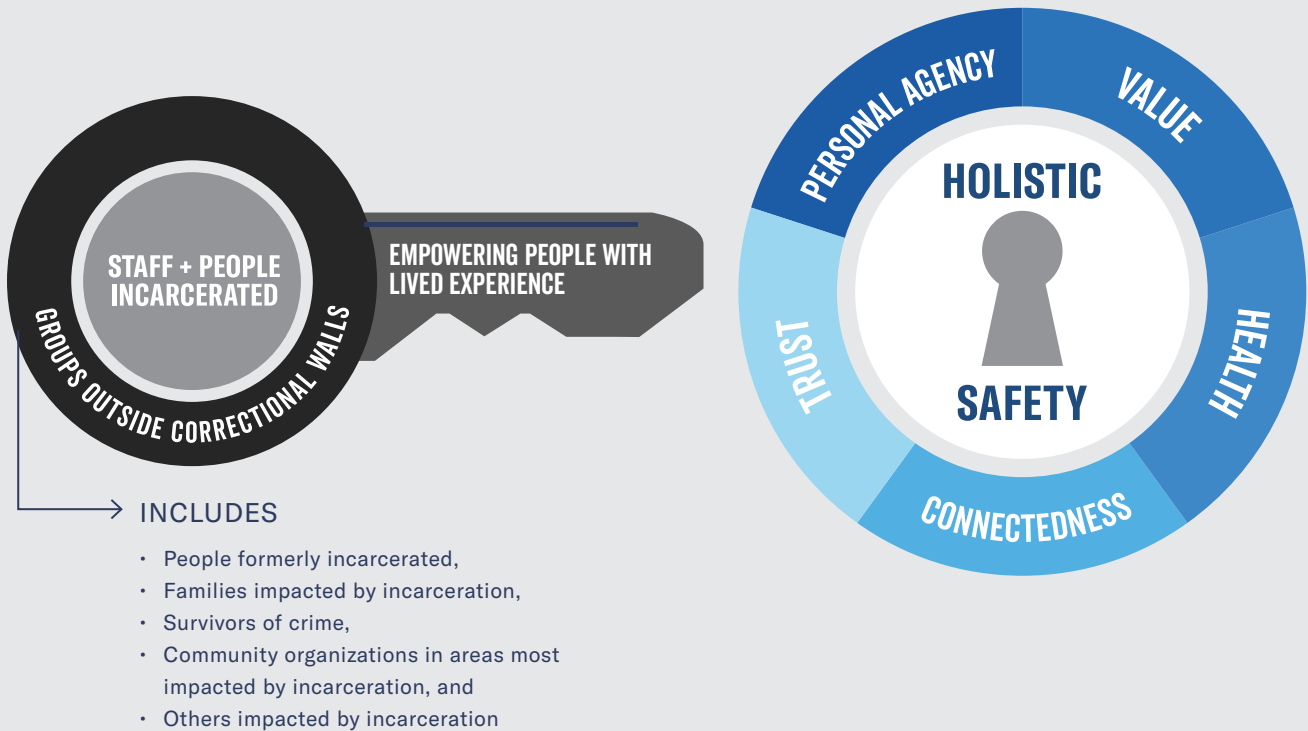
▶ JUSTICE VOTES 2020

A poster for the Justice Votes 2020 Presidential Town Hall held in Eastern State Penitentiary, a former prison in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The town hall was the first ever hosted by a group of formerly incarcerated or otherwise directly impacted leaders.

Photo Credit: Jonna Algarin Mojica

HOLISTIC SAFETY CANNOT BE ACHIEVED ALONE;
WE MUST EMPOWER PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

As correctional administrators, we must empower people with lived experience in order to unlock holistic safety.



Empowerment Means:

VALUE

Recognizing the expertise in people with lived experience

HEALTH

Giving people what they need to be well enough to engage in these efforts

CONNECTEDNESS

Bringing together all these groups, not just one or two

TRUST

Listening and sharing visibility and power in decision-making

PERSONAL AGENCY

Letting people play key roles in putting their ideas into action

Empowering people with lived experience makes community safer in many ways:

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

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

MORE EFFECTIVE POLICIES. “People with lived experience can tell us what it is like to go through the system, where gaps are, and how things we do will impact others,” attested Elias Diggins, Sheriff of Denver County. Including those closest to the problems gets leaders closer to the solutions.



► CELIA COLÓN

Celia Colón in the white shirt, CEO of Giving Other’s Dreams, an organization that provides holistic support to justice-impacted women, leads a healing circle formerly incarcerated women.

