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Helping At Risk Women Transition Back Home

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Cover Page Footnote

The authors wish to acknowledge all the hard work and efforts of the following individuals, who additionally helped plan and carry out the conference: Stefanie Ashley, ECU Facilitation Specialist and owner of Artfully Yours Studio; Laura Newhart, Chair and Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy and Religion; Dr. Jaleh Rezaie, Associate Dean, STEM-H Institute; Elizabeth Wachtel, Acting Vice President for Enrollment Management, Marketing and University Relations; Colleen Schneck, Chair and Professor, Occupational Therapy; Laura Melius, Director, ECU Career Services; Gayle Partain, Certified Yoga Instructor; April Barnes, ECU Director of Student Life; Reverend Daniel M. Newman, PhD., DD, Holistic Health Consultant and Author of *Grief Behind Bars*; and Karrie Adkins, Program Coordinator, Office of Regional Stewardship.

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An expanding movement within higher education has attempted to make universities more relevant and responsive to the communities and states in which they are located, utilizing community-based partnerships to enhance student service learning opportunities and strengthen their own communities. These partnerships provide a mechanism by which underserved populations might receive more attention. This article documents Eastern Kentucky University's partnership with a community-based agency that serves low-income individuals and families in central Kentucky counties and improves the lives and confidence of women involved with the criminal justice system by offering them coping skills, tools and resources that will help them to view themselves as valued members of the community.

Keywords: At risk women, University-community partnerships, Women empowerment, Prison reentry

Although women are incarcerated at far lower rates than men, they comprise the fastest growing segment of the incarcerated offender population, increasing at almost double the rate of men since 1980 (Carson & Golinelli, 2013; The Sentencing Project, 2014). Between 2000 and 2008, the number of men in prisons and jails grew by only 5 percent, while the number of incarcerated women grew by about 15 percent (Guerino, Harrison, & Sabol, 2012). Women are also the fastest growing prison population in Kentucky. Between the years 1977 and 2004, Kentucky's female prison population grew by nearly 1,000 percent, outpacing other states (Frost, Greene, & Pranis, 2006; Harrison & Beck, 2006). However, female offenders face different challenges and barriers related to reentering society than male offenders (Bloom, 2003; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004; Blanchette & Brown, 2006). Researchers Bloom et al. (2004) claim that public policy has ignored the context of women's lives and that women in the criminal justice system have suffered disproportionately as a result of ill-informed public policy (p. 31). As underscored by Shay (2009), "though incarcerated women may be locked up, they should not be overlooked" (p. 390).

This article documents the events and lessons related to a one-day empowerment conference for women offenders in the state of Kentucky. The idea for this conference derived from a cohort of university faculty and the director of a nonprofit substance abuse recovery center who collaborated to develop a pilot program (i.e., women's empowerment conference) utilizing principles and strategies identified by gender-responsive programming literature. This article serves as Part I of a longer-term strategy to use this event model and its lessons to focus attention on public policy problems associated with at risk women, and how universities can foster strong, healthy and livable communities by utilizing community partners as co-educators.

Prison Reentry and Women Offenders

The United States has the highest documented incarceration rate in the world, with an estimated 2.2 million people currently held in a state and federal prisons or local jails (Walmsley, 2013; Guerino et al., 2012).¹ At year end 2012 the BJS reported 6,937,600 offenders as being under supervision within adult correctional systems, with an estimated 1 in every 50 US adults supervised in the community on probation or parole (Glaze & Herbeman, 2013). Without treatment or other intervention, an estimated 67.5 percent of persons released will be rearrested within three years, and nearly half of those will return to prison (Langan & Levin, 2002). Given that BJS reentry trends indicate that 95 percent of all state prisoners will be released from prison, with nearly 80 percent released to parole supervision, one of the fastest growing social concerns in the United States is *prisoner reentry*, or the process by which former offenders transition back to society (Hughes & James, 2003). Unfortunately, the chances of a successful reentry for released offenders are low:

