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SUCCESS STORIES PROGRAM EVALUATION

Marginalia Research Group

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Marginalia Research Group

Marginalia Research Group works with community organizations as a research partner. We focus on collaborating with social justice organizations and providing research services that support their work, such as running studies to provide evidence-based feedback on programming. The current members of Marginalia Research Group are Lindsey Beach, Hannah Curtis, and Christina Hughes. Trained in social science research methods, the team has a wide array of experience in both quantitative and qualitative approaches, including survey techniques, interview and focus group facilitation, pre-post program evaluation, and ethnographic observation.

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Glossary

CDCR.....	California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
GED.....	General Education Development Test
ILTAG.....	Inmate Leisure Time Activity Groups
TJ.....	Transformative justice

1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Study Overview

This report is a large-scale, mixed-methods evaluation of the Success Stories Program, completed by the Marginalia Research Group between 2022 and 2024. Success Stories is a transformative justice and feminist organization conducting programming at men’s and women’s California state prisons, juvenile facilities, youth centers, re-entry facilities, and middle and high schools. Their curriculum identifies and deconstructs the harm of patriarchal systems and toxic masculinity in an effort to transform participants’ lives and relationships. While Success Stories’ works with many different groups, this report focuses on programming in men’s state prisons operated by the California Department for Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). The aims of the study are to 1) deeply understand how Success Stories approaches their work, and 2) evaluate if, and to what extent, the Success Stories program changes participants’ beliefs and attitudes about masculinity and harm, improves their ability to set goals, and increases their self-efficacy.

To evaluate these changes, we observed program meetings, debriefed with facilitators, interviewed participants, and administered pre- and post-program surveys of a dozen 13-week workshops. Data cover topics relevant to the program’s functioning (e.g., strategies and their implementation, etc.) and intended outcomes (e.g., participants’ orientation to accountability, number or quality of healthy relationships with loved ones, etc.). Insights from interviews and observations help us qualitatively understand how participants respond to the curriculum, how they feel about their experiences, and points of contention or agreement. Further, qualitative analysis aids our interpretation of quantitative survey results.

The larger purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between transformative-justice, feminist-based programming and currently-incarcerated men’s understanding of harm and violence. Abolitionists argue ‘alternatives to incarceration’ are a crucial component in building toward a society without systems of punishment like prisons, police, or expulsions. They reject punitive solutions to individual harm, in favor of transformative justice approaches that support community-based accountability. In a rapidly-changing policy environment that must now be responsive to these conversations, scholarship is necessary to understand how the wide-scale adoption of alternatives to incarceration will work. Using data from observations, interviews, and surveys, our evaluation of the Success Stories Program contributes to the larger policy conversation about these abolition futures.

Key Findings

- 1 | Success Stories fosters transformative learning, leading participants to reevaluate their views on masculinity & relationships.**

Participants significantly shift their understandings of toxic masculinity, such as violence as a problem-solving method, and reject these harmful beliefs.
- 2 | Success Stories encourages resistance to the societal pressure placed on men to limit their emotional expression & vulnerability.**

Participants are more willing to engage in emotional self-reflection and express their feelings openly after completing the program.
- 3 | The program encourages participants to foster authentic relationships & community connections.**

Participants demonstrate increased trust, forgiveness, and openness to receiving feedback from others, indicating a shift towards healthier interpersonal dynamics.
- 4 | Success Stories empowers participants to identify & prioritize personal goals.**

Participants report a clearer understanding of their priorities and a greater sense of agency in pursuing their goals.
- 5 | Completion of the program is associated with a positive change in self-conception, characterized by increased integrity, pride, & agency.**

Participants express a newfound sense of purpose and optimism about their future.
- 6 | The program fosters a culture of accountability & honesty, promoting constructive communication and mutual respect among participants.**

Participants are more mindful, reflecting on their past actions and motivations with greater clarity and self-awareness.
- 7 | Program facilitators are praised by participants for their relatability, effectiveness, & ability to create a supportive learning environment.**

Overall, participants express high levels of satisfaction with the Success Stories workshop, highlighting its transformative impact on their lives.

2

SUCCESS
STORIES

SUCCESS STORIES

Organization History & Overview

Section written collaboratively by Success Stories leadership & Marginalia researchers.

Success Stories is designed and facilitated by currently- and formerly-incarcerated people, for people who have caused patriarchal harm. Program delivery occurs primarily in carceral settings, like prisons and juvenile halls, and preventative spaces, like schools and reentry organizations. This approach is in distinct contrast to other programs delivered by external organizations and parties whose facilitators have not directly navigated the criminal legal system or explored the relationship between patriarchy and violence.

The Success Stories organization was co-founded in 2014 by two incarcerated men—Richie Reseda and Charles Berry—at the California Training Facility (CTF) prison in Soledad, California. The curriculum was created 1) in response to a lack of programs that looked at the root cause of harm and violence, and 2) to start having a discussion about patriarchy, which they believed to be the main cause of these problems. Based on intersectional feminist theory and literature, like bell hooks' *The Will to Change*, the original Success Stories Program took shape.

In the early years, the work of Hugo Gonzalez and other men serving life sentences contributed to the success, growth, and practical implementation of the program. These individuals brought powerful relatability to the concepts being shared in group discussions. A group of men, all deeply committed to transformation, shaped a curriculum through experimentation, expertise based in lived experience, research, and vulnerability. Success Stories' contributions to public safety were quickly recognized by the state. In 2014, Chantal Coudoux, our outside liaison, and a pivotal group of women and nonbinary people supported Success Stories on the outside by helping grow the feminist content, advocating for legislative changes related to in-prison programs, and creating resources.

Success Stories continues their work to answer the critical question of how we keep each other safe. This work is supported by both members of the original leadership who have come home and the family who are still inside. Hugo Gonzalez is now the Director of Public Outreach; Christopher Johnson is the Executive Director; Chantal Coudoux is the Associate Director; and our very first outside coach and former inside coach, Graham Finocchio, is the Director of Programs. Both Richie Reseda and Haewon Asfaw, who was a critical source of support from the beginning, served on the board from 2020–2024 and continue to be part of the fabric of the Success Stories community as alumni members.

The primary way Success Stories organizes its work is through the delivery of its feminist curriculum in a “reflection group”-style setting, covering 12 concepts in facilitated discussion. The Success Stories curriculum is delivered in a 13-week long workshop. At the end of the program, participants are given the opportunity to attend a graduation event and join the Success Stories alumni membership, which offers ongoing support with community/accountability pod building, deepening participants’ understanding of the curriculum, and additional resources. Former participants are also encouraged to apply to become facilitators for future Success Stories cohorts.

Overall, the Success Stories Program is rooted in feminist-abolitionist theory that attempts to radically reshape how people who have caused patriarchal harm see themselves, their goals, and their relationships to the people closest to them. The approach moves beyond the dominance-based model that underpins the carceral state. The long-term goals of Success Stories are for participants to 1) understand their goals and how their relationship to patriarchal harm has stood in the way of achieving them, 2) develop the tools to define and live in integrity, and 3) create relationships of accountability.

The Success Stories curriculum is most often offered in the prison setting, but has increasingly also been offered in external spaces outside of prisons and online. Particularly during and after 2020—when access to California state prisons became more restricted for program providers—Success Stories adapted by both expanding its remote and correspondence curricular offerings, as well adding programming sites.

In addition to California state prisons, Success Stories now delivers its curriculum in schools, re-entry and recovery programs, juvenile probation departments, and in partnership with other nonprofits. More recently, the organization has developed a gender expansive version of its curriculum, which is being offered in women’s prison facilities and other relevant sites. They have also hired a new transformational coach to support this work.

Core Values

As a feminist abolitionist organization, Success Stories states its primary mission is to build a world free of both prisons and patriarchy by situating its work in seven core values.

1 | Intersectional Feminism

“We root ourselves in intersectional feminism, how multiple identities (gender, sexual orientation, race) compound to inform our lived experiences.”

2 | Centering People Directly Impacted by the Carceral System

“We believe that the people who know best how to shape freedom and change are those directly impacted by the same systems of oppression [we’re working with].”

3 | Abolition of Punishment Systems (Prison & Criminal Legal System)

“We do not believe in the use of punishment as a means of control or behavior change; not only are these systems inhumane but they do not lead to transformation. All institutions and practices associated with the carceral system can be replaced by community, collective support towards accountability, and integrity.”

4 | Transformative Justice

“Transformative justice [is] a liberatory approach to violence... [which] seeks safety and accountability without relying on alienation, punishment, or State or systemic violence, including incarceration or policing. We don’t believe in throwing people away. We don’t believe in punishment. We believe all behavior can be transformed. We believe people are inherently valuable.”

5 | Rooting in Love & Community

“We believe love is the act of spiritually investing in others and ourselves.”

6 | Non-hierarchical Forms of Relating & Co-learning

“We believe that transformative experiences come from communal healing not by ‘learning’ from someone whose lived experiences do not reflect directly impacted people. Our model is predicated on our coach and facilitators relating to participants and transforming alongside each other. We believe healing and decolonizing never ends.”

7 | Healing Justice

“We believe that by healing the wounds and harms of patriarchy and transforming the mindsets and conditions that lead to them, we break intergenerational cycles of trauma.”

Locations Served

Because Success Stories began as an in-person California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation program, the bulk of its work still takes place in California State prisons. Delivering its program across 11 CDCR facilities, the organization is currently working with incarcerated people at: California State Prison (Corcoran, CA), Calipatria State Prison (Calipatria, CA), Centinela State Prison (Imperial, CA), Chuckawalla Valley State Prison (Blythe, CA), Ironwood State Prison (Blythe, CA), California Rehabilitation Center (Norco, CA), Wasco State Prison (Wasco, CA), Correctional Training Facility (Soledad, CA), Central California Women's Facility (Chowchilla, CA), and California Institute for Women (Corcoran, CA).



In the past, Success Stories has also worked in: Delano Modified Community Correctional Facility, Northern Kern State Prison, Kern Valley State Prison, Pleasant Valley State Prison, Shafter Modified Community Correctional Facility, and Taft Modified Community Correctional Facility.

Peer-Led Model

One way Success Stories implements the core principle of non-hierarchical relating and co-learning is through their peer-led model. As displayed below, Success Stories encourages and trains people who have completed the program to continue contributing by becoming facilitators. Facilitators are also trained to lead sessions in a way encourages engagement, comfort, and a sense of community among participants.



Curriculum

In prison settings, Success Stories curriculum invites currently incarcerated men to acknowledge, challenge, and transform destructive behaviors and harmful dynamics in their relationships. Success Stories participants enroll in a 13-week workshop where facilitators guide discussions on these topics. Facilitators foster trust and support self-healing by asking participants to challenge traditional ideas of masculinity and explore alternative ways to define their self-worth beyond the norms of toxic masculinity.

The curriculum specifically focuses on goal identification, defining success, accountability, and integrity. Program activities include reflection exercises, goal- and priority-setting tasks, time logs, and peer group discussions (discussed in more detail on page 12). At the end of the program, participants attend a graduation event and are invited to join the alumni network.

Workshop Structure

- 12 weekly sessions + graduation (week 13)
- Each weekly session is 2 hours
- Approximately 25 participants per workshop
- Large group discussions
- Small breakout groups
- Individual activities and exercises

Weekly Topics

- 1 | **Top 5** - Priority-setting by identifying participants' Top 5 people and goals
- 2 | **Success** - Questioning societal definitions of success and worth
- 3 | **Keeping Your Word** - Supporting participant accountability and integrity
- 4 | **Toxic Masculinity** - Examining harmful beliefs about manhood
- 5 | **Patriarchy** - Connecting harmful masculinity to patriarchal systems
- 6 | **Patriarchy, Going Deep** - Unpacking participants' roles in harmful systems
- 7 | **Love** - The way to transformative change
- 8 | **Self-Awareness, Beliefs** - Rejecting harmful self-beliefs
- 9 | **Self-Awareness, Emotions** - Valuing healthy emotional expression
- 10 | **Victim v. Victorious Mentality** - Building agency and overcoming limitations
- 11 | **Rich Thinking v. Broke Thinking** - Moving beyond survival and scarcity
- 12 | **Success Stories** - Manifesting a transformative life in loving community

Activities



Top 5

The first activity completed, participants identify the Top 5 people and/or goals in their lives. This is a guiding framework throughout the program.



Time Logs

Participants fill out weekly Time Logs, tracking how they spend their time on a daily basis. These help participants assess progress toward their goals.



Vocabulary

In Vocabulary activities, facilitators define key terms used in the curriculum.



Check-Ins

Check-Ins gauge participants' relationship to the weekly topic before material is introduced. Presented as questions, they frame the lesson and assist participants in challenging their initial beliefs.



Dive-Ins

During the Dive-In, facilitators present the main lessons for the week.



Peer Discussion

Participants discuss weekly material and concepts with each other.



Honest Reflection Exercises

Completed at the end of a lesson or between weekly sessions, Honest Reflection Exercises prompt participants to consider the nuances of the material and reflect on how each topic connects to their own experiences.



In Real Life

In Real Life enables facilitators to share their experiences with the weekly lesson, fostering connection with participants, encouraging them to share their own experiences, and offering an alternative way to present the material.



Graduation

Graduation marks the end of the workshop. Participants share how the sessions have impacted them, present their "In 5 Years" letter imagining their future success, and are invited to join the alumni network for ongoing support.

3

THEORY
OF CHANGE

THEORY OF CHANGE

In this chapter, we conceptualize Success Stories' Theory of Change. Identifying a program's theory of change is the first step in evaluation, a process through which researchers make the "underlying rationale of a project explicit, which supports planning, implementation, and assessment of that project."¹ The Theory of Change model presented here is our distilled understanding of how Success Stories' programming works to transform the lives of participants and the broader community through transformative justice principles. Logic Models (pages 15-17) detail how Success Stories translates these pathways into programmatic interventions and outcomes.

To begin identifying the organization's Theory of Change, we talked with Success Stories leadership to understand their perspective on the program's work. Additionally, we closely analyzed Success Stories' curriculum to understand the methods, approaches, and objectives they use to spur transformation in participants. Lastly, we studied texts vital to the program's founding and reviewed existing literature on masculinity and abolition.

The overarching goal of Success Stories is to create alternatives to punishment (including incarceration) by offering transformative programming that creates space for individuals to take accountability for their actions and to examine their adherence to notions of masculinity that lead to harm. Success Stories uses an abolitionist framework, as they offer new ways of living in integrity, simultaneously divesting financially and ideologically from the prison industrial complex² and instead investing in community models of care and accountability. In general, abolition of the carceral state requires challenging individual, community, institutional, and systemic logics of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism, which are foundational to the U.S. criminal legal system. This following section explores our evaluation of how Success Stories translates its feminist-abolitionist visions into actionable pathways of transformation.

Pathways of Transformation

Success Stories actualizes its abolitionist imagination via three pathways (Figure 1). First, by engaging with criminal-legal institutions, like courts and prisons, from a 'non-reformist reform' analysis,³ Success Stories models an alternative approach to justice that aims to reduce the harm of mass incarceration. The criminal legal system relies on individualistic, punitive logics that treat people who have caused harm as disposable. It also has a

¹ Reinholdz & Andrews 2020:1

² Schlosser 1998; Davis 2003

³ Gorz 1987:102

disproportionately negative impact on Black, Indigenous, Latinx, low-income, and undocumented communities. Instead, Success Stories seeks to reduce harm and contact with the prison system by facilitating repair and accountability amongst participants in community, with a long term vision to shift culture so prisons are no longer needed.

