



Pathways of Possibility

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION'S ROLE IN REENTRY

BARUCH COLLEGE, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK,
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A report presenting key insights and strategies from the
PATHWAYS OF POSSIBILITY conference

Sponsored by
the NEW YORK REENTRY EDUCATION NETWORK,
the NYC OFFICE OF HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT,
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The conference design committee was co-chaired by John Gordon, the Fortune Society; Katy Taylor, NYC Office of Human Capital Development; and Susan Sturm, CISC. The conference design committee included Alberto Gutierrez, Center for Employment Opportunities; Aviva Tevah, NYREN/NYC Office of Human Capital Development/NYC Department of Correction; Azadeh Khalili, Consultant; Barbara Kravitz, the Doe Fund; Leah Gogel Pope, CISC; Rick Tibbetts, NYC Department of Probation; Ronald Day, the Osborne Association; and Tammy Arnstein, Consultant.

NEW YORK REENTRY EDUCATION NETWORK (NYREN)

Mission

1. To enable people with criminal justice involvement to receive quality education appropriate to their needs and aspirations so that they become engaged and productive members of their communities;
2. To make education a core component of the reentry policy, strategy, and practice in New York; and
3. To shift public priorities and resources from incarceration to educational access and success for communities affected by mass incarceration.

Members

Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES)	The Fortune Society
Center for Community Alternatives (CCA)	Friends of Island Academy (FOIA)
Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)	Future Now at Bronx Community College
College and Community Fellowship (CCF)	Getting Out and Staying Out (GOSO)
College Initiative	Horticultural Society of New York (HSNY)
The CUNY Catch Program	NYC Justice Corps
The Doe Fund, Inc.	The Osborne Association
Dreams Youth Build	Police Athletic League (PAL)
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NYC Department of Education's District 79
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Academic Affiliates

Center for Institutional and Social Change at Columbia Law School (CISC)
Prisoner Reentry Institute (PRI), John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Affiliated Coalitions

Bronx Clergy Criminal Justice Roundtable

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Pathways of Possibility: Transforming Education's Role in Reentry was a pathbreaking conference focused on elevating education's pivotal role in reducing recidivism, fostering personal transformation, building leadership, and promoting community revitalization. The conference grew out of an ongoing collaboration among people in community-based organizations, government agencies, and higher education institutions who formed the [New York Reentry Education Network \(NYREN\)](#) as a vehicle for pursuing a shared commitment to making education central for people with criminal justice involvement. NYREN organized and hosted the conference to enhance their effectiveness and visibility, to forge new partnerships, and to expand their reach. This Executive Summary presents the main points and concrete ideas that emerged during the conference in order to collectively move forward a robust reentry education agenda.

Call to Action: Education as a Strategy for Lowering Recidivism, Increasing Public Safety, and Reinvesting in Communities

With one in 100 out of the adult population, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Additionally, people of color are incarcerated and placed under criminal justice supervision at a disproportionate rate, and a large number of justice-involved people come from communities with high concentrations of poverty and low-performing schools. Quality education paired with holistic support services has a track record of reducing recidivism, increasing access to decent-paying career paths, and enabling people with criminal records to become contributors to and leaders of their communities. As such, access to education is a community reinvestment strategy that dramatically increases public safety.



Participants listen to an opening keynote speech about the critical importance of education in reentry.

Seizing the Moment: Education as an Achievable Collective Impact Goal

Recently, efforts to make education a central strategy in reentry have received a heightened level of attention and energy, creating a sense of momentum and urgency for change in the field of criminal justice. This sense of possibility stems from a shared perception that we are at a turning point. In New York City, individuals and organizations struggling for years to get education on the reentry agenda report that they have experienced a new openness and interest among policymakers, higher education leaders, and funders. At the national and state level,

task forces on reentry are making education a pillar of their work. The US Department of Education (USDOE), with the support of President Obama and USDOE Secretary Arne Duncan, has made education for people with criminal histories part of its policy agenda.

Defining Education in Reentry Settings

Education in reentry settings must be defined broadly in order to encompass a diverse array of both programs and skills. It is a pathway with many entry points, including high school equivalency,

degree granting-programs, vocational and workforce training, and job readiness. It is critical to build support at every level of educational achievement and to craft programs that prepare people to progress along the educational continuum. Additionally, reentry education must involve not only academic knowledge and skills, but also the full range of capacities necessary to enable educational success, including parenting skills, cognitive skills, vocational training, and substance abuse treatment. Successful reentry education results not only in recidivism reduction, but also in sustainable employment, empowerment, and a personal sense of fulfillment.

Areas of High Need and Shared Interest

To make education central to reentry, stakeholders must come together around concrete areas of high need and shared interest that are ripe for action. These themes provide a focus for collective efforts to realize education's transformative role in reentry moving forward:

- (1) Higher Education Access and Success
- (2) The Power of Peer Mentoring
- (3) Integrating Employment, Workforce Development and Reentry Education
- (4) Criminal Justice Agencies as Levers for Education
- (5) Creating Educational Pathways for People in the Criminal Justice System

Cutting across each of these areas is identifying the particular needs of youth populations and how to develop programming and wraparound services designed to support their social, emotional, economic, and educational well-being.

An Integrated Agenda for Education and Reentry

Six overarching goals have emerged out of our shared commitment to realizing education's potential in reentry:

(1) Integrate education as a core mission of and shared agenda for corrections and reentry

We seek to create a local and national culture focused on education rather than incarceration. This vision includes administrators and policymakers making commitments to support and expand educational opportunities in communities and in the correctional system, closing prisons where possible, re-conceptualizing the role of corrections to go beyond enforcing punishment and maintaining security, and continuing to transform the focus of probation and parole away from supervision and surveillance and toward support, individual transformation, and community renewal.



Workshop participants engage ideas from a previous panel.

(2) Make education institutions and work environments inclusive and welcoming for people with criminal justice involvement

The culture of education institutions and workplaces should be strengths-based, rather than deficits-focused. This requires a change in attitudes among educational institutions and employers, who must grow to value the experiences, knowledge, and assets of students and employees with

criminal justice histories. Additionally, reentry education will change perceptions among criminal justice system-involved people about their personal capabilities and opportunities for educational success. Reintegration into the community must be emphasized from the beginning of criminal justice system involvement.

(3) Provide multi-faceted supports to students through activities and programs that mutually reinforce educational access and success, a supportive community, and leadership roles

The culture of both correctional and educational institutions needs to be transformed to take a “whole person” approach to students with criminal justice involvement. By addressing students’ needs both in and outside of the classroom, we can increase their educational access and success. It is important to create strong and long-lasting social, emotional, and economic supports for formerly incarcerated students.

(4) Reframe success and encourage innovation through the creation of cross-sector partnerships, programming, funding, information-sharing, and measurement systems

Service providers need more freedom to experiment with programming, even as they come together around a set of shared metrics. This can be achieved through transforming the relationships between community-based organizations and funders. Also, creating a less competitive and more flexible funding environment would encourage and facilitate collaboration among community-based organizations and other sectors. Cross-sectoral partnerships, transparency, collaboration, and information sharing should be standard within the criminal justice system.

(5) Expand collaborations and bring more stakeholders to the table, with NYREN acting as a hub of communication and to facilitate collective impact and systems change

The challenges to achieving educational goals for individuals in the criminal justice system are immense and can only be met if people and organizations link their efforts in a sustained and intentional way. These challenges require continuing and strengthening NYREN’s role in building cross-sector relationships, coordinating disparate efforts, aligning services, and facilitating communications between stakeholders, particularly those that historically have had challenging relationships.

(6) Change public discourse on, the public’s understanding of, and education’s role in the criminal justice system

In order to mobilize public and political support for reentry education, a strong public relations and communications strategy is essential. A communications campaign can dispel myths and stereotypes about people with criminal justice experience and highlight their strengths and contributions to society; explain how mass incarceration is the civil rights issue of the current era and is an “epicenter of injustice;” cultivate a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding about the positive impact that education has on public safety and productivity in society; and help alleviate concerns about government spending and budget problems by showing the cost effectiveness of education as compared to incarceration.

I. CONFERENCE INTRODUCTION

Pathways of Possibility: Transforming Education's Role in Reentry was a pathbreaking convening focused on elevating education's pivotal role in reducing recidivism, fostering personal transformation, building leadership, and promoting community revitalization. The conference grew out of an ongoing collaboration among people in community-based organizations, government agencies, and higher education institutions who formed the [New York Reentry Education Network \(NYREN\)](#) as a vehicle for pursuing a shared commitment to making education central for people with criminal justice involvement. With funding and support from the [Mayor's Office of Human Capital Development \(OHCD\)](#) and in collaboration with the [Center for Institutional and Social Change \(CISC\)](#) at Columbia Law School, NYREN organized this conference to share the insights that have emerged from their collective work, and to develop new and deeper partnerships that will link policy makers with service providers, advocates, and community activists, and build the collective capacity to advance their shared educational goals. The conference was meant to be a leverage point: a chance for people with shared passions and commitments to come together, take stock of where we are, and create momentum for working together for the next weeks, months, and hopefully years.¹

The conference was designed collaboratively by members of NYREN in conjunction with allies from organizations focusing on education's role in reentry. The team of conference planners was committed to building strategic relationships and trust across sectors, for example, between government and community organizations, as well as emphasizing the importance of formerly incarcerated individuals' leadership. The content of the plenaries and workshops reflected NYREN's current work and future vision for reentry education. Finally, the conference was designed as an opportunity to build the effectiveness, visibility, and reach of NYREN.



Leaders from the Fortune Society, District 79 of the NYC Dept. of Education, the Osborne Association, the NYC Office of Human Capital Development, and CISC discuss the formation and relevance of NYREN.

The conference brought together a diverse group of community leaders, educators, advocates, policy makers, service providers, and students who seek to elevate education's transformational role in the lives of individuals with current or former criminal justice involvement. Of the more than 175 participants, roughly 90 were from community-based organizations, 45 from government, 35 from academia, and 5 from philanthropy. The more than 45 different community-based organizations

¹ [Glenn E. Martin](#), David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy at the Fortune Society

represented included those focusing on reentry, education, criminal justice, workforce, direct service, advocacy, and policy. Government agencies represented included the US Department of Education, New York State (NYS) Department of Education, NYS Office of the Deputy Secretary for Public Safety, NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, New York City (NYC) Office of the Mayor, NYC Center for Economic Opportunity, NYC Office of Human Capital Development, NYC Department of Education District 79, NYC Department of Correction, NYC Department of Probation, NYC Department of Small Business Services, and the Kings County Office of the District Attorney. At least 25 participants were justice-involved or formerly justice-involved individuals.



Photo By Jeyhoun Allebaugh/The Inspired Storytellers Collective

Participants from different sectors discuss joint responsibilities and possibilities for education pathways in criminal justice.

The planning team intentionally gathered participants from across these sectors so that the conference would serve as a microcosm of the kinds of conversations among the diversity of stakeholders needed to develop and carry out effective and sustainable strategies and solutions. “We have all experienced the siloing of our work, the tendency to do our own work and retreat to the isolated corners of our field. The intent of the conference was to build strong working relationships across institutions and bring differing perspectives to the table towards the same goal.”²

Framed by the principles of collective impact (Kania and Kramer 2011), the conference embraced the collective pursuit of a long-term vision and shared outcomes, building on the New York Reentry Education Network’s mission: (1) to achieve educational access and success—and the associated positive outcomes—for people with criminal justice involvement, and (2) to build the cross-sector collaborations and partnerships necessary to achieve those educational outcomes.

