

# Collective Impact Institute Report

## HOME WITH A PURPOSE



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## Project Overview

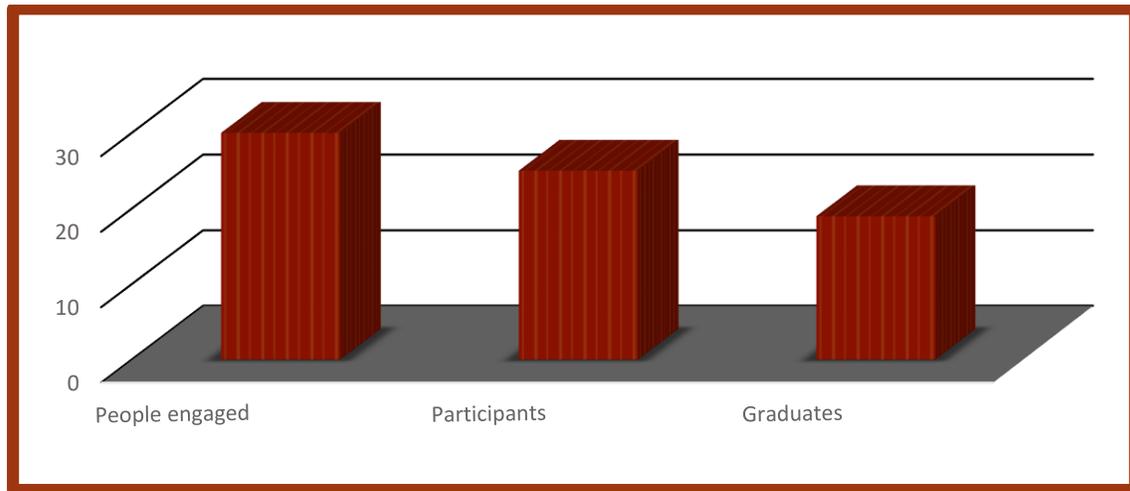
The Collective Impact Leadership Institute fosters leadership among men, women, and youth who have been directly impacted by the criminal justice system.

Two of the most prevalent challenges individuals who come in contact with the criminal justice system grapple with is disenfranchisement and community detachment. A system that claims to rehabilitate and heal, but instead has failed our communities and those returning home to our communities from incarceration for decades. The

Leadership Institute is committed to invest in the personal transformation of all men, women, and youth directly impacted by the criminal justice system in Richmond and throughout Contra Costa County. The institute also focuses on moving individuals to action on their own behalf in the form of community organizing and civic engagement to changing policies and structures that directly impact their population. The institute will also equip them to go out in to their communities and be true agents of change for all that is equitable. The Safe Return Project and their community partners leads this ten-week institute, held two days a week in the evenings. The participants are exposed to the basics of community organizing, violence prevention and personal transformation strategies that are culturally based, media and communication tactics, leading community actions, and civic engagement strategies at a local, regional, and state level.

Our expectation is that by the end of the ten weeks this cohort of up to 20 formerly incarcerated leaders will engage residents in community education events around re-entry and public safety issues. Participants are also expected to participate in civic engagement activities, giving testimony at public hearings, and leading community actions.

## Community Engagement Data



The data in this chart shows that the Safe return Project outreached to over thirty formerly incarcerated residents to participate in the leadership institute. Twenty five formerly incarcerated residents participated in the ten week process, nineteen participants graduated.

## Program Components



What people are supposed to be experiencing in this institute is personal transformation and how to liberate themselves from a system of oppression through community organizing and shifting the dominate narrative about who they are in their community as people who have made mistakes in the past.

## Violence Prevention Workshop

The Collective Impact Alive & Free workshops presented by Andre Aikins of Omega Boys Club included five weekly two-hour sessions. Twenty re-entry individuals participated in these sessions with the objective of helping them make healthy decisions, learning to stay Alive & Free, and being a positive impact in the community in which they live in.

The first workshop of the Institute focused on the process of becoming a responsible adult, the importance of life, and an example of a functional community. The participants were engaged, attendance was high, and everyone was eager for the next workshop.

There were several breakthrough moments, including the beginning of reconciliation between mother and son, great shifts in negative and counterproductive attitudes, openness, self-examination, and a willingness to use the process for change was the echoing sentiment.

The main components that make this workshop successful:

- **The process for change:**
  - Identify the thinking.
  - Delete the thinking.
  - Adopt a new way of thinking.
  
- **The rules for living we focuses on:**
  - “There is nothing more valuable than life”.
  - “Change begins with the individual”.