Second, Success Stories recognizes structures of violence precipitate individual acts of harm. Often, people are incarcerated after experiencing structural violence, state violence, or violence within their families, communities, or relationships. To address the interconnected systems of violence that reinforce existing power dynamics related to race, class, sexuality, and gender, Success Stories starts by consciousness raising through its programming. After recognizing the harmful influence of patriarchal, capitalistic, and racist ideologies, participants can start to dismantle these beliefs within themselves, changing how they interact with others, set priorities and goals in their lives, and perceive themselves as agents of change.

In the final pathway, the Success Stories Program creates communities where participants continue unlearning harmful beliefs and bond with others who have personal experience with the criminal legal system. After the initial program is complete, participants are asked to join an alumni network, through which they can continue work on goals and build community with other participants. This leads to community-driven accountability models that foster environments where commitments to transformation can be realized. Success Stories' commitments to diversionary programming in the criminal legal system, programming inside of prisons, and building community creates opportunities for transformation at the individual, community, and institutional levels.

Figure 1. Success Stories' Pathways of Transformation

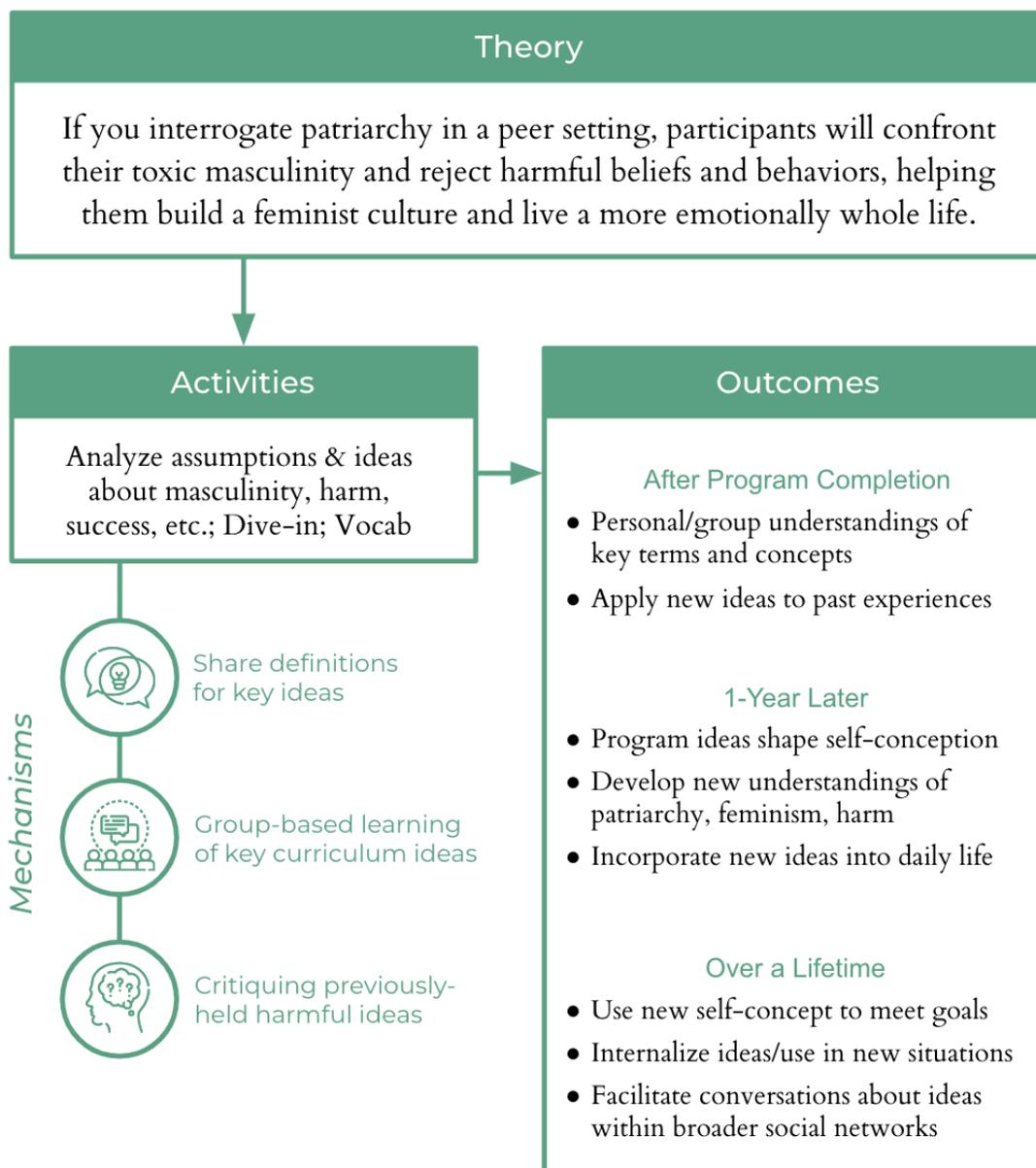


Logic Model

The Success Stories Program is an alternative to incarceration specified in the first pathway of transformation. To fulfill the second pathway, the organization helps participants recognize harmful social structures by facilitating transformation of harmful beliefs and ideologies. Finally, the third pathway is addressed by building community and transformative accountability through their programming. In the remainder of the chapter we detail how Success Stories connects these pathways to their programming goals through curricular choices, activities, and mechanisms that lead to short-term and ongoing change.

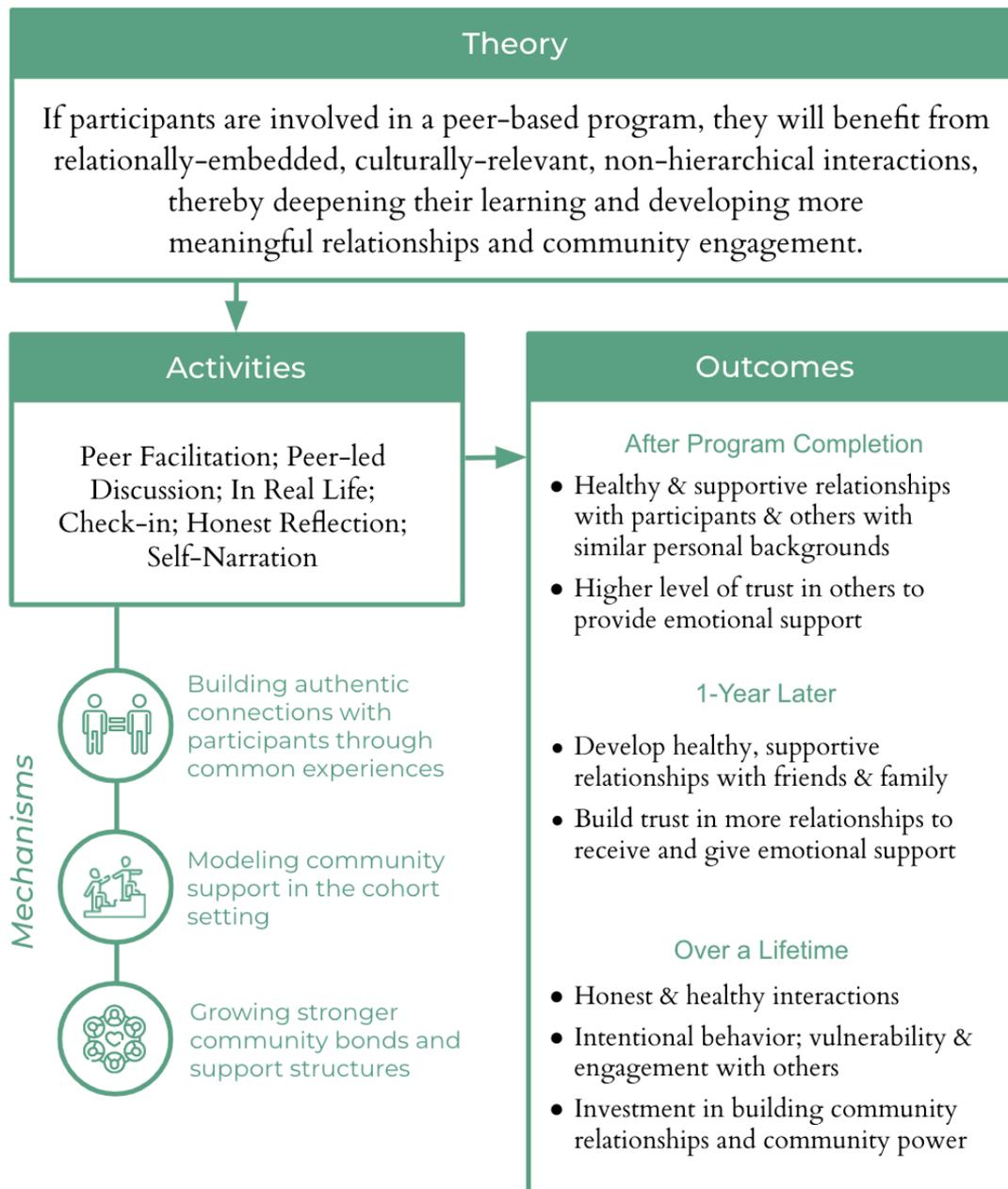
Ideological Change

Success Stories' programming focuses on deconstructing patriarchy, particularly toxic masculinity. It distills feminist theory—largely influenced by bell hooks and abolitionist feminists—about the relationship between patriarchal structures and masculine harm in a way that encourages participants to reflect on their past decisions and redefine their commitments to their loved ones and community moving forward.



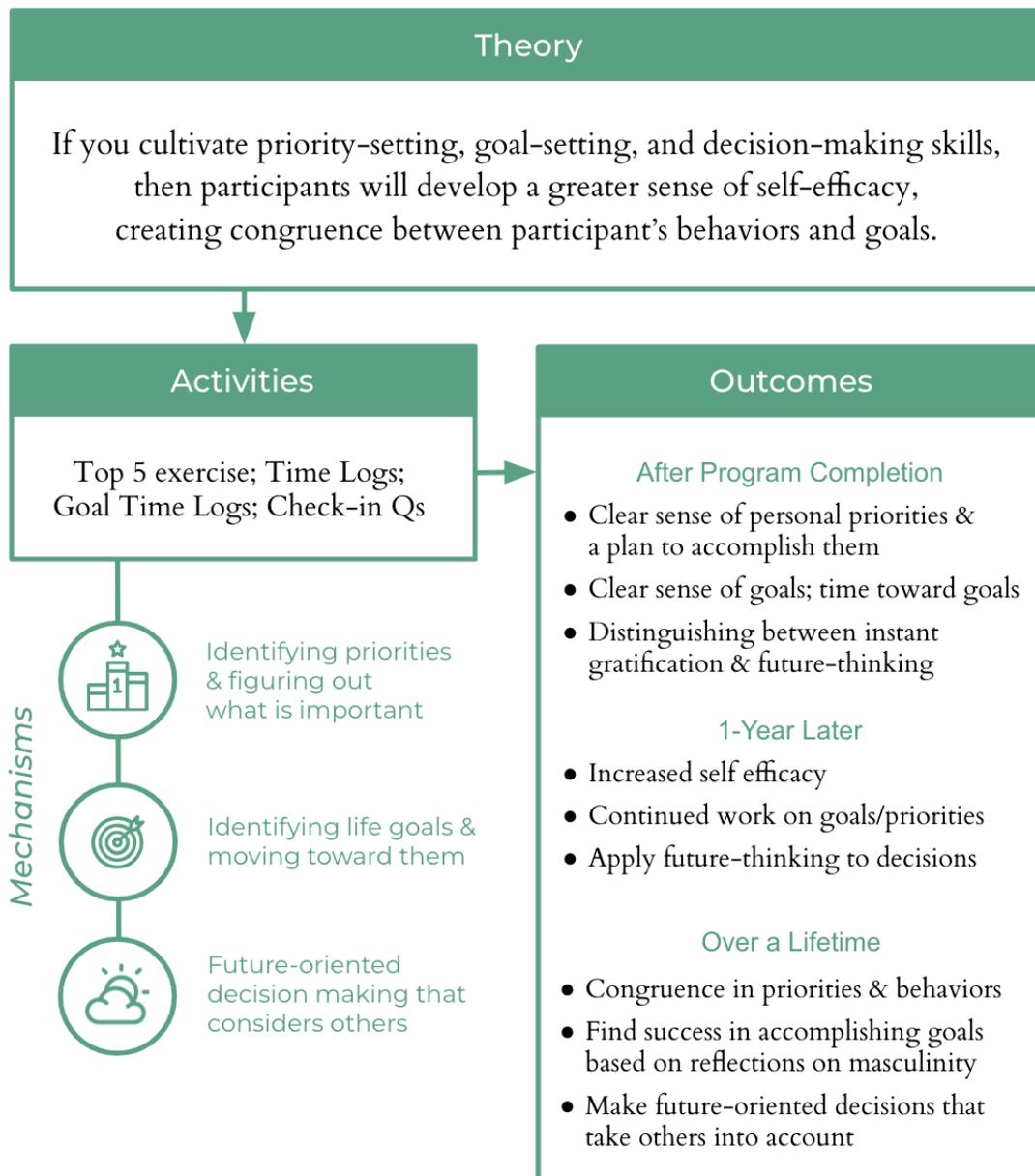
Community Building

Using a peer-delivery method, Success Stories' facilitators model how to build healthy, emotionally vulnerable relationships with other system-impacted men. This deepens the intimacy of the cohort and demonstrates the support strong relationships can provide. By strengthening bonds within cohorts, the program encourages long-term community building among participants.



Transformative Accountability

A key aspect of Success Stories programming is helping participants develop integrity, a kind of lived accountability. Integrity is the alignment between a person’s actions and their beliefs or values. To help nurture integrity, Success Stories starts by asking participants to identify which people and goals are important to them. Then, the program encourages participants to develop the skills they need to honor those commitments in their lives.



4

RELEVANT
RESEARCH

RELEVANT RESEARCH

While the Success Stories Program has not been empirically evaluated before this report, evidence from other research suggests the topics addressed by Success Stories are directly relevant to the institutional and reentry experiences of incarcerated men. In this review, we examine the feminist theory underlying the Success Stories curriculum, findings from evaluations of similar prison programs, and other relevant research. In doing so, this chapter underscores how addressing harmful ideologies and beliefs about masculinity can lead to institutional change and provides an overview of effective interventions.

Harmful Masculinity

Success Stories focuses their program interventions on harmful expressions of masculinity and closely related topics. This focus grows out of the organization's feminist analysis based on bell hooks' *The Will to Change*, that sees interpersonal expressions of harm as gender-based and fundamentally rooted in the patriarchal society in which we all live. Engaging with a wide array of thinkers including psychologists, philosophers, spiritual leaders, feminists, journalists, activists, poets, psychiatrists, writers, and sociologists, bell hooks argues patriarchy prioritizes domination and control through psychological terrorism and violence. In this framework, men struggle to love and others struggle to love men because of patriarchal conditioning that takes place in interpersonal relationships, popular culture, the media, and basic forms of socialization.

“Men cannot change if there are no blueprints for change. Men cannot love if they are not taught the art of loving. Love is vital to maleness, to the spiritual and emotional wholeness men seek.”

bell hooks

During boyhood and adolescence, hooks argues, men face stunted emotional development and are limited to expressing anger. They may lack healthy emotional bonding with patriarchal fathers and mothers, relating instead through feelings of fear, abandonment, shame, and alienation. Some are subjected to emotional, sexual, and physical abuse by older male relatives in acts of subjugation and submission. hooks argues the first violence

patriarchal men commit is against themselves in the form of self-degradation, a response to being consistently shamed.

The result is a normalized disconnection in young men, dismissed through anti-social caricatures of teenage boys and sentiments like ‘boys will be boys.’ These common experiences can decimate men’s self-esteem, limit their capacity for emotional awareness, and can distort masculinity toward violence. Cultures of patriarchy not only frame violence as inevitable, but succeed in structuring it as a reward.

