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# Trauma-sensitive Training for Yoga Teachers Serving Individuals Experiencing Incarceration

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## **Abstract**

Yoga For All Movement is a non-profit agency that facilitates yoga programs in underserved communities. This project delivered a trauma-sensitive training for yoga teachers to learn how to best serve individuals experiencing incarceration. The macro-level social problem is that the justice system perpetuates trauma for incarcerated individuals. The agency problem is that yoga teachers are untrained and unprepared to work with this population. The project purpose was to increase yoga teachers' knowledge and skills to prepare them to lead effective yoga classes in an incarcerated environment such as in jails and prisons. Participants in the training reported that they increased their knowledge about how to more effectively teach yoga to this special population. The agency will continue to hold this training and to help facilitate new programs for individuals experiencing incarceration.

## **Keywords**

Trauma-informed, incarceration, yoga, individuals experiencing incarceration

Yoga For All Movement (YFAM) is a non-profit agency that serves communities in Santa Cruz county. It was founded in 2016 by Shandara Gill, MSW. Ms. Gill had a vision to share the healing gifts of yoga and mindfulness to all people, but especially to underprivileged communities. Underprivileged communities have a lot of trauma, and yoga and mindfulness practices can help people heal by providing practical tools to become grounded and present in their bodies. (Yoga For All Movement, n.d.)

Yoga for all Movement has a two-fold mission which involves both macro and micro practice. Micro practice focuses on serving individuals, while macro practice works with the larger societal systems (Kiser, 2016). “This approach to helping is an ideal form of practice that acknowledges the roles of both the individual and the environment in personal well-being” (Kiser, 2016, p. 42). The micro practice involves providing yoga/mindfulness classes free to people who would not otherwise be able to access them (generally underprivileged people). This includes incarcerated persons, persons in residential treatment centers for substance abuse, at-risk youth, children, and low-income seniors, among many others. (Yoga For All Movement, n.d.)

Yoga for all Movement also has a macro practice that focuses on a more encompassing goal of pursuing social justice and helping to “dismantle systems of oppression” (Gill, personal communication, September 4, 2020). The agency’s vision shows their dual goals for micro and macro practice with their statements in support of access to yoga. “We believe in a world where all people have access to the healing tools of mindfulness and movement. The intention of the Yoga For All Movement is to create an outcome that dismantles the "us versus them" dichotomy in our community through the shared practice of yoga” and that “the intended impact for humanity is equity and justice for all”(Yoga For All Movement, n.d.). .

YFAM is funded from a variety of sources. During the time of COVID-19 (which brought financial instability to many agencies in the non-profit sector) YFAM survived financially. One of the reasons was that Ms. Gill made a decision for YFAM to apply for economic relief through the CARES Act that Congress passed to help businesses and nonprofit agencies survive the pandemic. These funds were used primarily to pay the salaries of two staff members who continued to work during the pandemic. Expenses were also lower because the stipends were no longer being paid to teachers [since most of the yoga classes were stopped] (Gill, personal communication, September 4, 2020).

Before the pandemic, the largest source of funding for YFAM came from fees for programs at sites through the organizations that fund them. For example, Encompass services paid YFAM to bring yoga classes to both the Si Se Puede and Santa Cruz Residential Rehabilitation centers. When the pandemic began, those contracts were put on hold. Private donations make up another source of revenue. Donors are engaged during fund-raisers and campaigns like the Human Race. YFAM also has provided trauma informed yoga training and retreats for teachers. Additionally, local for-profit yoga studios like Breath and Oneness have held fund-raising campaigns for YFAM where a portion of profits for an event or a special class go to YFAM. (Annual Report, 2019)

Primary community partners that were still active during the pandemic were United Way, Community Bridges, and Santa Cruz County (Sheriff’s Department). United Way partnered with YFAM through its United 4 Youth campaign, which brought yoga and mindfulness classes to an extremely underserved community. The aim was to encourage youth to develop healthy coping mechanisms and to offer a pathway to well-being (United Way, 2020). Through a partnership with Community Bridges called Elderday, YFAM offered 10 classes a week (taught remotely) to low-income seniors, which provides seniors with a source of physical movement and community, as well as helping to alleviate feelings of isolation (Community Bridges, 2020).