Photo Credit: Roger Morales / Chicago Beyond

PRACTICES FOLLOWING POLICIES. “If you create policy without line staff, they are put in positions where they have to implement rules they do not believe in or cannot explain,” claimed Richard Van Wickler, Retired Superintendent of Cheshire County in New Hampshire and current Board Member of the Law Enforcement Action Partnership. Empowering people with lived experience helps move policies from words into actions.

INDIVIDUALIZED RESOURCES. “We do not need evidence-based studies to tell us what people need to be well. We just need to ask people themselves,” said Celia Colón, founder and CEO of Giving Other’s Dreams. Nobody knows what a person needs to be safe better than the person themselves—if they are given what they need, safety follows.

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

A SEAT AT THE TABLE IS NOT ENOUGH. Just listening is insufficient. Although empowering people may look different for each institution, it will always require true partnership when it comes to key decision-making.

This can take many forms, such as:

- ▶ Formal conversations through town halls, advisory boards, focus groups, union meetings, and in-service training where people can raise concerns and be asked for input in a public forum that creates accountability
- ▶ Informal conversations during rounds, roll call, programming, recreation, shift changes, mealtime, and open-door time where people can get more authentic and dedicated attention
- ▶ Anonymous methods like suggestion boxes, surveys, and call lines where people feel like their ideas can be heard without judgment or retribution

NOT ALL PEOPLE WILL WANT A SEAT AT THE TABLE.

Each person has unique experience with this system. Some people do not believe change is enough. Some people are still processing their pain. In providing opportunities to collaborate, we must respect a person's decision if they do not want to participate.

NOT ALL PEOPLE WILL BE READY TO HELP RIGHT

AWAY. It may be unrealistic to expect people suffering from significant trauma to successfully engage in sensitive discussions without preparation and ongoing support. If someone has the ability and drive to help, we must invest in them so they can.

SECURITY DECISIONS ARE NOT OUT OF BOUNDS.

Consulting people incarcerated and staff on security policies (e.g., searches and discipline) is critical, because every policy has the potential to cause harm and diminish safety. To be clear, this does not mean all security details must be discussed with everyone—some things will have to stay private—but collaboration can help improve certain policies.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED THE MOST DIFFICULTY MAY GIVE THE BEST INPUT.

It is important to not only engage people with pristine records. Both people incarcerated and staff who have had trouble should be consulted, as they can provide valuable insight into where the current system is failing.

GROUPS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE ARE

NOT MONOLITHS. It is important that representation across groups is diverse, such as across different levels of incarceration or staff assignments. It is also important to recognize that groups can overlap. For example, many people incarcerated and staff are also survivors of crime.

THE CONVERSATIONS MAY BE DIFFICULT.

We must be prepared for difficult dialogue and commit to authentically hearing people, understanding their pain, and identifying pathways to healing. “When people talk about their harms, they are talking about their everyday lives. Correctional leaders must be ready to hear some agitation, some things that may not be civil,” confirms Willette Benford, Decarceration Organizer at Live Free Illinois.

Many correctional administrators have started to prioritize engaging people with lived experience.

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

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

After the pilots, we made sure to re-engage the groups to get feedback. One thing that we wished we did better was seek insights from survivors of crime to better enrich the experience, though we recognize the possibility that many individuals we engaged could have been survivors themselves.



- ▶ Cook County Sheriff's Office Lieutenant Angela Lewis looks on as an incarcerated father holds his baby during visitation.

Photo Credit: Roger Morales / Chicago Beyond

HEIDI WASHINGTON

Director of the Michigan Department of Corrections

The Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC)—and MDOC director Heidi Washington—recently launched a new **Wellness Unit for correctional staff, working with five correctional officers to design the program, as well as external community members in implementation**⁴⁶. Lynn Gorski, the new head of the Wellness Unit, testified to its importance during a joint hearing in front of the Michigan Senate, stating, “Wellness is not a perk [for this occupation]. It is a necessity.” The unit includes a peer support program that allows staff to talk about their problems and explore options with trained volunteers. The unit also includes a chaplain program that allows staff and their families to have the support of a chaplain during times of crisis and need, expanding upon an existing program in place for people incarcerated. The goal of the program is to help officers break down the stigma of talking about mental health and trauma, as well as address their elevated levels of burnout and stress.

ELIAS DIGGINS

Sheriff of Denver County

The Denver Sheriff Department (DSD) **implemented an Advisory Board** that continues under the leadership of Sheriff Elias Diggins⁴⁷. The board **includes people representing communities inside and outside correctional walls in order to guide strategic direction, identify priority issues, and uncover best practices**. Members include social workers, community activists, criminology scholars, and a person formerly incarcerated who now leads a gang alternative program for youth. Demonstrating the value of transparency with the community, the monthly board meetings include public forums where board members can hear and engage with concerns the public may have. In discussing the value of this work, Sheriff Diggins stated, “It is one thing to just listen to people with lived experience. It is another thing to have them guide decision-making. We have to realize the value in their voices as we cannot do this work alone.”

