

Breaking

Grounding

Growing

Expanding the Rhode Island
gardening reentry programs
as a pathway towards
stability

Juliana Soltys

Breaking Grounding Growing

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reentry programs as a pathway towards
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Breaking | Grounding | Growing

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Industrial Design in the Department of Industrial Design of the Rhode Island School of Design.

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Designed and written by Juliana Soltys.



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Situating

Abstract

What happens to the over two million people incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails?

Changing in sentencing laws and policies have created a cycle of imprisonment, racially isolating and oppressing BIPOC communities. Reintegration and reentry programs are an avenue to break the cycle of recidivism. Through my work, I have developed hands-on, structured opportunities for justice-involved adults to rebuild a life for themselves by increasing the accessibility of gardening reentry programs. This project creates a space for mentorship and support for Rhode Island's formerly incarcerated people with the goal of helping them to develop vital life skills through growing and gardening management.

It is time to meet people where they are and grow a space to foster a more inclusive community during this challenging transitional period.

Defining Language

Jail

+ A place of confinement for those convicted of a crime for 364 days, can spend years before their sentence in prison; No programming or mental health services¹

Prison

+ Institutional facilities under the jurisdiction of the state or federal government where convicted offenders serve longer sentences²

Mass incarceration

+ The widespread imprisonment of citizens. The United States is the leading country in incarceration and prison populations.³

+ "...Formal incarceration as our collective social response to crime."⁴

+ "Criminalization includes the expansion of law enforcement and the surveillance state to a broad range of activities and settings: zero tolerance policies in schools that steer children into the criminal justice system; welfare policies that punish poor mothers and force them to work outside of the home; employment practices that require workers to compromise their basic civil liberties as a prerequisite for a job; immigration policies that stigmatize and humiliate people while making it difficult for them to access essential services like health care and housing," said Deborah Small, Executive Director of Break the Chains

¹ "FAQ: What Is the Difference Between Jail and Prison?" Prison Fellowship. Accessed September 27, 2021. <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/resources/training-resources/in-prison/faq-jail-prison/>.

² FAQ: What is the Difference Between Jail and Prison?

³ Mukamal, Debbie A. "Introduction: Consequences of a Carceral State." *Social Research* 74, no. 2 (2007): 569–73. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971945>.

⁴ Bobo, Lawrence D. and Victor Thompson. 2010. "Racialized Mass Incarceration: Poverty, Prejudice, and Punishment." in *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century*, edited by Hazel R. Markus and Paula Moya. New York: Norton, 322-355.

Prison industrial complex

- + “Overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems.”¹
- + “Relationships linking corporations, government, correctional communities, and media...introduced by activists and scholars to contest prevailing beliefs that increased levels of crime were the root cause of mounting prison populations. Instead ideologies of racism and the pursuit of profit.”²

Reintegration

- + A formerly incarcerated person navigating reentry outside of prison
- + “Occurs when the victim or offender can become active and productive parts of their communities... (1) mutual respect for those in the community, (2) mutual commitment to others in the community, and (3) intolerance for --but an understanding of--deviant behavior by members of the community.”³

Recidivism

- + Cycling out of and back into prison, “Criminal acts that resulted in rearrest, reconviction or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three year period following the prisoner’s release.”^{4 5}

Social services

- + Mental support, employment & job assistance, financial assistance, lodging, substance abuse intervention, and more are just some of the programs designed to offer support and assistance⁶

¹ “What Is the PIC? What Is Abolition?” Critical Resistance. Accessed September 27, 2021. <http://criticalresistance.org/about/not-so-common-language/>.

² Davis, Angela Y. “Are Prisons Obsolete?” by Angela Y. Davis: 9781583225813: PenguinRandomHouse.com: Books.” PenguinRandomhouse.com. Accessed September 27, 2021. <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/213837/are-prisons-obsolete-by-angela-y-davis/>.

³ “Reintegration.” Restorative Justice. Accessed September 27, 2021. <http://restorativejustice.org/restorative-justice/about-restorative-justice/tutorial-intro-to-restorative-justice/lesson-1-what-is-restorative-justice/reintegration/#sthash.bZNeK93L.dpbs>.

⁴ Weiman, David F. “Barriers to Prisoners’ Reentry into the Labor Market and the Social Costs of Recidivism.” Social Research 74, no. 2 (2007): 575–611. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971946>.

⁵ Policy, NIJ (see Reuse. “Recidivism.” National Institute of Justice. Accessed September 27, 2021. <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism>).

⁶ Canada, Public Safety. “The Social Reintegration of Offenders and Crime Prevention.” Public Safety Canada. January 31, 2018. Accessed September 27, 2021. <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/scl-rntgrtn/index-en.aspx#s1>.

Equitable relationships

- + “The ratio of rewards/benefits to costs/investments is equal.... assumes that human societies maximize their collective reward by evolving systems for equitably apportioning resources among their members.”¹

Reparations

- + “Acknowledge the legal obligation of a state, or individual(s) or group, to repair consequences of violations - either because it directly committed them or it failed to prevent them....the most direct and meaningful way of receiving justice. Yet, they are often the last-implemented and least-funded measure of transitional justice.”²

Asset-based approach

- + “focuses on strengths and talents. It views diversity in thought, culture, and traits as positive assets...focuses on building relationships with and an understanding of students.”³

Emergent strategies

- + “complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions.”
- + “emphasizes critical connections over critical mass, building authentic relationships, listening with all the senses of the body and the mind.”⁴

Organic Intellectual

- + “articulate through the language of culture, the feelings and experiences which the masses could not express themselves.”⁵

¹ Berscheid, Ellen S., and Pamela C. Regan. The Psychology of Interpersonal Relationships. Old Tappan: Taylor and Francis, 2016.

² “Reparations & Transitional Justice: ICTJ.” International Center for Transitional Justice. April 17, 2017. Accessed September 27, 2021. <https://www.ictj.org/our-work/transitional-justice-issues/reparations>.

³ “An Asset-Based Approach to Education: What It Is and Why It Matters,” NYU Steinhardt Teacher Residency Program, September 16, 2020. <https://teachereducation.steinhardt.nyu.edu/an-asset-based-approach-to-education-what-it-is-and-why-it-matters/>.

⁴ Adrienne Maree Brown, Emergent Strategy : Shaping Change, Changing Worlds (Chico, Ca Ak Press, 2017)

⁵ Antonio Gramsci, Joseph A Buttigieg, and Antonio Callari, Prison Notebooks (New York : Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2011)

Grassroots

- + a local level of an organization using collective action for social, political and/or economic movements.
- + “provide the opportunity to create a new system of democracy, work, education, and environmental stewardship based on completely different values.”¹

Community garden

- + “plots of lands, usually in urban areas, that individuals and/or groups care for to grow vegetables and plants to grow healthy, local food.”²
- + a space that brings people living in a neighborhood together to spend time to grow food and have agency in the food system

Bottom-up approach

- + decisions are made by the participants or community members instead of the executives or leadership, a strategy used when upper management does not represent the rest of the organization or collective of people

¹ Grace Lee Boggs and Scott Kurashige, *The next American Revolution : Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 2012).

² “Community Gardening | Alternative Farming Systems Information Center | NAL | USDA,” www.nal.usda.gov, n.d., <https://www.nal.usda.gov/legacy/afsic/community-gardening>.

Companion planting

- + “great way to use space efficiently, can plant your vegetables and flowers in mutually beneficial arrangements, and protect your plants from insects.”¹
- + understanding the needs and giving characteristics of plants to build more symbiotic relationships between them

Planting schedule

- + “when to plant vegetables in the spring and the last dates that you can plant for a fall harvest, based on average frost dates for your location.”²
- + plantings can occur indoors or direct show outside

Germination

- + “a seed starts to sprout, grow and develop into a seedling under the right growing conditions.”³

Seedling

- + “the results of caring for a seed through a mix of oxygen, sunlight, and heat, and water.”
- + “Require sunlight and are prone to becoming leggy if not under the right growing conditions.”⁴

¹ “Companion Planting in Home Gardens,” extension.umn.edu, n.d., <https://extension.umn.edu/planting-and-growing-guides/companion-planting-home-gardens>.

² “2022 Planting Calendar: When to Start Vegetable Seeds | the Old Farmer’s Almanac,” [Almanac.com](http://almanac.com), accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.almanac.com/gardening/planting-calendar#>.

³ “Germination,” [Biology Articles, Tutorials & Dictionary Online](http://biologyonline.com), October 7, 2019, <https://www.biologyonline.com/dictionary/germination>.

⁴ Lee Stivers and Tianna Dupont, “Seed and Seedling Biology,” [Penn State Extension](http://extension.psu.edu), February 18, 2019, <https://extension.psu.edu/seed-and-seedling-biology>.

Personal Positioning

“Where are you from?” This is a question I ask and get asked very often. The short answer is it’s complicated. The slightly longer answer is Connecticut and California. The truth is I feel few loyalties to any specific geographical location. I find comfort in both shorelines, the winds nudging me in both directions, a constant push and pull.

My catalog of memories is what I’ve grown to cherish, revisiting them often to understand how my past informs my present.

I grew up watching crime shows like NCIS & Law and Order. There was almost an ease and awe to how these investigators could find the bad guy in a matter of 45 minutes and lock them up forever, forgetting about them and moving on to the next unsolved crime.

Within every formula, there would be a punishment. This prescription would suck me in, and I'd watch entranced in my white, sheltered neighborhood, ignorant of how law enforcement and the criminal justice system actually treat people, especially BIPOC people. I started to believe that this was the best option to keep our communities safe, giving little thought to the humanity of those incarcerated.

These rose-tinted depictions are far from the truth of what actually happens I've grown to learn. Little attention is given to addressing the real roots of the problem: colonization, disinvestment, surveillance, and blatant racism. Why were these topics of conversation ignored for a standardized script? How does media play such a large role in the ways we think about justice?

**Roaming the
neighborhood, my
feet brush along
the golden braids.
Dots of sunlight
peak through the
dancing leaves as I
rest in my favorite
oak tree. I only
hear the distant
sounds of birds,
free from fences
and homogeneous
manicured lawns.**

It wasn't until college that I met my best friend, who introduced me to another side of the prison system. Working at a halfway house, she worked with men reentering from Tennessee prisons, noticing the lack of care or support from all angles.

Occasionally participating in weekly dinners, I helped prepare food and had a meal with the men living in the house. Nestled in a family neighborhood, this halfway house was small and close-knit. You are met with large comfy brown couches and a large flat-screen TV when you walk through the front door. Crown molding runs along the top and bottom of the walls with hardwood floors throughout. Past the living room, a long wooden dining table with room to fit at least 12 people. Food is cooked the way back in a small, all-white kitchen.

I felt very awkward invading their living space and participating in a mandatory dinner. I can recall one evening when all eyes were looking over at the men sitting around the table. It was almost like they were put on for viewing, supposed to entertain the guests and the board members visiting. Some people ate quietly, and other smaller conversations broke off, inaudible, along the table.

I later learned that the men would get in trouble if they didn't show up. It didn't matter if they didn't like the visiting guest sitting across from them at the table. The dinners were developed to foster community and improve social skills; forced encounters can help with assimilation, right? Rules are necessary for structure, but where is the line to support those reentering and maintaining money for operations?

The first summer of the pandemic, I couldn't find a job and was lost about what I should do during a time when I should be "furthering my career." On a whim, I decided to apply to work on a farm in a town of 300 people. Living in a non-functioning school bus, I learned how to garden on a larger scale while taking care of the animals and of each other.

The school bus was the same make and color I used to take to high school sports games. Parked near the pig enclosure, I often grabbed my box of cereal, slipped on my sandals, and walked up the short dirt road in the early mornings. As I approached, faint footsteps would pound into the clay-rich earth, with snorting exponentially growing. Once in sight, the pigs would saunter up to the electric fence with hungry eyes and bellowing cries. The enclosure was scarce of greenery today (it was the end of this week's rotation), so I would often toss handfuls of tall weeds for their snouts to snack on. Distracted, I found my favorite rock and sat eating my cereal and conversing with pigs, barely getting a word in edge-wise.

I appreciated this symbiotic relationship. We would move the pig enclosure constantly to ensure fresh greens, and in turn, the ground would be weeded and fertilized for vegetables to be planted. I think both groups were happy in this nurturing series of cycles. I started becoming attuned to noticing similar relationships, most requiring a lot more attention and work to make them beneficial to all people involved. But, can mutually beneficial relationships exist when there is an unbalanced distribution of power?

It's time to reimagine the U.S. prison system.
It's time to restructure the U.S. agriculture system.

These systems aren't working anymore.
These systems are elite.
These systems are white-dominated.
These systems are supported by extensive corporate investment.
These systems are profiting from Black and Brown bodies.

Situating

Personal Positioning

But how can we push back against this system that's so entangled?
Where do we start?
Who is the we?
Who should be part of these conversations?

How can I be part of this movement?
What do I have to offer to support the ongoing efforts?
How do my power and privilege come into play?

Where do I start?

Situating

Personal Positioning

Breaking

U.S. Prison System is Bullshit

The US spends over \$305,000,000,000 each year to imprison more people than any other country.¹² These hundreds of billions of dollars are spent locking up a disproportionate number of BIPOC people.³

Mass incarceration is a modern form of slavery.

Only in the past few centuries, largely to European imperialism, have people been classified along racial lines. The legacy of slavery has enforced these racial hierarchies of belittling Black people, being viewed as powerless. It's important to mention that other racialized histories of Indigenous people, Asian-Americans, and Latinos have also driven the US punishment system.⁴ White supremacy continued to be embraced by vast numbers of people and became deeply inscribed in new institutions. Many people who lived under Jim Crow could not envision a legal system defined by racial equality. Social institutions of slavery, lynching, and segregation were all deemed as normal at one point. Today, mass incarceration is seen as a modern form to punishment, yet also maintains these racial hierarchies.⁵

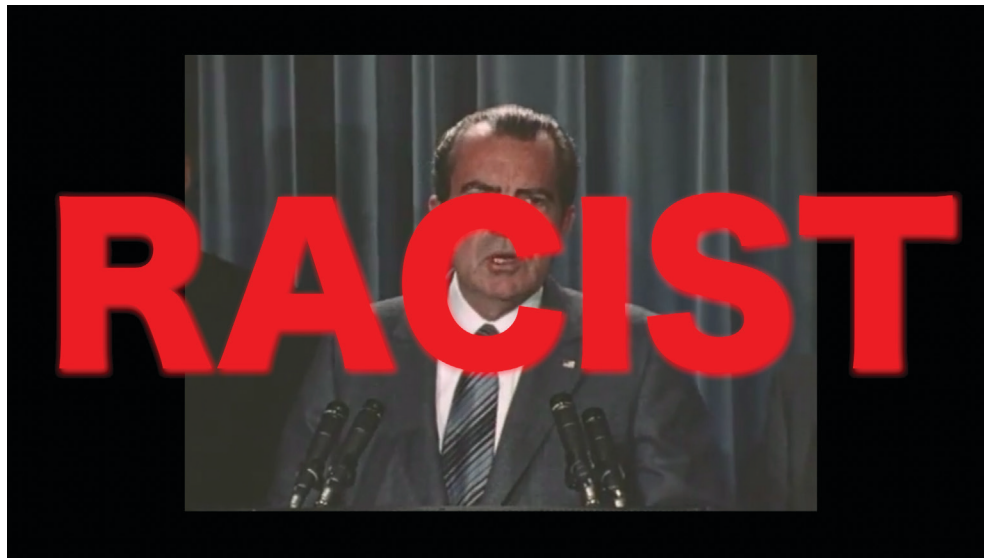
1 <https://bjs.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh236/files/media/document/jeeus17.pdf>

2 <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2021.html>, Rate calculated per 100,000 people

3 Lawrence Bobo and Victor Thompson, "Racialized Mass Incarceration: Poverty, Prejudice, and Punishment," *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century*, 2010, 322–55.

