

## Draft

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### Restorative Reentry Planning Circles for Imprisoned People

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#### Abstract

A reentry planning process using restorative justice and solution-focused brief therapy was developed in Hawai'i. The circle process is goal oriented and strength based. It is based on John Braithwaite's suggested transition planning process to assist youth in preparing for emancipation (Braithwaite, 2004). Insoo Kim Berg, co-founder of solution-focused brief therapy, helped develop the reentry circle model. The purpose of the circle is for victim healing and for an imprisoned individual to make amends and reconcile with loved ones harmed by their behavior and incarceration. The circles also assist imprisoned individuals to construct and affirm "a meaningful story to redeem themselves" necessary for continued desistance (Maruna, 2006, 55). Supporters of the imprisoned person, including loved ones and at least one prison staff person, attend the circle. A written reentry plan is developed at the circle, and provided later to the participants. Circle participants, not exclusively experts or professionals, develop the circle plan. Recidivism results three years after release from prison show imprisoned people who had a circle were less likely to repeat crime compared to those who applied for circles, but did not receive one, and also compared to Hawai'i's state average recidivism rates.

**Keywords:** reentry planning circle, reentry planning, reentry circles, restorative justice, solution-focused brief therapy, desistance

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#### 1. Reentry circle development and background

The reentry circle is a group planning process for an incarcerated individual to meet with their family and friends (loved ones), any other supporters including counselors, clergy, etc., and at least one prison representative. The process was developed in response to John Braithwaite's 2004 suggestion for a circle to assist youth in planning to prepare for emancipation and independence. Insoo Kim Berg, co-founder of solution-focused brief therapy, assisted in the design of the reentry process (Walker, 2013).

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In 2004, based on Braithwaite's vision for a youth circle and with Berg's assistance, a youth circle was developed to assist foster youth in Hawai'i in emancipating from state custody. The *E Makua Ana Youth Circle* has been provided to thousands of youth since 2004 as a "federally required intervention for independent living services for youth aging out of the system" (EPIC, Inc., 2006, p. 1).

The reentry circle and the youth circle process are both based on restorative justice. While restorative justice (RJ) is commonly thought of as a reconciliation strategy where the primary offenders and their victims to a specific incident of wrongdoing meet in a shared group process to discuss fundamental RJ questions (Zehr, 1990), restorative justice is also an effective intervention for addressing many levels of social injustice (Braithwaite, 2002). RJ processes may include meetings that do not involve the primary unrelated victims and offenders of a specific crime. A harmed person who does not meet with the individual who harmed them, may benefit from an RJ process (Walker, 2004). Both the youth circle and the reentry circle process use the solution-focused approach developed by Steve deShazer and Insoo Kim Berg (Berg & deShazer, 1993). The solution-focused approach has been used successfully in a variety of processes for criminal cases (Walker & Hayashi, 2007 & 2009).

Restorative justice focuses on meeting the *needs* of individuals and communities who have been affected by wrongdoing. It gives an opportunity to people affected by wrongdoing to express what they need to repair any resulting harm (Zehr, 1990 & 2002). It gives people who caused harm along with those harmed, the opportunity to determine how they can best reconcile in their particular situation. It also gives imprisoned people the opportunity to tell a life story or "narrative identity" that is vital for desistance (Maruna, 2006, p. 40).

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RJ removes the power of determining what a harmed person needs to heal from crime, and what an offender needs to desist from crime from professionals and experts, i.e. judges, lawyers, and therapists. RJ instead asks the individuals most affected by specific incidents of crime and wrongdoing what they need to best deal with their harm, and what they need to do to stay crime free.

Families of incarcerated people, even those incarcerated for so-called *victimless crimes*, i.e. drugs, have suffered harm as a result of the inmates' behavior, and are direct victims of the imprisoned person's behavior. Additionally, all family members and friends are potentially harmed when their loved one becomes imprisoned regardless of that person's guilt or innocence. The circles help them heal from the loss they have suffered.

A reentry circle is an approximately three-hour facilitated group planning process for an imprisoned individual to meet with their invited loved ones, any other supporters, i.e. counselors, mentors, etc., and a prison staff representative. The circle results in a written *transition plan* for the imprisoned person to assist them in preparing to leave prison and maintaining a law-abiding life. The circle participants help formulate the transition plan, which is printed and distributed to them by the circle facilitator a few days after the circle. Incarcerated people also make plans that they carry out while they continue to be imprisoned, e.g. "will write my son a letter once a week."

