RESTORING PROMISE

Vera INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE | MILPA

Restoring Promise Implementation Toolkit

Opening housing units for young adults built on human dignity

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Introduction

Young people ages 18 to 24 make up 10 percent of the United States. population but 21 percent of people admitted into adult prisons every year.[1] And among those, young men of color are overrepresented, with Black men in this age group seven to nine times more likely to end up in prison compared to their white peers. Young people make mistakes—we all have. But when the mistakes lead to prison, we should ensure young people are given the tools they need to learn from their mistakes, and to succeed in life and support their communities after they return home.

Restoring Promise, launched in 2019 as a collaboration between the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) and the MILPA Collective, seeks to transform prison cultures, climates, and spaces by partnering with correctional leaders to reimagine housing units for young adults and realign corrections policies and practices with a commitment to human dignity. Beginning with a successful pilot in Connecticut, the initiative has since expanded to seven young adult housing units in five states: Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, North Dakota, and South Carolina.

The Restoring Promise approach is creating more safety for incarcerated people and corrections professionals. In survey responses from correctional staff across Restoring Promise housing units,

- 88 percent of staff reported feeling less stressed working on the units;
- 89 percent reported that their quality of life had improved;
- 91 percent reported having grown professionally;
- 97 percent reported feeling safe on the unit; and
- 98 percent reported feeling like they are part of a community on the units.[2]

In an evaluation supported by the National Institute of Justice, Restoring Promise researchers using a randomized control methodology found that the initiative's approach to culture change in South Carolina led to significant reductions in violence. Young adults living in a Restoring Promise unit experienced a 73 percent reduction in the odds of a conviction for a violent infraction and an 83 percent reduction in the odds of a restrictive housing stay during their first year of participation, compared to the control group in the general population.[3]

Restoring Promise has identified an evidence-based process to transform prison culture, grounded in our experience working with corrections leaders and professionals, incarcerated people and their families, and experts in the field. The key principles are

- safety through dynamic security;
- accountability through restorative practices;
- connection through quality time with family and community;
- a clear path to, and preparation for, a successful reentry;
- dignity through transformative redesign of carceral spaces;
- and sustainability of prison culture change through the empowerment of corrections professionals and incarcerated leaders.

About This Toolkit

The Restoring Promise Implementation Toolkit is a roadmap for corrections agencies interested in supporting the success of young adults (ages 18–25) by creating specialized housing units rooted in human dignity and restorative practices. The toolkit guides agencies through a nine-month process to opening a young adult housing unit, organized in five stages: plan and assess, implement, train, open, and pilot/sustain. The Restoring Promise approach centers the input and leadership of staff and incarcerated people throughout the implementation process, which is critical to the success and the sustainability of the housing unit.

YOUNG ADULT HOUSING UNIT GOALS

- Focus on young adult development and success in and out of prison.
- Center the human dignity of everyone.
- Leverage the leadership of the people most impacted by change: those who work for or are incarcerated in prisons.
- Shift prison culture from punishment to accountability, respect, healing, and rehabilitation.
- Use the implementation of a pilot housing unit as a roadmap for changes systemwide.

TOOLKIT DEFINITIONS

Community: The term used to describe the young adult housing unit; instead of a housing unit, we refer to both the space and the people as a community. "People" refers to everyone involved: the staff, mentors, and young adults. For example, the TRUE community (vs. the TRUE young adult housing unit).

DOC leadership: Usually the Department of Corrections (DOC) director, their deputies, and executive team.

DOC staff: This is a broad description of people employed by the DOC who are based in prisons. It includes, but is not limited to, administrative staff, correctional officers of all levels, counselors, and programmatic staff. It does not include people in leadership (for example, the warden or directors).

Housing unit leadership team: The corrections staff and mentors who are charged with creating and maintaining the housing unit culture, ensuring the safety of everyone, and supporting the needs of young adults.

Implementation: The process by which a young adult housing unit based on human dignity is planned and opened.

Mentors: Incarcerated people who are over the age of 25 and have been trained to work on the unit. Mentors are part of the housing unit leadership team.

Pilot unit: This refers to the first young adult community in your agency. The word pilot highlights the fact that it is something in process and that there is an element of learning together and iteration before expanding.

How to Open a Young Adult Housing Unit (Overview)

STAGE 1: PLAN AND ASSESS

In Stage 1, the corrections agency forms an implementation workgroup to shepherd the process of opening a pilot unit focused on human dignity. The implementation workgroup assesses existing resources, facility options to house the pilot, and the budget for necessary physical plan changes, as well as outlining the research goals. Given the information collected, the workgroup sets the timeline for the unit opening.

The steps of Stage 1 are as follows:

1.1: Assemble implementation workgroup

1.2: Conduct research and collect data

1.3: Plan and assess

1.4: Create a work plan

STAGE 2: IMPLEMENT

In Stage 2, the selected unit is renovated to create a more welcoming and functional space, and staff, mentors, and young adults are recruited and selected to live and work on the unit(s). The implementation workgroup reviews current DOC policies and practices, particularly conflict resolution policies, and proposes changes to prioritize human dignity and culture change.

The steps of Stage 2 are as follows:

2.1: Identify location, physical space, and necessary renovations

2.2: Select mentors

2.3: Select staff

2.4: Select young adults

2.5: Review DOC policy

2.6: Propose policy changes

STAGE 3: TRAIN

In Stage 3, the corrections agency leverages current training academy resources, conducts outreach to community groups, and develops the ideal training for the needs of the selected staff and mentors. This training is pivotal for building trust between staff and mentors.

The steps of Stage 3 are as follows:

3.1: Identify training components

3.2: Identify training resources and needs

3.3: Develop and plan training

3.4: Schedule training

3.5: Deliver training

STAGE 4: OPEN THE UNIT(S)

In Stage 4, the corrections agency begins the process of moving staff, mentors, and cohorts of young adults onto the unit, and celebrates the opening of the unit. Staff and mentors move onto the unit first to build trust and plan an orientation for the first cohort of young adults, who join one week later. The orientation of this first group sets the tone for community building and is repeated with each successive cohort that joins the unit.

The steps of Stage 4 are as follows:

4.1: Make final preparations

4.2: Launch the unit

4.3: Foster team building

4.4: Foster team cohesion

4.5: Welcome young adult cohorts

4.6: Celebrate unit opening

4.7: Conduct young adult orientation

STAGE 5: PILOT AND SUSTAIN THE UNIT(S)

Stage 5 is devoted to maintenance of the unit's culture and cohesion in the first year and beyond. The agency responds to ongoing training needs; the housing unit leadership team develops a daily routine, workshops, and small discussion groups led by staff and mentors; and the community regularly organizes events and activities that build community and cohesion on the unit. The implementation workgroup also continues to track outcome data and adjust programming as needed in response.

