



Governor Dan McKee's Overdose Task Force

February 11, 2026

Richard Leclerc; Director, Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals

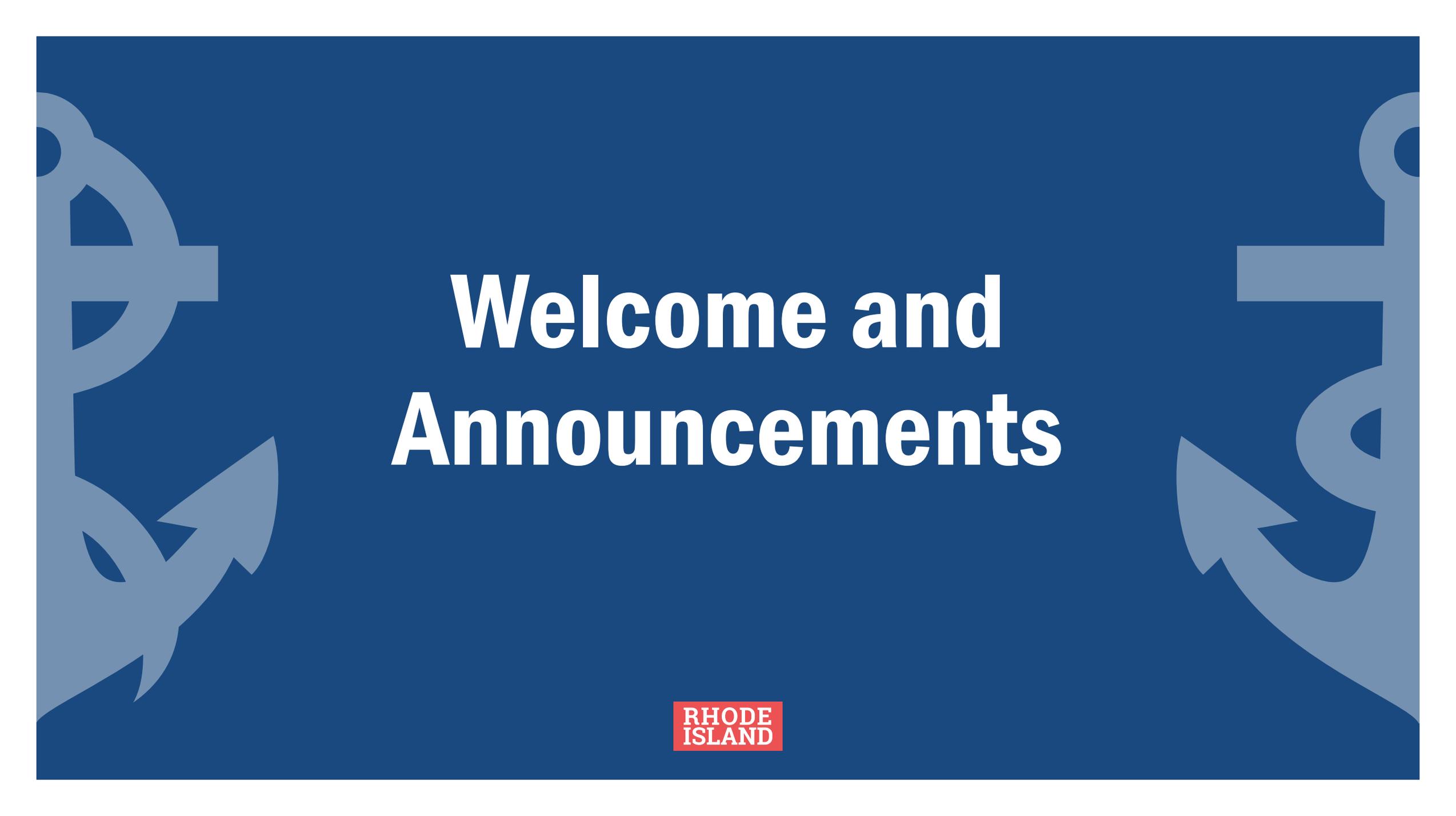
Jerome Larkin, MD; Director, Rhode Island Department of Health

Alex Gautieri, MSW; Task Force Community Co-Chair

Ana Novais, MA; Assistant Secretary, Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Cathy Schultz, MPH; Task Force Director, Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services

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ISLAND



Welcome and Announcements

**RHODE
ISLAND**

CELEBRATING

BLACK

HISTORY

MONTH

FEBRUARY



Join the Community BIPOC Affinity Group!

The Racial Equity Work Group of the [Governor's Overdose Task Force](#) and the [Rhode Island Department of Health \(RIDOH\) Drug Overdose Prevention Program](#) invite dedicated individuals who are **Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)** and working in the substance use field to participate in Rhode Island's **Community BIPOC Affinity Group**.

The purpose of this group is to:

- Identify ways staff could align our work with a racial equity lens;
- Network to discuss professional development needs and training opportunities;
- Share experiences and challenges; and
- Identify solutions and support systems.

Meetings are held the first Tuesday of every month from noon to 2 p.m. Organizations are encouraged to send BIPOC staff as representatives to participate.

If you or someone you know is interested in participating, please contact **Monica Tavares** (Monica.Tavares@health.ri.gov), RIDOH Education and Outreach Coordinator and Racial Equity Work Group Co-Chair.

Recovery Day *at the Capitol*



Recovery Ready RI is an initiative led by RI Communities for Addiction Recovery Efforts in collaboration with recovery supportive organizations across Rhode Island.