Participants who complete these sessions, walk away with plenty of new information and tools to help them with cognitive re-programing.





## Effects of Trauma Workshop

**NMT/Ripple** Effects a nonprofit whose mission is "to stem the tide of violence and detrimental behavior" and the American Friends Service Committee which promotes healing in communities, collaborated on the second workshop of the Institute. This workshop focused on healing self and the community. This collaboration was an experience that allowed different organizations to present diverse solutions for bringing the community together in support of each other and thereby beginning the process of peace.

These groups we facilitated in a circular open space to help create community. Much of the workshop discussions were about the impact of trauma on the participants in their communities, while they were incarcerated, and how that contributed to where and who they are today. The participants were also given homework assignments to reflect on after every workshop that we discussed the experience at the next session. In our effort to ensure a safe space for participants, all conversations and materials collected in these workshops were confidential and people were not forced to share in a group if they felt any discomfort.

In doing this work, it was important for facilitators to be aware of the population the workshop was intended for and the purpose of the workshop. Facilitators had to engage participants in a manner that put the participants' beliefs about what was needed and would benefit their community at the center of the work. Facilitators who lived in or were very familiar with the community had to be especially mindful of this dynamic. There was differential hierarchy amongst facilitators and participants. In order for participants to be engaged, the focus had to be on their ideas and issues. During this workshop, facilitators consistently made it clear that it was the participants' community that they were asking them to take part in changing.

Participants report that they not only left with a greater or renewed sense of hope for the communities future, but with a new set of resources that enabled them to confront and resolve problems differently than they had in the past.

## Community Organizing Workshop

The Safe Return Project is a group of well-educated and professionally trained men and women who have returned home from incarceration and reintegrated into Richmond. We are dedicated to creating an equitable and healthy environment for Richmond residents –young and old– returning home to their communities from incarceration. The team engages the community through research and community organizing. Our goal is to educate our communities on the needs of those returning home from incarceration, to transform systems that impact those returning home from incarceration, and to shift the dominate narratives in communities that receive and serve men, women, and youth coming home from incarceration, from one of fear to one of acceptance and hope. We believe that breaking down barriers to employment, housing, and family reunification etc. for people coming home to our communities will give them a fighting chance at change.



The structure of the community organizing workshop allowed just enough flexibility for people to process what they faced each day before we began each session. The workshop sessions focused on but was not limited to:

- **Real vs Ideal:** This process allowed the participants to have a real discussion about the opportunities for them in their community currently and what the ideal opportunities would be for a person returning home from incarceration.
- **Structures of Oppression and Race:** Participants identify where the source of their suffering is coming from in their communities
- **Cycle of Organizing:** The cycle of organizing was one of the most important parts of this workshop because it outlined a few of the tools the Safe Return Project have used in the past to drive the work of ending mass incarceration and how they to have the ability to use this model to build their power in the community
- **One to One's:** We focus in on what it means to be in relationship with each other and how to find that common interest that brings someone to the table.
- **Power Mapping:** After the group identifies the structure of oppression in the community then we discussed who benefits from the pain in their community within these structures.
- **Story telling:** Group learns the power of controlling their own stories and changing the narrative about them in their communities.



## Media and Communication Workshop

The Redemption Center, a collaborative member of the Collective Impact Institute, was an extremely purposeful experience. The Redemption Center viewed the entire collaboration as a transformative action; that would significantly impact the targeted population by way of exposure, information and direct action.

The purpose of our “Media and activism workshop” was to introduce a best practices approach to using media/social media as an instrument for activism. Some of the topics covered are as follows:

- **Cause and Effect (getting the word out):** this component focuses on once you have identified an issue how do you inform those who are most impacted and how do you pressure those who are in positions of influence, power and decision making utilizing multimedia tools.
- **Social Media in Action:** this component focuses on the most effective strategies to engage and keep target audiences informed via social media including how to figure out which media platforms would work best for a particular audience and message.
- **Rules of Engagement:** this component focuses on producing the best results when using social media as a form of proactive engagement and as a method to conduct surveys accumulate data and keeping those impacted or in the decision making process informed.
- **Magnify Your Message:** this component places an emphasis on making the information surrounding your action more accessible to a broader audience by using engaging and interesting tag lines to shape the narrative, and using unique hashtags across social media platforms as a way to brand one’s message.

