

BUILDING JUSTICE PODCAST



CRISJ Building Justice Podcast

Season Fall 2023, Episode II : Incarceration, Rehabilitation/Education and Re-entry, from a Woman's Perspective

Moderator: Moon Martinez

Guests: Aminah, Jennifer and KeKe

Please note: This transcript may be imperfect. Please contact **Moon Martinez** directly should you have questions.

Please note that this episode contains depictions of past acts of violence, including a topic of murder that some people may find disturbing.

Music lyrics:

Company under construction, the function, justice for the human family we demand it. Justice, true freedom, equality is a must. Thus, decolonization of the planet. So bust this. People be the power now we're Building Justice. Pulling out divinations, now we're Building Justice. Welcome the planet to the Podcast, "Building Justice," "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Building is to add on, or to do away with.

Welcome to build injustice, a podcast by Sacramento State's Center on race, immigration and social justice. The acronym is CRISJ. We explore critical issues affecting our communities with the hopes of creating a healthier and more just world. My name is Moon Martinez, a sociology major here at Sac State University. Today we will be doing part two of our conversation about incarceration, rehabilitation, slash education and reentry. The first part was from a men's perspective. Today we will be looking at this topic from a women's perspective. I have three guests today, Aminah and Jennifer, who are formerly incarcerated, and Keke who has not formally incarcerated, but who comes from a background of working with system impacted people from the areas of mental health, probation, law enforcement and community resources. My first conversation is with Aminah. Aminah, would you like to introduce yourself? Sure.

So thank you, moon for inviting me to speak with me to hear some of my perspective incarceration of women. Hi My name is Aminah Elster, she her pronouns. And I am a formerly incarcerated, one black woman who was incarcerated for 15 on a 15 to life sentence for a charge of second degree murder.

Okay. And how was your experience through that incarceration?

I'm sorry, can you repeat that?

How was your experience through that incarceration? Concerning, let's say, when you first started your sentence? What was the availability of rehabilitation programming for you?

So, you know, I think that's a great question. When I first started my sentence, there was a prevalence of hopelessness, and hopelessness to due to the fact that folks just weren't going home, and hopelessness because there were no programming, there was no programs at all, like really hardly any higher education programs and any self help programs in the self help programs that did exist. Because there were so few and the population was so large, it was like a waiting list that took years and years for folks to be able to be a part of.

So let me make it clear. So you were in the California prison system? Right?

Correct. I was in at first Valley State Prison for Women before it closed down. Men converted to a men's institution. And upon transfer to the Central California women's facility, both in Chowchilla California.

Okay. So you experienced that mass overflow of crowdedness that was going on?

Absolutely. Absolutely.

One thing I'd like to clear up is that, you know, I can relate because I just did a 30 year sentence on murder. And when I first came in, there was absolutely no rehabilitation programming available. So yeah, I can relate to your statement on that. And it was interesting to, to view all the changes that were going on when this curve started to head in that direction of rehabilitation. And luckily, the light came on, and I took hold of it real tight, and here I am. But getting back to your experience in that. So how do you feel the rehabilitation program and that was available? Let's say that at the latter part of your sentence was there like, Can you name some of them that you experienced and you took part of?

Um, yeah, so one thing I will note too is, you know, I think that, you know, people largely don't really understand and this is something important and I give props to my peers and people that are incarcerated with but it was mostly our peer community that developed and created programs in order to heal and support one another. So, you know, groups such as, like, domestic violence or intimate partner violence, and, you know, or all the other different types of abuses that people can face and having classes and support groups that addresses that trauma, you know, groups around insight, you know, what is insight? You know, how do I develop insight?

