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More Than A Record: The Impacts of The School-to-Prison Pipeline

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### **Abstract**

Young individuals are constantly being negatively impacted by the school-to-prison pipeline. It's initial purpose was to ensure school safety but over time schools have been relying on police officers to deal with minor student behavior and actions. This has caused youth to be labeled as "troubled" and be pushed out of schools and into the prison system. This causes youth to develop mental and emotional distress and limits their opportunities at a brighter and successful future. MILPA Collective is a non-profit organization that facilitates rites of passage programs, as well as advocating to end mass incarceration by calling for the investment in education, job training and mental health. The programs and leadership department is the division that facilitates such programs to aid youth and young adults in finding life skills needed to pursue higher education through mentorship and internships. The project is an informational video meant to inform individuals on what the school-to-prison pipeline is, how it affects youth and their families and continues to affect them as adults. The project consisted of a video where MILPA staff who have been system impacted share their experiences with the school-to-prison pipeline. The project's findings were that more information needs to be shared on the school-to-prison pipeline to not only educate but also show that people are more than their actions and in some cases the record that follows them. One recommendation is to host more informational public meetings on the topic to encourage individuals to advocate against punitive measures.

*Keywords: Youth, school-to-prison pipeline, system impacted*

### **Agency & Communities Served**

The agency the individual is completing their internship with is MILPA Collective. MILPA is a non-profit organization run by formerly incarcerated and system-impacted individuals created to support system impacted individuals as well as youth from the ages 14-24. MILPA promotes and advocates equality for all through cultural healing. Their mission is “to cultivate Change Makers for the Next Seven Generations by creating opportunities for cultural healing, intergenerational leadership, and empowerment through community-driven decision making for healthier communities.” (MILPA, 2021). MILPA also strives for racial justice with the end goal of ending mass incarceration.

MILPA frameworks and approaches are based on culture, strength and seeking a solution. Facilitations use stories, historic and relevant events, healing workshops along with touching on subjects that would normally not be talked about within the family to promote leadership and positive behaviors within individuals. Are culturally relevant, asset-oriented, strength-based, and solution-focused. As an organization, MILPA wants to build close relationships that will create social and emotional opportunities as well as creating healthier habits.

As an organization, MILPA is aiming to play a part in dismantling the school to prison pipeline. According to the California Sentencing Institute, hispanic youth are incarcerated at a higher rate than other races. Out of 100,000 youth incarcerated in Monterey County 35,935 of them were of hispanic descent (CASI, 2021). Although the rates for men and women being incarcerated have been steady over time, there has been a slight increase seen with both genders but men continue to have a higher chance of being incarcerated. Like many organizations, MILPA strives to make a difference and bring youth incarceration rates down.

### **Problem Description**

Too many young indigenous people of color are getting caught in the system, whether that is being incarcerated or in foster care. Some time ago, policies like the Zero Tolerance Policy were put in place to try and stop violence and punish students for their behavior. The War on Drugs made a huge impact on the implementation of such rules. They were initially intended to stop students from selling or stop any gang activity on school grounds. Over time, they have been used to criminalize youth for minor offenses like being defiant, truancy, the way they dress (Coronado, 2021). Rather than creating programs to support youth or question as to why they are engaging in “criminal” behavior, they are being seen as profitable margins and are being pushed into the system. An example of this is how young individuals are being incarcerated over status offenses, like running away from home or violating curfew.

Schools are seen as the first institution that children deal with. With the way America’s system is set up, schools are relying on school resource officers for things principals used to take care of in regards to discipline. Zero-Tolerance policies are being put in place to punish children regardless of the rationale behind their behavior. More and more money is being spent on creating contracts with school resource officers rather than investing in mental health professionals to provide students with mental and emotional services (Coronado, 2021). Surprisingly, schools play a part in racial discrimination as they participate in pushing students out of schools. According to the University of Miami, “Black students are 3.5 times and Latino students are approximately 1.5 times<sup>3</sup> more likely to be expelled than white students...Nationwide, more than 70 percent of the students involved in school-related arrests or

referred to law” (Miami Law, 2014). It is shocking to realize that what’s supposed to be a safe place for youth to learn, ends up criminalizing them.

