



2024

REENTRY LISTENING SESSIONS

WOMEN'S COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP

Hosted at Indiana Women's Prison in partnership with Notre Dame
Programs for Education in Prison & Marian University

OVERVIEW

Goal: To understand the women's **needs, priorities,** and **expectations** around reentry

On January 16 & 19, the WCP team hosted listening sessions with the students currently enrolled in the Women's College Partnership at Indiana Women's Prison. The purpose was to create space for the students to share their fears, thoughts, and questions around reentry. This will allow the work done by WCP to be centered and guided by the student's needs.

The following report provides an overview of what was discussed during the sessions.

"The world is different than when I left, and I am different than when I left - in a better way. I am going somewhere foreign to me and have no idea how or what to do to start."

QUESTIONS

- What feelings come up when reentry is mentioned?
- What are the pieces of reentry?
- What are your priorities around reentry?
- What are your career goals?
- How do you expect your degree to prepare you for employment?
- What don't I (Paige) understand about reentry?
- During our student surveys at the end of last semester, I read the quote, "I've not reached the point [in my sentence] to focus on reality" – How can we make thinking about reentry for everyone, not just those who may be released soon?

RESPONSES

Below are the pieces of reentry identified by students

Housing

- Transitional housing
- Renting an apartment
 - Affordable, safe, and accessible with past convictions
- Subsidized housing
- How to pay utilities
 - Utility assistance

Documentation

- Obtaining Social Security Card
- Birth Certificates
- State ID or Driver's License

Health

- Obtaining health records from prison
- Medication
- Insurance (public or private)
- Finding a doctor
- Navigating doctors as a woman, having doctors not listen
- Dental & Vision options

Finances

- Addressing past debt
 - Driving tickets, loans, student loans, credit debt, etc.
- Credit and debit cards
- Building credit
- Banking
- Retirement savings
- Avoiding scams
- Taxes

Employment

- Finding a job
 - What do I want to do or be?
 - Stable, sustainable, and sense of achievement
 - Jobs that hire with convictions
- Online applications, LinkedIn
- Writing resumes and cover letters
- Interviewing
 - Navigating the past conviction question
- Starting own business or non-profit

"I look forward to having a real chance at life. To live sober and have the best incentive - living my own hard work - to back me up. I'll finally have the chance to show ALL the people I let down that change is possible and I am proof of that. And that, if they let me, I can make them proud."

Education

- Finishing degree and continuing education
 - Application and admission process
 - Choosing degree paths
 - What does education do for you with employment?
- Tuition, loans, and financial aid
- Technology access and learning management systems
- Other opportunities: certificates, internships, trade school

Rights

- Voting rights
- Housing and employment rights
- Rights if stopped by authorities
- Advocacy and lobbying

"I literally have nothing. And that's terrifying. How do I come back from this? I don't know how to begin."

Transportation

- Bus passes, bus routes
- Other public transportation options
- Buying a car
- Obtaining a driver's license

Basic Needs

- Clothing
- Hygiene items
- Food pantries
- SNAP benefits (Food Stamps)
- Government assistance programs

Technology

- Obtaining a phone and laptop or tablet
- Navigating technology and the internet
- Setting up email
- Security and passwords
- Social media

Mental Health

- Treatment options
- Therapy
 - Informed on PTSD from incarceration
 - Affordable
- Trauma, types of mental health disorders
- Navigating bias and stereotypes around incarceration

Relationships

- Building healthy relationships
- Domestic violence
- Reconnecting with children
 - Getting custody
- Integrating with family
- Processing loss and grief

Community

- Religious connections
- Mentorship and guides (both having one and being one)
- Support groups
- Giving back to the program, support others

Skill Building

- Goal setting and pacing
- Political correctness
- Self-advocacy
- Coping strategies when it gets hard
- Healthy Communication
- Navigating conflict

"I've never had the ability to be an adult and am overwhelmed by all the aspects of it. Everyday living will be different and I'd like to get a plan in order but am afraid of failing the plan and becoming discourages but have too much anxiety to not have a plan."

Other Areas Mentioned

- Parole
- Disability
- Deportation
- Substance abuse

Programmatic Questions

- What reentry pieces can I work on internally vs. externally post-release
- What happens if students transfer to another facility or work-program? Can we still have contact with reentry support from WCP?
- Can we have student-led clubs, interest groups, and/or extracurriculars?

"Extremely nervous about life. Going from everything I 'need' fits in a tote to,,, the world."

TRANSITIONS

The women gave examples of things that change during reentry that many may not think of

- Riding in cars
- Shopping
- No bed time
- Wearing regular clothes
- Cooking
- Dark rooms
- Taking sick days and being able to miss work
- Being in a bathing suit
- Holidays
- Not having to wear shower shoes
- Being around men
- Wearing hats inside
- Having control over the thermostat
- Paying with a credit/debit card



WHAT DON'T I UNDERSTAND ABOUT REENTRY?

- The impact of staff treatment and disempowerment
- Grief and loss when you are in prison and can't go to funerals or call people not on your call list

"Going back to the same environment that got me locked up in the first place."

- Navigating triggers – sight, smells, sounds, etc.
- How to create small talk or casual conversation

"Wrapping my mind around the fact that complete strangers want to help."

- Having autonomy, being able to make choices, but still not having control
- Being in crowds or people moving in multiple directions when you are used to order and walking in lines
- Getting used to touch and physical contact when you have been in a zero-contact facility
- Not being used to yelling or silence

"What don't you know? How to explain that escapes me. Generally, how we have to relearn everything - how to deal with people after having had to be submissive in an environment where advocating for yourself or others is a 'lockable' offense, the constant dehumanization of all of us to the point that we lose who we are. How do we go back? How do we go forward?"

2024 REENTRY STRATEGIES

What the Women's College Partnership is doing in response to support our students

Writing a **reentry manual** for the state of Indiana, compiling resources and guiding users through all aspects of reentry. This manual will also grow, with new additions being published to cover gaps that emerge.

Building **community connections** that can help individuals reintegrate into society, navigate government benefits, and build relationships.

Develop **workshops** to bring into Indiana Women's Prison to prepare students with various employment skills (resume building, career panels, interview practice), reentry sessions (navigating housing, technology practice, voting), and soft skills (goal setting, healthy communication, political correctness).

Provide continued support post-release, ensuring that students are connected with our **reentry staff member** and that they have a team to assist them in finding and navigating resources.

"I would love to use my experience to shed light for the other women in WCP to be able to navigate their release. Any advice or pointers I can give would be an honor."

Connect students with universities and other educational opportunities to help them **continue education** to the extend they want.

Work with students on the inside to **prepare for reentry**, starting years prior to their expected release date to prepare for potential modifications.

Work to **connect alumni post release** to create a community of peer-support, understanding, and camaraderie as alumni of the Women's College Partnership.

Be an active member of Marion County Reentry Coalition and other organizations working in reentry to stay connected with the most **up to date resources and supports**.

"Thank you for caring and giving hope in the midst of a hopeless situation. Time - sentences - are hard to deal with especially when the number seems unbearable, but you acknowledge me despite the number."

Keep an updated and growing list of **employers** through the state that hire individuals who are previously incarcerated.

Work with individuals to acquire and learn **technology**, whether receiving personal devices through the Affordable Connectivity Program, renting laptops as a student through Marian University, or utilizing WCP laptops.

Support our students immediately upon release by supplying **hygiene baskets** that provide essentials to cover basic needs.

Connect with IndyGo bus systems to provide **discounted bus passes** for the first couple months for returning citizens in WCP who are living in Indianapolis.

