

FY2022-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

SEPTEMBER 2022

BACKGROUND

During the 2022 strategic planning process, community members reflected on the almost two-decade-long history of the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable (Roundtable) and its many evolutions. In the first Strategic Planning Session, participants collaboratively visioned three iterations of the Roundtable, each one marked by a catalyst for change.

The first catalyst was the creation of the Roundtable in 2003 by District Attorney Ronny Earle, a progressive move at the time to better coordinate governmental institutions with the goal of sharing best practices within the criminal justice system with the intent to improve outcomes for persons returning from jail or prison to Travis County. Modeled after the National Reentry Roundtable convened by the Urban Institute, the Roundtable was created to serve as an ongoing forum for academics, practitioners, community leaders, policy makers, advocates, and formerly incarcerated individuals working to address the challenges to effective reentry and reintegration of persons with criminal histories.

The second catalyst was the creation of the Ex-Offenders Council (now known as the Reentry Advocacy Project or RAP) in 2011 and the introduction of the Advocacy Fellowship in 2016. This catalyst sparked an era of intentional engagement with individuals who have lived experience navigating the criminal justice system, placing emphasis on storytelling, fighting stigma, and person-centered advocacy.

Spurred in part by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Austin/Travis County community has begun to elevate equity for reentering citizens like never before, as evidenced through public investments in funding for reentry service provision; comprehensive community initiatives to address chronic system challenges in addressing homelessness, mental health and substance use treatment and recovery; and a commitment to reducing the overall local jail population and focusing on diversion and preventing incarceration in the first place. As the Roundtable emerges into this new era, collaborators in the strategic planning process hope that this moment can be the catalyst for a new paradigm for the Roundtable. This emerging iteration of the Roundtable is one that prioritizes individuals who are system impacted in all meetings, events, initiatives, etc. and that fosters a strong leadership pipeline that reflects the lived experience expertise of this network. From feedback through planning sessions and stakeholder interviews, the Roundtable heard loud and clear that there is still much more strategic development needed at the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable to reach a future where persons who are system impacted are truly centered in this work.

The Roundtable's previous 2018-2022 strategic plan re-envisioned the strategic goals of the Roundtable to broaden community engagement and awareness of reentry as an issue that impacts every resident of Travis County, as well as to continue the original goal of breaking down silos among reentry stakeholders. During the last strategic planning period, the Roundtable released the Texas Criminal Background Screening Guide for Rental Housing Providers (2018), supported the City of Austin Fair Chance Housing resolution (2020), developed recommendations and a work plan to improve local reentry coordination in the

2020 Reentry Progress Report (2020), and completed a comprehensive survey of organizations and programs that provide services to formerly incarcerated persons in Travis County in the Reentry Service Landscape Report (2021), and conducted focus groups to engage the feedback of local women who had previously experienced reentry from jail or prison and/or who had participated in diversion programs to envision how to improve criminal justice diversion programming (2022).

Now, with the FY2022-2026 plan, Reentry Roundtable solidifies its commitment to centering individuals, families, and communities who are justice system impacted through prioritizing their leadership, advocating for quality resources and well-connected reentry networks, and continuing to educate and inform policymakers on the collateral consequences of incarceration. See Appendix 1 for a listing of Planning Council members on the date this strategic plan was adopted and Appendix 2 for the Strategic Planning Committee members and Strategic Planning Session participants. The plan was adopted by the Reentry Roundtable Planning Council on September 12, 2022.

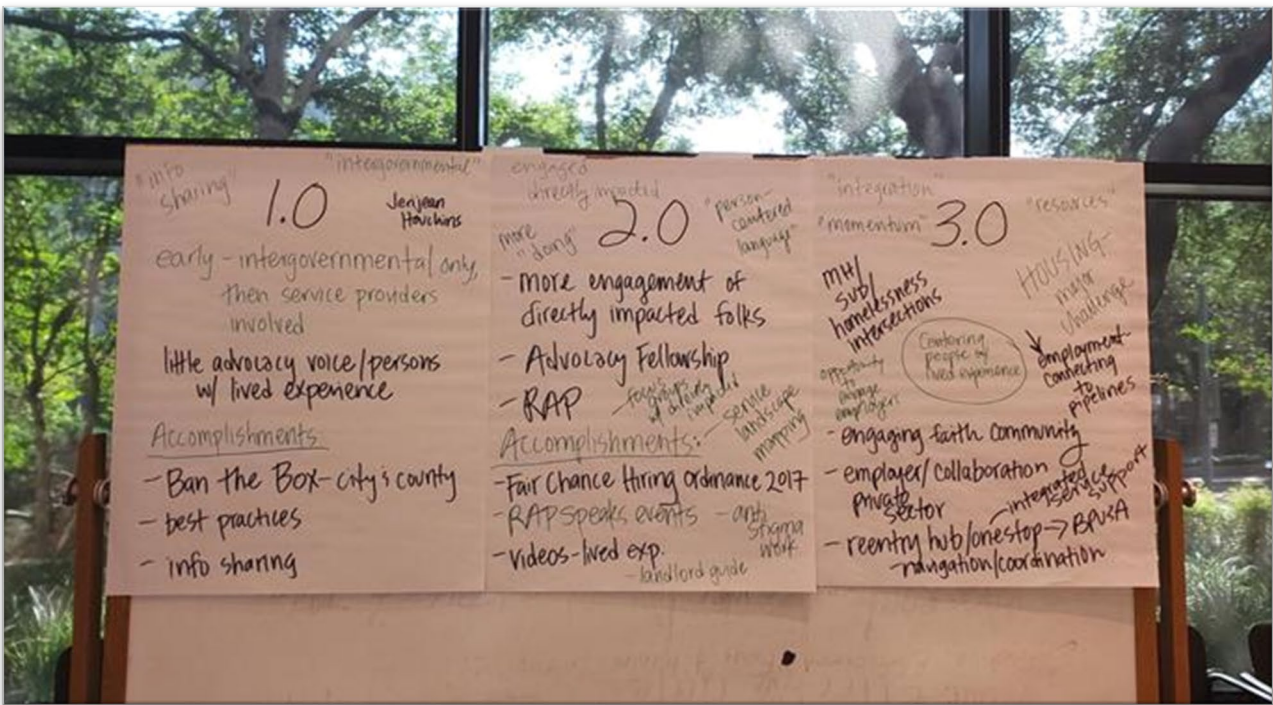


Photo from Strategic Planning Session #1: Participants mapped the Roundtable's history and future goals divided into three paradigms.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