Oftentimes, we think of “system impacted” as only referring to individuals that have been incarcerated yet it also includes those in foster care and residential treatment. In 2019, it was reported that approximately 3,375 youth were in foster care, 10,256 were in residential treatment, 4,535 were in adult prisons, 10,777 were in long-term secure facilities and 16,858 were in detention centers. Of these individuals, it is estimated that 69% of them are 16 years or older. The unbelievable and troubling fact is that more than 500 of the confined children are younger than 12 years of age.

### **Contributing Factors**

Parental imprisonment means that the parent isn’t able to be involved in their child’s education while they are in prison. Research states that “...(13 to 20 years old) with currently incarcerated mothers and found that when compared to their best friends, adolescents with an incarcerated mother were more likely to be suspended, fail classes, drop out of school, and have extended absences from school.” (Shlafer, 2017). Due to the lack of parental involvement, children of imprisoned parents tend to act out as a form of asking for the attention they don’t get at home. Also, these children often have less motivation to succeed in school because they are cared for by another family member or end up in the foster care system until their parents release them. This contributed to the high incarceration rates among youth in Monterey County. In comparison to California (222 per 1,000 arrests), Monterey County stood at a staggering 329 per 1,000 arrests in 2016. (CJCJ, 2021).

Another contributing factor is the way public schools are set up. Too many public schools have a punitive approach, quick to use harsh discipline as opposed to counseling or developmental discipline. The U.S. Department of Justice reports “These organizations reported that such policies, which disproportionately affect minorities, have negative consequences for at-risk youth (McCord, Widom, and Crowell, 2001). For example, suspension and expulsion do not appear to reduce undesirable behavior, and both are linked to increased delinquent behavior.” Rather than punishing kids for their behavior and getting them to think about the consequences of their actions, suspensions and expulsions give students that extra time to get involved in malicious activities that can lead to their arrest.

Minority groups, especially youth of color have been found to be overrepresented among the justice system. The Coalition for Juvenile Justice states “...Latino youth are incarcerated in local detention and state correctional facilities nearly twice as often as white youth. Research shows that youth of color are treated more harshly than white youth when charged with the same category of offense, including status offenses.” (CJJ, nd). Even before youth of color come in contact with the juvenile justice system, most of them have already been labeled as criminals. It has been demonstrated over and over again that youth of color receive harsher punishments, sometimes even ending up dead at the time of their arrest. This contributes to their high rates of incarceration because they really don't begin to stand a chance against the justice system due to their prejudices.

### **Consequences**

Youth with imprisoned parents face a wide range of long term consequences. According to the National Institute of Justice “There is particular concern that a parent's imprisonment will



lead to a cycle of intergenerational criminal behavior. One statistic indicates that children of incarcerated parents are, on average, six times more likely to become incarcerated themselves.” (Martin, 2017). Research shows that children and youth with system impacted parents more often than not have behavior issues. These youth are more likely to be exposed to violence and crime, making them believe that it is something normal and acceptable to engage in. Due to the fact that they are taught that criminal activity is acceptable, they end up committing crimes that place them in prison.

Even though the Zero-Tolerance policies were put in place to protect schools against delinquents, overtime it has been expanded to apply to smaller infractions. Because these policies are so often misapplied, it is creating more harm than good to the students that are being punished. Research states that “This disruption can often become a more permanent departure from education, in general. In fact, students who are suspended for longer periods of time drop out of school more than those who are suspended for shorter periods.” (Passero, 2021). In most cases, students are suspended for longer periods of time because they keep committing the same infraction or they get involved in bigger acts. At this point, they are already so disengaged in school that they become accustomed to being suspended and have missed out on so much school that it is easier for them to drop out of school than catching up. Those who drop out end up losing out on the various opportunities to change their life around and end up falling deeper into crime.

