

College of Health and **Human Services**

Strength Within: Building Resilience and Purpose Among Justice-Impacted Individuals in Santa Ana, CA **Community Roots**



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INTRODUCTION

Project Purpose & Description

This project tackles the cycle of incarceration and social isolation faced by justiceinvolved People of Color (POC) in Santa Ana, caused by poverty, crime, and lack of support. We created a two-part workshop focused on social and emotional learning to help both faculty and justice-involved individuals build skills for personal growth, emotional regulation, and problem-solving. Grounded in healing and accountability, the project supports long-term reintegration and aims to create more supportive, trauma-informed spaces for justice-involved POC.

Social Problem & Target Population

The City of Santa Ana has a high crime ratio with an overall D+ rating. With a crime occurring every 31 minutes, Santa Ana is ranked in the 27th percentile, translating as 73% of cities being classified safer than Santa Ana. The target population is individuals with incarceration history.

Scope of Social Problem

Through community interviews and research, critical needs in Santa Ana were identified, including high crime rates, rising homelessness, and economic inequality. Crime occurs roughly every 31 minutes, with the city ranking in the bottom 27% for safety nationwide (Crime Grade, 2022). Factors such as gentrification, poverty, limited job and educational opportunities, and strained resources contribute to crime involvement and cycles of incarceration. These challenges directly impact safety, stability, and future opportunities. By promoting evidence-based interventions focused on education, mental health, and support systems, we aimed to improve reentry outcomes and break the cycle of recidivism.

Community Stakeholder Interviews

G.A.F.I. (Grupo de Apoyo Familiar e Individual) is a church-based community program that provides support for addiction 20% of its population living below the recovery, spiritual growth, and family wellbeing in Santa Ana. A member shared,

"There is an issue with maintaining a safe city without gang violence and making the residence feel safe." He added, "My family and I tend not to be outside past 10:00 pm because we fear that we can be victims of gang violence".

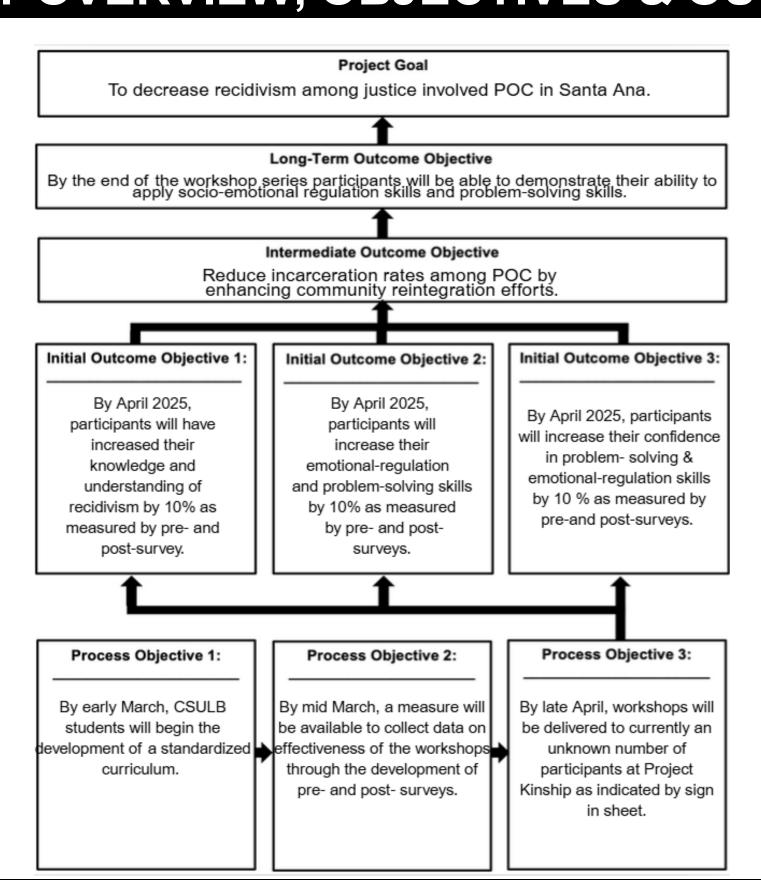
Secondary Data:

Santa Ana, California faces significant socioeconomic challenges, with nearly poverty line and over 50% of renters burdened by high housing costs. These conditions contribute to elevated gang activity, with approximately 40% of violent crimes in the city linked to gangs, reflecting broader national trends of over 30,000 gangs and 850,000 members across the U.S.

Alignment to Specialization

This project aligns with the Child and Family Well-Being specialization by applying strategies that support the emotional and psychological health of justice-impacted individuals and their families. Through the use of emotional regulation techniques and problem-solving skills taught in the specialization, the project helps create supportive, healing-centered environments. By promoting stability, personal growth, and trauma-informed care, the project advances the overall well-being of children and families affected by the justice system.

