

Utilizing Theatre to Break the Cycle:
*The Use of Theatre as a Means for the Rehabilitation
of Incarcerated Youth*

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Submitted to the School of the Arts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in Arts Management
Purchase College
State University of New York
May 2021

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*A special thanks to Rehabilitation Through the Arts for allowing me to experience the administrative side of prison arts programs through an internship opportunity;
To Josie Whittlesey for your support of incarcerated youth and for a piece of your wisdom;
To Charles Moore for your willingness to share your story and for inspiring those around you;
And to Ricki Gold for your insight on the process and for your dedication to the cause.*

INTRODUCTION

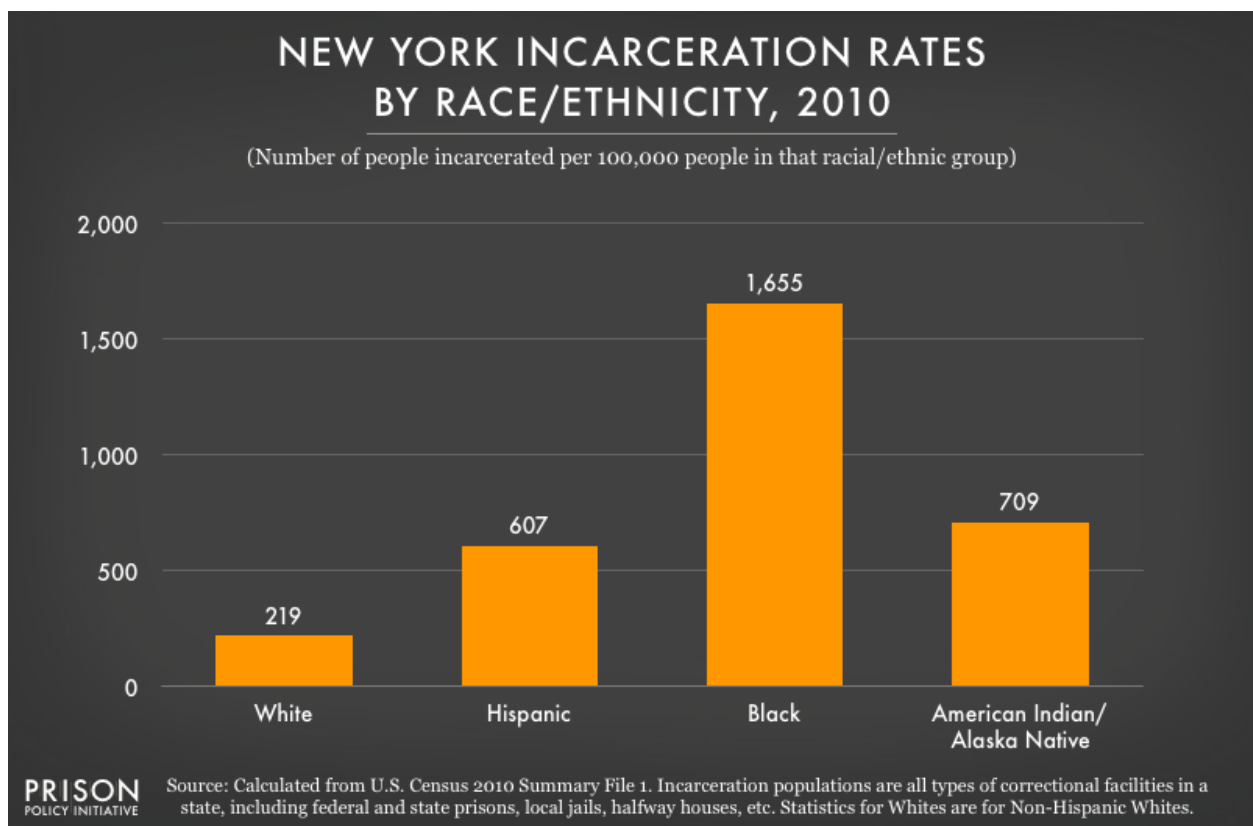
The saying, “children are the future”, is stated repeatedly and yet it seems as though it becomes circumstantial in the eyes of some employers, landlords, and law enforcement. The incarceration of youth in New York state alone is at an alarming rate but theatre arts offers the motivation to beat the statistics and overcome recidivism. It’s time to rehabilitate the broken lives of these youth who are working hard to reconcile for their wrongs and make something of themselves. Organizations like *Drama Club NYC* strive to achieve this through mentorship and improvisation programs in juvenile detention centers. Fixing the detention system is the first step, but improving the community environments around them at home is the more important step. This paper seeks to explore the effect theatre has on the aftermath of incarcerated youth and their communities by examining the work of various prison theatre arts programs around the country, much like *Drama Club NYC* and those using a similar structure to that of *Rehabilitation Through the Arts* (RTA), an organization that “uses the transformative power of the arts to help people in prison develop skills to unlock their potential and succeed in the larger community” (“MISSION”). With the skills instilled by said programs, I believe troubled youth can be a part of a stronger tomorrow.