4 Angela Y Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003).

5 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New Press, 2010).



Over time, the social response to crime became incarceration.¹ The aggressive pursuit during the War on Drugs in the 70s incarcerated a disproportionate number of Black and Brown people despite no significant gap in rates of illegal drug consumption.² The constant surveillance by law enforcement and lack of resources/connections increased the number of Black drug charge convictions.

US prison populations rose dramatically as more Americans were sentenced to prison for extended periods of time and the prison industrial complex developed.³ This system is a set of symbiotic relationships among correctional communities, transnational corporations, media conglomerates, guards' unions, and legislative and court agendas. Policymakers use tools like mandatory minimum sentences, automatic sentence enhancements, habitual offender statutes like "three strikes" laws, truth-in-sentencing, and the abolition of parole.⁴ These policies led to significant racial disparities in incarceration rates.

Media also plays a role in stigmatizing Black individuals charged and reinforcing anti-black stereotypes through harsher language and fear-mongering. This inevitably racist landscape renders incarcerated people invisible from the rest of society, fostering a cycle of recidivism. Out of sight. Out of mind.

¹ Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki, "The Entman-Rojecki Index of Race and the Media," [press.uchicago.edu](https://press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/210758.html), 2000, <https://press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/210758.html>.

² Bobo, "Racialized Mass Incarceration: Poverty, Prejudice, and Punishment," 322-55.

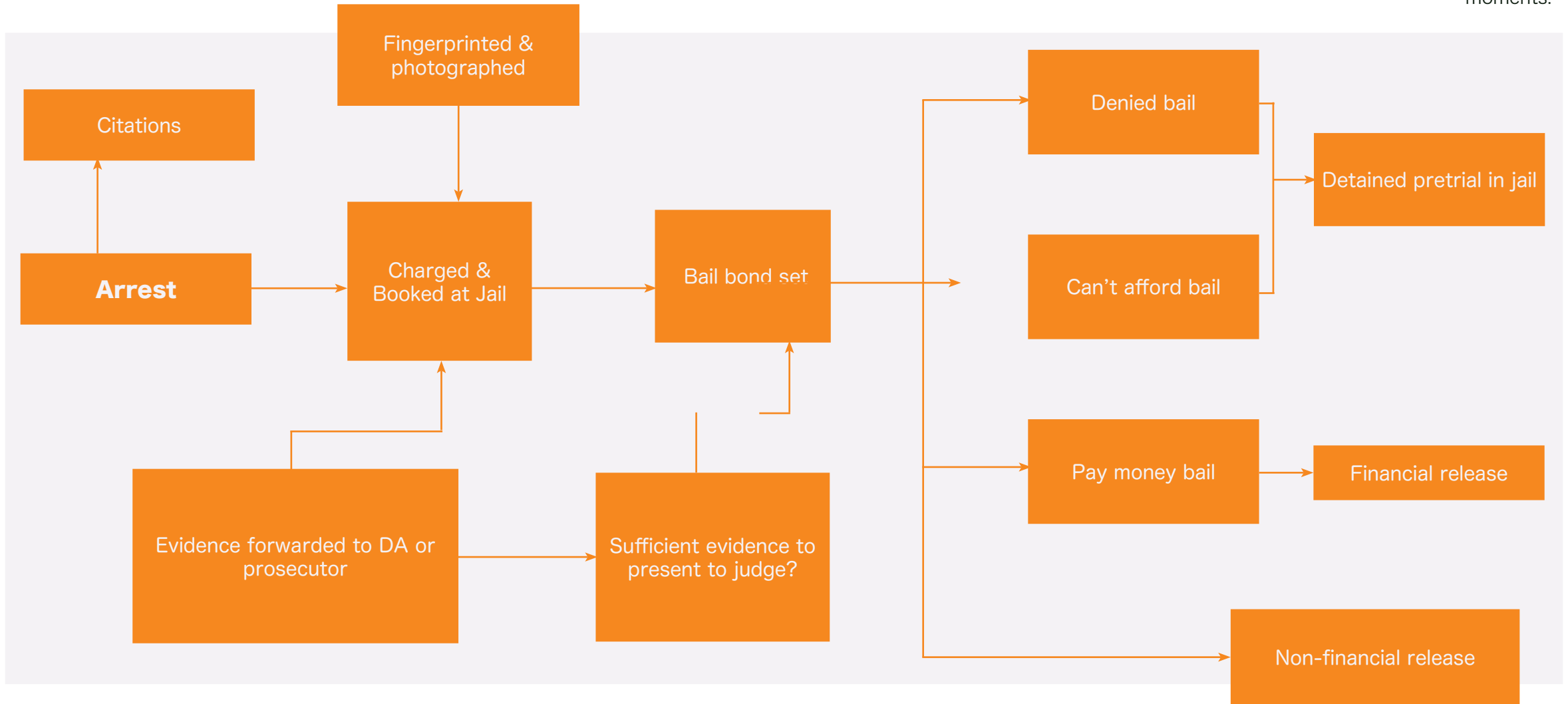
³ Ram Subramanian et al., "A Federal Agenda for Criminal Justice Reform | Brennan Center for Justice," Brennan Center for Justice, December 9, 2020, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/policy-solutions/federal-agenda-criminal-justice-reform>.

⁴ Angela Y Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003).

The U.S. prison system is roughly divided into three parts: arrest, prosecution, correction. Note: the diagrams and descriptions are summarized and oversimplified to share a general understanding from my secondary source research and personal experiences of these moments.^{1 2}

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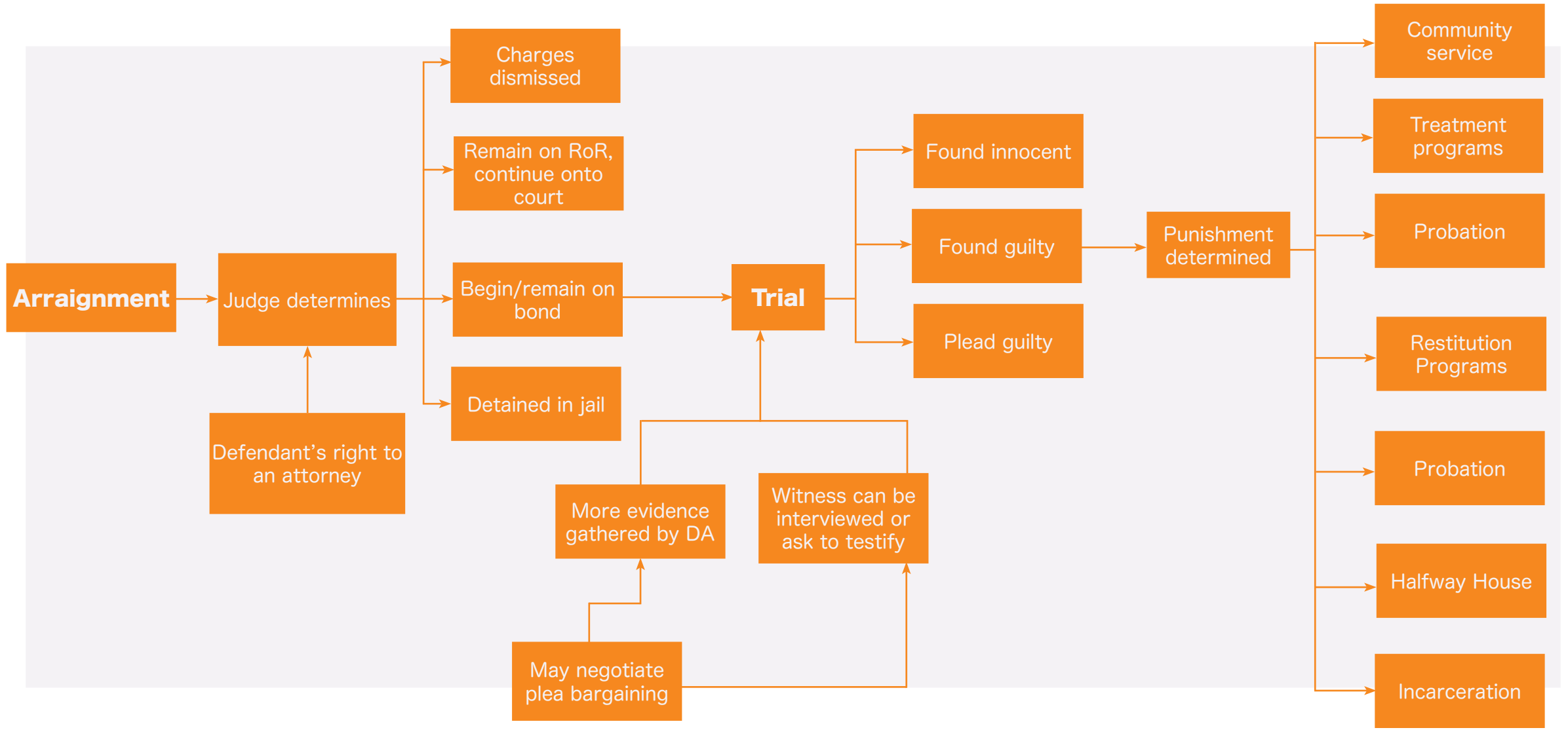
U.S. Prison System is Bullshit

U.S. Prison System is Bullshit

Arrest

Law enforcement usually receives a tip and learns about a crime. Once they've established a crime has been committed, a suspect could be identified, apprehended, and arrested. Agencies then present information about the case to a prosecutor, who then files formal charges, and defense counsel is assigned. Pretrial-release decisions are made, and bail is typically set to ensure appearance at the trial.

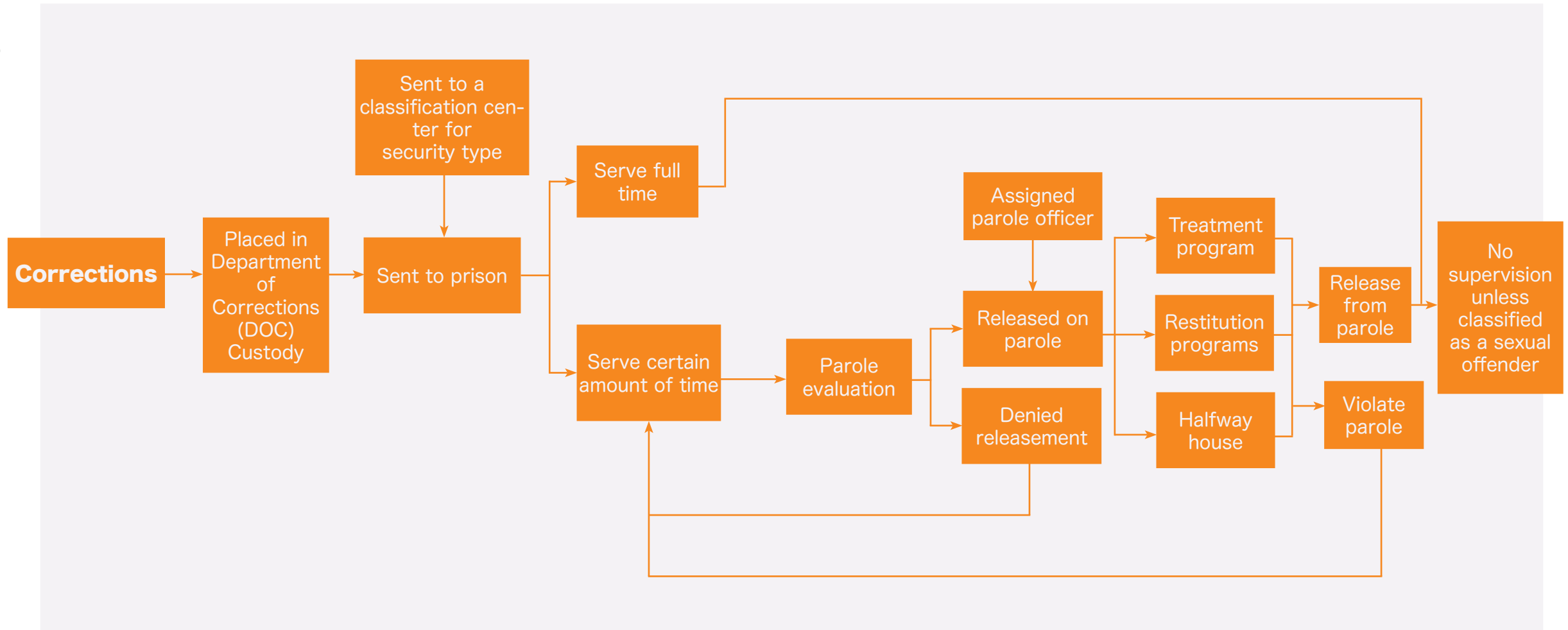
U.S. Prison System Path
First Stage: Arrest



U.S. Prison System Path
Second Stage: Prosecution

Prosecution

At the arraignment, charges are shared, and the accused is asked to enter a plea(guilty or not guilty typically) to the charges. With an accepted guilty plea, the accused is sentenced. With a not guilty plea, a trial date is set. A trial can have a jury or a bench trial where the judge makes the final decision. The trial results in acquittal or conviction on the original charges.



U.S. Prison System Path Third Stage: Corrections

Corrections

When a conviction is made, typically, the judge decides on the sentence. However, punishments can range, and in many jurisdictions, the law mandates that someone convicted of certain offenses serve a prison term. Someone sentenced to incarceration serves their time in a jail or state prison. Eligibility for parole occurs after serving a specific length of sentencing in which a parole board can grant the release of the person incarcerated.

1 Bureau of Justice Statistics, "The Justice System," Bureau of Justice Statistics, June 3, 2021, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/justice-system>.