The steps of Stage 5 are as follows:

5.1: Develop guiding philosophies

5.2: Conduct research

5.3: Deliver booster trainings

5.4: Develop programs and groups

5.5: Plan events and activities

5.6: Remember progress is not a straight line

STAGE 1: Plan and Assess

In Stage 1 the corrections agency forms an implementation workgroup (composed of Department of Corrections leadership, varying levels of DOC staff, and incarcerated people) to shepherd the process of opening a pilot young adult housing unit focused on human dignity. The implementation workgroup begins by assessing existing resources, information, and opportunities within the agency to contribute to an innovative approach to working with people who are incarcerated, as well as any specific priorities and goals of the DOC. Special attention in this stage is given to defining roles, responsibilities, and expectations. The workgroup outlines research goals, reviews facility options to house the pilot, and creates a budget for necessary physical plan changes. Based on the information collected, the workgroup sets the timeline for the unit opening.

There is often an inclination to dive headfirst into the creation of a new young adult housing unit. *Doing* things can feel better than *talking* about or *planning* things. Resist this urge. Take the necessary time in this stage to ensure that you are methodical in your steps, that you prioritize process, and perhaps most importantly, that you have the right voices and people at the table to make this endeavor a long-term and sustainable success for your department and the people who live and work in your facilities.

1.1: ASSEMBLE IMPLEMENTATION WORKGROUP

Every step and stage going forward will be the responsibility of the implementation workgroup. Should there be a need for outside support or expertise, securing those roles and partnerships will still be the responsibility of the workgroup. For this reason the key roles (see below) will be critical throughout the implementation process and crucial to its success.

- Ensure there is DOC leadership *and* facility leadership represented on the implementation workgroup. (Be sure to add facility leadership once

the facility has been selected, if one was not chosen at the time the implementation workgroup was identified.)

- Assign key roles for the implementation workgroup. These should include the following:
  - **Workgroup leads** to coordinate and run the implementation workgroup. These should be DOC staff and at least one person who is currently incarcerated, who will ideally become a mentor on the unit once it opens.
  - **Research point person(s)** to gather, analyze, and present data to the implementation workgroup. It is important to have this person identified and on board from this early point in order to ensure that the research goals and findings are included throughout the implementation process and inform the decisions that are made along the way.
- Identify other key members needed for the workgroup. Think broadly about who would be able to constructively contribute to the many details that go into the planning and opening of a new housing unit. The group should include people in leadership positions, line staff, and positions in between. Some specific roles to include on the implementation workgroup are
  - a senior operations person with the ability to make decisions about the unit and policies,
  - education staff,
  - warden(s),
  - deputy warden(s),
  - correctional officer(s),
  - counseling staff, and
  - people who are incarcerated.
- Once the implementation workgroup is formed, draft goals for the group and for the young adult housing unit.
- Draft an implementation timeline, order of activities, and expectations. Make

adjustments as needed to best fit agency and workgroup needs.

1.2: CONDUCT RESEARCH AND COLLECT DATA

In this step, think through what data could help inform planning and implementation for the new unit. Many of these actions could take place parallel to activities in the previous step. Staff and people who are incarcerated are incredible resources for thinking through research needs, opportunities, and process. With the proper training and orientation, they could act as survey administrators and/or research emissaries who are uniquely positioned to instill a sense of trust and willingness in others to participate in research and data collection. Some of the people who participate in research could potentially serve as staff or mentors on the unit once it opens.

- Determine what opportunities there are to conduct research.
  - What are the pros and cons of conducting research in-house with the DOC?
  - What is the capacity to contract the research and data collection to an outside vendor, and what are the pros and cons of this approach?
  - What benefits could data collection bring?
  - What is lost by not collecting data?
- Consider research methods for gathering information from staff and people who are incarcerated. These could include
  - administering surveys,
  - collecting administrative data,
  - conducting interviews, and
  - conducting focus groups.
- Identify and gather any relevant administrative data on young adults (ages 18–25) in the selected facility and/or DOC-wide, including (but not limited to)
  - demographic information (race, gender, age, etc.),

- top charge breakdowns,
- education,
- participation in programming, and
- restrictive housing history and use.

- Any data collected, from surveys and/or administrative data, should inform the implementation process (Stage 2), training of staff and mentors (Stage 3), and subsequent opening of the unit (Stage 4), as well as later research findings (step 5.2). Never underestimate the power of data and the stories that it tells—it is not always the same, and if this process is done well, the data will reflect the nuances of your staff and people who are incarcerated.

- Share the results of the data.
  - Once the data is compiled, make a plan for sharing results with the implementation workgroup. This can be done piecemeal, as all data may not be compiled at once.
  - Ensure that there are opportunities for the data to inform and sway the planning process.
  - Be curious and open-minded about where the data will lead you.

- Make a plan for incorporating the data into the training of staff and mentors (Stage 3).

1.3: PLAN AND ASSESS

The assessment step is intended as a first attempt at getting the lay of the land in your DOC agency. There is a difference between understanding the decisions that will need to be made to open a housing unit for young adults that focuses on human dignity, and having those questions already resolved. How these decisions are made is a critical part of the implementation process and should always include staff and people who are incarcerated who are interested in participating in the young adult housing unit. Seeking and gaining their buy-in to these decisions will contribute to the long-term success and sustainability of the unit(s). Here are some of the questions to

consider.

Location

- What unit(s) in which facilities are options to be converted to a young adult housing unit?
  - Where is there a concentration of young adults already?
  - Will you start with a women's or men's facility?
  - What facilities are ready for and/or need a correctional culture change that opening a young adult unit with an explicit focus on human dignity could impact?
- What infrastructure changes will be needed?
  - Which are possible?
  - What, if any, barriers are there to making these changes?
  - Who needs to be consulted and/or whose approval is needed?

Data

- What data is already and/or easily available?
- What gaps are there?
- What opportunities might there be to get more/different data and information as the implementation process continues?

Staffing

- What is the process for creating unit-specific positions? Are there potential barriers?
- Who are the staff that you can identify as primed for the unique opportunity of opening and working on a young adult unit that takes a nontraditional approach to management?
- What untapped potential exists between staff and mentors who will be working on the unit together and supporting one another in the goal of building a community?

Workgroup adjustments

- Now that the workgroup is off the ground (step 1.1 above), it is important to take stock of any gaps that exist. Are there any key members who need to be added? As the workgroup moves through different phases of planning and implementation, there will be unique and critical voices that will need to be included. Be open to making additions and adjustments to the workgroup, and ensure those voices are brought into the conversation sooner rather than later.