**Thursday
February 12th
2pm-5pm**

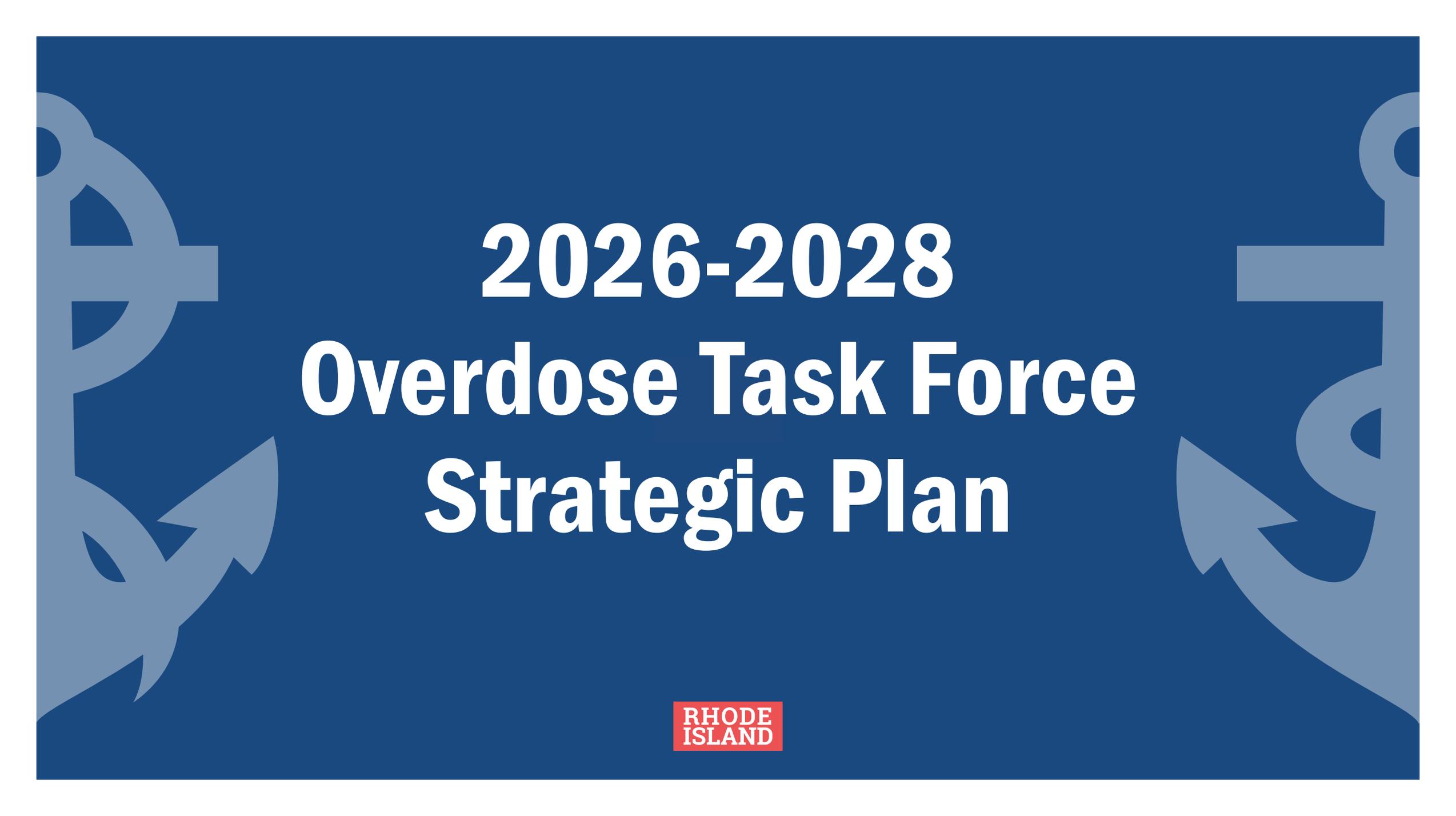
Event highlights include:

- Recovery Success Stories
- Resource Fair, featuring local treatment and recovery support services
- Tools to promote recovery and reduce stigma
- And more!

**Scan the QR code
to register:**



RECOVERY
Ready RI



2026-2028 Overdose Task Force Strategic Plan

**RHODE
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Overdose Task Force Cross-Cutting Priorities

Ensuring Racial Equity

- Ensure that the Racial Equity is being embedded across all pillars.

Building Strong Governance and Community Engagement

- Enhance governance, transparency, and inclusive decision making across levels of government and ensure community voice is centered in decision making.

Expanding Data Capacity and Surveillance

- Maintain a unified, equity-driven overdose data system that enables real-time action, disaggregated analysis across key demographic, geographic, and structural factors, and secure data sharing among State agencies and community partners.

Communications and Messaging

- Build community capital through education, public messaging, and narrative change that reduces stigma, strengthens social connectedness, and increases community trust and engagement across the overdose continuum.

Social Determinants of Health

- Prioritize housing stability, economic opportunity, and culturally responsive services for populations disproportionately impacted by overdose.

Rhode Island's 2026-2028 Overdose Task Force Strategic Plan

Reinforcing Comprehensive Prevention

- Prevent the initiation of substance use by **implementing evidence-based, equity-centered primary prevention** in schools, workplaces, healthcare, and high-risk settings. Primary prevention strategies include appropriate prescribing and injury prevention practices.

Strengthening Harm Reduction and Rescue

- Achieve targeted and statewide coverage of harm reduction resources by **maximizing access to lifesaving tools (e.g., naloxone), adapting services to the evolving drug supply, and implementing equitable post-overdose engagement strategies** that reduce mortality and improve linkages to care.

Increasing Engagement in Treatment

- Ensure equitable, low-barrier, and on-demand treatment services **across the lifespan**. Expand treatment access, workforce capacity, reduce social, cultural, and structural barriers, and address social determinants of health and **disparities** that limit engagement and retention in care.