PROBLEMS AND DATA

STRUGGLING COMMUNITIES

Our strongest influences as young adults are those in our own backyards: our communities. “Approximately four million children in the United States grow up [around] crime,

poverty, unemployment, and violence” (Coming Up Taller). The desire to feel safe and protected in our environment is crucial but what happens when some of the men and women who vow to protect, fail to do so or even conduct the violence themselves? Abuse of power is a reality the United States has seen too much of over the years and it continues to draw a divide in society due to racial profiling and stereotyping. Racial profiling is what is known as “discriminatory practice by law enforcement officials of targeting individuals for suspicion of crime based on the individual's race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin” (Racial Profiling: Definition). In fact, “New York State’s Division of Criminal Justice Services found that 93% of juvenile detention admissions in New York City in 2014 were Black or Hispanic (Petersen and Reininga). The image below reveals similar national statistics from the year 2010:

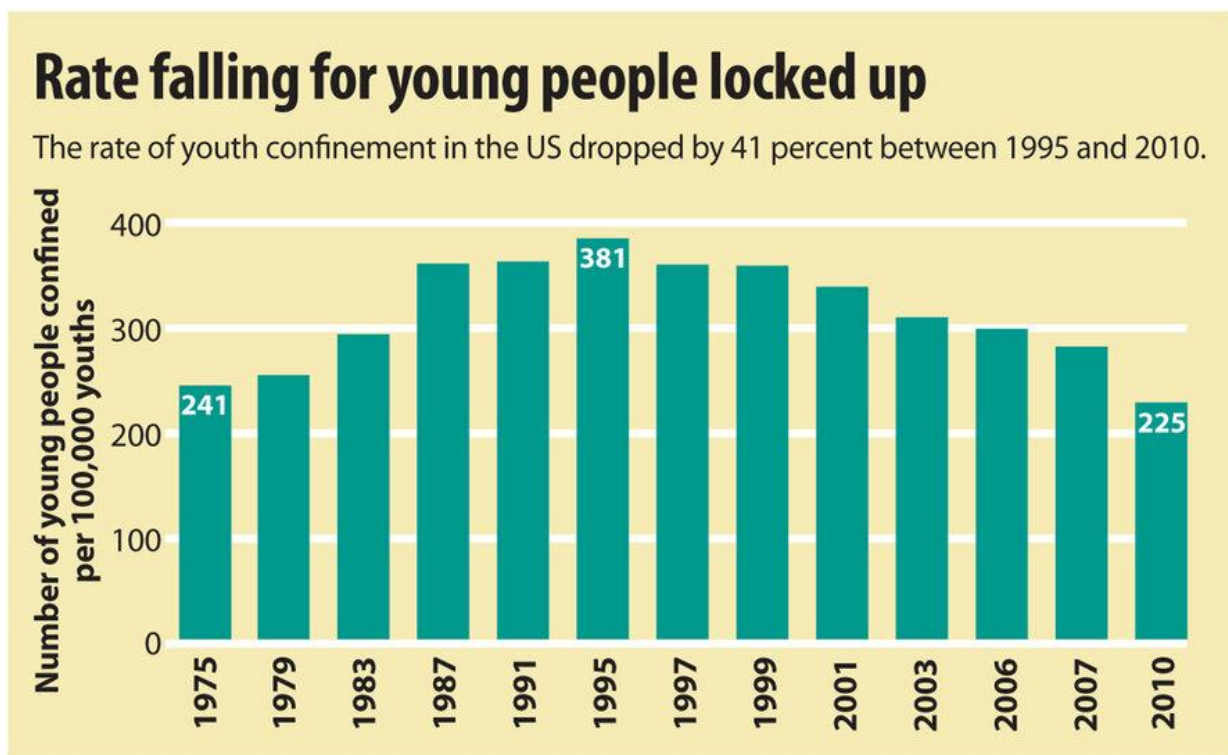


Though some of these young people do put themselves in illegal situations, others are falsely accused because of their skin color or for simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Being surrounded by violence, chaos, and fear can be debilitating especially to the growth of these youth. Lack of proper school funding and opportunity, unemployment, and social marginalization are commonly blamed for youth involvement in gangs, whose operations land them in police custody (Dunworth, Hayeslip, Lyons, and Denver, 6).

YOUTH INCARCERATION

Statistics show that “across the U.S., there are nearly half a million people awaiting trial, 2.3 million people incarcerated, and another 4.5 million on parole or probation, according to the Prison Policy Initiative” (Smith). Despite the decrease in **youth** imprisonment in the U.S. [down 41% between 1995-2010 based on the image below],



SOURCE: Annie E. Casey Foundation

RICH CLABAUGH/STAFF

on any given day in New York state in 2013, there were still more than 54,000 offenders incarcerated under the age of 21 (Petersen and Reininga). Some may argue “commit the crime,

do the time” but growing up in a broken home could easily mean that they don’t yet know right from wrong or legal from illegal. After years of being in the custody of drug-addicted parents or family members, experiencing/witnessing years of abuse and assault, how can a child be expected to know any different than their own terrifying reality? And that’s just what they are: children, because in New York state you can be arrested at seven years old and tried as an adult at 16 (Petersen and Reininga). With scientific studies showing that the brain doesn’t fully develop until the age of 25, how can a seven year old know that a single action of theirs can land them behind bars for years? Is punishment