YFAM serves the community that resides in Santa Cruz County, California. Most of YFAM’s programs operate in the city of Santa Cruz, with a few that operated in the city of Watsonville. Within this geographic area YFAM serves communities with very different characteristics. YFAM teaches classes to clients in rehabilitation centers dealing with substance abuse issues, incarcerated persons, children, and at-risk youth at a few different programs. Seniors also were able to take classes that YFAM offers at two different locations. Although they differ widely in many other ways, the one thing nearly all of YFAM’s clients have in common is that they live in poverty. Key characteristics that are significant to the work YFAM does are incarceration status, age, and income level. Most of the communities served by YFAM are impacted by poverty. During the pandemic, YFAM focused on serving low-income seniors and people experiencing incarceration. Seniors make

up a larger portion of the population in Santa Cruz County than the U.S. (Census, 2018). Before the pandemic, YFAM had a robust program serving children in Rio Del Mar elementary and also a program serving adolescents at Sequoia School. The population under 18 is lower in Santa Cruz County and Santa Cruz city, but the youth is a very important demographic to serve.

Table 1. Communities Served by YFAM and U.S. Demographics

Characteristic	U.S.	California	Santa Cruz County	Santa Cruz City
Incarcerated	2.2 million	581/100K	397	N/A
Age (over 65)	1.0%	14.8%	17.3%	11.7%
Age (under 18)	22.3%	22.5%	19.0%	13.0%
Poverty	10.5%	11.8%	12.2%	23.6%

(Board of State and Community Corrections, 2015),(Census, 2018), (Datashare, 2020)

### Analysis of Community Needs and Assets

YFAM aims to bring the healing benefits of yoga and mindfulness to communities that are typically under-served, and seeks to bring yoga to communities that would not normally be able to afford expensive membership fees at a studio. Yoga has been shown to help heal the body (nervous system) and alleviate stress, which can be toxic to the body if prolonged. Living in poverty can cause incredibly high levels of stress. People living in the communities that YFAM serves need tools to help manage their high levels of stress. Persons living with substance abuse need ways to be able to repair their fragile nervous systems in order to function without drugs and alcohol, which serve as coping mechanisms for high levels of stress. Incarcerated persons also need tools to handle stressors and triggers. (Van Der Kolk, 2016)

YFAM also serves at-risk youth, and young people are especially susceptible to developing unhealthy habits when they haven't learned skills to be able to deal with the high levels of stress that adolescence brings. Children in elementary school need to develop healthy habits and learn how to feel at home in their bodies. (Janjhua et. al, 2020)

Santa Cruz has several key assets that help YFAM carry out its mission. Santa Cruz has a very strong community of yoga practitioners and teachers. In other geographic areas yoga might be misunderstood but many people in Santa Cruz believe in the healing benefits of yoga. In fact, the community of Santa Cruz has provided a major source of revenue for YFAM, all from personal donations. In 2019, the mayor of Santa Cruz declared September 22 (YFAM's founding date) to be "Yoga For All Movement Day." Hannah Muse, one of Santa Cruz's most popular yoga teachers, serves on the board of YFAM. YFAM and its mission is often a topic in the classes Ms. Muse teaches, so many people have become aware of YFAM. In the Yoga Teacher Training program Ms. Muse holds every year, YFAM leads a workshop covering trauma-informed yoga and explains the work that YFAM does. Many students (after they become certified yoga teachers) go on to volunteer to teach classes for YFAM, which provides an opportunity for developing their teaching experience. Another asset is the large number of yoga teachers in Santa Cruz. Although paid yoga teaching positions at studios and gyms can be scarce, there are opportunities with YFAM to volunteer for a good cause (YFAM, 2019).

While there are several options for a capstone project with Yoga For All Movement (YFAM), the one that was most appealing was to assist in the development of a training or educational intervention for yoga teachers to hold classes for people serving sentences in incarceration. One of YFAM's collaborating partners, Legacy Motion, is a non-profit agency that offers training for yoga teachers to teach in situations where there is significant trauma. With a focus on trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive practices, Legacy Motion seeks to

enhance the resiliency of populations affected by trauma through mindfulness-based movement practices. Legacy Motion also seeks to aid professionals in helping professions in learning how to support the populations they serve. The capstone project was a collaboration with the founder of Legacy Motion, Kaye Wilkenson, to design and deliver curriculum for the purpose of educating yoga teachers to be sensitive and aware of trauma that incarcerated persons experience. (Legacy Motion, 2020)

This was a 30 hour training delivered online with lectures delivered online, virtual meetings, and individual self-study. This capstone helped with the planning and implementation of the course. The plan was to offer this training over six weeks beginning in February 2021 and culminating in March 2021.