Funding

What funding sources and/or additional financial resources are or can be made available for the implementation process? There will be a variety of potential costs, including the following:

- Dedicated time for workgroup lead positions. A certain percentage of staff time will need to be allotted to the person(s) tasked with leading the implementation process.
- Training—either consultants to provide training or staff time/overtime for both leading and participating in training.
- Paying mentors.
- Physical space and infrastructure renovations to the housing unit. For example,
  - removing doors for some cells to be converted to multi-purpose spaces;
  - removing beds, shelves, toilets, etc., from cells that will be used as community spaces (this can be determined by the workgroup and the unit once people are living and working there);
  - painting walls and cells;
  - remediation of the unit, such as upgrading bathrooms and showers;
  - adding hookups for washers and dryers on the unit;
  - installing a shared kitchen to the unit;
  - purchasing new furniture for cells and furniture for the unit that can be moved and rearranged—having the ability to move tables and

chairs allows for a variety of activities, meals, games, and community engagements, which is an important part of building and maintaining community; and

- more, depending on the physical space and architectural plans for the unit.

- Resources for the unit. Examples include (but are not limited to)
  - books and educational materials,
  - barber shop tools,
  - computers on the unit,
  - weights and exercise equipment,
  - washer and dryer, and
  - other community building activities and materials.

If there are not line items for these categories, it is important to identify a budget and available funds for supporting the changes and additions to the unit.

Training capacity

- While training is covered in depth in Stage 3 of this toolkit, it is important to begin assessing what training resources are available and/or lacking now, in order to ensure that training can run as smoothly as possible.

- What trainings/trainers do you have in-house, and what might you need to go outside your agency for? (As you will see in Stage 3, training for housing units grounded in human dignity must be different and more expansive than existing DOC training academy courses. It is never too soon to begin thinking through the training opportunities and challenges at your agency.)

Additional resources

- Have you missed anything? Each agency comes with its own unique opportunities and challenges, and you know your agency best. Resources are not always only financial. Think about specialized opportunities that you can marshal for this young adult housing unit with mentors. What programs already exist that could contribute to this implementation process?

1.4: CREATE A WORK PLAN

The planning step is a final opportunity to ensure your agency is ready to successfully move into Stage 2: Implementation. Using the draft proposed timeline and goals from step 1.1, as well as all the information that has been collected throughout Stage 1, draft and finalize an implementation work plan. Here are some pieces to keep in mind.

- **Timeline:** Every step and detail from this point on should be outlined with a timeframe and identified point person(s) to see that piece of the work plan through. Attached is a work plan template that details a potential timeline for the implementation of a young adult housing unit. (See Appendix on page 44.)

- **Location:** Finalize the housing unit selection for implementation. Your research and assessment should inform this decision, as well as the implementation process going forward.

- **Workgroup:** The roles, responsibilities, and participant lists should be solidified and clear at this point. The workgroup should be working seamlessly and prepared to dive into the implementation process. The next several months will be busy and require a team of staff and mentors working well together. We recommend engaging in some team building exercises to build relationships and trust as the workgroup moves into Stage 2.

STAGE 2: Implement

In Stage 2 staff, mentors, and young adults are recruited and selected to live and work on the unit(s). The selected unit is updated, as planned in Stage 1, to be a more welcoming and community-oriented space. And the implementation workgroup reviews current DOC policies and practices, including disciplinary policies, to establish community rules that prioritize human dignity and culture change.

Throughout Stage 2 we will reference the creation of a number of subcommittees that will focus on specifics. How these committees function, who is on them, and the inevitable amount of overlap in participation and subject matter will ultimately be up to the implementation workgroup. Each subcommittee will report to the implementation workgroup on a regular basis in order to create a hub of information sharing and decision-making that will successfully move this process forward.

2.1: IDENTIFY LOCATION, PHYSICAL SPACE, AND NECESSARY RENOVATIONS

There are a number of important considerations to keep in mind when selecting and renovating a unit to make the space more welcoming, community-oriented, and as similar as possible to life on the outside. When selecting a unit to use for your young adult community, we strongly recommend

- giving mentors their own cells;
- transforming a number of the cells into community spaces, such as meditation or religious spaces, mentor meeting rooms, a barber shop, a pantry for shared food, laundry for the unit, an office with computers, a library—the possibilities are endless;
- ensuring access to outdoor space;
- removing bolted-down tables and chairs and replacing them with movable furniture to facilitate reorganizing the space for different events;

- bringing in comfortable seating, couches, and chairs;
- adding artwork, plants, and other items to make the space feel warmer and more welcoming;
- installing a shared kitchen;
- painting the walls, doors, and cells, and involving the mentors and young adults in some of these decisions and processes;
- giving mentors and young adults the ability to lock their own doors to their cells;
- updating showers for increased privacy; and
- updating any in-cell toilets for increased privacy.

We also strongly encourage

- significant renovations that allow for more light, more open spaces, and a more home-like feel to the unit. If walls can be knocked down while maintaining structural integrity and lines of sight, this can notably improve quality of life for people living and working on the unit; and
- eliminating the physical divide between staff and residents on the unit, if possible. For example, if there is a bubble on the unit, ensure that staff are able to easily be outside of the bubble and on the unit as much as possible.

2.2: SELECT MENTORS

Mentors are a unique and critical part of life on the unit. They ease stress for the staff who work there. They add stability and consistency to life on the unit. They help resolve conflicts and provide accountability for the young adults and their peers. Mentors have been vital to the success of other Restoring Promise communities and the importance of their partnership with staff cannot be overemphasized.

- Establish a mentor selection committee. This committee should be made up of members of the implementation workgroup and ideally would include a range of staff and incarcerated people to ensure a broad array of perspectives.
- Draft a mentor job description. Determine the pay that mentors will earn

for their work. We strongly encourage making mentor positions among the highest-paid positions available in the facility due to the 24/7 nature of the work. Include pay rates in the job announcement and advertising.

- Identify the goals of the mentor application process. This should help narrow the application questions and the steps each applicant will follow as they move through the process.

- Create an application for aspiring mentors. Determine the timeline, process, and to whom, where, and how the application must be submitted. Treat this process as a job application and interview.

- Determine mentor selection criteria and process.

    - We strongly encourage agencies to make the selection criteria as broad as possible. Experience shows us that everyone can succeed in the correct circumstances and environment. Neither conviction status nor disciplinary incidents should prohibit someone from applying and being accepted as a mentor in the young adult housing unit.

- Make a communications plan for announcing and advertising the new young adult housing unit, the aims of the unit, and the application process for mentors. The plan should include steps for proactive recruitment of mentors and advisement that the application process is open to all interested.

- Put the application process in motion.

- Select and notify mentors. **Note, the final selection of mentors should be timed to coincide as closely to the start of staff and mentor training as possible.** Be sure to review Stage 3 and the included steps for training preparation to ensure a coordinated timeline.

2.3: SELECT STAFF

- Establish a staff selection committee. This committee should be made up of members of the implementation workgroup and ideally would include a range of staff and incarcerated people to ensure a broad array of perspectives.

- Draft staff job descriptions. Finalize and use these job descriptions as part of the announcement and advertising. We recommend the following specific staff roles be outlined with their own job descriptions (with the understanding that each agency has its own staffing titles and organization

that these roles should be fit into as appropriate):

  - unit manager
  - unit counselor
  - unit program coordinator
  - unit correctional officer

- Identify the goals of the staff application process. This should help narrow the application questions and the steps each applicant will follow as they move through the process.