2 Prison Policy Initiative, "Detaining the Poor: How Money Bail Perpetuates an Endless Cycle of Poverty and Jail Time," [Prisonpolicy.org](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/incomejails.html), 2016, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/incomejails.html>.

The Agriculture Disconnection

While a critical racial history of agriculture and prisons may not be obvious, these two systems are deeply intertwined with slavery and racism in the US.

The Trans Atlantic Slave Trade and slavery in the US lasted for over 300 years, kidnapping and murdering over 12.5 million Africans.¹ The percentage of stolen African people that made it to the west, worked the agricultural fields, generating \$6.5 to \$10 trillion of wealth, in today's dollars.²

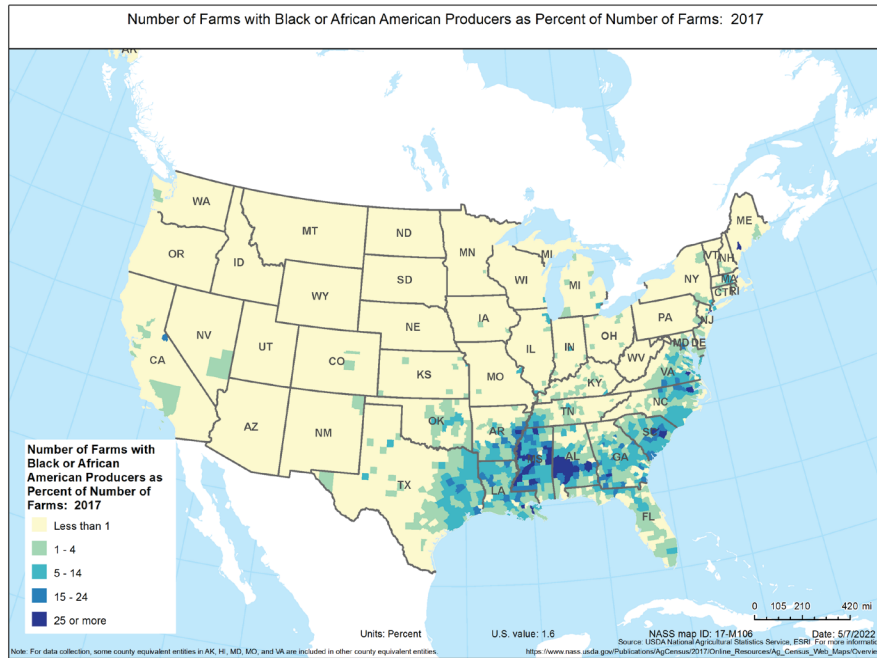
Once slavery was abolished with the 13th Amendment in 1865, the Black Codes were created in the south to label African Americans as criminals. Police were allowed to arrest Black people and force them into contract labor. Those incarcerated could also be leased out for cheap labor on farms, railroad construction, mining, and logging.

At the turn of the century, the federal discrimination against Black farmers continued. USDA agents withheld valuable loans, crop allotments, and technical support. The exclusion of agricultural and domestic workers, most of whom were Black, from the New Deal in the 1930's worked for lower wages and received no benefits.³ This blatant racism had long term effects on land ownership for farmers and to this day, the disparities in Black farms owned is exponential.

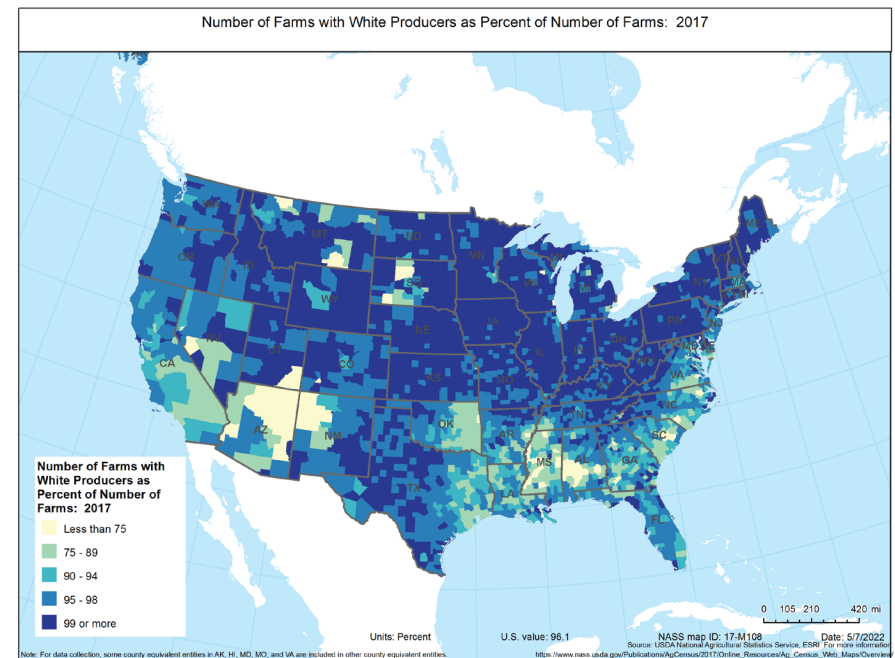
¹ Andrea Flynn et al., "A Roosevelt Institute REPORT BY," 2016.

² Andrea Flynn et al., "A Roosevelt Institute REPORT BY," 2016.

³ Juan F. Perea, "The Echoes of Slavery: Recognizing the Racist Origins of the Agricultural and Domestic Worker Exclusion from the National Labor Relations Act," SSRN Electronic Journal, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1646496>.



Note: using the same colors on both maps is just another form of racism to hide the exponential gaps in producing numbers



Pulling from the United States Department of Agriculture's 2017 Census data, the two maps show the number of Black producers on the left and the number of White producers on the right in percentage form based on county. There is a concentration of Black producers in the south, where the percentage is generally still under 30% by county. Whereas for White producers, the percentages are averaging in the 90's. This map shows the effects that slavery, incarceration, and other racist systems have on the US food system.



Leah Penniman, Soul Fire Farm

With racial slavery roots in the Western world, the US criminal justice system is a modern form of slavery. The United States' history of enslavement has disrupted the BIPOC connection to the land and a history of autonomous farming.¹ The association of agriculture and slavery can trigger and re-traumatize African heritage people.² In the US agriculture systems, essential milestones and advancements developed by BIPOC people are glossed over in this white-dominated landscape.³ There must be a commitment to address the systemic racism, denying Black and Brown people land and food sovereignty.

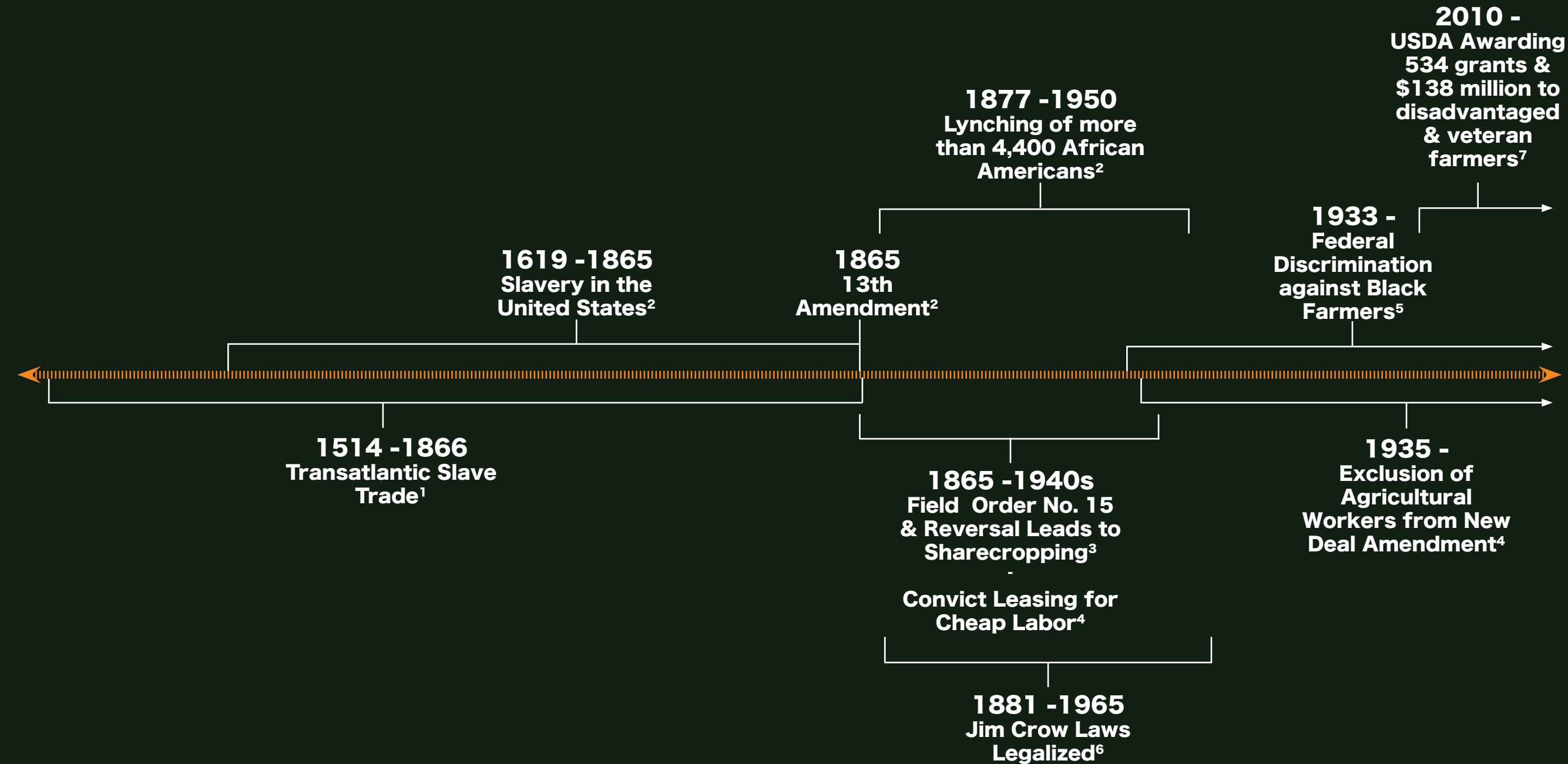
The prisons and agriculture systems today show the large racial disparities that have grown over time of the disproportionate number of BIPOC people incarcerated and the few farms operated by Black people.

A brief timeline depicted on the following page shows the connection of slavery to agriculture and the U.S. government's obstacles to preventing Black and Brown people from owning and farming.

¹ Leah Penniman and Karen Washington, *Farming While Black : Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land* (White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2018).
² Ram Subramanian et al., "A Federal Agenda for Criminal Justice Reform | Brennan Center for Justice."
³ Leah Penniman and Karen Washington, *Farming While Black : Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land*.

Brief Agriculture Timeline

Colonial Treatment of Black People



1. "EXPLORE THE DISPERSAL OF ENSLAVED AFRICANS ACROSS THE ATLANTIC WORLD," Slave Voyages, [PAGE], accessed September 27, 2021, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/>

2. History.com Editors, "Slavery in America," History.com, November 12, 2009, [PAGE], accessed September 27, 2021, https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery#section_2

3. "The Truth Behind '40 Acres and a Mule,'" PBS, September 18, 2013, [PAGE], accessed September 27, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/the-truth-behind-40-acres-and-a-mule/>

4. Leah Penniman and Karen Washington, *Farming While Black* (S.I.: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2018), [PAGE]

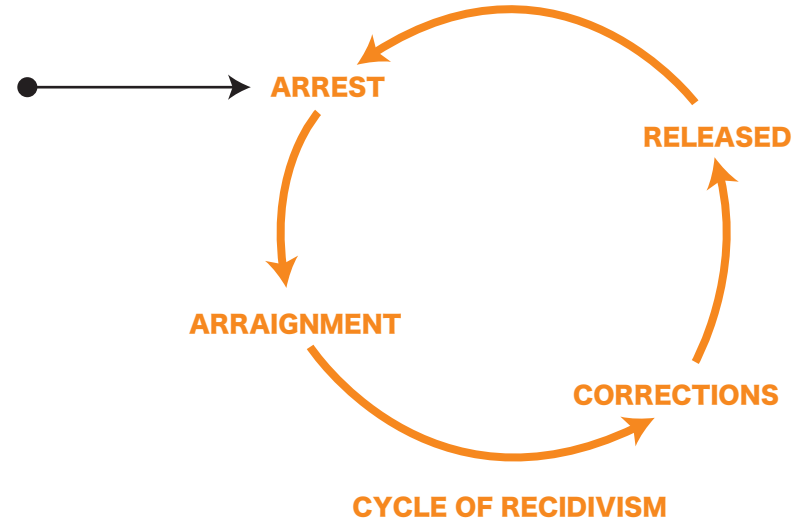
5. Carol Estes and Carol Estes, "Second Chance For Black Farmers," YES! Magazine, July 01, 2001, [PAGE], accessed September 27, 2021, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/issue/reclaiming-commons/2001/07/01/second-chance-for-black-farmers>

6. "A Brief History of Jim Crow," Constitutional Rights Foundation, [PAGE], accessed September 28, 2021, <https://www.crf-usa.org/black-history-month/a-brief-history-of-jim-crow>

7. "USDA Announces \$16.6 Million in Funding Opportunities to Support Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers," USDA, [PAGE], accessed September 28, 2021, <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2021/07/26/usda-announces-166-million-funding-opportunities-support-socially>

Grounding

Rooted Entanglement



I started to explore how recidivism and gardening can be linked together to foster community and develop healthy relationships. Through personal anecdotes and refining research efforts, I began to highlight their rooted entanglement.

Recidivism is a supported structure of people cycling in and out of prison by our society. Historical structures and systems of oppression make it challenging to successfully instill changes in one’s life, resulting in many homeless, unemployed, and/or living below the poverty line.

Most rehabilitation efforts were abandoned during Nixon’s presidency as drug arrests increased. In the 1989 Supreme Court Case *Mistretta vs. United States*, the Court upheld federal “sentencing guidelines,” which removed rehabilitation from serious consideration during sentencing.¹

There is a need for systemic change, but I also see the importance of the individual and local collective efforts developed to help people reintegrate.