really the best option for creating safer communities or will it simply continue the cycle of poverty, suffering, and violence? I believe otherwise and have the data to support it. Some juvenile detention centers in the U.S. **are** making an effort to offer youth less cruel treatment within facilities, much like a Californian facility offering a de-escalation room where children can utilize stress-relieving equipment instead of resorting to violence (Udesky); but is that enough?

PRISON REFORM

The desire for justice is one the country is believed to share as a whole. How the United States goes about obtaining that justice has been an argument worth having for years. The USA national recidivism is averaging 60-70% (Nicklin, 4). Recidivism, as defined by the US Department of Justice, is a person’s relapse into criminal behavior. Many people believe that incarceration should be utilized for punishment and not rehabilitation, while others strongly support the argument for more rehabilitation methods in order to create better citizens out of the struggling persons of our criminal justice system. Art programs, which have been implemented in prisons and juvenile detention facilities for years, have proven to have the potential to

decrease criminogenic risks (Miner-Romanoff, 61). According to research presented by Dr. Edward J. Latessa with the School of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati, one of the most effective methods of reducing recidivism involves the concept of social learning: the process in which individuals learn/gain behavioral skills, proper attitude, and knowledge from the people around them. Theatre being such a collaborative effort encourages this type of environment with participants. The way these programs are introduced and run within the facilities make a huge difference between those programs which will positively impact the participants and those which simply distract them for a while. My solution and its recommendations have the ability to make the changes that will impact, not only the individuals who will participate in these programs, but also the communities that some will reenter into.

SOLUTION

THEATRE AS A MEANS FOR REHABILITATION

Utilizing the art of theatre has already shown tremendous results as programs throughout the country work within prisons to rehabilitate the minds of youth and even older incarcerated people who wish to partake. Allowing for a dedicated space where these participants can express themselves in a safe way encourages a positive change in behavior and the opportunity to learn important skills. As stated by Ricki Gold, Deputy Director of *Rehabilitation Through the Arts* (RTA), “you can’t always claim causation but can claim correlation” and that is why I am presenting this information as an argument to support the funding of all prison theatre arts programs (in New York state) and hope to persuade you with data showing an increase in job readiness, academic performance, and community engagement.