Supporting Recovery

- **Build and sustain recovery capital across housing, employment, family, community, and cultural domains** by strengthening recovery-oriented systems, professionalizing the peer workforce, and supporting long-term recovery and intergenerational stability.

Access the 2026-2028 Strategic Plan on Prevent Overdose RI

preventoverdoseri.org/the-task-force



Governor's Overdose Task Force
2026-2028 Strategic Plan

Governor Dan McKee's [Overdose Task Force](#) and its [work groups](#) serve as a central body guiding a whole-of-government approach committed to lifting up community voices. The Task Force has set forth the following priority outcomes: reducing fatal overdoses, improving people's lives, addressing inequities, using data to inform action, and addressing social determinants of health. The Strategic Plan, also known as the "Roadmap," aligns with [Rhode Island's 2030 Plan](#) and its priority of [creating a healthier Rhode Island by supporting behavioral health](#).

The refined 2026-2028 Overdose Task Force Roadmap includes clear goals, measures, and targets to track progress and respond to changing policies and emerging issues. It maintains the original four pillars of prevention, rescue, treatment, and recovery, while focusing on cross-cutting priorities to guide statewide initiatives. The activities provided highlight existing efforts and recommended actions; however, they are not representative of a complete list.

The Strategic Plan has four main priorities:

			
Reinforcing Comprehensive Prevention	Strengthening Harm Reduction and Rescue	Increasing Engagement in Treatment	Supporting Recovery

To achieve these goals and improve people's lives, the following approaches have been adopted:

- **Use Data to Drive Action:** Initiating state and local level overdose response plans in Rhode Island's highest burden communities, addressing changes in the drug supply, and targeting private locations.
- **Prevention:** Implementing primary prevention across the lifespan.
- **Expanded Harm Reduction Coverage:** Continuing and increasing harm reduction services that are responsive to the rapidly evolving drug supply, particularly for people who use drugs recreationally and in private locations.
- **Targeted Rescue Activity:** Sustaining targeted naloxone distribution to people who use drugs and their families, including private locations.
- **Ensuring Equity:** Increasing targeted harm reduction and treatment services for non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic populations.
- **Increasing Access to Treatment:** Improving access to treatment and ensuring treatment on demand.
- **Recovery Supports:** Increasing recovery support, which lowers the risk of overdose-related deaths by addressing the recurrence of substance and opioid use.¹

**RHODE ISLAND
BLACK STORYTELLERS**



www.ribsfest.org

RIBS

Our Mission:

Bringing Black Storytellers and their Stories of the World to the World.

We define Black storytelling as the oral arts, traditions and practices of African Heritage people worldwide.

We fulfill our mission through performances, workshops, cultural, educational and historical programs for all people.

Donate Today



“

I love that our students get to experience the joy of listening and being engaged by someone

FUNDA STORY CAMP

APRIL AND SUMMER VACATIONS
YOUTH LEARN STORYTELLING AND PERFORMANCE SKILLS,
AFRICAN DRUMMING, DANCE AND ART MAKING WITH
PROFESSIONAL CULTURAL ARTISTS AND PERFORM FOR FAMILY
AND FRIENDS AT THE END.





FUNDA FEST

A CELEBRATION OF BLACK STORYTELLING

RIBS signature event just concluded its 28th year with public programming and school performances across the state, reaching over 5,000 people.

Funda means “To Teach and To Learn” in Zulu.

RIBS kicked off the RI250th Celebration with programming highlighting African Americans at the time of the American Revolution, in preparation for hosting the National Black Storytelling Festival in Rhode Island in November!

RHODE ISLAND BLACK STORYTELLERS PRESENTS:

FAMILY FUN DAY FUNDA FEST 28

Saturday: Jan. 17th, 10-4pm

A CELEBRATION OF BLACK STORYTELLING



FREE EVENT!

A full day of family-friendly programming, workshops, youth performances, guest artists, and a vibrant marketplace featuring local and youth vendors.

CCRI Providence, Liston Campus 1 Hilton Street, PVD

10:00 AM - 1:00 PM - Workshops for all ages (African drumming, Head wrapping and more).

1:00 PM – Youth Performance
Youth performers from FUNDA Story Camp and the Fall Workshop series take the stage.

2:30 PM – Family Storytelling Concert
Invited guest storytellers perform for all ages.

VISIT FUNDAFEST.ORG

A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS:



COX



PROVIDENCE
CITY COUNCIL

Beneficial Congregational Church
WOMEN'S GUILD



PROVIDENCE
TOURISM COUNCIL



PROVIDENCE
SHELTER FOR
COLORED
CHILDREN

ART
CULTURE
TOURISM

Kuldell Family
Foundation

AARP
Rhode Island



PROVIDENCE
PERFORMING
ARTS CENTER



RHODE ISLAND
FOUNDATION



COMMUNITY FLAVORS AND THE LEGACY ACADEMY: A PILOT PROGRAM

PART OF MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO RECOVERY, A PROGRAM SPONSORED BY THE CITY OF PROVIDENCE

LEGACY ACADEMY

A CULTURALLY BASED STORYTELLING PROGRAM

MADE POSSIBLE WITH SUPPORT FROM THE MAYOR'S OFFICE OF
THE CITY OF PROVIDENCE: MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO RECOVERY

THE LEGACY ACADEMY: A Culturally Based Storytelling Training Program

Are you in recovery from substance abuse?
Looking to discover your voice, share your
story, and connect with tradition?



The Legacy Academy welcomes individuals in recovery who want to build strength, community, and purpose through the power of storytelling.

