





Ujamaa Place

About Ujamaa Place

Ujamaa Place was created in response to the systemic, cultural, and political underutilization of African American males particularly in the area of education, employment training, and workforce development. Ujamaa Place provides holistic transformation for young African-American men experiencing inequity at the intersection of race and poverty by helping them achieve brotherhood, stability, and personal success. Since 2010, we have successfully transformed over 5,000 men and have maintained a 4% recidivism rate, compared to 68% nationally.



www.ujamaaplace.org 
 (651) 528-8006 

Employment Program Goal

Provide economic self-sufficiency and promote social connection

Project Focus Population

African American men aged 18-30 from the Twin Cities seven-county metropolitan area, many of whom have high involvement with the criminal justice system

Problem Trying to Solve For

Decreasing recidivism by strengthening family connection

Systems Change Focus

Family & community reunification

Systems Change Metrics

- **Number and strength of family connection (# family/children, visitation, # hours spent)**
- Number of friends/other supportive relationships (work, church, community, etc.)
- Level of physical activity
- Number/depth of organizational membership/citizenship (volunteer, religious, NPOs/ volunteering, voting)
- Perception of access to education, housing, employment, and wellness

How This Reflects the “Sense of Belonging” Systems Change Metric Category:

Ujamaa Place was one of two organizations that specifically identified sense of belonging as a key systems change metric. Belonging and social support, in the form of frequent, positive interactions, may help provide returning citizens with the emotional and practical supports needed to overcome obstacles to successful reintegration.

What the Research Says

When individuals reenter their communities after incarceration, they frequently have difficulties in meeting their basic needs. Social support can help buffer some of the challenges reentering individuals face. Controlling for other covariates, having a mental health diagnosis, having experienced childhood adversity, and being male all predicted lower levels of external social support during incarceration. Young men of color who experience childhood poverty could be seen as a key population to target to help bolster external social support networks prior to release from prison. Research has demonstrated that reentering individuals with close social bonds are more likely to secure employment, experience better mental health, exhibit lower levels of hostility, desist from criminal activity, and avoid recidivating. Although social support is helpful during reentry, incarceration often erodes external social support networks. While research points to the importance of sustaining or building external support during and after incarceration, information is limited regarding what factors may influence social support networks of correction-involved individuals.¹

An increasingly important area of research into reentry success is the role that family relationships play in creating successful reentry support, and thus the role such relationships can play in reducing recidivism. One study² explores what significant requirements, if any, successful offenders perceive to need and/or have experienced as lacking while attempting to successfully reenter society. Returning citizens discussed accessing both employment and housing with relative ease through both organizations and personal contacts. Among these four most commonly identified needs, transportation was reported as somewhat more difficult to secure, but was also adequately provided by non-profit social service agencies. Social supports, however, were identified as oftentimes remains neglected in government and non-profit organizational programming and a major barrier to successful reentry.

From research that indicates parent-child relationships undergo significant stress in incarceration scenarios, potentially creating stresses which may push children into the criminal justice system, to research which indicates that a lack of communication and associated support from family members can create multiple barriers to successful reentry upon release, especially in finding housing and employment, there is sufficient evidence to claim that reentry outcomes are heavily dependent on familial support.

Who Else is Doing This

The Freedom Project (Seattle) focuses on fostering a sense of community and healing for formerly-incarcerated individuals through nonviolent communication and mindfulness practices. The program includes The Family Circle, a support program specifically for the families, partners, and friends of people directly impacted by incarceration to assist loved ones in meeting needs for connection, support, and resources. By promoting emotional resilience and conflict resolution skills, the Freedom Project not only reduces recidivism rates but also strengthens communities.

1 Social Support During Incarceration: Predictors of External Social Support for Incarcerated Individuals | Journal American Journal of Criminal Justice Dated: 2022 | Author(s) J. M. Kjellstrand; M. G. Clark; I. A. Mannan; C. M. Loan | Date Published 2022

2 Beyond Basic Needs: Social Support and Structure for Successful Offender Reentry | https://epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1096&context=socs_fac

The STRIVE Program³ in Waco, Texas combines transitional living assistance with long-term family support. Not only does STRIVE provide peer mentoring and counseling and employment support, but also emphasizes the role of occupational stability in creating positive family outcomes.

The Family Connection Center⁴ is an organization that focuses exclusively on keeping families and their incarcerated members in contact, through services such as recording books/stories for children at home, requiring parenting classes for incarcerated individuals, and offering parent support groups. Such group interactions strengthen both the relationship between families and the associated emotional importance of family for incarcerated individuals, previously mentioned to aid in curtailing chances of recidivism post-release. It is worth noting the theory of change behind the Center's focus, specifically the role parental neglect through incarceration plays in creating a high-risk factor for a child's future incarceration.

3 https://iop.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/2023-02/IOP_Policy_Program_2019_Reentry_Policy.pdf

4 Ibid