**Empowered Path | Re-Entry**

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



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**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

Lareese Harvey, Once Incarcerated OH Inc.

**AUTHOR**

Lindsey Jennings, MSW, COYOTE RI

**PROGRAM PLAN**

Population this group intends to serve: 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.

Considerations: 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.

Group details: 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.

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

**Materials Checklist for Each Session:**

* Flip chart
* Color markers (if possible, for facilitator)
* Cards for name tags/place settings
* Photocopies of all handouts needed for the session
* Photocopies of relevant evaluation sheet(s)
* Pens and/or pencils for group members
* Blank paper for group members
* Folders
* Icebreaker Activities List
* Any extra materials you may need (poems, audio files, usb, poster paper)
* ‘Focus on the Future’ book

Agenda should be written out (every week) on flipchart and adhere to a similar structure to create consistency, while also allowing room for some 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 of session:** Create a warm welcoming environment, establish rapport, establish group norms/rules.

**Materials required:**

* Name cards for desks [Note: Collect name tags for seating at session end each week and bring in for participants so they are less likely to get lost.}
* Flip chart
* Color markers
* Notebooks
* Red folders for handouts [Include flyers for Coyote including support groups and flyer for transitional services offered through ACI]
* Pens
* Focus on the Future books
* Weekly Evaluation sheets
* Demographic Information sheet. [Ideally filled out prior to initial session for privacy purposes and to assist individuals with challenges around reading/writing]
* Basic Process Guidelines Sheet
* Icebreaker activity instructions for facilitator

**Introduction:**

Facilitator introduces herself including details about intentions of teaching this course, qualifications, and a personal touch.

Provide an introduction to Coyote RI’s organizational role and support services that will be available to the participants post-release such as assistance with retrieving documents, Sister 2 Sister support group, Healing Hustlers support group, resource referral (supplemental to transitional services offered by the ACI).

**Course Details:**

Facilitator will spend 5-10 minutes providing a course description, explaining the following:

* How the format works.
* Length of each session [1.5 - 2 hours]
* Length of the entire course [12 weeks]
* How often the group will meet [1x per week]
* Participation/good time:
	+ 1 day per month for participation
	+ 5 days for completion of course
* Attendance expectations to receive participation/completion credit
* Purpose of weekly, mid-course, and final evaluation forms
* Communication guidelines for in-between sessions (Facilitator can set expectations around this/provide explanation for when this is appropriate and when another party is most appropriate to contact, such as the participant’s case worker).
* Discuss with members their thoughts on the length and frequency of breaks (two 5 min breaks versus one 10 min break). Breaks will be held within the same room, but allow for unstructured time for members to develop trust among one another, ask the facilitator questions one-on-one, and provide a ‘brain break’ for better information processing.

**Icebreaker activity** Carousel Game [MAY CHANGE THIS]

**Group Expectations/Norms**

Hand raising activity: Using the situation examples provided in the Basic Process Guidelines Sheet, instruct the women to raise their hand if the answer is ‘yes’ to any of the statements. Each statement is a circumstance that may have caused the participants in the past to hold back their contribution, ideas, or feelings in group settings.

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

**Collaboratively Establishing Expectations/Norms:**

It is very important when beginning the group to determine what members of the group expect from each other, the facilitator, and the course. It is also important that the facilitator join in this discussion and explain what they hope for the group. The facilitator should be sure to add in any essential rules that may have been missed by members, refer to items listed in the box at the top of the Basic Process Guidelines Sheet. Write each expectation on a flipchart page titled ‘Group Norms/Expectations.’

Once completed, ask if the group members feel content with these expectations, and if anything else should be added.

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

*This sheet will be displayed on the wall each session as a reminder of the collaborative group contract.*

This sheet can be used to look back on at the end of the group to see if the expectations/goals have been met, or throughout should it be necessary to refer to for group norm violations. This exercise 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 at the end of the activity.

*The plan for each session should also be present at every group, preferably prior to participants walking into the room and reviewed at the beginning.* This is a helpful practice in reducing anxiety members may experience, particularly for those who may struggle with transitions.