The consequences of the school to prison pipeline disproportionately fall heavier on people of color. Youth are being penalized for wearing certain clothing to school, and while gang affiliated colors are reasonable there are instances where white t-shirts are the reason why

students are being punished and labeled as gang members. It is important to realize that for most low income families, they can only afford to buy a “3-pack” of white t-shirts. Most of the students that come from low income families tend to be of color, and that also plays a huge part as to why they are being targeted and prevented from improving their quality of life. The ACLU Washington states “Arrests make it more likely that students will drop out of school, earn less money as adults, and end up in the criminal justice system.” (ACLU, 2019). Youth that have been arrested, have a lesser chance of going to college and improving their chances of getting good job opportunities and bettering themselves. It’s unreasonable to think that youth are being punished for being of low income and only being able to afford “basic clothing” that has been labeled as gang member uniform.

**Problem Model**

<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
Parental Imprisonment	Youth of color are susceptible to getting caught up in the system, incarcerated or foster care (School to prison pipeline)	Children with imprisoned parents are more likely to have behavior issues and commit the same mistakes.
School policies/Infrastructure	Individuals are being criminalized for behavior that could be resolved without the help of police.	Rather than preventing bad behavior, it enhances it. Punishment options are giving youth the time they need to engage in violence/criminal behavior.
Racial and Ethnic disparities	Individuals are being labeled as criminals solely based on the color of their skin.	Youth of color are left with limited resources to succeed.

## **Capstone Project Description and Justification**

### **Capstone Project**

The public school system prioritizes the prison system (punishment) over education and programs and services. The intern is hoping to bring awareness to the school to prison pipeline and its effects on young individuals. The plan is for the intern to create a video of testimonials from people that have been system impacted and their experience with the school to prison pipeline. Once the intern creates a series of questions and hosts the interviews for the video, the video will be edited and presented on "The Milpa Show" as well as being posted on Milpa's podcast. The goal is to have the video posted on various platforms in hopes it reaches a wider audience.

### **Project Purpose**

Oftentimes, parents and other individuals don't realize how harmful school policies can actually be to children and youth. They are seen as a disciplinary measure meant to teach troubled youth that their actions are not right. All of this is due to the lack of information that is provided. The intentions behind this project are to bring awareness to the consequences of having zero tolerance policies in schools. The reason this needs to be addressed is because at-risk youth, especially those of color are being funneled into the school to prison pipeline. Many times there is no second thought given about the future consequences it might have on the individual that is being punished. For example, research states that "Rather than reducing the likelihood of disruption, however, school suspension in general appears to predict higher future rates of misbehavior and suspension among those students who are suspended." (Maxime, 2018). There is a need for more awareness on zero tolerance policies so that individuals can see how they are

doing more harm than the intended good they were meant to do. More awareness on the consequences of such policies also means that more people would get involved in advocating against them and demanding restorative measures in place of punishment.

### **Project Justification**

Having someone share their experiences with the school to prison pipeline and the negative effects they have suffered as victims of the justice system is crucial. Youth for RISE states “We also feel like having a network of individuals impacted by the school to prison pipeline, you’ve been impacted by the juvenile justice system, you are the best advocates to tell your story because the powerful story we feel plays a big part.” (Youth for RISE, 2017). I can see how this is true because no one can really share the truth on the subject unless they have gone through it. Sharing first hand experiences can help open the communities eyes on what the school to prison pipeline really is. Not only that but when people share their personal experiences you can sometimes see the pain certain experiences have caused them.

Creating a video that not only provides information on the school to prison pipeline and how it pushes young individuals of color into the system will be very helpful to the community. I believe that people need to have their stories heard so that more people can be compelling to the issues they face. We need to bring awareness to the fact that young people are being punished for small offenses that could be addressed in a different way. This project is created in hopes of encouraging others to advocate for alternatives to the school to prison pipeline and having more money spent on education and programs not prisons.