There is a lack of trauma-specific sensitivity training for yoga teachers, especially for incarcerated persons. Yoga is becoming a part of services offered at many jails and prisons, and is enormously helpful to give teachers providing classes in such highly controlled and monitored situations a skillset they can use to teach effectively in an incarcerated environment. In addition to content that is appropriate for this population, there is also a need to help yoga teachers adapt to the prison environment including frequent interruptions and bright lights, with a generally high-stress atmosphere. The desired outcome is to enhance the ability of teachers to engage this demographic in a more responsive way and to strengthen the delivery of a yoga class in an incarcerated environment. The longer-term objective is to give incarcerated persons skills they can use to feel safe in their bodies and learn to respond rather than react to external stressors. In other words, the longer-term objective is to help incarcerated students manage stress. By bringing attention to the breath and becoming physically grounded, incarcerated persons can become more centered and calm. When they develop these skills and become comfortable practicing them in their daily lives, they can begin to respond to their environment differently, both in prison/jail and once they are released. Ultimately, this approach may contribute to lower recidivism rates in the longer term.

## **Project Description**

The capstone project titled Trauma-Sensitive Training for Yoga Teachers Serving Individuals Experiencing Incarceration was a training/intervention that gave yoga teachers trauma-sensitive teaching skills that will help them teach more effectively in an incarcerated environment. The project consisted of the planning and implementation of the training, and also included the assessment and reporting phases. The project consisted of researching topics and helping to write the curriculum that informed the training, and also involved facilitating a portion of the training which focused on the topics of addiction and trauma. The project included participation in live-session groups and helping to manage that process. The training began February 1, 2021 and finished in the beginning of March 2021. This 30 hour training took place weekly over 6 weeks. Each week consisted of a lecture on a specific topic. These topics included an overview of the physiological effects of trauma, how race affects incarceration rates and systemic racism in the justice system, the physiology of addiction and the pervasiveness of trauma for people experiencing incarceration, trauma-informed yoga teaching practices, and how to teach a student who is currently experiencing the trauma of incarceration. Every week consisted of a one or two hour lecture delivered online, homework of additional reading or videos to watch and personal reflections to complete. Participants who attended the live lecture and completed the homework received a certificate of completion that counted toward CEU (Continuing Education Unit) hours for yoga teachers. To determine effectiveness, a survey was developed and distributed to participants after they completed the training to determine if the training was successful or not. Success was determined by asking the participants if they expanded their knowledge of teaching to incarcerated populations, if they became more aware of the issues regarding incarceration, if they became more aware of how addiction and trauma are interrelated, and if they felt they gained skills that helped them to function effectively as a teacher in a jail or prison.

## **Justification**

There is a need for holistic treatment services in places of incarceration and YFAM hopes to fill that need. There is a lack of trauma-specific training for yoga teachers who serve incarcerated populations and this capstone project addressed that problem. Trauma-informed yoga practices are becoming more commonplace, but some of the information commonly taught in trauma-informed yoga training is not applicable and/or useful for incarcerated settings. For example, some trauma-informed yoga teacher training gives guidance to lower lights and minimize outside noises and interruptions, but this is impossible in jails and prisons (Khouri & Haglund, 2016). The primary purpose of this training is to increase knowledge and enhance trauma-informed yoga teaching skills for participants.

The longer term outcome of this training was to promote the overall health and wellbeing of people experiencing incarceration in a way that empowers them to make better choices, and in turn, lower recidivism rates. Another outcome was to inform activism for criminal justice reform. The overarching goal is in line with the mission of YFAM - to provide yoga that is accessible to all people and “to promote equity and justice for all” (Yoga For All Movement, 2020). This mission is supported by this capstone project which helped yoga teachers bring yoga into places of incarceration where access to healing practices is extremely limited, and helped raise awareness of issues to address and correct in the justice system.