In 2022, Woollard Nichols & Associates (WNA) was selected by the Reentry Roundtable Planning Council to conduct the Roundtable’s five-year strategic plan process. WNA proposed to include a subcontract with MEASURE, a Black-led organization and leader in making data-driven and equitable change in organizations. As a strategic planning partner, MEASURE dedicated two Certified MEASURE Educator (CME) Facilitators to conduct a series of equity focus groups (EFGs) and create a historical timeline of incarceration in Austin/Travis County. This was a community-led and designed process to measure the Roundtable’s impact utilizing the lived experience data of individuals directly impacted by the justice system. The historical timeline was included to better understand how injustice has “shown-up” over generations. MEASURE developed a summary of key findings in their MEASURE Black Paper, *Elements of Effective Reentry and Reintegration: A Community-led Discussion in Partnership with the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable* (Appendix 4).

Building on MEASURE’s work, WNA lead the development of the five-year strategic plan alongside the Roundtable’s robust network of persons who are justice system impacted, service providers, advocates, academics, governmental partners, and other community representatives. The strategic planning process confirmed an organizational identity statement which includes mission, vision, and values of the organization; identified big questions and strategic options for the organization for the next 5 years; and developed of a well-defined theory of change statement that identifies outcomes, interventions and assumptions and clearly defined success metrics to assess the Roundtable’s community impact. The plan was developed collaboratively using a variety of approaches including Liberating Structures, scenario planning and appreciative inquiry to create a dynamic, engaging, and inclusive process. See a detailed timeline of the strategic planning process in Appendix 3.



Photo from Strategic Planning Session #1: Building Context and Understanding.

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY STATEMENT

Our **vision** is a connected community that values and supports equity, well-being and upward mobility for persons impacted by the criminal justice system.

Our **mission** is to be a robust network that champions safe and healthy communities through effective reentry and reintegration of persons with justice system involvement by bringing reentry partners together to increase collaboration, reduce duplication, align efforts and strengthen the capacity of persons with justice system involvement and the reentry programs that serve them.

Our core values are:

- **Community Voice** – we center the participation and leadership of persons with lived experience in the criminal justice system and prioritize communities impacted by the criminal justice system.
- **Inclusion & Accessibility** – we seek to engage and accommodate multiple perspectives on how to achieve safe and healthy communities through effective reentry and reintegration.
- **Respect & Relationships** – we honor the basic dignity of every person and support relationship building as a means to overcome challenges.
- **Anti-Racism** – we focus on racial disparities and inequities in system delivery and we are not afraid to ask hard questions to facilitate system change.
- **Preventing Incarceration** – we champion strategies that offer alternatives to jail/incarceration whenever possible.

Our long-term outcome:

All persons with justice system involvement have what they need to survive and thrive including access to housing, a stable income, a support network to connect them to needed resources, and access to pathways to upward mobility.

Our network exists to engage ...

- Persons impacted by the criminal justice system, including individuals, victims, families and communities impacted by the criminal justice system
- Representatives of criminal justice institutions; and
- Organizations and individuals engaged in providing services and/or advocating for issues that impact reentry; and
- Advocates addressing issues that intersect with the reentry population such as homelessness, workforce development, behavioral health and violence prevention.

In Austin/Travis County and the surrounding Central Texas area, and statewide on issues that impact reentry locally.

How we work:

- We engage diverse stakeholders impacted by reentry
- We convene dialogue and critical conversations

- We advocate to support institutional and public policy change
- We partner to broaden our impact
- We utilize data to inform our work
- We inventory services, avoid duplication and map providers to promote efficiency and accountability
- We support the dissemination of trauma-informed, culturally competent, evidence-based practices

We are **sustainable** through:

- Local government contracts (City of Austin, Travis County, Integral Care)
- Philanthropic and corporate sponsorships and support

Our **competitive advantages** are:

- We are a trusted convener as evidenced by the participation of multiple sectors impacted by reentry including persons impacted by the criminal justice system, decision makers from criminal justice systems, and providers of reentry services.
- Leadership from Advocacy Fellows and connection with the Reentry Advocacy Project.
- A network of over 1,500 local stakeholders on e-newsletter and social media platforms.



Photo from Strategic Planning Session #3: Participants completed Ecocycle Planning to map Roundtable activities and determine where to invest or divest energy and resources.