The typical profile of today's former prisoner is young, black and unskilled. Most of those released from prison today have serious social and medical problems. They remain largely uneducated, unskilled, and usually without solid family supports. Most also have young children who, as a result of having had a parent incarcerated, are five times as likely to be incarcerated later in life. (Petersilia, 2003, p. 3)

The partnering of criminal justice, social services, and community based services has quickly become the preferred solution for addressing the daunting problems associated with America's burgeoning correctional system and the high rates of recidivism. And yet, despite a growing body of evidence that documents critical gender differences related to criminal behaviors for both male and female offenders, most states continue to use risk assessment tools, best practices and treatment programs created for male offenders to respond to female offenders (Bloom, 2003; Bloom et al., 2004; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Immarigeon, 2006; Morash, Bynum, & Koons, 1998).

Women in prison have needs that are different than men, stemming in part from their disproportionate victimization from sexual or physical abuse and their responsibility for children (Morash et al., 1998). Jeremy Travis, Director of the National Institute of Justice, notes that women are also more likely to be addicted to drugs and have mental illnesses (Morash, et al., 1998). Travis also noted that many states and jail jurisdictions have little special provision, either in management or programming, for meeting the needs of women, even though many of these differences were reported by BJS statistics as early as 1991 (Snell, 1994):

- More than 43 percent of women inmates (but only 12 percent of men) said they had been physically or sexually abused before their admission to prison;
- Women serving a sentence for violent offenses were about twice as likely as their male counterparts to have committed offenses against someone close to them.
- More than two-thirds of all women in prison had children under the age of 18, and among them only 25 percent (versus 90 percent for the men) said their children were living with the other parent.
- Women in prison used more drugs and used those drugs more frequently than men. About 54 percent used drugs in the month before their current offense, compared with 50 percent for the men.

Socioeconomic issues also present substantial barriers to community reintegration for women. Greenfeld and Snell (1999), for example, reported that 60 percent of incarcerated women were not employed full-time when they were arrested compared with 40 percent of men, and nearly one-third of the women were receiving welfare benefits prior to their arrests. The growing body of research related to women offenders and programming needs confirm this disturbing and persistent trend (Henderson, 1998; Browne, Miller, and Maguin, 1999; Bloom, 2003; Brewer-Smyth, Burgess & Shultz, 2004; Carson & Golinelli, 2013; The Sentencing Project, 2014).

Taken together, these studies support the argument that in order to design gender-responsive treatment programs that match female offenders' needs, it is important to consider the demographics and various life factors that trigger criminogenic patterns (Bloom, 2003; Blanchette & Brown, 2006). Bloom et al. (2004) offer this definition to explain what is meant by gender-responsive programming:

Gender-responsive means creating an environment through site selection, staff selection, program development, content, and material that reflects an understanding of the realities of women's lives and addresses the issues of the participants.

Feminist theories suggest gender-responsive programming should begin with an understanding that differences between men and women with regard to their capacity and need for relatedness and connection should be viewed as sources of strength, not weakness (Bloom et al., 2004). In other words, women respond better to treatment when they feel safe and secure and their interactions with leaders or group members are mutual as opposed to one-sided. Differences among women related to race, class, culture, and sexual orientation should also be acknowledged in programmatic frameworks (Bloom et al., 2004; Blanchette & Brown, 2006). Bloom et al. (2004, p. 43) draws heavily on the gender-specific research to offer the following principles that speak to the reality of women's lives and address concerns about the management and treatment of women offenders in the criminal justice system:

- Acknowledge that gender makes a difference.
- Create an environment based on safety, respect, and dignity.
- Develop policies, practices, and programs that are relational and promote healthy connections to children, family, significant others, and the community.
- Address the issues of substance abuse, trauma, and mental health through comprehensive, integrated, culturally relevant services and appropriate supervision.
- Provide women with opportunities to improve their socioeconomic conditions; and
- Establish a system of community supervision and reentry with comprehensive, collaborative services.