## **Stakeholders**

The stakeholders involved in the training include YFAM, Legacy Motion, participating yoga teachers and students experiencing incarceration. Legacy Motion cares about this project because it coincides with their mission of providing trauma-sensitive yoga training to special populations. Legacy Motion is an international non-profit that encourages resiliency through mindful movement practices in populations affected by intense acute trauma (Legacy Motion, 2020). YFAM also has a stake in this project because the project could be used to apply for grants. YFAM had previously been contracted with the Santa Cruz Sheriff’s Department to provide yoga classes at both Rountree and Blaine Street Women’s jail in Santa Cruz County, so establishing a trauma-informed training program could expand the knowledge and competence of future teachers in addressing the needs of people at those facilities. YFAM operates locally in the community of Santa Cruz, but its vision of promoting yoga practices that are accessible to all will be helped by collaborating with Legacy Motion. Legacy Motion’s scope is international, and participants in this training were from locations other than Santa Cruz County, so the work that YFAM does in conjunction with Legacy Motion helped the vision of YFAM reach a broader geographic audience (S. Gill, personal communication, October 26, 2020)

## **Benefits**

The benefits of this training were far-reaching. The participants had the immediate benefit of increasing their knowledge and awareness of teaching in incarceration settings, and built their competence in addressing the needs of this special population of students. Future students in incarceration will have the opportunity to learn how to use the tools of mindfulness and yoga in high stress situations. This will give them the opportunity to develop tools during class that will help them to respond differently to their environment over time, which could help them to alter behavior patterns, and in turn lower recidivism rates. Promoting awareness of the inequities of the criminal justice system has the potential of increasing activism for criminal justice reform, which could in turn alter the systems of incarceration that perpetuate trauma.

## **Implementation method**

This capstone was an educational intervention that entailed developing and delivering a training for yoga teachers to learn how to effectively teach classes for people experiencing incarceration. This online training was conducted virtually over the span of six weeks. This training was modeled similarly to the Prison Yoga Project, which is a successful example of this type of intervention. Nearly 3,000 people have completed the online Prison Yoga Project training since 2019. “Prison Yoga Project supports incarcerated people with trauma-

informed yoga and mindfulness practices to promote rehabilitation, reduce recidivism, and improve public safety” (Prison Yoga Project, 2020). Another best practice to draw from is the Youth Facilitator Training that Legacy Motion offered in 2020 through a six-week online module. Since this training was so successful, this capstone project will be based on its structure. (Legacy Motion, 2020)

## **Participants**

Legacy Motion’s founder and Executive Director, who set up the framework for this project, had experience creating and delivering online content for other trauma-sensitive trainings for serving displaced populations and youth, as well as a trauma-informed yoga training for teachers (Legacy Motion, 2020). YFAM’s founder and Executive Director delivered most of the lectures, facilitated the groups, and created the curriculum for the training.

The plan was to have between 20 and 30 participants who were recruited through Legacy Motion and YFAM’s social media marketing campaign. For this capstone project, I was responsible for researching the topics, creating and editing the curriculum, delivering one week’s lecture on the topic of addiction and trauma, and creating the post-survey to measure the effectiveness of the training.

## **Resources**

The resources needed were time from staff at Legacy Motion and YFAM (including internship hours) to research the project, create the curriculum and lectures, and facilitate the online discussion groups. The marketing staff at Legacy Motion needed to commit time to promote the online training and recruit participants. The funds needed were to pay the salaries of staff. Both Legacy Motion and YFAM covered expenses incurred for developing this training. The meetings to collaborate on this project were held virtually, in accordance with the schedules of staff. The training was also held online. No additional funding was needed.

## **Supplemental**

This intervention was needed because yoga has been showing such promise as a type of trauma-informed therapy. Its success has motivated volunteer organizations to begin to offer yoga and mindfulness classes inside jails and prisons to address a variety of mental health issues (Prison Yoga Project, 2020). It is estimated that nearly 50% of incarcerated individuals have a substance use disorder and a significant number of incarcerated individuals are diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges (Lyons & Cantrell, 2015). With a large number of incarcerated people suffering from mental illness and the traditional methods of therapy, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), showing minimal results (Yoon, Slade, and Fazel, 2017), new approaches are needed. Studies on yoga and mindfulness training have shown these practices can significantly decrease symptoms of anxiety and depression. Other studies examined the therapeutic use of yoga during incarceration, which have shown how helpful this practice can be to alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression (Harner, Hanlon, & Garfinkel, 2010).

## **COVID-19 Accommodations**

This training and the planning and development meetings were held virtually with no face-to-face contact for any of this project. Every week there was a one or two hour training covering a specific topic, which was either attended live or viewed independently on the participant’s schedule.