Yes, really, I can relate to that, because I was one of those creators of certain, certain curriculum that dealt with causative factors, victims awareness, victims impact, trauma being emotionally aware emotional intelligence. And, like you said, it was our peers that we got together, and we created the curriculum that we needed to deal with our causative factors and get to the root cause, and, you know, resolve those issues and come up with coping mechanisms that will keep us in, a good orderly direction. And so, on the education part, what was your experience of the availability to higher education? From your view? Yeah, so in both prisons, there was largely only first there was only one, you know, higher education college program, and that was coastline Community College, which I mean, it's, it's great to be able to take some classes, but it's really counterintuitive, if you don't have like the advisors, or you don't have the assistants to really help you focus on what you want to major in what you want to do with your advanced studies. But instead, like, you know, given people are taking courses that aren't transferable upon their release, yes, or no, are ya? Really not? Yeah, really not even really relevant to further in their education. So, you know, I was extremely excited when Feather River College came available, which was, which was offered some in person. Of course, in person teaching with professors. I'd also had, you know, we were able to, you know, talk to folks that worked outside of this Institution and Feather River to help with advising and it was actually Feather River, who, you know, they came in, they told us, you know, you all can be at Berkeley, and that just, instill so much hope. And folks was like, you know, when, like, when there's formerly incarcerated people on the campus of UC Berkeley, yeah, who was a professor from Feather River.

It was Joan Parkin, Dr. Joan Parkin. Yeah Parkin thumb up to her she is such a beautiful person, man, totally supportive man. And, you know, what was interesting, I found myself being an educational advisor to a lot of my peers, because like you said, they were taking frivolous classes, just to take them thinking that they'll stack up all these credits, and they would get AA. And so I had to enlighten them on that, no, it doesn't work like that, man, you're gonna have to get the, IGETS, the golden for specific to your major. And so, you know, it was good that, you know, I got aligned to that. Because, you know, as we all do, and we pass on information, so we can all hit that goal. And, you know, be, you know, get the chance to come out into the community and be productive. And so what was your major?

Well, then, in my Okay, in prison, I majored I have to have two associates degree one in science and math. And the other one is, in a sociology, wow, wait a minute, wait a minute. So you're a stem girl?

No, but you see, well, math and science I could have been, you know, I should have been now that is what I love math, and I love science. But I also had to deal with the realities of my life. And, you know, a lot of the intersections such as incarceration, or you know, growing up in poverty, which led me to Legal Studies up on my release, you know, just to learn more about our history, and the US history. And you know, how it was that I found myself as a black woman in prison.

Yeah, because what I was doing was trying to make an emphasis to all the females out there that I wanted to give them a push to get involved with the stem, and branch out like you did. And that was very, that was very wise of you to take that track. And I just want to give a props to you even doing that at the time. And for the listeners that are female man hey. You see Amina she's a STEM girl to man. So, you know, let's push forward on that. So how do you feel that it could be more available for higher education to the female population in the California Department of Corrections?

Well, you know, honestly, and I'm not sure like this is a such a Good thing. But with the reinstatement of pell, I believe that there's going to be a lot of more a lot more college opportunities, but maybe not from credit colleges, maybe not from colleges that have the student's best interest, but just want to chase those funds that are attached to the pell. Yes. You know, what's interesting right now with our, our government administration, you know, it was great that Jerry Brown came back and then Gavin Newsom followed in the direction that, you know, we want this to go and that's rehabilitation. And as you know, what I know is that when a convicted felon gets higher education, you know, the recidivism rate really, really goes down. Because it validates that they are smart, you know, we are smart, we can achieve this. And I think it's a good thing that more and more, it's been available in the prison system. And the reason why I'm taking this perspective, from a woman's point of view, because I would like my incarcerated sisters to have more opportunities for that. Would you agree?

I totally agree. I totally agree. But I also think that, you know, there is the traditional path to education. And I'm not really certain, you know, how we do that in a carceral in a setting in a carceral, setting, a setting that does not, rehabilitate on its own, it takes the people inside to actually, you know, make that happen. But I do think that there is a part there is opportunity to offer, you know, opportunities such as you know, like defy or the last mile, who takes those type of programs in in sort of prison and upscales people on and I unlike ready work readiness that is relevant today. Oh, yeah.

You know what, I'm glad you mentioned that, because I want to cover the vocational that's available to my sisters in there, what do you think, would be a good set of vocational training for our sisters that are incarcerated?

Well, you mentioned stem earlier, and I have to second that. So some kind of coding, coding is also good, because that's the direction that we are moving towards. But also, I feel like there is a you know, especially for a lot of my peers, women, transgender non conforming folks that's being released out of prison, a lot of them go towards advocacy and organizing. So they're there. Yeah, there's opportunities for folks to learn how to how to organize or how to be an activist or even how to be a consultant. Yeah, policy work.

