

Successfully Implementing *Project WITH*

Facilitation Tips

- **Establish a “What’s Said Here, Stays Here” guideline** – Create a group tradition at the first session that emphasizes respect, confidentiality, and psychological safety. Explain that while staff must follow mandatory reporting requirements, youth should honor each other by keeping personal stories shared in the group within the group. Reinforce this norm each session—invite youth to repeat the guideline together, post it visibly if allowed by the facility, and model respectful listening. This helps build trust, promotes vulnerability, and supports a healthy group culture.
- **Group size: 6-12 youth** – Keeping the group small ensures meaningful engagement and allows facilitators to provide individualized attention.
- **Select facilitators with lived experience** – Ideally, the *Project WITH* facilitators will have also experienced being in the system in which these lessons are taught. They are very credible messengers of the *Project WITH* content. If not lived experience, then having facilitators who have successfully worked with youth in these settings is critical.
- **Seat the youth in a circle** – Arranging seating in a circle promotes equality, open dialogue, and a safe space for sharing personal reflections.
- **Facilitators sit in the circle with youth** – By participating alongside the youth, facilitators create an atmosphere of trust, reduce hierarchical barriers, and model that all group members are learners.
- **Use tablets to share videos** – Many correctional locations cannot access WIFI for programming. Since videos are used in each lesson, downloading them to a tablet lets you play them without internet access. By subscribing to YouTube Premium you can download the videos on up to 10 tablets for \$14 a month.
- **Consider facilitating two lessons on the same day** - Ideally, we recommend two lessons in a 2-hour session. This allows you to complete the 12 lessons over six sessions. Retaining participants over 12 weeks can be challenging for many reasons.
- **Share a meal with the youth** – Eating together within the 2-hour session fosters a sense of community, breaks down barriers, and encourages informal, meaningful conversations.

- **Utilize the journals for reflection** – Providing youth with *Project WITH* journals gives them a private space to process their thoughts and track their growth throughout the program. Keep the journals in a secure location during the 12 sessions to prevent them from being lost or misplaced at the facility. Youth may take their journals with them once the group has completed the program.
- **Offer excursions upon completion** - Providing participants, including system staff, with experiences upon completing *Project WITH* is a great opportunity to build lasting memories. For example, our team would take youth from Probation Camps to a local camp with zip lines, team-building activities, and other fun shared experiences. Many participants have never experienced these opportunities. Other options include miniature golf, go-karts, escape rooms, and an amusement park.

Collaborating with Credible Messengers to Deliver *Project WITH*

Collaborating with credible messengers with similar lived experiences to those of your participants has been key to the overall impact of *Project WITH*. *Project WITH* was developed in collaboration with people who had been in these systems as youth. Here are some key tips:

1. Engage Trusted Community Networks

- **Clearly articulate** why you need messengers based on the lived experience of your participants.
- **Identify the specific system-impacted communities** from which your participants will be coming.
- **Ensure alignment between** their experiences and the message you want to convey.
- **Partner** with local organizations, advocacy groups, or support networks that serve the system-impacted community.
- **Seek referrals** from trusted leaders within impacted communities.

2. Offer Meaningful Compensation and Support

- **Recognize their contributions** with fair pay, stipends, or other incentives.
- **Provide training and resources** to help them share their stories which can be effectively blended with the curriculum.
- **Offer emotional and logistical support** to ensure their well-being, as this work can be emotionally draining.

Collaborating with Correctional Facilities on Project WITH

When working with correctional facilities to provide programming, community-based organizations must navigate institutional policies, security concerns, and the unique needs of incarcerated individuals. Below are key strategies and best practices for developing and implementing Project WITH:

1. Build Strong Relationships with Facility Staff and Leadership

- **Establish Trust:** Work closely with correctional administrators, wardens, and program coordinators to understand their goals and concerns.
- **Learn the Policies:** Familiarize yourself with security protocols, facility schedules, and approved activities.
- **Communicate Clearly:** Maintain open, transparent communication with facility contacts to ensure program continuity.
- **Understand Their Goals:** As you better understand the facility's goals for the youth. You can find ways to have the program meet their and your goals. Look for the win-win.
- **Invite Staff to Participate:** Ideally, you would have the same staff with you regularly and invite them to be active participants in the circle or even ask them to check in at the beginning of the session.
- **Ask Staff for Feedback:** Following sessions, ask the staff for feedback and advice about the group. They spend time with the participants daily, can provide insight into challenges, and share the growth they have seen in the group.

2. Address Security and Logistical Considerations

- **Understand Facility Rules:** Ensure compliance with contraband policies, staff-to-participant ratios, and movement restrictions.
- **Be Flexible:** Expect scheduling changes and delays due to facility lockdowns or other disruptions.
- **Train Staff and Volunteers:** Prepare facilitators for the correctional environment, including de-escalation techniques and trauma-informed approaches.

3. Foster Engagement and Trust with Participants

- **Use Strength-Based Approaches:** Focus on empowerment, resilience, and future opportunities rather than just past mistakes.
- **Encourage Active Participation:** Utilize discussion groups, hands-on activities, and peer mentoring to enhance learning.
- **Be Consistent and Reliable:** Showing up as scheduled builds credibility and reinforces commitment to participants' success.