JOB READINESS

Participants who take part in the programs during their sentences have been believed to gain crucial life skills, but putting those into action in the real world can be a lot more intimidating. When these young adults are released on probation at the age of 18, a common requirement is that they hold a steady job to prove they can be productive members of society. The struggle to obtain said jobs is difficult because of the common misconceptions and judgment that comes along with having a criminal record. My research, nonetheless, has shown that participants gain the skills of negotiation, compromise, and conflict resolution which can directly affect their work performance within companies willing to hire them after their release (Mohler, 98). The story of Jecoina Vinson is one that these adolescents striving for a better life may wish to model after. He was incarcerated at 18 and, after years of imprisonment, served as a facilitator and mentor for a theatre program that had begun in secret at the Woodbourne Correctional Facility. A few months after his release, Vinson met Josie Whittlesey and became a board member of *Drama Club NYC*, an organization providing theatre training and mentoring to incarcerated New York City youth (Smith). By using their experience and the skills they gain through theatre, these youth have a chance at a successful career that supports change.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

For young adolescents who are released and not yet expected to obtain a job, their academic performance has seen incredible improvement thanks to the skills they learn from their time with these theatre programs. One program in particular, provided by *Unusual Suspects Theatre Company* of Los Angeles, shared that 71% of participants felt an increased commitment to school and 64% saw an increase in test scores and grades (Mohler, 91). In education,

assignments can be grueling and uninteresting but the feelings of satisfaction and pride that come with completion are feelings that prison theatre programs introduce to these youth when participating in shows. Playing to the quote “practice makes perfect”, incarcerated actors who continuously return to perform in multiple shows and read plenty of scripts “develop verbal, reading, and listening skills that lead to greater academic proficiency” (Wilcox). Other sources support this theory as well, stating that participants also benefit from understanding the value of hard work and a sense of empowerment and purpose which may be effective in learning outcomes (Miner-Romanoff, 62). Having a sense of purpose is crucial for all growing minds but especially those incarcerated who may lack a constant reminder that putting in the effort makes the reward much more special and motivating.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The third measure of impact I would like to touch on is how a boost of confidence and willingness to do better affects these adolescents’ community engagement. The newfound understanding of the value of teamwork collaboration for participants allows them to feel more confident in sharing their ideas and compromising, which benefits them when applying to jobs after release: a sign of character development to their fellow neighbors. The youth also exercise the concepts of equality and respect in building relationships within the program (Mohler, 91), concepts that may directly relay into their attempts to reconcile communal bonds in their hometowns. Overall, the increases in productivity, accomplishment, and expression lead to stronger social bonds and a sense of community restoration, showcasing that they are “more than a representation of their crimes” (Miner-Romanoff, 62). “These approaches work to foster a better reintegration of juvenile offenders into mainstream society” (Uggen and Wakefield 2005).

For those incarcerated youth who later find themselves as incarcerated adults, there are multiple advanced prison arts programs that are creating special packages to help with a more successful reentry than after their first release. An example of one of these said packages is later described in an interview with *Rehabilitation Through the Arts*' Deputy Director, Ricki Gold.

RECOMMENDATIONS

PRISON-ALTERNATIVE THEATRE PROGRAMS

“Statistically, community-based sentences are more effective in reducing reoffending” (Nicklin, 4). The model program I chose to research in support of this recommendation is a court-mandated Shakespeare prison alternative program which allows juveniles to live in their own communities while educating them on how to work on behavior modification (Nicklin, 2-3). Data is collected through journal entries over the course of 12 sessions that follow an agenda that includes check-in, activities, and reinforcement. Activities focus on commitment, achievement, self-confidence, personal expression, and voice. Small groups are also implemented where participants embrace individual differences and yet work collectively to support one another in their efforts to transcribe the old English language of Shakespeare (Nicklin, 9). The end goal is not to persuade everyone to love Shakespeare but instead to allow participants to complete the program with improvements in confidence, respect, and the ability to understand the impact of their actions (Nicklin, 14).