This report presents the key insights and themes that emerged through the conference, as reflected in the plenary and workshop presentations, the deliberative dialogue, and a collaborative brainstorm about the “history of the future”³ of education’s role in reentry, presentations and resources shared by conference speakers, and post conference debriefing. (See the [NYREN website](#) for the [Conference schedule](#), and [speakers and their bios](#)).

The Shared Vision: Education at the Center of Rebuilding Lives and Communities

The conference highlighted a strong consensus about education’s transformational, strengths-based, and community-revitalizing role, both in prison and in reentry. As [Vivian Nixon](#), Executive Director of [College and Community Fellowship](#), stated:

² Glenn E. Martin

³ “The History of the Future” large-scale Pathways of Possibility conference envisioning exercise, facilitated by [Azadeh Khalili](#)

Education—and especially higher education—remain the most under-appreciated, underused, and under-resourced tools to ensure the best chance of long-term stability and security for those who have been marked by criminal punishment.

Education is a “primary source of upward mobility” and “an effective tool of empowerment,”⁴ offering an authentic, strengths-based avenue for efforts to rebuild lives and reinvest in communities. [Brenda Dann-Messier](#), Assistant Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education at the US Department of Education, underscored the importance of recognizing the “hunger for education and self improvement that drives the vast majority of former offenders.”⁵ Expanding upon this idea, Vivian Nixon attested that “education is a powerful path to individual transformation and vastly improves one’s ability to deal with the vicissitudes of life. But it is also the window to self-awareness and awareness of one’s place in society.”⁶ Investment in education reverberates outward by improving educational outcomes for the children of formerly incarcerated people.



Vivian Nixon, Executive Director of College and Community Fellowship, opens the day with a charge to collectively improve reentry education

Quality education paired with support and wraparound services that promote educational success has a track record of reducing recidivism, increasing access to decent-paying career paths, and enabling people with criminal records to become contributors to and leaders of their communities. As such, access to education dramatically increases public safety. Education is also crucial because it enables people with criminal justice involvement to take up crucial leadership roles in enabling others to pursue education as a pathway to rebuilding their lives. [Brenda Dann-Messier](#) explained:

Given the proper support when they resume their studies, these students don’t just excel academically, have low recidivism rates, and post higher graduation rates than their non-adjudicated peers. They also pursue careers in social services, community development, and related fields in far greater numbers than the general student population. They have a lasting desire to give back and a deep sense of mission.⁷

People in the criminal justice system believe that education will help them to rebuild their lives. A recent study found that 94 percent of the respondents, who were soon to be released from prison, indicated that the services they most needed when they returned home was education.⁸ The need for education ranked higher than the need for employment, housing, and medical and mental health treatment.⁹

⁴ [Vivian Nixon](#), College and Community Fellowship

⁵ [Brenda Dann-Messier](#), US Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE)

⁶ Vivian Nixon

⁷ Brenda Dann-Messier

⁸ [Visher and Travis, 2012, The Characteristics of Prisoners Returning Home and Effective Reentry Programs and Policies, in the Oxford Handbook of Sentencing and Corrections](#)

⁹ Vivian Nixon and Brenda Dann-Messier, quoting from Visher & Travis 2012

Education must be defined broadly (e.g., high school equivalency; degree granting-programs; vocational and workforce training; job readiness), as a pathway with many entry points and as an endeavor aimed at more than recidivism reduction.¹⁰ It is critical to build educational support for people at every level of educational achievement, and to craft educational programs that prepare people to move along the educational continuum, culminating in sustainable employment, empowerment, and a personal sense of fulfillment. The multiple pathways and expanded definition of education encompasses academic knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as the full range of capacities necessary to enable educational success, including parenting skills, cognitive skills, vocational training, and substance abuse treatment.



Photo By Jeyhoun Allebaugh/The Inspired Storytellers Collective
Participants from Getting Out and Staying Out (GOSO) and the Prison Education Initiative (PEI) think outside the box.

The Compelling Need to Transform Education for Reentry

Education is an effective antidote to the problems caused by United States' unparalleled incarceration rate (nearly 1 in 100—the highest in the world) and the disproportionate incarceration and criminal justice supervision of people of color. The nation is paying the price for its high incarceration rates and low public investment in education, especially in poor communities of color. As Brenda Dann-Messier noted:



Photo By Jeyhoun Allebaugh/The Inspired Storytellers Collective
Brenda Dann-Messier, US Dept. of Education Assistant Secretary of Vocational and Adult Education, provides national context for the work happening in New York City.

Between 1987 and 2007, the amount states spent on corrections grew by 127 percent. In the same years, higher education spending increased by just 21 percent. In the same years that America was slipping from the world's top ranks in the proportion of college graduates, we were climbing the ranks by a different measure. Today this country has the highest world's rate of incarcerated individuals, at an annual cost of 70 billion dollars a year, while we are 14th in the world in college graduates.¹¹

Underinvestment in education cuts across the educational spectrum. Many people who are in prison or under criminal justice supervision have never had adequate access to education. An estimated 37 percent of State prison inmates, 26 percent of Federal inmates, 44 percent of inmates in local jails and 42 percent of those serving probation sentences have not completed high school or its equivalent, as compared with 19 percent of the general population.¹² As [Linda Gibbs](#), the Deputy Mayor for NYC Health and Human Services, noted,

¹⁰ [Ronald Day](#), the Osborne Association

¹¹ [Brenda Dann-Messier Keynote Address at Pathways of Possibility Conference, February 27 2013, NY NY](#)

¹² Bushman, Stoll and Weiman 2007

“low educational attainment is highly correlated to higher rates of incarceration.” [Brian Fischer](#), former Commissioner of the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, stated:

There are too many undereducated people going to prison. There is a need for basic education as well as for access to postsecondary education. We are blaming people for committing crimes and not getting a job when some of that blame belongs to us. We are learning the hard way, not providing adequate education and services.

Public policies explicitly prevent access to education, notably the elimination of eligibility for need-based Pell Grants at the Federal level and State education grants in most states, including New York.¹³ Since 1994, the elimination of federal and state funding through Pell Grants and the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) has limited access to college education in prisons and jails, with an increasing reliance on public-private partnerships to fund those programs.¹⁴ Beyond traditional educational services provided through the Department of Education for 16-21 year olds and privately funded college programs, Rikers Island has established other educational programs, such as programs with the Horticultural Society of New York and John Jay College of Criminal Justice. However, these programs currently can serve a relatively small number of students; most are unfunded, and do not currently have the capacity to scale up to serve large numbers of students. Forty percent of the incarcerated students at the Department of Education’s East River Academy on Rikers have a learning disability,¹⁵ and most do not have access to adequate programming to meet their educational and related needs.¹⁶ Privatization of the high school equivalency exam (formerly known as the GED) beginning in 2014 will make the test more expensive for correctional institutions and possibly inaccessible for a large portion of the population.



Participants in the morning workshop, “Criminal Justice Agencies as Levers for Education.”

Understanding the Barriers and Challenges

The need for a [collective impact approach](#) to increasing educational access and success for justice-involved people stemmed from an analysis of the barriers that must be overcome to achieve the shared vision of making quality education the centerpiece of reentry. Although there is [a strong commitment to education](#) among the leadership of the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision and the NYC Department of Correction, educational programming is

¹³ Vivian Nixon; [Marsha Weissman](#), Center for Community Alternatives

¹⁴ See [Education from the Inside Out Coalition](#).

¹⁵ [Tim Lisante](#), District 79, NYC Department of Education. This statistic includes individuals ages 16-18, and those individuals 19-21 years old who have opted into educational services at East River Academy.

¹⁶ [Linda Gibbs](#), NYC Health and Human Services

often constrained by security concerns within correctional facilities, which interferes with the capacity to create an environment conducive to education or to carry out educational objectives.¹⁷ Implementation of educational programming is also hindered by a lack of communication between policymakers/administrators and line staff. Particularly in jails, the structure of correctional education is also affected by the size and transient nature of the student population.

After returning home to their communities, students with criminal records must contend with stereotypes and fear of formerly incarcerated people, “check the box” policies requiring people to indicate their criminal histories on admissions applications, and exclusion of people with felony convictions from certain educational programs, which limit access and success in post-incarceration education.¹⁸ In addition to insufficient access to educational programming, currently and formerly incarcerated people lack information about available educational programs or the steps needed to apply to, fund, and enroll in them. Those who do seek education must navigate the requirements of complex educational and criminal justice bureaucracies that operate in silos and impose conflicting



Workshop participants challenge the status quo.

demands. Fragmentation and lack of coordination make it difficult to coordinate the provision of necessary holistic services.¹⁹ Large educational institutions, such as the City University of New York (CUNY) system, may also have “silos within silos” that have varying interests, some of which may not align with increasing access and success for students with criminal justice histories.²⁰ Staff in both educational and corrections institutions often lack knowledge and skills needed to facilitate educational access and success upon reentry. Differing educational assessments and curriculum make it difficult for people to transition into programs effectively.

As education consultant [John Garvey](#) noted, “[W]e can’t afford to underestimate challenges that students face.” Many incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students have suffered past trauma in their communities or while incarcerated, or have other social, emotional, mental health needs that affect their learning capacity, attitudes towards education, and potential educational attainment. In addition, many students reentering the community must support themselves or their families

¹⁷ [MacKenzie, D.L. \(2012\). The Effectiveness of Corrections-Based Work and Academic and Vocational Education Programs. The Oxford Handbook of Sentencing and Corrections. Oxford University Press.](#)

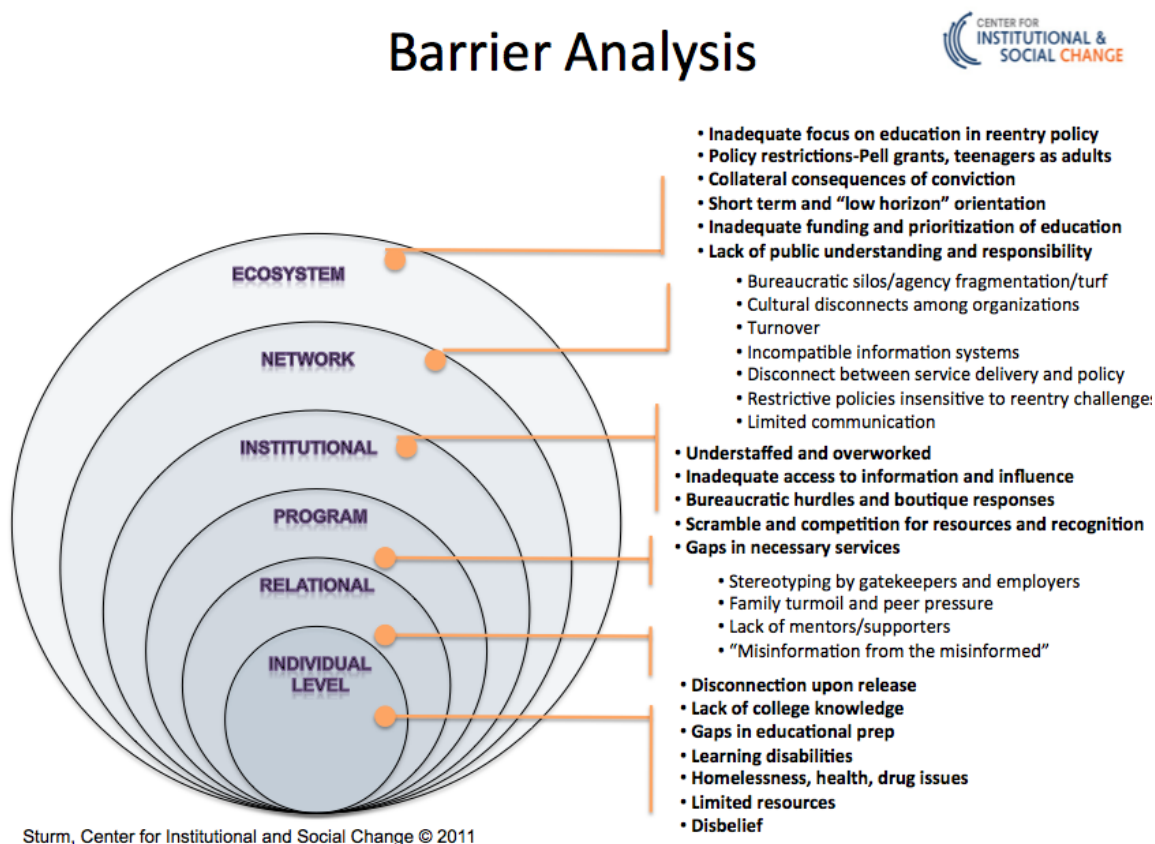
¹⁸ Sturm, Susan, Kate Skolnick and Tina Wu. (2011). [Pathways of Possibility from Criminal Justice to College: College Initiative as a Catalyst Linking Individual and Systemic Change](#). Report. New York: Center for Institutional and Social Change; [“The Use of Criminal History Records in College Admissions, Reconsidered,” Center for Community Alternatives; M. Weissman. \(2013\). Criminal History Records and Higher Education: Leveraging Second Chances \(Powerpoint\)](#)