As boys grow into men, hooks continues, patriarchal violence shows up in their interpersonal relationships through domestic violence, femicide, abuse towards those close to them, homophobia, sexual violence, and a general investment in maintaining relations of domination and control. Not only does this violence harm their loved ones and communities, it also prevents men from experiencing love, accepting themselves, being authentic, and feeling emotionally whole. hooks explains this is because, in relationships centered on domination and control, love cannot exist.

While recognizing feminist contributions to critiques of patriarchy, hooks⁴ notes some have failed to provide alternatives, solutions, or pathways out of this harmful system:

When feminist women insist that all men are powerful oppressors who victimize from the location of power, they obscure the reality that many victimize from the location of victimization. The violence they do to others is usually a mirroring of the violence enacted upon and within the self. Many radical feminists have been so enraged by male domination that they cannot acknowledge the possibility of male suffering or forgive. Failure to examine the victimization of men keeps us from understanding maleness, from uncovering the space of connection that might lead more men to seek feminist transformation.

hooks, however, offers an intervention. She insists deep relational work be done on a cultural level and calls for a ‘revolution of values’ centering a ‘love ethic’ to end the epidemic of male alienation and subsequent violence. The framework hooks provides replaces patriarchal ideas of domination and subjugation with a model of partnership that requires interbeing⁵ and interdependency.

Success Stories applies hooks’ theory of addressing the harm and violence of imperialist, white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy by implementing a curriculum based largely on the account of masculine harm and patriarchy in *The Will to Change*. Through this curriculum, facilitators address toxic beliefs about manhood and model healthy

⁴ hooks 2004:139-140

⁵ ‘Interbeing’ is the idea all things are interconnected and mutually dependent.

emotional expression, giving men who have caused harm the opportunity to take accountability and fostering a community of love and support among peers.

Recalling the logic models discussed previously, micro-level interventions in participants' beliefs and community interactions can have long-term and macro-level implications that go beyond individualistic calls for greater 'personal responsibility.' Success Stories emphasizes how harmful social structures constrain men's lives *and* can be resisted and transformed. The curriculum's peer-based model highlights the agency of incarcerated people to support accountability and repair their relationships with others by understanding how their own beliefs and behaviors have reproduced patriarchal systems.

Implementing this 'revolution of values' for transformative, structural change is an intervention hooks and Success Stories recognize as a cultural shift that must ultimately involve everyone in our patriarchal society. Both recognize that men, who have caused harm due to structures of violence, sit at the crux of these necessary changes. As a program founded by incarcerated men in the prison setting, Success Stories specifically roots its work in the micro-macro connection between incarcerated people and the carceral state. This is important because incarcerated men who have caused harm are uniquely positioned as 'structuring agents'—i.e. social actors located at the intersection of social structures and social behaviors who are capable of transforming the former through shifts in the latter.⁶

Research on the harms of toxic masculinity bolster hooks' argument concerning the stakes of addressing patriarchal beliefs about manhood at the micro-level. In particular, prior research indicates that stereotypical ideas about masculinity can negatively impact men in prisons, where displays of harmful 'traditional' masculinity can include excessive risk-taking, emotional numbness, assertions of dominance among peers, isolating self-sufficiency, and the subjugation of women.⁷ These negative masculine expressions can lead to increased prison violence and negative mental health outcomes.⁸ Work by Gordon et al. specifically focuses on incarcerated men of color, finding high levels of adherence to normative masculine values are associated with longer incarceration stays.⁹ Another study on the effect of masculine norms on the mental health of incarcerated men finds men who had stronger adherence to heterosexual presentation had higher rates of anxiety and reported more depressive symptoms than men with less adherence.¹⁰ In addition, men with smaller informal support systems also reported higher rates of anxiety and depressive symptoms.¹⁰

Other research supports hooks' connection of interpersonal gender-based violence to macro-level patriarchal systems in prisons and other institutions. For example, White,

⁶ Giddens 1986

⁷ Kupers 2005; Ricciardelli et. al. 2015

⁸ Michalski 2017

⁹ Gordon et. al. 2013

¹⁰ Iwamoto et. al. 2012

Merrill, and Koss find violence within military couples is higher when couples enter the Armed Forces environment than in pre-military courtship.¹¹ Violence was most likely to occur within the dyad when the male, heterosexual partner was in the military.¹¹ Moreover, in the often pathologized example of gang street violence, Robert Vargas shows how violence in Chicago was not due to a ‘lack of community in poor neighborhoods,’ but rather local competition for political power among state actors like police officers and politicians.¹² This competition often undermined efforts to reduce gang violence.¹² In the case of incarcerated people, Mark Halsey and Melissa de Vel-Palumbo document how roughly one in five people who are incarcerated report having a parent who is currently or previously incarcerated.¹³ This finding demonstrates the link between intergenerational trauma and the emergence of the prison as a life-defining institution for many children who come from families impacted by mass incarceration.¹³

Transformative Justice & Harm

Taking into account the micro-level and macro-level interdependencies shaping masculine harm on the ground and patriarchal violence at the institutional level, Success Stories agrees with hooks’ position that men often victimize, not because they are powerful oppressors, but because they want to distance themselves from the victimization they experience in their own lives. Breaking the perpetrator-victim dichotomy draws on hooks and from a more specific body of work developed by transformative and other anti-carceral feminists. Rather than absolve people who have caused harm from taking responsibility for their actions by reasoning that they have been abused themselves, anti-carceral feminism alternatively recognizes that building more prisons and deploying more police only exacerbates the immediate and enduring cycles of harm that tend to disproportionately impact the most marginalized and vulnerable.¹⁴

Mia Mingus defines a transformative justice (TJ) approach as a framework that aims to avoid creating more violence when trying to respond to violence:

TJ can be thought of as a way of “making things right,” getting in “right relation,” or creating justice together. Transformative justice responses and interventions 1) do not rely on the state (e.g. police, prisons, the criminal legal system, I.C.E., foster care system (though some TJ responses do rely on or incorporate social services like counseling)); 2) do not reinforce or perpetuate violence such as oppressive norms or vigilantism; and most

¹¹ White, Merrill, & Koss 2001; Jones 2012

¹² Vargas 2016

¹³ Halsey and Vel-Palumbo 2020

¹⁴ Critical Resistance-INCITE! 2003

importantly, 3) actively cultivate the things we know prevent violence such as healing, accountability, resilience, and safety for all involved.¹⁵

According to Mimi Kim, the TJ framework can be traced back along several genealogies, including when INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence emerged in Santa Cruz in 2000.¹⁶ Centered around the experiences and needs of women of color, especially survivors of sexual and domestic violence, INCITE! developed a framework condemning both gender-based violence and state violence, demanding more resources for intervening into the structural conditions that were harming BIPOC communities like racist policing practices, underinvestment in communities, and hazardous zoning.¹⁷

“ It is also important that we develop strategies that challenge the criminal justice system, while providing safety for survivors of sexual and domestic violence. To live violence-free lives, we must develop holistic strategies for addressing violence that speak to the intersection of all forms of oppression. ”

INCITE!-Critical Resistance

Drawing on the prison abolitionist work of another California Bay Area group—Critical Resistance—founded in 1998 in Berkeley, INCITE! correspondingly argued its movement would also reject any strategy that relied upon the legitimacy of the carceral state. During this period an organization led by survivors of child sexual abuse called generationFIVE promoted TJ as a liberatory justice framework. Various other community-based organizations, ranging from non-profits to grassroots groups, formed in the 2000s and 2010s to apply the TJ framework in more specific contexts.

Communities turn to these organizations for internal resolution and healing over relying on police, courts, the child welfare system, or immigration authorities. Previous versions of carceral feminist often paired supporting survivors with calls for harsh punishments and more policing.¹⁸ The interventions of these TJ-oriented groups still

¹⁵ Mingus 2024

¹⁶ Kim 2020

¹⁷ INCITE! 2006

¹⁸ Thuma 2019

strongly support survivors, while opening up new paths and questions about what justice and healing might look and feel like without turning to carceral systems. Recent social protest over police violence has brought more support, or at least curiosity, to TJ and similar approaches.

Success Stories applies the idea of deconstructing the perpetrator-victim false dichotomy into practice by taking the life experiences of incarcerated people seriously and taking action from a place that respects their ability to create their own spaces of healing, mutual accountability, and collective transformation. Careful to not place the onus of responsibility on those who experience disproportionate harm at the social margins as the "solution" to eliminating interpersonal violence in society, the program emphasizes a nuanced position regarding how these micro-level interventions can both function as alternatives to existing carceral state punishments already systemically perpetuating cycles of institutional harm and as long-term measures capable of shifting culture towards Success Stories' emphasis on calling patriarchy to account and building a world free of gender-based domination and violence. As such the theory of change can be understood as placing the ability to enact structural change in the hands of agentic actors on the ground, i.e. directly impacted people, their loved ones, and allies, who---in understanding the structural role of patriarchy in social violence---actively intervene in how its harmful structures play out in everyday life by creating models for a different world in themselves and their relationships.

Evaluating Efficacy

Feminist & Peer-led Programs

Prior research shows feminist and peer-led prison programs can improve the lives of incarcerated individuals. Marcus-Mendoza explored the benefits and needs of feminist prison programs, arguing core feminist tenets can be useful for implementing successful programming.¹⁹ For example, feminist principles of egalitarianism, relationality, and community facilitate practices of mutual empathy and empowerment, which in turn can help participants build healthy relationships. These are crucial factors in shaping the experience of reentry post release. Additionally, feminist and gender-responsive programs are effective because they address specific group needs (e.g. for incarcerated women: substance abuse treatment, education, job training, parenting programs with child contact, and family reunification).²⁰

Research on peer-led prison programming shows benefits for both peer leaders and participants. Peer leaders report an increased sense of empowerment and fulfillment, feelings they unsuccessfully tried to acquire through prior behavior that often resulted in criminal

¹⁹ Marcus-Mendoza 2004

²⁰ White 2012

punishment.²¹ The opportunity to develop their leadership skills and help their peers also results in improved self-esteem and self-confidence.²² Peer leaders also report feeling more embedded in society,²³ which may increase positive experiences with reintegration after release.

Devilly et. al.²⁴ helpfully summarize studies of peer-led programming: “Peers are deemed more credible sources of information [than outside professionals] because they have experienced similar struggles and are, therefore, able to ‘speak the same language’ by offering practical support and positive role modeling.” Compared to programs run by professionals, studies find peer-led models can increase participant motivation and confidence in making change²⁵ and enhance participant self-esteem and self-worth.²⁶

Success Stories’ programming currently implements many of these best practices, ranging from its emphasis on feminist tenets in its curriculum to its reliance on peer-led facilitation. Their interrogation of harmful forms of masculinity builds upon prior research demonstrating the effectiveness of these approaches. Meanwhile, their use of a peer-leader model prioritizes the expertise of incarcerated people to direct their own self-reflection and encourages authentic, non-hierarchical relationship building.

Moving Beyond Recidivism

One of the main ways researchers evaluate the effectiveness of programs working with system-involved people is by measuring and tracking individuals’ recidivism patterns. Recidivism is an analytic concept focusing on people’s ‘criminal behavior’ after they have ended contact with a system or program.²⁷ A program may be considered effective if participants are arrested, jailed, or imprisoned less frequently after completion. Recidivism can be one useful way of measuring a program’s positive impact on participants; reduced system contact may indicate underlying shifts in people’s behavior and thinking. However, arrest and incarceration are social processes that often treat non-dominant groups punitively—as such, recidivism may measure individual-level changes and social patterns. While recidivism can play a role when evaluating harm and the criminal legal system, it is only one way of conceptualizing program effectiveness in this setting.

Research shows a wide variety of interventions, factors, and characteristics shape recidivism. In general, factors related to recidivism are described as static (i.e. historical or

²¹ Maruna 2001; Turner & Shepherd 1999

²² Backett-Milburn & Wilson 2000; Parkin & McKeganey 2000

²³ Maruna 2001

²⁴ Devilly et. al. 2005:231

²⁵ Topping & Ehly 1998

²⁶ Maheady 1998

²⁷ NIJ 2024

immutable individual characteristics) or dynamic (i.e. factors that can be changed through intervention).²⁸ In a meta-analysis of 131 studies, Gendreau et al.²⁹ find ‘criminogenic needs,’ described as “antisocial cognitions, values, and behaviors,” and social achievement are both dynamic factors that significantly shape recidivism patterns in American adults. In fact, this study suggests individuals’ criminal history and ‘criminogenic needs’ explain patterns of recidivism equally well, suggesting transforming people’s thinking, values, and behaviors can be a powerful factor in reducing future system involvement.

Other work explores the connection between emotional processing, social-emotional learning, and recidivism. Leshem et al.³⁰ find suggestive evidence that limits in people’s ability to process and verbally express emotions may compound other factors related to recidivism, increasing the likelihood of contact with the criminal-legal system. Moral cognition—the complex process that drives decision making and is informed by learning, rationalization, and biases³¹—is also directly related to recidivism. People who were less able to understand others’ emotions were more likely to recidivate,³² along with those who have feelings of shame and low levels of self-respect.³³ Finally, a sense life is largely outside of a person’s control or determined by luck (i.e. an external locus of control) is associated with several known recidivism risk factors³⁴ like limited social skills,³⁵ unhealthy coping,³⁶ and low self-esteem.³⁷ Increasing a person’s internalized locus of control³⁸ and self-efficacy³⁹ has been shown to decrease their future contact with the criminal-legal system. In all, many of the dynamic factors that shape recidivism rates—a sense of control over one’s life, self-respect, identifying and expressing emotions—are also essential for both being in healthy relationships with others and interrupting cycles of harm.

While abolitionist programs, such as Success Stories, may gladly welcome reductions in recidivism among their participants, they are predominantly concerned with people’s overall quality of life, ability to resolve conflict in nonviolent ways, and connection to the broader community. This is true for people who are currently incarcerated and those in the free world. Success Stories intervenes on many of the recidivism factors discussed here *and* values transformation that goes well beyond the concept of recidivism.

²⁸ Douglas & Skeem 2005; Gendreau et al. 1996

²⁹ Gendreau et al. 1996:575

³⁰ Leshem et al. 2019

³¹ Van Bavel et al. 2015

³² Van Langen et al. 2014

³³ Hosser et al. 2008

³⁴ Tyler et al. 2020

³⁵ Veneziano & Veneziano 1988

³⁶ Carton & Nowicki 1994

³⁷ Asberg & Renk 2014

³⁸ Asberg & Renk 2014; Morgan & Flora 2002

³⁹ Johnson et al. 2019

5

APPROACH

APPROACH

Our study of the Success Stories Program evaluates the feminist curriculum’s efficacy in meeting its goal of putting transformative justice into practice through peer-led discussions and reflections.

Using a mixed methods design, our analysis relies on quantitative data collected from pre- and post-participation surveys collected from 141 Success Stories participants in California men’s prisons, as well as qualitative data collected from interviews and observations conducted over the course of one workshop offered at a community reentry program in Los Angeles, California.

In this chapter we discuss our mixed-methods data strategy, survey measurement, analytic methods, and study limitations. The four research questions below guide our analysis; we answer these questions in the conclusion.

Research Questions

- 1 Do participants change their ideas about masculinity after completing the Success Stories curriculum?
- 2 Does the curriculum & design of the Success Stories program help participants learn healthy interpersonal dynamics & form connections with peers?
- 3 Does the Success Stories curriculum and design increase participants’ sense of self-efficacy & personal responsibility?
- 4 Are Success Stories participants satisfied with the program?

Mixed Methods Data Strategy

Combining statistical information with interview and observational data, a mixed methods strategy generates nuanced and confirmatory information via “triangulation”—e.g. collecting multiple forms of data to measure a social process. Our work utilizes session observations, coach debriefs, participant interviews, and pre-post surveys. Together these methods lend unique insight that cannot be gained using only one approach.