With the aforementioned studies and gender-responsive principles in mind, a cohort of Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) faculty and their community partner, Kentucky River Foothills Development Council, Inc. (KRFDC) designed and implemented a one-day conference for a group of twenty court-ordered women nearing completion of a community based recovery program located in the University's service region and operated by KRFDC. The next section provides an overview of the women's empowerment project, the rationale for choosing the community partner, program highlights and finally, the preliminary

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evaluations and lessons that will drive the next phase of this project, to develop a method by which future research can be taken to measure the community impact of helping at-risk women successfully return home.

Empowering Women for Positive Social Change

Program Overview

In January of 2012, two faculty members met in a research grant writing class sponsored by ECU. The two women soon discovered that they were both looking for grant opportunities related to women's leadership or correctional public policy issues which led to a third faculty member, who worked with at-risk students attending the university, asking to be involved. Those discussions resulted in the creation of a women's empowerment committee, drawing from the expertise of an interdisciplinary group of women from the university and the director of a local nonprofit agency—KRFDC—to brainstorm ideas about how the university could reach out to at-risk women in the state of Kentucky.

Shortly after the committee formed, ECU's regional stewardship office sent out a request for proposals to fund projects and programs led by university faculty and staff that would meet identified needs in communities throughout the University's 22-county service region. The committee applied for the grant, developing a proposal to host a one-day conference, entitled, "Empowering Women for Positive Social Change," that would provide a capstone event for 20 court-ordered women who were nearing completion of a drug and alcohol recovery program. As part of the application, the committee created a set of goals for addressing the challenges faced by the women served by the recovery center as they neared release:

- Goal 1: Enhance self-esteem and employability opportunities for at risk women within the university's service region
- Goal 2: Increase university faculty, staff and student engagement in regional stewardship initiatives.
- Goal 3: Increase the value placed on women at risk of economic distress by community members and businesses in the designated service region.

Program Participants

The 20 participants selected for this first conference were in the final stages of a residential drug and alcohol recovery program operated by KRFDC and thus approaching reentry into society. The typical profile of the participant was aged 18+, convicted as an adult, and previously imprisoned in a state, local, or tribal prison or jail.² The overarching goal of the conference, according to the grant application, was to improve the lives and confidence of the participants by offering them coping strategies, job tips and support networks in a pleasant and safe environment that would help them to see themselves as valued members of the community. The proposal was one of 11 selected for funding in the spring of 2013.

Choosing the Community Partner

The identification of Kentucky River Foothills Development Council, Inc. (KRFDC) as the community partner for this project was reasonable considering the myriad of past and present collaborative efforts between ECU and KRFDC. By far the largest nonprofit service provider in the University's 22-county service area, KRFDC has an established history of making available its programs and personnel for university collaborations

including service-learning and cooperative education, internships and work study, research efforts and adjunct professorships, and community development projects. KRFDC's focus on reentry initiatives since 2008, however, made them the ideal community partner for this women's empowerment project.

In 2008, KRFDC, a community-based nonprofit agency primarily serving four Kentucky counties, responded to the state's need for more recovery and reintegration services for recovering women. Chosen as one of ten centers to be opened through former Governor Ernie Fletcher's Recovery Kentucky initiative, KRFDC's Liberty Place Recovery Center for Women is a transitional supportive housing development that utilizes a recovery program model including peer support, daily living skills training, job responsibilities and challenges to practice sober living. This unique type of supportive housing and recovery program is proven to help people who face the most complex challenges to live more stable, productive lives. This model of recovery has also been implemented successfully by two centers in Lexington and Louisville; both programs have been replicated throughout the nation.

