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Addressing Impacts of Incarceration in Marin, CA

Project Avary PeaceMaker Initiatives

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### **Abstract**

Project Avary, a nonprofit in Marin, piloted a new initiative, Peacemakers, to promote health equity and awareness of the impacts of incarceration. The need for a comprehensive program to bring awareness of the impacts of incarceration was clear. The Peacemaker Initiative will address the issue, by empowering Marin youth to educate their communities. The project seeks to improve the life outcomes of many youth in Marin County.

The focus of the paper is a summary of Project Avary's new initiative, the Peacemaker. The paper will highlight strategies and approaches used to breaking cycles of intergenerational incarceration. Furthermore, this report links the field of public health to the underserved population of children, youth and families impacted by incarceration. The Fieldwork Summary Report shows an overview of the public health significance, and the competencies addressed.

## Addressing Impacts of Incarceration in Marin, CA

### **Introduction**

Public Health Professionals evaluate the health of populations. Mass incarceration is an epidemic, which influences many public health outcomes. This paper defines an epidemic as the occurrence in a community or region of similar illness or risk. (Gordis, 2004) Public Health tools can be used to address the impacts of incarceration. Looking at mass incarceration as an epidemic allows the community to view incarceration in terms of cycles i.e., intergenerational cycles. It allows the community stakeholders; nonprofits and organizations better serve this population and create more comprehensive programming.

This paper will address mass incarceration as an epidemic and will provide a summary of the student's 300 hours of fieldwork experience at the nonprofit, Project Avary. The student addresses the impacts of incarceration thru piloting a program called the Peacemakers.

### **Background**

#### **Agency Information**

Evidence reported that children with parents in prison were more likely to join the cycle of intergenerational incarceration. (Bilchik, Seymour, & Kreisher, 2001, p.109) In response to the need of this population, the nonprofit Project Avary was developed to "break the intergenerational cycle of incarceration by building a community of support for children whose parents are imprisoned or otherwise involved with the criminal justice system." (Project Avary, 2014)

### **Project Avary Programs**

Project Avary provides a free summer camp in Mendocino County to address the needs of their children and teens. The camp curriculum includes traditional summer camp activities as well as emotional intelligence activities. The children and teens continue to participate with Project Avary by participating in their Adventure Day program. This program includes all participants from 8 to 13 years of age. Once a month the participants are provided with an enrichment outing that includes learning activities such as teamwork, conflict resolution, stress management and positive relationships. (Project Avary, 2014)

Project Avary provides a teen leadership program, to train teens to take on leadership roles at Project Avary. The curriculum used to develop the monthly activities is a youth development approach. This curriculum develops the children's capacity to deal with the trauma they have suffered. This curriculum also empowers the participants to help other children and teens and become change agents. (Project Avary, 2014)

Project Avary provides a family support program. Parent's participant in monthly caregiver groups in Marin. This allows the caregivers to discuss the challenges to parenting children with an incarcerated parent. Working with caregivers continues to strengthen the mission of breaking cycles of intergenerational incarceration. (Project Avary, 2014)

Project Avary's annual evaluation shows "that children with at least two year's involvement in Project Avary improve in: Communications, Leadership, Anger Management, Conflict Resolution, Comfort & Confidence with Communications, Positive Relations and Connection to Community, Goal Setting, and Leadership." (Project Avary Evaluation Surveys, 2012)

## Literature

The United States incarceration rate is more than five times higher than any other country in the world. Between 1995 and 2005, the number of incarceration women increased by 57% compared to the 34% of men. (Harrison & Beck, 2006) Incarceration impacts not only the inmates but also families and communities. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1.5 children of the United States are impacted by incarceration. (Harrison & Beck, 2006) Many researchers are interest in incarceration of children because of the number of children affected. Professor Duckers, from Columbia University frames mass incarceration as an epidemic. (Columbia University, 2014)

The literature reveals a range of health problems correlation with impacts of incarceration. Studies have shown the short and long term impacts of incarceration on children. Researchers have drawn the conclusion that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be incarcerated during their lifetime (Johnston, 1995). These children are exposed to other risk factors such as violence, alcohol, and substance abuse. (Phillips, Erkanli, Keeler, Costello & Angold, 2006). All these confounding variables contribute to negative health and life outcomes for children.