Session Observations & Coach Debriefs

Researchers observed a single Success Stories cohort from February through April 2022 to gain insight into coach-participant dynamics, group camaraderie, and the translation of the curriculum into real-world conversation. We observed how participants made meaning during weekly sessions.

For 8 weeks of the 13-week workshop, a research team member conducted in-person observations at an organization serving reentry communities in the Los Angeles area.⁴⁰ After each session, the research team member debriefed with the coach to address specific situations and ask clarifying questions.

For the 5 remaining weeks the research team scheduled in-depth debriefs with the facilitator(s). No observations were made during these weeks to give the group privacy to discuss difficult and sensitive topics. Because the research team consists of only cis women, we decided certain days (i.e. those covering patriarchy and toxic masculinity) would produce more realistic conversations if the facilitators, who identify as cis men, were able to facilitate without us present to avoid influencing what participants felt willing to share. In total, the research team completed 13 hours of session observations and 6 hours of coach debriefs.



Participant Interviews

Research team members conducted 14 semi-structured, life course interviews with cohort members who participated in the Success Stories Program at the external site in Los Angeles. Interviews were approximately one hour long and covered questions related to participants’ backgrounds, experiences with the criminal-legal system, attitudes towards masculinity and patriarchy, goals for the future, and impressions of the Success Stories Program experience.

⁴⁰ Due to limited prison access, researchers observed and interviewed participants at an established reentry organization. According to experienced coaches, the participants, discussions, and workshop environment were similar to those in the prison setting. Most participants had been very recently released from prison.



Pre- & Post-Program Surveys

All participants are asked to voluntarily complete a survey at the beginning and end of the program. Facilitators administer pre-surveys before delivering any curriculum, while post-surveys are distributed after the workshop is complete. Surveys were piloted and revised in collaboration with Success Stories leaders.

To develop the survey, we worked with Success Stories to identify specific concepts their program addresses. Based on these concepts, we 1) generated a set of variables to probe in the surveys, 2) identified established survey questions measuring these concepts, and 3) developed new questions when validated questions were unavailable.

Because Success Stories aims to transform men's self-perception, goal-setting, and relational focus, we included validated measures of self-efficacy, locus of control, and confidence in our design to speak to the prior research. Validated questions were also included to measure interpersonal generosity and beliefs about conflict resolution. This approach lets us gauge these ideas among Success Stories participants and compare our findings with similar research on other groups.

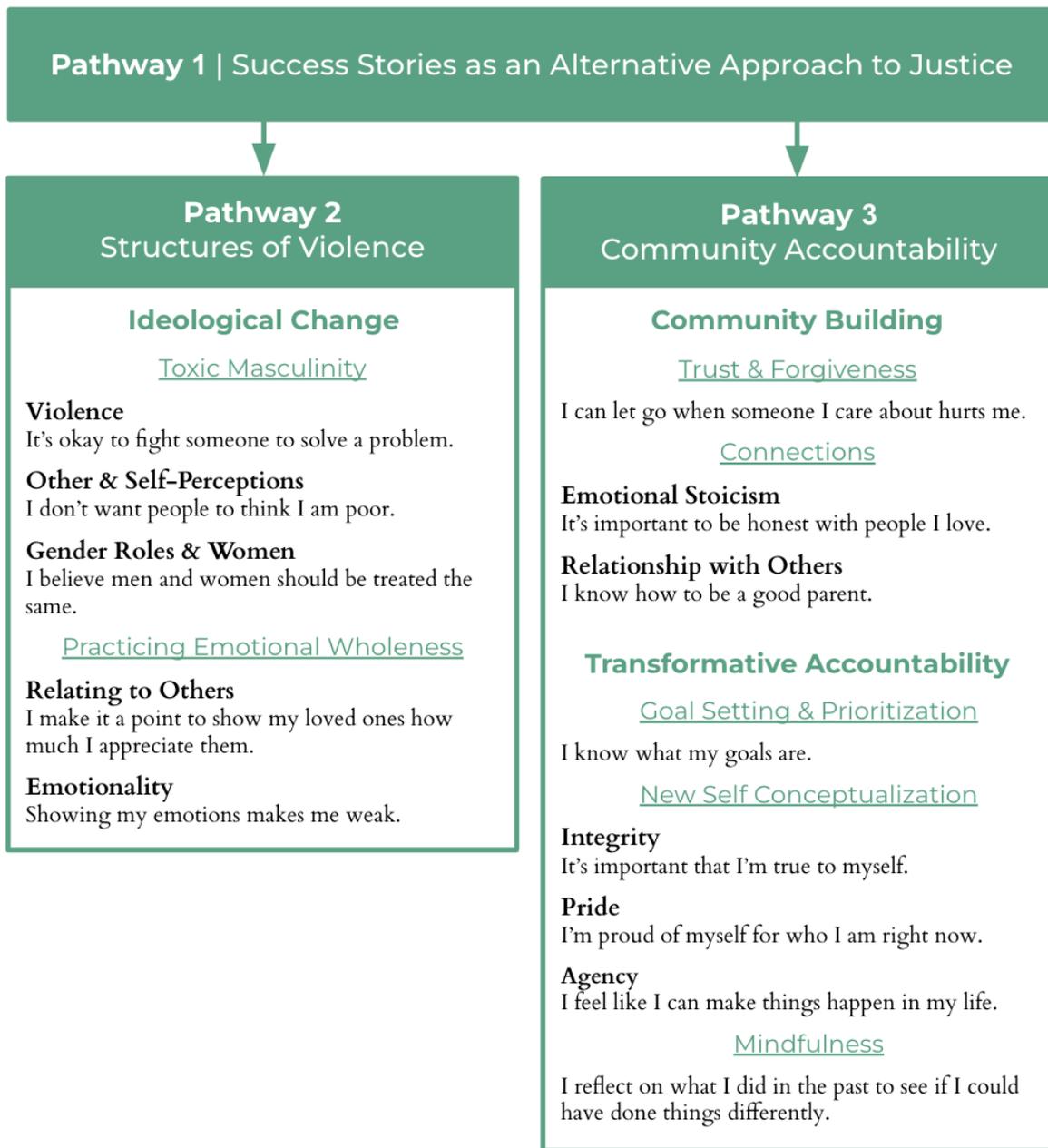
Finally, we were unable to find validated and appropriate questions about masculinity and stereotypes of harmful behavior in published studies. Because of this, we developed a suite of new questions to measure these concepts.

Appendix B lists all survey questions.

Survey Questions	
	Demographics
	Personal & Social Perceptions
	Masculinity, Agency, Integrity
	Relationships
	Goals & Priorities
	Program Experience

Survey Measurement

We use pre-post surveys to gather quantitative data about Success Stories’ participants and practices. In these surveys, we measure key interventions into masculinity, emotionality, relationships, and goal setting previously outlined in the Theory of Change and Logic Models (pages 13-17). The figure below is an example of this process. Within each pathway, there are areas of change (teal bold), central concepts (teal underlined), subconcepts (black bold), and survey questions (black plain).



Analytic Methods

Pre-Post Survey Analysis

Pre- and post-participation studies are one of the standard designs in program evaluation, and many similar evaluations of prison programming have used this approach.⁴¹ Pre-post analysis allows us to statistically evaluate if a change in participants' attitudes or beliefs occurred over the course of participating in the program and, if so, the magnitude of change.⁴² Additionally, a pre- and post-participation study design is an appropriate way to examine programs that have not been empirically evaluated.⁴³

Descriptive Statistics & Paired t-tests

While descriptive statistics cannot establish the statistical significance of change over time, they are important for characterizing the demographic profile of participants, their attitudes and perceptions at the beginning of the workshop, and their satisfaction with the program.

In this report, we are primarily interested in understanding how participants change during their time in Success Stories. To do this, we use paired t-tests to evaluate differences in an individual's response to the same question in the pre- and post-program surveys. A paired t-test evaluates whether the mean change for pairs (i.e. a person's pre- and post-answers to the same question) are statistically significant from zero. This test relies on inferential statistics, allowing us to draw conclusions about the broader population of Success Stories participants.

Qualitative Analysis

As described previously, we gathered qualitative data through session observations, coach debriefs, participant interviews, and open-ended survey responses. Research team members collectively discussed session observations and coaches debriefed with us shortly after the sessions occurred, noting key patterns. Interviews were transcribed and reviewed to identify common themes. Open-ended survey responses were coded for emergent themes, many of which mirrored findings from the quantitative survey analysis. In our interpretation of the survey results, we returned to our qualitative data to provide additional context and information as needed.

⁴¹ Messina and Zwart 2021; Nadkarni et al., 2020; Powell et al., 2021

⁴² GAO 2012:36

⁴³ CDC 2011

Limitations

There are several limitations to the current study. Some of these limitations are by design –we restrict our quantitative study sample to include only incarcerated men who have completed their Success Stories workshop. As a result, our findings directly apply to Success Stories’ work with this particular group of participants. It is *possible* Success Stories’ interventions may be similarly impactful to other groups they work with like women, gender-expansive people, young people, and formerly incarcerated community members who have recently been released. Direct research with these groups is needed to fully assess Success Stories’ impact. Other limitations are related to the challenges of researching prison programs. These challenges, and their possible impact on the report, are detailed below.

Prison Environment

Based on our debriefs and discussions with Success Stories leadership, there are clear challenges to operating workshops in a prison environment. Additionally, conducting research in a closed environment required close collaboration with Success Stories facilitators and coaches to administer surveys and track participants. The main responsibilities of program facilitators is to deliver curriculum, foster a welcoming and trusting environment, and support participants as they process challenging material.

It is not feasible for facilitators to gather all information that may be of interest to the research team (i.e. logging participants who may drop out of the program, miss specific weeks, or who are superficially engaged). Because of these conditions and restrictions, there are some aspects of the Success Stories program we are unable to speak to in this report, such as possible selection effects in those who chose to join the program or selection effects in those who chose to drop out of the program.

Research team members were also unable to visit prison sites in-person, which limited our understanding of how workshops operate on the ground. To address this limitation, we completed session observations at a re-entry site in Los Angeles that served men very recently released from prison.

Incomplete Participation

While evaluating Success Stories it became clear from survey data some people joined the program after week one (missing the pre-survey) or left the program early (missing the post-survey). Because these participants are missing one of the paired surveys, they are excluded from our analytic sample. We do not know if these participants are more likely to fall into a particular demographic group or leave the program early because they are dissatisfied with their experience.

We reached out to members of the Success Stories leadership team familiar with the prison programming to understand what was happening on the ground. They identified several possible reasons for people's incomplete participation.

Transfers | Some people are transferred to other prisons or the prison closes entirely. Chuckawalla Valley State Prison was one of Success Stories main locations until recently, when they were notified of its closure in March 2025. Several Success Stories workshops were terminated early due to this development.

Work Assignments | Approximately 56% of participants work inside the prison while also being enrolled in Success Stories. Some people receive work assignments from prison officials that conflict with program times, causing them to miss sessions.

Prison Intervention | Facilitators are tasked with developing an intimate and trusting environment within sessions. One way they do this is by closing enrollment after a workshop begins. However, prison officials may choose to place people on the roster. If participants join a workshop late, facilitators attempt to catch them up on missed material. If they have joined too late, they are not eligible to graduate and facilitators will encourage them to join the next available workshop to complete the full Success Stories program.

Survey Refusal | A small number of participants refused to take the surveys. Some express suspicion about information gathering efforts or may be worried about the confidentiality of their answers in a prison environment. According to Success Stories leadership, refusal was rare and explains very little of the missing surveys.

Multi-Program Involvement

The vast majority of people (85%) in our sample who complete the Success Stories program are concurrently involved in other prison programming. We provide additional information about this multi-program involvement on page 38 and in Appendix C.

The main reason multi-program involvement is a limitation for our report is that it may prevent us from isolating the effects of Success Stories participation from the possible influence of other programs. For example, if someone was enrolled in Success Stories and also involved in a separate program focused on goal setting, it would be extremely difficult to identify the independent influence of either program. This issue is particularly concerning if the majority of Success Stories participants are enrolled in other programs with very similar curriculum or aims.

In our sample of Success Stories participants, people are most commonly enrolled in programs related to substance use and 'criminal behavior.' Fewer individuals were enrolled in programs focused on issues similar to Success Stories' curriculum, such as anger management, relationship development, and self-help/treatment. Additionally, Success

Stories leadership emphasizes how their workshops differ significantly from other prison programs. In particular, Success Stories' discussion of toxic masculinity and patriarchal harm are unique to their programming.

It is also important to note, while multi-program participation may pose complications for exacting statistical analysis, it appears to be a feature of how Success Stories operates. It is possible individuals who are willing to join programs (due to personal interest and/or a desire to earn credits toward early release) are more likely to self-select into the Success Stories program. Survey data suggests some participants choose to enroll in Success Stories because they hear positive things about it from people in other prison programs. It is very unlikely multi-program involvement is responsible for the effectiveness of Success Stories documented in this report. While many Success Stories participants participate in other programs, these programs emphasize other material, cultivate different skills, and rarely discuss issues such as masculinity.

Measuring Recidivism

Recidivism—when a person “relapses into criminal behavior, often after [they] receive sanctions or undergo intervention for a previous crime”⁴⁴—is one of the main measures used to evaluate the effectiveness of programs enrolling system-involved people. Traditionally, recidivism is measured as re-arrest or re-incarceration in jail or prison after a criminal conviction. Some researchers have critiqued the usefulness of recidivism as a way to evaluate program efficacy.⁴⁵

We do not evaluate participant recidivism in this report. One reason for this decision is because only a small portion of Success Stories participants in our sample appear to have been released from prison.⁴⁶ Additionally, our study is the first formal evaluation of Success Stories. Now that we have documented the program is strongly associated with meaningful change in participants' thinking and beliefs, future research can focus on changes in participants' behavior and system contact.

⁴⁴ NIJ 2024

⁴⁵ Zgoba and Salerno 2017

⁴⁶ We do not have a direct or valid measure of prison release, but we looked up all participants in the California Incarcerated Records and Information Search (<https://apps.cdcr.ca.gov/ciris/search>). We were unable to find 17 participants (12% of the 141 person sample), suggesting these individuals *may* have been released from prison.

6 PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANTS

In this chapter we provide detailed information about the Success Stories sites, workshops, and participants we evaluate in this report.

Sites & Workshops

We focus on a specific group of program sites and 13-week workshops in our survey analysis. All sites are men’s state prisons in California (locations mapped on page 9). At each of these sites, coaches run multiple workshops at a time and offer workshops consistently during the year. Table 1 displays the specific sites, number of workshops, and number of participants included in the survey analysis.