PRISON THEATRE PROGRAMS WITHIN PRISONS

Drama Club NYC is a nonprofit arts organization whose mission is to provide theatre and

mentorship to incarcerated or court-involved youth in New York City. The curriculum uses improvisation theatre to help build better judgment skills by allowing the participants to make positive choices and take healthy risks in order to keep the story going. Their mission is “to provide theater training and positive mentor relationships to New York City youth throughout each step of their journey through the criminal justice system: detention, placement and aftercare” (“ABOUT”). This program is one that enters multiple detention facilities and offers their services within the physical boundaries of the facilities. Participants meet with staff twice a week for an hour and a half each time and work on improvisational performances which they put on weekly for their families and prison staff (Petersen and Reininga). Their structure is similar to the program described in the previous paragraph: they open with introductions to check in with new-comers, exercise different activities and games, rehearse, and end the sessions with another check-in to see how the participants are feeling. In an interview, founder of *Drama Club NYC*, Josie Whittlesey confessed that the most rewarding part is being a constant figure in these young adults' lives after many of them experience repetitive abandonment. Similar programs to *Drama Club NYC* like those offered by *Rehabilitation Through the Arts* are available in adult prisons for those who didn't have access to the arts as a preventative method and, therefore, experienced recidivism.

PRISON THEATRE PROGRAMS **OUTSIDE** OF PRISONS

My last recommendation in regards to theatre as a means for rehabilitation is allowing the incarcerated to experience theatre in a more positive environment. In a 2015 article written by Carol Jordan, Western Kentucky University's 10-week, student-led juvenile theatre program is brought to light. The program partners with the university's sociology department and local

detention centers in order to bring incarcerated participants to the campus to work on improvisation, character work and staging, and playwriting. The qualitative data from this program is collected through weekly journal entries written by 14 of the 21 participants in 2013 - 2014. Kriss shares what she learned: “Interacting with people is my fear and I’m learning some stuff here to help me with that” (Jordan) and Angela elaborates on her boost of confidence by stating: “The acting we have to do is helping me not be scared talking in front of other people” (Jordan). After their final performance, parents and audience members were asked about their opinions on the program and provided plenty of positive feedback. Many stated that they would recommend this theatre program because it provides “positive reinforcement” and forces people to become “more mature” and “do positive things” with their time (Jordan). An additional benefit of outside-of-prison theatre programs is spending time on a real college campus, removing them from negative environments and motivating them to work towards a college education.

INTERNSHIP FIELDWORK

It is important, not only to offer the facts and statistics behind my research, but also my personal take on the issue and solution. The reason I chose to do this project is because, as an arts manager and advocate, my passion has always been in finding new ways that the arts positively affect people in order to build the argument that they should be properly funded. Theatre as a means for rehabilitation is one of the many ways that the arts can do more than just entertain. I’ve heard of music therapy for physical healing and restoration and I genuinely believe theatre can do the same for incarcerated youth and their communities. Studying new,

creative ways to improve society is important because an on-going cycle of punishment is damaging to society as a whole and not just an individual. Though my project focuses on incarcerated youth in particular, when I stumbled upon a chance to intern at *Rehabilitation Through the Arts* (RTA), I seized the opportunity.

Rehabilitation Through the Arts is the lead program of Prison Communities International, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Their mission is essentially to bring the arts inside the walls of maximum-security prisons and showcase the humanity behind bars. As the arts management intern, it has been my responsibility to assist with program research, donor relations, and marketing projects. Throughout the course of the semester, I provided information about potential donors, researched opportunities for more outreach via documentary publication, transcribed materials for promotional use, and have handwritten “thank you” cards for new and existing donors.

My time at RTA allowed me to fully grasp the harsh reality of incarceration and its effects on people. During the pandemic especially, based on personal accounts, health and safety protocols are not strictly enforced within the facilities, leaving inmates fearful and potentially exposed to COVID-19. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, one of my jobs was transcribing emails sent by participants utilizing JPAY (a corrections-related service provider) where I read the concerns of several incarcerated people regarding the loved ones they can’t see because visits are restricted, they themselves who got sick with the virus, and their desire to be back in the in-person RTA program for its sense of community and fun. Along with emails plagued with terror and desperation, there were also incredible pieces of work in the form of poems submitted by participants. Reading their words and feeling the emotion packed behind each phrase was powerful and reassured me that I am representing and supporting a strong group of people with

this research.