¹⁹ “A Reentry Education Model,” Office of Adult and Vocational Education, US Department of Education

²⁰ [Felix Matos Rodriguez](#), President of Hostos Community College; Sturm, Susan, Kate Skolnick and Tina Wu. (2011). [Pathways of Possibility from Criminal Justice to College: College Initiative as a Catalyst Linking Individual and Systemic Change](#). Report. New York: Center for Institutional and Social Change

financially, and struggle to continue their education while working.²¹ Unstable housing, disrupted relationships, and an absence of social capital, role models, and support networks also create obstacles to both access to education and success once formerly incarcerated students are in school.²² The majority of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students test significantly below their grade levels. For example, 60 percent of people who come to the Fortune Society's education program are testing at the sixth grade level or lower in reading or math at program entry. Many of these students came from struggling and low performing New York City public schools and had histories of low educational achievement even before their criminal justice involvement.²³ Not only does this create challenges for educators in providing remedial education appropriate to the needs of students, but it also means that students have experiences of educational failure, which may create additional barriers to future achievement.²⁴

[Susan Sturm](#), Director of CISC, who conducts ongoing research and reflection with NYREN, summarized the network's collective insights about the barriers facing people with criminal justice involvement:



²¹ [Garvey, John](#). Towards a New Model of Success for Disconnected Youth: CBO-Community College Partnerships. [Youth Development Institute](#); [Garvey, John. \(2011\)](#). From GED to College Degree: Creating Pathways to Postsecondary Success for High School Dropouts. [Jobs for the Future](#)

²² Sturm, Susan, Kate Skolnick and Tina Wu. (2011). [Pathways of Possibility from Criminal Justice to College: College Initiative as a Catalyst Linking Individual and Systemic Change](#). Report. New York: Center for Institutional and Social Change

²³ [John Gordon](#), the Fortune Society

²⁴ [Basic Education, High School Equivalency, and Beyond Workshop](#)

Seizing the Moment: Education as an Achievable Collective Impact Goal

Despite the barriers that must be overcome to make education a reality for those with criminal justice involvement, a sense of energy and hope reverberated throughout the discussions at the Pathways conference. As [Ann Jacobs](#), the Director of the [Prisoner Reentry Institute at John Jay College of Criminal Justice](#) noted, “there is more attention and energy than I can recall at any time in the 40 years that I have been doing this work.” This tangible sense of possibility stemmed from a shared perception that we are at a turning point in the history of this work. The budget crisis has increased the urgency of reducing expenditures on incarceration. Incarceration rates in New York have begun to drop; juvenile justice detention in NYC has dropped by 30 percent in the last 5 years, while the NYC adult incarceration rates in state prisons dropped 30 percent in the last 10 years.²⁵

At the same time, there is a growing coalition of policy researchers, practitioners and advocates promoting access to and success in education for people in correctional settings and under criminal justice supervision, or with criminal histories. Education is a cost-effective alternative to mass incarceration; there is mounting evidence that reentry education reduces recidivism, thereby increasing public safety. The US Department of Education (USDOE), with the support of President Obama and USDOE Secretary Arne Duncan, has made education for people with criminal histories part of the policy agenda, as part of its goal that “by 2020 the US would again have the world’s highest proportion of college graduates and the most competitive workforce, and every American will complete at least one year of post secondary education or training.”²⁶ In the words of Brenda Dann-Messier, “you are part of a much wider movement in what I believe is a powerful shift toward justice reinvestment all across this country.”



Photo By Jeyhoun Allebaugh/The Inspired Storytellers Collective

Siddiq Najee of the Osborne Association appreciates a fellow participant’s remarks.

In New York City, individuals and organizations struggling for years to get education on the reentry agenda reported experiencing a new openness and interest among policymakers, higher education leaders, and funders. At the national and state level, task forces on reentry are making education a pillar of their work. These policy conversations (e.g., [Correctional Education Summit](#) co-hosted by the USDOE and the Ford Foundation) and education-focused reentry funding opportunities (e.g., USDOE’s grant fund, [“Promoting Reentry Success through Continuity of Educational Opportunities;”](#) NYC Department of Probation’s Young Men’s Initiative [“Justice Scholars” RFP](#), Vera Institute’s [“Pathways from Prison to Post-Secondary Education Project”](#)) are increasingly bringing community-based organizations and people with direct criminal justice experience, involvement, and expertise to the table. Relationships that have been cultivated over the last decade provide a foundation enabling both on-the-ground collaboration and policy integration.

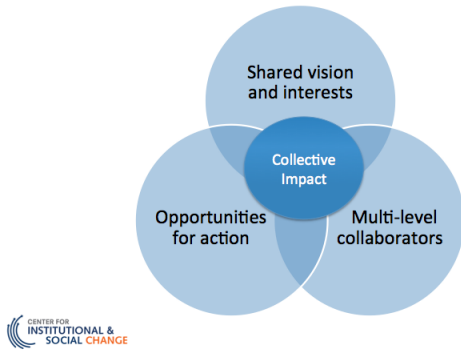
²⁵ Linda Gibbs

²⁶ Brenda Dann-Messier

NYREN's Collective Impact Approach

The challenges to achieving educational goals for individuals in the criminal justice system are immense and can only be met if people and organizations link their efforts in a sustained and intentional way.²⁷ Students with criminal justice backgrounds have to navigate the requirements

Education and reentry: An inflection point



of many different government systems—criminal justice, education, social services, public benefits—and these systems are not currently communicating with each other. There is a need for holistic support to provide the array of services at the time that they are most needed. This wrap-around support requires bringing together expertise and background from many different people operating in different organizational cultures who do not usually work together. Coordination and alignment across systems is required at the state and city level, and must be reflected in the way that people actually receive services and support on the ground. This requires

a change in culture, policy and practice. These shifts do not happen only by mandating it at the top. So often people on the ground know what is working and what is not, but do not have connections to people in policy positions. The people in policy positions can transform policies to embrace and respond to the experiences and recommendations of direct service providers and frontline staff.²⁸

[Katy Taylor](#), former senior policy analyst at NYC Office of Human Capital Development, explained how NYREN grew from a deliberate effort to elevate the importance of and capacity for cross-sector collaboration:

Most of the problems we are grappling with and that are worth solving are incredibly complex. They are systemic problems and there is no way to make progress on them with the effort over here and there. To tackle something as complicated as reentry or education, we need to work together. When we [NYREN] first started and envisioned this, we understood that everyone has their voice and each voice is very important: the community, the government, the access and pressure points that all of those people represent.



Katy Taylor, then at the NYC Office of Human Capital Development, describes city government's role in NYREN's development.

NYREN members have been working in this field for decades, and have formed relationships that cut across position, sector, and status, and are primed for collective efforts to achieve shared goals. [John Gordon](#), Associate Vice President of Programs at [the Fortune Society](#), described the history:

²⁷ [Susan Sturm](#), Center for Institutional and Social Change, Columbia Law School

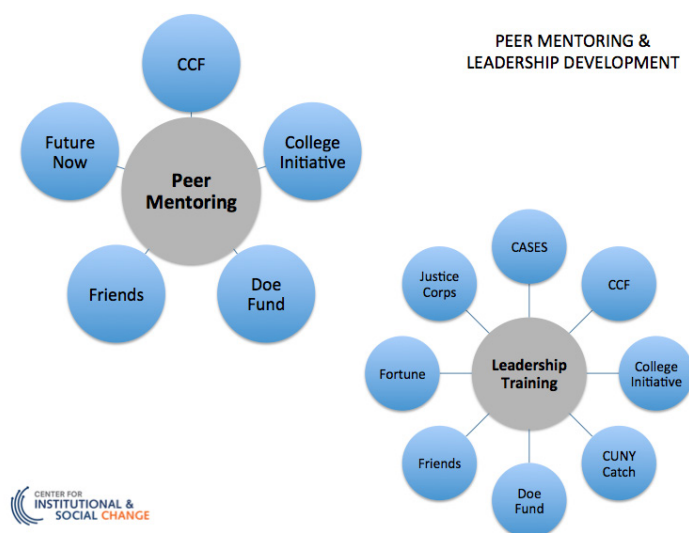
²⁸ Susan Sturm

There was a sense of excitement there. It was time. We had a set of shared issues and goals. We agreed on the importance of education for people coming out and the awareness that we had not come together as a group before. In the same way that reentry was invisible in adult education, education was almost invisible in reentry. We set out to develop an agenda, but found that we had to take time to ground our conversation in the experiences of people coming home.²⁹

More importantly, NYREN links highly dedicated people who are full of passion and care deeply about this issue, building upon “the convergence of commitments” to shared goals and collective action.³⁰

We talked a lot about the work we were doing, the specific activities our organizations were engaged in, about our education programs, the barriers we faced in our work. We met monthly and rotated from site to site so we would get to know each other, and slowly we educated each other about the work of our organizations. I don’t think we realized at the beginning that it would take that long. The important thing is that we got to know each other and to build a community. There was a sense that the title didn’t matter, what mattered was the kind of commitment you had, that you kept coming, what you had to say at meetings. We built a culture that allows us to continue and sustain ourselves.³¹

The network is linked together by many different hubs—organizations that link a wide range of people working on an issue or supporting a particular population.³² NYREN also connects organizations and people that operate on the different levels, making it possible to connect on-the-ground service delivery to high-level policy. For example, service providers, policy makers, researchers, and community advocates have formed working groups to increase access to higher education, improve transitions from criminal justice to education, and forge stronger linkages between education and employment.



NYREN has created communication channels to share knowledge and enable problem solving in multiple directions. These regular interactions among people in many different positions have produced horizontal and vertical linkages, with a high level of interaction among many different organizations spanning the educational continuum. People supporting and providing basic education,

²⁹ John Gordon

³⁰ Susan Sturm

³¹ John Gordon

³² Susan Sturm

GED, vocational and higher education both within corrections institutions and in the community are now working together and building lines of ongoing communication. It can be challenging for government agencies to collaborate with many separate community-based organizations in a systematic way, but a group of community-based organizations that are already working together and have a shared vision and agenda can begin to collaborate on a city-wide level with the NYC Department of Correction, the NYC Department of Probation, the NYC Department of Education, as well as the state through the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision.