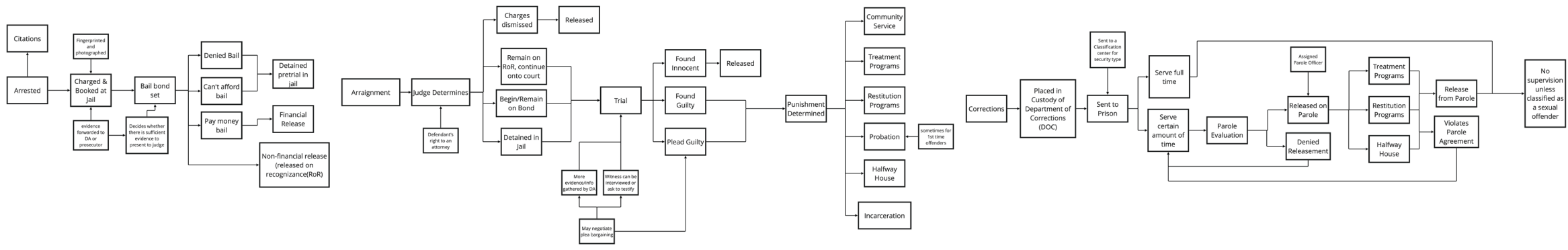
¹ Liz Benecchi, “Recidivism Imprisons American Progress,” *Harvard Political Review*, August 8, 2021, <https://harvardpolitics.com/recidivism-american-progress/>.

How can we best prepare people who are reintegrating to reduce the chances of recidivism?

Why reentry?

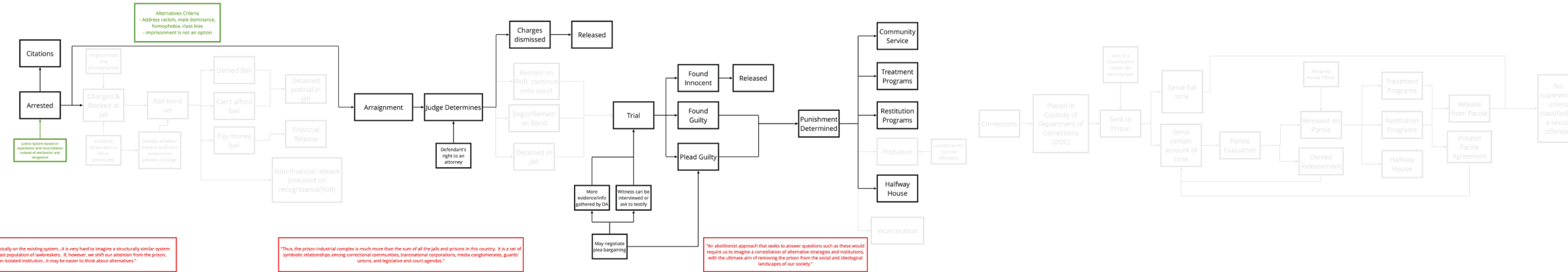
As I continued grounding my understanding of the U.S. prison system, I prioritized learnings from organizations like Brennan Center for Justice, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, and activist Angela Davis, doing the work. I started mapping their areas of intervention along the criminal justice system based on the diagram starting on page 38. Based on their reforms and suggestions, additions to the system I highlighted in green, removals in gray, and reforms in purple. The red text boxes hold summarized critical findings of their efforts.

Organizations and activists investigate other connected systems, like health care and education. Reintegration programs can be many things, including agriculture programs. Many organizations take a multi-pronged and holistic approach to address multiple issues at the same time that I briefly describe below. As the access to these services increases and by removing racial and class disparities, the prison industrial complex can start to be reversed. In addition, looking at incarceration, changing imprisonment lengths would shorten the time people are separated from their communities and reduce overcrowding and overused. Lastly, reforming and improving reintegration can help break the cycle of recidivism. By providing more multi-integrated resources and structured programming, people could feel better equipped to reenter society.

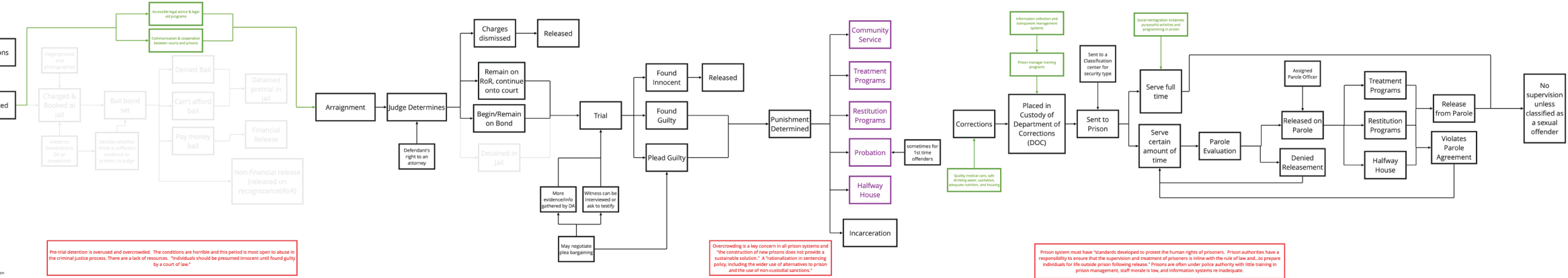


- Remove mental and physical disabilities in existing care at mental and medical institutions
- Health system that provides free physical and mental care to all
- Women entering the US to register sexual violence should be more gender-equal justice
- Eliminating the processes that punish people entering the US without documents
- Free, community-based programs accessible to all people who wish to solve their drug problems
- Decriminalization of drugs and sex work
- Remove presence of armed security guards and police
- Medialization of education of all youth (from preschool to high school)
- Encourage the pay of learning
- Demilitarization of schools

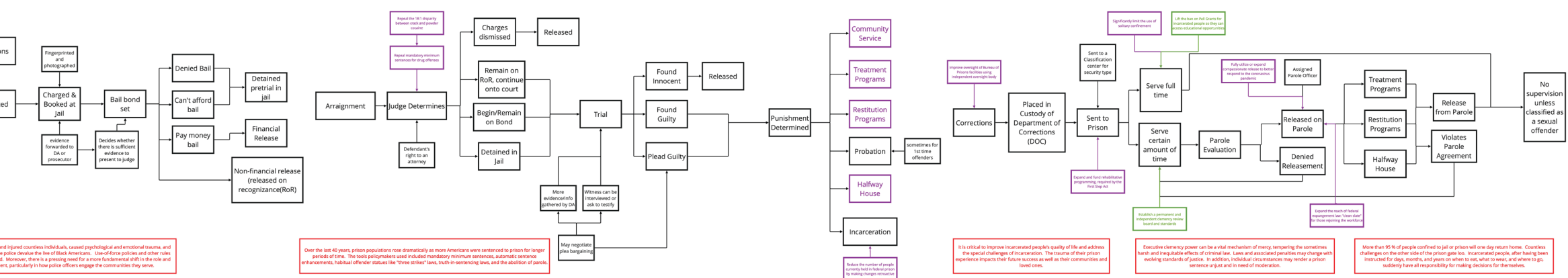
Alternatives Criteria
 - Address racism, male dominance, homophobia, class bias
 - Imprisonment is not an option



- Addition
- Removal
- Reformation



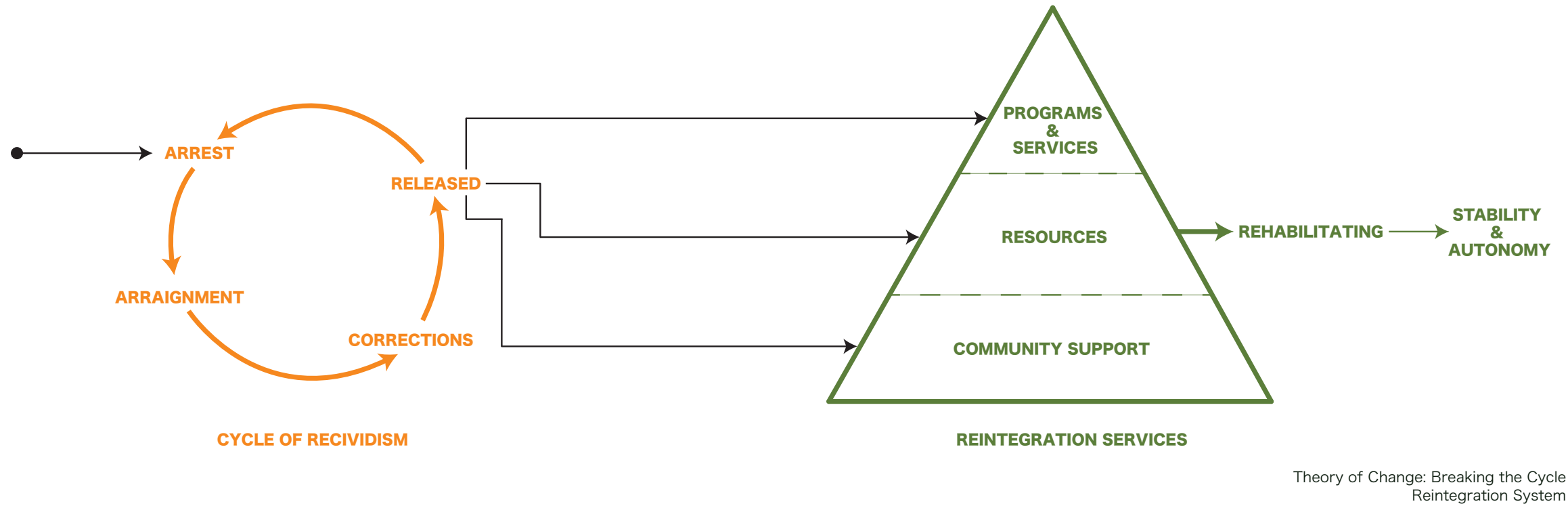
- Addition
- Removal
- Reformation



- Addition
- Removal
- Reformation

Grounding

Grounding



Rooted Entanglement

Rooted Entanglement

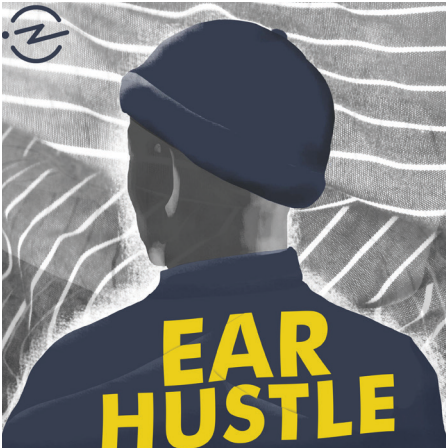
Reintegration services are an avenue to improve the chances of staying out of prison. The above image is a theory of change I imagine for reintegration services. Community support is at the base of the pyramid because having a network to rely on is essential, especially during life's unplanned obstacles. Resources and programs & services provide support through different avenues but are often underfunded and understaffed. Over time, these services would lead to rehabilitation from the trauma of prison, a lifelong process. The ultimate goal is to have stability and autonomy to live a grounding and fulfilling life. In no way is this process linear and everyone's experiences are very different, but we can start finding effective similarities between organizations to use as a foundation to develop more program development.



Ari Shapiro, "Behind 'Ear Hustle,' the Podcast Made in Prison," NPR.org, April 18, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/04/18/603562521/behind-ear-hustle-the-podcast-made-in-prison>.



James Rainey, "From inside San Quentin Prison: A Podcast That Won't Stay behind Bars," NBC News, June 22, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ear-hustle-podcast-unchains-voices-behind-prison-walls-n774171>.



"Ear Hustle," Ear Hustle, n.d., <https://www.earhustlesq.com>.



"San Quentin State Prison | History & Facts," in Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/San-Quentin-State-Prison>.

“I’m gonna miss, to be honest with you, like the structure, how everyday is more or less the same...I don’t want to have a bunch of choices. That makes me nervous.”

Chayne Hampton
Ear Hustle Podcast
2:19 So Long- Exit Strategy & Interviews

To continue learning, I started listening to the Ear Hustle podcast created and produced inside California’s San Quentin State Prison. I wanted to learn from the first-person perspective of experiences trapped within the prison industrial complex. Through pulling quotes, I mapped out reoccurring interviewee’s experiences by common events, especially drawn to people’s stories around reintegration. Three themes around excitement, sorrow, and feelings of being overwhelmed were often mentioned when discussing family, friends, and habits transitioning to life outside of prison.



Images I took from cooking, growing, and caring for the animals

Why gardening?

Growing up, I was privileged to be part of a community that prioritized healthy, local food. My family grew in two plots, each about 4 feet in width and 8 feet in length. I remember growing large tomato plants with flavorful cherry fruits and long vined vegetables with shaded squash hidden under the large leaves. Over the summer if it didn't rain, we would go to water the raised beds and checkout what other people planted.

I'm grateful to spend the better half of a decade tending these two beds, not fully realizing the benefits they provided to me and my family. A fun activity, but also a low-stress, relaxing environment for my imagination to go wild. Having access to a nurturing landscape shaped my passion for growing and appreciation for land and community.

Fast forward to the summer of 2020, the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and I find myself lucky enough working on a farm in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. D Acres Farm taught me valuable skills about permaculture and gardening, but also about the interconnectedness of land, animals, and plants.

Over time, I noticed that every action was intentional and every component within the farm was connected. The food scraps are fed to the pigs and their manure provides nutrients to the ground. The pigs simultaneously clear the fields by eating the weeds and when the time comes, they can be butchered for meat and seeds can be planted.

The "natural" harmony of cycles and relationality has shaped my mindset about environmental justice and the importance of a community support network. Support from the Earth and one another can provide benefits beyond the communal food grown.

Organizations Doing the Work

This section focuses on my efforts of wanting and needing to acknowledge the work that is already being done with organizations and people focusing on the intersection of gardening and supporting those incarcerated and formerly.

My goal was to understand the context of their efforts and how they identified their strengths and weaknesses. Through online research on their websites and other articles, I obtained an initial understanding of how they help and which areas of reentry, whether personal and/or professional, the organizations deemed essential. These focus areas ranged from education and employment to specific trainings and workshops.

Through this process, I started reaching out to leaders and participants within these organizations to gain a first-person understanding of how programs are run and their theories of change to strengthen my knowledge on these topics and apply a design-thinking approach to advance their programs.

Throughout this phase, I utilized a couple of strategies to research with a critical lens. It was important to identify where on the spectrum organizations placed themselves from prison reform to abolition to understand their theories of change. Were efforts pre-active or reactive to the prison system? How do they see their work instilling local to systemic change?

I was also interested in understanding specific tactics of programs and how they function. Do programs recognize knowledge experts or are operations top down? Are programs run in a lecture-style or group-style?

There are many obstacles when reentering society and what specific areas do organizations focus on. Are programs specific or multi-pronged? Is it more effective to be a generalist or an expert?

Over the next couple of spreads, I explain four organizations that are well established and an inspiration for my future work.

In future pages, I use acronyms for names and organizations to maintain some privacy and respect. I can only discuss my experiences and perceptions from firsthand and secondhand experiences.

If you're curious to learn more about the organizations, please reach out.