## Moving to Action

According to a 2011 Safe Return Project research report stable housing is essential for obtaining employment, rebuilding relationships with family and community, and other components of reintegration. This research also found that 69% of people coming home to West Contra Costa County rely on short-term solutions – staying with family or friends or at homeless shelters. This rate may be higher now given that the survey was carried out before Realignment, and the shift of people from parole to probation means fewer people have access to the greater transitional housing options available to parolees. The county probation department reported in September 2012 that 90% of people on AB109 probation had housing. This higher rate included people staying at homeless shelters, and others with unsustainable and inhumane arrangements, such as an individual who was living in a tool shed. The County Reentry Strategic Plan estimates housing needs at 30% to 50% of the reentry population.



The Collective Impact Institute graduates, as new members of the Safe Return Project, led a community action to change policy around permanent and transitional housing opportunities for the formerly incarcerated and their families on October 30, 2014 at New Hope Missionary Baptist Church in North Richmond. Sixty residents and five policy makers attended the event from the County of Contra Costa and the City of Richmond. Each policy maker agreed to working with the Safe Return Project to reduce barriers to housing for formerly incarcerated men, women, and their families. Program participants engaged over 100 residents concerning this issue of fair housing

## How was all of this possible?

The Institute members coordinated a three-week outreach plan to inform community around the issue of fair housing for those directly impacted by the criminal justice system and their families. Outreach included one to ones with other formerly incarcerated residents and direct outreach in high impact communities, contacting public officials, research meetings, and finalizing report findings. The team worked on the communications strategy with the media workshop facilitator, planned the action agenda, lead action prep and space walk through at the action site.



## How Change Happens | Testimony of England Rodgers

There I am standing between two great guys. As a young person growing up in Richmond California, I attended school and enjoyed writing and math a lot, my mother and father separated while I was a teen and this pushed me to be a bit out of control and I ended up in the system. My grandmother took me in after I aged out the group home I was in and she pushed me to graduate from school after I was shot.

I heard about Rubicon while I was in school. Shortly after graduation, I was in and out of jail and so I decided to give them a chance to help me change my life around. I felt that I had nothing to lose. After attending a few workshops, I decided that I really was not into the structure thing, but then I meet Damien King and started to develop a real relationship. He has been my role model over the past year, helping me to see myself as someone worthy of a better life. Since then I have worked on and off but couldn't keep a job and had many family issues to deal with. By this time, I had been home a year and was struggling to find my footing when Damien introduced me to Tamisha Walker of the Safe Return Project and I signed up for their leadership development workshop. I was interested in seeing how this program could work for me and to learn more about organizing, personal transformation, and how to become a leader in my community. I had a lot I needed to get out and needed a place to feel heard. I enjoyed the whole institute but the personal transforming piece was the most beneficial to me. Andre Atkins from the Omega Boys Club made a lot of sense to me. I learned a lot about the choices I make and how they could influence the outcome of my life. I also learned about the power we hold as community, and the structures in organizing.

The graduation was inspirational. Participant's families came out and public officials were there to congratulate us on our journey to becoming leaders. The stipends we earned made great incentives to make sure we followed through with the ten week program. Currently, I am still working with Rubicon looking for work and also staying connected to people like Tamisha and Damien for support. I believe that I will stay connected to the work and try to connect guys I know in my neighborhood to this work and to resources in the community. I am striving to be a good example for my little brother, working on getting a driver's license, reflecting on my past and where I am now. My hopes for the near future are to have a stable job, my own apartment, and to attend Contra Costa College for a degree in culinary arts.

## Project Method and Outcomes

**First Step:** A collaboration between the following organizations was developed: Safe Return, Project, Omega Boys Club, The Ripple Effects, The American Friends Service Committee, The Redemption Center, and CCISCO.

**Second Step:** There was a three week planning process through this collaborative for the following program areas: curriculum development, calendaring of workshops, outreach and recruitment, budget development and fundraising



**Third Step:** Population engagement began during the early months of June 2014. The outreach strategy consisted of a list of Community Based Organizations (CBO) that provide direct services to the formerly incarcerated. A total of five presentations took place on the sites of these CBO's with groups of up to 20 formerly Incarcerated men and women. The purpose of the initial engagement works were to present the project overview to formerly incarcerated men, women and youth to sign them up for the orientation in July of 2014.

**Fourth Step:** Twenty-five people attended orientation for the Collective Impact Institute was held on July 15, 2014. Twenty-six participants attended the first of ten weekly Collective Impact workshops on July 23, 2014. Over the course of ten weeks workshop participation increased to 31, which included formerly incarcerated men, women, and youth, other community members, and reentry service partners. During orientation participants were required to sign a contract committing to attend all ten workshops and engage in community action events to make up for three missed workshops, or lose forfeit their stipend at the end.

