

Empowered Path | Re-Entry

A 12-week group psychoeducation program for incarcerated women preparing for re-entry.



CALL OFF YOUR OLD TIRED ETHICS
www.coyoteri.org

Bella Robinson
Executive Director
Bella@coyotreri.org | info@coyoteri.org
(401) 525 8757
Lindsey Jennings, MSW (Facilitator)
Health and Safety Education Specialist
lberrycoyoteri@gmail.com

Empowered Path is a pilot prison-based group psychoeducation program, created by COYOTE RI, in support of the RIDOC's ongoing reentry efforts. This program intends to aid in improving outcomes for women currently incarcerated at the ACI, who are nearing the end of their incarceration period.

Since its original founding in 1979, Coyote Rhode Island has offered expert advice and sensitivity training for social service and law enforcement agencies that come into contact with individuals involved in the commercial sex industry. Reestablished in 2009, Coyote RI writes and advocates for legislation to improve public health and safety outcomes, conducts research in partnership with Brown University, offers a safe haven for sex workers and trafficking victims in crisis, provides harm reduction and hygiene supplies to unhoused Rhode Islanders through weekly street outreach, offers peer-led support groups, and more. Coyote RI's leadership has informed not only statewide advancements, but is also highly regarded nationally and internationally for its activism.

Project Partners

SWOP Behind Bars

Once Incarcerated OH Inc.

Authors

Lindsey Jennings, MSW, COYOTE RI

EMPOWERED PATH | RE-ENTRY PROGRAM

Program Plan

This group will serve women currently incarcerated at RI's ACI with one year or less remaining on their sentence. This group aims to be inclusive and should be offered to any interested qualifying individuals serving within the same facility who identify outside the gender binary.

Specific accommodations will be required when working with this population to ensure the curriculum is accessible, optimizing the effectiveness of the program and satisfaction of the participants. Research studies, as well as data provided by the RIDOC indicate high occurrences of the following disabilities/challenges/sensitivities for adult women who are incarcerated in RI/USA: functional illiteracy 70%, dyslexia 48%, History of Trauma/Adverse Childhood Experiences 90-97%, Traumatic Brain Injuries 21% [Additional Note: 35% with a TBI history experienced their first TBI in an act of violence, with the majority sustaining multiple].

Accommodations, as well as research data provided for this program will be cited in the bibliography.

This group will be closed, as group norms/rules will be established collaboratively in the first session. A closed group will allow more opportunities for connection and trust among participants, which better facilitates openness among group members. This program is designed for 8-12 individuals. There should be no more than 12 participants per group. The group will meet weekly for approximately 2 hours.

Goals of the group: The primary goal of this group is to increase participant's confidence in successful transition to the community post-release. Learning objectives of this course aim to support a decrease in recidivism rates as well. In addition, this program intends to function as a bridge through the building of positive rapport to community support available through COYOTE RI upon release from the ACI.

Learning objectives include: provide preparedness information for effective community integration post-release, increased feelings of overall self-acceptance/self-esteem, skill build around emotional regulation and healthy coping, offer information on healthy relationships and recognizing unhealthy relationships, and practice interpersonal skills including appropriate boundary setting.

Materials Checklist for each session:

Flip chart

Colour markers (if possible for facilitator)

Cards for name tags

Photocopies of all handouts needed for session

Photocopies of relevant evaluation sheet

Pens and/or pencils for group members

Blank paper for group members

Folders

Any extra materials you may need (poems, audio files, usb)

Agenda should be written out (every week) on flipchart and adhere to a similar structure to create consistency, while allowing room for flexibility:

- Check-in/icebreaker/activity
- Review schedule for session
- Activity on topic
- Information providing on topic of week's session
- Group discussion
- Closing activity that should be centered on grounding, meditation, stress relief techniques.

Session 1: Introduction to Empowered Path/Defining Empowerment

Primary goals: Create a warm welcoming environment, establish rapport,

Materials required: Name tags, flip chart, color markers for facilitator, notebooks and folders for handouts for participants, pens/pencils, weekly evaluation sheets, and demographic information sheet (although this would ideally be filled out prior to session with support from case manager or other supportive staff to account to accessibility needs and privacy within the group setting.

Note: collect name tags for seating at the session's end each week and bring in for participants so they are less likely to get lost.

Introduction: Facilitator introduces herself including details about why she is running the course, qualifications, and a personal touch. Provide an introduction on what Coyote, RI is, and support services that will be available to the participants post-release.

Icebreaker activity (Carousel Game).