Image from D.H. Greenhouse

D.H. provides housing and services to homeless former prisoners on a 12-bed, working farm, where residents learn critical vocational skills to reintegrate positively and meaningfully with society. Residents and staff work together to tend the farm and grow food for a summer CSA and local food pantries. They also provide affordable apartments for up to eight Dismas program graduates and their families are offered next step affordable housing.

Strategies Identified

- + prison reform theory of change
- + structured programming around housing, employment, mental health, reentry planning
- + more of a top-down approach
- + Connecting to the Earth and place

D.H. Massachusetts

Language is paraphrased from the website.



Image from G.T. garden inside RI ACI

G.T. provides prison-based educational programs that teach incarcerated men and women how to cultivate gardens and grow food for their own economic and personal well-being and self-reliance. Outside of prison, they offer a six-week green industry job training program for formerly incarcerated people every fall. The reentry guide is distributed inside and outside prison.

Strategies Identified

- + Prison reform theory of change
- + Structured programming around life skills, employment, reentry planning, education
- + Community building inside and outside of prison
- + Connecting to the Earth and place

G.T. Rhode Island

Language is paraphrased from the website.



Images from G.R.I. Adult Job Training Program



G.R.I. introduces local residents, special emphasis on serving formerly-incarcerated individuals, to career pathways in the environmental sector. The trainings offer many certifications to make applicants more competitive on job applications. Around 70% of training graduates are placed in jobs. G.R.I. has a landscape business that design-builds and maintains green spaces, hiring graduates from the job training program.

Strategies Identified

- + prison reform theory of change
- + structured programming around employment, education
- + more of a top-down approach
- + Connecting to the Earth and place

G.R.I. Rhode Island

Language is paraphrased from the website.



Oakland North. "Planting Justice Celebrates 10 Years of Cultivating Gardening Skills for Incarcerated People," September 20, 2019. <https://oaklandnorth.net/2019/09/20/planting-justice-celebrates-10-years-of-cultivating-gardening-skills-for-incarcerated-people/>.

P.J. believes that education programs activate people affected by food injustice. Their programs create a local food system through ecological design, nutrition, education, and art. Working inside San Quentin State Prison, they train people inside about permaculture gardening, preparing them for a job on the outside. They provide their employees a living wage and over 35% of the staff are formerly incarcerated. They believe in a "culture of wellness" to support reentry staff.

Strategies Identified

- + prison reform theory of change through preparing before leaving
- + structured programming around employment, education
- + provides multiple avenues of care
- + Connecting to the Earth and place inside and outside of prison

P.J. California

Language is paraphrased from the website.

Localize to Rhode Island

Navigating my position working at the intersection of incarceration and gardening, connections and relationship building in Rhode Island were at the foundation. Students can get stuck in their education bubble and I believe it's important to educate myself about where I'm currently living.

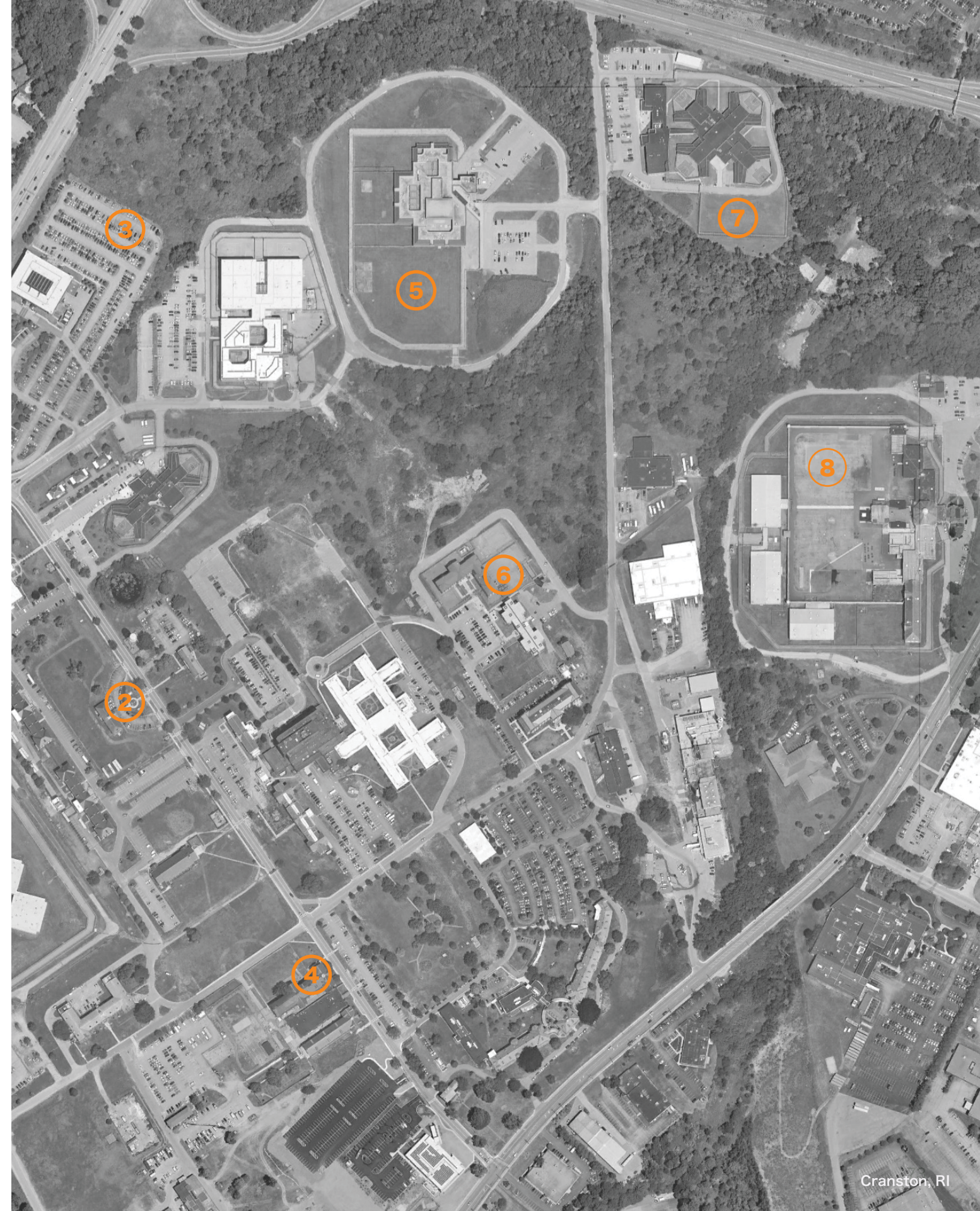
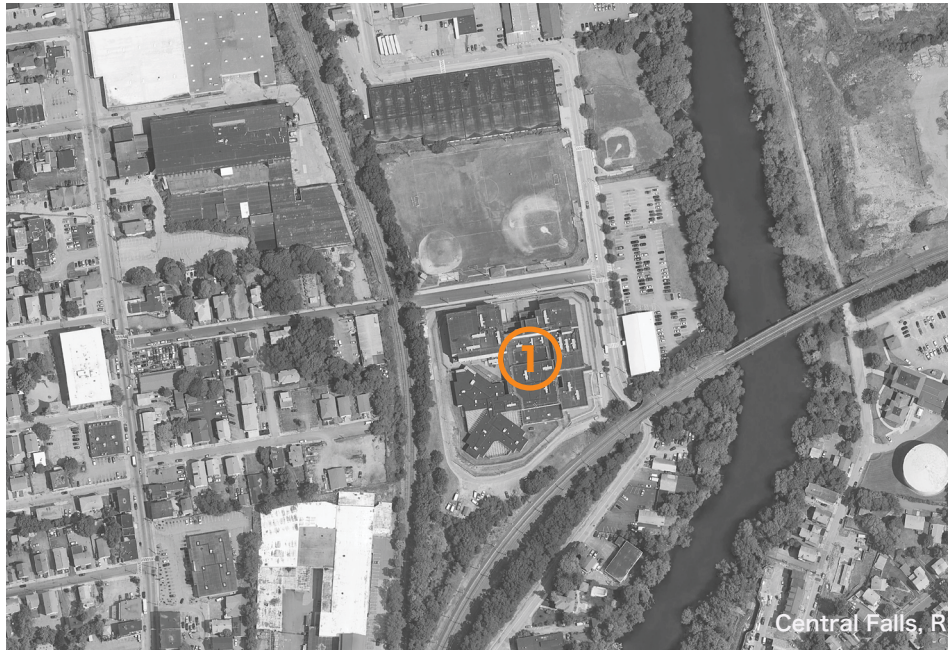
To focus my thesis work as an ally, I knew that I needed to be able to work face-to-face with organizations. So I took a two-pronged approach of reaching out to RI nonprofits that developed reentry programs and emailed the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) directly to learn about their perspective and process with reentry.

After reaching out to ten or so organizations, some focusing on gardening, three responded: G.T., G.R.I., and R.T.E. I spoke with the Executive Directors from each organization to learn about the programs and services they provided and why they chose to focus their efforts on reintegration.

I thought the best way to ground my work was to volunteer and participate in learning from their operations but also the people with the lived experiences. After initial discussions, I wanted to know how I could get involved as an outsider wanting to help and how my skills could benefit them. I understood that I was a stranger and that our relationships would require a lot of trust to grow.

Rhode Island Prisons

Cranston & Central Falls



1 Donald W. Wyatt Detention Facility

2 John J. Moran Facility

3 Anthony P. Trivisono Intake Service Center

4 Minimum Security

5 High Security Center

6 Gloria McDonalds Women's Facility

7 RI Training School. Youth Development Center

8 Maximum Security

Reaching out to the RIDOC was chaotic and complex.

Emailing a Transitional Care Coordinator opened up a can of worms, expanding the conversation to five people and getting few answers. My goal was to learn about discharge planning at the RIDOC to learn about gaps or areas of improvement in their provided services to help guide my work.

They had so many obstacles to preventing any form of transparency or information sharing. I was curious about their protocols, not any specific details that would undermine their work. By gatekeeping their processes, I had to rely on their website and learn from people's experiences.

Creating these barriers is another example of how prisons don't want you to understand or learn about what goes on behind closed walls.

The annual reports published on the RIDOC website provided some information about demographic data. Every five years or so, would publish information about recidivism rates, clearly knowing that they are a problem this system faces. Unfortunately, statistics can easily be construed to hide or highlight certain information, distracting from what this information really means. Taking a close look, I could reword information pulled from annual reports for a larger audience to understand.

I knew I would have to take the information with a grain of salt, and statistics are different than lived experiences, but it was the first step to understanding what is happening in Cranston and Central Falls.

This cycle of recidivism traps people within the prison system, and by one-year post-release, 70% of recidivists return to the RIDOC.¹ At the time of arrest, over half of the people are unemployed.²

¹ "Fiscal Year 2019 Annual Population Report," Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 2019, <https://doc.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkg-bur681/files/docs/FY19-Annual-Population-Report.pdf>.

² "RIDOC Goals," 2020, <http://www.doc.ri.gov/docs/FY20%20Annual%20Population%20Report.pdf>.

Growing

Relationship Building

I wanted to be intentional and build trust and connections with nonprofits and people already doing the work to continue to support their efforts and use my skills to uplift and grow their initiatives.

I knew this wasn't going to be a straightforward process of cold emailing and calling organizations wanting to learn more about their experiences and seeing how I could get involved and collaborate. Reaching out, I wanted to avoid transactional relationships but build more equitable ones through trust, respect, openness, and honesty.

To uphold these rules, I made sure to write in my journal my intentions and goals before reaching out to organizations and after reflecting on all interactions. The careful attention to detail helped me stay closely aligned with my intended standards.

How can I use my design skills to help organizations ?

Why should an organization trust me?

What can I offer an organization? How can I use my design skills to help an organization?

How do I build trust with people in the organization?

How do I make this relationship less transactional?

Questions I Constantly Consider

Student Interested in learning about [redacted] [close] [print] [share]

External [arrow] Inbox x

Juliana Soltys <jsoltys@risd.edu> Fri, Nov 5, 2021, 1:57 PM [star] [reply] [more]

to [redacted]

Hi [redacted]

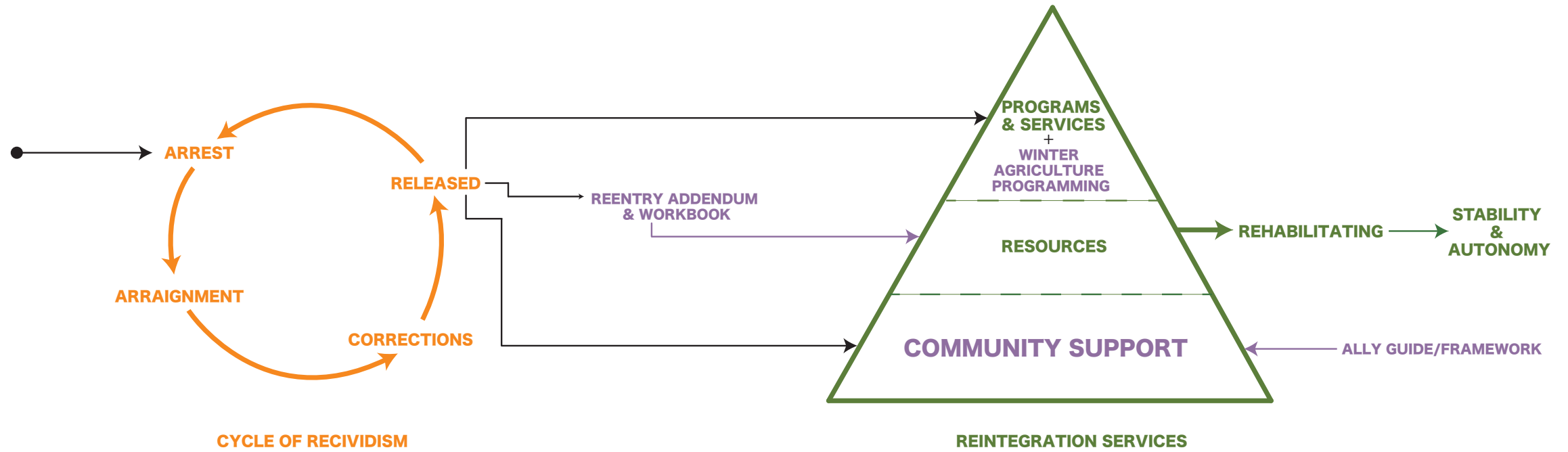
I hope you're doing well! My name is Juliana, and I'm a design graduate student at RISD, educating myself in the intersection of food systems and reintegrating those formerly incarcerated. I've briefly talked to [redacted] and she mentioned [redacted]

I'm looking to get more involved in the community, fighting for the rights of those incarcerated and those formerly. [redacted] interests me because of your work inside and outside of prisons. I believe grassroots movements are important to larger systemic change, and I want to use my skills to help!