HOLISTIC SAFETY CANNOT BE ACHIEVED ALONE;
WE MUST EMPOWER PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

JOHN WETZEL

Former Secretary of Corrections for the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections; CEO of Phronema Justice Strategies

Former Pennsylvania Corrections Secretary, John Wetzel, **partnered with Amachi Pittsburgh**, a community organization that empowers youth and families dealing with the incarceration of loved ones, **to educate correctional administrators from across the country on the impact of incarceration on children and families** in an annual Correctional Leaders Association meeting. Anna Hollis, Executive Director of Amachi, shared “Secretary Wetzel created an avenue for community organizations and correctional administrators to consider alternative perspectives.” She elaborated, “Everyone is in a silo and correctional administrators don’t get to fully understand the impact of their policies. Community organizations understand the need to control contraband and that security is paramount, but I wonder if leaders understand the impact on children or incarcerated parents when their ability to connect is limited and erodes—not just through letters, but to see, feel, and touch. Community organizations understand that we are not security, but we’re here to help.”



▶ John Wetzel listens to a person incarcerated on a life sentence in Graterford Maximum Security prison.

Photo Credit: Courtesy of John Wetzel

VINCENT SCHIRALDI

Former Commissioner of the New York City Department of Correction; Adjunct Professor and Senior Fellow at Columbia University Justice Lab

Former Correction Commissioner for Rikers Island, Vincent Schiraldi, made history when he appointed Stanley Richards as his First Deputy Commissioner, the first person on the senior staff of the New York City Department of Correction to be formerly incarcerated⁴⁸. To Commissioner Schiraldi, the decision was simple. “Stanley was incredibly qualified,” he explained, adding, “Stanley recognized our staff faced horrific conditions and took initiative to help. If staff were working triples, he would show up to deliver sandwiches. If people got hurt, he would be at the hospital. That’s just who he is.” Acknowledging that many staff were not happy with the hiring decision, Commissioner Schiraldi still hoped to show staff that, “A person like Stanley is who we should want others who are incarcerated to emulate”.

RICHARD VAN WICKLER

Retired Superintendent of Cheshire County in New Hampshire; Board Member of the Law Enforcement Action Partnership

When Richard Van Wickler, former Superintendent of the Cheshire County Department of Corrections in New Hampshire and current board member of the Law Enforcement Action Partnership, heard concerns from Muslim people detained that their meals may be coming into contact with food outside their diet (e.g., pork), he sought out ideas from both staff and people incarcerated. Eventually, one dietitian proposed using trays of different colors for different diets. “We immediately started washing and filling different colored trays separately. Implementation was easy since the idea originated from the staff, and we were able to build more trust among religious groups in the facility,” Van Wickler expounded.

ELAINE LORD

Retired Superintendent of Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York

Elaine Lord, retired Superintendent of Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York, worked with a team of women incarcerated to develop a counseling and education program on AIDs in the 1990s⁴⁹. “The women knew the need better than me. One woman who had HIV told me that if she left a piece of candy out, no one else would touch it out of fear. These insights helped us understand where knowledge gaps were,” Lord said. Eventually, the women incarcerated were even able to get hospital employees to train women inside as HIV counselors. These women were empowered to address misinformation and provide support services for their peers, including accompanying them to get test results.

OUR COLLECTIVE CHALLENGE: HOLISTIC SAFETY CANNOT WAIT →

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

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

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

CORRECTIONAL ADMINISTRATORS

- ▶ EMBRACE Embrace the discomfort and risk that comes with system change.
- ▶ BE VISIBLE Be visible inside and outside the walls so you can genuinely engage and support the communities you serve.
- ▶ ROLE MODEL Role model the changes you hope to see, starting with positively engaging people with lived experience.
- ▶ EMPOWER Empower people with lived experience to assist with changing training, policy, and procedure in a way that bolsters their health, connectedness, value, trust, and personal agency.
- ▶ BUILD Build a diverse coalition of supporters to ensure change is adopted and sustained.

PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Including correctional staff, people currently and formerly incarcerated, survivors of crime, their families, correctional unions, justice advocates, and community organizations in the areas most impacted by incarceration:

- ▶ ACKNOWLEDGE Acknowledge your shared harms, as well as your core disagreements.
- ▶ COMMIT Commit to uniting with those you disagree with to work toward a shared vision of holistic safety.
- ▶ ADVOCATE Advocate for the training, policies, procedures, and resources you need to be and feel safe.
- ▶ UTILIZE Utilize—and encourage the use of—available resources, in particular those that help address trauma.