You know, one thing out here is there's a lot of corporations and just companies that are on that path of policy, advocacy, and all that. And that would be a great, great avenue for our sisters that are incarcerated, you know, to utilize the skills that they have come aware that they already had, you know, what I mean? And I see, and I think it's a good thing to, for our peers always water each other to make those grow even better. And we can visualize them and see them more clearly. As you know, a lot of us go into the system with a lot of baggage of trauma addiction, and, and so that blurs our vision map. But once we could grab onto some positive and our vision starts to clear up, we start to see that we have these soft skills, and to develop them even better and apply it to what we just mentioned on those avenues of advocacy, policy and organizing. And that's a great thing. And you know, one thing that that I found out that there was a lot of vocations that are available in there that are outdated, would you agree?

I would totally, I totally agree. You know, when I was inside, I took I finished I did carpentry. Now, don't don't get me wrong as a hobby. I love doing DIY projects. But however, that was not going to be a profession that I was like, eager and looking forward to stepping into once I'm released. So like refrigeration, or you know, maintenance, a lot of folks just are not willing or interested in doing that type of work when they get out. Or and on top of that. A lot of the vocations are not even recognized once you get out to allow you to enter the field, you know, in the curriculum is so outdated. You're not you wouldn't be

up to up to standards, you know, so it's really just given people inside something to do and pass their time, but not empowering them or preparing them to succeed once they're released.

You know, what brings to mind is that, is this designed like that? You know is that Keep us marginalized. You know, it's something that makes, you know, makes me pause and think, you know, is this a designed system to, you know, keep the people in a certain category?

Absolutely. Yeah. So, yeah, I would, I would like to see more modernized, vocationals available to my sisters in there as well. And I think it's a great point that you make. And I want to move on to reentry. Now, how was your experience of reentry? The resources that were available to you a woman?

Well, yeah. You know, I am appreciative and I'm very thankful for the organizations that, you know, supported me prior to my be released, such as the Berkeley underground scholar,

oh, yes, which.

Yeah, yeah, which wrap their arms around me upon my release, and, you know, brought me in and helped me to, you know, fill out my application and personal develop my personal statement, but also organizations like the California political prisoners, when survived and punished, that supported me and you know, raise money for my release, so that when I came home, I'll be able to have the things that I needed, you know, that would tie me over till I'm done with transitional living, and could get a job. So because of the supports that I had garnered, I would say that my transition was really, you know, really smooth, immediately. My focus is on education. You know, I wanted to go to school, finished my undergrad getting my bachelor's, I wanted to, you know, start working. I had plans. So you know, as a lifer, you are, you know, really required to develop some parole plans. And I took that.

Yeah, no, no, I get it, ma'am. You know, I'm a former life for myself, and oh, my goodness matter. It's like, you have to be a scholar in that to, you know, to dot all your I's and cross all your T's. But what one thing that you mentioned, was underground scholars at Berkeley, and I got to give them props, because they were the ones that kind of, were my educational advisors, because I would send them what I had. And then they gave me the roadmap to what I had to do to achieve my ADT degree in sociology, so props to them. But what I really want to know is that, how can we bring more resources to the awareness of our sister prisoners, that they can grab a hold and start developing their parole plans with the resources that are available? What kind of resources should in what I want to what I want to say is how much more can be available to them?

Great question. Great question. And I think the number one, one of the number one issues because there are some organizations and some groups out here doing really good work and, you know, can provide supportive services, but there is a lack of information flows. So and geography, you know, women's prisons, the two main ones CIW, and CCW F is really like, especially CCWF is located, you know, in the Central Valley really far removed, you know, so it's really hard for a lot of folks to get out there. And it's easy to become invisible alized. Same thing with CIW, especially under the weight of the number of men that are incarcerated. But so it's really about you know, so it's really about getting, you know, peers. So there's some amazing people that, you know, I've been incarcerated with including myself, being able to have access back inside of the institutions to share this information with folks. So that they are knowledgeable and able to connect to the resources that are available outside of this, the carceral CDCR itself.