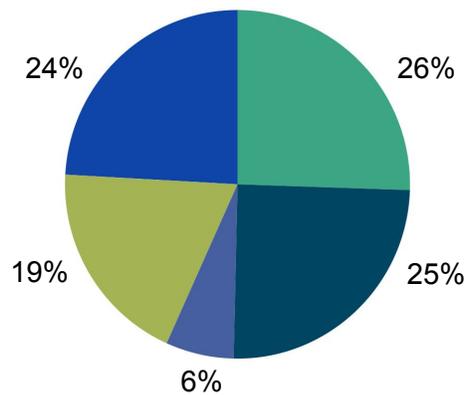
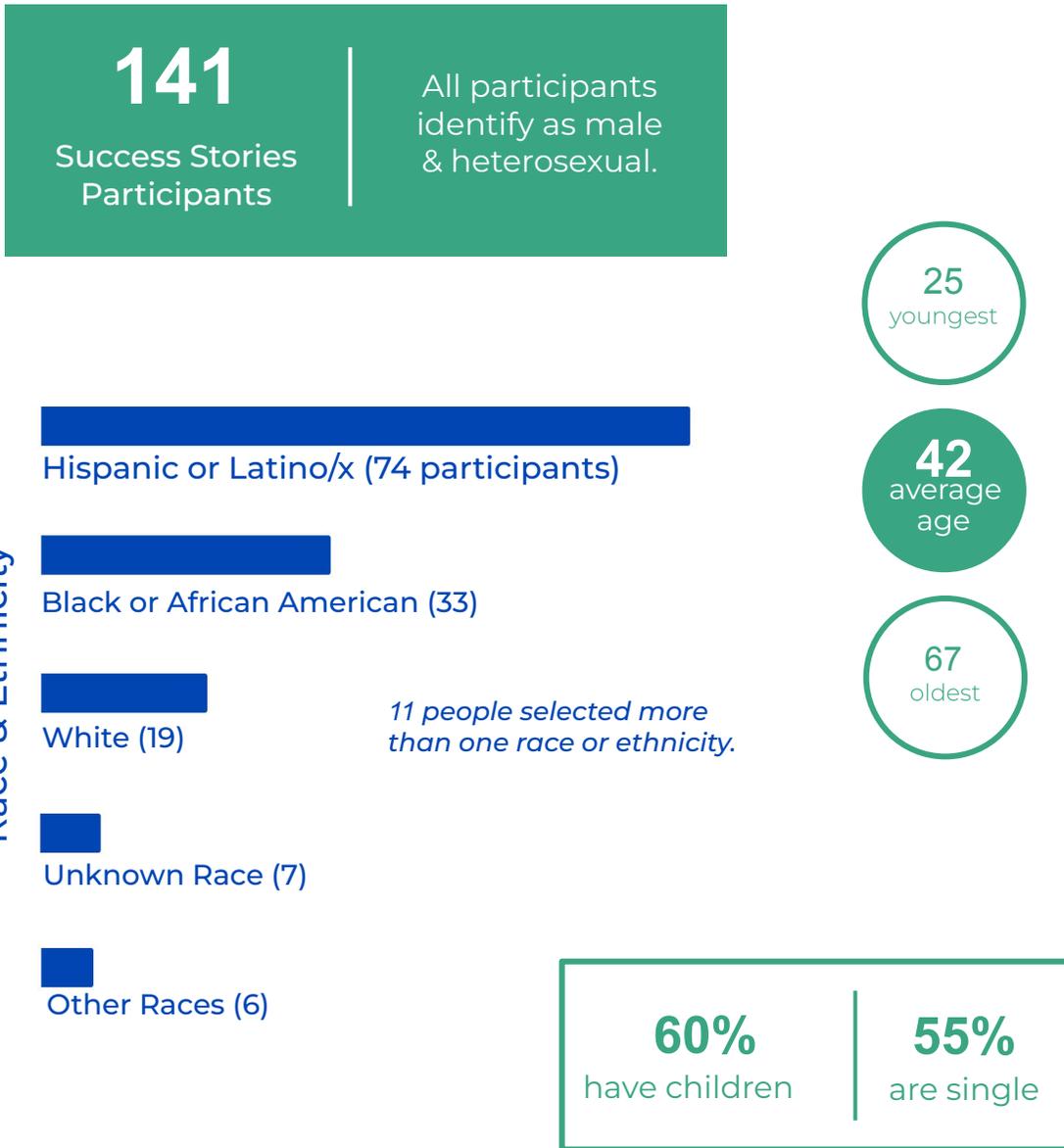


Table 1. Sampled Sites, Sessions, and Participants

Sites	Workshop(s)	Participants
Calipatria State Prison	2	36
Chuckawalla Valley State Prison	2	35
Ironwood State Prison	4	34
Correctional Training Facility	3	27
Centinela State Prison	1	9
Total	12	141

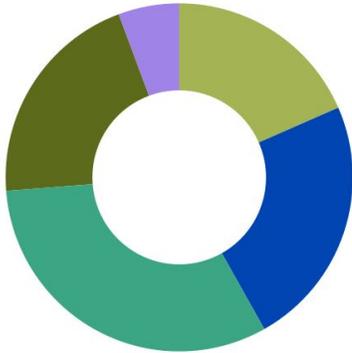
Participant Demographics

All sampled participants are male Success Stories graduates in California state prisons who completed both pre-program and post-program surveys. In this section we describe these participants in detail by exploring their demographics, participation in other programs, comparison to the broader male California prison population, and common themes in their life histories. All demographic information is self-reported unless otherwise noted.



Participant Demographics

Education



Less than a High School Degree - 26 participants

High School Degree/GED - 33

Some College Classes - 45

College Degree (A.A./B.A.) - 29

Unknown - 8

Current Prison Term*

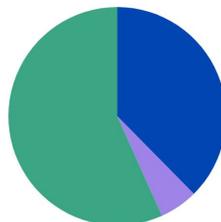
1 year
shortest

13 years
average

38 years
longest

*Note: This measure was calculated using information from the CDCR Incarcerated Records and Information Search.

Do you currently have a job?



Yes - 80 participants

No - 53

Unknown - 8

Comparison to CDCR Population

Here we compare the demographic profile of sampled Success Stories participants and the broader population of men incarcerated in California state prisons. Notable differences are highlighted—the research sample over represents Hispanic/Latino/x individuals and individuals with long current periods of incarceration. White individuals, younger men, and people without a high school degree are underrepresented in the research sample.

Table 2. Comparison of Sampled Success Stories Participants to Men Incarcerated in California State Prisons and the California General Population

	Success Stories Participants	CDCR Population	CA General Population
Race/Ethnicity^A	Hispanic/Latino/x	54%	44%
	Black	23%	28%
	White	13%	21%
	Other Races	4%	7%
Age Groups^A	18-24 years old	0%	9%
	25-29 years old	7%	16%
	30-39 years old	34%	30%
	40-49 years old	23%	21%
	50-59 years old	17%	15%
	60+ years old	5%	8%
No high school degree ^B	18%	40%	21%
Currently hold a job ^C	57%	40%	—
Have children ^D	60%	57%	—
Average incarceration length ^E	13 years	2.3 years [†]	—

^A Legislative Analyst's Office (2020)

^B Bailey and Hayes (2006)

^C CDCR Office of Research (2023)

^D Powell and Nolan (2003)

^E Gaes and Laskorunsky (2023)

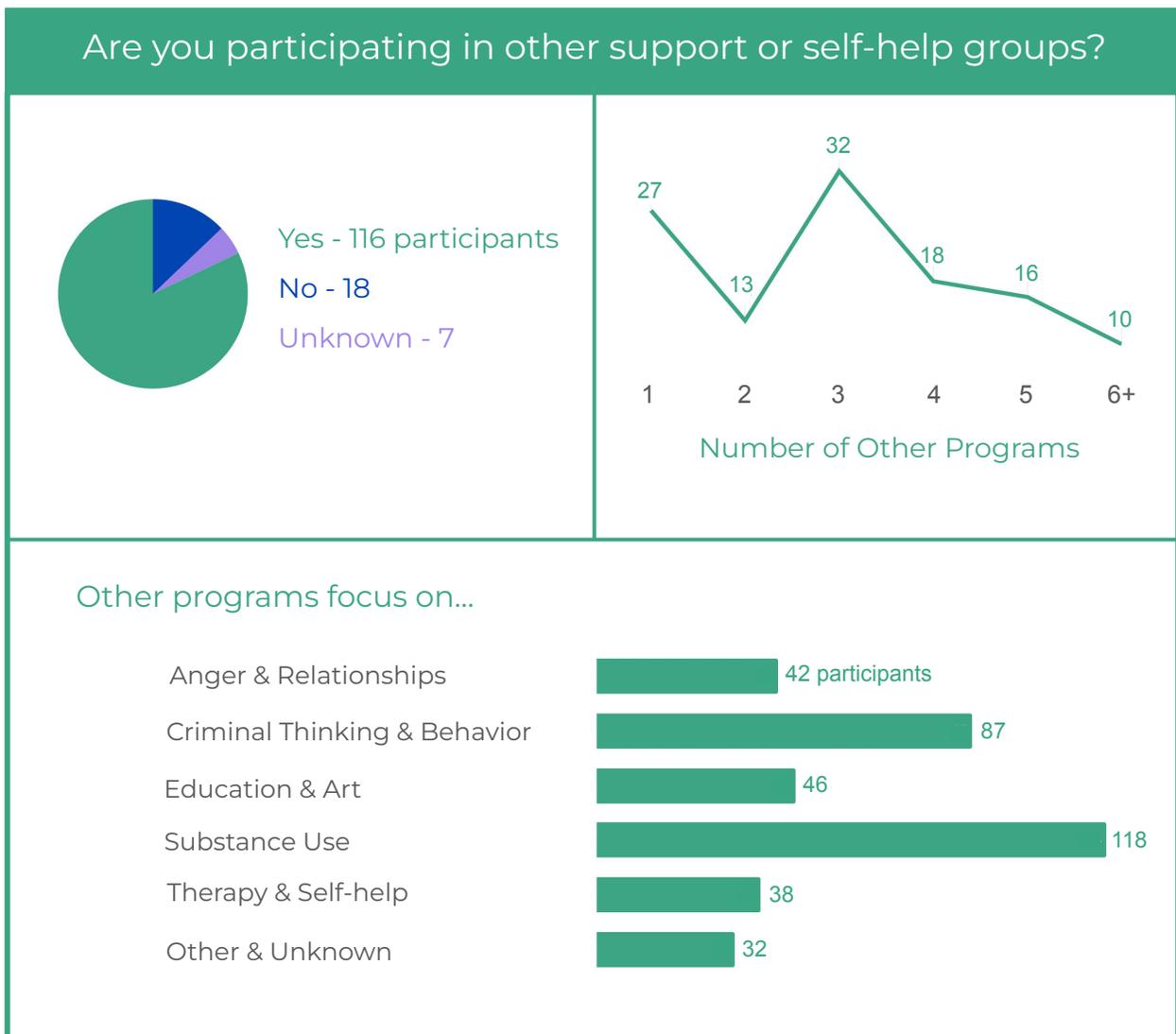
[†] This is the average time served for all individuals in the California state prison system. For those serving long sentences (10+ years; 8% of CDCR population), average incarceration length is 10.2 years.

Participating in Other Programs

The majority of Success Stories participants (82%) also participate in other programs. Roughly a third of the other programs focus on substance use and a quarter focus on criminal behavior and thinking. As a group, Success Stories participants join a wide variety of other programs and may be more likely than others in the general prison population to participate in programming (comparison statistics unavailable).

We discuss the implications of multi-program participation for our findings on pages 32-3.

Appendix C provides additional information about other programs.



Qualitative Trajectories

Interviewees help contextualize the life experiences shared by Success Stories participants. While those interviewed in the Los Angeles external site may differ from Success Stories participants attending the program in a prison setting, the personal accounts they provide about their backgrounds lend crucial depth and participant voice to complement the quantitative portion of the analysis. Though many interviewees identified coming from diverse racial and class backgrounds prior to being incarcerated, the figure below summarizes commonalities across their interviews. These themes emphasize the poverty, cycles of harm, policing, and kinship disruption many Success Stories participants experience prior to incarceration. Recognizing the impact of these experiences in participants' early lives is important for a transformative justice program like Success Stories, as this approach asks participants to move beyond the perpetrator-victim dichotomy and make connections between interpersonal harm and systemically violent social structures.



7

IMPACT

IMPACT

In their 13-week workshop, Success Stories seeks to change how participants think about, act in, and relate to their world. Much of this work involves identifying and replacing harmful ideas, developing a sense of clarity and agency around goals, and encouraging emotional wholeness through reflection and connecting with others.

We find participants experience many of these changes after completing their Success Stories workshop. This chapter follows the Success Stories' logic model (detailed in Chapter 3), presenting statistically significant findings from the pre- and post-program surveys alongside participant quotes (in teal text).

We display tables of statistically significant survey results at the end of each section. More detailed quantitative results tables and notes on interpretation are available in Appendix D.

Statistical Significance?

When a result is **statistically significant**, it suggests that chance or random factors are unlikely explain it.

Essentially, a statistically significant finding indicates a very small probability of the outcome happening if there were no genuine effect in the research study.

Here, we're interested in the effect completing the Success Stories program had on participants.

Note: All reported significant findings have a p-value less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) and the majority have a p-value less than 0.01 ($p < 0.001$).

Ideological Change

Addressing Toxic Masculinity

Much of Success Stories’ work centers on identifying and replacing harmful beliefs about masculinity, emotionality, violence, success, and women. Success Stories defines this set of ideas as toxic masculinity, which “is measured by men’s ability/willingness to be violent, prioritization of money, and objectification/domination of womxn”.

Many participants comment, because of Success Stories, they are now able to identify these beliefs in society, understand them as harmful, and feel capable of addressing them. Some describe learning about toxic masculinity as transformative:

I really like the ‘toxic masculinity’ topic. I’ve learned a lot. It made me realize that I was wrong in the way I treated my sister and wife. Women aren’t different from us. All human beings should be treated the same. It doesn’t matter if you are a woman or a man.

Success Stories has opened my mind to more knowledge that I can apply in my life for the better of myself and my loved ones. I saw and learned that... what I thought a man was supposed to act and be like was not a positive perspective or view that I was taught or learned to be like, thanks to Success Stories.

Specifically, men changed their thinking about using violence as a solution to problems, the need to not be perceived by others as weak, and how they relate to others. While participants did not explicitly discuss changes in their perceptions of violence during interviews or open-ended surveys, statistically, they were more inclined to disagree with the idea of solving problems with violence after completing the program.⁴⁷

Practicing Emotional Wholeness

Participants also show statistically significant differences in their beliefs about other people’s perceptions before and after the program. When asked, participants were more likely to strongly disagree with the statements: “It’s important that others don’t see me as a ‘pussy’.” and “Showing my emotions makes me weak.” These changing beliefs about weakness and emotionality are important, as they allow participants to engage more fully in other areas of



⁴⁷ “It’s important that I can ‘take someone’ in a fist fight”; “It’s okay to fight someone to solve a problem.”

the curriculum that emphasize reflection, honesty, and emotional wholeness. One person commented Success Stories changed his perceptions of emotional awareness and masculinity, saying “I’m more of a man today because I have tapped into my emotions and inner feelings than I have ever been”. Other participants noted the program helped them “talk about my feelings” and “find the courage to ask questions and to express what I really want”.

Finally, participants changed how they relate to others. We find after completing the workshop, participants are less likely to say they are threatened by other people’s success and that they are less likely to say things they know will hurt other people’s feelings. Both of these shifts are statistically significant, meaning they can be directly associated with the Success Stories’ program.

“Participating in Success Stories has help me identify my flawed belief system and has also given me the tools to correct them.”

We did not find quantitative support that Success Stories changes participants’ thinking about gender roles or women. This could be because participants’ prior beliefs about these topics appear to closely match the Success Stories’ orientation. In general, participants coming into the sessions had strong negative reactions to the ideas that “women should listen to men and do what they say” and that they are more interested in women “for how they look than their personalities” (Figure 2). Conversely, participants showed support for men and women being treated equally.