- Create an application for staff interested in working on the new unit. Determine the timeline, process, and to whom, where, and how the application must be submitted. Treat this process as a job application and interview.

- Determine selection criteria and process for staffing positions.

  - Ensure that there is a diversity of skills, experience, and demographics represented in the group of staff. This will help staff better connect with the young adults who join the unit. Much as the young adults should be representative of the overall prison population (race, conviction types, etc.), so too should the staff who are selected.

  - Following training, plan on welcoming mentors and staff to the unit in advance of the first young adult cohort. This allows for bonding, expectation setting, and preparation for young adult orientation. This easing-in process for staff and mentors, and then a small cohort of young adults, is crucial for the overall success of the unit and community. (Once mentors and staff arrive on the unit, see Stage 4 for specific activities.)

- Make a communications plan for announcing and advertising the new young adult housing unit, the aims of the unit, and the application process for the various staff positions.

- Put the application process in motion.

- Select and notify staff who will work on the unit. Note, the final selection of staff should be timed to coincide as closely to the start of staff and mentor

training as possible. Be sure to review Stage 3 and the included steps for training preparation to ensure a coordinated timeline.

2.4: SELECT YOUNG ADULTS

This step does not need to immediately follow the staff and mentor selection processes, as staff and mentors must be trained before any young adults move to the new unit. Once selected, staff and mentors should have a collaborative role in the young adult selection process.

- Establish a young adult selection committee. This committee should be made up of staff and mentors.
- Identify the goals of the young adult application process. This should help narrow the application questions and the steps each young adult will follow as they move through the process.
- Create an application for young adults interested in joining the community. Determine the timeline, process, and to whom, where, and how the application must be submitted.
- Make a communications plan for announcing and advertising the new young adult housing unit, the aims of the unit, and the application process. The plan should include steps for proactive recruitment of young adults throughout the agency and advisement that the application process is open to all interested.
- Determine selection criteria and process for young adults.
    - We strongly encourage agencies to make the selection criteria as broad as possible. The group of young adults that is selected (either each cohort or the overall group of young adults) should resemble the makeup of the facility and/or agency as a whole. This should include demographics (specifically, but not limited to, race and ethnicity) and conviction charge. The goal with the selection process is to avoid favoritism and not cherry pick a group of young adults who are perceived to be the best behaved. This model can work for everyone and should be available to everyone. Using a lottery system is one way we have found success in making the selection process as open as possible.
    - Plan on welcoming young adults to the unit in cohorts of about 10-12. Allow at least four to five weeks between new cohorts in order to establish community culture and expectations. Filling a unit to capacity

at once will make the process more difficult and less likely to succeed. (Once a cohort arrives on the unit, see steps 4.4–4.7 for welcome and orientation activities.)

- Put the application process in motion.
- Select and notify young adults. Note, the final selection of young adults should be timed to coincide as closely to the opening of the unit as possible. Ideally the unit will open following the completion of staff and mentor training (detailed in Stage 3). For specifics detailing the ideal timing for young adults moving onto the unit, please review Stage 4 and the included timeline to ensure a coordinated process.

2.5: REVIEW DOC POLICY

In this step, the term "policy" should be understood broadly to include (but not be limited to) DOC policies, institutional directives, and operational procedures.

- Establish a committee to review relevant DOC policies. Be sure to include incarcerated people, line staff, and other staff, not only DOC leadership. Policy is what the people living and working in DOC facilities personally experience daily and in a very visceral way. It is critical to hear their voices in the review of policies, especially those that will impact the goals and function of this new young adult housing unit.
- Identify and list policies that could hinder or support the success of young adults on the new unit, and revise as needed. These could include
  - disciplinary policies,
  - grooming policies,
  - uniform and clothing policies (for both staff and mentors),
  - policies around interactions, such as undue familiarity, and
  - conflict resolution policies.
- To better inform the committee, consider creating focus groups made up of both staff and incarcerated people for specific areas of policy to (1) discuss and share any policies or areas that they identify as potential challenges and (2) review actual policies and suggest changes and/or amendments.

- The policy review should be informed by the data that has previously been gathered.
    - If more young people are written up for certain offenses, consider the possible causes and how they might be addressed.
    - Are there certain offenses that are being used as "catch-all" infractions for low-level, easily manageable behaviors?
    - How are demographics (race, age, gender, etc.) showing up in the data related to certain policies?
    - What other patterns or irregularities showed up in the data related to DOC policies?
- Give special consideration to the conflict resolution policy. Changes to this policy should be prioritized. In order to build a community of young adults, mentors, and staff built on trust, mutual respect, and human dignity, every effort to deal effectively with conflicts and incidents on-site, without expelling people from the unit, needs to be made. That means that policies that would, under other circumstances, result in removal from the unit need to be suspended or changed altogether. Opportunities to understand and change behavior are critical to the continuity and community building of the unit.
    - Model the conflict resolution policy and practices after examples such as restorative practices, mediation, circle processes, and processes that center the needs of the person or people most harmed and the necessary accountability to make those situations right.
    - Avoid recreating a punishment-based policy such as a disciplinary hearing or any process where staff and mentors are making decisions about consequences or accountability measures for the people most impacted and responsible for the incident.
    - Establish the conflict resolution policy for one year, and make it permanent following a successful year of application (unless it is made permanent from the outset).
- Once completed, the policy review committee (and/or any focus groups that were also created) should present their findings and recommendations to the implementation workgroup. At this point it will likely be necessary to add a section on pushing through and approving policy changes to the

implementation work plan. These policy changes should be in place at the time of the unit opening. Restoring Promise can provide you with samples of a policy review and a findings and recommendations document.

2.6: PROPOSE POLICY CHANGES

- Pilot recommended policy changes on the young adult unit once it is operational, and consider making a detailed plan and timeline for permanently adopting these changes on the unit once they have been fine-tuned.

- Once it is demonstrated that policy changes can be made successfully on the young adult unit, we strongly encourage agencies and facilities to extend these changes throughout the facility. Changing policies to allow for flexibility and discretion on the part of staff, with the support and backup of facility and agency leadership, can have a dramatic impact on the culture and community of all units.

- Schedule a review of any policy changes at the six-month and one-year marks to address any components that are not working and/or need to be changed.

- Policy changes should also be informed by the outcomes of the data and research that was conducted in Stage 1.

STAGE 3: Train

Stage 3 is pivotal to prepare the unit for opening and especially for building trust between staff and mentors. The corrections agency leverages current training academy resources, conducts outreach to community groups, and develops the ideal training for the needs of the selected staff and mentors.

Preparing and delivering the training for staff and mentors will require a significant amount of time and many simultaneous considerations. Once again, please view the following steps in Stage 3 as different buckets of work, many taking place in overlapping time frames rather than a consecutive approach.

