



Community Healing Coalition, Inc.

community + healing + coalition = a village working together to heal a village

Using evidence-based models, Community Healing Coalition, Inc. (CHC) builds community around formerly and currently incarcerated individuals and their families for the purpose of building resilience, encouraging determination and perseverance, and facilitating hope and healing. God does the work; we are simply willing vessels.

Family Healing and Reintegration Circles

Overview

Family Healing and Reintegration Circles are a group process designed to help individuals who have experienced trauma, abuse, or other challenging life experiences to heal and reintegrate with their families and communities. These circles provide a safe and supportive space for individuals and family members to share their experiences, process their emotions, and discuss what a new future might look like for everyone involved. Using public health learning principles, restorative justice, solution focused based therapy, social psychology and group dynamics, and positive motivation and mindfulness, these circle experiences help incarcerated people to make plans for a successful life including making amends with family, friends, and others harmed by past behavior within a supportive environment which in turn provides the opportunity for healing for the Circle participants.

Family Healing and Reintegration Circles are an opportunity for individuals to meet with their families as they define “family.” A *Transition Plan* is developed during the **Circle** outlining what the individual believes they need for a successful life; how they want to live differently compared to the past; and how they might make amends. Making amends is done by discussing how people were affected by the incarcerated person's past behavior, and what can be done to repair that harm. An agreement to repair the harm is made during the circle and is included in the incarcerated persons transition plan. In addition to establishing a Transition Plan, the benefits for the incarcerated person and the other Circle members are many; four important benefits are (a) the sense of community and support that is established or strengthened, (b) increased self-awareness, (c) improved mental health, and (d) new coping skills. The greatest advantage of strengthening family support during this transition is that the incarcerated person will have a support system as they prepare to leave incarceration and with continued support and growth, the likelihood of recidivism decreases.

The Process

Ideally, one to three Circles are held 6 months prior to an individual's release from jail or prison, and one to two Circles are held post-release. The process begins when an incarcerated individual requests a Family Healing and Reintegration Circle. The facility will contact the



incarcerated individual's community advocate such as their social worker, counselor, clergy or case manager and they in turn should access the CHC website and request a referral form.

When the completed referral form is received, a facilitator will contact the appropriate person at the facility to inform them that a Circle has been requested. With the approval and support of the facility, the facilitator will meet with the incarcerated individual to discuss their request for a Circle including their goals for the Circle and the family members that they would like to participate. A representative from the facility will also attend the Circles, as well as other resource people who might be able to help the incarcerated person post-release will be invited to attend. The Circle Facilitator will contact the family members identified by the incarcerated person to explain the process and ask them if they would be willing to participate in the Circle. In the event a loved one does not want to participate in person, they may write a note or letter that will be placed on a chair in the Circle and read at the appropriate time during the Circle.

Before a Circle is held, the incarcerated person decides how they want to open their Circle, for example a poem, a prayer, song, or words of inspiration. Circles take about 3 hours.

Requirements for A Family Healing and Reintegration Circle

1. We require a private room large enough for individuals to sit in the Circle comfortably; the number of chairs will vary depending on the group, but on average we will need 6-8 chairs placed in a circle.
2. If the facility allows food, we will need tables for the refreshments.
3. We require a member of the staff who works with the incarcerated person to participate as a member of the Circle.
4. We will need visitor access to the space where the Circle is held.
5. A talking piece which will be provided by the Circle Facilitator.

A Sample Circle Agenda

Welcome and Opening: The incarcerated person opens the Circle and then each participant introduces themselves giving their name and relationship of each participant to the incarcerated individual.

Purpose and Guidelines: The purpose – which is to assist the incarcerated person as they reconcile and plan for a successful transition back into the community – is shared with everyone in the circle. The most important guideline is that participants speak one at a time & respect confidentiality. We often use a talking piece which identifies the speaker and all others are silent while that participant has the talking piece.

Individuals Share: Everyone shares one at a time with respect, remembering the importance of confidentiality, and the incarcerated loved one shares and responds in turn. This will



include sharing what they are especially proud of that they have accomplished in jail/prison. And then each person will share their thoughts on the incarcerated person's strengths.

Reconciliation: A time of talking about the harms and hopes of reconciliation and moving forward. Individuals are encouraged to listen deeply and forgive one another and themselves if appropriate.

Short Break

Plans for the Future: The incarcerated person will talk about the specific ways that they want their future to differ from their past.

Group brainstorms resource options: Everyone in the circle will consider options and thoughts about housing, financial, continued learning, employment transportation, documents, emotional and physical health.

Make a Transition Plan: The facilitator will help to write out the transition plan, including a list of supporters and a timetable for completion.

Next Circle Date: The group will discuss the possibility of a follow-up circle.

Circle Closing: The group compliments the incarcerated loved one and the incarcerated loved one shares how the Circle process was for them. Everyone will complete an evaluation.

Breaking of Bread: After each Circle there is an informal gathering with simple refreshments if jail/prison allows food.