I'm curious if you have time next week to chat over the phone or on Zoom. Thank you for taking the time to read this, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Best,
Juliana Soltys

Sample cold email I sent out to organizations



Theory of Change: Breaking the Cycle Reintegration System + Interventions

Through my research and relationship building, I have decided to focus on three areas mentioned in purple. Using the theory of change as a foundation, I wanted to contribute ideas in multiple levels of the pyramid.

My three focus areas are the Reentry Addendum + Workbook, Winter Gardening Program, and this book! The goal of the agriculture program is to increase access to programs and services, while the Reentry Addendum + Workbook provides more information about resources in Rhode Island. Finally, this book aims to share my approach as a learning opportunity of my successes and shortcomings.

G.T. Reentry Guide

By reaching out to local RI organizations, G.T. quickly responded and was excited to talk about the organization and its mission. A quick conversation led to a collaboration, and I was very eager to help in any way I could.

The organization manages gardens inside and outside of the ACIs in Rhode Island and recently published a free, physical reentry guide to share that can also be viewed on their website. Because of my design background, she wanted help updating the guide, and soon we started making plans and communicated more frequently.

Meeting in person in November for the first time, I learned more about the organization and was able to chat briefly with some of the program graduates. I took home a copy of the guide with me that afternoon and started reviewing it, developing a plan for making the updates, and identifying critical areas of improvement.

Areas for Improvement

* Initially identified by K.L. and myself

- Need to prioritize more voices involved in the program
- Very busy pages with a lot of information
- Need a method for making changes
- Tailor workbook to more personalization options



Cohort Workshop

The Reentry Guide Workshop was a design exercise with my cohort taking spreads from reentry guides published across the country to find strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in graphic design, language, and layout. This was the first iteration that I planned to propose to G.T. as an exercise to run with participants of the program to gain additional insight into how to update the guide. I wanted to incorporate more first-hand experience of program participants to make improvements to the guide.

Updating Guide Process

I knew that I wanted to approach the guide with a bottom-up strategy very early on. With this strategy, I knew that I needed to interview participants of the program to gain their insights and involve them in the process if they were interested. Having those with the lived experiences be the center since their voices are often not heard or prioritized when decisions are made.

To help smooth line this process, I developed an interview document with a consent form and questions to share. Unfortunately, proposing these ideas, I received a lot of pushback from K.L.

From our Zoom interactions, I wanted to be very careful to be respectful as a non-expert and outsider navigating our relationship. Hesitancy might have been from the lack of initial trust built up, and I soon felt like I needed to prove myself and my intentions more clearly.

Over time, I proved myself by continuing to work and share updates to the guide. In the back of my mind, I still had the goal of incorporating the voices of the program participants, but I knew that would be a slow process. I stuck with the collaboration, occasionally mentioning incorporating their voices. After five months, I was able to propose interviewing and execute it during a garden workday preparing the raised beds.



Photo credits: E.C.

“I’m committed to this program...This gardening program helped me figure out what a healthy relationship looks like.”

Stephen
G.T. Program graduate

One Friday morning early this spring, I helped E.C. and men from the G.T. program prep the raised beds by adding compost and planting seeds. Then, with the permission of the men also working in the garden, I asked questions I had prepared with K.L. about their experience leaving prison and living on the outside.

Experiences couldn’t be generalized, but many spoke about the benefits of the G.T. program in their lives and how they wished for the program to be more frequent; they enjoyed the growing process, and one another’s company.

Providence Winter Gardening Program

Based on my research and working with G.T., I imagine what continuing a program would look like over the winter months.

The Providence Winter Gardening Program creates a space for justice-involved individuals to develop vital life skills through growing and gardening management.

Located at a Providence community center in a classroom setting with an outdoor gardening space, participants new and returning work with nonprofit coordinators to learn about seed saving, crop planning, and seed germination while reflecting on lived experiences and preparing for the now. In addition, communities of support and care can develop through mentorship relationships. This support network extends beyond the scheduled program times to help with life's obstacles.

Meeting two to three times a week, this program aims to provide structured support for people reintegrating and foster a community that realizes one another's potential and builds self-confidence. In addition, through the activities and trainings, participants can develop and enhance skills translatable to their personal and/or professional life.

The program would utilize an asset-based approach throughout but in different ways. In the start, building trust and community is vital to creating a cohort environment where people can build off each other's strengths and start to feel comfortable around one another. It would then feed into the crop planning approach, where tools and techniques would be used to balance knowledge hierarchies and leverage people's expertise and experience with food and agriculture. Finally, recognizing skills would go beyond just food systems but connect to employment, family life, and other areas of life.

Growing

Growing



RI Gardening Reentry Programs & Trainings

PVD Winter Gardening Program

PVD Winter Gardening Program

People are released from prison throughout the year, but RI reentry gardening programs don't run during the winter months. Beyond the time gap, I noticed areas for improvement, especially around timing, agency, and autonomy, as I learned more about the organizations. What happens to the members of those programs? Where do recently released people find support?

How can closing the gap in garden trainings & programs foster community and build important life skills for those formerly incarcerated?

Growing

Growing



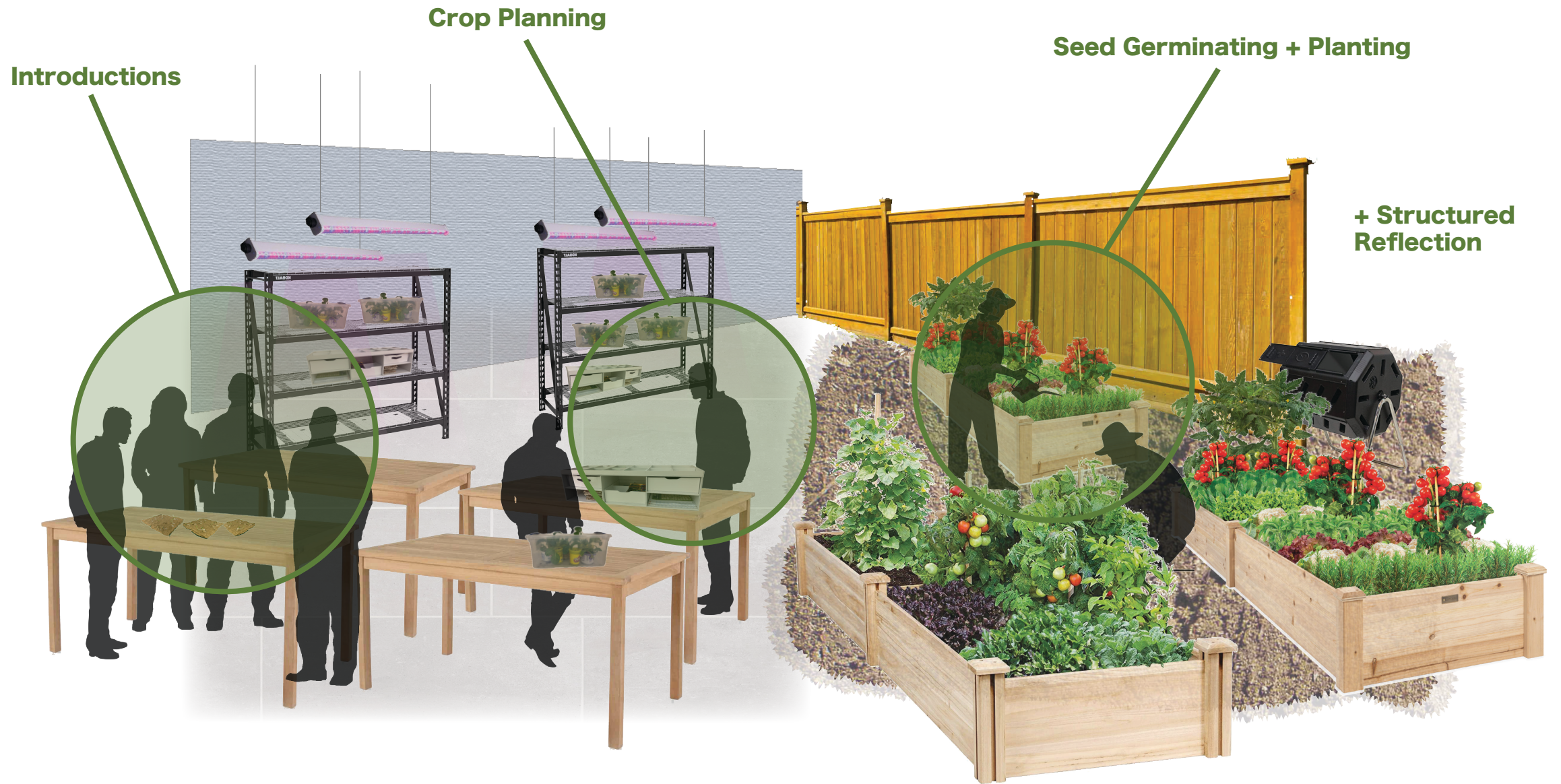
PVD Winter Gardening Program

PVD Winter Gardening Program

Providence Winter Gardening Program
Community Center

Growing

Growing



PVD Winter Gardening Program

PVD Winter Gardening Program

Providence Winter Gardening Program
Community Center

Time of Year: December - May

Weather: Snow, ice accumulation, wind chill

Temperature: 0-58 °F

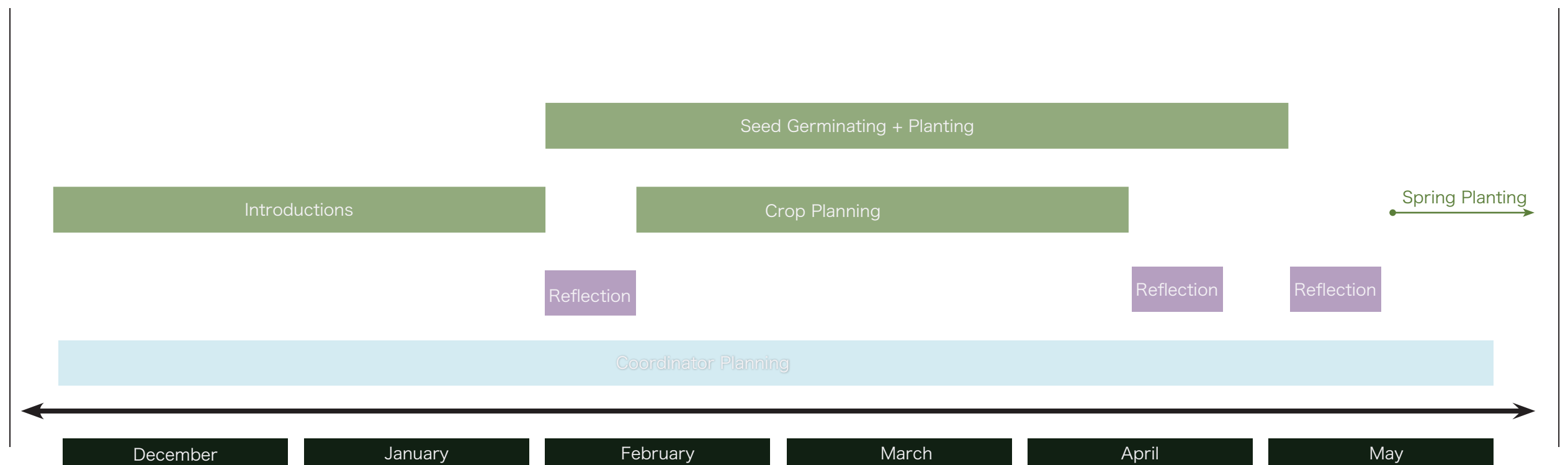
Area of City: Community Center, Providence, RI

People Involved: Justice-involved people & family, non-profit coordinators

Days of Week: 2-3 days for 2-4 hours depending on the day and activity

Growing

Growing



Providence Winter Gardening Program
Program Timeline

PVD Winter Gardening Program

PVD Winter Gardening Program

With the design criteria (timing, networking/community, skill-building, and mental healing) in mind, the program has three areas of focus highlighted in green with scheduled times for regrouping and reflection in purple. The blue simplifies the coordinator's role in planning and managing the program throughout the five months.

Introductions

The prison system strips people of their empowerment and confidence, and it's important to have structure when leaving. There is comfort in routine when inside prison, and once that is disrupted, someone could start to feel very overwhelmed and fall into unhealthy patterns.

Mentorship and connecting with people who have been out for longer can build more trusting relationships and means of support, especially with obstacles that aren't addressed in discharge planning or reentry guides. The introductions are a time to build relationships and for mentors to share their experiences. Human-to-human connection is vital for reentry.

This intervention seeks to respect and uplift the knowledge and expertise of the individuals in the program, especially those who have been outside of prison for some time. Their lived experiences and survival are evidence of their successful ability to navigate challenging circumstances. As Gramsci calls "organic intellectuals", this approach acknowledges individuals with lived experiences."¹

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Conversations are facilitated by coordinators and returning participants to talk about the structure of the program, expectations, and previous experiences. Discussions around seed saving, previous experience gardening, goals, or areas of interest are just some of the topics discussed to gain an understanding of what people are interested in learning about and growing and want to work towards during the duration of the program.