Figure 2. Participants’ Attitudes about Gender Roles & Masculinity (Pre-Program Survey)

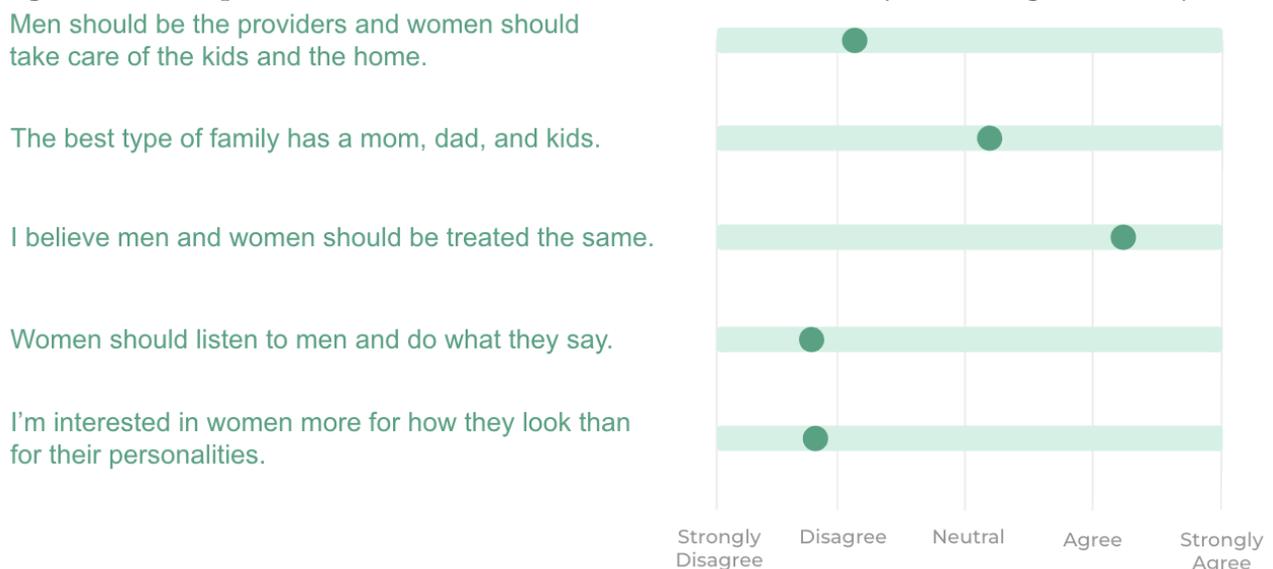


Table 3. Ideological Change Survey Question Results

Survey Questions	t-value
<i>Toxic Masculinity</i>	
It's important that I can "take someone" in a fist fight.	3.22**
It's okay to fight someone to solve a problem.	3.12**
It's important that others don't see me as a "pussy".	4.01***
<i>Practicing Emotional Wholeness</i>	
Showing my emotions makes me weak.	3.13**
Sometimes I feel threatened by other people's success. (<i>inverse coded</i>)	-2.98**
Sometimes I say things I know will hurt people's feelings. (<i>inverse coded</i>)	-3.52***

p-value = * ≤ 0.05, ** ≤ 0.01, *** ≤ 0.001

Notes on t-value Interpretation

In the paired t-tests used in this analysis, a positive t-value indicates the mean response of the first group (i.e. participants who took the pre-survey before starting Success Stories curriculum) is higher than the second mean response (i.e. the same participants who took the post-survey after completing the Success Stories curriculum). The answer options are strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neither agree or disagree (3), agree (4), or strongly agree (5), unless otherwise indicated.

For the survey questions reported in Table 3, positive t-values indicate that *before* starting Success Stories participants agreed more strongly with the importance of "tak[ing] someone" in a fist fight, fighting someone to solve a problem, others [not seeing them] as a "pussy", and that showing emotions makes [them] weak than they did *after* completing the program. Put another way, we observe less agreement with these statements after Success Stories.

A negative t-value indicates the mean response of the first group (pre-Success Stories) is lower than the second response (post-Success Stories). The final two questions in Table 3 are inverse coded, meaning that strongly disagree is treated as a 5 and strongly agree is treated as a 1. The negative t-values (for these questions with inverse-coded answer options) mean that, as a group, participants agreed more strongly with the statements *before* starting Success Stories than they did *after* completing the program.

Community Building

The second area of change Success Stories focuses on is community building. Participants are challenged to reflect on their relationships with others and identify their contributions to unhealthy patterns. By modeling healthy peer relationships in a cohort setting, Success Stories' goal is to encourage participants to develop honest and authentic relationships in the service of building a loving community more broadly.



Trust & Forgiveness



Connections

Trust & Forgiveness

Much of why participants lack community is due to the way harmful masculinity severs men's ability to be emotionally vulnerable and witnessed, especially by other men. This in turn hinders their openness to receiving feedback and building accountability into their relationships with others.

In survey questions designed to evaluate this area, there is strong evidence completing the Success Stories curriculum increases participants' willingness to trust and forgive other people, as well as to receive feedback from them. Three related questions show statistically significant differences between pre- and post-program responses:

1. If someone thinks that I'm wrong, I am open to hearing what they have to say.
2. I can let it go when someone I care about hurts me.
3. I don't have strong relationships because I tend to push people away.

In each case, participants indicate that they are more open to hearing contradictory ideas, forgiving others after being hurt, and being patient with discomfort and conflict. Combined with findings related to attitudes about violence, there is evidence the Success Stories curriculum increases participants' willingness to maintain relationships that may be stressed and address problems in non-violent ways. Curiously, participants do not discuss this theme in their written comments, but the survey findings suggest it was a strong and consistent pattern amongst the men.

Connections

Evidence also suggests participants make important shifts in how they approach their connection to others. In the survey data, participants show decreased levels of emotional

stoicism after completing the program. After completing the program, participants agreed more strongly they were willing to express themselves when they have a lot to get off their chest.

One participant describes this shift by writing, “This class really helped me to articulate exactly how it is I'm feeling and where I'm at, where I'm going and where I need to be”. This participant demonstrates how emotional stoicism is not only a willingness to share, but also includes emotional intelligence and awareness, an agentic orientation to the future, and a recognition of their connection to others.

Another person remarked “I'm more of a man today because I have tapped into my emotions and inner feelings than I have ever been”. We also find participants remark frequently about being more open to sharing because of the structure of the Success Stories program and the safety they experience within the group. We explore this finding in more detail in the “Participant Satisfaction” chapter.

By modeling this communication style in the structured environments of weekly sessions, participants learn how to value communication and the skills needed to practice it. One participant summarized this shift in his thinking about communication when he wrote (emphasis added), “I obtained a sense of balance in my method of communication. I now talk to people instead of talking at them”.

“ I have grown as a man, friend, parent, and husband from Success Stories. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. ”

In the surveys, participants were asked to self assess their ability to be a good parent, friend, neighbor, and to have a healthy romantic relationship. There was a statistically significant shift in people’s self-perception of their ability to parent. Roughly 60% of participants report having children. While this measure does not capture the experience of all participants, several discuss the impact Success Stories had on their parenting. One person connects his learning about openness, honesty, and communication to his future parenting:

I look forward to being the best father I can be to all of my children. Being the best father to me is finding that balance where I can be a father and a friend. Also creating a space where my children can express their thoughts and feelings comfortably without judgment.

Others commented Success Stories helped them refocus their attention on their families.

Table 4. Community Building Survey Question Results

Survey Questions	t-value
<i>Trust & Forgiveness</i>	
If someone thinks that I’m wrong, I am open to hearing what they have to say.	-3.58***
I can let it go when someone I care about hurts me.	-3.53***
I don’t have strong relationships because I tend to push people away. (<i>inverse coded</i>)	-3.69***
<i>Connections</i>	
Sometimes I feel like I have a lot to get off my chest, but most of the time I just keep it inside.	3.79***
I know how to be a good parent.	-2.49*

p-value = * ≤ 0.05, ** ≤ 0.01, *** ≤ 0.001

Notes on t-value Interpretation

In the paired t-tests used in this analysis, a positive t-value indicates the mean response of the first group (i.e. participants who took the pre-survey before starting Success Stories curriculum) is higher than the second mean response (i.e. the same participants who took the post-survey after completing the Success Stories curriculum). The answer options are strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neither agree or disagree (3), agree (4), or strongly agree (5), unless otherwise indicated. For the survey questions reported in Table 4, positive t-values indicate that *before* starting Success Stories participants agreed more strongly with the statement “Sometimes I feel like I have a lot to get off my chest, but most of the time I just keep it inside” than they did *after* completing the program. Put another way, we observe less agreement with this statement after Success Stories.

A negative t-value indicates the mean response of the first group (pre-Success Stories) is lower than the second response (post-Success Stories). For the statements asking if participants were open to hearing how they were wrong from others, letting go of hurt, and knowing how to be a good parent, participants had higher levels of disagreement with these questions *before* starting Success Stories than they did *after* completing Success Stories.

The question asking if participants push others away is inverse coded, which means strongly disagree is treated as a 5 and strongly agree is treated as a 1. On average, participants agreed more with this statement *before* starting Success Stories than they did after completing the curriculum.

Transformative Accountability

Finally, Success Stories helps participants reflect on their lives, while also fostering a cohort culture that encourages priority- and goal-setting, accountability, and proactive repair. This approach is described as “having integrity,” where alignment between a person's actions and their beliefs or values is considered important to emotional wholeness. Success Stories envisions this micro-culture of accountability has the potential to grow into a larger culture of transformative accountability, where mutual care and responsibility take precedence over individualism.



Goal-Setting & Prioritization

A key activity in the Success Stories program is the Top 5 exercise. In this activity, participants think about the five people or goals that are most important to them; throughout the remainder of the sessions, participants are asked to reflect on the amount of time they dedicate to their Top 5 in their Time Logs, assess if their actions honor their priorities, and think about how they can develop a more intentional relationship to the people and goals they prioritize.

Participants are very impacted by the Top 5 exercise. Unprompted, many commented the Top 5 exercise helped them identify and clarify their goals, giving them the tools to follow through on their intentions:

- I developed tools that I will use to accomplish my goals, such as writing out my Top 5 goals and writing out a plan I will do to put myself in a position to execute accomplishing my goals. I also understand the importance of delaying gratification.
- Success Stories has taught me many things and ideas that I didn't know were possible to do and accomplish. My Top 5 goals with the most important people is the best way to get far in life in a positive way.
- With the Top 5 most important people or 5 goals, I feel and want to focus on my real family and the people who have been there and accomplish my goals.

In their discussions of the Top 5, participants demonstrate how Success Stories' encourages people to engage with their lives intentionally. One participant expressed this shift, saying:

This program came at a critical time in my life, both in prison and my romantic life. It was exactly what I needed. I shared the Top 5 exercise with my girlfriend and I know it helped us keep focused. I was glad to share my 10 year plan with her and have her in it.

Survey results support these qualitative findings. After completing the program, participants are more likely to say they “know how to pick goals [they] will finish”. This suggests Success Stories helps participants identify achievable goals and may help them feel empowered to complete them. Similarly, Success Stories participants who complete the program agree they are better able to manage their stress and identify what is most important when they have a lot of things to do at once. Both the qualitative and quantitative results suggest those who complete the Success Stories program have a greater perceived ability to goal set and prioritize than they did before starting the program.

“ I now look at my future with a better outlook. This group helped me become a better person, both in and out of prison. ”

In addition to a greater sense of priority, participants also expressed a renewed hope for the future. Participants readily shared they thought differently about the future because of Success Stories.

- I now look at my future with a better outlook, this group helped me become a better person, both in and out of prison.
- This was the very program to help me see myself clearly and allowed me to see my future more clearly than I have ever seen it.
- Success Stories has really given me hope and a new way to be successful in life and thinking.

New Self-Conception



Prioritization, goal setting, and future-orientation are all central to Success Stories’ programmatic aims. These skills are not only about helping Success Stories participants achieve their goals, but also serve as a way for participants to integrate their new learning and emotional openness into their conception of self. Once participants feel this change in agentic purpose in their lives, their self-image also starts to shift.

Participants share the program “helped me understand myself better” and “helped me see myself in a different light.”

One person connected shifts in how he understood himself to larger changes in his understanding of masculinity:

The curriculum of Success Stories has allowed me to see myself for who I really am in a person, and has given me the courage to understand I'm bigger than the distorted thoughts and feelings I labeled myself with for acceptance of a man where acceptance is not needed to be a man.

Survey results suggest participants change their self-conception in three domains: integrity, pride, and agency. After participating in the 13-week workshop, participants expressed stronger agreement with the importance of being true to themselves and living a life true to their values. Both of these measures showed a statistically significant shift between the pre- and post-program surveys. One participant discussed his changed self-concept and sense of integrity, saying “I come to understand I'm a person with a purpose and everything I do positive is one step towards my success”.

Participants also express increased pride, suggesting these men are better able to affirm themselves after participating in Success Stories. One person put it this way: “I have come a long way from the selfish person I was when I came to prison. I am very proud of the man I am today”.

“Success Stories helped me look at myself in various different positive ways and take my life seriously.”

As a group, participants express stronger agreement with the statement, “I’m proud of myself for who I am right now” after completing the curriculum. Another person shared they had a sense of pride in themselves, as well as the other participants in their cohort. They tied this sense of pride to the learning they had completed about the harmful ideas discussed previously: “I'm proud of the progress we as prisoners and ex-prisoners have made to contest the ideal of toxic masculinity”.

Participants who complete the program also expressed an increased sense of agency and control in their lives. Before starting Success Stories, the average participant expressed moderate disagreement with the ideas that “planning feels useless because my plans don’t usually work out” and that they “usually wait for things to happen rather than making things happen”. These survey items measure a person’s sense of agency, or a feeling of control over action and their consequences.⁴⁸

After completing the program, participants have stronger negative reactions to these statements and express a greater sense of control in their open-ended responses. One person reflected on these ideas, using language from the Success Stories curriculum, “I have learned to view my whole victim mentality in a different way by living in a victorious mentality”.

When asked to describe themselves on the post-program survey, many participants used this space to share their new sense of control and urgency to make positive change in their lives:

- I am working on changing the difference between my old life and my new life right now. I know it is gonna be hard but I know I can do it.
- I'm very motivated in my goals and willing to take steps for change and success.
- I got a long way up. I know things are going to come my way. It's going to be hard for me but I'm going to try my best to make it out of this place.

Mindfulness

Finally, Success Stories hopes shifts in how people self-conceptualize ultimately encourage participants to become mindful community members who feel empowered to care for others. This begins with Success Stories’ facilitating reflections among participants about harm they have caused and discussing what repair and healing might look like for them in order to move through it.

Survey results suggest participants are able to think about their actions in a neutral and reflective way (i.e. mindfulness) after completing Success Stories. In the survey, participants felt more strongly after the program they were able to “reflect on what I did in the past to see if I could have done things differently.” Additionally, participants said they have more clarity around their past behavior (“I learned how to be more humble and understanding. I see all my flaws from the past more clearly.”) and a greater understanding of their past motivations (“It’s really made me think about why I really did

⁴⁸ Moore 2016

the things I did.”). When participants discuss these reflections, they are not berating themselves or expressing self-hatred; rather, they are sharing how Success Stories has allowed them to reflect and think more clearly about themselves so they can make different choices in the future.

Our analysis finds, after completing the workshop, participants are more open to holding themselves accountable to others and feel more confident in their parenting, a key interpersonal relationship many participants in the observational, community setting stated had been difficult in the past. This emotional growth allows Success Stories participants to reflect on their lives and decisions in a neutral way.

Ultimately, participants’ willingness to be open and share extends to a willingness to foster greater accountability and to be honest with the people they love; both of these measures⁴⁹ showed statistically significant differences before and after people finished the workshop. People comment the program helped them love and respect others, see others as equal and worthy of acceptance, and talk about feelings.

In their written feedback, participants do not use the language of ‘honesty’ or ‘accountability’, but it is clear through their statements they are more open to direct, positive, and brave forms of communication. This points to many of the changes in attitudes and behaviors taking place within Success Stories participants, which matters for the organization’s long-term goal of building a world without prisons and based on transformative accountability.

⁴⁹ “It’s important that I hold myself accountable to others.”; “It is important for me to be honest with people I love.”