You know, one thing that I was involved in, when I was incarcerated is I was involved with the self-help group that is a nonprofit out here in the community is self-awareness & recovery.org. And while inside we organized events, where we brought in like 30, community based organizations to come in and have a little table and show the population, what's available to them on the outside, because a lot of these C.B.O's community based organizations, they get grants and some of these, a lot of these grants, you know, is, you know, the resources for incarcerated and returning citizens. And I think it would be great for us to in-reach back into and organize those kinds of events for you know, our sisters and incarcerated because a lot of people just don't know. Yep. And that's one of the reasons why I'm doing this podcast because I want to bring awareness, you know, to our listeners, man that they can be a part of changing the narrative man because my view is that I want my sisters to come out healthier than when they were when they went in and also have the resources out here to be that person that they see in their vision for life?

Absolutely. I agree with you, wholeheartedly, I think for me to recognize in the lack of resources, the lack of opportunities in women's prisons, and then, you know, hearing how people were suffering, and especially throughout throughout the COVID, 19 pandemic, when people were largely shut down, they were shut off classes, there were no classes, there were no groups, there was really nothing really sparked mine and a few of my other friends to create an organization unapologetically hers that, yeah, human experiences through research solutions, where we work with, or we partner with people inside of California, women's prisons, to do participatory action research, trainings, peer parole coaching, and just some mentorship for individuals and the our participatory action research training, really allows people to, you know, get information like about what is going on right now, issues that are pertinent and are that are, like, important to them. Then they research it, and they produce something tangible now, whether it'll be a toolkit, maybe it's an anthology, you know, whatever it may be, to kind of help to advocate and help shape, shape and change the narrative. But also, it's bringing in information and developing folks developing folks, because who's teaching people how to research or how to analyze data, which is something that's critical, and you can earn a living outside of prison, like doing the work? You know, that's what consultants do. All the time? Yeah.

Well, I want to go give us that contact information for that organization real clearly, once more.

Yeah, so with unapologetically hers, healing experiences through research solutions, and you can look us up @ www.uahers.org.

Thank you very much. So that's a very, very critical resource for our sisters incarcerated. And Aminah, I look forward to working with you. Maybe we can do some in-reach, specifically the women's prisons to bring that awareness to them. and I want to thank you for being a guest today. And I look forward to seeing you grow even bigger than a redwood Sequoia.

Thanks, Moon. It's a pleasure and you keep doing what you're doing too. Okay. Yep.

Yeah, we'll we'll contact each other later. Okay. Thank you. Thank you. Bye, bye. That was a nice lived experienced perspective from Aminah. Now, let's hear what Jennifer's experience is like concerning this topic. Jennifer, would you like to introduce yourself?

Hi, my name is Jennifer. I'm a formerly incarcerated woman.

Yeah. Oh, what kind of sentence did you have?

I had a life without possibility of parole.

How much time did you do on that? 13 years. Okay. Well, you know, today's podcast, we're our subject matter is incarceration, rehabilitation slash education and reentry, from a

woman's perspective. And I would like to, for you to share your thoughts on that. So how was your beginning of your sentence? Was there? What would you say? How was your view on the availability of rehabilitation program?

There was none. When I first started my settings, based on the amount of time that I had, you weren't allowed to take any type of groups, you weren't allowed to program, basically, you just sit in your cell. And in my point of view, with my amount of time, I'm the type of individual that should have been taking those groups and they should have had access to so there was like, completely none because I was a closed custody, and I had to do an extra two counts a day.

Oh, yeah. So, you know, being sentenced to life without that they put you in a close 'A' count, right? Yes. So I think that's a little discriminatory to exclude, you know, because I you know, I'll formerly incarcerated myself and a former lifer where I did 30 years on a murder. And so I know when I started, there was absolutely no rehabilitation program. And plus, you know, I was close custody, which excluded me from even having, you know, yard at certain times because I had to come back in at 12 Noon to count and I think it's, it's kind of discriminatory, that they do that to certain inmates and like you said that it should have been available to you at a sooner time. And so, as as you got into deeper into your sentence, or when did you have the unktion to start programming?