### Health Effects of Incarceration

When a child or youth losses a parent to incarceration, this loss can be described as being traumatic. The literature shows the short-term health effects from losing a parent to prison include stigmatization, anxiety, aggressive behavior and depression. (Farrington, 2002)

The literature shows the long-term impacts include mistrust of authority, inability to cope with stress, and criminal activity. (Farrington, 2002) Parent's incarceration has a long lasting emotional, social and developmental impact on the child and teens. These short and long term

impacts need to be address in order for these youth not to become part of the cycle of intergenerational incarceration. (Miller, 2006)

### **PeaceMaker Initiative**

#### **Purpose**

Project Avary staff believed there was a need to better serve their teens that weren't able to follow the traditional leadership program. Avary teens at the age of thirteen, who were not interested in becoming youth worker, would drop out of Avary. Project Avary developed a new initiative that would better serve all the Avary teens. Project Avary decided to look at the issue thru a public health lens. In order to do this, they hired on a Master in Public Health graduate student, Jessica (a former graduate of the program), to help design and pilot a new program in Marin County.

The Peacemaker's Project aims to help guide Marin youth on a path of inner healing and mastery of the trauma of parental incarceration and bring awareness and education of the intergenerational incarceration epidemic. Piloting a new program in Marin, Project Avary developed an asset map of the resource and stakeholder's of the community.

#### **Target Population**

The reports state, "every year, ten million children have experienced having a parent incarcerated at some point in their lives." (Simmons, 2000) Project Avary believes communities need to invest in their youth in-order to be healthier and thriving. Project Avary teens have the power to be heard among their peers and among power players in the community of Marin County. Mass incarceration impacts youth and contributes to their life outcomes. (Farrington, 2002) Since these youth are more likely to join the cycle of intergenerational incarceration,

Avary teens and other teens in the community needed a more comprehensive program to focus on not following their parent's footsteps.

### **Project Methodology**

Project Avary works with youth when the effects of the trauma associated with impacts of incarceration are fresh and negative behaviors have just begun to develop. The focus on early intervention in youth's life offers advantages. Their capacity to trust others has been compromised, which increases the likelihood of teenagers not to confide in anyone about the abuse. (Project Avary, 2012)

Project Avary employs an assets based approach to working with this highly at-risk youth population. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) emphasizes community involvement in all aspect of the program. The assets themselves are the children and youth of Project Avary. (Burns et al., 2012) Children entering Project Avary have suffered multiple traumas, insight into their own situation acquired through group discussions. Project Avary empowers these children to help others, and see themselves as change-makers rather than victims. (Project Avary, 2012)

### **Implementation of the Initiative**

The key to success for this project is working with youth who are currently feeling the impacts of incarceration. The goal is to empower youth to master their story of the impacts of incarceration, then educate and bring awareness to other teens and community members. The project will provide a tool to strengthen the mission of Project Avary. Project Avary will use a logic model that will define short and long-term outcomes for the Peacemaker initiative.

Project Avary outreached to current Avary teens in Marin County. Avary teens helped



create an outreach plan for recruiting more teens in Marin County who are impacted by mass incarceration. Peacemaker target participants, 12 teens, ages 13-17yr old. This group of teens will meet once a week from October to May 2015. Each participant will receive a stipend for his or her participation in the group.

### **Outreach Plan Included October to December 2014**

- Develop flyer for outreach
- Send flyer to community organizations, schools, individual contacts
- Interview prospect teens

### **Peacemaker curriculum is broken into five modules:**

1. Introduction the Impacts of Incarceration.
2. Conducting a community needs assessment
3. Analyzing needs assessment
4. Develop community action/campaign plan based on analyses of needs assessment
5. Implement community action/campaign plan

With each module, goals and objectives were established. Then activities were created to achieve each learning objectives.