EVERYONE

- ▶ ACKNOWLEDGE Acknowledge the trauma that exists in correctional institutions and our role in maintaining the status quo.
- ▶ CHALLENGE Challenge our biases and assumptions about each other and what it means to be safe.
- ▶ CENTER Center—and increase investment in—the voices and leadership of people with lived experience.
- ▶ RECOGNIZE Recognize the different perspectives in this work, while uniting in our shared goal for holistic safety.

LET US GO FORWARD TOGETHER →

Thank you for your willingness to take this journey alongside all the people who contributed their voices to this vision.

We ask that you use *Do I Have the Right to Feel Safe?* to encourage shifts in how we all view and ensure safety for everyone—inside and outside the correctional walls—because the lives impacted by incarceration are worth saving.

DEEPEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING.

- ▶ Explore our Holistic Safety Resource Toolkit to hear more directly from people with lived experience.
- ▶ Join an event. Visit ChicagoBeyond.org/Justice-Initiatives and follow our social media to stay tuned on future conversations, presentations, and workshops on holistic safety.
- ▶ Learn more about Justice Initiatives at Chicago Beyond. Visit ChicagoBeyond.org/Justice-Initiatives and fill out our contact form to schedule a conversation if you have additional questions on our work.

TAKE ACTION.

Use *Do I Have the Right to Feel Safe?* and the holistic safety framework to build pathways toward safety for yourself and in your work. Implement a change management process that holds us accountable to the people we serve.

AMPLIFY THE MESSAGE.

- ▶ Share and discuss *Do I Have the Right to Feel Safe?* and the holistic safety framework with your colleagues, teams, allies, challengers, and friends.
- ▶ Partner with Chicago Beyond to bring these ideas to your institution, organization, or community. Visit ChicagoBeyond.org/Justice-Initiatives and fill out our contact form to begin the planning process.

JOIN THE DIALOGUE.

What examples of holistic safety have you seen in your own work? What additional ideas do you have to drive holistic safety in our communities? What hurdles have you overcome and what challenges do you continue to face? Visit ChicagoBeyond.org/Justice-Initiatives and fill out our contact form to join the dialogue and contribute to our mutual learning.

THANK YOU AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS →

As mentioned in the beginning, this vision was built alongside many correctional staff, people formerly incarcerated, survivors of crime, current and former correctional administrators, community leaders, researchers, academics, lawmakers, policymakers, funders, and advocates.

Although we all stand united in our shared goal of holistic safety, our collaboration did bring about moments of tension and disagreement. We all did not—and do not—always see eye-to-eye. Moreover, we all carry some risk in standing together—risks to our reputations, credibility, and livelihood. But if we want to build a coalition that can further momentum and drive change, we must run toward these areas of friction and discomfort, for it is in these relationships and conversations where increased power lies.

- 20** Current and former correctional administrators
- 15+** People formerly incarcerated
- 15+** Current and former correctional staff members
- 5+** Justice funders
- 10+** Justice researchers
- 25+** Community organization leaders
- 10+** Policy or law makers or influencers

One Voice United, JustLeadershipUSA, and the Chicago Beyond Advisory Council on Justice Initiatives played deep roles in crafting the concept of holistic safety and ensuring that this work centered the diverse perspectives of people with lived experience, and especially correctional staff and people incarcerated.

ONE VOICE UNITED is a campaign to give correctional officers and staff a voice in national conversations about corrections and the criminal justice system. They are working to shift the conversation from one that perpetuates tension between incarcerated individuals, corrections staff, and budget constraints to one that is centered on protecting the safety and interests of all who are impacted by the corrections system. One Voice United helped us authentically relay the lived experience of correctional staff and officers.

Andy Potter, Founder and Executive Director

Simon Greer, Senior Advisor

Corey Post, Program Director

JUSTLEADERSHIPUSA amplifies the power of people who have been directly impacted by the criminal legal system to self-organize and empower their communities to dismantle racist and oppressive systems in their communities to build a just U.S. JustLeadershipUSA helped us authentically relay the lived experience of people currently and formerly incarcerated.

Deanna Hoskins, President and CEO

Ronald Simpson-Bey, Executive Vice President

THE CHICAGO BEYOND ADVISORY COUNCIL ON JUSTICE

INITIATIVES is an assembly of 10 leaders in the criminal legal reform movement who have all experienced incarceration. Members participated in individual and group listening sessions with Chicago Beyond, sharing their experiences with the criminal legal system. Each member was compensated by Chicago Beyond for participating in this work as part of a commitment to valuing the time and effort of people formerly incarcerated the same as we would for those of any other expert.