**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. [Write on flipchart for group members to copy OR ideally, print questions]

“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 deserve in your life? Have a right to? Want/need?
* What currently or in the past has prevented the growth of your self-esteem? What is within your control?
* Write about two positive things you have done this week.

**SESSION 2: SELF-ESTEEM/SELF-COMPASSION**

Materials:

* Name cards from previous week
* Flipchart
* Markers
* Poster paper
* Weekly Evaluation sheets
* FACILITATOR PRINTOUT:
	+ Self-esteem group activity (instructions)
* HANDOUTS FOR PARTICIPANTS:
	+ Trauma-informed meditation
	+ Poem From: I Love My Love,
	+ RAIN Exercise
	+ Self-Holding Exercise
	+ Personal/Social Identity Wheel
* Usb with downloaded video
* Pens

**Check-in.** [LIST OF CHECK-IN QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES NEEDED] **& review agenda.**

**Discussion:** Journal questions from previous week.

**Read:** Poem From: I Love My Love

**Discussion:** *What is self-compassion?*

**Activities:**

* Self-Esteem Group Activity depending on group dynamics, this may be saved for a later session. Use Poster Paper. [Alternative: Listen to Gabor Mate segment, using USB].
* RAIN Technique

**Discussion questions:**

* *What does it mean to transform our pain into power?*
* *What does ‘healing’ mean to you?*
* *“Healing is the restoration of identity” (The Care Center). Eradicating our pain versus integrating it.*

May use the flip chart for ideas.

**Grounding Exercise:**

Prior to meditation exercise, discuss meditation’s flexibility, using the Trauma-informed meditation guide. May discuss participant’s thoughts/feelings to information provided, how this aligns with prior meditation/mindfulness experiences, and ease of implementation.

Provide handout on Self-Holding Exercise. Encourage exploring where self-hold works best for each person, where it is most comforting, as this is different for each person. Remind participants that meditation can and should be flexible.

Advise participants to listen to their own bodies. Note that if the experience is too uncomfortable or they notice mindfulness/meditation exercises activating fight/flight/freeze responses or otherwise causing distress, they are able to listen to the wisdom of their bodies and do not have to continue the meditation/mindfulness practice. [Alternatives during group practice can include simply mentally disengaging, drawing/writing in notebook, or anything other activity that is non-disruptive].

Facilitator may also say, “please let me know afterward as well if you experience any discomfort and we can discuss how to accommodate, if possible.”

**Homework:** “Violence is…” handout. Participants should be given the option to complete this next week instead during the session if this provides better emotional safety. If group members prefer to complete during the week, a reminder should be given to pause before/after each question and scan the body for any increased sensations of tension. If the activity feels overwhelming at any point, stop and time will be given to complete the following week.

**SESSION 3: HEALTHY ANGER/COMMUNICATING ANGER**

**Materials:**

* Flipchart
* Markers
* Name cards
* Weekly Evaluation sheets
* Extra pens
* Extras of “Violence is…”
* HANDOUTS:
	+ Defuse Me
	+ Anger Iceberg (2 Handouts)
	+ Falling Back in Love with Being Human Quote
	+ Personal and Social Identity Wheel (Homework)

**Check-in and review agenda.**

**Read Poem:** Defuse Me as a segway to discussion.

*What does this poem mean?*

**Discussion:** “Violence is…”, sharing is optional.

**Activity/Discussion:**

Provide Anger Iceberg handout. Use flipchart if helpful.

* *What purpose does your anger serve?*
* *How can your anger be channeled into something beneficial?*

**Grounding activity:**

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

Read the quote from ‘Falling Back in Love with Being Human.’

**Homework:**

Personal/Social Identity Wheel. Explain how to complete in advance, the facilitator should be sure to allow space for any questions. Let participants know that answers do not need to be shared with the group. Encourage them to be as honest as possible when completing and think about the following:

* Identities you think about most often.
* Identities you think about least often.
* Identities that have the strongest effect on how you perceive or define yourself.
* Identities that have the strongest effect on how others perceive you.

Facilitator will plan to do this homework along with participants for the following week.