Rehabilitation Through the Arts, at this current time, is only offered in adult prisons so their programs don't reach incarcerated youth; however, I believe implementing similar programs in juvenile detention centers will lead to less youth being rearrested and set to the adult prisons. Josie Whittlesey, after working with RTA for a couple of years, decided to do just that and created the amazing *Drama Club NYC* so that incarcerated youth would be offered theatre, in specific, as a way to escape their current reality and become tomorrow's strong, independent leaders and citizens. I had an opportunity to interview Whittlesey along with two members of the RTA staff; the following are transcripts of our conversations.

INTERVIEWS

JOSIE WHITTLESEY - FOUNDER OF *DRAMA CLUB NYC*

How would you describe the work you do in your own words?

"We provide an opportunity to join a drama club that is purely about drama; it's not asking young people to talk about their trauma or their lives, it's really just trying to bring the experience that many high schoolers have to these darker places. We think it's important to have a place where they can be drama geeks and laugh and make jokes."

When did you first realize that you wanted to work with incarcerated youth; can you share that memory?

"I started teaching at NYU undergrad and at a high school program in the summer to pay the rent and students would return as blossoming adults from the skills they learned so I started thinking of the people who didn't have access to that. Then I read an article about a 15 year old who was killed by an officer in a placement center and what really struck me about that article was how there was really nothing for them to do. That's where I got the idea and I wanted to volunteer for someone doing this work and then I found RTA where I did an intensive at Sing Sing Correctional Facility for two years. When I told the men at Sing Sing about the idea (to create Drama Club NYC), they were

like 'oh my God, you have to do that' because they wish they would've had that since they went through the system as kids."

What were the first steps in creating *Drama Club NYC*?

"I always joke that I'm a fire/aim type of person. It's actually really difficult information to find because the youth in custody are a protected population. I couldn't find the name of the facilities so I did a lot of digging around. It was sort of frustrating because I kept finding programs like this but in other states and I was like 'why isn't there one in New York, this is crazy; theatre capital of North America'. I finally found someone talking online and she was in charge of programming for kids in detention, so I paused the video, wrote down her name, Googled it, and found her phone number and called her. We met and she drove me to this detention center; it was intense. I did a whole summer workshop there and it was a success. I think the people who get involved with the youth facilities get into it because they want to help but then there's chronic compassion fatigue."

Does it ever get overwhelming for you?

"It does, yeah. To be honest, working in the women's jail was very, very difficult and burnt me out and I started having a lot of health issues so I stopped teaching, personally. It actually took me three years to feel ready to go back inside."

Do you prefer the administrative side or the on-deck teaching side?

"The teaching side is more joyful but it's very hard. You build connections but, anyone under 18, you're not allowed to contact after they leave the facilities. So we have no idea what this work does and I also think the state doesn't track recidivism for anyone under 18."

What about the mentorship aspect? Do people come back and share their success stories?

"For sure. We have an apprentice program and it's a way for us to be in touch. One major success story right now is about a young woman who was an adolescent on Rikers Island when I first met her and now she's 22 and about to have twins and she works in a teaching artist capacity with us."

What are the specific challenges of continuing this work during the pandemic?

"We haven't been able to continue the work behind bars because they (participants) aren't allowed to have internet access and my teaching artists don't feel comfortable"

going in because participants aren't wearing masks and it's a chaotic environment. Right now, we're in the process of creating a video and sending that in with a worksheet and participants choose the next scene in order to create a movie. That (project) took a year to get going. They're (facilities) begging us to come back because there's an increase in violence since there hasn't been legal visits, school, or programs in a year."

Is there state legislator / governor support for your program? What needs to happen in order to gain more support?

"There is city support but I don't know if there's state support. City support comes through a contract called SONYC which DiBlasio extended to include detention centers. I think there's been money through the ACS (Administration for Children's Services) who run the detention centers but we haven't taken money from them. We like being under the radar so we aren't being told how to run our classrooms under contracts. I do think there could be a lot more support and oversight, though. I feel strongly about having long-term existing programs because the woman I mentioned earlier came to trust us because we were there when she was 16 and when she got rearrested, we were still there. More personal testimony would also be powerful (in gaining more support)."

What are your hopes for the future (next five years) of *Drama Club NYC*?

