

Yoga 4 Change Receives Grant To Fund Study On Trauma Informed Yoga

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In my work to date, I have seen that embodied mindfulness programming can help to ameliorate mental health symptoms, improve physical well-being and create positive coping strategies. Yoga can help with impulse control, bring greater awareness, and allow the practitioner to more effectively maintain sobriety and to manage trauma symptoms by staying present. Yoga improves both emotional awareness and emotional regulation, and allows practitioners to be embodied in a way that they may not have had access to before. Embodied mindfulness programming may offer an opportunity for vulnerability in an environment where it is generally not safe to be vulnerable, this can be powerful. These embodied practices can serve as complementary and alternative approaches to other mental health and substance abuse treatment modalities. Embodied practices also become a tool people who are incarcerated can share with others in their lives.

Statistically speaking, how is the average incarcerated adult's mental and physical health impacted by their time spent within the justice system?

Systemic issues have led to significant increases in incarceration. Incarceration is impacted by racial disparities, the criminalization of homelessness, and the incarceration of people with mental illness. The War on Drugs has led to the incarceration of nonviolent offenders in need of treatment, but these needs often

go unmet. The jails and prisons in our country have come to be referred to as the “new asylums.” As institutions for the treatment of mental health issues closed and community based services were not available, many individuals with mental illness ended up in the correctional system. Jails and prisons became a de facto mental health system.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, approximately 1 in 7 prisoners and 1 in 4 jail inmates meet the criteria for serious psychological distress. People who are incarcerated are more likely to meet the criteria for mental illness than are people in the general public. Women who are incarcerated have an even higher rate of mental and physical health needs. Women are more likely to have a history of physical and/or sexual abuse, to be primary caretaker of young children and to have distinct physical and mental health needs.

Incarceration itself can be both traumatizing and re-traumatizing. Trauma responses can be triggered by many aspects of incarceration including aggressive or abusive peers or superiors, misperceptions of other’s behavior, small spaces, strip searches, lack of privacy, and of course, solitary confinement. Within this context, trauma-informed programming is so important.