

Reentry Planning Focusing on Repairing Family Relationships To Increase Criminal Desistance

The VERA institute has long advocated family involvement for the rehabilitation of people who have committed crimes. In Hawai'i, we are experimenting with how healing through restorative justice can be a part of the family-inclusive rehabilitation process. Giving people an opportunity to address the trauma often caused by having a loved one who committed crimes and is incarcerated, can be a healing experience. It is especially important for children, and the parents of incarcerated people, to tell their stories, and it is a healthy path to rehabilitation for incarcerated people to describe their transformation.

For the last five years *Huikahi Restorative Circles*, a facilitated group transition planning process, has been provided to 56 individual incarcerated people and their loved ones. Additionally, 48 incarcerated people have had *Modified Huikahi Restorative Circles* without the participation of loved ones, which other incarcerated supporters attend. Modified Circles address how an incarcerated person might reestablish or develop relationships with loved ones.

The Circles use *solution-focused brief therapy* language and *restorative justice* to address how one's needs for desisting from crime and drug use may be met. Huikahi Circles are a simple yet elegant process for family and friends to participate and support reentry planning. Restorative justice offers incarcerated people an experiential process to learn from wrongdoing, and helps everyone, opportunities to heal.

Similar to the VERA's *family-focused model of the Family Justice Program*, the Circles assume family relationship is a key component for assisting people in their efforts to desist from crime. Criminal and substance abuse desistance is the well-established phenomenon where most people naturally outgrow bad behavior without professional intervention. The two most important factors for increasing chances for criminal desistance, are having relationships with law-abiding people and having a meaningful way to make a living. The Huikahi Circles provide opportunities to repair and strengthen relationships with law abiding loved ones, and employment planning. The Circles also give incarcerated people the opportunity to develop and describe a "transformative story" about their past criminal behavior and ability to desist from it.

The Circle process* is self-directed by an incarcerated person who takes responsibility for addressing how they can meet their and their loved ones' needs for reconciliation and, when appropriate, also how they might make amends with people harmed who do not participate in the Circle.

Preliminary research on Circle process results is promising. In samples of people out of prison two years or more, 23 Circle participants who met with loved ones, and 22 Modified Circle participants meeting with incarcerated supporters, shows lower rates of repeat crime compared to people who do not have Circles. The research also indicates the process is healing for loved ones even when there is another incarceration.

*For more details of the process of creating and facilitating the circle process, please see *Huikahi Restorative Circles: Group Process for Self-Directed Reentry Planning and Family Healing*, European Journal of Probation, Vol. 2(2), 76-95, 2010.

Hyperlinks:

- 1) ***Huikahi Restorative Circles***,
[http://www.uscourts.gov/uscourts/FederalCourts/PPS/Fedprob/2010-06/06_restorative_circles.html]
- 2) ***solution-focused brief therapy***
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solution_focused_brief_therapy]
- 3) ***restorative justice***
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restorative_justice]

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