The transition plan details an imprisoned individual's needs, which includes the need for reconciliation with loved ones, who may or may not participate in the circle, any non-related victims, the community, and the inmate herself.<sup>1</sup> Reconciliation can be whatever the

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<sup>1</sup> The circles have been provided in Hawai'i for incarcerated men, women and youth.

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group determines is needed to repair the harm. It is often as simple as “staying clean and sober” and “having a legitimate job and leading a law abiding life.”

The transition plan also addresses the imprisoned person’s other needs such as housing and employment necessary for her to create a successful life. Meeting these basic needs has been shown to close the “revolving door” of prisons for a significant number of formerly incarcerated people (Howerton, et al, 2009). The transition plan also details exactly how the imprisoned individual will meet her needs and by what date any necessary tasks will be performed. For example a plan can provide: “By December 13, 2016 Reiko will mail letters to at least three potential employers about the possibility of obtaining job interviews within two weeks after her release.” A circle makes it clear to imprisoned individuals that they are responsible for their lives by the decisions that they make, which is a critical component of an effective reentry model (Taxman, 2004).

The transition plan is essentially an imprisoned person’s blueprint for what she will do while in prison to make that time more productive for her eventual release. A reentry circle can also help repair and establish family relationships, which can make the prison experience more successful for imprisoned individuals. The circle can inspire a loved one to visit or write letters that can have positive impacts on an imprisoned person’s daily life. These contacts with loved ones can motivate the imprisoned person to “do good prison time,” e.g. take classes in prison, avoid other imprisoned people who violate prison rules, etc.

A Native Hawaiian prison warden named the process *huikahi*. In Hawaiian *hui* means group and *kahi* mean individual. For the purposes of the circle, together the word *huikahi*, signifies individuals coming together to form an understanding.

In 2004, two Hawai‘i non-profit organizations (NGOs), the Hawai‘i Friends of

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*European Conference on Restorative and Therapeutic Justice*, San Sebastian, Spain, 2016 Restorative Justice (formerly the Hawai'i Friends of Civic & Law Related Education), and the Community Alliance on Prisons, along with a state prison, the Waiawa Correctional Facility, all located on the island of O'ahu, collaborated to provide the reentry process in 2005 (Walker & Greening, 2011).

To date approximately 133 huikahi reentry circles have been provided in Hawai'i, with approximately 575 people participating, including the incarcerated individual having the circle. The reentry circles have mainly been for incarcerated adults, but fourteen incarcerated youth and their families have also had circles. Two circles were also provided for people who had been released from prison—one was held at a church and one at the formerly imprisoned man's mother's home. Two circles were also provided for people completing parole. Additionally, individuals on probation have also had circles in California, New York, Hawai'i, Vermont, and Washington DC. Finally, formerly imprisoned individuals in Finland and Japan have also had circles.

The reentry circle process was replicated in New York and provided at a woman's jail about four years (Dougherty, et al, 2014). It was also replicated in California, but both the programs in New York and California lost funding and have been discontinued. The reentry process was recently replicated in Washington DC, by a non-profit working in violence prevention, Collaborative Solutions for Communities, which has named it *the healing circle*, and has produced a seven minute video of an actual circle process (Viemo, 2016).

### **2. Reentry circle's restorative justice application**

The modern restorative justice movement began about 40 years ago, but many believe its beginnings are traced back to “most of human history for perhaps all the world's peoples” (Braithwaite, 2002, p. 5). Circle processes are a fundamental practice of the restorative

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justice movement (Zehr, 2002).

Peter Senge, co-founder of MIT's Organizational Learning Center, is known as "one of the top 10 management gurus" in the world (MIT, 2016). He is an expert in human groups and believes that "no indigenous culture has yet been found that does not have the practice of sitting in a circle and talking (Isaacs, 1999, p. xvi)."

Research confirms that restorative justice is an evidence-based practice that can reduce criminal recidivism (Sherman & Strang, 2007). How correctional agencies can work to prevent repeat crime by the incarcerated is vital, especially for those who have committed crimes that have seriously harmed others. "Correctional administrators recognize that it is probation and parole failures, not new prison admissions (due to convictions) that fuel our current prison crowding crisis" (Byrne, Taxman & Young, 2002, p. 15). Restorative practices for incarcerated people to reenter and return to the community have been suggested, especially for those who have committed serious crimes (Bazemore & Maruna, 2009).