Table 5. Transformative Accountability Survey Question Results

Survey Questions	t-value
<i>Goal-Setting & Prioritization</i>	
I know how to pick goals I will finish. ²	-2.63**
When I have a lot of things to do at once, I know which ones are the most important. ²	-2.60**
When I get overwhelmed, I can manage my stress. ²	-4.07***
<i>New Self-Conception</i>	
I live a life true to my values. ²	-3.80***
It's important that I'm true to myself. ¹ (<i>inverse coded</i>)	2.26*
I'm proud of myself for who I am right now. ²	-2.89**
Planning feels useless because my plans don't usually work out. ³ (<i>inverse coded</i>)	-2.59*
I usually wait for things to happen rather than making things happen. ³ (<i>inverse coded</i>)	-3.88***
<i>Mindfulness</i>	
I reflect on what I did in the past to see if I could have done things differently. ²	-2.04*
It's important that I hold myself accountable to others. ¹ (<i>inverse coded</i>)	6.04***
It is important for me to be honest with people I love. ²	-2.44*

p-value = * ≤ 0.05, ** ≤ 0.01, *** ≤ 0.001

Notes on t-value Interpretation

The notes on page 43 and 46 apply here as well.

- ¹Positive t-values with inverse coding: This means that *before* starting Success Stories participants disagreed more strongly with the statements than they did *after* completing the program.
- ²Negative t-values: Participants had higher levels of disagreement with these statements *before* starting Success Stories than they did *after* completing Success Stories.
- ³Negative t-values with inverse coding: On average, participants agreed more with this statement *before* starting Success Stories than they did after completing the curriculum.

Self-Assessment

Participants were asked to directly evaluate their own learning after completing the workshop. Figure 3 displays the average response to these questions.⁵⁰ In general, participants either agreed or strongly agreed they learned in the workshop. The strongest consensus was that Success Stories helped participants learn lessons they could use in the future. This sentiment was also reflected in people’s written comments.

Figure 3. Participants’ Self-Assessment of Learning (Post-Program Survey)



⁵⁰Questions marked with an asterisk are paraphrased; original question wording can be found in Appendix B.

8

PARTICIPANT
SATISFACTION

PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION

Success Stories' organizational structure and workshop delivery are shaped by their core values. Curriculum content and facilitation practices mirror each other and reinforce the ultimate goals of the program. As discussed in the "Success Stories" chapter of the report, facilitators lead participants as peers, demonstrating vulnerability and emotional openness by sharing their own life experiences and discussing transformational justice and feminist thinking in weekly sessions.

Because the *way* Success Stories facilitate their workshops is so intricately tied to *what* material they teach and *why* they do this work, evaluating participant satisfaction is important for several reasons. In general, it is useful to know if participants enjoy the workshop and find it meaningful—high levels of program satisfaction can lead to more buy-in with materials and activities, as well as continued participation.

We asked participants to evaluate if the program was effective in its aims to shape people's thinking about prioritization and goal setting, living with integrity, masculinity, and self reflection. This self-assessment supplements findings discussed in the previous "Impact" report chapter.

Finally, written responses provide additional insight into how the structure and facilitation of the program serve as a mechanism through which Success Stories enacts their model of change (see pages 13-17 or Appendix A).

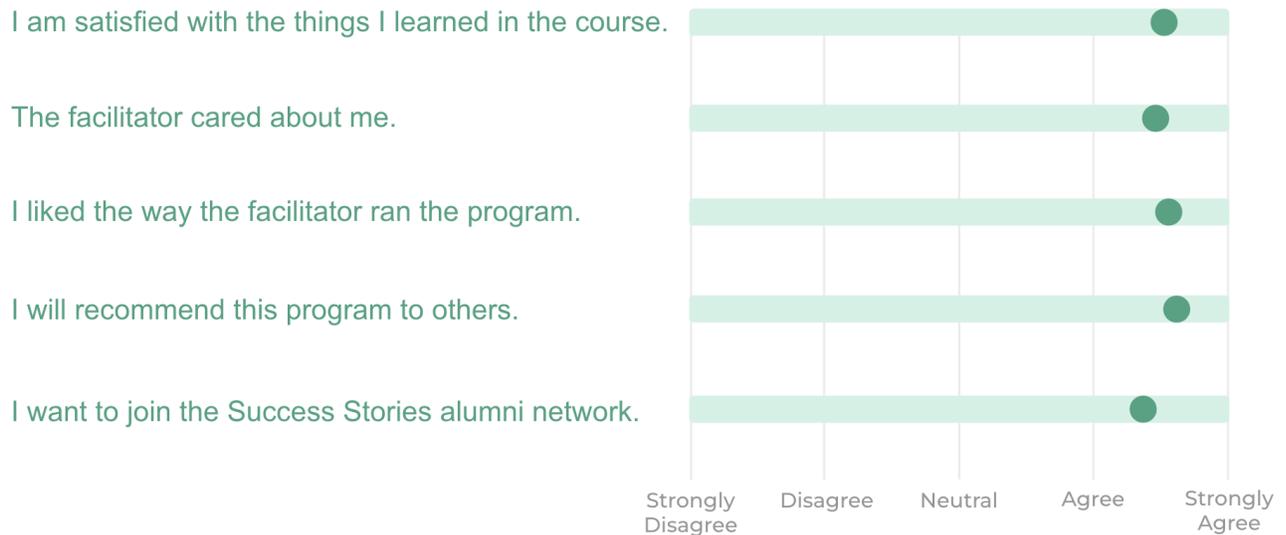
“ The first time [the prison] started Success Stories I met people going to it. They told me all these good things. And to tell you the truth, it's the best program I've been to. ”

Overall Satisfaction

Participants who finished Success Stories workshops were very satisfied with their experience. On the post-program survey, these individuals strongly agreed they would recommend the program to others (Figure 4). Participants indicate they either agreed or strongly agreed with all program satisfaction questions on the survey.

In their written comments, people stated it was “one of the best experiences ever”, “the best class [they] had ever been a part of”, and that it was “one of the most illuminating programs [they had] ever participated in”. Additionally, some participants⁵¹ were asked why they chose to take the workshop; many answered they had “heard really good things” and that the program had been recommended by previous participants. In their open-ended responses, participants frequently thanked Success Stories and their facilitator. Participants stated they “always looked forward to going to the Success Stories meetings”, enjoyed the class, and were grateful to be a part of the program.

Figure 4. Participants’ Assessment of Program Satisfaction (Post-Program Survey)



⁵¹ The question “Why did you enroll in the Success Stories program?” was included in one version of the post-program survey. We do not have complete data from our participant sample for this question, but include the partial results here as a suggested finding.

Workshop Facilitation

Participants liked how facilitators ran weekly sessions (see Figure 4). In written comments, one participant said the group had a “good vibe” and many others praised facilitators for how they ran the group. One person mentioned their facilitator was effective when responding to disruptive individuals:

At no fault of the facilitator, some classes would be disruptive by rude individuals. But to the facilitator's credit, how he dealt with it & brought refocus to the group with his patience is & was very commendable.

People also note facilitators are respectful of the participants, effective teachers, and share information in a clear and relatable way. In the written portion of survey results, participants frequently commented on the relatability of facilitators and the camaraderie they experienced in their workshop.

Relatability

Success Stories emphasizes the importance of a non-hierarchical, co-learning model. Facilitators are trained to embody these values by being prepared and responsive, sharing about their personal experiences with the material, and clearly explaining new concepts. Participants observed many of these approaches.

People described their facilitators as very good, down to earth, helpful, passionate, caring, energetic, expressive, and personable “communicating with each one of us”. Participants noted facilitators were “very knowledgeable” and that they were able to “glean a lot from [their] insight”.

They also commented facilitators were authentic, honest, and genuine (“they keep it 100”) and clearly “understand the world” participants live in (facilitators “talk about real stuff and [are] very relatable having had first hand experiences”). This relatability extends to how facilitators discuss workshop material. Participants picked up on the curriculum’s intentional accessibility: “I like that the facilitator spoke a language I could understand. It felt safe to express myself to someone”.

This relatability translated to hope for many participants. They discuss how seeing their facilitators’ success was inspirational, gave them hope, and that facilitators’ stories were “a channel to see what the possibilities are”. People also said the facilitator’s modeled how to stay positive and focused, “leading by example”.

Camaraderie

Participants indicate they feel comfortable and welcome during sessions, leading to camaraderie within the workshop cohorts. The care and comfort they experience from the facilitators creates a sense of safety, making emotional vulnerability possible. Several participants noted they were able to open up about their previous experiences and emotions in a meaningful way because of their facilitator:

- This is the first group I spoke about my life of crime, which broke a roadblock in my recovery.
- I would like you to know that through this program and [facilitator], I have been able to open up and not be afraid anymore to expose my struggles or personal issues.
- Success Stories help me overcome my shyness to speak in front of people.

Others noted the facilitation style of Success Stories helped them come out of their comfort zone, share more freely with others, and interact more effectively with their peers. Because of this comfort, participants said they were able to learn from other participants “[get a view] into one another’s lives”. One person pushed back on our use of the term ‘participant’ in the surveys, saying it should be removed “because I actually felt like 1 group as a whole”. Another said Success Stories was a “great brotherhood.”

“ The benefits of the Success Stories program are numerous. The most important thing is that I’m not alone to face social constructs that are made so I need to be someone I am not. ”

Other Reflections

Desire for Additional Participation

Some Success Stories participants wanted more. They expressed this desire by suggesting the workshop be extended (“I would love to attend more classes”, “I wish it were longer”). Others wanted to continue learning after their workshop ended, expressing a desire to do correspondence curriculum, join the Success Stories alumni network, or take the workshop again. Several participants expressed interest in becoming facilitators themselves.

Critiques

The vast majority of feedback about Success Stories was positive, however a small number of participants (approximately five) critiqued the program or research efforts. Some participants commented the program felt rushed, suggesting Success Stories should make it longer. One person wanted facilitators to cite sources when discussing studies and facts. Finally, a participant felt inquiring about satisfaction with the facilitator was missing the point:

The way the questions are stated are not to my liking. They shouldn't be asking to find out if the facilitators did a good or bad job. The questions should cater to what the individual obtained from the program. I don't feel as if facilitators made me understand myself better, but I do feel as if they reminded me about things that I forgot. I knew what was important to me, I just did not focus on them. The facilitator did a great job.

It is important to note these limited critiques reflect attitudes held by individuals who *completed* the full workshop and post-program survey. It is possible (and outside the scope of this report) that people who dropped out before completion have different critiques.

9 CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

This evaluation of Success Stories began with four research questions, asking whether the program changed participants' ideas about masculinity, whether the curriculum helped participants develop healthy relationship skills to better form community connections, whether participation increased their self-efficacy and accountability to others, and whether participants were satisfied with the program.

First, findings related to ideological intervention show that Success Stories effectively encourages participants to recognize and challenge toxic masculinity. This is particularly true for beliefs about using violence to resolve conflict and the importance of expressing one's emotions. Participants report being able to identify harmful societal beliefs about masculinity after participating in the program and reflect on how these beliefs are detrimental.

Many participants describe the learning experience as transformative, noting improvements in their personal relationships and attitudes toward other people. Although there was no significant change in participants' views on gender roles or women, the authors hypothesize this is likely because many already had stated progressive views on these topics—participants consistently support gender equality across our survey measures.

Second, the results also show that the Success Stories program and curriculum helps participants develop healthy relationship skills to better form community bonds. This is achieved by fostering emotional vulnerability, trust, and forgiveness, as well as enhancing communication skills. Participants became more open to hearing differing opinions, maintaining relationships despite conflicts, and moving beyond their emotional stoicism.

They attribute this to the program's emphasis on openness, honesty, and authentic peer connection, particularly in the use of system-impacted facilitators to deliver the curriculum. Overall, Success Stories' peer-cohort model helps build the support structure that many participants seek and equips them with the tools to build and sustain similarly meaningful and supportive relationships in other contexts.

Third, we find that the Success Stories program increases participants' sense of self-efficacy by building their prioritization and goal-setting skills. By having participants engage in the Top 5 exercise, identify important people and goals, and reflect on how their actions align with these priorities, the program emphasizes the alignment of actions with values as part of cultivating a culture of accountability.

As a result, participants report renewed hope for the future and a clearer vision of their path forward. This is linked to shifts in self-perception, where participants develop a stronger sense of integrity, self-worth, and agency. As they become more mindful of themselves and the effect their actions have on others, these reflections help them make choices from a place of accountability to self and others.

Fourth, findings indicate people were very satisfied with their participation in the Success Stories program. Participants express high levels of satisfaction with both the content and the facilitation of the workshops, describing it as one of the best and most illuminating programs they had taken. In particular, facilitators were highly regarded for their ability to create a positive, emotionally safe, and relatable group atmosphere. Some participants wished for the program to be longer and expressed interest in continuing their involvement through additional classes, correspondence, or becoming facilitators themselves. While feedback was largely positive, some participants remained skeptical of Success Stories' curriculum and how it could help them or improve their lives.

Based on these findings, Success Stories is effectively addressing its Theory of Change by facilitating significant transformation in its participants. The program's emphasis on integrity, prioritization, goal-setting, and self-reflection aligns with its abolitionist vision of creating alternatives to imprisonment through transformative justice. Participants report high satisfaction with the program, noting the relatability and effectiveness of the facilitators, the sense of camaraderie within the cohort, and the ability to openly discuss and reflect on personal experiences and goals. This satisfaction and engagement indicate Success Stories is succeeding in fostering environments where individuals feel safe to explore and dismantle harmful beliefs, ultimately leading to personal and community transformation.

By emphasizing peer-led facilitation, emotional vulnerability, and accountability, the program not only helps participants rethink their actions and values within the broader context of harmful patriarchal structures but also cultivates a supportive community committed to building grassroots, community-driven long-term change. This approach aligns with Success Stories' goal of challenging the systemic logics of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism as they express themselves in carceral systems. These system logics also shape the everyday lives of men who face societal pressure to live according to harmful masculinity.

We find Success Stories contributes to the broader feminist abolitionist movement by simultaneously providing an alternative to punishment, changing ideological beliefs around harmful patriarchal social structures, and building community accountability.

10 REFERENCES & APPENDIX

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Detailed Logic Model Table

Theory of Change					
Program Action		Outcomes			
Activities	Mechanisms	Short Term <i>(Program Participation)</i>	Midway <i>(1 year)</i>	Long Term <i>(Lifetime)</i>	
Ideological Change	<i>If you interrogate patriarchy in a peer setting, participants will confront their toxic masculinity and reject harmful beliefs and behaviors, helping them build a feminist culture and live a more emotionally whole life.</i>				
	-Discuss and challenge pre-existing ideas about patriarchy. -Dive-In -Vocabulary	Develop internal critique of patriarchal ideals that are harmful to participants. Introduce definitions for key terms and concepts for group discussions.	Identify how new ideas about patriarchy apply to lived experiences. Gain general understanding of key terms and concepts.	Incorporate these ideas into everyday life. Develop new understandings of patriarchy, feminism, and harm.	Develop a different self-conception about manhood. Facilitate conversations of key terms and concepts with others.
	Community Building	<i>If a participant is involved in a peer-based program, they will benefit from relationally-embedded, culturally-relevant, non-hierarchical interactions, thereby deepening their learning and developing more meaningful relationships and community engagement.</i>			
-Identify belief systems related to emotions, accountability, and relationships -In Real Life -Check-In -Honest Reflection -Self-Narration		Connect with participants by sharing common experiences. Identify and label emotions.	Develop relationships with other program participants. Reflect on experiences with emotions and relationships without judgment.	Develop relationships with romantic partners, family, and friends. Cultivate self-awareness and recognize internal emotional states.	Investment in building community relationships and community power. Be authentic and vulnerable in interactions by using self-awareness and reflection.
Transformative Accountability	<i>If you cultivate skills of priority setting, goal-setting, and decision-making, then participants will develop a greater sense of self-efficacy, creating congruence between participant's behaviors and goals.</i>				
	-Discuss priority setting, goals setting, and decision making -Top 5 -Goal Time Log	Recognize personal ability to make choices that match priorities. Learn about considering the future when making choices.	Recognize and create a plan for priorities and goals. Understand the difference between instant gratification thinking and future-based thinking.	Grow feelings of self efficacy. Work on goals and making decisions with the future in mind.	Align actions with priorities to maintain integrity. Find success in accomplishing goals based on reflections on masculinity; Make future-oriented decisions that take others into account

Appendix B. Survey Questions

Notes

- Questions are listed in the order they appear in the survey.
- Asterisks indicate answers are inverse coded in analysis (i.e. strongly disagree = 5... strongly agree = 1)
- Variable names are included in brackets.