CORE BELIEFS

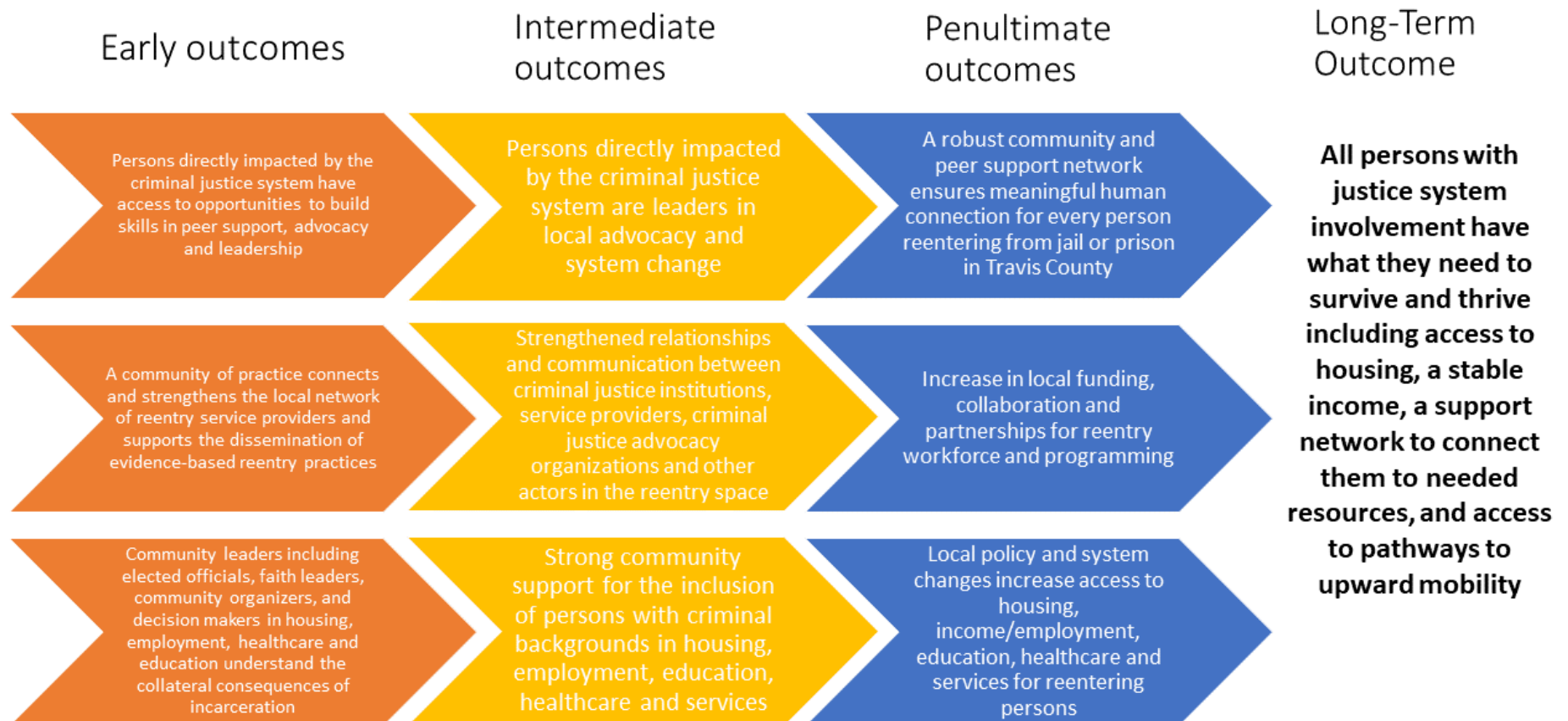
For the 2022-26 Strategic Plan, the Roundtable decided to integrate a set of core beliefs that captures key values of the network. Stakeholder interviews, MEASURE’s evaluation, and ongoing discussions helped the Roundtable articulate shared understandings about reentry into a set of beliefs that will be shared publicly.

1. A racial equity and anti-oppression lens must be utilized in developing any solutions to improving reentry outcomes, due to the disparate impact of incarceration on Black persons and other persons of color.
2. Justice system-impacted persons must be engaged in solutions to address effective reentry. Using human-centered language is critical to ensuring their dignity.
3. Reentry planning and support must begin upon incarceration and should ideally begin before incarceration through “pre-entry” criminal justice prevention and diversion programs.
4. Effective reentry depends on trusting relationships between criminal justice entities, community partners, advocacy groups and persons who are directly impacted by incarceration. Technology may be a part of reentry solutions but does not trump human connection and relationships.
5. Families and allies are impacted by incarceration and should be supported and engaged in reentry planning.
6. Trauma, mental health, substance abuse and housing instability are intersectional issues to reentry and must be addressed comprehensively as a part of successful reentry.
7. Professionals serving in the reentry workforce must have the capacity, support and expertise to assist persons in reentry to be successful.
8. Individuals in reentry need government funding, community-based services, and peer and community support to be successful.
9. Policy change to address the collateral consequences of incarceration must be a part of the solution.
10. The entire community has a stake in successful reentry and continuing to engage in stigma reduction across the community (including employers, landlords, and faith communities) is critical.



Slide from Strategic Planning Session #2: MEASURE shared findings from their evaluation of barriers to successful reentry in Austin/Travis County.

THEORY OF CHANGE



5-YEAR GOALS AND STRATEGIES

5-YEAR GOAL	STRATEGIES	HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE
<p>LEADERSHIP & CAREER DEVELOPMENT: Increase opportunities for professional skill-building and mentorship for persons with justice system involvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage the Roundtable network to establish employment, mentoring, and other networking opportunities for persons with justice system involvement • Support the development of a regional leadership cohort of persons with justice system involvement and/or support the increased participation of persons with justice system involvement in existing regional leadership programs • Develop a guide for organizations confronting barriers to employing persons with justice system involvement • Engage area employers and human resource professionals to reduce stigma, share benefits of hiring persons with criminal backgrounds, and promote skills-based hiring practices • Maintain and strengthen the Advocacy Fellowship & Mentor Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants gain skills and expand their professional network • Advocacy Fellow and other leadership participants have new career opportunities and pathways for upward mobility • More organizations hire persons with justice system involvement 	<p>Planning Council, Executive Committee, RAP, Advocacy Fellow, Backbone consultant, any interested network participants</p>

<p>PEER NETWORK: Anyone released from jail or prison has access to a robust peer support network</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene organizations that train and host justice-involved reentry peer specialists to develop a strategy for increased capacity and funding • Promote the creation of more peer support employment positions across a wider range of organizations with opportunities for advancement • Develop options for potential growth, expansion, and funding of the Reentry Advocacy Project (RAP) network and create an implementation plan, including building community both for persons who are justice system impacted and for their families/allies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number of justice-involved reentry peer specialists certified and paid positions offered • Increased partnerships with allied organizations and already existing peer networks • Increased RAP network activity and participation 	<p>Planning Council, Executive Committee, RAP, Advocacy Fellow, Backbone consultant</p>
<p>CAPACITY BUILDING: Provide technical assistance to support the expansion and improvement of local reentry services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene a reentry community of practice and potential sub-areas of practice (e.g. workforce development, housing, health) • Facilitate and support the development of a closed loop referral system for reentry services • Develop capacity building framework for emerging reentry leaders and organizations in partnership with RAP • Engage area jails and prisons to review internal policies and procedures to align with evidence-based practices for reentry • Build partnerships with area academic institutions to advance the dissemination of evidence-based reentry practices and support data driven decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased adherence to evidence-based practices in local reentry services • Increase in local funding for reentry workforce and programming • New reentry services, programs and partnerships • Increased collaboration and trust between organizations in the local reentry ecosystem 	<p>Planning Council, Executive Committee, Reentry service providers, Advocacy Fellow, Backbone consultant</p>