In this **FREE** program, you will:

- Share personal stories and practice expressive storytelling
- Select materials that resonate with your journey and community
- Explore storytelling traditions rooted in Black culture, folklore, and history
- Develop skills in voice, movement, and presence to tell stories with confidence



WHY JOIN?

- Strengthen recovery by engaging in meaningful, creative activity
- Build community and social connectedness at every stage of recovery
- Support whole health and wellness through storytelling



REGISTER NOW — LIMITED SPACE!

Scan QR Code or Visit: www.ribsfest.org/legacy

Contact: Jaquel Scott, Community Support (RIBS): community@ribsfest.org | 401-563-8998

Transform your experiences into stories that inspire. Learn. Share. Heal. Lead.









RHODE ISLAND BLACK STORYTELLERS



RIBS

RIBSFEST.ORG

FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM
FIND US ON FACEBOOK

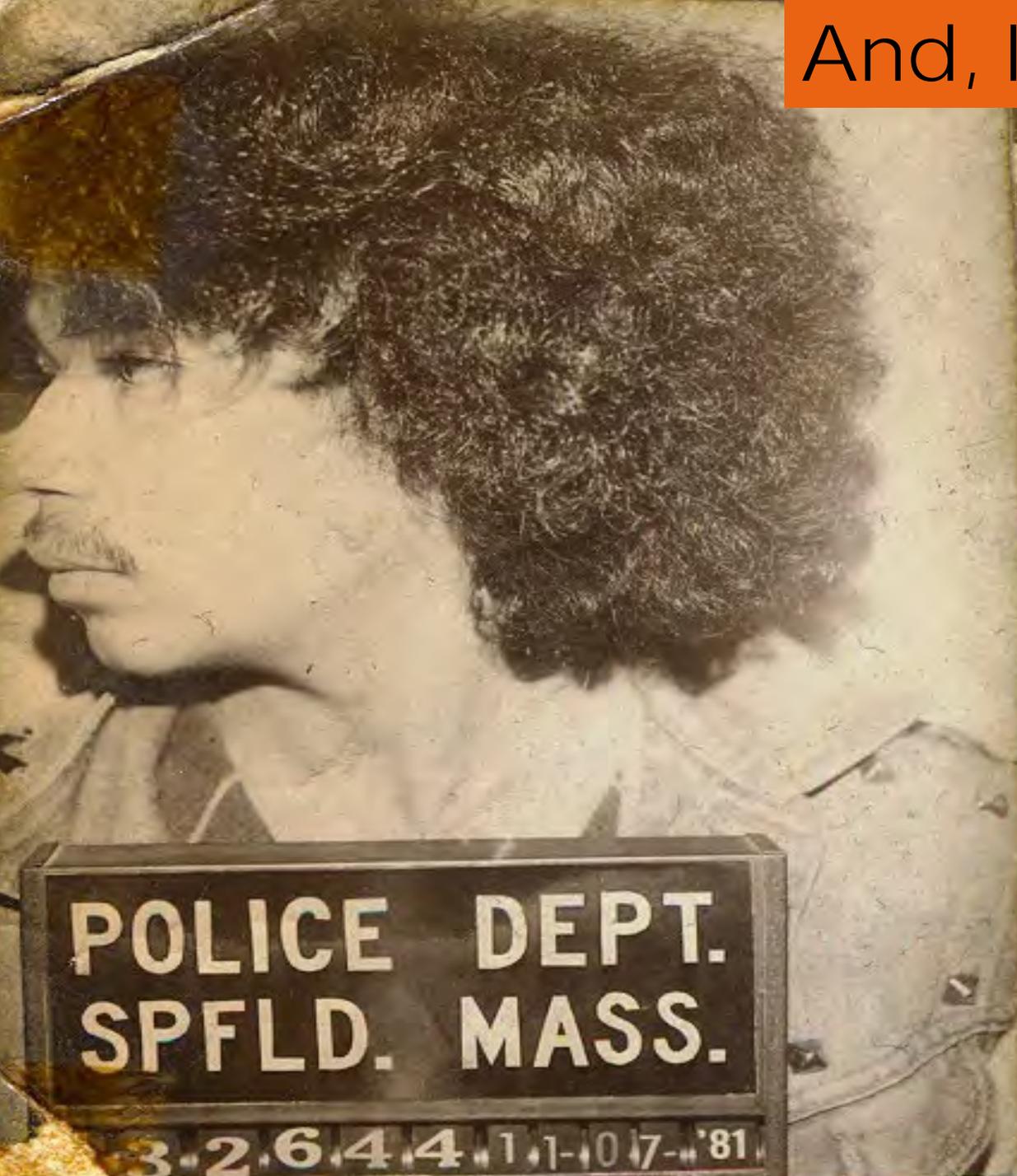
JOIN OUR MAILING LIST
INFO@RIBSFEST.ORG



Disparities and Inequities: The Impacts of Broken Systems and Equitable Strategies to Engage and Retain People in Care