**Fifth Step:** After ten weeks of the following workshops: Personal Transformation, The Effects of Violence, Community Organizing, Media and Communication. On October 8, 2014, nineteen participants graduated the Collective Impact Institute with certificates from each collaborative partner as well as the office of the County Supervisor and stipends provided by the Safe Return Project. The City of Richmond provided dinner for the event.

**Sixth Step:** Evaluate the process: (1) What went well? (3) What did we learn? (4) What could we do better next time? And (5) how well did we do on building a leader base?

## Project Workshop Evaluation

The most important part of this process is gathering input from the participants. It is valuable feedback and should never be overlooked or an afterthought when doing this work. We asked that individuals be honest and open about their experiences. We also allowed participants to remain anonymous during the evaluation part of every workshop. We also respected the choice of any individual that decided not to evaluate the workshops.

We asked five questions at the completion of each workshop:



*(Strongly Agree   Agree   Not Sure   Disagree   Strongly Disagree)*

1. I felt the workshop was well organized and the main points were well covered and clear.
2. I felt that the facilitator knew what he or she was talking about.
3. The facilitator helped me to understand how this workshop related to my life experience.
4. I felt welcomed and safe enough in the space to share my own experiences.
5. I gained usable skills and will be able to apply them to my life.

We asked two open-ended questions at the end of the survey to allow participants an opportunity to reflect on their experience in their own voice.

1. What was the most valuable aspect of the workshop?
2. What could have been done to improve the workshop?

## Workshop Evaluation Responses:

**Alive & free workshop:** 14 participants evaluated this workshop and the overall theme of their responses was that they felt completely safe in this space and appreciated the content of the workshop frame on staying alive and free.

**The ripple effects/American Friends services committee workshop:** 10 participants evaluated this workshop and the overall theme of their responses was that they felt that they left with tools to deal with their anger, frustration, and the impact of trauma in a more productive ways.

**Safe return project workshop:** 10 participants evaluated this workshop and the overall theme of their responses was that they were inspired by the workshop and wanting to stay connected to the work in the future. Nine of the 10 respondents actually lead the action we hosted for fair housing on (date here).

**The redemption center workshop:** 8 participants evaluated this workshop and the overall theme of their responses was that they ended this workshop feeling more informed about how to use traditional and social media to reshape the dominate narrative about who they are as people.



## Continuing the Work of Change | Kimberly Gamboa

I am Kimberly Gamboa and that's me supporting the work of the Safe Return Project and talking about my experience participating in the Collective Impact Institute on the radio show Street Solders. I was first introduced to the Safe Return Project and its work while attending Rubicon programs in Richmond. I remember meeting Tamisha Walker for the first time as she presented an opportunity to a group of about 15 women to participate in a leadership development institute called

Collective Impact. Although I was already a Rubicon participant, I felt a deeper connection with Tamisha because she is also a formerly incarcerated women like myself. She also struggles with the same barriers that we all face after incarceration and with the impact that incarceration has on our families. Before my incarceration my children and I were a moderately happy family, I worked as a school teacher, and I had no criminal history before. My life has been forever changed by my one mistake and getting my life back has been a full time job. So I signed up for the four month leadership institute. Participating in this process helped me look into many areas in my personal life, my community, and organizations that serve my community that I did not understand.

I learned how to turn all of my fears about being a convicted felon into power that I had no idea that I had. Tamisha showed us how to use that power to organize, defeat policies, and break down barriers that have been put in place to oppress those that have made past mistakes. The Safe Return Project believes people directly impacted by the system have a responsibility to be a part of their own rescue and lead change on the ground.

In the organizing workshop we discussed who benefits from our communities not having equitable education, fair housing, and gainful employment. We focused on uniting our families and our community to make sure that any policy change will reduce the gaps in the system fairly. After this experience I have a new outlook on life and signed up to be a part of change, I am ready to organize, canvas communities, and even rally for second chances. What the Safe Return Project has accomplished over the past five years has reduced many barriers people impacted by the criminal justice system and their families face every day. Without this work of changing the narrative about who we are; we would still be looked at as menaces to society. I am now a member of the Safe Return Project and without a doubt a part of my own rescue and others.

## Acknowledgments

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Mrs. Miki Elster Founder and President of FYI Trilogy and Vice President and Program Manager for NMT/ THE RIPPLE EFFECTS

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Richard Boyd Community Engagement Specialist with CCISCO (Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization)

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Kimberly Gamboa Community Leader with the Safe Return Project

Rhody McCoy Contra Costa County Director of Economic Empowerment at Rubicon Programs

England Rodgers Rubicon Participant and Collective Impact Institute Graduate

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