3.1: IDENTIFY TRAINING COMPONENTS

- You will want to approach the training differently than you have with other trainings that have come out of your DOC training academy. In order to achieve the necessary culture change, shift in practice, and buy-in, you will need to incorporate new and innovative training modules. Some of these might appear outside the traditional wheelhouse of corrections training, which is exactly what is needed.

- Take into consideration all the data that has been collected, the feedback from staff and mentors (or incarcerated participants), the policy review and recommendations, and any additional needs and gaps that you have identified during the implementation process. Add that to the list of necessary training components, and begin planning for how to provide appropriate training to both staff and mentors on those subjects.

- Training components that Restoring Promise has found necessary to the success of the units we have opened are listed below. While it is understood that no agency will be able to replicate this training exactly, consider these components and descriptions as a template for training themes and topics to prioritize.

- **Introduction to the goals and vision of the new young adult housing unit**
  - Introductions of trainers, staff, and mentors
  - Overview of training schedule and curriculum
  - Opening circle to set the tone
  - Goals for the unit
  - Overview of timeline for unit opening and young adults joining the unit
- **Social-historical context and best practices**
  - Examining the social-historical context of incarceration in your state/area
  - Why race equity is important and how it should be incorporated into culture change efforts
  - Introducing best reform practices from Germany and Norway, the Missouri Model, and other U.S.-based reform initiatives
- **Working with young adults**
  - What makes young adults tick
  - Best practices for working with and supporting young adults
  - Why it is important to focus on young adults who are incarcerated
- **Cultural healing & healing-centered engagement**
  - Understanding and incorporating people's cultural, religious, and family traditions into work on the unit
  - Centering the tools and mechanisms that people already have for healing, while moving beyond trauma

- **Restorative practices**
  - → Understanding harm
  - → Practicing accountability and active listening
  - → Facilitating conflict circles, role plays, and mediation
- **Group dynamics & facilitation**
  - → Preparing for the stages of a (new) group formation
  - → Building community on the unit
  - → Supporting people to learn and take on leadership skills
- **Family engagement**
  - → Rethinking how families are involved in the lives of young adults
  - → Strategizing for successful engagement
  - → Expanding the understanding of who is family
- **Managing boundaries and relationships**
  - → What is working in the “gray”
  - → Fostering trust as staff and mentors
  - → How to build meaningful relationships in a correctional setting
- **Changemakers training by MILPA**
  - → Breaking down “us” vs. “them” categories
  - → Preparing people for healing and bridge building
  - → Creating opportunities for staff and mentors to build together

- In addition to creating the initial core training, begin planning and laying

the groundwork for regular booster trainings. We recommend providing booster trainings to both staff and mentors every three to four months. This also allows for new staff and mentors to receive some training as there are inevitable transitions in and out of the unit.

- You may not be able to cover all of the desired training components due to timing, scheduling, or budget. In that case, plan for how the agency will incorporate those components in future booster trainings.

3.2: IDENTIFY TRAINING RESOURCES AND NEEDS

Your agency already offers or contracts for many training topics. Additionally, there are existing programs and initiatives that people incarcerated in your facilities participate in, created themselves, or facilitate already. When considering the needs for this young adult community, these existing resources are a good place to start. Reviewing existing trainings also helps to identify gaps. You may need to look to outside trainers to fill these gaps and to truly shift correctional culture and ensure that staff and mentors are prepared for a successful unit. Below are some areas to look to in order to best assess and identify your training resources and needs:

- Existing educational and peer support programs, both official and ad hoc. These may be run by staff or by incarcerated people.

- Staff ideas. So often there are staff who have innovative ideas that have not fully been explored or given space to breathe. An innovative young adult unit may be the perfect place to give some staff room to explore their creative ideas.

- Existing groups of incarcerated men or women who have already organized themselves (e.g., mentor groups, lifers groups, tutoring initiatives, etc.). They may have even created draft curricula that they are eager to put to good use.

- Training academy.

    - Is there existing space where staff and mentors can be trained together, either in person and/or virtually?

    - What classes in your training academy can be used or retooled to benefit a housing unit for young adults?

    - Are there innovative training staff who have been looking for opportunities to expand the training curriculum?

- Ongoing existing relationships with outside training institutions and organizations.

- Community-based organizations and volunteer groups that already work inside DOC facilities providing programming, education, or other services.

3.3: DEVELOP AND PLAN TRAINING

- Draft a training plan with topics, details, and timing. For staff and mentors, aim to provide a minimum of 80 hours of initial training. Additionally, you may need to assign pre-work to be done in advance and outside of training sessions (aim for a minimum of 10 hours).

- Include a variety of learning styles and modalities. Everyone learns in different ways, so it is important to incorporate a variety of methods such as reading, discussions, free writing, acting and role playing, movement, activities, etc.

- Share this plan for approval with the implementation workgroup.

- People who should participate in the training are

    - staff who will work on the unit,

    - staff who will in some way support the unit (e.g., a shift captain who is responsible for staffing decisions but does not work directly on the unit), and

    - mentors who will live and work on the unit.

- Determine what parts of the training should be virtual, hybrid, or in person.

- Create a cohesive team.

    - Staff and mentors should be trained on the same materials.

    - Staff and mentors should be trained together as much as possible. This is a critical step towards building trust and community on the unit.

    - All training components, regardless of topic, are opportunities to build trust and relationships between staff and mentors. Above all else, the training should set a tone for how staff and mentors will work side by side for the benefit and success of young adults.

- For any outside contractors, make sure all the proper contractual details and legal issues are handled in the manner that your agency requires.

3.4: SCHEDULE TRAINING

- Plan as far ahead as possible and get it on all the right people's calendars.
- Book the training space(s) and equipment.
- Consider the importance of setting the tone with some opening remarks from the director and be sure to manage the scheduling challenges that this poses.
- Build in rescheduling time. Scheduling hiccups are inevitable, especially for long trainings. Plan for make-up sessions, recorded trainings, and methods of accountability for missed training hours.
- Secure and/or test any technology to ensure full participation. This is especially important when considering the need to train mentors alongside staff. If there will be any hybrid components to the training, it will be critical to have a plan in place for where and how mentors will be able to participate fully.

3.5: DELIVER TRAINING

- Identify a training point person—it will be necessary to have someone on hand to see the entire training through. We assume that there will be a wide range of training situations and trainers, which will all require a lot of logistics management.
- Allow for adjustments and agenda changes as the training progresses to respond to the issues, needs, and interests of the staff and mentors being trained. This should be a conversation between the training point person, the people delivering the trainings, and the implementation workgroup.
- The training is a unique opportunity to build bridges between staff and mentors as they are trained together. This allows for community agreements, plans for the unit, programming, and scheduling to be developed in tandem between staff and mentors. Make space and time for that to take place throughout the training as it will set the unit up to begin working as a community.

- Plan for a graduation or training completion celebration. This is a new and exciting initiative and it is cause for celebration.