### **3. Reentry circle's public health applications**

In response to the failure of incarceration to reduce recidivism, corrections experts have advocated for "public health" approaches to address criminal behavior for sometime (Zimbardo, 2007; Swartz & Boodell, 2009). Jeremy Travis (2005) specifically outlined how public health applications can assist imprisoned people with reentering the community after incarceration.

Public health educators work to improve the health outcomes for populations and have done so for many generations. Public health is known for prevention and applying effective learning models and systems. Health education successfully works to change human behavior.

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Changes in health status can best be achieved through partnership between clinical efforts focusing on individual patients and community-wide public health interventions addressing environmental and social determinants that place individuals at great risk of disease.

Both science and social factors form the basis for public health for public health intervention” (Novick & Morrow, 2007, p. 4).

The World Health Organization (WHO) established criteria for health educators to use in working to change behavior (WHO, 1954). The WHO acknowledged that learning is more likely when: there is a focus on the goals of individuals; positive motivation is used; information is provided in group settings; and experiential activity-based processes are used. The WHO’s directives are consistent with Albert Bandura’s research confirming that *enactive learning* is the most effective learning approach for improving human behavior (Bandura, 1997).

The reentry circles, as well as most restorative practices, apply the criteria recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Walker & Greening, 2011). The circles use individual’s positive motivation to repair harm and to take responsibility for their futures in a self-directed group process that is goal oriented, and provided in an active, applied learning experience for all participants.

Additionally, the reentry circles address each of the “five principals of effective reentry” that Jeremy Travis advocates in *But They All Come Back: Facing the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry* (2005). The circles work to:

1. build bridges between prisons and communities;
2. seize the moment of release;
3. strengthen the concentric circles of support; and
5. promote successful reintegration (Travis, 2005, p. 324).

#### **4. Reentry circles provide a solution-focused approach**

While restorative justice provides the theoretical basis for the reentry circle model, its

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facilitators are trained to use solution-focused brief therapy language during the process.

Solution focused therapy acknowledges that a healing process “happens within language and language is what therapists and clients use to do therapy” (deShazer, 1994, pp. 3). It is language that assists individuals during the circle process, which assists them in discovering or affirming their inherent strengths, in establishing their goals, and in finding viable ways to achieve their preferred futures.

Sixty years ago penology and criminology expert Donald Cressey, who was “trained in law and clinical psychology as well as sociology,” noted the influence of language on criminal behavior: “criminality is learned in interaction with others in a process of communication” (Cressey, 1954 p. 29). The reentry circle’s application of solution-focused language is an important aspect that makes it a powerful tool for helping people find their strengths and what they can do to be law and abiding.

The United States government recognizes that solution-focused brief therapy is a promising evidence based intervention (OJJDP, 2009). A Hawai‘i court collaborated in providing a program that applied solution focused approaches. The restorative justice program, used voluntarily in cases where low-level defendants pled guilty, addressed violence by developing group, pair and individual processes (Walker & Hayashi, 2009). In Australia, judge Michael King’s *Solution-Focused Judging Bench Book* details how a solution-focused approach can assist judges and courts in hearing cases and administering justice (2009).

The solution-focused approach is a proactive learning strategy that uses specifically designed language skills to assist people in determining what they want and how to achieve their desired outcomes (George, Iveson & Ratner, 1999). This process is in contrast to



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analyzing why problems exist and finding something or someone to blame for them. The solution-focused approach is a client-driven process where therapists are considered facilitators who look for and complement clients on their strengths, constantly asking how they have succeeded (De Jong & Berg, 2013). An example of the solution-focused approach is: “Wow, you’ve been sober for the last week. How have you managed to do that?”

The solution-focused approach fits naturally with RJ processes because both address problem solving in positive ways using language that can increase individual and community self-efficacy and empowerment (Bandura, 1997; Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Both the solution-focused approach, and RJ generate optimism and hopefulness for the future, regardless of past experiences. Optimism is vital for individuals to develop coping skills and resiliency (Seligman, 1990). Reentry circles using the solution-focused approach are powerful processes that can help build positive relationships and community, and promote desistance, in response to crime and wrongdoing.