KRFDC offers all clients gender-specific, offender-oriented recovery services. These include provision of life skills classes, individual and group services (educational and peer support), self-help groups, etc. Permanent housing is another focus of Liberty Place. Program staff work with local agencies to help each woman secure permanent housing. Those who complete the program, including offenders who are serving out their sentences at Liberty Place, qualify for Section 8 housing assistance. But while Liberty Place's activities have been evaluated as being effective in facilitating the successful reentry of offenders,³ their reentry efforts and outcomes are often challenged by participants' low levels of self-esteem, limited life skills, and lack of stress management/self-care techniques. Liberty Place provides remarkable support, but more help is always needed, particularly for women near the completion of their recovery programs – a time when anxieties rise to the surface as they wonder if they will be able to obtain employment or be welcomed back to the community.

Program Theme and Design

The conference was designed to address some of the most pressing challenges related to self-esteem and stress management as the Liberty Place women contemplated transitioning back into the community. As noted earlier, the conference format drew on Bloom et al.'s (2003) gender-responsive principles and the expertise of an interdisciplinary committee of university faculty, career counselors, reentry experts and KRFDC employees to provide a series of interactive sessions utilizing cognitive, affective and behavioral approaches in a safe and pleasant setting. A focus on mind-body-spirit formed the central theme of the conference because studies have shown that the use of creative therapies such as yoga and art are effective in improving mood, behavior and socialization skills, and for increasing self-control (e.g., Austin, Bloom, & Donahue, 1992; Gussak & Ploumis-Devick, 2004; Rojcewicz, 1997; Sydney, 2005]. The committee felt this element of the program, in keeping with the evidence-based studies on women offenders, would offer a unique way to lead stress reduction strategies and offer career advice in a manner that both rewarded and engaged the women, without being overly repetitive or using therapies the participants had already received at the Liberty Place Recovery Center for Women. Table 1 provides a complete description of all sessions.

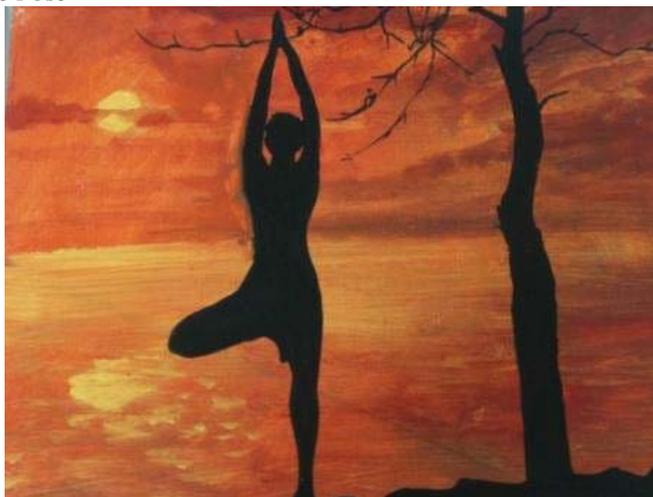
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Table 1: Empowering Women for Positive Social Change Conference Sessions

Yoga	Research has documented the effectiveness of yoga therapy as a stress-reduction method and as a comprehensive health approach for changing unhealthy habits of thought or lifestyle. In this first session of the day, the yoga instructor guided the participants through a series of gentle yoga poses and verbal affirmations.
Logic Based Therapy	Logic-Based Therapy is an offshoot of Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy that focuses on faulty thought patterns that lead to counterproductive behaviors. In this interactive session, participants learned to recognize and refute faulty reasoning and to replace it with thinking that leads to more pleasant and effective feelings and actions.
Etiquette	Learning appropriate conduct for dining in professional settings or job interviews is an important career building skill. Participants were led through an instructed lunch on dining etiquette and how to present themselves professionally.
Career Strengths	Participants completed a self-assessment test identifying their strengths prior to their arrival. With the guidance of the session leader, they were then able to identify and discuss their dominant traits and strengths in the context of how they could be of value in the workplace. Different strengths were linked to possible careers for the participants.
Art Therapy	The arts have been gaining increased attention as being effective tools for overcoming obstacles to, and promoting, learning and self-awareness. During this session, a local artist led participants through an easy-to-follow process to create their own painting, called the Tree Pose (see, Fig. 1).
Laugh at Stress	At the end of the day, the keynote speaker, an interfaith minister and holistic health consultant, used humor and storytelling as a way to help the women identify and cope with stressors in their lives.