PROJECT OVERVIEW, OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES



METHODS

CSULB students collected 13 pre- and post- surveys that included both quantitative and qualitative data from Project Kinship participants to understand the participants as well as learning outcomes. The surveys included: Likert-Scale Questions, Demographic information questions and Open-ended response. The data was analyzed through Qualtrics and SPSS.

RESULTS

Participant Characteristics

Age Range: 26–30

- (average ≈ 27.8) → Participants were young adults, typical individuals recently exiting the justice system.
- Gender: Predominantly male (6 out of 9), with 3 females
- → Reflects broader are overrepresented.

Ethnicity/Race:

- Hispanic/Latino identities dominate (6+ entries)
- Others include Samoan, Black, and Mexican This shows a racially and ethnically diverse group, but one that reflects overrepresented communities in incarceration stats.

Zip Codes: All Southern California residents (Orange County) → Indicates localized reentry incarceration trends, where men experiences and can be useful for tailoring services geographically

Descriptive and Qualitative Results

Even among formerly incarcerated individuals, there's limited awareness of the term "recidivism—possibly due to jargon disconnect or lack of formal education on the issue.

Participants demonstrated increased confidence in handling, approaching, and understanding problems after the workshop. Feedback reflects meaningful personal insights and improved emotional regulation. The consistently high scores and absence of critical feedback suggest the workshop was well-received and effective in its goals.

Participant Confidence in Problem-Solving After the Workshop

Self-reported levels of confidence across various problem-solving skills

For the following questions, use this scale: 1 = Not Confident 2 = Slightly Confident 3 = Moderately Confident 4 = Confident 5 = Very Confident 4



Qualitative Data: Pre and Post open ended questions

Themes	Participant Responses
Knowledge	"No at all" (understanding of recidivism) "Somewhat" or "Not at all" (factors that contribute to recidivism)
Skills	"Self control with positive results" "I can control my anger" "I learned a breakdown of how to look at problems in my life"
Attitudes	"My greatest challenge is going to sleep and peicing my life back together" "Self growth" "Program needs to be longer and more individually in-depth to fully help people"

RESOURCES

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). Santa Ana city, California. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov National Low Income Housing Coalition. (2021). Out of reach: The high cost of housing. Retrieved from https://nlihc.org/oor National Gang Center. (n.d.). https://nationalgangcenter.ojp.gov/ Santa Ana Police Department. (2020). Local crime statistics

CONCLUSION

Analysis of Findings

After analyzing the comparison of pre- and post-surveys means, it was evident that participants brought deep, firsthand experience with challenges like homelessness, recovery, and stress, but lacked the formal language to describe their journeys in professional settings. Despite this, they showed strong emotional insight and coping skills and high confidence in effective problem-solving and decision- making skills suggesting potential for roles in peer mentorship, advocacy, and education. To fully support their growth, holistic approaches are essential combining emotional support, practical services, and skills training. By bridging lived experience with educational tools, we can continue to empower these individuals as credible leaders and experts within their communities. A portion of participants did not complete the post-survey, which may be attributed to several factors, including a perception that they had adequately coped with the challenges, hesitation to share personal insights, or difficulty with comprehension of the questions. These findings suggest that future surveys should account for varying levels of comfort with selfdisclosure and ensure clarity in question design to accommodate diverse cognitive abilities, while also providing support to encourage full participation.

Limitations & Improvements

One key limitation was the inability to follow up with participants after the workshops, which made it difficult to assess long-term impact. Additionally, time constraints limited the number of workshops we were able to offer. For future efforts, extending the project timeline and incorporating follow-up opportunities would strengthen evaluation efforts and provide deeper insight into participant outcomes.

Recommendations & Implications

Practice

- Implication: Community-based organizations are essential in building trust with previously incarcerated individuals.
- Recommendation: Strengthen partnerships with organizations like Project Kinship to co-develop and co-lead empowering programs.

Policy

- Implication: There are limited supportive policies for re-entry programs that focus on healing and empowerment.
- **Recommendation**: Advocate for funding and policy support for trauma-informed, community-led empowering services.

Research

- Implication: There's a lack of longitudinal data on the outcomes of short-term empowering workshops
- Recommendation: Conduct follow-up studies to track long-term impacts on mental health, employment, and recidivism.

COMMUNITY PARTNER

Project Kinship

We partnered with Project Kinship, a community-based organization in Santa Ana, CA. supporting individuals impacted by incarceration. They allowed us to host workshops centered on healing, empowerment, and recidivism. Their team provided valuable guidance, outreach, and a welcoming space for participants to engage and grow.

Name of Collaborator

Contributions

Project Kinship contributed to the success of this project in several ways:

- Assisted with the recruitment of willing participants.
- Provided the space to implement the workshops.
- Contributed by overseeing the implementation of our interventions and participating during the workshops.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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