"We are very interested in trying to move outside of the city limits and move into facilities upstate. I think we'll run into the mistrust and chronic fatigue that we usually do, we just have to be persistent plus we rarely ask for money. We did a program where we were embedded in an ELS class and helped teach 'The Tempest' and it was super successful and students received school credit. The principal was ecstatic and went to ACS and said there was a reduction of violence in their housing with an added mental health component but we just couldn't get it off the ground. We tried to pitch it during the pandemic by using Microsoft Office but people still said 'no'. Staff are also paid very poorly and live with these kids everyday so there needs to be support for those adults."

Throughout my interview process with Josie Whittlesey, I fully came to realize just how much determination, passion, and drive these organizations' members have. And upsettingly enough, I also realize how little support they receive for all of their hard work attempting to transform the lives of these youth in order to help them re-enter into a society that may try to shut them out. As mentioned by Whittlesey, people who work in live-in facilities/centers with

these incarcerated youth are often left with ‘chronic compassion fatigue’. Once further explained, I understood that ‘chronic compassion fatigue’ is when people who care so deeply for a cause, work tirelessly to achieve the best possible outcome for those they’re helping, however find themselves struggling to keep going after a long period of time because the work is so grueling and mentally-weighing. These amazing people deserve more compensation for their endless efforts to improve society by catering to the character development and growth of these incarcerated youth.

CHARLES MOORE - RTA ALUMNUS & RTA DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

What would you say are the key skills you learned going through the program, yourself?

“My communication and leadership skills started developing during my incarceration because there’s a steering committee that kind of leads the program on the inside and that’s actually where Katherine (RTA founder) noticed my skills. She said, and I’ll never forget, in 2006 after she had seen me in action for two years, she said ‘wow you are very good at what you do in terms of being on time and are very focused on details and I can see RTA offering you a job when you get released’ and I didn’t take that very seriously because I still had 8-10 years left of my incarceration but when I made the parole board, I asked her about it and she said ‘absolutely’.”

What was your experience like right after release?

“I had an internship with Exodus Transitional Community in New York City because the founder told Katherine ‘it’s too soon to offer him so much responsibility (at RTA) so let me offer him an internship so that he can get used to the ethics of working again’ and I think that was one of the most beneficial opportunities that I had. I did the internship for almost a year which definitely helped to mature me and gave me the guidance of integrating into free society.”

How would you describe the work you do now in your own words?

“I think my job is very rewarding and I think that I really bring a unique perspective because there’s a lot of things I brought to light as a result of working in the office as opposed to just being a resident on the inside. One of the first things I was very troubled

by was the language they were using in the office because they would refer to participants as 'inmates' and 'prisoners' because that was the language that they were used to using outside of the program but, as the first alumni to work for the organization, I said 'listen, we have to stop using those words because if we really believe in the humanity of the incarcerated, how can you sit here and refer to them as 'inmates' and 'prisoners'? Why can't we just call them 'participants' or 'members'? 'So language, being inclusive, and being seen as a human are some things both I and the organization are constantly conscious of. People tend to forget that these are human beings who made bad decisions and mistakes but all-in-all they're still human beings. You want people to spend their time incarcerated to become better people when they come out so they can be tax-paying citizens.'"

When we first met, you mentioned wanting to include youth into RTA programs; why do you think it's important to do so and do you see it in RTA's near future?

"I want to say 'yes' but Katherine, the founder and executive director, is kind of resistant to it only because working with the youth requires additional training for the staff and when Katherine retires maybe we'll start working with youth, then. She gives her blessing after her recession but, under her regime, having to tackle that is a whole other ball game. I hope we do though because I feel that if we can be more so preventative, our job would be much more successful."

I learned a lot from my time speaking with Charles Moore. It was an honor to have the opportunity to meet (virtually) with someone who survived the system and has benefited from the successful results of the programs that I have been researching throughout this paper. Just as my research supports, Moore's communication and leadership skills improved greatly during his time with a prison arts program which ultimately, along with his incredible drive and willingness to work, landed him a job after release. I also took a personal note away from our interview and edited my paper to reflect straying away from using the harsh terms 'inmates' and 'prisoners' and inturn utilizing the terms 'incarcerated' or 'participants', in order to show my support of the humanity behind bars.