### **Goals / Objectives for Peacemaker Initiative:**

**Goal:** Awareness of the Impacts of Incarceration

#### **Objective**

- Develop awareness around the impacts of parental incarceration

#### **Activities:**

- a. Have tools for self reflection: journaling,
- b. Be able to honor your personal gifts and strengths
- c. Understand personal triggers

**Goal:** Develop strategies for transforming and healing trauma.

**Objective**

- Introduction of strategies to improve youth's inner peace and strength thru mindfulness activities.
- Organize one outdoor retreat for youth.

**Activities:**

- a. Yoga
- b. Outdoor activities: Hikes, Sports
- c. Writing poetry/ Art
- d. Self-care

**Goal:** Take action. Embark on a community service project.

**Objective**

- Introduction to community organizing.
- Brainstorm issues in our communities to address i.e. stigma around prisons, developing/implementing an arrest protocol when children/youth are present, visiting regulations, etc.
- Developing a needs assessment surrounding issue.
- Carry out the needs assessment
- Begin to analyze data
- Finish data analysis
- Create action plan based on data
- Implement community action/campaign plan
- Continue implementation

**Activities:**

- a. Learn how to run a meeting
- b. Organize community
- c. Conduct community research
- d. Create and manage a budget
- e. Public speaking

**Evaluations**

The short-term impacts of the project will be measure by a survey. The youth take a survey when they enter the program, and when they enter and exit the program. The survey tool measures youth development assets: communication, conflict resolution, positive self-image, healthy relationships, substance abuse, poverty, education, and socially.

Lastly, the long-term impact will be measure by the overall increase in awareness of the impacts of incarceration and the cycle of intergenerational incarceration in Marin County. This program will start each fall and continue until the following spring, to improve the overall awareness of the impacts of incarceration of children, youth, and families in Marin community.

**Public Health Significance**

Overall, this project is addressing a new public health area. This project incorporates the community members, those affected by the impacts of incarceration in all the process of the project: planning, implementing and evaluation. This is key in public health to include the community members in all aspects of the project.

Additionally, the Peacemaker initiative can serve as the model for other organizations to use to serve the populations of teen impacted by incarceration. Public health professionals work in cross-sector projects and the PeaceMaker initiative helps connect the population being served to the community. This project address health disparities by understanding the population's social and political factors that contribute to their health.

### **Competencies Addressed**

The main focus of the fieldwork was on the core knowledge areas and crosscutting values obtained related to program planning, evaluation, and epidemiology. The fieldwork experience focused on designing an outreach plan in Marin County. This stage needed more time than expected because Project Avary needed to develop more relationships at the high schools, local nonprofits, and community organizations.

The second part of the fieldwork experience focused on goal 1, increasing awareness of the impacts of Incarceration. As the project took off, each week activities were created to achieve the objectives for the first two goals. The last goal, take action and embark on a community service project will take place in the spring. The remainder of the fieldwork is developing more solid learning objectives for the third goal.

The Peacemaker initiative is currently unfolding and learning how to engaged in Marin County. The spring semester the Peacemaker youth will focus on how to take action, and how to develop a research question. Once the issue is cut, the youth will participate in collecting the data. Once the data is collected, they will learn how to analyze the data collected. The peacemaker will learn how to disseminate the results and make public recommendations.

As the Peacemaker project unfolded, the competences achieved included health education, community needs, develop public health strategies, and apply theoretical constructs of social change. These activities allowed the youth to demonstrate leadership abilities. Lastly, it allowed applying moral and ethical public health practice.

**Conclusion:**

Youth are the key assets to bring awareness about the impacts of incarceration. By increasing awareness, this will increase the participation for Project Avary youth as well as the Marin county youth. More awareness of this Public Health issue will improve youth short-term and long-term life outcomes. Project Avary is one of the few organizations that address the impacts of incarceration on children, youth and families. Implementing the Peacemaker project, to train the youth to bring awareness around this issue, will improve life outcomes for the overall community. Now Marin community members can become more involved in bringing awareness about the new epidemic of mass incarceration.

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