<b>Scope of Work</b>
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**Title:** Trauma-sensitive Training for Yoga Teachers Serving Individuals Experiencing Incarceration

**Project description:** This is a training for yoga teachers to learn how to more effectively teach classes to people experiencing incarceration, and raises awareness of the impacts of social justice issues that affect incarceration.

**Purpose/Primary objective of the project:** The primary purpose is to increase the knowledge and skills of yoga teachers about how to be sensitive to the trauma that affects individuals experiencing incarceration and how to adapt their teaching to best serve this underserved population.

**Longer term goal:** This project contributes to YFAM’s goal of increasing access to the healing benefits of yoga and mindfulness to all people, especially underserved populations.

Phases		Activities/Tasks		Deliverables	Timeline/ deadlines
1	Initiation	1.1	Discuss capstone project ideas with mentor and agency staff	Generate a list of capstone project ideas.	Sept 2020
		1.2	Review trauma informed literature and related trainings	Share research findings with mentor	Oct 2020
2	Plan project	2.1	Research information about trauma, incarceration, mindfulness, and yoga to inform curriculum	Share research findings with mentor and collaborating agency	Nov 2020
		2.2	Help to develop the curriculum.	Submit draft content for curriculum to mentor for review/approval.	Dec-Jan 2021
3	Implement project	3.1	Develop pre-program surveys for participants	Submit draft survey to mentor for review/approval.	Late Jan 2021
		3.2	Participate in live virtual sessions	Submit participant sign-up sheet and session recordings	Feb 2021- Mar 2021
		3.3	Help lead discussion in breakout groups during live virtual sessions	Submit notes on participant needs to mentor for future planning	Feb 2021- Mar 2021
4	Assess project	4.1	Develop draft post survey	Submit draft survey to mentor for review/approval	Mar-April 2021
		4.2	Collect responses from participants with pre and post survey data and analyze	Submit preliminary data analysis findings to mentor for review/approval	Mar- April 2021
5	Report on project findings	5.1	Complete reporting requirements	Final agency and capstone reports	May 2021
		5.2	Prepare capstone presentation in selected format	Present at Dress Rehearsal for grading	May 2021
		5.3	Final preparation for Capstone Festival	Final Capstone Festival presentation!	May 2021

**Problem Model**

The micro-level problem that this capstone addressed is that yoga teachers are generally unaware of how trauma affects incarcerated students. Some causes to this problem are that many trauma informed yoga trainings do not focus on trauma that is specific to individuals experiencing incarceration (Khouri & Haglund, 2016). Another contributing factor is that yoga is a relatively new practice in jails and prisons (Pilon, 2013). Additionally, yoga teachers who are used to teaching traditionally in a studio-like setting are untrained to serve the needs of incarcerated students. Some consequences of not addressing this issue are that yoga teachers may teach in ways that are harmful or retraumatizing to students. A further consequence is that people experiencing incarceration do not develop coping mechanisms to deal with the stressors of life and reoffend. The macro-level problem this capstone project addresses is that too many people who need mental health and substance abuse treatment end up incarcerated. A contributing factor to this problem is that due to the deinstitutionalization of people with mental health conditions in the 1960s, many people with mental illness ended up incarcerated. Additionally, since addiction is criminalized, many people who need treatment are sent to overcrowded jails and prisons instead of into a treatment facility. Consequences to society include high recidivism rates, fractured communities, and a permanent underclass. People attempting to re-enter society after incarceration have to try to reintegrate without the ability to cope with difficulties in life. (Frazier et. al, 2015)

Addressing these micro and macro problems is in alignment with YFAM’s mission “to promote equity and justice for all (YFAM)”. While it is beyond the scope of YFAM’s work to solve the larger issue of the flawed criminal justice system, YFAM can focus on providing a pathway to mental and physical well-being for local people experiencing incarceration. In this way, YFAM helps to provide an intervention that helps incarcerated people in Santa Cruz County deal with mental health challenges and problems with substance abuse.