<p>ADVOCACY: Encourage local civic and community leaders to take action to reduce the negative impacts of unsuccessful reentry on the community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a community-wide advocacy agenda to raise awareness of the collateral consequences of incarceration and the importance of successful reentry to addressing other community challenges including homelessness, mental health and substance use, food insecurity, and family reunification • In alignment with the Roundtable advocacy agenda, seek opportunities for media coverage to personalize the issue of reentry for the decision makers and the public • Coordinate with the City of Austin and Travis County to achieve the goals and strategies identified in the Roundtable Civil Rights Agenda (2022) including advocating for local legislative and administrative policy changes related to fair chance housing and hiring; partnering with state-level organizations to impact state policy changes related to fair chance housing and hiring; and educating employers and housing providers to reduce stigma • Align with the BHCJAC Intercept 4 Work Group and Travis County Travis County Forensic Mental Health Project to address the complex reentry needs of justice-involved persons with mental health and substance use disorders • Build a data dashboard to develop and track how to measure outcomes in the Roundtable theory of change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic leaders can articulate the negative impacts of incarceration on the community • Increased collaboration and partnerships with peer organizations • New policies and/or changes to existing administrative and legislative policies that reduce collateral consequences of incarceration 	<p>Planning Council, Executive Committee, RAP, Advocacy Fellow, Backbone consultant</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop communications and outreach strategies to Mobilize Roundtable and RAP networks to lead or co-sign local advocacy movements; maintain a calendar of upcoming engagement opportunities and encourage Roundtable representation in relevant community work groups 		
<p>GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE: Redesign Roundtable governance structure to improve leadership accountability, clarify expectations, and create a pipeline of leaders with lived experience in decision-making roles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the current governance and operational structure (Planning Council, Executive Committee) and propose a sustainable future structure • Revise Roundtable bylaws to accommodate a more inclusive vision of the Roundtable as a network of reentry leaders that anyone can participate in • Develop and/or refine current financial policies including annual budgeting • Introduce intentional network weavers and Roundtable ambassadors to foster new connections and deepen relationships across networks, including local faith communities, criminal justice reform organizers, area academic institutions, and coalitions addressing intersecting issue areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated bylaws • Updated financial policies and procedures • Deeper and broader participation and engagement in Roundtable activities 	<p>Planning Council, Executive Committee, RAP, Advocacy Fellow, Backbone consultant</p>

APPENDIX 1: PLANNING COUNCIL MEMBERS AND SUPPORT

2022 Planning Council:

Donald J. Tracy, Austin Community College [Chair]
Dr. Charles A. Moody, Jr., Community Coalition for Health [Vice Chair/Nominating Committee Chair]
Jennifer Carter, Goodwill Industries of Central Texas [Immediate Past Chair]
Joe A. Ramirez, Texas Veterans Commission [RAP Representative]
Sonja Burns, Community Representative
Carolyn Brown, LMSW, Travis County Correctional Facility
David Clauss, LMSW, American YouthWorks
Helen Gaebler, JD, UT School of Law
Juanita Garcia, Travis County Public Defender
Mia Greer, RN, BSN, CLIA, Community Coalition for Health
Darwin Hamilton, Community Representative
Carl F. Hunter II, M.Div., Building Promise USA
Cathy McClaugherty, Travis County Justice & Public Safety
Rodolfo (Rudy) Pérez, Jr., Travis County Adult Probation
Hank Perret, Community Representative
Kaleigh Phelan, Capital Area Private Defender Service
Melissa Shearer, LBSW, JD, Travis County Mental Health Public Defender
Paola Silvestre, Indeed
Cynthia Simons, RPS, MHPS, Texas Center for Justice & Equity
Louella Tate, Ph.D., Community Representative
Peter Valdez, City of Austin Downtown Community Court
Alex Villarreal, LPC, Integral Care

Reentry Advocacy Fellow: Amanda Cassidy-Trejo

Strategy Support: Kelly Nichols & Madeleine Jordan-Lord, Woollard Nichols & Associates

APPENDIX 2: STRATEGIC PLANNING COLLABORATORS

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Donald J. Tracy, Austin Community College [Chair]
Dr. Charles A. Moody, Jr., Community Coalition for Health [Vice Chair/Nominating Committee Chair]
Amanda Cassidy-Trejo, Reentry Roundtable [Advocacy Fellow]
Mia Greer, RN, BSN, CLIA, Community Coalition for Health
Darwin Hamilton, Community Representative
Carl F. Hunter II, M.Div., Building Promise USA
Cathy McClaugherty, Travis County Justice & Public Safety
Peter Valdez, Downtown Austin Community Court

STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION #1 PARTICIPANTS

Jennifer Carter, Goodwill Central Texas [Past Chair]
Amanda Cassidy-Trejo, Reentry Roundtable [Advocacy Fellow]
Bob Batlan, Advocates for Social Justice Reform
David Clauss, American YouthWorks
Mia Greer, Community Coalition for Health
Rachel Gunner, Advocates for Social Justice Reform
Frank Kavanaugh, Just Faith, St. Alberts Church
Hank Perret, Community Member
Maggie Luna, Texas Center for Justice & Equity
Cathy McClaugherty, Travis County Justice & Public Safety
Kaleigh Phelan, Capital Area Private Defender Service
Melissa Shearer, Travis County Mental Health Public Defender
Paola Silvestre, Indeed
Peter Valdez, City of Austin Downtown Austin Community Court

Facilitators: Kelly Nichols & Madeleine Jordan-Lord, Woollard Nichols & Associates

STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION #2 PARTICIPANTS

Charles Moody, Community Coalition for Health [Vice Chair]
Jennifer Carter, Goodwill Central Texas [Past Chair]
Tyra Clark, Community Member
David Clauss, American YouthWorks
Helen Gaebler, UT Austin Law School
Darwin Hamilton, Community Representative
Beverly Johnson, Helping Hands Through Connections
Kevin Lee, Urban Alchemy
James Levy, Socrates Software
Maggie Luna, Texas Center for Justice & Equity
Michelle Myles, City of Austin Office of Violence Prevention
Vanessa Perez, American YouthWorks
Hank Perret, Community Representative
Reginald Smith, Earl Carl Institute for Legal and Social Policy Inc.
Octavio Ulloa, Travis County Health and Human Services
Crystal Voelpel, Travis County Mental Health Public Defender

Larry Wallace Jr., Austin Area Urban League
Cluren Williams, Peace Program
Jason Wysong, Community Member

Facilitators: Vanessa Beltran & Dr. Tiffany Ricks, MEASURE and Kelly Nichols & Madeleine Jordan-Lord, Woollard Nichols & Associates

STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION #3 PARTICIPANTS

Charles Moody, Community Coalition for Health [Chair]
Amanda Cassidy-Trejo, Reentry Roundtable [Advocacy Fellow]
Anthony Alexander, Workforce Solutions Capital Area
David Clauss, American YouthWorks
Mia Greer, Community Coalition for Health
Shelley MacAllister, Unite Us
Lori Mellinger, Lioness
Hank Perret, Community Member
Kaleigh Phelan, Capital Area Private Defender Service
Cynthia Simons, Texas Center for Justice & Equity
AtmaJodha Singh, Mystic Visions
Cluren Williams, Peace Program
Chivas Watson, WorkingGroup512
Pete Valdez, Downtown Austin Community Court

Facilitators: Kelly Nichols & Madeleine Jordan-Lord, Woollard Nichols & Associates



Photo from Strategic Planning Session #3: Participants worked in small groups to reimagine Reentry Roundtable's identity statement

APPENDIX 3: STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS TIMELINE

- January 10, 2022: Reentry Roundtable's Planning Council awarded strategic planning contract to Woollard Nichols & Associates with the proposed subcontract with [MEASURE](#)
- February – April 2022: WNA developed strategic planning scope of work in consultation with MEASURE
- May 4, 2022: WNA presented full strategic planning timeline and activities to Roundtable Executive Committee for approval
- May 9, 2022: The May Planning Council meeting was the Strategic Planning Kickoff. WNA shared an overview of the proposed process and timeline, and posed the following question to the Planning Council: *What is currently happening in the Austin/Travis County reentry ecosystem that demands creative change?*
- May – June 2022: MEASURE conducted outreach to individuals with lived experience with incarceration and reentry to recruit for the MEASURE equity focus groups (EFGs)
- May 26, 2022-July 13, 2022: WNA conducted 13 one-on-one stakeholder interviews to collect in-depth feedback on the challenges and opportunities facing the Roundtable
- June 9, 2022: Strategic Planning Session #1 was held in-person at 700 Lavaca. This was a 3-hour session with the objective of building context and understanding for strategic planning.
- June 11, 2022 – June 21, 2022: MEASURE conducted three equity focus groups which responded to the problem statement developed by Reentry Roundtable and focus group participants: *people don't have what they need to be successful when they get out of prison*
- July 27, 2022: Strategic Planning Session #2 was a virtual information session on the findings of the equity focus groups conducted by MEASURE
- August 5, 2022: Strategic Planning Session #3 was held in-person at Downtown Austin Community Court for a half-day of workshopping the Roundtable's identity statement and developing strategic options and a theory of change.
- August 8, 2022: Planning Council members and guests continued to add comments to the draft identity statement, core beliefs, and theory of change in the August Planning Council meeting
- September 7, 2022: Reentry Roundtable held a Community Feedback Session during the public comment period for the strategic plan. Community members were invited to provide feedback on the strategic goals and strategics to inform the final document.
- September 12, 2022: The 2022-26 Strategic Plan was approved by Reentry Roundtable Planning Council in the September meeting by voice vote with no abstentions.
- September 2022: Strategic Plan submitted to funders and the Roundtable began development of FY22-23 deliverables and work plan.

APPENDIX 4: ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE REENTRY AND REINTEGRATION: A COMMUNITY-LED DISCUSSION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE AUSTIN/TRAVIS COUNTY REENTRY ROUNDTABLE

For the Reentry Roundtable 2022-26 Strategic Plan, Woollard Nichols & Associates partnered with MEASURE to understand how we can best support people returning to our community after incarceration. MEASURE's mission is to use data and education to mobilize communities and eliminate social disparities. Vanessa Beltran, MPH, RDN, LD and Tiffany N. Ricks, PhD., RN (Certified MEASURE Educators) led a series of equity focus groups and published the MEASURE lived-experience data Black paper, *Elements of Effective Reentry and Reintegration: A Community-Led Discussion in Partnership with the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable*.



**ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE
REENTRY AND REINTEGRATION:
A COMMUNITY-LED DISCUSSION IN
PARTNERSHIP WITH THE AUSTIN/TRAVIS
COUNTY REENTRY ROUNDTABLE**

Vanessa Beltran, MPH, RDN, LD | Tiffany N. Ricks, PhD., RN

Elements of Effective Reentry and Reintegration

A LIVED-EXPERIENCE DATA BLACK PAPER

MEASURE
Community Led. Data Driven.

Vanessa Beltran, MPH, RDN, LD | Tiffany N. Ricks, Ph.D., RN

ABOUT MEASURE

MEASURE, an Austin-based nonprofit, works to support people impacted by social disparities and the accompanying narrative. MEASURE believes that, when used strategically, data provides a common language upon which community members can meet and increase their knowledge about the causes and work together to create equitable change and increase awareness. MEASURE has a mission to mobilize communities that are furthest from opportunity to fight against systematic disparities in health, economics, criminalization, and education through the MEASURE CARE Model and our other anti-racist evaluation tools. The organization's vision is for Powerful Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities to have access to information that will support them self-advocate towards an antiracist and equitable future.