The role of the Reentry Education Transition Specialist (held by [Aviva Tevah](#)), created through funding administered by the former Mayor's Office of Adult Education (MOAE) (Adult Education is now housed within OHCD) and initially jointly housed by MOAE and the NYC Department of Correction Educational Services Unit, has been especially important in building partnerships between government and community-based organizations. As Katy Taylor shared:

What [Aviva Tevah, Reentry Education Transition Specialist] has ended up being is the translator between the different systems, the DOE, Corrections, and community-based organizations. One thing that is really striking—the parts of these systems don't understand or talk to each other. To have someone who can run interference has made a big difference.³³



Reentry Education Transition Specialist
Aviva Tevah discusses collaborative solutions.

NYREN provides sustained communication facilitated by monthly meetings, online communication, and targeted working groups and partnerships. This ongoing communication has enabled organizations serving overlapping populations to coordinate and align their services, initiate the matching of clients with the agencies that are most responsive to the services they need, and develop place-based collaborations focused on achieving community-wide educational outcomes. Community-based organizations have joined with government partners to produce training sessions for criminal justice agencies on education and reentry that build capacity to promote education in reentry. Examples of NYREN's work include the development of [referral tools](#) capturing all of the NYREN member programs' services, which has facilitated the ongoing operationalization of collaboration with East River Academy (ERA), the NYC Department of Education high school at Rikers Island. ERA transition staff, including orientation leaders, school counselors and psychologists, referral support staff and coordinators, and data managers, have attended mutual trainings with NYREN program staff, exchanging resources and practices around education transition planning. All ERA students now receive NYREN member information in their student support materials.

Using a listserv, NYREN members routinely share information, such as available GED testing seats, new opportunities for collaboration, and events. NYREN has also signed onto campaign letters such as the [Education from the Inside Out Coalition](#) advocating the reinstatement of Pell Grants and TAP funding in correctional institutions, published a guide called "[Strategies for Engaging](#)

³³ [Katy Taylor](#), NYC Office of Human Capital Development (formerly the Mayor's Office of Adult Education)

[Students Involved with the Criminal Justice System,”](#) and held workshops for the NYC Department of Probation’s professional development series. In short, NYREN has produced a learning community that enables sharing resources, tools and knowledge, advocacy, institutional problem solving, funding, relationships across the transitions, and policy change.



Ronald Day, Director of Workforce Development at the Osborne Association, discusses collective impact.

Over the past two years, CISC has been collaborating with NYREN to develop the capacity to pursue their mission with a collective impact approach. Ronald Day summarized this shift to collective impact orientation:

If you are working for individuals, you are asking the question: How can I tell people what is not working so they can change the system? What if everyone takes a collective impact orientation, whether in individual or systemic work? Then you get the information and collaboration that is needed to shift cultures and systems. We can then do that systematically by sharing knowledge, data and best practices.³⁴

NYREN sits within a critical space between individual interaction and large-scale institutions where groups coalesce and create a local context for action based on enduring relationships and shared understandings. The network is positioned to be a key player in linking policy level interventions to everyday practice, and to practice the five key elements of a collective impact strategy: (1) a common agenda, (2) shared measurement, (3) mutually reinforcing activities, (4) continuous communication, and (5) backbone support.³⁵

NYREN illustrates and can take lessons from other collective impact approaches that are being used to tackle complex public problems, such as the [New York Juvenile Justice System’s Safe Communities Successful Youth Initiative](#) and [The Strive Partnership](#). Funders can play a significant role in enabling collective impact collaborations to develop, flourish and last, by supporting network development, amplifying impact, increasing the efficiency of resources, and driving alignment.³⁶

II. ACTION ARENAS ADVANCING EDUCATION IN REENTRY

To make meaningful progress in making education central in reentry, stakeholders must come together around concrete areas of high need and shared interest that also seem ripe for action. Five areas for focused inquiry and collaboration coalesced from the conference and workshop planning process, plenary and workshop panels, and dialogue and discussions generated before, during and following the conference. The themes provide a focus for collective efforts to realize education’s transformative role in reentry moving forward. They include: (1) Higher Education Access and

³⁴ Ronald Day

³⁵ [Large Scale Social Change: Funding for Collective Impact Workshop Panel](#), quoting Kania and Kramer 2011

³⁶ Large Scale Social Change: Funding for Collective Impact Workshop Panel

Success, (2) the Power of Peer Mentoring, (3) Integrating Employment, Workforce Development, and Reentry Education, (4) Criminal Justice Agencies as Levers for Education, and (5) Creating Educational Pathways for People in the Criminal Justice System. Cutting across each of these arenas is the identification of the particular needs of youth populations and how to develop programming and wraparound services designed to support their social, emotional, economic, and educational well-being.

1. Higher Education Access and Success

Post-secondary education is a crucial component in transforming lives and communities affected by mass incarceration. Achieving post-secondary educational access and success depends upon successfully navigating the pathways from the criminal justice system into the community, providing continuity of support across those transitions, and building institutional cultures that support education as a core goal. Strategic partnerships between community-based organizations, academic institutions, and government agencies are crucial to building this capacity. What follows are strategies to focus and sustain these collaborations to maximize their impact at a community level, overcome the barriers and challenges facing justice-involved students in the community, and cultivate opportunities for collaboration and policy change to enable these programs to have maximum impact.

Pursue place-based initiatives

Place-based strategies link higher education access and success to community renewal. This approach is important to get us past “fixing things one person at a time or one problem at a time”³⁷ or relying solely on the efforts of “dynamic leaders, caring and committed folks at local level.” Susan Sturm summarized this strategy as a way of “building the critical scaffolding to support higher education access and success for students with criminal histories:”

Because the system is not working for anyone, we have to basically rebuild a different system around each person to enable that person to move through a system that is not set up for them. What would it look like if we took a place where there was high need and took a group of anchor institutions and programs that were located and committed to that community and a group of community leaders rooted in that community and brought them all together to say, how do we make progress not only person by person and program by program, but how do we change Hostos, and link Hostos with BCC (Bronx Community College) and link them with probation and Bronx clergy and the local hospital? How would we think about these partnerships



Susan Sturm, Director of the Center for Institutional and Social Change (CISC) at Columbia Law School, offers perspective on NYREN's significance and collective impact possibilities.

³⁷ [Ann Jacobs](#), Prisoner Reentry Institute, John Jay College of Criminal Justice

and CBOs that support these strategies, using this place-based approach?

Community colleges such as Hostos play a critical role because they are not just *in* but *of* the community. A community college's mission is to facilitate community renewal that includes formerly incarcerated individuals; it is crucial to send the message that providing higher education access and success for formerly incarcerated students is "mission-critical."³⁸ A place-based strategy is thus a focused version of collective impact, bringing together major stakeholders in a community to figure out how to connect their efforts and transform their practices so that the community itself encourages a college-going culture for people affected by the criminal justice system.

Reframe reentry to make education central and achievable

For education to become a reality, people must come to see those with criminal justice involvement as current or future students, and education as a pillar of reentry:

At the level of the individual, prospective students coming out of prison must be able to view college as a legitimate goal if they are to take on the challenges of making that aspiration real. Faculty and administrators who are the gatekeepers of educational opportunity have to accept that formerly incarcerated people belong in college, that education is crucial to their re-integration, and that educators have a responsibility to enable these students to succeed. At a more collective and policy level, institutional change requires bringing together groups of people at the intersection of criminal justice and education, and enabling them to see the connections across these issues.³⁹



Leaders from the College Initiative, NYC Dept. of Probation, and Hostos Community College (CUNY) are excited about expanding college access for people with criminal justice system involvement.

This mindset shift means that people with criminal histories come to be regarded as students seeking to realize their potential.⁴⁰

What really powered this project along was the philosophical agreement that education is an effective strategy and the right strategy for [formerly incarcerated students]. When there is that shared vision, lots happens.⁴¹

This approach requires "talking the language of the higher education community" and using

³⁸ Felix Matos Rodriguez

³⁹ Sturm, Susan, Kate Skolnick and Tina Wu. (2011). Pathways of Possibility from Criminal Justice to College: College Initiative as a Catalyst Linking Individual and Systemic Change. Report. New York: Center for Institutional and Social Change, p.14

⁴⁰ Vivian Nixon; Brenda Dann-Messier

⁴¹ [Michael Carey](#), College Initiative

persistence, retention, and completion as measures of success.⁴² Formerly incarcerated students who occupy visible roles as advocates, peer mentors, artists and leaders play a critical role in enabling this reframing to occur, by visibly challenging stereotypes and serving as living proof of higher education's reach.⁴³ Collaborating with networks and programs that are not organized around reentry, such as the [New York Public Library](#) and the [Black Doctoral Network](#) may garner greater support and resources for access and success. College and Community Fellowship's Theater for Social Change ensemble, which performed at the conference, exemplifies how theater can prompt this mindset shift by providing a public platform for formerly incarcerated women who achieved post-secondary educational success to enact transformation and hope in many venues, from Rikers Island to the state legislature.

Members of the Theater for Social Change perform during the conference's evening event open to the public.



Increase collaboration between higher education institutions and community-based organizations

Higher education institutions tend to be fragmented and bureaucratic, posing barriers and requirements that newcomers have difficulty meeting without support. Criminal justice and education institutions often operate in different worlds that require greater coordination and ability to communicate across systems and cultures (we need many allies and supporters to “act as translators and bridge builders.”) Many of the challenges facing formerly incarcerated students also affect other students transitioning into higher education, and can be most effectively addressed at a systems level. Sustainable strategies will depend on collaborations enabling institutional adaptation and culture change.

Intermediaries such as [College Initiative](#), [College and Community Fellowship](#), [Future Now](#), and [COPE](#) are crucial bridge builders and drivers of collaborative problem solving connecting the criminal justice and higher education systems. They facilitate students' access, provide holistic services, and connect students with different kinds of support. As one student explained:

I was released from prison in 2000 to a community organization. A counselor at the organization said, have you ever thought of college? And I did. But somewhere along the way I lost my hopes and dreams and it was the counselor who reignited that; I went to CUNY, took the entry exam, remedial courses. Then life happened, I got custody back of my daughter, I felt like at that point maybe I'm doing too much, I wanted to quit school. But my co-worker told me about CCF (College and Community Fellowship), I saw the examples of people who were going to school and getting an education and they

⁴² [Fred Patrick](#), Vera Institute of Justice

⁴³ Ronald Day; Cheryl Wilkins, Center for Institutional and Social Change, Columbia Law School Sturm, Susan, Kate Skolnick and Tina Wu. (2011). *Pathways of Possibility from Criminal Justice to College: College Initiative as a Catalyst Linking Individual and Systemic Change*. Report. New York: Center for Institutional and Social Change

mentored me and supported me. I obtained my B.A. at John Jay in criminal justice even though some counselors said not to apply because of my criminal background; now I am getting my M.A. in mental health counseling. It wasn't easy but the support that I got was important. I hope that who is coming behind me their experience can be a little easier; that organizations have more knowledge about how to help those who have been in criminal justice system.⁴⁴

Sean Pica, Executive Director of [Hudson Link](#), described the effectiveness of community-based organizations in connecting returning students to other organizations; finding laptops for those coming home, making sure that someone has business attire; and providing alumni networking events that enable people to “bring a resume, get advice, vent; and learn that the thing about parole is you're not the only one; we've all struggled with it.”

