

Balancing Justice with Mercy:

What is a Healing Community?



1. Vision. A Healing Community seeks to engage congregations in the restoration and healing of people affected by crime, incarceration and reintegration.

2. Faith community's unique strengths. A Healing Community offers a place where the belief systems and unique strengths of the faith community are invoked -- acceptance, compassion, forgiveness, redemption and restoration. It can offer what programs and services generally cannot -- the transformation of hearts and minds and the building of relationships that support people.

3. Who is served. A Healing Community serves both the individuals *and their families* affected by the criminal justice system and reentry -- for instance, the mother *and* her son who is in prison, the wife and children *and* the father who was just arrested etc. "This is a ministry that starts with people you already know."

4. Timing of service. A Healing Community may help members of the congregation and their families at any time from arrest through the return home from prison.

5. Nature of service. A Healing Community offers a ministry of presence; they "walk with the person" and connect them to their faith. The community's members open their hearts and offer an embrace him of love and understanding -- without necessarily providing the services that programs deliver.

6. Strengthening. A Healing Community seeks to strengthen families and communities by creating a sense of welcome inclusion, by reducing stigma and shame, and by building networks of support that start in houses of worship and expand to the community at large.

7. Personal responsibility. A Healing Community facilitates taking responsibility for harm done and encourages taking action to repair harm to the victim, community, family and self.

8. Transformation. A Healing Community transforms the congregation, which leads to the transformation of neighborhoods and communities.

GETTING STATED: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HEALING COMMUNITIES FRAMEWORK

1. Introduction of concept. A faith leader or a member of the congregation introduces the Healing Communities framework within his or her congregation. The stories told in the guide (Chapter One and Appendix A) are a rich source of inspiration for sermons, study and discussion groups.

2. Leadership. A shared leadership structure within the congregation is created for adoption and implementation of the model.

3. Education. The leadership educates itself on the impact of crime, incarceration and reentry on its community. Chapter Two of the guide is a starting point; finding out about the criminal justice system in your state and community is the next step.

4. Out-reach and welcome. The faith leader preaches, teaches and reaches out to members of the congregation to create a culture of healing and restoration for people affected by crime and incarceration.

5. Leadership partnerships. The leadership may reach out to other faith leaders to form a prayer circle or other shared learning structure to study, pray over and develop Healing Communities within their congregations.

6. Congregational education. The congregation learns how crime, incarceration and reentry affect their own members and what they can do to minister to them.

7. Volunteer engagement. Members of the congregation volunteer to spread the Healing Communities message and foster shared responsibility for the supporting individuals and families affected by crime, incarceration and reentry and the transformation of their house of worship.

For more information about the Healing Communities framework, including guidebooks on how your congregation can create one, visit the Annie E. Casey Foundation's website at www.aecf.org and type "Healing Communities" into the search box.