

The Atlas of Your New Life – Scaping From Prison

Connecting Newly Released Women Prisoners with Community Resources

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Purpose

- Our purpose is to serve incarcerated women such as mothers, single mothers, as well as single women who are preparing to reintegrate into society
- The goal of this Scaping project is to assist a subset of the population which is embarking upon a new chapter of their lives
- The challenges faced by incarcerated women, depending on the length of their imprisonment, are that they may find themselves in difficult personal, social and professional circumstances. For example, an incarcerated woman may be disconnected from her family, or not prepared to enter the current job market
- This is where our purpose lies as librarians: to help women situate themselves and reintegrate into society

Mission of Improvement

The proposed program facilitates knowledge-creation among incarcerated women in three ways:

- Create individualized programs by mapping their own needs and outcomes-based personalized SCAPES
- Offer an assortment of resources; mediate access to counsellors, resource-centres and public-library personnel to develop personal, professional and life skills
- Track knowledge-creation progress through a long-term model of soliciting feedback throughout the program; offer suggestions and points of intervention as needed

A conversation-based program to facilitate incarcerated women’s transition beyond bars through designing personalized programming in collaboration with community partners.

Program Goals

Facilitate successful transition from prison life to civilian life

- To fill the identified gaps in service to incarcerated and recently-released female prisoners
- To ensure women feel prepared, empowered and respected

Decrease recidivism rates

- To create gender-responsive and trauma-sensitive educational, rehabilitation, and recidivist programming to cater to any “gender-related situations and circumstances” (Morash & Schram, 2002, p. 166-7)
- To provide multilingual and multicultural service to facilitate re-entry into womens’ chosen communities (Marshall, 2011, p. 24-26)
- To leverage larger reform efforts by incorporating a variety and a number of sub-elements of the program that women can “pick and choose” based on their individual information needs and unique interests and goals (Morash & Schram, 2002, p. 176)

Social improvement through community partnerships

- Situate the library and librarian in the centre of a network of pre-existing community programs that help facilitate holistic rehabilitation and respectful re-integration
- Motivate libraries and other community organizations to consider recently-released women prisoners - as well as the incarcerated population - as important and valued members of the community with unique needs

Fiscal responsibility

- Approach financial challenges by harnessing pre-existing resources and the combined people power of multiple community organizations

New Librarianship & Conversation Theory

New Librarianship

- Based on Participatory Librarianship, which proposes that conversation creates knowledge (Lankes et al, 2007. Information Technology and Libraries, 26(4), 17-33)
- Motivates librarians to “improve society through facilitating knowledge creation in their communities” and to move outside of the physical library (Lankes, 2011. The Atlas of New Librarianship. p. 15)
- Our goal is to focus on what knowledge can be created through in-person conversations facilitated by information professionals between individual women and the community at all levels

Conversation Theory

- Theory proposed by cybernetician Gordon Pask (1976. Conversation Theory: Applications in Education and Epistemology)
- States that individuals learn, create knowledge, and come to agreements through conversation (Scott, 2011. Foundations of Science, 6(4). 343-360)
- Conversations can be captured and visualized as entailment meshes representing relationships between concepts (Pask, 1984. ECTJ 32(1). 3-40)
- Our program will use entailment meshes to map and capture conversations between individual women, facilitating librarians, and the community

Program Elements

This program will be facilitated by a community librarian through a partnership with a women’s prison and a local public library, as well as multiple community partners. Our program consists of a suite of information modules for the women to select from in order to map a personalized curriculum created from community resources that will meet their unique information needs once outside of prison. As the program progresses, the women will be encouraged to suggest new topics and modules. These information modules could include:

- Personal Development**
 - Health & Wellness: Addictions Recovery & Support; Anger Management & Problem Solving; Dealing with Abuse
 - Creative Expression: Writing, Art & Drama Therapy; Reading Group for Marginalized Women
- Life Skills**
 - Everyday Life: Literacy; Housing; Finances; Cooking & Nutrition; Time Management
 - Parenting: Ages & Stages; Child Literacy; Custody & Support
- Professional Development**
 - Career Counselling: Skills & Aptitude; Education Options; Job Search Skills & Services; Interview Preparation
 - Computer Literacy & Training
 - Starting Your Own Business

Evaluation

Evaluation of the proposed program would proceed in five stages:

- Collection of feedback from the women immediately following their initial consultation with the librarian through a semi-structured interview
- Surveys immediately following any in-library programs or workshops on the usefulness of the program content
- Collection of feedback from a wide variety of stakeholders (community groups & agencies, funding bodies, etc.) using surveys to determine how satisfied they are with the partnership and what improvements can be made to the service
- Assessment of the program as a whole from the participant’s perspective through semi-structured interviews either in-person or via phone call
- Collecting data on rates of individual program element completion, recidivism, etc.

MEMBER PROFILE

- Single woman in her mid-50s
- Unemployed & homeless at time of last arrest
- Has been in jail 3 times
- No family or friends in the area
- Substance and alcohol abuse issues