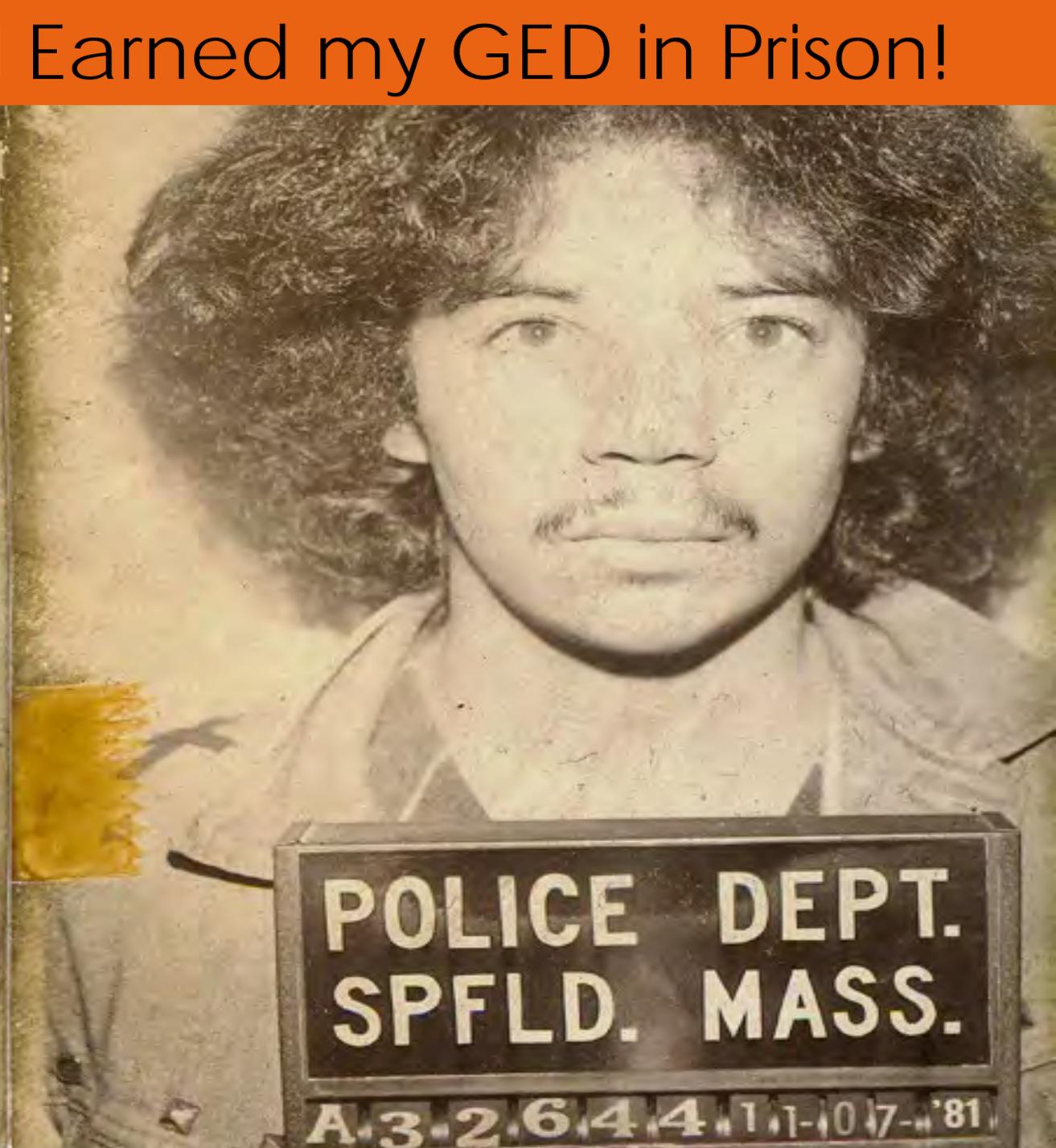
HANER HERNANDEZ, PHD, CPS, CADCI, LADCI
INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT

And, I Earned my GED in Prison!



POLICE DEPT.
SPFLD. MASS.

3-2-6-4-4-1-1-0-7-'81



POLICE DEPT.
SPFLD. MASS.

A-3-2-6-4-4-1-1-0-7-'81

History



Context

Matteri!

Mantra: Addiction and Mental Health Don't Discriminate!!

Individuals

WHAM

systems

privateSLP

RULES

POLICY

PROCEDURES

social, minority, different, respect, inclusion, right, business, work, rejection, face, nce



Deliberate Silos



CHILD WELFARE





FLAWED

DESIGN

recurrence
person in recovery
alcohol and
person with a
substance use disorder
mental health dis
person with a
substance use
disorder
recurrence of use
and drug use
person with a
mental health disorder
recovery