New partnerships are also critical to changing higher education policy and practice to be welcoming to students with criminal justice histories. Frederick P. Schaffer, the General Counsel and Senior Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs of The City University of New York, noted that, “without it ever having been thought through, the practice at CUNY was not to ask about criminal record on admission form.” He suggested creating partnerships such as between college admissions officers and educators in correctional institutions or community-based programs:

We made clear to [admissions] staff that they should reach out to the people that are doing re-entry programs and at least to talk to you and find out a little more; in some cases I think that some of the staff might not have been aware that there were these programs. Ideally we will establish those types of connections; it doesn't mean that the answer will always be yes, but it will make the decision making process more of a partnership.



Representatives from a community-based youth reentry organization, Bronx Community College, and the NYC Dept. of Education think about their roles as intermediaries.

These organizations face challenges in getting education to become a priority for policy makers and institutional leaders, as well as for line staff. By sharing information both between programs and across systems, successes can be used to gain support of reluctant leaders and to build more effective partnerships and programs.

Adopt a holistic approach supporting movement from criminal justice involvement through post-secondary education

Educational success requires a holistic strategy that enables individuals to enter, persist, and succeed in education, and to realize their educational and employment aspirations. This strategy must span from entry to completion, with the aim of producing quality employment. It includes a focus on connection, entry, progress, completion, and placement into employment.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ [Leslie Campbell](#), College and Community Fellowship

⁴⁵ Fred Patrick

- **Connection:** From initial engagement to application: the strategy is to engage individuals around the importance of education; they may have had a family member that has thought about education, but how do you develop a strategy to inspire individuals to personally commit to formal education?
- **Entry:** From the application process to enrollment: we find that there is engagement in prison, but there is no follow up during reentry; what can we do systemically to further that engagement post-release so that individuals enroll in college programs?
- **Progress:** From college entry onto a career path: enroll and complete a course of study that gives you credentials for a job; education in and of itself should still be transformative, but at a systems level, how do we make sure that education is linked to economic sustainability?
- **Completion:** Graduation: the ultimate goal is obtaining the credential that enables people to build a productive and meaningful life and in the process, avoid recidivism; how do we promote retention that leads to completing education programs?



Photo By Jeyhoun Allebaugh/The Inspired Storytellers Collective

Participants share their perspectives in response to keynote speeches.

2. The Power of Peer Mentoring

Peer mentoring has taken hold in New York as a powerful, strengths-based strategy that works to connect people with effective support and to build communities of leaders committed to expanding educational access and success for formerly incarcerated students. It thus has great promise as a broader education and empowerment strategy both for formerly incarcerated students and for others transitioning into higher education. Reentry-focused programs have led the way in engaging successful individuals with former criminal justice involvement as peer mentors, role models, and credible messengers. As Deputy Commissioner of the NYC Department of Probation [Clinton Lacey](#) put it, “peer mentors have proven themselves to be the most effective/powerful messengers, partners, coaches and mentors.”

People transitioning to education from criminal justice involvement need holistic support at the time and place when they must overcome inevitable challenges and barriers.⁴⁶ As Associate Professor of Social Work at Lehmann College [Carl Mazza](#) noted, the harshness and isolation of prison strongly affects individuals’ feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. Peer mentors provide relationships of trust to connect students with information, resources, and support at key points along the pathway to graduation. “Peer mentoring integrates all aspects of programming so that participants complete the 12 steps.”⁴⁷ In essence, peer mentoring supplies the two components that are necessary for a successful reenter: there is a shift in identity and students become self-motivated to succeed. They

⁴⁶ [Hipolito Rosario](#), Future Now; Fred Patrick; John Garvey

⁴⁷ [Future Now. Resilience and the Community Mentoring Approach to GED and College Completion \(Powerpoint\)](#)

take ownership for the program and they take responsibility for their own success.⁴⁸

Peer mentoring allows potential mentees to envision themselves as the person who has already gone through the process. Many people assume that education, particularly college education, is not a realistic possibility. People think they are ineligible, not smart enough, parole won't allow them to go at night, or that it is just too hard to make it work. As Sean Pica put it:



Photo By Jeyhoun Allebaugh/The Inspired Storytellers Collective

Peer Mentors from Future Now are at the table with Executive Directors and Assistant Commissioners.

When I walked out of prison after 16 years, all I knew was that I had watched talented men come back and after 6 months . . . Getting out of bed in the morning knowing that 50 percent of people you are surrounded by doesn't make it, how am I going to be the one that succeeds? Being able to be connected to CI (College Initiative) and others that were there to lend a hand as I decided to go to school [made all the difference].

Peer mentors are the living proof of possibility and success.

Hipolito Rosario's story, powerfully told by him at the conference, exemplifies the power of peer mentoring. He met Mark Bodrick from Future Now during an outreach event on Rikers Island. Although Hipolito did not think that he spoke English well enough to go to school, Mark spoke to him about the possibility of getting his GED at Bronx Community College (BCC). Mark's belief in Hipolito inspired him to show up at Future Now and he mentored him throughout the GED process. Hipolito went on to complete his Associates degree at BCC and a Bachelor's degree from Lehman College. He also became a mentor at Future Now to those who followed him (also working for the Mayor's Office through the Young Men's Initiative). He believes that mentoring has been widely used as an effective tool and it is only now that the powers that be are recognizing mentoring as a strategy to improve the outcomes for reentry education.⁴⁹

These narratives of success are backed up by the numbers. [Charlene Griffin](#) of [College Initiative](#) described a shift from 33 percent retention prior to peer mentoring, which "then shot up to 80 percent with peer mentoring." Hipolito Rosario reported that for 260 people in the program, Future Now reports 85 percent GED pass rates for all students enrolled, a 95 percent college transition rate, and a three-semester college retention rate of 67 percent, which is substantially above the rate for the general community college population. Future Now's Director [Elizabeth Payamps](#) explained:

In addition to building individual educational success, peer mentoring programs build a larger community of leaders who are deeply committed to advancing educational success

⁴⁸ Hipolito Rosario

⁴⁹ We are indebted to John Molina for his text on this section of the report.

for students with criminal backgrounds, their families, and communities. Many of the mentoring programs have powerful graduation ceremonies, strong alumni involvement, and an emphasis on community building. The resulting community provides a many-sided support system for students.

Given the success of peer mentoring as a strategy, the issue becomes how to increase effective use of peer mentoring, support the individuals, programs, and communities that provide it, and build it more squarely into an institutional and public policy agenda.

Several key strategies emerged for increasing the availability and impact of peer mentoring:

Expand support for peer mentoring as a core strategy for successful transitions, educational success, and leadership development

Building social capital and supports through mentorship and leadership development programs are critical to ensuring access to higher education and academic success for disconnected students. Panel speaker and Associate Professor Social Work at Lehman College, Carl Mazza, explained that although mentors can be invaluable resources, mentoring is an enormous responsibility and can be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Mentors must receive appropriate training and support to ensure continued success in their own lives and in their leadership positions. To achieve this goal, peer mentoring has to be built into the fabric of reentry education policy.



Peer Mentors from the Improving My Progress at College Today (I.M.P.A.C.T.) program, which Future Now is helping replicate at Medgar Evers Community College and Hostos Community College.

For younger students, peer mentors become particularly significant, and the challenges in developing successful peer relationships increase:

Kids are younger; haven't done prison time; intervention isn't there like the older guys. All in all, less committed, our model has to be even more engaged, we have to seek them out and have more initiative. They'll give a cell phone number and it's not operational after a week. Younger folks are a moving target and a lot less committed to going to college.⁵⁰

Formerly incarcerated people often didn't have experience trusting other people and being trusted themselves, as [Leon Digard](#), a Research Associate from the [Vera Institute of Justice](#), learned in a study of the peer mentoring program at College Initiative. Digard concluded that, "no matter what's

⁵⁰ [Charlene Griffin](#), College Initiative

happening in the program, the working relationship between mentor/mentee is crucial; everything falls apart if you don't have that. What is needed is a strong connection of trust."

Successful mentoring programs put a premium on personalized and accurate matching of mentors and mentees, considering factors such as personality, location, and shared background or experiences. In addition, involving mentors from the beginning of the program enrollment process, and pre-release, where possible, helps to foster long-lasting, trusting relationships between mentors and mentees.

The relationship between the mentor and mentee, and the mentee's perception about the level of investment of the mentor in the program were key factors related to the success of College Initiative's peer mentoring program. Because formerly incarcerated students play such a critical role as peer mentors for people transitioning to the community, many spoke of the need for policies enabling outreach in correctional facilities by people with criminal justice involvement who have been properly vetted.

Effective peer mentoring programs must, then, provide support for mentors and mentees alike:

Mentors need some guidance—you never stop learning; it's not just about getting your GED, technical training and getting job; it's a lifetime learning, once you decide you want to learn, you open and make that a part of your life; you have the responsibility to mentor the people behind you.⁵¹

Additionally, workshop participants stressed the importance of including students in the program development process. They have unique knowledge about the criminal justice experience, communities to which people are returning, and needs of students. Their involvement also fosters feelings of ownership and buy-in in the process and resulting program.