<b>Figure 1. Problem Model</b>		
<b>CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO AGENCY PROBLEM</b>	<b>AGENCY-SPECIFIC “MICRO-LEVEL” PROBLEM ADDRESSED BY PROJECT</b>	<b>CONSEQUENCES TO AGENCY</b>
Trauma-informed yoga trainings do not focus on trauma specific to incarceration	Too many yoga teachers lack awareness of how trauma affects incarcerated students	Yoga might be retraumatizing incarcerated students
Yoga is a new program in jails and prisons		People experiencing incarceration do not develop new coping skills to deal with stress
Yoga teachers are untrained to serve the needs of incarcerated students		YFAM does not fulfill its purpose of providing trauma-sensitive yoga to people experiencing incarceration
<b>CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO BROADER PROBLEM</b>	<b>BROADER “MACRO-LEVEL” HEALTH/SOCIAL PROBLEM</b>	<b>CONSEQUENCES TO SOCIETY</b>
People with mental health and substance abuse problems lack adequate health care	Too many people with mental health and substance abuse problems end up incarcerated	High costs to taxpayers
Deinstitutionalization of severely mentally ill people		High recidivism rates

Substance abuse disorder is criminalized

Fractured communities - people previously incarcerated become a permanent underclass

### **Micro-level agency problem**

Yoga teachers are not aware of how trauma affects incarcerated students. One of the reasons is that while trauma-informed yoga teaching programs are becoming more widely available, most of these trainings do not address the trauma specific to incarceration and how to teach in an incarcerated environment. The bright lights, frequent interruptions, and charged atmosphere of incarceration is a very different environment than a studio or other setting where yoga is customarily taught. Yoga teachers may teach in facilities of incarceration not knowing how trauma from the past and the present could be affecting the physiology of incarcerated students. Therefore, yoga teachers may not know how to best serve the needs of incarcerated students. “When people are chronically angry or scared, constant muscle tension ultimately leads to spasms, back pain, migraine headaches, fibromyalgia, and other forms of chronic pain (Van Der Kolk, p.268, 2016). This affects YFAM in that the agency of YFAM cannot provide physically safe, trauma-informed yoga in jails if teachers are teaching in ways that lack attention to the unique challenges of people experiencing incarceration.

An additional contributing factor is that yoga is a relatively new program offered in jails and prisons. Exactly when yoga began to be offered in incarceration environments is unknown, but one of the pioneering agencies, the Prison Yoga Project began operating in 2001. (Pilon, 2013)

YFAM currently teaches at two jails in Santa Cruz County. One of them is a men’s facility (Rountree) and the other is Blaine Street jail for women. A large number of people experiencing incarceration in Santa Cruz County are sentenced for drug and alcohol-related offenses. “Drug arrests have demonstrated a significant increase in Santa Cruz, from 5% of all arrests in 1980, to 22% of adult arrests in 2009” (Macaillar et. al, 2012). When people experiencing incarceration don’t receive adequate treatment for addiction and mental health issues, they are far more likely to return to the behaviors that led them to be incarcerated (Frazier et. al, 2015).

### **Macro-level broader health/social problem**

Too many people who need mental health and substance abuse treatment end up incarcerated. The war on drugs that began in the 1970s incarcerated (and continues to incarcerate) people with substance abuse problems. Deinstitutionalization of the 1960s left many mentally ill persons without housing or resources, and this led to incarceration of many mentally ill people who were underserved in the community or ill-equipped to handle life on their own. The rise of prisons and jails as the main facilities housing the mentally ill in the United States represents the fact that mental illness is criminalized. (Dumont et al, 2012)

People with substance abuse problems are criminalized as well. During the course of their incarceration they often receive inadequate care. For example, very few jails and prisons provide methadone to inmates currently taking methadone for opioid addiction. The severely addicted person then has to suffer through withdrawal during incarceration, and has a high risk of overdose upon release. People who meet criteria for substance abuse disorder make up 50% of the incarcerated population. (Dumont et al, 2012)

“Arrests are concentrated in low-income, predominantly nonwhite communities where people are more likely to be medically underserved” (Dumont et al, 2012). As a result, people experiencing incarceration

have greater rates of physical and mental illness rates than the general population. “The involvement of individuals with chronic and severe mental health or substance abuse problems in criminal justice processes is often known as “entrenchment” because they remained imprisoned longer, are less likely to receive community sanctions, and are much more likely to violate their probation or parole conditions and return to jail or prison than other offenders charged with comparable offenses” (Frazier et al, 2015). PTSD is prevalent among incarcerated women, approximately one third of whom were sexually assaulted and/or physically abused before becoming incarcerated (Dumont et al, 2012).