Punitive Approaches



**THE CRIMINALIZATION
OF COLOR**



13TH

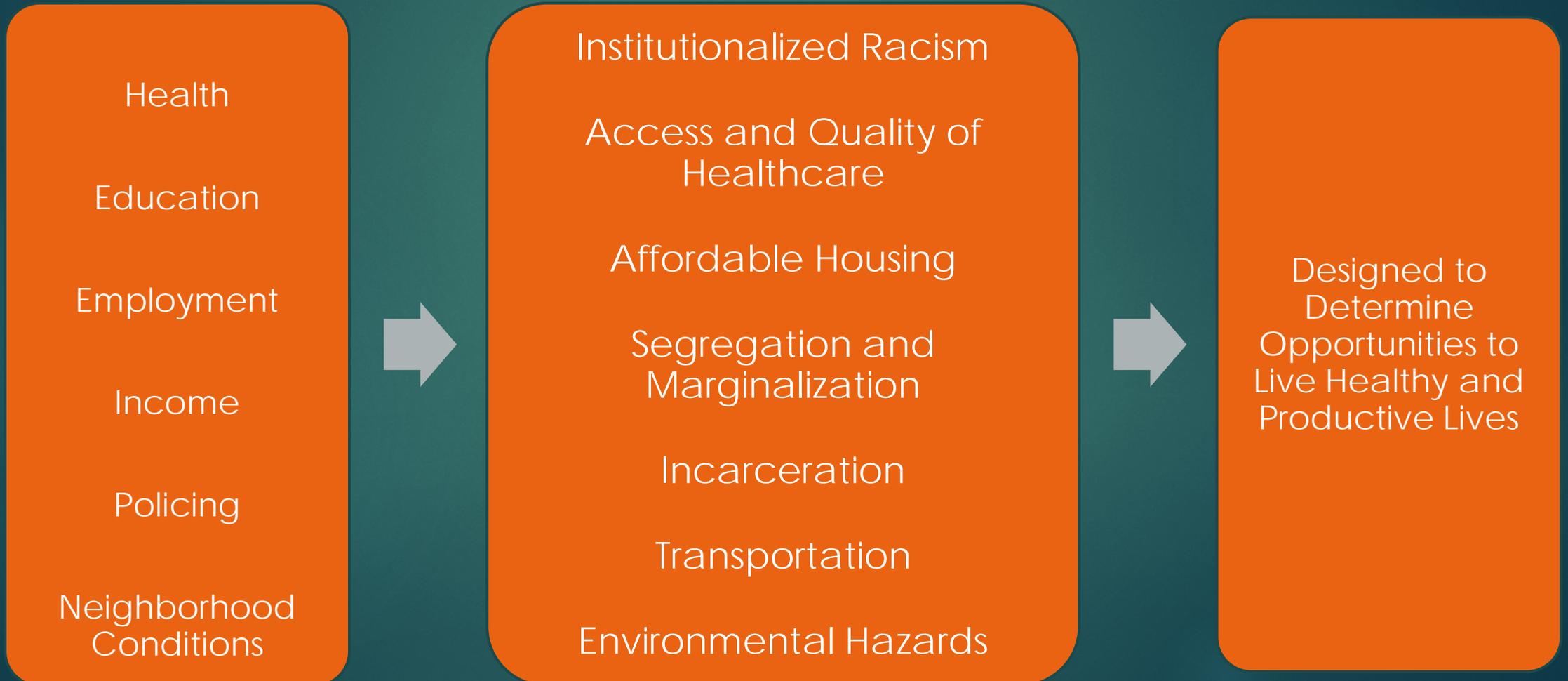
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Disparities - Examples

- ▶ Healthcare: Access and Quality
- ▶ SUDs and Mental Health
- ▶ Opioid Overdose Deaths
- ▶ HIV/AIDS
- ▶ Hepatitis C Virus
- ▶ Workforce

- ▶ Housing
- ▶ Employment
- ▶ Education and Training
- ▶ Food: Access and Quality
- ▶ COVID-19
- ▶ Others

Disparities are Driven and Sustained by the Structural Determinants of Health





Yested For Success Case Study
A Report Published By Yated Creative, Dan Vercillo, and Spence Kelly

Yested For Success Case Study
A Report Published By Yated Creative, Dan Vercillo, and Spence Kelly

Mass Incarceration

1970
200,000



2025
2.1 M

5.5 to 6 Million Individuals
on Probation, Parole, House Arrest!

Policies that Drive Incarceration

- Deinstitutionalization
- War On Drugs
- School Zones
- 3 Strikes and You're Out

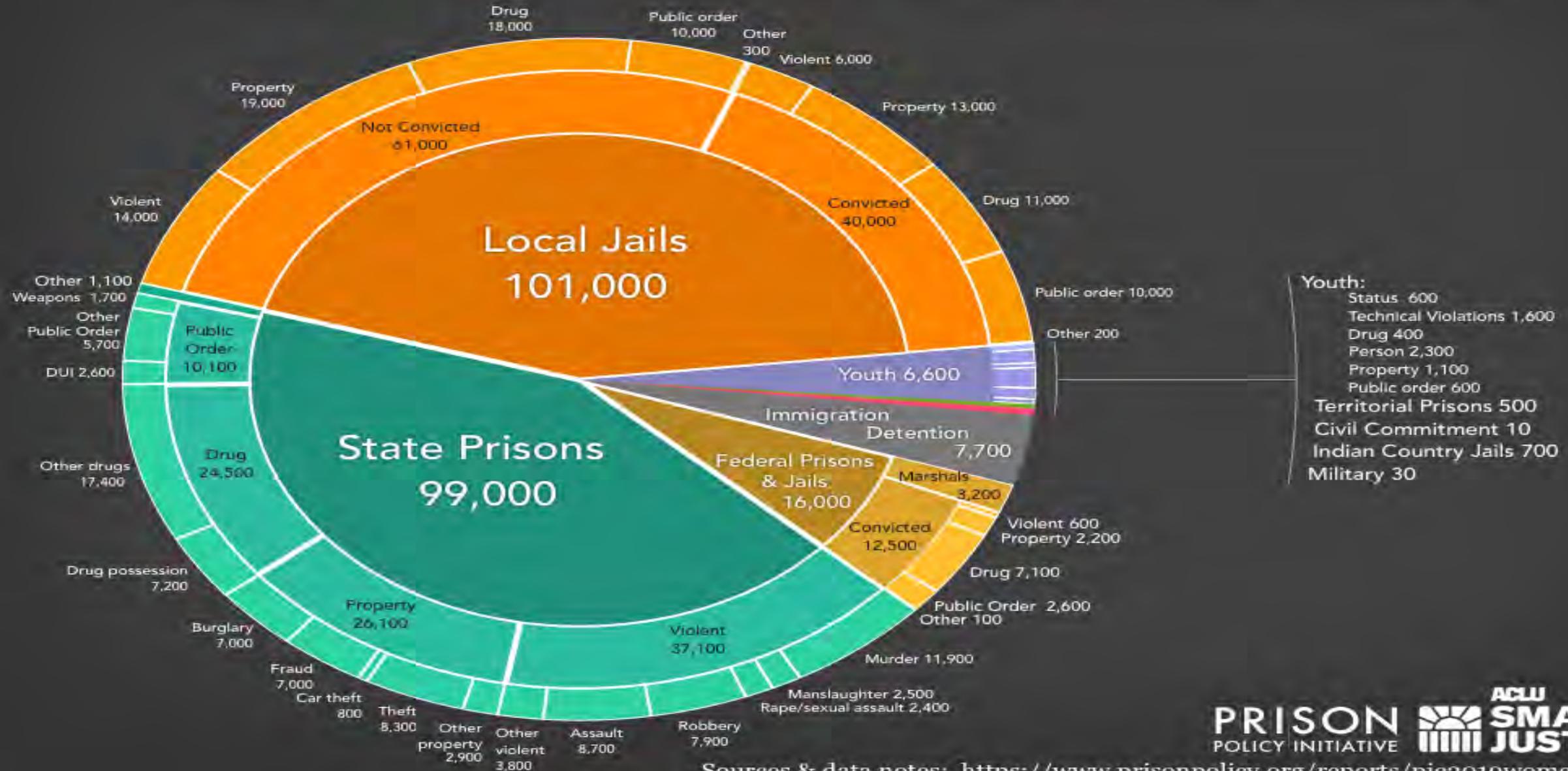
NOT Broken: Deliberate Policies!