Build a peer mentoring learning community

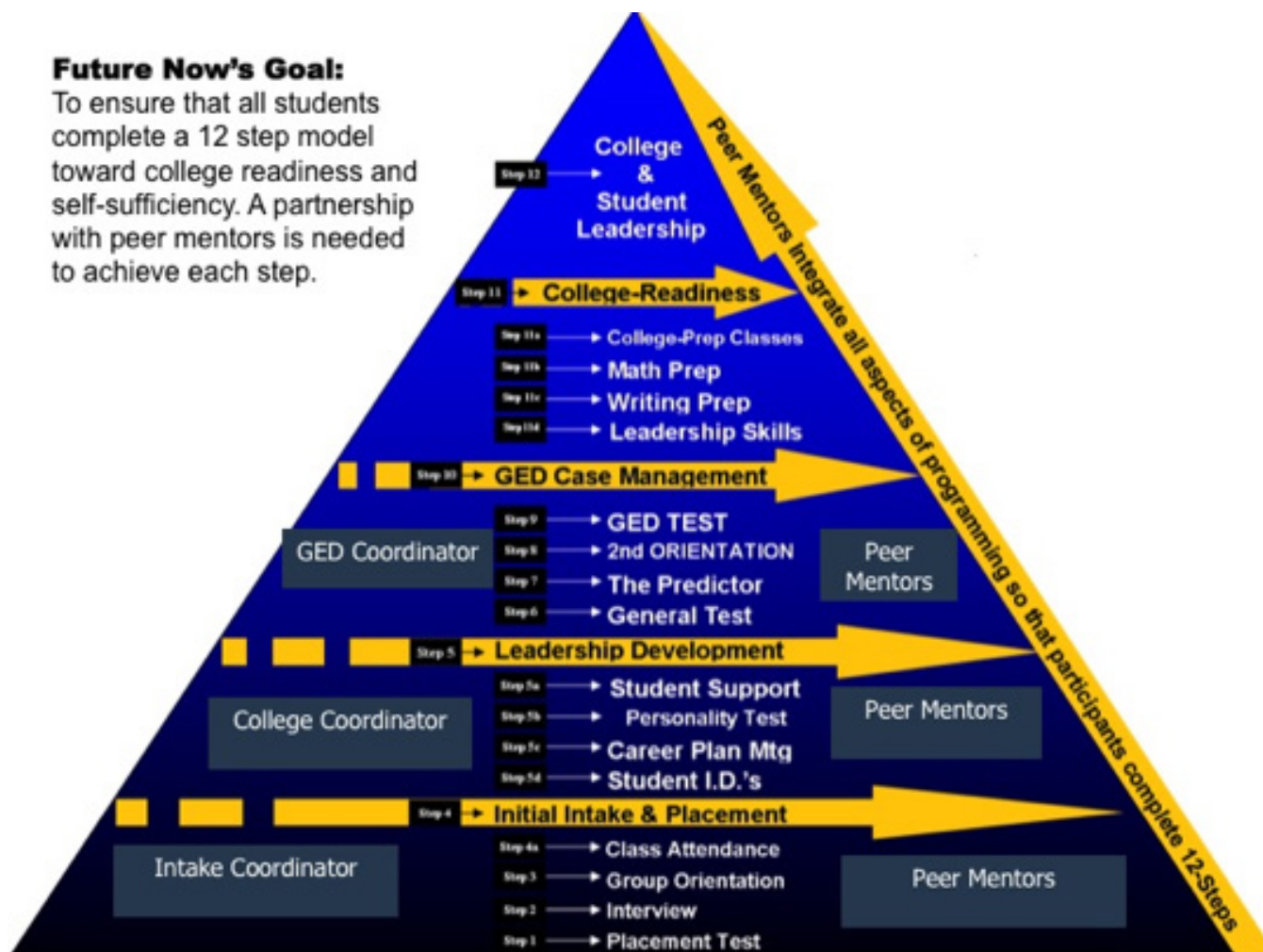
A number of reentry programs in New York have expressed a desire for increased collaboration to identify and share best practices with other programs, and to build on proven, developed, and tested strategies that work. Programs currently use different strategies and have different strengths. Future Now does not employ one-on-one, one-on-two, or group mentoring. Instead, they use a "community mentoring" model, which means each mentor could potentially mentor any of the students. If a student has any issue, the community mentors that student. Future Now has identified "competence, confidence, and connection" as the essential building blocks of resilience, which are the focus of its IMPACT mentoring model.⁵² [The ARCHES model used by the NYC Department of Probation](#) focuses on questions such as "How are we going to get off probation?" and "What pathway will be most successful for you and how do you walk down that pathway?" Workshop panelist [Andre Ward](#), a Program Coordinator at the [Osborne Association](#), suggested a blending of one-on-one and cohort-based mentoring models to obtain the benefits of individualized support, while also building larger networks with peers who have had similar experiences. Some are trying to figure out how to adapt programs designed for older returning students to the needs of younger mentees.

⁵¹ [Leon Digard](#), Center on Sentencing and Corrections, Vera Institute of Justice

⁵² [Future Now. Resilience and the Community Mentoring Approach to GED and College Completion \(Powerpoint\)](#)

Future Now's Goal:

To ensure that all students complete a 12 step model toward college readiness and self-sufficiency. A partnership with peer mentors is needed to achieve each step.



Workshop participants also recommended different approaches to therapy, including positive youth development, appreciative interviewing, and [Moral Reconation Therapy](#), which has been employed at the Osborne Association.

Creating a community of learning among allies and colleagues is a key ingredient in bolstering the success of justice-involved students and augmenting the impact of peer mentoring programs. As one workshop participant put it, "We don't have model-sharing (that's a challenge) among service providers. When we develop more collaborations and model-sharing it will make all of our jobs a lot easier." Such engagement has the potential to strengthen program outcomes and dramatically improve academic success, build a college-going culture, reduce recidivism, support crucial life transitions, and develop the leadership skills of justice-involved students both inside corrections settings and outside in reentry education programs.

Change how success is measured, documented, and rewarded

One of the themes repeated by every professional in the room was that programs should start using qualitative measures to represent peer mentoring program outcomes better. Participants argued that foundations need pushback from programs about what constitutes evidence of program

success. The stories of the students whose lives have been positively impacted by education and how that impact changes the attitudes of their family, friends and in the community should be used to augment and flesh out the traditionally prioritized quantitative measures that are only able to provide a partial picture of the impact of mentoring programs. It is also crucial that community-based organizations be at the table with funders to help redefine the meaning and measures of success in reentry programs.

Clinton Lacey used the ARCHES Transformative Mentoring Program to illustrate how funders could more effectively engage community-based organizations in the process of grant selection and assessment. The NYC Department of Probation issued a concept paper on their website. Community-based organizations and those interested in this issue were invited to comment on this paper and an RFP followed. Unlike other RFP's, the awardees for the ARCHES grant were chosen not just on the score for the written proposal but they were interviewed at their respective sites. Probation wanted to make sure that the grass-roots organizations that were doing the work "on the ground" were given a chance for some funding so that this did not become a "proposal writing contest," and they wanted to ensure that these organizations could mobilize credible messengers in the communities where the young people they are serving live.



Photo By Jeyhoun Allebaugh/The Inspired Storytellers Collective

Conference participants enjoy the chance to learn from one another.

3. Integrating Employment, Workforce Development, and Reentry Education

Life and family-sustaining steady employment is key in transforming lives and breaking cycles of incarceration. In criminal justice and reentry contexts, the logic and necessity of aligning job readiness, including both education and training, with job placement is inescapable: on average, individuals with higher educational attainment receive higher wages, and a higher income reduces the likelihood of recidivism.

A number of barriers exist that make it more difficult for formerly incarcerated people to enter and remain in the workforce successfully. First, employment discrimination is rampant, which is facilitated by practices such as requiring job applicants to answer questions about their criminal histories (including arrests that did not lead to prosecution or conviction) on applications and limitations on the hiring of multiple former offenders in one work environment (known as "associational conditions").⁵³ Second, people leaving prison are often released without the documentation they need (e.g., birth certificates) to transition back to their lives and secure employment. Third, job preparation and training programs inside of prisons may not be relevant to urban environments to which people are returning. Work within prisons may be focused more on alleviating costs of incarceration, reducing management problems, or retribution, rather than rehabilitation and learning.⁵⁴ Lastly, institutional barriers to education, including changes to the GED test in 2014,

⁵³ [Pager, Western, and Bonakowski 2009, Discrimination in a Low Wage Labor Market: A Field Experiment](#)

⁵⁴ [MacKenzie, D.L. \(2012\)](#)

such as limits on test-taking multiple times, and lack of access to Pell Grants to fund college courses in prison, negatively impact post-incarceration employment opportunities.

Beyond institutional barriers to employment, other challenges such as substance use, mental health issues, and difficulties with reintegration with family and other social networks may make the transition from prison to work more difficult. Low educational achievement also creates challenges to employment: before going to prison, 48 percent of incarcerated people did not have a GED or high school diploma.⁵⁵ Additionally, a disproportionate number of incarcerated people have learning disabilities, and correctional facilities do not have the capacity to assess and address those challenges adequately. Workshop participants also noted that incarceration can suppress the development of social skills, such as good communication, politeness, and punctuality that are critical to job success, yet many programs helping formerly incarcerated people to locate and connect to employment opportunities are not adequately addressing the need for “soft skills” training. Finally, women in prison need special programming to foster community and support around their needs, including needs related to higher rates of trauma and role responsibilities (e.g., mother, caretaker, head of household) upon release.



Brian Fischer, former Commissioner of the NYS Dept. of Corrections and Community Supervision, listens to other keynote addresses.

[Marta Nelson](#), Executive Director of [Center for Employment Opportunities NYC](#), explained that there are also challenges for people trying to balance full-time employment, which they must do to support themselves and their families, with education programs. “We found that we lost most people during the moment when they feel the need to balance student and work identities, which is typically at the beginning of the program. We are really focused on combining work skills with educating people. It is challenging to educate and prepare for the workforce, but it is possible.”

Funding is generally siloed and inflexible, which creates an additional challenge for providers seeking to create holistic, flexible programs to meet the diverse needs of formerly incarcerated people entering the job force.

What follows are strategies for meeting these challenges, and linking education to high quality jobs that can transform lives and communities:

Develop integrative, holistic, transparent, and accessible programs

The [Workforce Funders Group](#) has identified several key principles for workforce development programs. First, reentry education should integrate both educational and job readiness components, which requires collaboration across the education and workforce development silos. For example, [YouthBuild USA](#) uses a 50/50 model, in which participants alternate between having a week of

⁵⁵ Visser and Travis (2012)

academics and a week at job skills training. At the end of the program, successful participants have obtained both a GED and a certified skill, such as construction or retail. Second, programs should be transparent, with concrete, long-term goals and outcomes that go beyond job placement to include other indicators of success. Third, they must be accessible with a “no wrong door” policy such that a person can enter either through the education or workforce development path. Fourth, programs must have competent staff, for example, trained in interpersonal and cognitive behavioral skills training, to support participants.⁵⁶

Beyond these principles, workshop participants agreed that programs must address the range of social, emotional, mental health, and other needs experienced by formerly incarcerated people returning home and entering the workforce. For example, YouthBuild USA helps to build social skills by offering programs with blended populations (including those with and without criminal justice histories) to help people understand themselves as members of general public and practice social skills in that environment.

Finally, [Justice Corps](#) exemplifies a number of these principles, with an intense intake period to assess educational and emotional needs, a community benefit project to contribute and build ties to the community, an internship to provide on-the-job training in an area of interest, and a comprehensive wraparound service model with peer support through cohorts. (For more information on the impact of corrections-based vocational education programs across the country, see [MacKenzie, “Effectiveness of Corrections-Based Work and Academic and Vocational Education Programs”](#).)

Educate, engage, and create incentives for employers to hire formerly incarcerated people and support their educational advancement

Education and training programs should develop connections with private sector employers, labor unions, and industries for which people are being trained. With more information regarding available jobs and the skills and certifications necessary for those jobs, programs will better prepare their participants for the job market. For example, [Angela B. Jimenez](#), NYS Deputy Commissioner of Community Supervision, explained that in an effort to expand their culinary arts program, she consulted with representatives from culinary schools regarding the specific skills and certifications that students would need in the field. In addition, educating employers about the strengths and capacity of formerly incarcerated people, how to evaluate applicants with criminal justice histories, and the anti-discrimination laws already in effect may reduce employment discrimination and increase job opportunities.⁵⁷



Workshop participants are not afraid to engage difficult ideas.

⁵⁶ [“Re-Envisioning the New York City Workforce System,” New York City Workforce Strategy Group](#)

⁵⁷ [“A Guide for New York State Employers: Understanding Article 23-A: How to evaluate qualified job seekers with conviction histories,” the Doe Fund](#); [“Report and Recommendations to New York State on Enhancing Employment Opportunities for Formerly Incarcerated People,” the Doe Fund](#); [Independent Committee on Reentry Employment](#)



Experts from the Fortune Society, East River Academy, Future Now, and Friends of Island Academy discuss quality high school equivalency education on a panel.

[Enhancing Employment Opportunities for Formerly Incarcerated People](#)) that prevent incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people from access to gainful employment. In particular, the initiative includes a campaign to reverse negative employer stereotypes and discriminatory hiring practices by messaging that formerly incarcerated individuals are hard workers, dedicated, and dependable (see [Success Stories](#)). Work for Success also publicizes the Federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit designed to give employers an incentive to hire formerly incarcerated people and other disadvantaged individuals, as well as employer awareness tools (e.g., a video and written guidelines) on fair hiring practices and the rights of applicants. Work for Success integrates and elevates the importance of jobs training and certification for formerly incarcerated applicants, encouraging employers to recognize the benefit that trainings and certification programs undertaken by applicants have for businesses to succeed. Additionally, the initiative links employers to community-based organizations that provide training programs for formerly incarcerated people, which provides a direct link from education to employment.