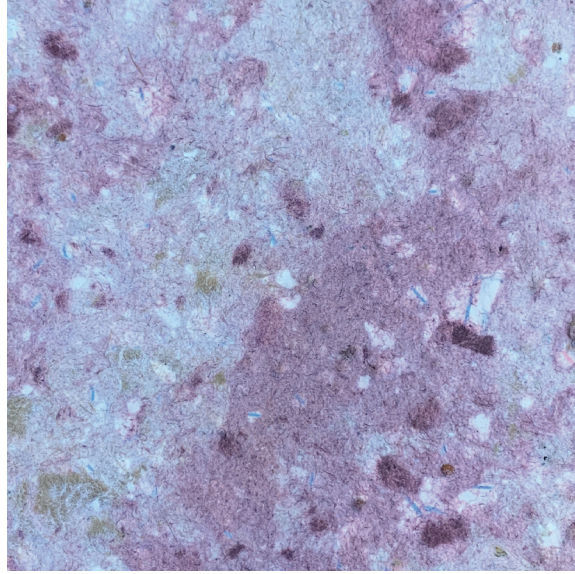
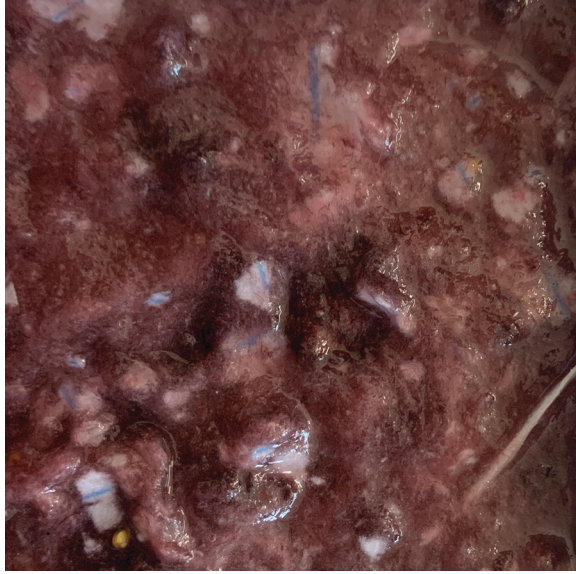
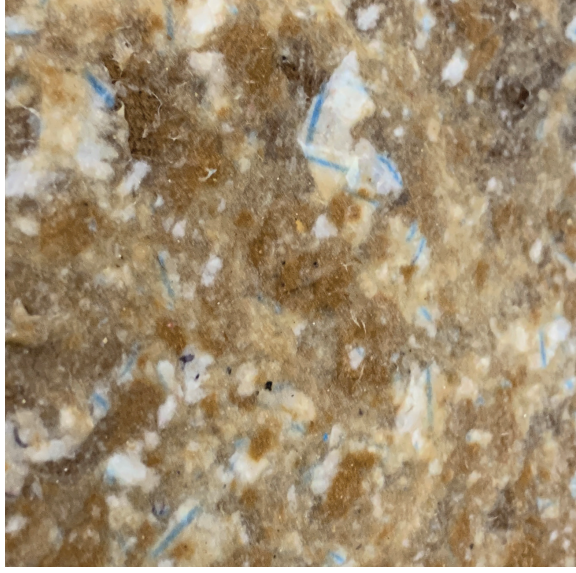
The seed paper-making activities allow for a creative outlet to learn about seed saving and create artifacts that'll be stored and distributed for the following year. In addition, this low-stress activity creates a tie and connection between each year's evolving community.

¹ Antonio Gramsci, Joseph A Buttigieg, and Antonio Callari, *Prison Notebooks* (New York ; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2011).

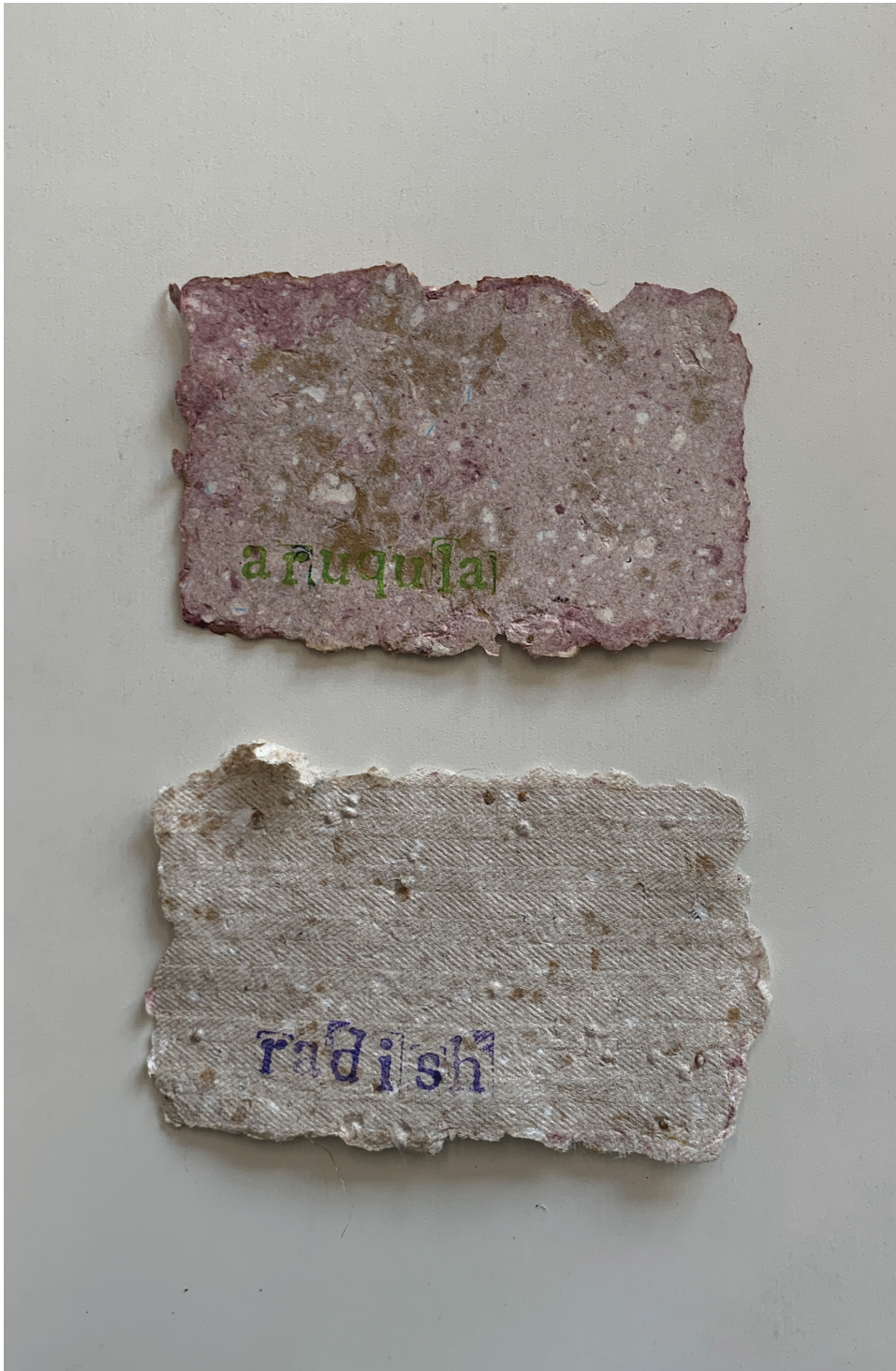


Making seed paper using simple printmaking techniques

The seed paper making process is not only a creative activity during the introductions portion, but also fosters annual cycles within the program by preparing for the following growing year and cohort of growers. This form of gift-giving establishes longer forms of care amongst participants directly and indirectly throughout the length of the program.



Seed paper drying overnight with lettuces seeds



Dried seed paper with arugula and radish seeds using recycled printer paper and brown grocery bags



Crop Planning

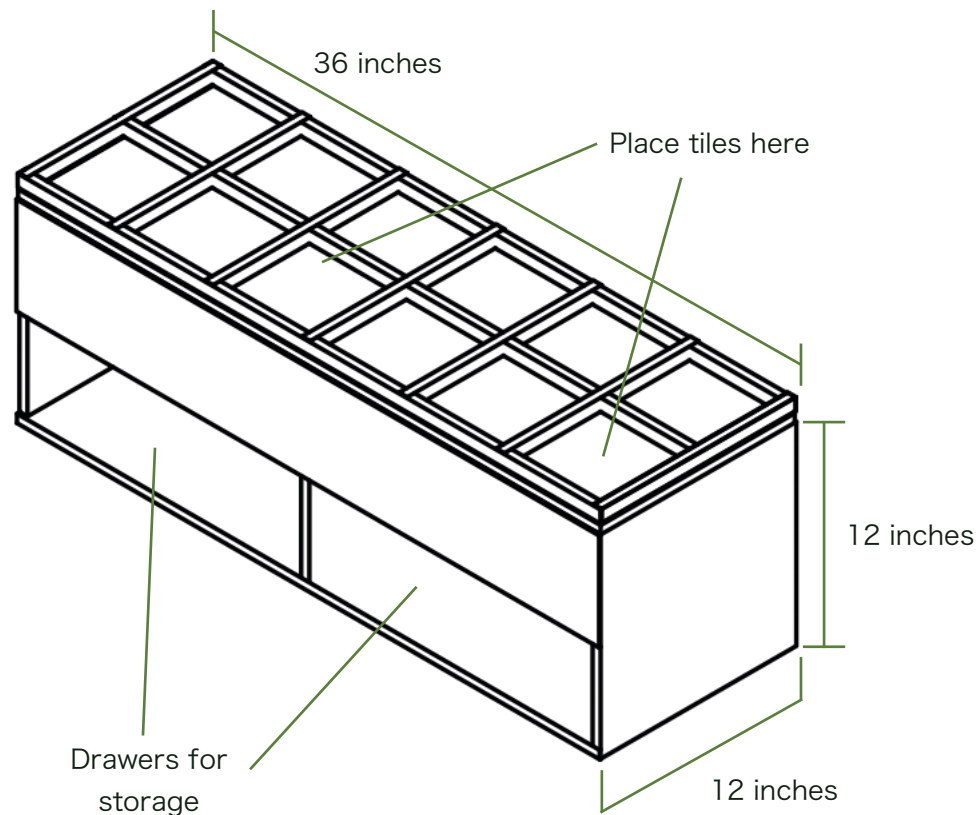
After the introductions, it's time to start crop planning around late February. Coordinators create small groups to prepare the planting schedule for the community-raised beds as a collaborative process. Mixed groups with new and returning work together to decide which kind of vegetables, how many, where to plant them, and when.

This opportunity can have a steep learning curve but was designed with an asset-based approach to build and highlight specific life skills based on interests and experiences.

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The groups are each given a crop planning tool, pictured on the following page, to help organize the raised bed. Roles are split based on experience and personal preferences, and groups work together to accomplish these four goals: seed decisions, layout, timing, and budget. Mentors and more experienced community members can help lead the conversations with the coordinators, checking in once in a while for help.

At the end of the process, groups present their decisions to the larger group to receive feedback and practice public speaking and presentation skills. Finally, the crop planner can be brought outside to help with the raised bed planting based on the planting schedule.



Rendered drawing of the crop planning tool

The Crop Planner is split into two parts. The top component is modeled after a raised bed, half scale. The larger rectangle is broken down into 12 equally sized squares to help with positioning the vegetables to plant. Each kind of vegetable requires a different amount of space to grow, ranging from the smallest size (ex. carrot and beet) to the largest size (ex. cabbage and tomato). On the back of each tile has information typically found on a seed packet: sun amount, spacing, days until germination, and days until harvest. The whole top part is removable and can be carried around separately from the base to different areas inside or outside where the planting occurs. To prevent tiles from sliding around, the bottom of the crop planner is magnetic. Tiles also have a small magnet inside to secure them in place but can still easily adjust.

The base has four drawers, two accessible from each side. The two top drawers contain storage for extra tiles, seed packets, and seed paper. Typically the newer participant would be on that size of the crop planner to have particular responsibility and leadership. On the other side, the returning participant or more experienced grower would be working from the side with the bottom drawers, accessing planting schedules, companion plants, and additional notebooks and stationary. They can work together to help decide where and when the vegetables should be planted by placing the tiles.



Crop planner tool at the RISD 2022 Exhibit Opening

Seed Germination

During crop planning, each participant is handed out a growing kit to take home in early February if they have the space and ability. The kits include the necessary materials to start germinating the seed paper made the year prior.

At home, if able to, the grower is responsible for the seeds they want to grow and for bringing them back to the community center when the time is right. Having that personal connection and independence is important to instill responsibility for watering and caring for the small plants and to bring them back to flourish at the community center.

Gardening can provide many mental health benefits too. Taking care of something and watching it grow can positively impact the grower and those living in the space—the additional benefits of seeing the reward of your labor.

This section of the program uses strategies like emergent strategies and an asset-based approach to guide the structure to build and highlight specific life skills.