YO! Cali is an organization for young individuals that have been oppressed and marginalized. They aim to transform communities and help impacted individuals move up in life.

One of the programs they have created since the death of George Floyd is the Youth Task Force. This task force is composed of youth and comes together to work on a set of demands they would like to see happen in schools. The set of demands consist of police free schools, advocating for more mental health help and counseling for both students and teachers along with other demands. This is a very important step into police free schools because young individuals are coming together to have their voice be heard and working together with state assembly members among other important officials.

### **Project Implementation**

To begin with, the intern will ask some of the Milpa staff if they would be willing to share their experiences with the school to prison pipeline. Once the intern has gathered the group of people to be interviewed, the intern will then create a set of questions along with the help of her mentor. After this, the plan is to revise the set of questions with the interns mentors to make sure that they think they are appropriate or if they have any input. After all the logistics have been done, the intern will proceed to set up for the interviews and compose the video.

The intern and mentors have discussed the possibility of presenting the video on the Milpa show once it is developed. The video will be edited and presented following the Milpa show format and guidelines. To do so, The intern will edit the video alongside the Milpa shows editing staff member. After all is done, the plan is also to publish the video on youtube and share it on the organization's social media as well as publishing it as podcast audio.

### **Assessment Plan**

Measuring the effectiveness of bringing awareness to an issue can be challenging. The intern and mentors have been discussing that although surveys are boring and many people don't

want to complete them, this could be the best way to see if the video is serving its purpose. The plan initially was to create a survey and have it out when the video was presented, but the intern is not sure that will be very effective. After careful consideration, it was concluded that it would be best to gather the thoughts and input of the Milpa staff. The intern created a survey with questions that focused on measuring the effectiveness of the project and its impact according to Milpa staff. Overall, the goal was to receive good and constructive feedback to analyze if the video was reaching its intended purpose and if not, what would they as victims of the juvenile justice system, would like to see addressed in the video.

### **Expected Outcomes**

The expected outcomes for this project are many. To begin with, the intern expects this project to raise the much needed awareness on how susceptible youth of color are to being system impacted. It is essential to inform individuals on how easily people of color are dragged into the system and sometimes their life is defined solely on that fact. Also, another expected outcome is to give impacted people a voice. For many system impacted individuals, it feels like they have been deprived of having a voice because they have been negatively labeled. This project will give individuals the platform they need to share their experiences and have their voices heard. By sharing their experiences, the hope is that individuals will have a better idea on what the school-to-prison pipeline is doing and encourage them to take a stand, this would serve as a call to action.

### **Project Results**

The activities that were conducted in order to complete the project were similar to what the initial plan was but there were some slight changes. The initial plan was to create a set of

questions that asked the interviewees to share what they felt comfortable sharing about their background, family and upbringing. Other questions focused on their thoughts on the school-to-prison pipeline, how it affected them as youth, their families and continued to have some effect on them in future years. This part of the project remained the same, the interviews were held and recorded to later edit. What was different was the actual presentation of the video since the video had to fit a certain format. Also, the intern didn't host the show in person like it was planned in the beginning. Instead, the video was edited as a question and answer session and posted on youtube as well as being streamed on MILPAs podcast platform.

The expected outcomes for the school-to-prison pipeline project were to bring awareness and give individuals insight on the topic. The school-to-prison pipeline is such a controversial topic and not everyone understands what it's really doing to youth. During the time the project was being executed, the community was going through a decision-making phase on whether or not resource officers should be allowed back into schools. During this process, MILPA staff realized that a lot of the parents that were involved, were not sure on what the school-to-prison pipeline was or the possible effects of having SRO's back on school grounds could have on youth. This video could potentially help individuals understand the school-to-prison pipeline, especially hearing others testimonials on how they were affected first hand.