More in my mind that we got moved around to a different prison. And then that's when the opportunity they started, like holding groups within classrooms inside of the buildings and the housing units, which were like ran by just inmates, and they weren't like certified facilitators or anything, it was more so just to try to stay on a positive path.

Also, our peers, were the ones to organize these self help groups, right?

Yeah, for the for the close custody, the ones that were not allowed to go to the, to the ones where you have actually certified facilitators teaching you?

Yeah, you know, I was one of those peers that I had to organize, you know, self-help groups, to specific, you know, groups of my fellow prisoners, because they were excluded and all that. So it's kind of like, inside is that our peers are sometimes our best resources, because they know the struggle, you know what I mean? And so, moving on to the education part, how, how was your experience through there? Was higher education available to you? Real easy, or was it a struggle? What's your perspective on that?

It was really hard going back, you know, once again, because I was close custody, I wasn't able to have any of those opportunities. So it took about, oh, six to seven years into my prison sentence for me to able even to get on the college waiting list.

Wow. Yeah. You know, that's, that's, that's a disparity we would like to change. And wouldn't you like to see that change?

Absolutely, it should change, you know, especially, they say that they have the prisons have all this money to rehabilitate us and educate us. So when we come back into society, we have a different mindset. And we're more knowledgeable, and we have more education, but it's not happening.

Yeah, you know, that's part of what I want to do on this platform with CRISJ and building justice podcast is to bring awareness to our listeners that inside they cannot see what's going on. And keeping certain prisoners from programming is not where their tax dollars were going, their tax dollars are going to, you know, rehabilitation to make that available to the most hardened criminal. And because we want, you know, our sisters, to have that opportunity to get educated and to heal, and we want them coming out healthier than when they went in. Wouldn't you agree?

Absolutely. And another thing is that, they want you to get your like, if you have your GED or high school diploma, they want it to come straight from that source. And sometimes it's hard to get that. And so they'll have people that already have their high school diploma and GED in those high school diploma and GED classes. And there's people that are like, on a waiting list that actually need it, and want to go to it, but they can't, because they fill those spots with people that already have it.

Yeah, that's exclusion right there. And we don't like that, you know, because, you know, tax dollars are going for a specific reason. And you know, and you're Joe and Jane taxpayer, are completely unaware of this stuff. So hopefully, through this podcast, will bring some awareness and, you know, we'll get a gathering of people who will want to change the narrative to allow those prisoners that want these opportunities to develop themselves and to change. And I think it's a great thing when that happens, because, you know, from my experience, you know, I was denied a lot of stuff. And when it was available, you know, I bid harder to it, and I thrived. You know, I became a leader in that environment. And I would like to see that available to my sisters, man, and hopefully, man will, will bring a lot of awareness to them while they're doing their time. And I would like to go into the part of reentry resources. What's your thoughts, from your experience, in this perspective, that a woman paroling out of the California system back into the community, what are the resources that would benefit them the most?

There's not really a lot of resources for women, as there is for men. But we do there is a couple programs, where I'm from there's one called freedom through education, which is transitional housing. And I really recommend that women getting out of an institution that they go to transitional housing, versus me, I did it, and I had a really, really difficult time. It was really rough on me, just more so emotionally and mentally. Because I didn't know how to navigate in this road by myself. And I went to family and they don't didn't have an understanding of what I went through and where I came from. I mean, my mindset was completely Different from, it's completely different from a lot of people out here. And so I felt really alone. And I know with transitional housing, a lot of the staff and the peers there, the other participants, you know, they've kind of all went through the same experiences you so they can help you navigate and you know, send you to those correct resources, send you in the right direction, help you do an email help you work your smartphone, because, you know, a lot of people went in, there was just pagers, you know, So technology is the whole turnaround. So those are the type of resources I would recommend. I want to ask you your current profession. What do you do?

I'm a case manager for transitional housing.