Another consequence of this traumatization of people experiencing incarceration is that communities of primarily people of color become fractured. “Because incarceration is not equally distributed but concentrated in some communities, both incarceration and release have enduring health effects on the individual as well as the community” (Dumont et al, 2012). The children of people who have been incarcerated are more than five times as likely to become involved with the criminal justice system. People formerly incarcerated end up having a difficult time finding employment and in many states a prison record keeps one from qualifying for much needed services like food stamps, student loans, and housing assistance. (Dumont et al, 2012)

The goal for this training was to increase awareness of the issues facing people experiencing incarceration, and to give participants a new understanding of systemic oppression and how it contributes to mass incarceration. The lecture this capstone specifically addresses is the topic of “addiction and liberation”, which covers the physiology of addiction, addiction and trauma, breath and the nervous system, and specific breathing techniques a teacher could use as part of a class taught in incarceration. The lecturer also shared personal life experiences of dealing with trauma, addiction, and incarceration, as well as described how impactful the practice of yoga and teaching yoga has been for the process of recovery.

The measure used to assess this project’s success was to determine if the participants gained knowledge from the different modules (especially the module on the nervous system, trauma, and addiction), if the material was understandable, and if the training provided skills that increased the participants' ability to teach a yoga class in an incarcerated environment. Participants were also asked what they learned about systems change, if they were satisfied with the training overall, and feedback to improve the training in the future. These measures determined what parts of the training were most effective. The method used to gather evidence was an anonymous survey distributed at the culmination of the six week program.

The short term outcome was that the participants became aware of the issues facing people experiencing incarceration, and were provided with skills to teach trauma-informed yoga classes in jails and prisons. The intermediate outcome will be that more yoga teachers who are trained in this program will be able to effectively teach classes in jails and prisons. For the teachers who are not in the Santa Cruz area, the intermediate outcome will be that they begin to teach classes in their location, and create new programs for people in custody to receive yoga classes. The long term outcome is that more yoga programs and classes will be provided for people experiencing incarceration. This will increase the health and well-being of incarcerated people, and provide them with better coping skills for stress. These new coping mechanisms and ways of alleviating stress will have a positive effect on the behavior of people when they are released. It can be hoped that these healthy behaviors could affect the rate of recidivism, thereby decreasing the number of people returning to custody. When people who were previously caught in a cycle of incarceration recover and exit that cycle, they become productive members of society, and in this way positive social change occurs.

## **Findings**

The group, which was composed of seven individuals, were given a link to a survey after completing the training. This survey determined if the training was successful or not. Five participants completed the survey. The feedback was extremely positive, and 100% of the participants who completed the survey reported that they gained skills and awareness as a result of this training.

## **Assessments**

The survey asked several questions to determine the effectiveness of the training. It used a likert scale to determine the measures of skills gained and awareness/knowledge expanded, and open-ended questions to obtain qualitative data. The survey asked participants if their awareness of issues regarding incarceration expanded as a result of this training, how satisfied they were with the knowledge and skills gained throughout this training, and if their understanding of how the nervous system and the breath are connected was enhanced by this training. . Additionally, 100% of the participants responded that the training improved their ability to lead a yoga class in an incarcerated setting. 100% of participants felt like the module on addiction and trauma increased their understanding of how substance abuse and trauma are connected very much. All participants answered a five on the likert scale for the quantitative questions, which indicates this training was a success. Some feedback received from participants was that they desired more teaching practice with each other.

## **Reccomendations**

Several participants indicated they would like to take the training again, and there is a plan to offer the training again (possibly as a hybrid course) in August 2021. The facilitators met after the training to give feedback and discuss any changes that needed to be made. The assessment of my part was that my lecture was very informative and powerful, but that more practice of the breathing techniques to calm the nervous system would be beneficial. Since there was such a lot of information in that lecture, it was discussed to develop a workshop solely on addiction and trauma. In the future the training will be extended from six to eight weeks to allow for more subject material and time for teaching practice. Also, although the cost for the training was fairly low (\$40), there will be an equity pay scale next time to make the training accessible to more people, and to allow those who can pay more to do so. The individual coursework that was assigned needs to be improved as well - the person who facilitates the lecture should determine the homework for that week.

The workshop was successful in increasing knowledge and awareness of issues affecting incarceration, and gained skills. The agency will continue to implement the training in the future. The benefit to the agency is that the training supports its mission of bringing yoga to the most underserved populations. The broader social significance is that the benefits of the training will ripple out into the participants' communities as they go on to initiate new yoga programs in their locations and to teach in a trauma-informed way. The students who take the yoga classes while serving sentences will receive the benefits of better health and wellbeing; it can be hoped that this will make a positive effect on their lives and could contribute to a reduction in recidivism rates.

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