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### Hopeful Homecomings: Women, Prison Reentry and the Arts

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# Hopeful Homecomings: Women, Prison Reentry, and the Arts

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Community Partner: Judy Dworin Performance Project

Faculty Advisor: Judy Dworin

## Significance

There is a growing interest in providing arts programming for women within and outside prison walls as a tool for rehabilitation and transformation.

This project explores why and how do arts organizations use arts programming to help formerly incarcerated women transition from prison back into society?

## Goals of Study

- 1 • Provide prison activists, artists interested in prison work, as well as those specifically with an interest in reentry with an opportunity to see what existing programs are available.
- 2 • Increase communication and collaboration among those individuals and organizations.
- 3 • Serve as a catalyst for establishing future models, initiatives, and public attention on this work.

## Methods

Comparative Qualitative Study of 3 arts organizations:

1. Poetic Justice Project (PJP)
2. Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP)
3. Judy Dworin Performance Project (JDPP)

- Web Analyses
- Surveys and Interviews

## A snapshot of the organizations

|   | PJP        | PCAP   | JDPP   |
|---|------------|--|--|
| <b>Year Founded</b>                           | 2009       | 1990   | 1989   |
| <b>Location</b>                               | California | Michigan   | Connecticut  |
| <b>Number of Women's prisons in the state</b> | 3          | 1  | 1  |
| <b>Programs for formerly incarcerated</b>     |            | The Linkage Project                              | Women Beyond Boundaries                                  |
| <b>Arts Approach</b>                          | • Theater  | • Theater<br>• Visual Arts<br>• Creative Writing | • Theater<br>• Dance<br>• Visual Arts<br>• Story Telling |



Judy Dworin Performance Project  
In My Shoes Performance (2014)

## Findings

### Why arts programming?

|  | PJP | PCAP | JDPP |
|--|-----|------|------|
| <b>To increase public awareness about incarceration and those affected</b> | X   |      | X    |
| <b>To change public image of the incarcerated population</b>               | X   |      |      |
| <b>To reduce recidivism</b>  | X   |      |      |
| <b>To increase self sufficiency</b>  |     | X    |      |
| <b>To increase communication skills</b>                                    |     | X    |      |
| <b>To provide a community of support</b>                                   |     | X    |      |
| <b>To support creativity</b>   |     |      | X    |
| <b>To provide financial support for formerly incarcerated individuals</b>  |     |      | X    |

### Common themes across all 3 organizations to explain how art programming is used:

- To develop life skills
- To give the women a space to explore their feelings
- To give the women a space to share their work via community performances and exhibitions
- To create dialogue between formerly incarcerated women and people who may not know much about incarceration

## Conclusion

Although these organizations are limited in resources, my findings suggest that the arts programs provide a community of support for formerly incarcerated women, increase their self sufficiency, and increase public awareness about incarceration and those affected.



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