- Invite family to the celebration. We have had success inviting family to join both in person and virtually. Inviting family further solidifies the importance of family engagement and reframing of the relationship between families, their loved ones, and the correctional staff and agency.

- Give all trainees who complete the training certificates commemorating the hours and topics they completed.

STAGE 4: Open the Unit(s)

In Stage 4 the corrections agency begins the process of moving staff, mentors, and cohorts of young adults onto the unit—–effectively *opening* the unit and putting into practice all the preparation, planning, and training that the implementation workgroup has invested in this process. The unit opening is cause for celebration. The unit opening marks new possibilities and the start of the process by which a housing unit becomes a community. Staff and mentors move onto the unit first in order to build trust and to plan an orientation for the first cohort of around 12 young adults, who join one week later. The orientation of the first cohort of young adults sets the tone for community building—it is repeated with each successive cohort that joins the unit (at least one month apart) until the unit is at capacity.

The following is a ***unit opening timeline*** with goals and activities outlined for clarity. This time is one of the most critical periods of the life of the unit, so it is important to give close attention to the process and steps necessary to establishing a new community with brand-new norms and a new group of staff, mentors, and young adults who need to get accustomed to different roles and responsibilities.

4.1: MAKE FINAL PREPARATIONS

Goal

Trained staff and mentors continue to meet regularly in anticipation of moving onto the unit, while the implementation workgroup can take a step back from regular meetings and planning.

Activities

- Finalize unit preparation.
  - Ensure renovations and physical changes to the unit are completed.

- Check that new furniture is delivered, washer and dryer are installed, and other amenities are prepared and ready.
- Decide if there are some final touches that staff and mentors could do together as a team building exercise (not free labor).

- Schedule a meeting with unit staff and mentors following training.
  - Maintain progress of team building.
  - Begin to collaboratively brainstorm ideas for unit, such as
    - → unit name (if not already decided),
    - → community agreements,
    - → daily schedule for the unit, and
    - → some classes and groups that will be offered by staff and mentors.
  - Review and revisit roles and responsibilities.
  - Discuss goals and hopes for the unit.

- Develop and fine-tune the orientation plan and materials for young adults. The orientation plan should be spread out over time, beginning with the first day. Some components could last weeks into their time on the unit, but as part of a planned set of activities. See step 4.7 for specific activities and themes to include.

- Plan for seamless move of mentors' belongings to the unit.
  - Request advice from mentors on how to ensure everything goes smoothly.
  - Communicate date/time/process to mentors *in advance*.

- Finalize selection of first cohort of young adults.
  - Use a selection framework to explain choices and hold each other accountable for the decisions made.
  - Check for and hold each other accountable for biases.

- Cross-reference choices with data about young adults to ensure it is representative of the facility as a whole.
- Avoid cherry picking.

- Create a process to pair mentors with young adults.
  - At least two mentors should be identified to welcome and shepherd the first cohort of young adults. Subsequent cohorts should be assigned different sets of mentors as part of the planning for welcoming each new cohort.
  - Most importantly, there needs to be intentional and direct support for new cohorts of young adults in order to avoid people or behaviors slipping through the cracks.
  - Remember that all mentors (and staff) can and should act as supports for young adults. Being assigned as a cohort to a set of particular mentors should not preclude access or engagement by other mentors or staff.

- Plan day one on the unit activities! (See the next section for activity and theme ideas.)

4.2: LAUNCH THE UNIT

Goal

Seamless transition of mentors and staff onto the unit.

Activities

- Team/community building between staff and mentors should be the key focus.
- Make time and space for an extended opening circle. Think about having someone trained in facilitation, such as a counselor or social worker, lead the circle. Everyone should participate—staff and mentors.
- There should be a celebration activity of some sort to mark the occasion. (But there is no pressure or expectation for this to be the official grand opening celebration or a big deal at all.)

- Plan to spend time getting settled. This will look different for everyone. Sometimes it requires giving staff and mentors space to settle in to where they will be living and working. Other times it may mean having honest conversations between staff and mentors about expectations and roles.

- Make sure the rest of the week together is mapped out, clear, and agreed upon. Even if it feels strange, plan some activities with everyone (consider the different shifts of the staff as well) so that people can become comfortable with one another and learn about each other.

4.3: FOSTER TEAM BUILDING

Goal

Staff and mentors are working effectively together and feel prepared to welcome young adults.

Activities

This first week is a time where the mentors and staff have dedicated time on the unit prior to the young adults joining and are able to focus on the following:

- Build trust between staff and mentors.

- Plan and prepare for the first cohort of young adults to join the unit.

- Review training content together. Both staff and mentors should have handouts and training materials that allow review and re-engagement with the content. Consider the following:

    - What will happen if a community agreement is broken? Some options for remedies include

        - circles,

        - conflict resolution,

        - restorative practices,

        - accountability, and

        - family support and involvement.

- Agreements and expectations of staff and mentors—how will information be shared that is obtained informally (not from a tool provided in training)?

- Recommit to the goals and vision of the unit through intentional community circles, check-ins, and other activities. There is no wrong way to recommit to the goals and vision of the unit, but it is important to do so collectively and thoughtfully. It also may need to be done more than once in the life of the unit.

4.4: FOSTER TEAM COHESION

Goal

Young adults feel welcomed and transition onto unit is seamless.

Activities

- First mentee cohort (roughly 12 young people) join the unit!
- First and foremost, create the conditions for the young adults to feel safe and welcome.
- Launch the orientation program for the young adults (see step 4.7).
- Have fun! In all seriousness, it is important to celebrate and provide opportunities for laughter and joy.
- Big welcome from unit and facility leadership! (Be sure to include the warden and team.)
- Welcome from the unit manager and other staff.
- Welcome from mentors.
- Mentors and staff help young adults move in and get settled.
- Plan a meal together.
- Mentor and staff meet and greet with the young adults.
- Meet up at the end of the day to check-in/out about how the day went.

- Assign and/or divide responsibilities on the unit. Examples of potential responsibilities include
  - cleaning common areas,
  - cleaning individual spaces,
  - leading check-ins,
  - daily reminders,
  - leading groups, and
  - leading conflict circles.
- Have one-on-one and/or small group check-ins with young adults.

4.5: WELCOME YOUNG ADULT COHORTS

Goal

Unit is working effectively. Everyone is engaged, settling into a routine, and excited to plan for the future of the unit. Additional cohorts are joining the unit approximately every four weeks until the unit is full.

Activities

- Repeat orientation activities with each successive young adult cohort joining the unit.
- Always welcome people onto the unit in groups, even if that number is smaller than the original cohort size, to both ease the frequency of orientation activities and instill a sense of cohesion. It is possible that after the unit initially fills up after the necessary amount of young adult cohorts, the size of the required cohort to fill up the unit in the future will be smaller. Ultimately, this will be up to unit and facility leadership.
- Plan and revise the welcome for each new cohort. There is always room for improvement and the possibility of learning from our experiences. Take the time to think through how mentors/staff should lead conversations with young adults around some of the following questions: what worked, what should change from your first day/week, and what would you have liked to have included in your orientation and welcome?

