

The IF Project

We are a collaboration of law enforcement, currently and previously incarcerated adults and community partners focused on intervention, prevention and reduction in incarceration and recidivism. Our work is built upon—and inspired by—people sharing their personal experiences surrounding the issues of incarceration. This project is based on the question:

If there was something someone could have said or done that would have changed the path that led you here, what would it have been?

WHY? In the United States, there are over 6.9 million people in prison, in jail, on probation or parole—one in every 34 adults. Perhaps even more alarming is that women are the fastest growing segment of the incarcerated population, increasing at nearly double the rate of men since 1985. The vast majority of these women are mothers and women of color.

THE BACKSTORY: In 2008, Seattle police officer Kim Bogucki walked through the gates of the Washington Corrections Center for Women, intent on asking a group of mothers for permission to work with their school-aged daughters in a Girl Scouts Beyond Bars troop. On that day, Bogucki asked the mothers a critical question: "If there was something someone could have said or done that would have changed the path that led you here, what would it have been?" To date, The IF Project has over 3,000 answers to that question.

On that day, Renata Abramson was a repeat offender serving a 9-year sentence. Kim's question struck a chord. In the following days, Renata took it upon herself to answer the question in writing and invited her fellow prisoners to do the same. A month later, Renata handed Kim a stack of raw and poignant essays and The IF Project was born.

THE VOICES: The voices that came forth told heartbreaking stories of generations of poverty, neglect, drugs, and physical, emotional and sexual abuse. For the first time, the women were able to express themselves and be vulnerable without judgment. For the first time, Renata saw that a police officer genuinely cared about her, and about ensuring that her children could avoid the seemingly inevitable road to prison. An unlikely relationship between cop and convict was forged. Since 2008, The IF Project has collected thousands responses to the "IF question" and the answers have inspired a full array of prevention, intervention, and awareness programs and a full-length feature documentary film.

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION:

A NEW WAY OF POLICING: The IF Project turns the usually adversarial relationship between cops and criminals on its head. It provides a ground-breaking way to acknowledge the divide, hear the stories, seek to understand—and partner to produce powerful change in individual lives and in our communities.

STORYTELLING FOR CHANGE: The IF Project, a recently completed feature-length documentary film, follows three female prisoners and the unlikely champion they have found in Seattle detective Kim Bogucki. The film documents their journey as they are released, reunited with their families and face life on the outside. We watch as they discover their ability to change, to heal and to find forgiveness. The film provides an intimate and humanizing journey into a world of the locked away and forgotten, and raises important questions about our system of mass incarceration and re-integration into society. We hope to use the film in communities and prisons to spark a conversation about mass incarceration, policing and reentry. To learn more, visit www.theifprojectmovie.com.

IFP Intensive Writing Workshop:

Incarcerated women answer The IF Project question, using expressive writing and creative truth telling to explore their lives with trust and curiosity. Themes include love and forgiveness, rage and shame, grief and loss, and courage and fear. Writing is a cathartic experience for participants and gives them a sense of purpose and hope as they share their journeys to inspire at-risk youth. Since the first workshop in 2008, The IF Project has collected thousands of answers to The IF Project question from incarcerated men, women and youth.

Health & Wellness Workshop:

The IF Project collaborated with The Village, a leadership group of incarcerated women at Washington Corrections Center for Women, to create this 10-week Health and Wellness program focuses on issues relevant to the women it serves, like communication, health and nutrition, conflict resolution, parenting, domestic violence, goal setting, self-esteem, and personal empowerment. Guest facilitators are health & wellness professionals, giving participants a chance to get personal feedback on healthcare goals and concerns. Since its launch in Spring 2016, over 190 women have participated in this program.

Personal Reentry Education Plan (PREP) Class:

This is a 10-week program that focuses on participants developing a personalized reentry plan for their transition back to the community. This curriculum was created in partnership with WCCW Staff and a Curriculum Advisory Committee composed of incarcerated women at WCCW. The program is facilitated by The IF Project staff, and has a strong focus on creating community, trust, and authentic conversation around the needs of women in the reentry process. Topics covered include housing, transportation, access to services/resources, health relationships, family reunification, stigma, personal responsibility, financial literacy, employment readiness, access to education/union membership, and technology. Since its launch in Fall 2016, over 220 women have participated in this program.

In 2018, a focus group of formerly incarcerated women and The IF Project staff worked together to revise and strengthen the curriculum. A new edition of the PREP curriculum and facilitation guide is set to be implemented in the summer of 2019, featuring a core group of 8 sessions with 4 skills-building sessions that are tailored to the personal development levels of the participants.

IFP Youth P.R.E.P:

This 6-session program was developed in response to youth at King County Juvenile Detention Center, who engaged with our original PREP workbook. The original program was developed as a 12-week course at WCCW in 2016 to be gender-responsive planning for successful re-entry. Using this course as a base to develop a youth-responsive curriculum, The IF Project identified the key issues confronting youth who are reintegrating into their families, schools, and communities.