Program Highlights

Figure 1: Tree Pose



On the morning of October 18, 2013, the conference convened at the Lake Buck Lodge. The conference location was selected by the organizing committee for several reasons, but especially because of the secluded nature of the lodge and its naturalistic environment.

Women in residential recovery centers often experience high levels of job turnover due

to issues relating to fear of failure and poor self-esteem. Through an interactive career session titled, “Identifying and Capitalizing on your Personal Strengths” participants were introduced to the idea that weaknesses are actually strengths in some contexts. The conference participants took an assessment before arriving at the conference that allowed them, with the guidance of the session leader, to identify and discuss their dominant strengths. Newly identified strengths were linked to possible careers for the participants.

An Art Therapy session also allowed the participants to view themselves in a different light. Under the direction of a local artist, all of the women were given the same object to paint and step-by-step instructions. Many of the women were initially nervous and self-defeating about their artistic abilities but by the end of the session were smiling and proud of their artwork.

The conference’s keynote speaker used humor and storytelling to help the women cope with stress through laughter - a natural and no-cost stress reliever. The women were coached in developing stress management skills through self-control, including cognitive and behavioral techniques to achieve better balance at home, at work and in relationships.

Program Results

At the conclusion of the conference, the women were asked to complete a short evaluation form, ranking their overall satisfaction with each of the sessions (see Table 1) on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the least satisfied and 5 being the most satisfied. Table 2 illustrates the number and corresponding percentages related to each ranking on the evaluation instrument. All twenty women responded to the evaluation; the two KRFDC staff that accompanied the women and participated in all sessions for the day also filled out the evaluation. All participants additionally had space on the form to make comments if they chose.

Table 2: Empowering Women for Positive Social Change Evaluation Results

Sessions	1 (Low)	2	3	4	5 (High)
Yoga	0% (0)	0% (0)	5% (1)	27% (6)	68% (15)
Logic Based Therapy	5% (1)	13% (3)	32% (7)	45% (10)	5% (1)
Etiquette	0% (0)	0% (0)	18% (4)	50% (11)	32% (7)
Career Strengths	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	23% (5)	77% (17)
Art Therapy	0% (0)	0% (0)	5% (1)	0% (0)	95% (21)
Laugh at Stress	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	25% (5)	77% (17)

n=22

The results indicate that, overall, the conference was well received by the women from the Liberty Place Recovery Center for Women. Roughly eighty-seven percent gave positive rankings of 4 or 5 on a 5 point scale. The yoga, career strengths and art therapy sessions

received some particularly positive comments:

Positive Comments:

- It was very relaxing and comforting. Something new
- Made me feel good to hear some positive things about myself and how I can use those to my advantage
- I know more how to use my strengths
- I didn't know I had such talent
- Very hands on. I never knew that I could do it
- It was interesting and therapeutic; I wish we had yoga at Liberty Place

The session on Logic-Based Therapy (LBT) received less impressive results. The rationale of this session was to introduce the women to LBT, a behavioral theory in which people decide to make themselves upset emotionally and behaviorally by deducing self-defeating conclusions based on irrational premises. Studies related to LBT suggest the most effective treatment programs are behavioral in nature (Latessa & Lowenkamp, 2006). The participant comments were instructive, however, suggesting that it was not the topic at fault, but rather the delivery of the material. All the sessions offered at the conference, with the exception of the LBT session which followed a more traditional one-way lecture style, were highly interactive. The following comments regarding the LBT session support Bloom and her co-researchers' findings that females respond better to mutual exchanges in which they feel facilitators understand their experiences and empathize with them as they recall painful experiences or try to express feelings in healthier ways:

Negative Comments:

- Session leader wouldn't take questions
- Needed more group involvement
- Little over my head with information provided
- Great information, but a little hard to understand
- Remember, many of us are high school drop outs and have not been exposed to a college-level lecture before

Overall, the women's empowerment committee and session leaders believed the first women's empowerment conference was extremely positive and instructive in developing future strategies. The Director of KRFDC sent an email to the session leaders at the end of the day, saying:

Liberty Place staff members, Alicia and Jessica, have been sending me a steady stream of pictures throughout the day. The facility is so beautiful and the women look so happy!!! Thank you so much for making this very special day happen for them. I hope you realize that for many of those in attendance, this is the nicest thing that anyone has ever done for them (10/18/13 @ 8 pm).

The committee followed up with the Liberty Place Recovery Center for Women Program Director six months later to get an update on the status of each woman who participated in the conference. Of the twenty participants, three were still in residency; twelve had moved from the program and were in compliance with aftercare requirements; two no longer lived at the center and did not complete aftercare requirements; two no longer lived at the center and were not in compliance/good standing with program; and the status of one

participant was unknown. If the women's conference is replicated for the AY 2014-2015, the conference committee will use the results and lessons of the 2013 conference to make program adjustments, establish benchmarks for success, and administer pre and post-test questionnaires to more accurately measure the effectiveness of the conference in helping the conference participants achieve goals related to self-sufficiency and stability.

Where Do We Go from Here

While the evaluation results offer only anecdotal findings as to whether the women participating in the conference left with more confidence or resources for enhancing their job prospects post-release, the overall positive feedback from the participants and community partner support the literature that women respond better to treatment plans that include a combination of cognitive, affective and behavioral approaches.

To sustain this research agenda and find other ways to develop studies that focus on the adoption of new practices or disseminate information that is based on research, not satisfaction surveys, collaborations across universities, funding agencies, community partners, and state and regional substance abuse treatment arenas must be developed. This next phase will involve devoting a certain amount of time to finding the best way for evaluating evidence-based treatment/recovery practices and reporting results that, for the purpose of this project, can measure community impact. Two recent conferences dedicated to bringing students, academics and practitioners together to discuss civic engagement will be used to advance the women empowerment committees' research agenda: 1) The Democracy Project; and 2) Connecting Campuses with Communities.

The American Democracy Project (ADP) is a multi-campus initiative focused on higher education's role in preparing the next generation of informed, engaged citizens for our democracy (see, <http://www.aascu.org/programs/ADP/>). The goal of the American Democracy Project is to produce graduates who are committed to being active, involved citizens in their communities. The theme for American Democracy Project's 2014 meeting, 21st Century Citizens: *Building Bridges, Solving Problems*, called attention to the educational experiences and civic skills needed by today's college graduates. The purpose of attending the Democracy Project conference was to share the preliminary findings and to solicit ideas about how we could develop a service-learning course in which students could partner with researchers to write grants, with businesses to provide materials goods such as computers or training programs for women, or even with media agencies, to educate the community about the concept of civic engagement and the realities of women offenders, including the implications for communities when they are overlooked and marginalized.

The second conference, Connecting Campuses with Communities, (see, <http://csl.iupui.edu/about/conferences/connecting.shtml>) showcased a capacity building program by which faculty, staff and students can make a difference in the community through service learning courses, community service events, and various campus-community partnerships and initiatives.

The 2014 conference was a two-part event that focused on building a network of scholars and practitioners through the following opportunities:

- (1) The Service Learning Institute was for those interested in gaining strategies used to improve the quality of a service learning course;
- (2) The Research Academy was designed to strengthen research on service learning while advancing scholarship of teaching and learning.

As with any professional conference, it is anticipated that listening to presentations, attending workshops, and sharing ideas with academics from other institutions will inspire research ideas and other tools by which we can increase university faculty, staff and student engagement in regional stewardship initiatives that benefit the community.