Okay, so not only do you have a live experience of being a formerly incarcerated. And so you're on the other side of change and development. And so you're a certified alcohol and other drug counselor? Yes. Okay. So you're a case manager. And I want to backtrack a little bit back to the rehabilitation programming. And because me and you have talked about trauma, that, you know, a woman experiences, and can you give us some enlightenment on what kind of rehabilitation program that will be beneficial for a woman prisoner during time,

I would say more informed trauma, basically, because a lot of women, they, they have experienced trauma from either their mothers selling them for drugs, them getting in unhealthy relationships, their fathers, uncles, brothers molesting them. There's like, so much trauma that a lot of these women have went through, because when I was in there, I practice my AOD counseling, and I ran a lot of groups, and just the stories of these women

and, you know, being sold by their own mothers, for drugs, and just all these type of things. It's just it needs to be more trauma and forced, informed.

You know, I definitely agree with that man, because I'm a facilitator and myself of trauma informed healing groups. And I know, from my experience, you know, I suffered a lot of trauma. You know, I'm born and raised in the ghetto and housing projects in LA. And, you know, I come from a dysfunctional background, broken home, single mother, welfare and all that. And I can just imagine, you know, from a girl's perspective, what kind of trauma that builds up, you know, having daddy issues, self esteem issues, and so on. Would you agree?

Absolutely. And not even you know, it just when, when when people are in their addiction, because of, you know, their underlying issue of why they went the route that they route, all the trauma that they've experienced, they're going to prison is trauma. Yeah. I mean, how often is stripped naked in front of 20 other women and cough and squat where everybody's looking, you know, up your private parts, that's traumatizing. You never know, if a person was sex trafficked, and they were made to do that on a constant, you know, so anything could trigger any type of trauma. So even being in prison and watching other inmates beat up other inmates in the room and the C.O's doing nothing about it. I mean, that's just trauma, you know? Yeah. So it's a lot of trauma that I feel there should be a lot more rehabilitation focused on trauma, and not from their peers. It should be from licensed clinicians. are the ones that create the groups, run the groups and facilitate the groups that really would work like that. One thing I'd like to add, wouldn't it be better from a lived experience person that's now got their social work degree? Yes, that gets their degree. Yeah. So so what I want when I'm getting to yourself, you know, you got your certificate. And so when you work with the females that are coming to the program, you get you you make a better connection, right? Absolutely. Yeah. So I really liked that. And I think that's a good thing, man, that we have lived experienced people getting their education and degrees and certifications and reaching back in to help those that are still in the struggle that that is very, very good. And once again, can you very clearly state that organization that you're associated with?

Oh, freedom through education.

So what would be the contact information on that would that be freedom through education.org? Or what would it be, um, just freedom through education? If you look it up, it will pop up freedom through education or Freedom House USA,

okay. I just want to give you props for, you know, being here today, you know, you're a very strong girl. Because you ain't no weakling you made it this far. You're a very smart girl so that, you know, you're still here, man. So that's evidence that you ain't no dummy. And I think that you're doing a good service to our community and just keep up the good work.

All right. Thank you so much. I appreciate you. And thank you for having me on here. Okay, bye bye. That was a very informative perspective of Jennifer's lived experience. Now, our conversation shifts over with Keke, who was not formally incarcerated. But comes from a background of working with system impacted people from the areas of mental health, probation, law enforcement and community resources. Keke, would you like to introduce yourself?

Hello, hello. My name is keke Brown. Right now I'm currently operating in the capacity, I run a Community Wellness Center for African American that focuses on mental health and ensuring that we have quality access to mental health as well as providing advocacy

through various systems of in which we're disproportionate in, I also have an agency that specifically goes into the jail for the most high risk populations to teach life skills, provide therapy and things like that.

Would you like to give us their contact information?

Absolutely. If there is anyone who needs that extra support, my program is called soul space, you can actually Google it, soul space Sacramento and then it will come up, you can also give me a call, my direct number is 916-269-4102, more than welcome to reach out ask questions or anything like that be happy to help.

Great, great. And so one thing would you like to give us your background?