ABOUT THE AUSTIN/TRAVIS COUNTY REENTRY ROUNDTABLE

The Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable is modeled after the National Reentry Roundtable convened by the Urban Institute - an ongoing forum for academics, practitioners, community leaders, policy makers, advocates, and formerly incarcerated individuals working to address the challenges to effective reentry and reintegration of persons with criminal histories. The Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable works to promote a community that values and supports equity for formerly incarcerated persons and individuals with justice involvement. The Roundtable's intended impacts are: (1) Policy and practice changes that lead to reductions in recidivism and revocations from community supervision with the ultimate aim of reducing the number of incarcerated persons in Travis County; (2) Improved access to housing, job opportunities, and physical and behavioral health care for persons with criminal backgrounds in Travis County; and (3) Shifted public perception of people with criminal justice involvement so that every person in Travis County understands that people with criminal histories are contributing members of society.

HOW DO WE BEST SUPPORT PEOPLE RETURNING TO OUR COMMUNITY AFTER INCARCERATION?

Reentry is the process by which incarcerated persons return to the community. The reentry process should begin at arrest and continue through community reintegration. 95% of people who experience incarceration will eventually return to the community. Recognizing the need to center equity in the next Reentry Roundtable strategic planning process and to develop a strategic plan that is more data-driven and articulates measurable outcomes, Woollard Nichols & Associates partnered with MEASURE to understand how we can best support people returning to our community after incarceration.

For more information, please see:

1. About - WE MEASURE. Accessed July 15, 2022. <https://wemeasure.org/about/>
2. About - Reentry Roundtable. Accessed July 15, 2022. <https://www.reentryroundtable.org/about-us/>

DEEPENING THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF INCARCERATION AND REENTRY IN AUSTIN

**"NOT EVERYTHING THAT IS FACED CAN BE CHANGED, BUT NOTHING CAN BE CHANGED UNTIL IT IS FACED."
— JAMES BALDWIN**

The United States, despite representing only four percent of the world population, accounts for 22 percent of its incarcerated people. America has the highest rate of incarceration of any nation on Earth, with every U.S. state incarcerating more people per capita than virtually any independent democracy on earth. The legacy of slavery, including mass surveillance and excessive punishment, is the root of the carceral state that has created the conditions for reentry. Segregation, particularly residential segregation enacted through the adoption of Austin's 1928 Master Plan, had a profound impact on communities' access to resources and opportunity. Under-resourced neighborhoods were particularly affected by the War on Drugs and policies related to sentencing, leading to rising incarceration rates. In Texas, incarceration rates quadrupled between 1978 and 2003. Founded in 2004, Reentry Roundtable provides critical support as Austin/Travis County residents return to our community after incarceration.



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<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/prison-industrial-complex-slavery-racism.html>. Published August 14, 2019.

2. Initiative PP. States of Incarceration: The Global Context 2021. Accessed July 15, 2022. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2021.html>

INCARCERATION AND REENTRY IN AUSTIN:

A HISTORICAL TIMELINE

AUGUST 2022

AUTHORS
Vanessa Beltran, MPH, RDH, LD, Tiffany N. Ricks, PhD, RN, Reentry Roundtable

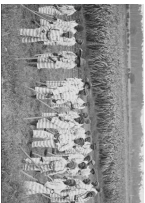
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1877

JIM CROW LAWS AND SEGREGATION

Jim Crow laws were statutes and ordinances established to separate the white and Black races in the American South, condemning Black citizens to inferior treatment and facilities. The Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) supported racial segregation for public facilities across the nation. (3)



SLAVERY & THE "JUSTICE" SYSTEM

After slavery was abolished, the criminal legal system has been used to extract labor from enslaved people's descendants. Black codes criminalized activities like selling crops without permission from a White person. The convict leasing system allowed private individuals to lease incarcerated people as workers. (1,2)

1865

1971

WAR ON DRUGS

President Nixon declares a war on drugs, which leads to a spike in incarceration rates as more non-violent offenders, drug users, and drug dealers were sent to prison. Under President Reagan, drug-related mandatory minimums under the Sentencing Reform Act and Anti-Drug Abuse Act. (8,9)



DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION OF MENTAL HEALTH HOSPITALS

As a result of deinstitutionalization, more mentally ill individuals, who might have previously been treated in mental institutions, were being sent to prison. Exposure to violence in prisons and jails can exacerbate existing mental health disorders or even lead to the development of post-traumatic stress symptoms. Storages in inadequate community mental health care can lead to incarceration. (6,7)

1955

1978 - 2003

MASS INCARCERATION

Starting in the late 1970s, mass incarceration accelerated at both the federal and state levels. In Texas, state incarceration quadrupled between 1978 and 2003. Mass incarceration has caused a breakdown in community care systems and led to the stereotyping of Black and Latinx fathers as absent. (10)



REINFORCING POLICIES LEADING TO MASS INCARCERATION

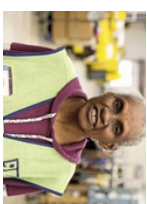
The "tough on crime" narrative led to the Violent Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1994 under the Clinton Administration. This bill featured the largest expansion of the federal death penalty in modern times, the gutting of habeas corpus, the evisceration of the exclusionary rule, the tying of 1.5-year-olds as adults, and 100,000 new police officers on the streets, which led to an explosion in racial profiling. It also included the elimination of Pell educational grants for prisoners, the implementation of the federal three strikes law, and monetary incentives to states to enact "truth-in-sentencing" laws, which subsidized an astronomical rise in prison construction across the country, lengthened the amount of time to be served, and solidified a mentality of meanness. (8)

1994

2016

ADVOCACY FELLOWSHIP CREATED

The Fellowship is an innovative program designed for formerly incarcerated persons with lived experience navigating the criminal justice system. Fellows work closely with the Roundtable Executive Committee and consultants to develop their leadership skills and become competent and professional advocates for criminal justice system-involved individuals.