4.6: CELEBRATE UNIT OPENING

It is important to celebrate the hard work that led up to the opening of the unit. When this takes place will depend on scheduling, opportunity, and many other agency-specific details. The unit opening celebration does not necessarily need to take place on day one or even the first week that the young adults join the unit. One good reason to wait until the first young adult cohort has settled in to the unit is to involve everyone in the planning. But ultimately, when exactly this takes place is up to the unit and should reflect the community that is being built by everyone involved.

Goal

Celebrate the opening of the unit.

Activities

- Be creative! Staff, mentors, and young adults have gifts and skills that you may not know about but show up for these types of events.
- Invite families. We have had success doing this both in-person and virtually. It demonstrates the different path that the DOC is taking with this unit, allows staff to meet affected families, and gives people living on the unit something to be proud of and the chance to share that with the people who mean the most to them.
- Provide food and refreshments for everyone.
- Plan for activities and/or space for kids to enjoy and feel comfortable in.
- Ideally, host the celebration on the unit so that everyone has a chance to see for themselves the uniqueness and quality of the unit.
- Consider inviting the press. This is an excellent opportunity to shine a positive light on what is going on inside a prison. Keep in mind the impact this can have on families who are also attending and make sure that members of the press respect the families' space and time as well.
- Invite the DOC director and their team. This is a great opportunity for the director to show support for a new endeavor, while learning more about it in person from the staff and residents.

4.7: CONDUCT YOUNG ADULT ORIENTATION

The orientation plan and materials for young adults is a key component of welcoming and introducing the young adults into a new housing unit with different practices, guidelines, and expectations. Both mentors and staff should have roles in the orientation. The orientation should be spread out over time, beginning with the first day. Some components could last weeks into their time on the unit, but as part of a planned set of activities. Below is a list and description of what to include in the orientation of the young adults.

1. **Community agreements**. Post community agreements publicly in the unit, share them regularly, and review them with the young adults. Make the community agreements a centerpiece of the orientation and life on the unit. Soon everyone will be engaged in a community culture that outlines behavior expectations and mechanisms for accountability.

2. **Daily schedule**. The daily schedule should mimic life on the outside as closely as possible (e.g., mealtimes should be described as meals and occur at reasonable times of the day), be transparent and accessible (i.e., the schedule should be publicly posted and followed), and be a mix of structured and flexible activities, jobs, and expectations.

3. **Expectations of young adults**. Without a clear set of new expectations, each person who moves onto the unit will automatically revert to the standard expectations of the facility. The goal is for this unit to both be and feel different, and in order to do this, the expectations need to be defined and shared during orientation. Revisiting these expectations is a useful tool for accountability and getting back on course.

4. **What to expect from mentors**. Similar to sharing the expectations for the young adults, it is important to be clear about what they should and should not expect from the mentors. Make the implicit explicit and explain what mentors will be doing on the unit, how they will work with staff to support young people, and that their utmost goal is to see young people succeed.

5. **What to expect from staff**. The goal of this unit is to have staff become change agents in the lives of the young adults (and mentors) that they are working with each day. This is a new role that they were not expressly trained to do when they joined the DOC. Therefore, there should be an explanation of how things will be different (not just that they will be, but also *how*) and a statement of commitment to show up in their new role differently.

6. **Introduce restorative practices**. Because most infractions and conflicts will be dealt with through restorative practices and conflict resolution, it will be necessary to spend significant time outlining situations in which restorative practices will be used, what that process will look like, and what the expectations are for participation and accountability.

7. **Explain the importance of family engagement**. The way staff (and mentors) will communicate and engage with family members of the young adults will likely be very different from what they have experienced in the past. It is necessary to explain in practical terms exactly what this will look like and that family members (including chosen family) will be included in a three-pronged support network for the young adults. The three prongs will be staff, mentors, and family. Expect that a fuller understanding and belief that things will actually be different will not take place until at least the first family orientation event. Family orientation should include an invitation to family members to visit the unit and/or facility. The goal of family orientation is to set the tone for how staff and mentors will work with family to support young adults. Family engagement refers to the overall inclusion of families in that support structure and a continuous relationship that is built and reinforced over time. This is first initiated with the orientation activities.

8. **Include culturally relevant activities and practices**. The inclusion and honoring of people's culture should be a hallmark of the unit, and if these are known and appropriate, they should also be part of the orientation. Reconnecting and deepening one's engagement with culture, traditions, and beliefs allows people to grow, heal, and take risks toward positive change. Creating opportunities for this to take place should be a central facet to life on the unit from the very beginning.

9. **Fun icebreakers**. Make the orientation fun! Laughing and doing fun activities together is one of the best ways to break down barriers and build trust. Don't just do one icebreaker—pepper them in throughout the orientation days. Make sure that both staff and mentors participate enthusiastically to set the example for young adults and to demonstrate the trust.

10. **Tour of the unit**. Welcome the young adults to their new residence! There should have been physical changes and alterations to the unit such that it will look and feel significantly different from other units in the facility. There will be other new aspects to the unit that they are not familiar with. This includes new and different spaces that they are allowed to use and visit, often at will, and opportunities to try new activities. Show them

things like where the check-in and check-out will happen every day so they can start to get a sense of what life will be like in this new space.

11. **Team-building activities**. Just like icebreakers, group activities build trust and allow people the opportunity to have fun and get to know one another. Building a community requires all of these components. Group activities can range from a basketball tournament to sharing a meal together to everyone telling a funny story about their childhood. Once again, group activities should always also include staff and mentors.

12. **Use your creativity and imagination!** Part of the beauty of each unit is that the community that is built within each one is distinct to the people who live and work there. Rely on one another's gifts, creativity, and unique ideas to make the unit and the process of welcoming new people special and customized based on personalities that make up the community.

STAGE 5: Pilot and Sustain the Unit(s)

The community's first year is the most critical and when the foundation of the unit is often tested. The unit culture and cohesion requires consistent maintenance and care. This first year is also an opportunity for evaluation and responsiveness to the findings from the evaluation. The implementation workgroup identifies key performance indicators and the metrics to measure the impact of change efforts, while responding to the findings from those metrics once available. In Stage 5, the agency responds to ongoing training needs; the housing unit leadership team develops a daily routine, workshops, and small discussion groups led by staff and mentors; and the community regularly organizes events and activities that build community and cohesion on the unit.