Absolutely. So My professional background, I've pretty much worked jobs in which the systems were the forefront. And when I refer to systems, I mean, in the mental health system, the incarceration system, so I was a child protection worker for a number of years. And then I went over to probation. And so I was a probation officer for about seven years. And then I transition on to the police department in Omaha, Nebraska, where I'm from, so I served as a gang unit officer for approximately nine years, give or take, and then I ended up going to mental health. So I was a mental health officers. And what that means is, anytime there was a call for mental health services, in a black or brown neighborhood, officers would respond to try to address the situation. And if we could prevent them from being booked and taken to jail, and, you know, replaced that with the service that they needed for mental health.

Great, great. I like that. And so I would like to get your view on the rehabilitation programming available to the women prisoners in California, what do you think, would be an ideal program for our sisters that are incarcerated to get a hold of and to resolve those trauma issues that they suffered in the past? Because me myself, I want them to come out healthier than what they went in? So can you give us some ideas that available programming that would be beneficial to our sisters?

Absolutely. You know, when I think a rehabilitation, and then you really think about what is it gonna take to expose this this woman to different ways of thinking, what services can we provide to ensure that this woman has addressed the trauma and the various things that they've been through, the first thing that comes to mind is providing culturally affirming, and culturally relevant therapeutic services, making sure we have providers that look like the women that are being served, who have an understanding of what it is to be incarcerated, as a woman of color, that skill set is absolutely foundational, if you really want to make sustainable change, and really work on a person's thought pattern, which leads to their decision making in some of the things that they allow that you put in place, you know, a program that's going to do that. So that's first and foremost, I definitely think that you got to deal with the underlying issues, women and men, they're not wanting to jail because they don't have anything to do, right. Nobody's waking up in the morning and saying, I think today's a great day to go to jail. Nine times out of 10, you're dealing with somebody whose life has just really gotten difficult, they are doing what they have to do to survive. And that's just what it is. And sometimes things happen. The problem is when they go into these systems on incarceration, there's nothing there for especially the women who, by the way, oftentimes are mothers. And that's not to take away from the men are fathers. But for the women who are going in there that have children out there, that there are no services when they go into jail or prison that actually speak to being a mother. How do you parent from a jail cell as a mother? How do you actually deal with your trauma so that when you are released back into the community, where now you have to take this role backup as a mother, how do you equip them to do that? Yeah, that's great. Definitely will

say the mental health. Yeah, the mental health and parenting and those would be the two primary things and alongside the mental health, and I think you and I have talked about this before is the mental health can't just be diagnosed, right? It has to be. How do you love yourself? What's that look like for you? How do you set boundaries, teach them about healthy relationships, teach them ways that they can actually find a resource when they need it so that they don't have to depend on those unhealthy supports to get what they need. A lot of women that are out here in certain lifestyles, give them the resources that they need, so that that's not even an option.

Yes. Well, you know, backtrack a little bit. You know, when I asked you the question, what would you have? A, how do you see things of being a rehabilitation program? And what you mentioned, I think it's very foundational to build on because you need to have that foundation to understand yourself and understand that I do possess these quality skills, but I didn't know and bringing awareness to that then validates you that, you know, I am able to, I am strong, I am independent, I can, and I will. And I think that's very important, because in my journey incarceration, I had to find that for myself, and it's a journey, you know, and, you know, I was a person that didn't know, I had the skills because nobody ever told me. And I didn't know that this was something that was in me. But, you know, my addiction and my trauma were more powerful than that. And I think, what, what's what you mentioned, to bring that to the forefront that's available, man, because every person has to reach their core self and order to use that as a lens. Now, you know, Let's clear our vision from all this blurriness and all this trauma and addiction and abuse that was suffered. And let's see who you really are. And let's water that it's like a garden, you know, I like to say that I have a garden inside myself, and I water that with really good water, because I want to always grow. And I think that bringing that to our sisters man will really make them beautiful flowers out in the community.