### **5. Description of reentry circle process steps**

#### **5.1 Application and interview for reentry circle**

An imprisoned individual chooses to have a circle and applies for one. Normally, individuals learn about the process from other incarcerated people and sometimes by presentation from the non-profit that provides the program, Hawai‘i Friends of Restorative Justice.

The only criteria applicants must meet to qualify for a circle is their desire to reconcile and make amends with anyone harmed by their past behavior and/or their imprisonment, especially loved ones and the community. An imprisoned applicant must also take responsibility for her future and be willing to make a plan for desistance that will

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address her essential needs for reentering the community, and also for living productively in prison. Circles have been provided, however, for two women who were not guilty of the crimes they were incarcerated for, yet they benefited by addressing the harm they suffered, the harm their imprisonment caused others, and by planning for their futures (Walker, 2015).

After the non-profit receives the individual's application from the prison, an interview is scheduled. The interview is solution-focused with the facilitator making a surface assessment noticing her apparent strengths during the meeting. The facilitator also makes great effort to complement the individual on her noticeable strengths, e.g. "It's great that you want to make amends and are being accountable for yourself!"

The facilitator also reviews a brochure about the circle process so the individual understands exactly what is going to happen, and can prepare for it. Unfortunately, resources to provide all the circles requested cannot be met in Hawai'i. Applicants are informed during the interview that they may not receive one. They are told that "The squeaky wheel gets the grease and people who consistently contact us, and show they really want a circle, have better chances of getting one." Circle provision priorities include individuals who are leaving prison the soonest or who face other time sensitive issues including the serious illness of a loved one or themselves. Circles have been provided for imprisoned people who saw a loved one for the last time because of a fatal illness, before they were released from prison.

### **5.2 Convening a reentry circle**

Before a circle is scheduled and held for an imprisoned individual and their supporters, a trained facilitator spends about ten hours on convening the process. At the convening stage, the individual has filled out an application and has been interviewed at the prison by the facilitator many weeks before the actual circle takes place. The individual's

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loved ones are contacted and necessary information for their security clearance to enter the prison are completed. Potential dates and times that work for the supporters and the prison are considered. The best date and time for all the parties is ultimately chosen. Ideally a prison would allow the circles after traditional work hours so loved ones would not have to miss work to attend. Also a phone with a speaker would be available for loved ones unable to attend in person.

For anyone who cannot attend, or cannot participate by telephone during the circle, the facilitator interviews him or her prior to the circle. The facilitator asks them the same questions that would normally be asked at the circle including “What do you like about [name of individual having circle]? What are her strengths? How did her past behavior and imprisonment affect you? What could she do to try and repair the harm she caused?” The responses to these questions are typed into a computer while the person speaks and reread to them after the interview to ensure each word is their own and correct. The responses are printed out and they are placed in an empty chair in the circle to be read as the questions are asked other participants during the process. The missing person indicates whom they want to read their responses during the circle. Often people get tears in their eyes when they hear the words of the missing loved one’s thoughts and feelings. The written testimonials have proven to be a meaningful way for participating even when someone is unable to personally attend.

### **5.3 Reentry circle opening and beginning stages**

The participants sit in a circle of chairs without any table, etc., in the middle. The facilitator sits in the circle and a recorder stands outside writing down what participants say on a large sheet of paper taped to the wall. The individual having the circle begins the process before anyone speaks. Openings have included singing songs, reciting poems,

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reading written statements, saying prayers, and Hawaiian chants. Sometimes the individual will ask a family member to say a prayer.

After the opening, and sharing what they have accomplished in prison, each participant, beginning with the prison representative, says what they think the imprisoned person's strengths are. Identifying strengths is a key feature of the solution-focused approach. A long list of strengths, which includes the individual's attributes such as: "kind, open hearted, intelligent, family oriented, friendly, persistent," is collected and written down by the recorder. Affirming and acknowledging strengths helps the individual and group to focus on what a person does well, which can help generate more of these attributes in the future.

### **5.4 Addressing reconciliation needs at reentry circle**

After the incarcerated person's strengths have been listed, the circle focuses on the individual's needs for a successful reentry. Reconciliation is the first need addressed. The individual is asked first: "Who was affected by your past behavior that brought you to prison?" After she names who was harmed, and usually the person is sitting in the circle, the individual is next asked: "How do you think they were affected?" After explaining how she thinks the person was affected by her behavior and or her imprisonment, and assuming they are in the circle, that person is asked "How were you affected?" and additional questions: "What might [name of person having the circle] do to make things right with you and repair the harm?" After they say what they would like, the imprisoned person is asked "How does that sound to you?" Each of the things identified and discussed, which the loved ones said would help repair their harm, and the imprisoned person agrees to do, forms the reconciliation part of her transition plan.