- No Voting Rights
- Others

Is this System Broken?

How many women are locked up in the United States?

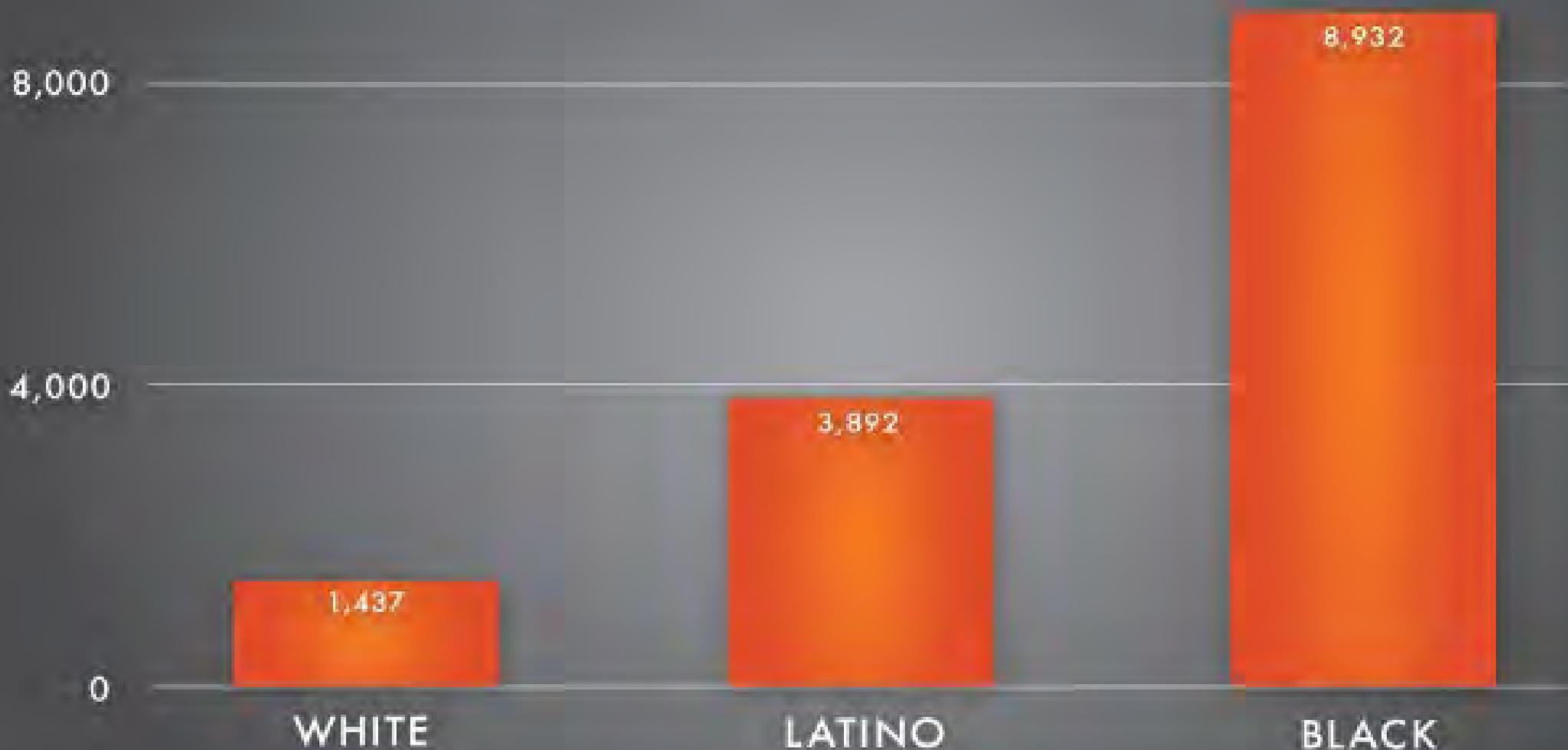
The United States is one of the top incarcerators of women in the world. Changing that will require knowing where 231,000 incarcerated women fall within our decentralized and overlapping systems of mass incarceration.



Sources & data notes: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2019women.html>

Young Male Incarceration Rates, 2023

(Number of people 25 to 29 years old incarcerated per 100,000 people in that age group)



Institutionalization

- Personal Story
- What are the Factors that Drive Institutionalization?
- Recidivism Rates = 80 to 90 Percent!



Restorative Justice

What Does Restorative Justice Look Like?



What Should We do to Ensure Restorative Justice?