LAUNCH OF REENTRY ROUNDTABLE



In September 2003, the Roundtable's initial Planning Council was formed, comprising of multiple city and county stakeholders. The first forum, held in April 2004, kicked off the organization with a plan to encourage reentry stakeholders to break down the silos in which they were operating.

2004

REENTRY ADVOCACY PROJECT (RAP) COUNCIL FORMED

RAP, a council of formerly incarcerated individuals and reentry stakeholders that informs the ongoing work of the Roundtable, was formed to ensure the voices of those with lived reentry experience are at the center of the Roundtable's work. They meet monthly to provide support and connect to resources, utilizing a mutual aid self-help model.

2011-2012

CITY OF AUSTIN FAIR CHANCE EMPLOYMENT ORDINANCE

The Fair Chance Employment ordinance, which prohibits private employers with more than 15 employees from inquiring about a job applicant's criminal history before extending an offer, was passed 8-7 by City Council in March 2016 and implemented in April 2017. Austin became the first city in Texas to "ban-the-box," requiring employers to revise their job applications, guidelines, and documentation for the hiring process. The law aims to reduce recidivism and unemployment and increase re-entry for qualified job applicants with criminal histories. Reentry Roundtable conducted outreach to employers in an effort to improve enforcement and increase awareness of the ordinance. (11)

2016 - 2019

METHODOLOGY

Participants were recruited from the Austin area to participate in one of three virtual focus groups. Participants were recruited by Reentry Roundtable leaders. In addition, participants were contacted via listservs and Facebook groups for local organizations that provide reentry support services and resources for the Central Texas community.

Participants were invited to share their experiences and provide insight into their perceptions of the components of "successful" reintegration into the Central Texas community after incarceration. Each focus group was 90 minutes in length and took place on June 11, and July 20 and 21 of 2022. Reentry Roundtable provided each participant with a \$100 electronic gift card for their time.

A team of two Certified MEASURE Evaluators facilitated each focus group. Participants were encouraged to openly and authentically share their experiences and views within a space of safety. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify, organize, and report prevalent themes from this project. The evaluators identified relevant excerpts from the stories as codes. The codes were then grouped to formulate overarching themes. Finally, after comprehensive discussion and refinement of each theme during weekly discussions, four major themes emerged. With the aim of trustworthiness, preliminary findings were first shared with MEASURE leaders before sharing with Reentry Roundtable leadership and staff.

The problem the research team aimed to address, determined by Reentry Roundtable leadership and focus group participants, was: *people don't have what they need to be successful when they get out of prison.*

Using MEASURE's Equity Focus Group Tool, Certified MEASURE educators were able to facilitate three virtual discussions wherein participants were asked the following questions:

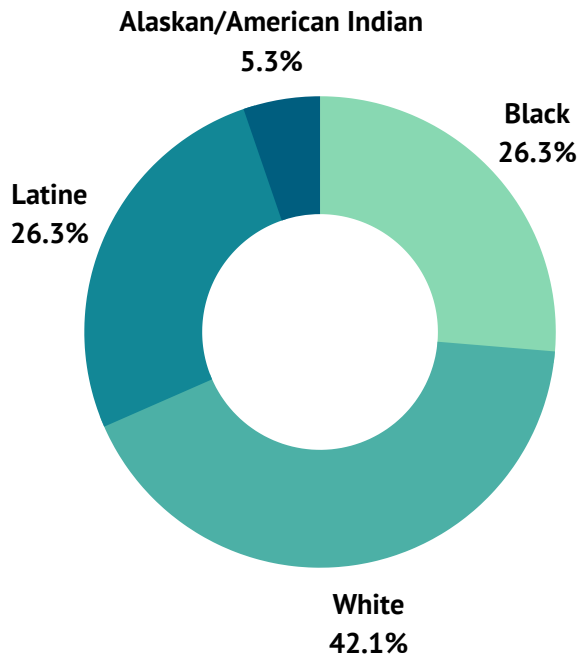
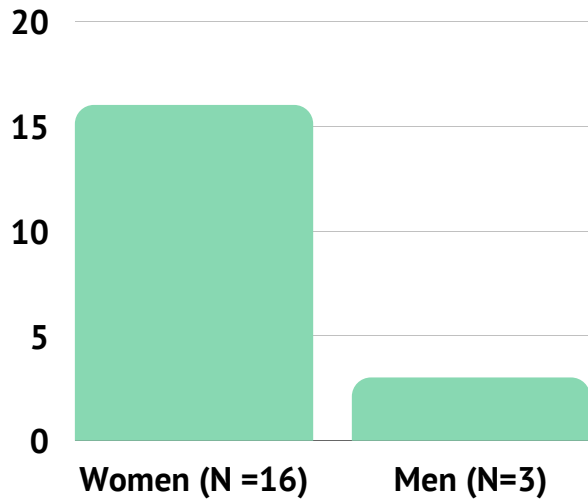
- In your mind, what does ideal reentry support look like?
- How should we meet people where they are (various carceral states)?
- How do we better reach people who are system impacted?
- How can we provide information to you on the inside so when you are stepping out the door, you have the resources you need, rather than hoping you'll find the resource once you are released?

LIMITATIONS

Focus groups were conducted in English only. This may have limited participation for persons who feel more comfortable communicating in a language other than English. In recognition of the social contexts and backgrounds that shape participant experiences, we recommend that future research include opportunities for bilingual or multilingual focus groups.

EQUITY FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

A total of nineteen (19) men and women participated in three (3) focus groups. All but two (2) participants had personally experienced incarceration. One participant indicated that her partner had been incarcerated while another person indicated that a sibling had just recently been released from prison. The average length of time out of prison was 6.9 years. All focus groups were conducted virtually and in English.



THEMATIC ANALYSIS

THE DEHUMANIZATION OF INCARCERATED PEOPLE

"It (incarceration) like strips away, like all your dignity and all of your dreams." This statement made by a male participant echoed the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of participants. Their experiences with incarceration were commonly **associated with traumatizing conditions and a primary focus on punishment instead of rehabilitation**. The perceived lack of attention to their physical, mental, and emotional health while incarcerated had left them **feeling less "human"** than people who had not been incarcerated.