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For any other family members and victims who are identified, but not at the circle, specific plans may be made for how the imprisoned person will work to reconcile things with them. Sometimes people choose to write apology letters or plan to talk to other harmed people after their release from prison. For those writing an apology letter, they are often offered guidelines. See Appendix A. Also people are often are both thankful and sorry to people, and are offered guidelines for an apology and gratitude letter. See Appendix B.

The imprisoned person and loved ones are next asked: “Are there any *unrelated* victims that you need to consider for reconciliation and to make amends with?” Unrelated victims could be homeowners whose houses were burglarized, owners of cars broken into, etc. Often people who commit crimes do not know who the people they stole from, etc., are. When there are unrelated and or unknown victims, plans are made for how the imprisoned person will reconcile with them. Often they simply agree to stay law abiding and a good citizen who pays taxes, etc. While in prison several of the incarcerated have said that, “Obeying the prison rules,” is a way that they could reconcile for their past criminal behavior to other victims of their crimes not participating in the circle.

Sitting in a circle and agreeing to do things is easier for an imprisoned person than actually facing problems that will naturally arise after release from prison. Problems arise for everyone in life despite plans. Asking an imprisoned person how she will behave differently when problems occur is an important feature of the reentry circle model. It is especially important to address how problems will be dealt with at the circle because so many imprisoned people have substance abuse problems. Facilitators do not tell people how they should solve problems, and instead ask questions that assist individuals in finding their unique solutions to problems. Typical questions include: “What gives you hope you can stay

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off drugs? How have you coped successfully with problems in the past? What is different for you now that tells you that you will act differently in the future?”

At the conclusion of the circle’s reconciliation phase, the facilitator asks the imprisoned person: “Is there anything you want to say?” Most often they express deep remorse and thankfulness to their loved ones for coming to their circle.

### **5.5 Goals setting and addressing desistance needs at reentry circle**

After the reconciliation stage of the circle is complete a break is often taken for about ten minutes. When the group reconvenes the imprisoned person is asked: “How do you want your future to be different from your past? What are your goals?” The goals are included in the transition plan and the group moves on to the imprisoned person’s specific needs.

Maruna (2006) has discussed desistance needs in detail, which assist former law violators and substance abusers to become and stay law abiding and clean and sober. The two most basic needs are relationships with law abiding others and meaningful employment and activity. Story telling and a self-narrative describing transformation by former law violators is essential:

The narrative identity can be understood as an active information-processing structure, a cognitive schema, or a construct system that is both shaped by and later mediates social interaction. Essentially, people construct stories to account for what they did and why they did it. These narratives impose an order on people’s actions and explain people’s behaviors with a sequence of events that connect up to explanatory goals, motivations and feelings. These self-narratives then act to shape and guide future behavior, as people act in ways that agree with the stories or myths they have created about themselves (Maruna, 2006, p. 40).

The circle is an opportunity for an imprisoned person to tell their story, to discuss their goals and work on reconciliation. At a circle a former law violator has a chance to self-narrate and describe their transformation to a law-abiding person.

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### **5.6 Needs addressed at the circle**

The needs addressed at the reentry circle include repairing relationships and meaning work and activity, which assist with desistance. The reconciliation stage of the circle helps repair damaged relationships. The later circle discussions on employment and continued learning assist the imprisoned person in making a plan for pursuing her work and learning goals.

At the beginning of the circle stage concerning other needs besides reconciliation, the facilitator explains to the group: “This is a brainstorming process. Please think of any possibility and share it. Your idea can help cause others to think of other possibilities. The more possibilities the better.”

The circle participants brainstorm the incarcerated person’s needs including housing, employment and financial, continued learning (not necessarily formal education, but can be anything that the imprisoned person is interested in learning about), emotional health (drug treatment and other issues to maintain mental health are addressed here), physical health, leisure time use. Any other unique needs of the imprisoned person has, e.g. divorce, child custody, selling a car, etc., are also addressed by the group.