Absolutely, you touch on one of the very things we do at the agencies I'm at, is we don't start with let's look at your trauma and and fix your trauma, so to speak, one of the first things that I do is tell me how you love you, tell me what that looks like. Because what we believe in our minds about who we are, and what we're capable of, are what actually drives our decision making, and allows us to stay in situations that are healthy for us and, and even though I had all these job titles, because they are just that their job titles, right, I still dealt with a lot of my own self doubt. And it wasn't until a couple of years ago when I really started to invest in my own self love Journey, which was the birth of the agency or crown life that I run. And that focuses on providing opportunities of healing. That is based on a personal mission that I took to really focus on loving myself. And like you say, that journey is hard, because even though I had those job titles, I didn't grow up in an environment where I was told how wonderful I was or how, you know, great, I was smart I was those things were not my environment. Many times you're running into, yeah, you're running into these women who their foundation for building up who they are, is trauma, violence, poverty. So if that's what you're planting, and that's what's being watered, because that's what's around you, then that's what's going to grow. So if you have an opportunity where someone can come alongside you and say, even with all those rough patches, even with all of this trauma you've been exposed to you mean something you are worthy, you are valuable. Let me walk with you through that journey, it makes a ton of a difference. I can't even tell you how many times I go into the different jails. And you know, if we just want to have a transparent conversation, the biggest challenge is these women do not believe that they are worth it. Yes. So they don't believe that anybody cares? They don't believe that they actually could do something with their life, because they don't have people in their

corner saying, I love you, you matter. Let's do this together, the world is demanding something from them and given very little in return. And so you know, as women, it's important to know that you have value you have worth even when it doesn't look like yes, that is so very well put. And I want to change directions into the resources that are available to returning citizens our sisters that are coming back. Can you give us some enlightenment on that? What would you think would be great resources for them?

Absolutely. Some of the first things that I want to throw out there. So our programs soul space is a great resource. And we do serve African Americans. But also if someone comes to us in need, we're not going to tuck them away. And we are very focused on our reentry portion of our program. So we provide the life coach and we provide the mental health but we also provide just the ability to come home and have somebody walk alongside you for the challenges of getting an ID, figuring out transportation, figuring out how to get to your P.O. getting diapers if that's what you need, in getting housing if that's what you need. So Soul space is a great resource, but also there's a couple of other organizations that I do think through my partnership with them, they do amazing stuff. So one of the first ones I definitely want to throw out there is called our daughter Destiny that is ran by Cheryl Howe. And they work with reentry. And their whole goal is to make sure that they have the technology of technology skills to come back and be introduced into the community, teaching them how to write an email, teaching them how to use a cell phone, teaching them how to go on interviews, showing them how to dress for interviews, and it's hands on right, then you have Exodus project. Rabbi says, wonderful gentleman, anytime we call him if there's a mental health deed housing need, they wrap their arms around our client, and they make sure they're taken care of. And I referenced those two programs, specifically, because they are primarily ran by staff with lived experience, which I think is important, I come from a different side of it. Um, doesn't mean I don't understand because I had a brother that was incarcerated on doing federal time, for much of his life, and I do understand some of the challenges. But again, being incarcerated is a unique experience. And these organizations have individuals who walked that journey, they know the difficulties that come with it, and it is important. And when our clients come to us, and they're formerly incarcerated, we always make sure we connect them with somebody who understands the journey, and can provide a layer of support that we can't because we haven't lived that, you know, we haven't had that experience. Um, so there are organizations out there, but again, those are the two that we lean on a lot. Because we they do great work.

Okay, so in closing, I would like you to clearly give the contact information of your organization's the daughter mercies and the Exodus. So can you clearly give us those contact information?

Yes, so Soul space, you can call it you just give me a call. Our direct number is 916-269-4102. The two resources they can Google it's called our daughter's destiny. And then the other one is called Exodus project. Right off the top of my head. Exodus project is located right off of 23rd and L st. in Sacramento. And you can always Google it. And you can always ask for Seth Castleman, if you Google our daughters destiny, you can always go straight to C, H, E, R, R, E, L, L, Howe h o w e, and you'll definitely find their contact info. So once again, your organization is soul space, soul space. Okay, Keke, thank you very much for spending the time with us in bringing so much enlightenment to all the resources and availability that you give out and that you feel people you know, because some people think that they're empty, you know, glad there's people out there like you that say no

you're not empty, you might just be half full. So let's let's bring some more into you. Thank you very much Keke and see you.

Blessings. Thank you, bye bye.

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Outro Music Lyrics

No more penalties and no more wars. Based on the actions. Now, time for "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Time for building justice, justice.