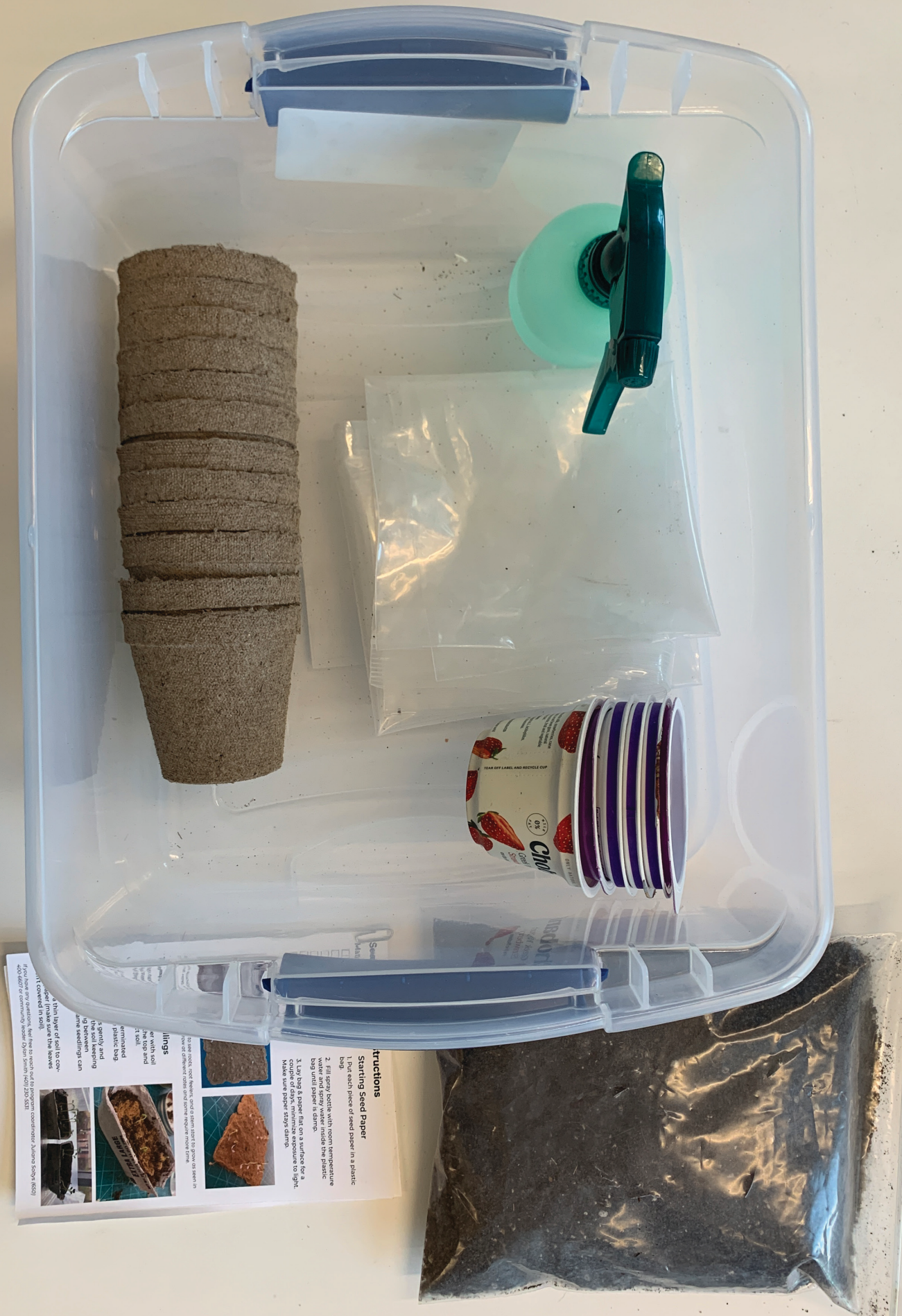
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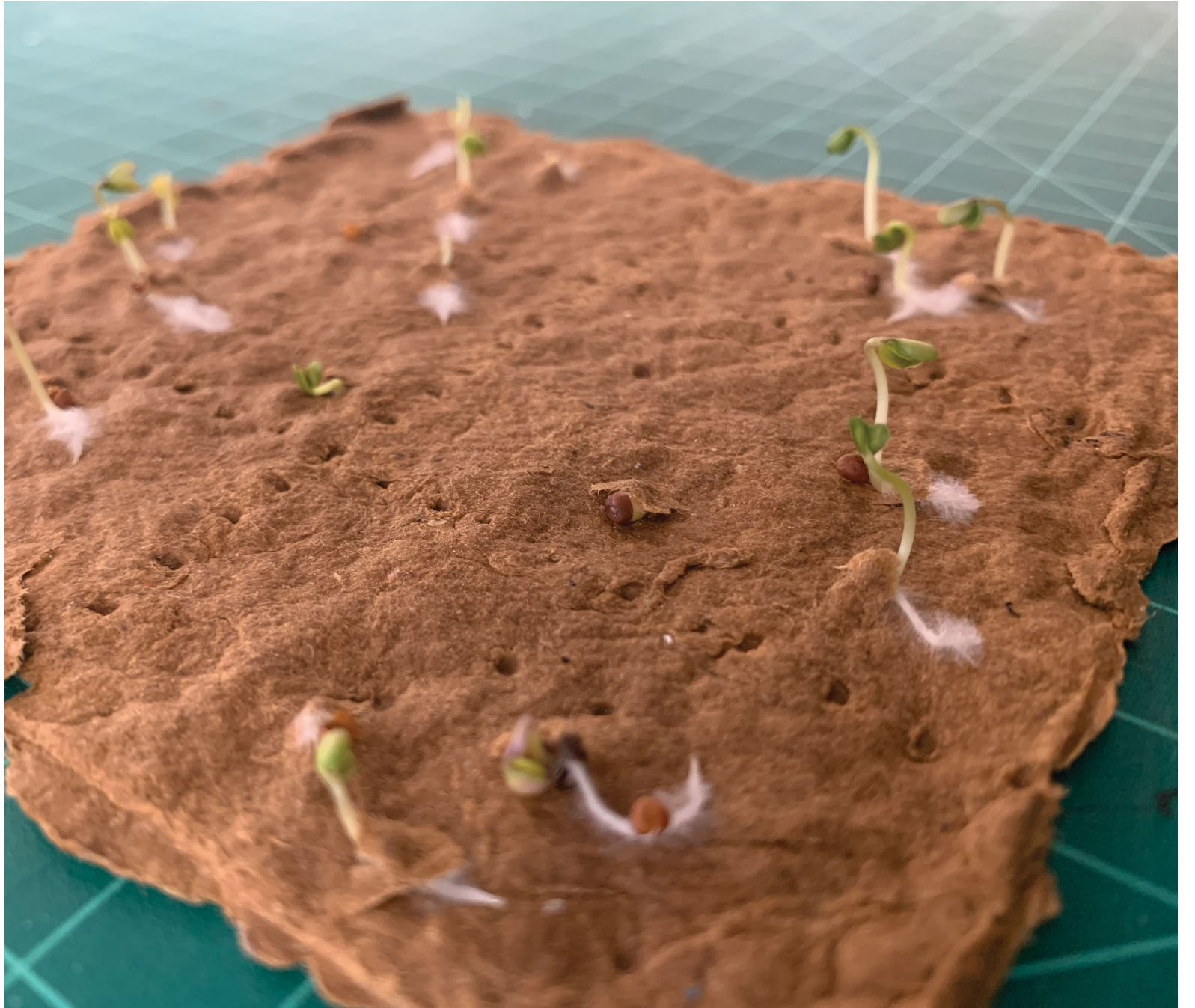
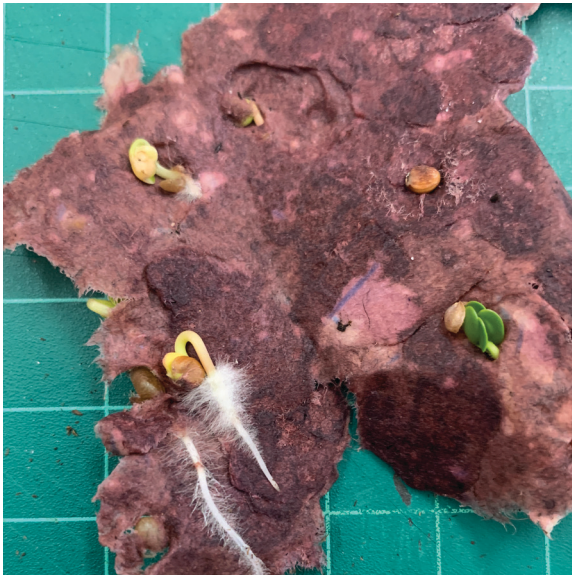
At the community center, coordinators and experienced growers explain the process of germinating the seed paper in plastic bags, transplanting seedlings to the soil, and the growing conditions.

Participants bring back their growing kits in the plastic Tupperware to be stored and eventually transplanted outside in late April and early May. Soon after, the already established programming begins with watering, weeding, and other classroom teaching opportunities, creating a new nurturing cycle that supports and grows the people involved.

Growing Kit Materials

- + seed paper
- + instructions
- + spray bottle
- + peat containers
- + yogurt cups (larger containers)
- + bag of soil
- + plastic bags
- + plastic Tupperware container





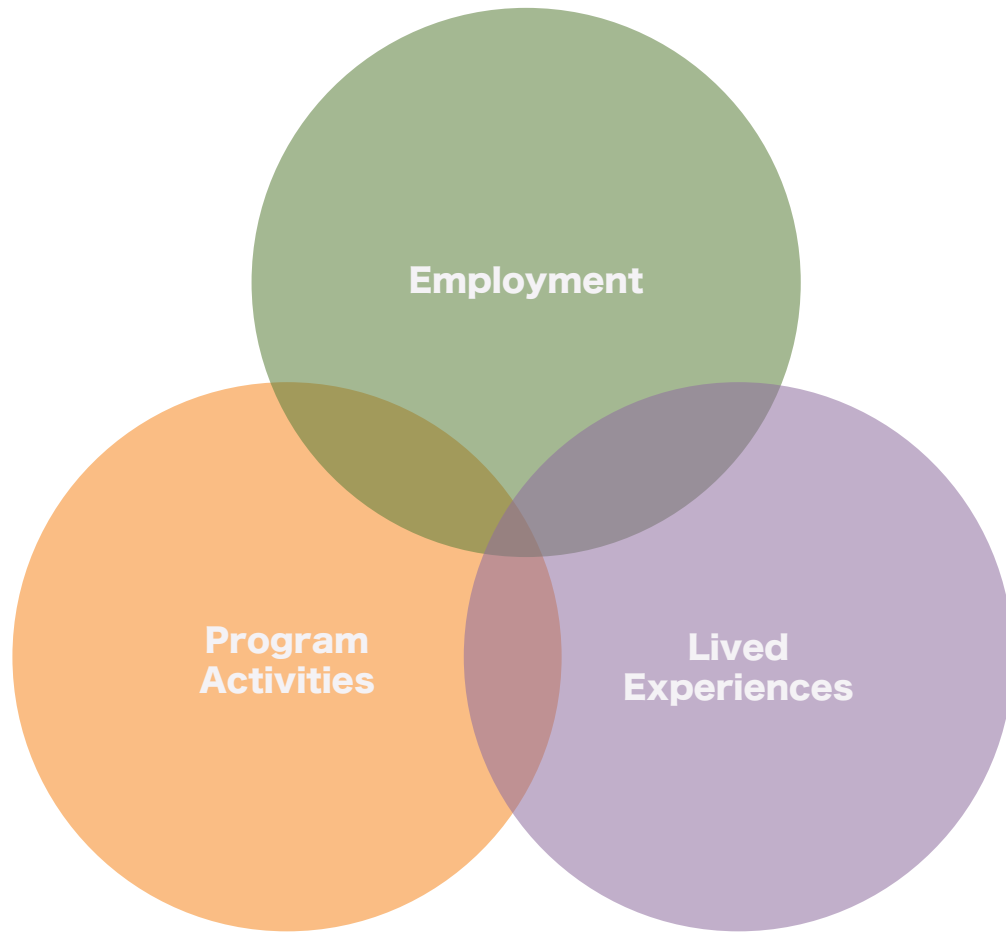
First experiment germinating lettuce seeds on homemade seed paper



Growing transplanted seedlings in found containers



Transplanting lettuce to larger containers



Reflection

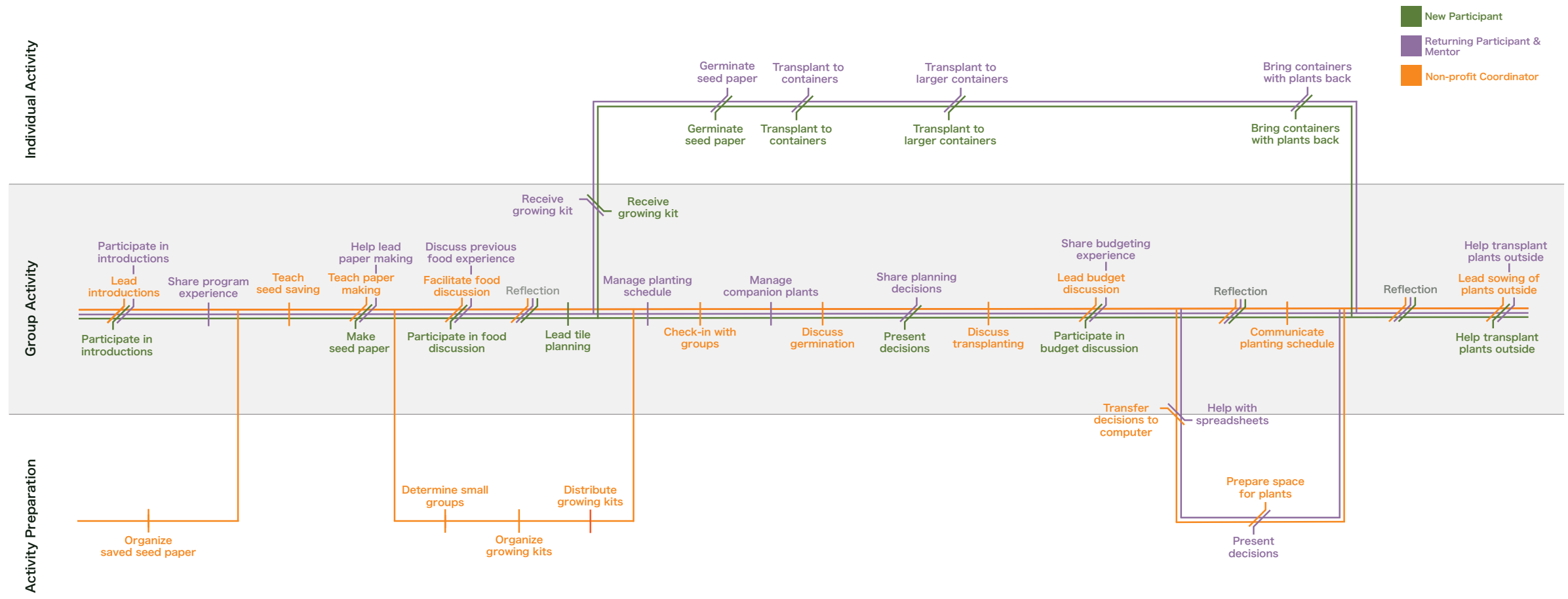
After each major activity, it's important to take time for structured reflection. Prison can evaporate someone's self-worth and confidence, and it's vital to create space to help people realize their potential.

So after each activity, structured time will be scheduled to reflect on the skills learned and used and how they can translate to various areas of life, personally or professionally. Returning participants can help lead these discussions and talk about their experiences in relation to the activities and beyond.

Finding employment and recognizing your skills can help ground feeling overwhelmed or lost. Incarcerated people have lived experiences employed, and many worked while inside prison. Those experiences can help them find employment, and it's vital to see how those skills can transfer to a career after prison. This structured time would help with that translation and finding a path to find jobs that highlight their skills.

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At the community center, everyone would sit ideally in a circle or in smaller groups to reflect on the significant activity they just accomplished with prompts like: What did you learn (skills, about yourself, etc.)? What was challenging about the activity or working with your group? How can this activity impact your life personally or professionally? The goal is to create a safe space where people feel comfortable sharing and respectfully listening to one another.



Program Phase	January	February	March	April	May
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Life Skills	January	February	March	April	May
communication skills	communication skills	collaboration	conflict resolution	caring	conflict resolution
collaboration	collaboration	conflict resolution	delegating	empathy	critical thinking
creativity	creativity	creativity	empathy	independence	empathy
organization	organization	design skills	interpersonal skills	independence	independence
patience	patience	empathy	management	management	management
public speaking	public speaking	leadership	mentorship	mentorship	math knowledge
teamwork	teamwork	patience	negotiating	open-minded	mentorship
		planning	teamwork	reporting	money management
		planting knowledge	troubleshooting	self-confidence	public speaking
		teamwork		time management	organization
				time management	time management
				troubleshooting	troubleshooting

Providence Winter Gardening Program
 Detailed Program Timeline

Reflecting

Next Steps

This is only the beginning, so instead of a conclusion, I wanted to take a moment to reflect and discuss the next steps. Over the past 2.5 years, I've learned about the U.S. agriculture system, and more recently, my perspective on the U.S. prison system has changed. By no means am I an expert or claiming to be an expert about either of these topics, but sharing my process of discovery and understanding.

The pandemic has been a continued challenge in navigating relationships and working hands-on. Building collaborative connections has not been a straightforward process, especially when you're an outsider. I've realized that navigating allyship is a lifelong process, and there is no formula. Patience, honesty, and open communication can help. Yet, I believe the stickiness can grow into something beautiful.

The program is a first step toward imagining what extending care during reintegration can look like. However, this is only a first step to starting the conversation. The project is not done, but a checkpoint bounded by my thesis program. After graduation, I hope to continue this work with youth in Boston and continue collaborating in Providence.

I imagine a world that is more patient, caring, and loving. Together, we can support one another and grow a future.

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