As the possibilities to meet the needs are expressed, the imprisoned person chooses which possibilities she wants to pursue. For housing, at least three options are always noted in the transition plan. It is imperative that the incarcerated person makes her own goals and finds ways she wants to meet her needs, which make up her plan. It is more likely that she will follow a plan that she made, compared to one made for her by others. The less paternalistic the process, the more likely it will be effective (Roberts, 2002). Allowing autonomy as the reentry circle does, contrasts starkly to the usual correction interventions, in

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which the incarcerated are told what they need and what they must do, e.g. follow a case plan developed for them by professionals.

After the group has discussed all the imprisoned person's needs and she has selected which resources she will pursue, which will be included in the transition plan, the inmate is asked: "Who are your supporters? Who you can count on when you need someone to listen to you and to help you?" The transition plan will include the list of people that the individual identifies as her supporters.

### **5.7 Scheduling follow up reentry circles**

After addressing reconciliation and the other needs, the group is asked if they want to meet again to follow up on how the transition plan worked. Plans change and nothing is permanent. It is expected that the transition plan created during the circle will change. Additionally a follow up circle is an effective way to keep the imprisoned person accountable for herself and also others who may have volunteered to assist her during the circle. Having supporters come together again to discuss changes is helpful all around. Any number of follow up circles may be help.

### **5.7 Reentry circle closing**

Beginning with the prison staff person, each circle participant compliments the incarcerated person on something new and positive they learned about her at the circle or on anything else they want to say. This is an inspiring part of the circle. Most imprisoned people hear about their failings in life, prison is a large reminder of them how they have failed. Hearing compliments is moving and many cry at this stage of the circle. Often too the compliments identify additional strengths of the imprisoned person.



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Finally, the imprisoned person closes the circle by answering: “How was this process for you? Do you have anything else you’d like the people here to know?”

### **5.8 Breaking of bread after reentry circle**

The circles are scheduled for three hours and any time left over is spent socializing and having refreshments with the incarcerated person, her supporters and loved ones, prison staff, the facilitator and recorder, and any observers, if the prison rules allow food. Some prisons do not allow food under any circumstances and some monitor what type of food and its source. Eating food together at the conclusion of the process helps to solidify repaired relationships. This informal part of the process provides for further social capital building, and allows the group to decompress after any emotional exchanges that occurred during the circle.

### **6. Preparation and dissemination of written transition plan and circle summary**

Within a few days after the circle, the facilitator completes writing and prints out the transition plan and circle summary. The document is at least five pages long and contains information and decisions made at the circle, timelines for doing things, e.g. “By September 28<sup>th</sup>, [name of imprisoned person] will mail letters about potential half way houses.” The plan also lists the imprisoned person’s strengths, what she is most proud of having accomplished since being in prison, what she wants different in her life (her goals), how she will achieve her needs, who her supporters are, and the date for any follow up circle. The transition plan also includes how she plans to reconcile for past behavior and imprisonment. A copy of the circle summary is provided to each participant household and the imprisoned person. The plan is frequently used when parole is requested.

### **7. Reentry circle research results**

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The reentry process results have been researched both by people affiliated with the non-profit providing it (Walker & Greening, 2010; Walker, et al, 2015) and by an independent third party researcher (Davidson, 2016). Research shows all circle participants, one hundred percent to date, have reported that the process was positive. Additionally, participants continue to believe that the circle was a positive experience even in the cases when their imprisoned person loved one relapsed and became re-incarcerated years after the process (Walker & Greening, 2010). Research also shows that children and youth of incarcerated parents found the process “healing.” They have less rumination about the loss they suffered in losing a parent to prison and that they have increased optimism after the circle (Walker, et al, 2015). Finally, recent independent research on the repeat crime rates of incarcerated people who have a circle, compared with those who applied for one, but did not have one, and compared to the state’s average rate of recidivism, shows those who have a circle experience greater levels of desistance and law abiding behavior (Davidson, 2016). A detailed paper on the positive recidivism outcomes for people who have reentry circles will be published by 2018.

### **8. Conclusion**

Our current justice system does not provide healing for loved ones harmed by crime and imprisonment, and it fails to prevent many formerly imprisoned people from committing repeat crimes after their release from prison. While prisoner reentry efforts should not be judged solely on the basis of recidivism (Petersilia, 2004), a goal of corrections should be to provide opportunities to “correct” behavior, and that should necessarily include the prevention of repeat criminal behavior. Additionally, the current system fails to adequately assist and bring healing to victims by giving them an opportunity to restoratively discuss how

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they were affected by a crime and what could possibly be done to repair any harm they suffered. The circles can help increase healing for victims and help reduce repeat crime. It is a process that should be used and studied more.