Conclusion

It has been 50 years since President Lyndon Johnson committed the nation to a war on poverty. And yet, in 2014, vulnerable populations all across America continue to struggle with poverty, disparities in health care, and exclusion from society. Former offenders, in particular women, are often overlooked and forgotten. The latest BJS statistics and research on women offenders and the gendered effects of public policy strongly support the assertion that women offenders have different needs than male offenders. There is undisputed evidence that women are less violent than male offenders, more likely to be convicted of substance abuse, have histories of physical or sexual abuse, are more responsible for children, and less likely to be able to find gainful employment. Correctional policies such as the “war against drugs,” have disproportionately punished women. Correctional programming for the assessment and treatment of offenders as they attempt to transition back to society post-release have similarly been focused on male offenders. That gender matters is a lesson that is being learned increasingly by academics, advocates, policy makers and practitioners in the field of corrections. Taken together, the statistics and studies related to gender-specific approaches to treatment indicate a heightened need for individualized services to address the innumerable issues impacting women within the criminal justice system, and as they move back into the community.

University-community partnerships provide a mechanism by which underserved populations can receive more attention. Until communities become more involved and knowledgeable about ways to increase these women’s access to employment and educational opportunities that will help raise their socioeconomic status, the economic costs on society will continue to grow. Importantly, the literature on offender rehabilitation suggests that public policies that focus solely on offender treatment practices typically overlook networks of support related to neighborhoods, social capital and collective efficacy (Rose & Cleary, 2001).

The first “Empowering Women for Positive Social Change” conference examined herein will hopefully spark a larger conversation about the economic and social costs related to the growing number of women involved with the criminal justice system—women that are part of any university’s service region. Certainly, the ground work and early assessments related to the literature on gender-responsive programming warrant the next phase of this research, to involve a variety of stakeholders—including university leaders, students and community partners—to be active participants in applied research that will not only be able to measure community impact, but magnify the importance of social networks for the family, within the community, and between the community and broader society.

Notes

¹In the 1970s, growing frustration over escalating crime rates caused public sentiment to shift from rehabilitative correctional philosophies back towards retribution, via stricter sentencing policies. Between the years 1980 to 1999, the number of inmates under federal or state jurisdiction tripled; between 1980 and 2006, prison populations quadrupled (Bureau of Justice Statistics, www.bjs.org).

²KRFDC serves up to 65 women at any point in time in partnership with the Kentucky Department of Corrections. The majority of the women have committed Class C or D offenses associated with the possession and trafficking of controlled substances or criminal possession of forged instruments.

³All 14 Recovery Kentucky Centers (7 women/7 men), including KRFDC, are collectively evaluated annually by the University of Kentucky Center on Drug and Alcohol Research. Each center pays a fee for this evaluation and report, which begins with interviews of the clients six months before they leave. For yearend 2012, the Recovery Kentucky Centers reported that only 5% of the 325 sample surveyed had abused substances in the past 30 days; clients self-reported that they experienced less depression and anxiety by 72 percent and 61 percent respectively. Economic stability among Recovery Kentucky program participants also increased dramatically with 54% of the completers securing employment and the incidence of homelessness dropping by 83% (Logan, Cole & Stevenson, 2013).

Acknowledgement

The authors wish to acknowledge all the hard work and efforts of the following individuals, who additionally helped plan and carry out the conference: Stefanie Ashley, ECU Facilitation Specialist and owner of Artfully Yours Studio; Laura Newhart, Chair and Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy and Religion; Dr. Jaleh Rezaie, Associate Dean, STEM-H Institute; Elizabeth Wachtel, Acting Vice President for Enrollment Management, Marketing and University Relations; Colleen Schneck, Chair and Professor, Occupational Therapy; Laura Melius, Director, ECU Career Services; Gayle Partain, Certified Yoga Instructor; April Barnes, ECU Director of Student Life; Reverend Daniel M. Newman, PhD., DD, Holistic Health Consultant and Author of *Grief Behind Bars*; and Karrie Adkins, Program Coordinator, Office of Regional Stewardship.

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