**SESSION 4: SOCIAL AND PERSONAL IDENTITY, RACISM, AND OPPRESSION**

Materials:

* Flipchart
* Markers
* Poster paper
* Extra pens
* Name cards
* Weekly Evaluation sheets
* Cycle of Socialization
* HANDOUTS:
	+ Additional copies of Personal/Social Identity Wheel
	+ Dear Society Parts 1 & 2
	+ Origin of Difference
	+ Color Breathing

**Check-in & review agenda.**

**Discussion:** of homework Personal/Social Identity Wheel. *How did it feel to complete this?* Sharing details is not necessary, although should be allowed if desired.

**Information Sharing:** Discuss Cycle of Socialization using flip chart (facilitator will use sheet as guide, may or may not be useful as handout). Members can help contribute to this.

**Activity:** Complete Dear Society Part 1 (Part 2 can be saved for homework)

**Discussion:**

* *How do we persevere in a broken world?*
* Emphasize the importance of 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?*

The facilitator may choose to use flipchart for idea sharing.

**Grounding activity:** Color Breathing

**Homework**: Dear Society Part 2

**SESSION 5: HEALTHY VERSUS UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**

**Materials:**

Flipchart

Markers

Handouts

Extra pens

Name cards

**Check-in & Review agenda.**

**Activity:**  “Dear Society Part 2” homework (allow group members who did not complete time to complete now). *How did it feel to complete this?* Allow group members to share answers.

**Handout:** Power and Control Wheel versus Equality Wheel.

**Information sharing:**

* ‘Boundaries’ define (may use flip chart).
* What does ‘healthy boundary setting’ look like?
* Passive, passive-aggressive, aggressive and assertive communication.
* Demonstrate broken record technique and use of I statements. Have participants practice in pairs, if this suits group dynamics.
* Boundaries are kind to the other person as well, explain why. Also explain that boundaries should be defined as rules we have for ourselves, never rules to impose on others. Explain this difference with examples.

**Discussion:**

* *How comfortable are you with boundary setting?*
* *Are there people in our lives where boundary setting is particularly difficult and why?*
* *Self-abandonment - define. Does this term resonate? Can you think of a time in which you abandoned yourself, whether or not you realized it this at the time?*

Use this opportunity for group members to support one another; the facilitator should be mindful to intervene gently if a group member begins to dominate the conversation at this time and redirect questioning if the discussion is not appearing to become escalating rather than beneficial.

**Grounding Activity:**

Revisit self-holding exercise with variation, ideally seated. Begin with guiding slowed, deep breaths.

Participants begin with both hands on lap, then move to lower belly, solar plexus, upper chest/heart area, shoulders/neck, forehead/back of head, top of head.

As the group goes through this sequence, the facilitator will guide members through affirmations, having participants repeat phrases.

Break up longer affirmations, one sentence at a time.

*I am here. I am now. I am safe.*

*I am worthy. I am a work of art. I allow my inner self to be seen and expressed.*

*I have a purpose on this planet.*

*I love myself unconditionally. I open my heart to love from others and for others.*

*What I say matters.*

*I trust my intuition.*

*I am a part of this universe, and my place in it is important.*

Remaining weeks will function as a ‘book club’ on Focus on the Future book. Supplemental activities will be included in this packet.

DRAFTING

Session 6: HEALTHY VERSUS UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS (Cont.)/

Session 7: COMMUNICATION AND BOUNDARIES

Session 8: SEXUAL HEALTH, OVERDOSE PREVENTION, RESOURCES

 Overdose prevention strategies

Nasal narcan administration overview and visual demonstration

 Sexual Health

 Correct way to put on a male condom to prevent breakage

 Female condoms as option

Information on dental dams, and options for when one is not available

 Menopause/vaginal dryness - use of lubricant to prevent condom breakage

 Increased risk of contracting STI/STDs with anal sex

 Consent

Session 9: SHAME/FEAR

Session 10: FINANCIAL LITERACY/BUDGETING/SURVIVING CAPITALISM

Session 11: PLANNING FOR POST-RELEASE

Session 12: TERMINATION SESSION