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## APPENDIX A



### Apology Letter Guidelines

We all hurt people sometimes unintentionally and sometimes intentionally. The following guidelines may be useful in developing an apology letter to someone you have hurt. These guidelines are based on the free confidential program [www.apologyletter.org](http://www.apologyletter.org) developed by Dr. Ben Furman a psychiatrist from Finland, and Lorenn Walker, Hawai'i public health educator & restorative lawyer.

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*[fill in [bracketed] information with the specifics of your situation and **copy what is in bold**]*

*[fill in date]*

*[include your name & address on letter]*

**Dear** *[person's name you have hurt, and if you have hurt more than one person please write each person a separate letter]:*

*[Describe what you did to the person named above that was hurtful, unfair or wrong towards him/her]*

**I know I have hurt you with my action and I want you to know that I truly regret my behavior.**

**I have been thinking about what happened and I feel that I have learned a lesson. I have learned that:** *[Describe what you have learned]*

**I will never do anything similar again, to you or to anyone else. I am determined to deal differently with similar situations in the future. In similar situations I will:** *[Describe what you will do different in the future]*

**I wish there was a way for me to make up to you what I did to you. If you have any ideas for how I might repair the harm I caused, I will try my best to do it. One possibility I thought of is:** *[Describe what you might do to make it up to the person you have hurt]*

**I am also willing to listen to you and meet with you in person to discuss this situation too if you wish.**

**You are free to accept or reject this apology. I have wronged you and I don't want you to feel any pressure from me to accept my apology. That is a different matter and totally up to you.**

**Please let me know if you want to meet, or if there is anything else I can do to make things right.**

**Yours sincerely** *[or love, aloha, etc. & your name]*

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## APPENDIX B



### Gratitude & Apology Letter Guidelines

Thanking people is vital for positive relationships. Some people we are grateful for have also been hurt unintentionally, and sometimes intentionally, by our actions. We can express both gratitude and make a meaningful apology in one letter. The following guidelines may be used for writing a combined gratitude and apology letter. (Please respect and do not contact anyone subject to a protective order concerning you). These guidelines are based on work by Dr. Martin Seligman, founder of positive psychology, Dr. Ben Furman a psychiatrist from Finland, and Lorenn Walker Hawai'i public health educator & restorative lawyer. Furman and Walker developed [www.apologyletter.org](http://www.apologyletter.org).

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*[fill in [bracketed] information with the specific facts about your situation and **copy what is in bold**]*

*[write your name & address on letter]*

*[fill in date you are writing letter]*

**Dear** *[person's name you are grateful for and who you have also hurt. If more than one person is involved please write each person a separate letter]:*

**First, I want to thank you and to express my gratitude to you for** *[Describe what specifically the person did that has made a meaningful difference in your life that you are grateful for]*

**You have made a difference because** *[Describe the meaningful difference the person you are thanking has made for others, e.g. "Your taking care of (child's name) has helped (her or him survive)..."]*

**I deeply appreciate and am thankful for all your hard work and kindness in** *[doing whatever they did that you are thanking them for]*

**Second, I want to apologize to you for** *[Describe what you did to the person named above that was hurtful, wrong, or unfair towards him/her]*

**I want you to know that I truly regret my behavior.**

**I have been thinking about what happened and I feel that I have learned a lesson. I have learned that:** *[Describe what you have learned]*

**I will never do anything similar again, to you or to anyone else. I am determined to deal differently with similar situations in the future. In similar situations I will:** *[Describe what you will do different in the future]*

**I wish there was a way for me to try and make up for what I did to you. If you have any ideas for how I might repair the harm I caused, I will try my best to do it. One possibility I thought of is:** *[Describe what you might do to make it up to the person you have hurt]*

**I am also willing to listen to you and meet with you in person to discuss this situation too if you wish. Please let me know if you want to meet, or if there is anything else I can do to make things right.**

**You are free to accept or reject this apology. I have wronged you and I don't want you to feel any pressure from me to accept my apology. That is a different matter and totally up to you.**

**Yours sincerely,** *[or love, aloha, etc. & your name]*