Develop innovative funding streams

In light of limited funding, workshop participants brainstormed strategies for increasing funding for reentry programs. Michelle Light, Executive Director of the NYC Office of Human Capital Development suggested combining funding streams to help produce better outcomes, and then leveraging program success to obtain additional funding. Participants also discussed the potential of new funding models known as social impact bonds (i.e., harnessing private investment to encourage the expansion of social programs that yield results) and other pioneering ways to facilitate partnerships and smaller projects funding. Finally, policies providing wage subsidies (e.g., the Federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit mentioned above) or other financial incentives for employers or creating internship programs may encourage employers to hire formerly incarcerated people.

Workshop planners identified the recently launched government/community-based organization “[Work for Success](#)” partnership as a cross-sector model for tackling systemic reintegration barriers facing former and current justice-involved people. In February 2012, Governor Cuomo announced this statewide employment initiative (housed within the Department of Labor), a coordinated employer outreach effort to overcome the barriers identified by organizations and experts (e.g., [Independent Committee on Reentry and Employment, Report and Recommendations to New York State on](#)



Maurice Green, PhD student at CUNY and Executive Director of the International Black Doctoral Network Association, shares his perspective.



Photo By Jeyhoun Allebaugh/The Inspired Storytellers Collective

Tim Lisante, Superintendent of District 79, NYC Dept. of Education, talks to leaders from CUNY Community Colleges.

Encourage collaboration between actors inside and outside correctional facilities

Workshop participants suggested bridging education and job readiness programs in the community with programs inside prisons. For example, City University of New York (CUNY) and State University of New York (SUNY) schools could permit pre-release applications to facilitate college access and, ultimately, improve employment outcomes. [Abrigal Forrester](#) of YouthBuild USA also indicated their interest in bringing their program inside prisons to help people get jobs from the inside. Workshop participants also suggested that information-sharing between corrections, parole/probation, and providers regarding the types of services and training provided to a particular person could assist programs on the outside to assess individual skills and capabilities more quickly.

4. Criminal Justice Agencies as Levers for Education

Criminal justice agencies have undertaken to provide the full spectrum of high-quality education opportunities and

integrate educational opportunities, pathways, and programs that have historically been isolated from one another. As [Christine Pahigian](#) of [Friends of Island Academy](#) demonstrated, these agencies are crucial educational access points both during incarceration and while under criminal justice supervision. These access points for connecting services include:

- » Custody: Post arrest/in a pre-arraignment holding cell
- » Custody: Post-arraignment pre-trial detention
- » Community: ROR/out on bail, with a pending criminal case
- » Community OR Custody: Convicted, awaiting sentence
- » Community: Serving Probation sentence
- » Custody: Serving Jail or Prison sentence
- » Community: Parole⁵⁸

Yet lack of communication, bureaucratic silos, limited funds, and enduring stereotypes lead to a disconnect between planned educational services and those actually provided. The critical challenge is to figure out how these actors can harness their strengths and collaborate to provide effective educational programming within correctional facilities and in the community, what types of partnerships are needed to improve these services, and the limitations of such collaborations.

The NYC Department of Probation has placed education at the center of its justice reinvestment strategy.⁵⁹ The NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision has a long history of providing educational access for people in prison, and now mandates that people participate in

⁵⁸ [Christine Pahigian](#), Friends of Island Academy

⁵⁹ [Clinton Lacey](#), NYC Department of Probation

education.⁶⁰ Educational programs in New York City correctional facilities serve a transient and diverse population, particularly in jails or youth facilities where lengths of stay are shorter. For example, [East River Academy](#) at Rikers Island serves 4,000 students throughout year, with 800-1000 students enrolled each day. Educators face the difficult task of teaching a constantly changing student body, with drastically different needs and levels of prior education. In addition, correctional education programs struggle with how to engage both youth and adult students effectively.

Although the NYC Department of Correction faces serious challenges in part because of the quick turnover of people in jails, progress is underway to build strong partnerships and educational programming to enable people at Rikers to transition successfully into educational programs in the community. For example, Rikers now has credit-bearing college courses at Manhattan College for students while incarcerated, with the opportunity to enroll once people are back in the community, as well as partnerships with community-based organizations that support students along the pathway into post-secondary education.⁶¹

Strategies were identified to build the capacity of criminal justice agencies to increase educational access and success:

Foster collaboration between actors inside and outside correctional facilities

Improving service navigation within correctional facilities and communication and information sharing between correctional facilities and receiving organizations, such as parole and probation, community-based organizations, and educational institutions is critical to continuity of education during reentry. This collaboration should be systematized so that it is not dependent on a few dedicated employees and leaders. In addition, criminal justice agencies should engage educational institutions to increase access for people leaving prison, such as by advocating for “ban the box” initiatives, creating best practices for screening applicants with criminal justice histories, and conducting research regarding public safety on college campuses to demonstrate whether students with criminal histories are threats to campus safety.



Elliott Dawes of CUNY’s Black Male Initiative, Fred Patrick of Vera’s Pathways project, and Leslie Campbell of College and Community Fellowship on a panel about higher education.

Foster collaboration between prosecutors, defenders, criminal justice agencies, and law enforcement

The NYC Department of Probation already works with prosecutors to expand the array of options available to offenders. Increased collaboration between prosecutors, defense attorneys, criminal justice agencies, and law enforcement will allow for more individualized treatment of offenders throughout the criminal justice process and help to reframe public opinion about the role of

⁶⁰ [Linda Hollmen](#), NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

⁶¹ [Angela Tolosa](#), NYC Department of Correction

education in ensuring public safety. Additionally, defense attorneys representing students in criminal proceedings should be trained to advocate for students' access to education.⁶²



Cheryl Wilkins, Associate Director of the Criminal Justice Initiative at the School of Social Work at Columbia University, shared her extensive experience with challenging and rewarding collaborations.

Develop a communications strategy to mobilize institutional and policy change

Mobilization of community members in support of correctional and reentry education is critical, both because community members have the capacity to exert strong influence over policymakers, and because communities must be willing and able to support people coming home. Community mobilization efforts should include informing community members about available programs and their community-wide benefits. These efforts must build on the most effective messages to reach the public, including the collective benefit of education for those in transition, the cost savings of providing education that lowers rates of costly reincarceration, and the benefits to public safety.⁶³

Provide professional development for line staff

Line staff must be better trained and be given the time and resources to help inmates navigate the correctional education system and connect to community-based organizations prior to their transition home. Given the dominance of security concerns in correctional institutions, NYREN can play a role in framing education as a means of promoting safety because a better educated and engaged population will be more secure.

Reinvest in communities affected by mass incarceration

Prison closures must be accompanied by innovative job creation and economic development strategies in upstate communities where correctional institutions have been a primary source of local employment. Savings from prison closures should also be reinvested in education programs within the communities to which formerly incarcerated people are returning home and in correctional educational programs that are no longer supported by Pell Grants and TAP financial assistance.

5. Creating Educational Pathways for People in the Criminal Justice System

Individuals with criminal justice involvement are much more likely than the general population to be without a high school diploma. Without a high school degree or credential, these individuals are far more likely to experience persistent unemployment or underemployment and much higher rates of re-incarceration. Moreover, many high school equivalency programs do not adequately prepare students for post-secondary education and high quality employment. Recognizing the importance of basic education and attaining high school equivalency, the workshop participants identified a number of specific challenges to meeting the basic educational needs of people involved in the criminal justice system.

⁶² ["Criminal History Screenings in College Admissions: A Guide for Attorneys Representing College Applicants and Students During and After Criminal Proceedings," Center for Community Alternatives](#)

⁶³ John Molina; Glenn E. Martin

Basic education and high school equivalency often does not prepare students to transition into college or the workforce.⁶⁴ A 2010 study found that 77 percent of GED graduates who started college dropped out after one semester, and only 6 percent had earned a post-secondary credential. Workshop participants agreed that high school equivalency programming is overly focused on test preparation, and does not provide students with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to excel in college. Elizabeth Payamps identified the lack of familial and other social supports, insufficient remediation classes, and financial issues as the main challenges to successful transitions into post-secondary education.



Photo By Jeyhoun Allebaugh/The Inspired Storytellers Collective



Photo By Jeyhoun Allebaugh/The Inspired Storytellers Collective

Glenn E. Martin, Vice President of the Fortune Society, offers insight as emcee of the day's events.

Reentry organizations, government agencies, and service providers are seeing an increase in the number of youth entering their doors and recognize they cannot address young people's needs using program models designed for adult learners. Due to their particular stage of development, youth populations have specific educational, social, and emotional needs that must be taken into account when creating and implementing youth education and wraparound services programs.

Several key strategies for building educational pathways for people in the criminal justice system emerged during the conference:

Provide holistic and strengths-based programming

Elizabeth Payamps, from Future Now, identified key strategies of successful strengths-based programming: Build confidence, competence, and connectivity among students through holistic programming that addresses the range of student social, emotional, mental health, and other needs.⁶⁵ John Garvey emphasized several elements of high quality programming:

- Strong program orientations that enable both program staff to learn about students and students to learn about programs so that students are able to learn “the rules of the game” (i.e.; how to navigate, operate within, and succeed in these programs and within the larger education system) and why those rules exist
- Assessments of students' technical abilities in reading and writing levels and how students utilize these skills in context
- Curricula that are well-developed and implemented consistently by teachers
- Evidence-based practices drawing from national data and research about how people learn⁶⁶

⁶⁴ [From College GED to College Degree](#)

⁶⁵ [Elizabeth Payamps](#), Future Now

⁶⁶ John Garvey

Raise expectations and focus on quality

Panelists and workshop participants agreed on the importance of quality curriculum and instruction focused on content, not testing. According to a GED Testing Service survey, of those who responded, only 23 percent of GED graduates who enrolled in college completed their first semester.⁶⁷ In addition, participants noted that raising expectations and providing positive reinforcement throughout the educational process for both students and staff are critical to individual and program success. It is crucial to develop strategies to address resistance by current staff and provide incentives to become more ambitious about the quality and impact of the programs. Research on reentry programs has demonstrated that programs that address multiple needs, are skills-oriented, and focus on behavioral outcomes and positive reinforcement are most effective.⁶⁸



Conference organizing consultant Azadeh Khalili joins participants' discussion about the transformative power of peer mentoring.

Use research-based practices

Develop correctional and reentry educational programs based on research about what works in education and how people learn, as well as the specific needs of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people at each stage of the criminal justice process. Through research and assessments, determine students' academic and skills levels and use this process to identify educational opportunities available to students at key intervention points in the criminal justice system.

Build support systems at critical junctures

The criminal justice system has moments that lend themselves more than others to alternatives to incarceration and educational interventions, including: arrest, prosecution, adjudication, sentencing, education in prison, probation, and parole.⁶⁹ Provide more support to students by engaging families both before and after reentry to the community, and building networks of students and an infrastructure for peer mentoring, which includes training, commitment from participants, and links between people already enrolled in other programs. In addition, provide students with more information about their educational options, financial aid, and other forms of assistance and support.

Increase collaboration

Workshop participants agreed that collaboration is key to improving educational outcomes. In particular, more collaboration with judges and creating networks of students to support each other would be valuable additions to existing collaborations. In addition, participants stressed the

⁶⁷ Garvey, 2011, *From GED to College Degree: Creating Pathways to Postsecondary Success for High School Dropouts*. Jobs for the Future

⁶⁸ [MacKenzie, D.L. \(2012\)](#)

⁶⁹ Christine Pahigian

importance of increasing coordination between government agencies and service providers, and between correctional and community programs, to decrease miscommunication and redundancy.