5.1: DEVELOP GUIDING PHILOSOPHIES

There is a significant amount of work that goes into getting the unit up and running. It is easy to forget that the work of building community on this new unit should be different from other units and will require a greater amount of relationship building. It is hard and sometimes uncomfortable work. Below are some guiding philosophies that we have found to be helpful:

- Center conflict resolution and mediation devoid of "blaming, shaming, and naming." If you make the goal of conflict resolution about the harm that took place and what is required to repair that harm, accountability (not blame) is built into the response, as well as an understanding of what went wrong and why it was harmful. This is central to the success of the unit.
- Promote agency. When people feel empowered and in control of their decisions and day-to-day lives—whether staff working the unit or mentors and young adults living on the unit—there will be harmony in the community.
- Resist relying on traditional modes of correctional practice. If one of the goals is to shift correctional culture, then actions need to be different from they were previously.

- Treat curiosity as a rule. Responding to conflict or difficult situations with curiosity rather than condemnation or punishment always elicits a better response. Curiosity seeks to understand.

- Cultivate active listening as a habit. All of us, but especially young adults, have a need to be heard. When people are listened to, it is a form of acknowledgement that their feelings and experience matter. Active listening can change the entire trajectory of an interaction for the better.

5.2: CONDUCT RESEARCH

If you want to know what changes are taking place on, and because of, the new young adult housing unit, you and your team will want to develop some research methods for tracking attitudes, incidents, and responses. Each agency has different approaches and capacity for research, but regardless of your approach, the plan should be in place no later than the unit opening.

- Surveys of staff, mentors, and young adults are very helpful at tracking how culture shifts on the unit.

- Determine and monitor key performance indicators for the unit. Track successes just as often as failures. Celebrate those successes, and be responsive when missteps occur.

- Tracking incidents, responses, and accountability responses can provide some well-needed statistical backup for the innovative decisions that are being made on and for the unit.

- Include your staff, mentors, and young adults in the interpretation of the data you collect. Ask them what they think about it, and give them opportunities to craft hypotheses about the collected data. This adds a nuanced and personal layer to the data that is incredibly useful.

5.3: DELIVER BOOSTER TRAININGS

- Make a plan for booster trainings for staff and mentors. A few hours of conflict resolution training, for example, does not allow the necessary shift of practice to occur, and people can always use more time to practice new skills and strategies.

- We recommend quarterly booster trainings on both new and previously trained skills.

- Be responsive to the requests and needs of staff and mentors on the unit. If

they ask for a specific type of training or a refresher on a topic, it is because they see the value in it, and it will hopefully contribute to the community on the unit.

- Staff and mentors should always get the same training opportunities when it comes to unit-specific trainings.

5.4: DEVELOP PROGRAMS AND GROUPS

One of the most exciting components of creating a unit with staff and mentors working in partnership to support the needs and success of young adults is the opportunity for staff and mentors to be creative in the programs and groups that they develop and lead. Each unit that we have helped open approaches this differently, but the unifying theme is that the people living and working on each unit get to take all of their unique skills and interests and marshal them into a community.

- **Thematic programming.** Having goals, a vision, and expectations for everyone living and working on the unit is a unifying and clarifying structure. Some units have created model economies, others have used a stamp process—each of which progresses through steps with goals and growth that are supported by staff and mentors in mind. Programming on a unit usually exists to provide structure to life on the unit and is longer lasting than topical groups.

- **Topical groups**. In addition to regular programming, mentors and staff can create time-limited groups for the young adults to participate in. Examples range from discussing current events, to interview skills, to studying musical lyrics, to exercise groups. The beauty of running a group is that it does not have to last forever, but there should be a plan for how, when, and what it will be. It can be something that gets recycled every few months or year, or a brand new idea. It is important for young adults to have options and for there to be an expectation of some level of participation.

5.5: PLAN EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Special events and activities are always wonderful ways to get people excited, keep them busy, and build community. Here is a list of just some of the activities that have been planned over the years, but the sky is the limit:

- family day,

- basketball tournament,

- olympics,

- movie night,
- cooking together,
- talent shows,
- anniversary celebrations, and
- game night.

5.6: REMEMBER PROGRESS IS NOT A STRAIGHT LINE

In all the years we have done this at Restoring Promise, we have never had our statistics only go up or had fewer challenges with each passing month. Shifting culture inside a prison and building community among staff, mentors, and young adults are monumental efforts. There will be setbacks and challenges. There will also be brilliant, beautiful moments. Here are some things to remember, especially in that first year as people get settled into not only a new unit, but also a new way of being around and with one another:

- Make opportunities to check in with each other on the unit. Sometimes this is in small groups or one-on-ones, but do not shy away from all unit check-ins, town halls, and other opportunities for staff, mentors, and young adults to *all* meet and share together.
- Do not assume that because this unit will be different it will be an easy process. It takes effort and patience to shift culture, build trust, and be successful at something new.
- Talk about the challenges. Chances are that if you are not talking about the challenges that are arising on the unit with one another, with openness and curiosity, then those challenges will only get bigger.
- Remember, conflict will always be something we have to deal with. It's how you deal with it that will make or break a situation.
- Use the research you collect to help understand what is working and not working on the unit, but also do not get discouraged when enthusiasm dips or frustrations arise. Rather, understand those reactions as normal and part of the ebb and flow of relationships and new communities. Focus on making shifts when needed rather than being discouraged about backsliding.

Appendix

RESTORING PROMISE IMPLEMENTATION TOOLKIT WORK PLAN TEMPLATE

	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8	Month 9	Ongoing
STAGE 1: Plan and Assess										
1.1: Assemble implementation workgroup										
1.2: Conduct research and collect data										
1.3: Plan and assess										
1.4: Create a work plan										
STAGE 2: Implement										
2.1: Identify location, physical space, and necessary renovations										
2.2: Select mentors										
2.3: Select staff										
2.4: Select young adults										
2.5: Review DOC policy										
2.6: Propose policy changes										
STAGE 3: Train										
3.1: Identify training components										
3.2: Identify training resources and needs										
3.3: Develop and plan training										
3.4: Schedule training										
3.5: Deliver training										
STAGE 4: Open the Unit(s)										
4.1: Make final preparations										
4.2: Launch the unit										
4.3: Foster team building										
4.4: Foster team cohesion										
4.5: Welcome young adult cohorts										
4.6: Celebrate unit opening										
4.7: Conduct young adult orientation										
STAGE 5: Pilot and Sustain the Unit(s)										
5.1: Develop guiding philosophies										
5.2: Conduct research										
5.3: Deliver booster trainings										
5.4: Develop programs and groups										
5.5: Plan events and activities										
5.6: Remember progress is not a straight line										

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ENDNOTES

1 The Council of State Governments Justice Center *Reducing Recidivism and Improving Other Outcomes for Young Adults in the Juvenile and Adult Criminal Justice Systems* (New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center, November 2015), https://perma.cc/4ZBK-D4NV.

2 Vera and MILPA report on Restoring Promise cross-site analysis results, forthcoming 2024.

3 Selma Djokovic and Ryan Shanahan, *Changing Prison Culture Reduces Violence* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2023), https://www.vera.org/publications/changing-prison-culture-reduces-violence.

CREDITS

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