RICKI GOLD - RTA DEPUTY DIRECTOR

How would you describe the work you do in your own words?

“My job has changed a lot over the years. Then, I was writing every marketing piece, working with graphic designers, and sending emails. Now, a big chunk of my job is fundraising, meaning grant and report writing, but also on special projects like the Reentry Toolkit. This is for the general prison population within two to three years of release and this is a project that we’ve been thinking of for eight years but now we are actually creating something that will help prepare people while they’re still inside, for reentry. We talk about the emotional and social challenges of coming home to teen-aged kids or a partner who is expecting things of you. It involves 15-minute films that are meant to trigger conversations about how to reconcile relationships. The pandemic has actually helped to move up the timeline on the Reentry Toolkit.”

What would you say is the most difficult part of funding for this organization?

“The most difficult thing is finding an organization (that is offering grants) where you fit nicely into their guidelines. At first, people were really not thinking about criminal justice 14 years ago, but it’s become more mainstream now so a lot of bigger foundations have refocused their guidelines but they’re very specific in what they’re looking for. There’s also a big part of our operation that I don’t have anything to do with but individual donors are tracked so we know who is giving for what purpose because every organization needs to understand what motivates people and to track so that you can escalate gifts. It’s a very thin border-line between asking and being pushy but you have to finesse that. There’s a special type of person involved in soliciting individual donations and I’m honestly not that person, I can do it in writing but there are fearless people who can say ‘how about that \$50,000?’.”

There is an argument that prison should be for punishment rather than rehabilitation. In your own experience, is there more push back because you work with incarcerated people and why do you think that is?

“There’s a lot of ignorance on the part of the public and why shouldn’t there be, especially with all of the technical violations? Technical violations when you’re on parole can be missing curfew or missing an appointment and any of these minor things that can happen in life can land you back in jail. Even if you’re doing everything else in your life right: you’re working and have established yourself and you’re doing well, if any of those things happen, you face the threat of being thrown back in jail. This contributes to a huge

amount of recidivism in New York state which is at 40% but if you took away all of those technical violations, it would not be as dramatic.”

What are your hopes for the future (next five years) for RTA?

“In addition to the Reentry Toolkit project being released, I think we are at somewhat of a crossroads right now with trying to expand which is a little bit controversial because you don’t want to lose track of your mission. As a service organization, it takes a lot of resources and time to really help people with what has probably been a lifetime of crap. Everybody wants to see money get put where you see the quickest results but you can’t have them come out good citizens in a year so we have talked about expanding but it would not be the same.”

There were two things in specific that stood out to me after my interview with Ricki Gold: the issue of technical violations and RTA’s Reentry Toolkit project. Punishment for technical violations results in a decent percentage of national recidivism rates in the United States. People being rearrested for something as minor as being late to a parole appointment seems intense considering that hitting traffic or getting stuck at work causes dozens of people each day to arrive late for meetings. The issue of a debtor’s prison alludes to the same idea of withholding someone’s freedom for things that could happen to anyone, like not having enough money to post bail on the spot. Secondly, I am very thrilled to hear that organizations are considering the reentry process thoroughly and offering more tools to help people acclimate back into mainstream society. Some maximum-security prisons do offer resume help and the like but creating informative videos that will help with home life after release is important because fostering those relationships and strengthening communal bonds will likely result in a decrease of recidivism.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the United States as a whole must face their problems head on in order to create stronger and safer environments for their citizens. Issues like the causes of struggling communities, youth incarceration rates, and the need for prison reform, need to be addressed in healthy ways that break the cycle of discrimination and incarceration that plague the country. “Art and theatre classes act as a catalyst for psychological and social well-being that can provide the foundational support for desistance from crime” (Cheliotis & Jordanoska, 2014). Theatre arts programs as a means for rehabilitation offer a solution to these issues by creating more job readiness, increased academic performance, and community engagement. Youth especially will benefit from art programming that fosters a safe means of expression, empowerment, and creativity (Heise, 2014). Our children are the future of this country and they cannot run it from behind bars or while lacking crucial life skills. Let’s work towards properly funding the arts and theatre programs that will challenge their minds to create, promote change, and inspire.

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