In the beginning it was hard to figure out how the project would be measured. The intern thought about a survey for viewers to fill out, but in the end it was decided that most people aren't willing to fill out surveys. After careful consideration, the intern narrowed it down to asking the Milpa staff for feedback. Although the survey for viewers wouldn't work out, the intern created a survey for the Milpa staff to share their thoughts on the video itself. On that

survey, the staff were able to state if the expected outcome was met and if they thought there could have been something to better the video and or taken out of it.

After conducting the survey, the intern received great feedback. Overall, the staff mentioned that the video served it's main purpose of informing individuals on the school-to-prison pipeline and its effects. When asked if they believed the video had a positive impact on it, one staff member mentioned "you hear personal stories that reflect data of expulsion and incarceration due to the school to prison pipeline. You get to hear the stories behind the numbers". Another staff member mentioned "the video documents the experiences of Chicano / Indigenous stories which are often not documented.". More often than not, all that is seen in regards to youth incarceration are the statistics and rates of people of color in prison. In the end, this video was able to capture first hand experience of system-impacted youth (of color) and it gave them the opportunity to show that they are so much more than what their record says.

Another collection method used by the intern was measuring the total number of views the video received. In the span of a month, the video has received a total of 67 views and one comment. Compared to the rest of the videos posted on the Milpa show's youtube profile, the number of views were average. Also, the comment that was left was a positive one. Overall, the video was being watched and that means that it is serving its purpose of getting the word out on the impact of the school-to-prison pipeline and how individuals are more than the record that follows them around.



### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

The school-to-prison pipeline is a topic that individuals might hear throughout their life, but if they aren't impacted by it, they might not know what it really means. After conducting this project and the research pertaining to it, the intern concluded that even though many are being affected by the school-to-prison pipeline, not much awareness is being done. To this day, individuals believe that school resource officers should be on school campuses to keep children and youth safe. For so long, that was the intended purpose behind SRO's but overtime, it has become the only way of addressing conflict and student misbehavior, leading to more and more students falling into the system.

As a result of this project, the intern has concluded that platforms should be given to those who are system impacted. This would be beneficial not only to those sharing their stories, but also to those that are listening to their stories. One recommendation the intern has for Milpa, is that they continue to share informational videos on the topic among their social media platforms. Social media is one of the main sources of communication and information gathering nowadays, therefore, it would be the best way to reach a wider audience. Another recommendation would be to host educational workshops to inform parents, especially those of color, on the importance of advocating against the school-to-prison pipeline and asking for better resources.

### **Personal Reflection**

The topic of the school-to-prison pipeline was something I didn't understand or even was really aware of before. Throughout the process of this project, I have learned much on the topic, but the most important thing I learned was that the school-to-prison pipeline needs to be talked

about more. I learned that many of us have a perspective on the topic because we have grown up with the idea that school personnel and authority figures are educated and therefore their decisions and actions for the most part are right. In reality, the school-to-prison pipeline has become contrary to what it was supposed to be initially. Rather than reducing and preventing violence in schools, it has become that which pushed students out of school and into the system. It has criminalized youth, sometimes even as children, for things that could be dealt with, without the intervention of police. I also learned that the effects of the school-to-prison pipeline follow the impacted individuals even as adults. Through the interviews I also understood the need for mental health awareness and programs. I understood that rather than penalizing and judging at-risk youth, they should be asked about what they're feeling and going through. Many times, there are reasons behind their actions and getting them the help they need should be prioritized.

Through the process of planning and implementation I realized that the project idea and structure had its strengths and limitations. The project had purpose and it's intention of bringing awareness and calling for advocacy was appealing, especially since it shared first hand experiences. It was a raw video composed of the stories of chicano/indigenous individuals and it allowed for the audience to see that there is so much more than what they have been labeled as. Although the idea and method of choice was interesting, the project possessed some challenges and limitations. With the pandemic, it was hard to conduct in person interviews, which I believe would have been more engaging and would have allowed the audience to feel more connected. Another challenge the project faced was time. There was a specific deadline that the Milpa show coordinator wanted to follow based on the time the project was due for the class and how long I

would have to gather feedback. I would have done a whole production video with a good background and good lighting but the pandemic made it hard for that to happen. With the time and opportunities given, the video was executed to the best of my ability, along with the help of the interviewees and editing help by Keylin.