Willette Benford, Decarceration Organizer at Live Free Illinois

Erik Bringswhite, Co-Founder and Executive Director of I. Am. Legacy.

Celia Colón, Founder and CEO of Giving Other's Dreams

Khalil Cumberbatch, Director of Strategic Partnerships for the Council on Criminal Justice

Mujahid Hamilton, Curriculum Coordinator of Green ReEntry at the Inner-City Muslim Action Network

Darren Mack, Co-Director of Freedom Agenda

Yusuf Madyun, Participant in Green ReEntry at the Inner-City Muslim Action Network

Vivian Nixon, Writer in Residence for The Square One Project and former Executive Director of College and Community Fellowship

Shaka Senghor, New York Times best-selling author and President of Shaka Senghor, Inc.

Sharon White-Harrigan, Executive Director of the Women's Community Justice Association

THANK YOU AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The pilots—and eventual full implementation—of contact visitation in Cook County jail is what inspired the concept of holistic safety. Chicago Beyond thanks these parties for their leadership in that transformation:

THE COOK COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE (CCSO)

oversees one of the largest single site jails in the country, Cook County jail in Chicago, Illinois. Led by the vision articulated by Sheriff Thomas J. Dart for family-friendly visitation, the CCSO jail leadership were exceptional partners in their openness to change, meeting regularly with the Chicago Beyond team to identify improved visitation spaces, revise visitation policies, and facilitate trauma-informed training for the more than 2,500 staff members employed at the Cook County jail.

Chief Brad Curry

Chief Tarry Williams, ret.

Warden Jane Gubser

Warden Don Beachem

Warden Michael Miller, ret.

Director Keyuana Muhammad

Director Michele Payne

Director Ron Howard

Director Michael Brady, ret.

Director Theresa Olson

Director Joseph Ryan

Lieutenant Angela Lewis

Lieutenant Jacqueline Pullums

Officer Nicole Trice

Officer Michael Chavez

CHICAGO CHILDREN'S MUSEUM (CCM) is a place where play and learning are connected in ways that allow children and families to learn and grow. The CCM team inspired us to dream big and were the architects of play spaces designed to promote family engagement.

Jennifer Farrington, President and CEO

Natali Bortoli, Vice President

Peter Williams, Vice President

Saleem Penny, res.

Michele Boglio, res.

THE CENTER FOR CHILDHOOD RESILIENCE (CCR)

is a leader in the area of children's mental health and wellness. The CCR team provided expertise on ways the impact of trauma could be mitigated for children, families, and staff impacted by incarceration through training and onsite support during pilot visitations.

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Mashana Smith, Psychologist

Claudio Rivera, Psychologist

Bianca Vargas-Ocasio, Social Worker

Faith Summersett Williams, res.

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Elaine Lord

Superintendent, ret.
Bedford Hills Correctional Facility (NY)

Thomas Schoolcraft

Correctional Officer
Minnesota

**Formerly Incarcerated, Convicted
Peoples and Families Movement
(FICPFM)**

Kevin Kempf

Executive Director
Correctional Leaders Association

Director, ret.
Idaho Department of Correction (ID)

John Wetzel

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Alissa Riker

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Jeanne Russo

Commander
Kendall County Sheriff's Office (IL)

Kevin Thom

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Pennington County Sheriff's Office (SD)

Rob Yantis

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GLOSSARY →

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

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

COMMUNITY IMPACTED BY INCARCERATION

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

COMMUNITY INSIDE CORRECTIONAL WALLS

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

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Local organizations aimed at improving the health, well-being, and functioning of their communities.

COMMUNITY OUTSIDE CORRECTIONAL WALLS

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

CONNECTEDNESS

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

CORRECTIONAL ADMINISTRATORS

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

CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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

CORRECTIONAL STAFF

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

THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM

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

DECARCERATION

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

DETERRENCE

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

HARM

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

HEALING

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

HEALTH

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

HOLISTIC SAFETY

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

INCAPACITATION

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

LIVED EXPERIENCE

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

REFORM

The act of changing institutional policies, procedures, and practices in an attempt for improvement.

TRAUMA

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

TRUST

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

PEOPLE INCARCERATED

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

PERSONAL AGENCY

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

REHABILITATION

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

RETRIBUTION

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

SEGREGATION

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

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

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

VALUE

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

VISITATION

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

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DO I HAVE THE RIGHT TO FEEL SAFE?

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