Personal Reflections (Pre- & Post-Survey)

Answer options: strongly disagree (1); disagree (2); neither agree or disagree (3); agree (4); strongly agree (5); I do not know (NA); Blank (NA); More than one answer selected (NA)

- I am responsible for my choices.⁵² [pr_choices]
- When I want to make a good decision, it's important for me to think through it first.⁵³ [pr_thinkthrough]
- Planning feels useless because my plans don't usually work out.*⁵⁴ [pr_uselessplanning]
- I feel like I can make things happen in my life.⁵⁴ [pr_makethings]
- My success comes more from luck than hard work.*⁵⁴ [pr_luck]
- I usually wait for things to happen rather than making things happen.*⁵⁴ [pr_waithings]
- I am mainly responsible for my future.⁵² [pr_future]
- I know what my goals are.⁵⁵ [pr_knowgoals]
- I live a life true to my values. [pr_truevalues]
- When I have a lot of things to do at once, I know which ones are the most important.⁵⁶ [pr_prioritize]
- When I get overwhelmed, I can manage my stress.⁵⁶ [pr_managestress]
- Sometimes I say things I know will hurt people's feelings.*⁵³ [pr_sayhurtful]
- I don't have strong relationships because I tend to push people away.* [pr_pushaway]
- Sometimes I feel threatened by other people's success.* [pr_threatensuccess]
- I'm proud of myself for who I am right now. [pr_proud]
- I am open to learning new things. [pr_learningnew]
- I reflect on what I did in the past to see if I could have done things differently. [pr_reflectpast]
- I can let it go when someone I care about hurts me. [pr_letgo]

⁵² Item developed by Mergler, Spencer, and Patton 2007

⁵³ Adapted from the Restraint-Weinberger Adjustment Inventory (Feldman & Weinberger 1994)

⁵⁴ Adapted from the Internal versus External Control of Reinforcement Scale (Rotter 1966)

⁵⁵ Adapted from the Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem 1995)

⁵⁶ Adapted from the Self-Regulation Scale (Schwarzer et al. 1999)

- If someone thinks that I’m wrong, I am open to hearing what they have to say. [pr_openhearing]
- I usually don’t feel sorry when people have problems.* [pr_notsorry]
- I make it a point to show my loved ones how much I appreciate them. [pr_showappreciation]
- When I know I am wrong, I take responsibility for it.⁵² [pr_wrongresponsibility]
- If someone hurts me, I usually cut them off.* [pr_hurtcut]
- It is important for me to give a real apology when I do something that is wrong or hurts someone.⁵² [pr_realapology]
- It is important for me to be honest with people I love. [pr_honest]
- I usually have a good idea about how I’m feeling.⁵⁷ [pr_knowfeeling]

I know how to... (Pre- & Post-Survey)

Answer options: Never (1); sometimes (2); most of the time (3); always (4); N/A (not applicable); I do not know (NA); Blank (NA); More than one answer selected (NA)

- Be a good parent. [pr_goodparent]
- Pick goals that I will finish.⁵⁵ [pr_pickgoals]
- Be a good friend. [pr_goodfriend]
- Stay physically healthy. [pr_physicallyhealthy]
- Stay mentally healthy. [pr_mentally healthy]
- Return a favor. [pr_favor]
- Be a good neighbor. [pr_goodneighbor]
- Have a healthy romantic relationship. [pr_romantic]

Personal Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs (Pre- & Post-Survey)

Answer options: Strongly disagree (1); disagree (2); neither agree or disagree (3); agree (4); strongly agree (5); I do not know (NA); Blank (NA); More than one answer selected (NA)

- It’s important that I can “take someone” in a fist fight. [pv_takefight]
- It’s okay to fight someone to solve a problem. [pv_fightproblem]
- It’s important that others don’t see me as a “pussy”. [pv_viewweak]
- Men should be the “providers” and women should take care of the kids and the home. [pv_menproviders]
- The best type of family has a mom, dad, and kids. [pv_bestfamily]
- Women should listen to men and do what they say. [pv_womenlisten]
- I’m interested in women more for how they look than for their personalities. [pv_womenlooks]
- I believe men and women should be treated the same.* [pv_eualtreatment]
- It’s important for me to make a lot of money. [pv_makemoney]
- I don’t want people to think I am poor. [pv_poor]

⁵⁷ Adapted from the Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al. 1998)

- Sometimes I feel like I have a lot to get off my chest, but most of the time I just keep it inside. [pv_keepinside]
- Showing my emotions makes me weak. [pv_emotionsweak]
- Sometimes I feel embarrassed because I don't look manly enough. [pv_lookmanly]
- It's important that I hold myself accountable to others.* [pv_accountable]
- It's important that I'm true to myself.* [pv_truemyself]
- I want other people to think I'm attractive. [pv_attractive]
- *Open-ended:* Is there anything else you want to tell us about yourself?

American Values (Pre-Survey)

Answer options: Everyone (1); most people (2); some people (3); a few people (4); no one (5); I do not know (NA); Blank (NA); More than one answer selected (NA)

- People think “real men” know how to “throw down” in a physical fight. [av_throwfight]
- Women are treated like sex objects. [av_sexobjects]
- Men should “call the shots”. [av_calltheshots]
- The best type of families have a mom, dad, and kids. [av_bestfamily]
- Wealthy men get more respect than poor men. [av_wealthyrespect]
- For a man to be successful, he needs to have money. [av_moneysuccess]
- People tend to think men are weak if they cry. [av_weakcry]
- Men should want to have sex all the time. [av_sexallthetime]
- People are impressed if a man has slept with a lot of women. [av_mansex]
- People believe that “real men” keep their word.* [av_keepword]
- “Real men” should be able to handle their business on their own. [av_handlebusiness]

Success Stories Experience (Post-Survey)

Answer options: Strongly disagree (1); disagree (2); neither agree or disagree (3); agree (4); strongly agree (5); I do not know (NA); Blank (NA); More than one answer selected (NA)

- The facilitator cared about me. [ss_faccaared]
- I am satisfied with the things I learned in the course. [ss_satisfiedlearning]
- I liked the way the facilitator ran the program. [ss_facrun]
- These sessions helped me clarify my goals. [ss_clarifygoals]
- I understand myself better after taking the program. [ss_understandself]
- The sessions helped me know what is important to me. [ss_priorities]
- Success Stories helped me value taking time to think about how I feel. [ss_valuereflection]
- After this program I think about being a man differently. [ss_differentman]
- I learned lessons that I will use in the future. [ss_futurelessons]
- I will recommend this program to others. [ss_recommend]

- I want to join the Success Stories alumni network. [ss_alumni]
- *Open-ended*: Is there anything else you want to share about your experience with the Success Stories program?

Demographic Information (Post-Survey)

- *Open-ended*: What year were you born?
- Check all that apply. I identify as...
 - *Answer options*: American Indian or Alaskan Native; Asian; Black or African American; Hispanic or Latino/a/x; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; White; Other (please write in your answer); I don't know; Decline to answer
- What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 - *Answer options*: Some middle school; middle school (8th grade); some high school; high school diploma (12th grade); GED; some college classes; Associate's degree (2-year program); Bachelor's degree (4-year degree); Master's degree or higher; I don't know; Decline to answer
- What is the highest level of education completed by your primary parent/caretaker/guardian?
 - *Answer options*: Some middle school; middle school (8th grade); some high school; high school diploma (12th grade); GED; some college classes; Associate's degree (2-year program); Bachelor's degree (4-year degree); Master's degree or higher; I don't know; Decline to answer
- Do you have a job right now?
 - *Answer options*: Yes; No; I don't know; Decline to answer
- *Open-ended*: If you have a job, where are you working and what do you do?
- Check all that apply. Right now, I have a good idea of...
 - *Answer options*: How I'm going to get food this week; Where I'm going to sleep tonight; How I'm going to pay rent this month; Where to get help if I'm sick; A person I can call if I'm having an emergency.
- Are you participating in other support or self-help groups?
 - *Answer options*: No, I am only participating in Success Stories; Yes, I am participating in other programs too.
- *Open-ended*: If you are participating in other programs, what are they?
- Have you ever been to jail?
 - *Answer options*: No; Yes, 1 or 2 times; Yes, 3 or 4 times; Yes, 5 or more times; I don't know; Decline to answer
- Have you ever served time in a state prison?
 - *Answer options*: Yes; No; I don't know; Decline to answer

- *Table:* If yes, please fill out the table below. Start with your most recent prison experience in the first row. If you have served time in more than 8 prisons, list the most recent here.
- *Open-ended:* What is your gender?
- I identify as...
 - *Answer options:* Straight; Gay; Bi; Other (blank to fill out); I don't know; Decline to answer
- What's your current relationship status?
 - *Answer options:* Single; In a committed relationship; Married; Separated; Divorced; Widowed; Other; I don't know; Decline to answer
- *Open-ended:* Do you have children? If so, how many?

Appendix C. Other Program Names & Categories

- Anger & Relationship - Alternatives to Violence; Cage Your Rage; Guiding Rage into Power; Insight Workshop; Life Cycle; Path to Kinship; Phoenix Alliance; Prison of Peace; Victim Impact
- Criminal Behaviors - Anti-Recidivism Coalition; AVATAR Parole Preparation and Relapse Prevention; Balance Reentry Activity Group; Criminal and Gang Members Anonymous; Criminal Thinking; Fresh Start; Gang Awareness; Hustle 2.0; Life Without a Crutch; Life's Too Short; Posse Solutions; The Road to Freedom; Responsibility Driven
- Education & Art - Arts in Corrections; Book Club; College; Crochet Corner; GED; Healing Rhythms; In-cells Studies; Inmate Peer Education Program; Inside Out Writers; Playwrite; Podcast class; Prison Arts; Shakespear; Soledad Arts; Toastmaster; Write of Your Life
- Religious - Bible study; Latter Day Saints; Love Lifted Me; Prison Fellowship
- Specific Populations - Alternative Custody Program; ICSA re-entry program; Life Support Alliance; Life Support Alliance; Lifers; Veterans Group
- Substance Use - Alcoholics Anonymous; Celebrate Recovery; Division of Rehabilitative Recovery; Integrated Substance Use Disorder Treatment; Narcotics Anonymous; Substance Abuse Program
- Therapy/Self-Help - California Prison Industry Authority; Center for Counsel; Choice Therapy Group; Cognitive Behavioral Interventions/Therapy; Compassion Prison Project; Emotional Intelligence; Exercise in Empathy; Getting Out by Going In; Glossphonics; Kindness Restoration; Mindful Kindness; Reality Check; Thinking for Change; Transitions; The Work
- Other & Unknown - All of Us or None; CBF; CB2; CCG; GBI; Initiate Justice; Living in Balance; Pathways; Realize by Ahimsa Collective

Appendix D. Quantitative Result Tables

Note on t-value interpretation

In the paired t-tests used in this analysis, a positive t-value indicates the mean of the first group (i.e. participants who took the pre-survey before starting Success Stories curriculum) is higher than the second (i.e. the same participants who took the post-survey after completing the Success Stories curriculum). A negative t-value indicates the mean of the first group (pre-Success Stories) is lower than the second (post-Success Stories). The sign only shows the direction of the difference, not the significance, which is determined by the p-value and comparison to a critical t-value.

Table D1. Statistically Significant Paired t-test Results

Note: Only results with a p-value <0.1 are reported in the table below; variables names followed by an asterisks* are inverse coded; variables with unexpected outcomes are in green

Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.	Pre- Mean	Post- Mean
pr_choices	-1.78	135	0.077	-0.33	0.02	4.59	4.78
pr_uselessplanning	-2.59	131	0.011	-0.40	-0.05	4.00	4.20
pr_waitthings	-3.88	136	<0.001	-0.48	-0.16	3.86	4.19
pr_truevalues	-3.80	129	<0.001	-0.53	-0.17	3.98	4.31
pr_prioritize	-2.60	133	0.010	-0.42	-0.06	4.00	4.25
pr_managestress	-4.07	126	<0.001	-0.57	-0.20	3.69	4.09
pr_sayhurtful*	-3.52	128	<0.001	-0.59	-0.17	2.63	3.03
pr_pushaway*	-3.69	135	<0.001	-0.63	-0.19	3.24	3.66
pr_threatensuccess*	-2.98	133	0.003	-0.46	-0.09	4.00	4.28
pr_proud	-2.89	131	0.004	-0.47	-0.09	3.96	4.29
pr_reflectpast	-2.04	133	0.043	-0.29	0.00	4.39	4.53
pr_letgo	-3.53	126	<0.001	-0.58	-0.16	3.47	3.92
pr_openhearing	-3.58	134	<0.001	-0.45	-0.13	4.15	4.42
pr_notsorry*	4.41	136	<0.001	0.35	0.91	3.90	3.26
pr_hurtcut*	-1.89	128	0.061	-0.38	0.01	2.87	3.06
pr_honest	-2.44	135	0.016	-0.37	-0.04	4.47	4.66

Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.	Pre- Mean	Post- Mean
pr_knowfeeling	-1.80	130	0.075	-0.27	0.01	4.15	4.26
pv_takefight	3.22	126	0.002	0.13	0.55	2.11	1.77
pv_fightproblems	3.12	134	0.002	0.08	0.38	1.80	1.59
pv_viewweak	4.01	130	<0.001	0.24	0.71	2.36	1.92
pv_menproviders	1.92	136	0.058	-0.01	0.34	2.09	1.96
pv_makemoney	1.81	133	0.073	-0.01	0.33	3.45	3.29
pv_poor	3.09	133	<0.002	0.10	0.44	2.63	2.37
pv_keeinside	3.79	136	<0.001	0.18	0.57	3.27	2.90
pv_emotionsweak	3.13	134	0.002	0.10	0.42	2.03	1.73
pv_lookmanly	1.80	136	0.075	-0.01	0.26	1.71	1.59
pv_accountable*	6.04	127	<0.001	0.53	1.04	2.26	1.48
pv_truemyself*	2.26	134	0.026	0.31	0.16	1.47	1.31
pr_goodparent	-2.49	92	0.014	-0.04	-0.23	3.00	3.27
pr_pickgoals	-2.63	132	0.009	-0.34	-0.19	3.07	3.24
pr_mentallyhealthy	-1.90	135	0.059	-0.24	0.00		
pr_romantic	-1.86	111	0.065	-0.31	0.01		

Table D2. Descriptive Statistics for Success Stories Experience Questions

Variable	Lower C.I.	Mean	Upper C.I.	N/As*
ss_faccared	4.35	4.46	4.57	7
ss_satisfiedlearning	4.44	4.56	4.67	3
ss_recommend	4.51	4.62	4.74	3
ss_alumni	4.22	4.37	4.51	13
ss_satisfiedlearning	4.41	4.53	4.66	2
ss_clarifygoals	4.34	4.48	4.61	3
ss_understandself	4.25	4.39	4.53	2
ss_priorities	4.23	4.38	4.53	2
ss_valuereflection	4.32	4.45	4.59	2
ss_differentman	4.17	4.32	4.46	3
ss_futurelessons	4.43	4.55	4.67	3

*N/As include N/A responses and blanks