Take a positive, youth-development approach to educating young populations

The [Community Education Pathways to Success \(CEPS\) model](#) was created by the Youth Development Institute as a holistic approach to serving court-involved youth with their particular needs at the center of its design. The CEPS model provides structured services for youth with low academic skills and strengthens the capacity of community organizations to provide high quality integrated youth development, support, and education services. The CEPS model takes a youth development strength-based approach and views this as a shared responsibility between family,



Photo By Jeyhoun Allebaugh/The Inspired Storytellers Collective

Leonard Battle of NYC Small Business Services (SBS) suggests ways that city government can partner with community-based organizations to better support people in reentry.

school, community-based organizations, religious organizations, civic groups, and youth themselves. Many lessons can be taken from the success of the CEPS model, including the need to keep youth in their communities for their education so they can be close to their family and support systems. Second, a youth development approach gives young people an opportunity to cultivate strengths from within and develop leadership skills. Third, CEPS moves away from traditional test prep that many GED programs focus on, instead teaching reading instruction and balanced literacy in line with Common Core Standards, even at pre-GED level. Finally, access to employment, internships, and career and college planning is well integrated into the program.⁷⁰

III. AN INTEGRATED AGENDA FOR EDUCATION AND REENTRY

The conference participants shared a sense of urgency about the need for action informed by a larger vision. Out of this sense of shared commitment emerged a coherent agenda to guide a growing movement focused on realizing education's potential in reentry. This integration yielded six overarching goals to guide us on the path towards achieving our collective reentry education goals.

1. Integrate education as a core mission of and shared agenda for corrections and reentry

A collective-impact focused change process begins with the identification of a shared mission and agenda. Here, making education for criminal justice-involved people integral to the core missions of correctional institutions, reentry programs, and educational institutions emerged as a key shared goal. Some specific steps for achieving this goal include:

⁷⁰ ["Towards a New Model of Success for Disconnected Youth: CBO-Community College Partnerships," Youth Development Institute](#)

- Short-term activities: select leaders with strong commitments to making education core to reentry; provide professional development and education for correctional staff to gain the skills necessary to support education in correctional facilities; create better feedback loops between correctional staff and administrators to ensure that policy changes regarding education are carried out at the line staff level; provide educational opportunities within correctional facilities to people of any age to promote lifelong learning; increase communication between correctional facility staff and community educational institutions, such as community colleges; encourage and support reentry programs to integrate education as a primary focus, encourage Alternative to Incarceration (ATIs), Alternatives to Detention (ATDs), court mandates, and supervision agency mandates to incentivize education; foster communication between silos within institutions to align stakeholders toward goal of education.
- Intermediate objectives: strengthen community corrections and increase the use of place-based services; reinvest in both New York City and in upstate communities to decrease economic reliance on mass incarceration, including by repurposing correctional facilities into educational institutions and training former correctional staff for other positions; expand use of risk/intake assessments to divert people away from incarceration or to less restrictive environments with greater educational opportunities; expand array of educational programs available to provide both higher education and vocational opportunities that are attuned to the needs of local employers.
- Long-term outcomes: create a local and national culture focused on education, rather than incarceration, securing commitments from administrators and policymakers to support education in communities and in the correctional system and, where possible, closing prisons; reconceptualize the role of corrections to go beyond enforcing punishment and maintaining security; continue to transform the focus of probation and parole away from supervision and surveillance and toward support, individual transformation, and community renewal.

2. Make education institutions and work environments inclusive and welcoming for people with criminal justice involvement

Another key shared goal relates to the transformation of educational and employment environments to be more inclusive and welcoming for people with criminal justice involvement. Some specific steps for achieving this goal include:

- Short-term activities: build on the existing “Ban the Box” campaign to eliminate questions about criminal justice history from college admissions and employment applications; create more flexible admissions policies that provide for conditional acceptances for students who do not yet meet standards but could with extra support; establish mechanisms to allow for easier transfer of credits from correctional education programs to community schools; train mainstream education programs to support students with past criminal justice system involvement better; create partnerships with employers, including through development of internship and apprenticeship programs; educate employers about existing employment discrimination laws.

- Intermediate objectives: advocate with federal and state policymakers to reinstate eligibility to Pell Grants, Tuition Assistance Program assistance, and work-study for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students to make higher education financially accessible; establish reentry programs within community colleges to provide on-site support to students; improve enforcement of employment anti-discrimination laws; institute wage subsidies and tax breaks for employers who hire formerly incarcerated people and/or support their educational progress; expand programs targeted at including traditionally-excluded populations in education, such as the Young Men's Initiative.
- Long-term outcomes: create a culture that is strength-based, rather than deficit-focused; change attitudes among educational institutions and employers to value the experiences, knowledge, and assets of students and employees with criminal justice histories; change perceptions among criminal justice system involved people about their capabilities and opportunities for educational success; build and strengthen educational and vocational training pathways from inside-out, emphasizing reintegration into the community from the beginning of criminal justice system involvement.



Photo By Jeyhoun Allebaugh/The Inspired Storytellers Collective

Felix Matos Rodriguez, President of Hostos Community College (CUNY), shares how supporting reentry relates directly to the mission of his institution.

3. Provide multi-faceted supports to students through activities and programs that mutually reinforce educational access and success, a supportive community, and leadership roles

A third goal that emerged focuses on providing holistic support to address students' multi-faceted needs, which may include educational, financial, social, child care, housing, mental health, substance use, emotional, and other issues. Because of the wide range of needs that students may have, this goal, in particular, requires many stakeholders to conduct distinct yet mutually reinforcing activities.

- Short-term activities: build on existing peer mentoring models to provide social support to students, including using both justice-involved and non-justice-involved people and senior citizens as mentors, as well as drawing on the strengths of individual and cohort-based programs; improve assessment in facilities and in reentry programs to identify and plan for needs of people transitioning out of correctional facilities; provide training to correctional officers on working with people with mental health and substance use issues, trauma histories, and other needs; collaborate with courts and prosecutors to screen out people with severe mental health issues and provide treatment, rather than punishment.
- Intermediate objectives: develop leadership skills and broader social networks among students and formerly incarcerated people; expand array of services offered by reentry programs and educational institutions to account for diverse needs of students.

- **Long-term outcomes:** transform the culture of both correctional and educational institutions to take a “whole person” approach to students with criminal justice involvement; increase educational access and success of students by addressing student needs both in and outside of the classroom; create strong and long-lasting social supports for formerly incarcerated students.

4. Reframe success, and encourage innovation through the creation of shared measurement systems



Speakers from the US Dept. of Education, the Mayor’s Office, Hostos Community College, the NYS Dept. of Corrections and Community Supervision, College and Community Fellowship, the Osborne Association, and CISC.

Beyond specific outcome-focused goals, establishing a shared measurement system is a critical piece of successful collective impact projects. In the reentry education context, this means reframing how success is defined and measured to capture incremental improvements and incorporate more holistic measures of success that look beyond reductions in recidivism.

- **Short-term activities:** develop a mutually agreed upon set of shared measures of success that focuses on education and employment rather than failures and recidivism, including measuring graduation and employment rates, and intergenerational incarceration and education rates; adopt mechanisms for including people and communities affected by mass incarceration in sharing their stories.
- **Intermediate objectives:** persuade both private and public funders to make long-term commitments to enable grantees to develop and implement innovative programming; move towards accountability model based on positive outcomes, rather than rigid accounting of time spent on activities; encourage funders to adopt a broader view of education, including jobs skills and social skills necessary for work environments; develop and document success of pilot programs as models for innovations in programming.
- **Long-term outcomes:** transform relationships between community-based organizations and funders to give more freedom to service providers to experiment with programming; create less competitive and more flexible funding environment to encourage and facilitate collaboration between community-based organizations as well as with sectors; make cross-sectoral partnerships, transparency, collaboration, and information sharing the standard within the criminal justice system

5. Expand collaborations and bring more stakeholders to the table, with NYREN acting as a hub of communication and to facilitate collective impact and systems change

The conference participants represented a wide array of organizations, agencies, and communities with a shared interest in exploring the connection between the criminal justice system (including corrections and reentry) and education. An important component of collective impact change efforts is to identify and forge new partnerships to advance the shared mission. These challenges require

continuing and strengthening NYREN's role in building cross-sector relationships, coordinating disparate efforts, aligning services, and facilitating communications between stakeholders, particularly those that have historically had challenging relationships. In addition to educational and corrections agencies already actively involved with NYREN, the following stakeholders and collaborations were identified as critical to advancing the shared goals of integrating corrections and education and making education more welcoming for criminal justice-involved people:

- Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people: draw on the resources, knowledge, and experiences of people who have been affected by the criminal justice system to identify problems, and develop and implement innovation solutions.
- Higher education institutions: build on the role of higher education institutions as anchors for community and policy change; enlist faculty and staff by integrating criminal justice concerns into curriculum; forge connections between concerns facing court-involved students and educational access and success challenges facing many other students; connect to the national 2020 strategy regarding increase college access.
- Employers: incentivize employment of formerly incarcerated people; incentivize employers to incentivize education; include employers in dialogue about industry needs and training of potential employees; and develop internship programs to build relationships and trust between employees and potential employers.
- Government agencies: take leadership by prioritizing the integration of education in all corrections strategy; collaborate with agencies not working directly with at-risk youth or criminal justice-involved people to dispel stigma and expand opportunities for all people in communities affected by mass incarceration and low educational achievement.
- Key politicians and high-ranking officials: engage candidates for 2013 New York City mayoral race to make correctional and reentry education a priority; foster partnerships between high-ranking Department of Education and Department of Corrections, and engage city and state officials, including representatives from the mayor's office.
- Courts, prosecutors, and defense attorneys: bring judges to the table to discuss the impact of sentencing on educational and employment opportunities; encourage increased use of alternatives to incarceration (ATI) and alternatives to detention (ATD) programs that focus on education; innovate new ways to use court involvement to link people with educational opportunities.



Francis Torres, Executive Director of Educational Services, and Andre Bethea, Special Assistant, NYC Department of Correction, contemplate strategies to expand educational opportunities at Rikers Island.

- Law enforcement: transform the relationship of the police to communities experiencing high rates of criminal justice involvement by reconceptualizing the role of police officers as mentors and teachers; involve police officers in activities with youth, such as sports and trips to colleges, to help change law enforcement's perception of youth. Is "corrections" law enforcement? If so, something about training Cos to facilitate educational access.
- Victims' groups: bring together offenders' and victims' groups to identify shared goals and move forward, recognizing the transformative power of education, rather than perpetuating cycles of retaliation.
- Other criminal-justice and education-related advocates: participate in coalitions with advocates working on other, related issues, such as reducing policing in schools, curbing stop-and-frisk practices, raising the age of criminal responsibility, and decriminalization of drugs.



Hostos Community College Professor
Sandy Figueroa proposes a creative solution.

6. Change public discourse on, the public's understanding of, and education's role in the criminal justice system

In order to mobilize public and political support for reentry education, a strong public relations and communications strategy is essential. The communications campaign can dispel myths and stereotypes about people with criminal justice experience and highlight their strengths and contributions to society; explain how mass incarceration is the civil rights issue of the current era and is an "epicenter of injustice;"⁷¹ cultivate a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding about the positive impact that education has on public safety and productivity in society; and play off concerns about government spending and budget problems by showing the cost effectiveness of education as compared to incarceration.

⁷¹ Linda Gibbs