Course Details:

Take about 5-10 minutes to describe the course briefly, making sure to explain the following:

How the format works,
including the length of each session,
the length of the entire course,
and how often the group will meet.

How to communicate in between the sessions with guidelines, expectations and explanation of when this is appropriate and when case manager or another party is most appropriate.

Discuss with members their views on the length and frequency of breaks (two 5 min breaks versus one 10 min break).

Group Expectations/Norms

Hand raising activity: list of situations where women will raise or not raise their hands if this situation has caused them to hold back their contribution, ideas, or feelings (refer to Basic Process Guidelines Sheet).

Discussion: How can we best support one another and make sure everyone is heard and treated with respect?

Collaboratively Establishing Expectations/Norms:

At the outset, it is very important to ascertain what members of the group expect from each other, and from the facilitators and the course itself. It is also important that the facilitator join in this discussion and explain what you hope for the group, and be sure to add in any essential rules that may have been missed (refer to basic process guidelines sheet.)

Write each expectation on a 'Group Expectations' flip chart.

Once completed, ask if the group members are happy with these expectations, and if they would like to contribute some more ideas.

Once the flip chart is complete, put the sheet up on the wall to use as a reference point.

This sheet should ALSO be put on the wall at each session as a reminder, along with weekly plan, and can be used to look back on at the end of the group to see if the expectations have been met.

EMPOWERED PATH | RE-ENTRY PROGRAM

This establishes ground rules for how everyone will treat one another and information provided in the group.

The participants will sign the flip chart at the bottom agreeing to these.

Discussion: Define empowerment together. What would an empowered life after release from the ACI look like?

“We all deserve ownership over our own stories, and our own lives.”

Homework: Journaling ideas for the week given out. “Please pick one prompt to write or draw on, or if other ideas on this topic/discussion come to you while writing, please feel free to bring those ideas in next week as well.”

- What does self-esteem mean to you, and how much do you feel that definition fits with how you feel about yourself now?
- What are some things you feel you have a right to or deserve?
- What do you feel prevents the growth of your self-esteem?
- Write about two positive things you have done this week.

Session 2: Self-Esteem/Self-Compassion

Check-in

Review agenda

Read Poem: I Love My Love

Discussion on journaling prompts from last week

What is self-compassion?

Activity: self-esteem group activity

Provide handouts on: RAIN technique,

Watch or listen to audio of Gabor Mate on authenticity & healing.

Discussion: How do we transform our pain into power?

What does 'healing' mean to you?

May use flip chart for various ideas on this.

Grounding: Practice self-holding exercise together, discussion around meditation's flexibility.

Provide handout on self-holding.

Explain meditation can and should be flexible and to listen to your own body and where it is most comforting to place your hands. If the experience is too uncomfortable or it becomes distressing to connect to your body during meditation, you do not have to continue the meditation/mindfulness practice. Feel free to pull out your composition notebook. Please let the facilitator know afterward if you experience any discomfort and we can discuss how to accommodate if possible.

Homework: Dear society

Session 3: Racism, oppression, social identity

Check in

Review agenda

Discussion of homework 'dear society' invite sharing of letters but not mandatory

Handouts: social identity wheel, origin of difference (used in discussion), socialization

Activity: complete handout on 'wheels...'

Discuss personal and social identity wheel questions, process of creating their wheel, encourage participants to continue exploring this outside of group.

How do we persevere in a broken world?

Emphasize community and self-care (not marketed self-care, genuine self care).

What can you do or are you doing currently with the limits you face to care for yourself in this environment? What about post-release?

Grounding activity:

Session 4: Healthy Anger/Communicating Anger

Check in

Review agenda

Discuss journal questions

Read poem Defuse Me

Handout/activity: iceberg with discussion questions

Additional discussion: What purpose does your anger serve?

“Anger is the part of you that loves you the most.”

Homework: “Violence is...” to discuss next week

Session 5: healthy versus unhealthy relationships

Check in

Review agenda

Discuss ‘violence is...’ homework (allow time to complete/consider if some participants haven’t finished this.

Handout: power and control wheel versus equality wheel

Information sharing: Boundaries definition and healthy boundary setting, Passive, passive aggressive, aggressive and assertive. Demonstrate broken record technique and use of I statements.

Discussion: how comfortable is everyone with boundary setting and walking the line of assertiveness? Any examples of past or current situations where group members can support one another in determining how to set a boundary with someone, or discuss past situations (that may show up as patterns)

Discuss concept of self-abandonment. Does this resonate?