FEELING UNPREPARED TO RE-ENGAGE WITH FAMILY AND THEIR COMMUNITY

"We are not prepared to enter back into the world of interpersonal relationships." Participants described some of the skills they thought conducive to **successful reintegration** back into the community. They included skills like emotional intelligence, dealing with conflict in healthy ways, and the ability to problem-solve and make 'good' decisions. Post-incarceration, participants described the difficulty they experienced in rebuilding and healing familial relationships and friendships that had been **damaged due to incarceration**. Many shared difficulty navigating familial interactions once home. Parents reported that being incarcerated had disrupted their ability to care for their children and had resulted in **feelings of inadequacy, resentment, and mistrust among friends and family**. Not being able to make decisions while incarcerated led to sustained struggles making both personal and professional decisions related to areas like employment opportunities and housing options.

UNSURE OF WHERE TO TURN TO GET WHAT YOU NEED

"A couple of people mentioned when you don't know where to go, what to look for, then we're going to do what - go back to what we know." Almost every participant spoke of the challenge in knowing where to go after incarceration to secure resources related to housing, healthcare, educational opportunities, support services, and employment and workforce training. Without a clear plan upon release, there was a general consensus that it was **extremely difficult figuring out where to begin** in trying to complete what they considered essential tasks like procuring an ID/driver's license or applying for a job. This **difficulty contributed to increased risks of engaging in illegal activities in order to meet their needs**.

OVERCOMING THE BURDEN OF A HISTORY OF INCARCERATION

"I did my time. Y'all sent me to jail and I did that. Now I got to just keep on, keep on being punished and penalized over for like for the rest of my life." This statement, made by a woman who was 19 years post-incarceration, reflected the frustration and anguish felt by most participants in their quest to rebuild their lives after being incarcerated. In his book, Dr. Reuben J. Miller (2021) describes the **"afterlife" of incarceration and the perpetual disenfranchisement and traumatizing of people** after they have served their time. The inability to secure safe, affordable housing, being relegated to certain types of work (e.g. telemarketing), and the parole structure were often cited as significant barriers to reentry back into the community. In essence, participants reported feeling like they were **still being punished by society** although they were no longer in prison or jail.

LIVED- EXPERIENCE DATA & STORYTELLING



"I didn't have a community, had a hard time keeping a job because when you have mental health and you have trauma and you don't have support, it's like, it's, you're just squeezing someone. You can't breathe and you feel like you're being kicked while you're already down."

- Female Participant

"We're not taught how to navigate the medical system. We're not really taught how to navigate the legal system and the identity system or how to get benefits. Those things are so lightly touched on. It's got to be a whole comprehensive culture and it's not, there's just one person, a social worker sitting there saying, what do you need. Half the time, you don't know what you need."

- Female Participant

"If we **really** want to be a community that opens our arms and holds space for those who want to do better, then we need to have employment, transportation and housing lined up."

- Male Participant

Our lived experience
makes us

EXPERTS

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to public records, the incarceration rate in Travis County has increased 950% over the past 45 years (Statecourts.org, 2022) which presents an opportunity to effectively support a significant number of people and families impacted by incarceration. The Austin Travis County Reentry Roundtable is dedicated to promoting safe and healthy communities through effective reentry and reintegration of formerly incarcerated persons and individuals with criminal histories. Innovative, sustainable solutions are needed to achieve this mission. Facilitating successful reentry into our community after incarceration requires the removal of barriers, while developing support services and resources that center the voices and unique needs of those most impacted by incarceration.

REENTRY SUPPORT SHOULD BEGIN BEFORE RELEASE

"I agree with starting to look at re-entry from the time you go in, not like after you're already released out and don't know where to go." This statement made by a female participant mirrored those of most participants after discussing the limited awareness of and the ability to access resources that support effective reentry. Participants suggested that reentry planning should begin, in some capacity, on the first day of incarceration. That way, a comprehensive release plan can be tailored to meet their unique needs and background, thereby increasing the odds of successful reentry and adherence to that plan.

RESOURCE REPOSITORY

"I felt like I was absolutely hopeless in trying to find even identification or another place to stay, or be able to obtain a job. Like I didn't know anywhere to turn and I didn't stay free very long." This statement made by a woman who had been released 18 months earlier, reflected the experiences of a majority of participants. With a desire to meet their most immediate needs related to housing, meaningful employment, food, transportation, and obtaining personal identification, participants asked for the creation of a resource repository, or coordinated services, that would be able to assist them in meeting those immediate needs. They wanted to be offered a wide range of up-to-date, effective wraparound services. All too often they shared that they had been referred to certain organizations for support only to be told those services were no longer available. Most felt that knowing where to go to get what they needed would help keep them out of prison.

TRAUMA INFORMED SERVICES

"We've already been subjected to the traumas of the system and on top of the traumas that we came in with." This statement, made by a participant who had been released from prison 19 years ago, highlighted the desire for trauma informed reintegration resources and support. Engaging in criminal activities is often associated with childhood traumas that often continue into adulthood (Wolff & Shi, 2012). A majority of participants reported a history of trauma, with imprisonment being identified as a significant traumatic experience. With a goal of healing, maximizing autonomy, and long-term recovery, participants discussed a need for programs, strategies, and services that recognize and mitigate the impact of sustained trauma.

**PEER SUPPORT
AND
MENTORSHIP**

"Our success seems to merge on the fact that we look after each other. Because we understand what we're going through, what we need, what the challenges are." The statement highlights the consensus that peer support is crucial in the establishment of trusting, authentic relationships with service providers and those offering reentry support services. Participants reported feeling more connected to people who had successfully reintegrated into the community after having been incarcerated, so that is who they wanted to serve as their advocates. Having shared experiences seemed to give them more credibility among participants, resulting in an increased willingness to listen to and adhere to their guidance and suggestions.

Successful reentry and reintegration depends on a **variety of well coordinated programs and services** designed in ways that respect an individual's unique contexts, while addressing the factors that have the most significant impact on reentry success. In partnership with each other, we can create opportunities and resources that effectively support the transition back into our community after incarceration.



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