Developments and Policy Changes in Criminal Justice

- Specialty Courts: Substance Use Disorder, Mental Health, Veterans, Others
- Innovation: “The Angels Program” - Gloucester, MA
- Upwards of 45 States Visit and Adopt and Tailor the Program
- New Innovations Developed Across the Country
- Re-Entry Services in Prisons and Jails
- Community Policing: Recovery Coaches and Mental Health Professionals Integrated
- Funding from Federal, State, Local and Private Sources are Made Available
- Yet Disparities and Barriers Continue to Impact Marginalized and Racialized Communities

Doctors
abuse
Overdose
Political
Families
Epidemic
Usage
OPIOID
Drugs
Heroin
ence

After decades of racialized and poor people dying, why declare a crisis in recent history?

Detox
Antidote
Drugs
Treatment
Depression
Withdrawal
Diverse
La

Lessons yet to be Learned.....

- In 2023, Opioid Overdose Deaths were Reduced by 10%.
- In 2024, there was a 24% Reduction in Opioid Overdose Deaths.
- As a Result, Many People are Celebrating Prematurely.
- Opioid Overdose Deaths Rose Significantly for Native, Black, and Latino/x/e Peoples Across the Country in this Same Period!
- Our Work is Not Done! We are as Healthy as the Unhealthiest Person in Our House!

Our Language and Actions Matter

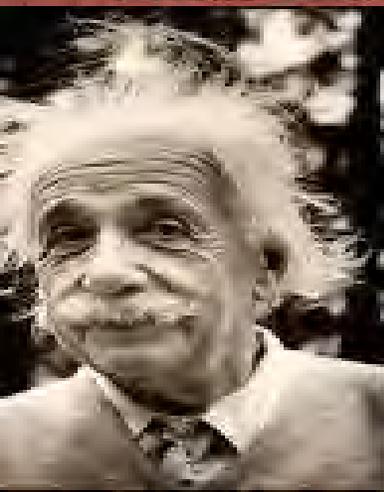


Strength
~~Weakness~~

natural
Strengths
abilities
gifts
Qualities
Core talents

Strengths-Based Engagement and Practice

CREATING EFFECTIVE HELPING RELATIONSHIPS



Everybody is a genius.
But if you judge a fish by its
ability to climb a tree, it will
live its whole life believing
that it is stupid.

—Albert Einstein

We Can Do It!



SOME PEOPLE CAN'T
BELIEVE IN THEMSELVES
UNTIL SOMEONE ELSE
BELIEVES IN THEM
FIRST.

GOOD WILL HUNTING

WWW.LIVEIFFEELHAPPY.COM

Understanding and Addressing Bias

- **Definition:** Bias is prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair (Oxford Dictionary).
- **Conscious Bias:** Also known as explicit bias or explicit prejudice refers to the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that people intentionally exhibit toward certain groups based on their identity.
- **Implicit Bias:** As defined by Harvard researchers like Mahzarin Banaji, refers to judgments or attitudes about individuals that are made without conscious awareness or intention. These biases, which are a part of all human minds, can be either positive or negative and affect how we think, feel, and behave. They are activated involuntarily and are shaped by factors like past experiences, culture, and social environment.

Cultural Humility, Not Cultural Competency

“Cultural humility incorporates a **lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self critique** to redressing the power imbalances in the patient-physician dynamic and to developing **mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic clinical and advocacy partnerships with communities** on behalf of individuals and the defined population.”

(Tervalon and Murry-Garcia, 1998)



Cultural Self-Assessments

- Developed for individuals and organizations.
- Gauge the degree to which you are effectively addressing the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse groups.
- Determine your strengths and areas for growth.
- Plan strategically for the systematic incorporation of culturally and linguistically competent policy, structures, and practices.

Source: National Center for Cultural Competency
<https://nccc.georgetown.edu/assessments>

Project Implicit at Harvard

- The mission of Project Implicit is to educate the public about bias and to provide a “virtual laboratory” for collecting data on the internet. Project Implicit scientists produce high-impact research that forms the basis of our scientific knowledge about bias and disparities.
- Take a Test: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/research>

Health Equity...

“ Behavioral Health Equity is the right to access quality health care for all populations regardless of the individual’s race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, geographical location and social conditions through prevention and treatment of mental health and substance use conditions and disorders.” - SAMHSA



Build Equity!!!



EQUALITY

~~**EQUITY**~~

REALITY

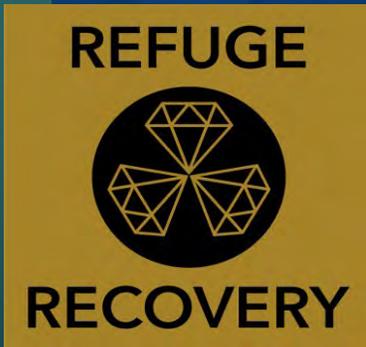
All Credible Evidence and
Outcomes Show that There are



of Wellness and Recovery



Infinite Pathways of Wellness and Recovery



**HARM REDUCTION
SAVES LIVES**

- Harm Reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing the negative consequences associated with drug use.
- Harm reduction is also a movement for social justice built on a belief in, and respect for, the rights of people who use drugs.

Source: National Harm Reduction Coalition

Who Here Practices
Harm Reduction?

Dead People Don't
Recover or Get Better!

Change is NOT an Event...
It's a Process.

5 Stages: Pre-contemplation,
Contemplation, Preparation, Action,
Maintenance.

What's the Most Controversial Aspect of Harm Reduction Right Now?



Current Workforce



Client Population



Diverse Workforce



We Have an
Ethical
Responsibility
to Change
this Reality!

Muchas Gracias – Thanks

Contact Information

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Public Comment

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