The school-to-prison pipeline is part of a bigger problem, which is the continued rise of incarceration rates among people of color. From a young age, individuals of color are being pushed into the system based on the judgement and discrimination done by authorities. Individuals of color are known to receive harsher punishments over whites solely based on their skin color. The project "More Than A Record: The Impacts of The School-to-Prison Pipeline " addresses this issue in that it is bringing awareness to the issue. School policies have been put in place to favor incarceration over education and important resources that would help address the behavior that is causing the students to get into trouble. This project is a call to action to advocate for resources and the overall end of mass incarceration, especially that of youth.

Further research can be done to address the broader social problem of mass incarceration. Individuals like to see data and statistics to support what is being argued. Having clear evidence would help individuals understand the issues revolving around mass incarceration and why alternative measures should be discussed. It would be beneficial to create programs that would educate individuals on the topic, but also provide a safe space for those directly impacted to have their voices heard and guide them post-incarceration and into the possible opportunities they can have.

A strong suggestion I have for future capstone students would be to get involved in as much as they can. I was limited in regards to hands-on opportunities and experiences because of

the COVID-19 pandemic and other issues surrounding it. I would recommend for them to ask for what they need from the staff because at the end of the day, this is their internship and it would call for a better experience. Other suggestions are to be detailed and organized. For me, it was helpful to have a paper planner and write things down as well as having a google calendar that would send me notifications. Overall, the main thing I would suggest and wish for future students would be for hands on learning experiences that would possibly allow them to not only grow professionally but also on a personal level.

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## Appendix A

### Scope of Work

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Meeting with Airam and Rosaura	Discuss capstone project ideas	March 04,2021	Airam Coronado and Rosaura Mendoza
Meeting with Airam and Rosaura	Discuss what the community needs, what is of major impact and needs to be addressed	March 18, 2021	Airam Coronado and Rosaura Mendoza
Meeting with Airam and Rosaura	Finalize capstone idea, discuss how it will be presented and how the effectiveness will be measured	April-July 2021	Airam Coronado and Rosaura Mendoza
Research on the School-to-Prison pipeline	Conduct on going research on the school-to-prison pipeline, it's effects and consequences	May-December 2021	Airam Coronado
Create interview questions	Interview questions will be discussed and narrowed down to be specific and sensitive to the interviewees	August 27, 2021	Airam Coronado
Begin interviews	Conduct interviews on how individuals were and continue to be impacted by the school-to-prison pipeline	August 31-September 16, 2021	Airam Coronado
Review interviews	Review interviews to begin using clips to use for each question	September 7-16, 2021	Airam Coronado
Conocimiento with Keylin	Get to know each other meeting with Keylin, discuss project idea, expectations, editing format	September 10, 2021	Keylin Figueroa

Editing Meetings with Keylin	Edit the clips wanted for the video and start putting the video together	September 17-20, 2021	Keylin Figueroa
Send out video to participants	Send out edited video to participants to see if they have any feedback before it's posted	September 21, 2021	Keylin Figueroa
Review final video	Watch entire video for final approval and write up it's description	September 22, 2021	Keylin Figueroa
Post final video and send to entire Milpa staff	Post video on Milpa's youtube page, publish it as a podcast and send links to staff	September 23, 2021	Keylin Figueroa
Create survey for staff	Create survey for staff and send it out to receive their feedback on the video/measure out its effectiveness	October 26, 2021	Airam Coronado

### Appendix B

**Project Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7tVaKW6uuE>

**Staff Survey:**

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeANmduvgu4CdpovYU7fKAddOwkJVx6COY1BdIDScd4Zg9H9g/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeANmduvgu4CdpovYU7fKAddOwkJVx6COY1BdIDScd4Zg9H9g/viewform?usp=sf_link)