



Planting Seeds of Justice

Critical Interventions to
improve the waiting
experience in correctional
facilities

Service Playbook by Team Palmy



Welcome!

We are team Palmy.

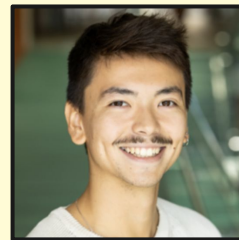
This playbook is the culmination of several weeks of research and ideation to improve the waiting room experience in correctional facilities. We will guide you through 5 “plays” from background research to implementation. If followed together, these guidelines could help to improve the visiting experiences of the family members of system-impacted individuals.



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Thank you for taking the time to read this.

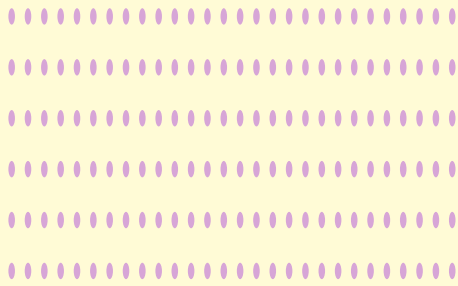


Introduction

Incarceration has detrimental effects on residents, their families and their children. Children's experiences in prison waiting rooms can be traumatic and have long-lasting effects on their emotional and mental well-being. For this reason, we believe that improving the quality of visits to correctional facilities by focusing on the design of waiting rooms can reduce trauma-related experiences and provide opportunities to foster education, play and quality time spent with inmates.

This playbook is based on our learnings from secondary research, conversations with system-impacted women from the Women's Justice Institute (WJI), and observing an analogous service (early childhood learning center at a laundromat). We provide a comprehensive guide to help prisons, jails, policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders address the experience of prison visits as it impacts people affected by incarceration. Our focus is on the experience of children visiting these facilities to meet their system-impacted parents. Additionally, the experiences of parents, caregivers, or other accompanying family members visiting, as well as those of system-impacted individuals, are also covered.





A note on abolition

We would also like to address that while this playbook is intended to improve the visiting experiences of the family members of system-impacted individuals, ultimately, we believe in abolishing the prison industrial complex. We fully support the work being done by communities and organizations working towards this goal. We encourage readers to learn more about the prison industrial complex and what a future without prisons could look like. We have included a list of resources at the end of this playbook for your reference.

Additionally, we would like to credit the work done by the San Francisco Partnership for Incarcerated Parents for compiling the [bill of rights](#) based on interviews with children of incarcerated parents. While not all of these rights can be addressed through the waiting room, this playbook refers to rights 6–8. We believe and hope that the visitation and waiting experience will be redesigned to address all of the rights.

Bill of Rights of Children with Incarcerated Parents

1. I have the right to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest.
2. I have the right to be heard when decisions are made about me.
3. I have the right to be considered when decisions are made about my parent.
4. I have the right to be well cared for in my parent's absence.
5. I have the right to speak with, see and touch my parent.
6. I have the right to support as I face my parent's incarceration.
7. I have the right not to be judged, blamed or labeled because my parent is incarcerated.
8. I have the right to a lifelong relationship with my parent.





Table of contents

This playbook consists of 5 key “plays,” each consisting of background information, recommendations, and things to keep in mind when designing a waiting room experience in a correctional facility:

1. Understand the needs of groups impacted by this experience
2. Understand what happens before and after the visit
3. Preparing Children for the visit
4. Create opportunities to foster connection and build meaningful relationships
5. Design a waiting room experience that meets stakeholders’ needs

Note: We are using the term “residents” to refer to individuals who are currently living in prisons, the term “system-impacted” to refer to individuals who have been or are currently detained or incarcerated, and the term “correctional facility” to refer to jails and prisons.






1. Understand the needs of groups impacted by this experience






To design an effective service, it is essential to incorporate the needs and expectations of the people who will be using it. This means there should be representatives of the user group included in the design process from start to finish. Additionally, the desires and values of the user group need to be advocated for by the design team. Design outcomes should be tested with the user group to observe how it performs and ensure that the solution is effective. Furthermore, secondary research should be conducted to learn about existing analogous services, who their users are and how they interact with them. This will inform designers of what existing solutions are doing well and where they are failing to meet user needs. Methods to conduct secondary research could include social listening, literature reviews, and collecting data from government agencies.

Recommendations

- a. Include people who are affected by incarceration (system-impacted people and their visiting families) in the design process
- b. Understand and address the needs of the people using the waiting room
- c. Conduct additional research to understand who all of the user groups are and what their journey is when visiting a detained or incarcerated family member

Questions to keep in mind

- a. Who are all of the people who will be using the waiting room?
 - b. How will they be using the waiting room?
 - c. What are the needs being addressed through the waiting room currently?
 - d. What are the unmet needs of people using the waiting room?
 - e. Are your decisions based on insights or recommendations from the people using the space?
 - f. Are you asking for feedback from the people involved?
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2. Understand what happens before and after the visit

There is a lot of preparation and steps involved in the process of getting to the waiting room to visit a system-impacted family member. This includes, but is not limited to, applying for visitation abilities, scheduling the visit, commuting to the correctional facility, and going through the screening process. Sometimes, groups of many families go to visit a correctional facility together. The experiences people have in the steps leading up to visiting their system-impacted family member can have a profound effect on the experience of the visit itself. Additionally, the ending of a visitation session is just as critical to consider. Families can be stressed about uncertainty of when they will see each other again. It may seem difficult to say goodbye, or they may desire for the visit to be longer. The aftermath of a visit can lead to relapse of trauma, thus impacting a child significantly in their everyday life. This often includes their performance in school, relationships with friends, family and teachers, and the overall structure of their home life. In some cases, children are not fully informed about the reality of their system-impacted parent's current status and why they have been separated. These feelings may be heightened depending on the length of time the system-impacted individual will be staying at the correctional facility.

Recommendations

- a. Provide resources to help children develop healthy coping skills and build emotional awareness
- b. Provide information to help support the primary caregiver and connect them to resources
- c. Provide informative guides on how to talk to children about the impact of incarceration and how this relates to their system-impacted parent's situation
- d. Use the waiting room to help relieve stress caused by the steps required to get to the visit
- e. Use the waiting room to aid in relieving some of the stress at the end of a visit

Things to keep in mind

- a. A bad visit is more traumatic than no visit
 - b. Leaving a visit is difficult and emotional
 - c. The logistics of getting to a visit (scheduling, arranging transportation, childcare, etc.) can be a major hurdle
 - d. Families might be visiting in large groups and therefore have to wait longer and sit in the waiting room before and after seeing their family member
 - e. Younger children don't always understand the concept of imprisonment, and the topic might be perceived as taboo
 - f. Children are worried about judgment from classmates and friends
 - g. Consistent communication between children and their parents will benefit their relationship once the parent returns home
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3. Preparing Children for the Visit

The stigma associated with being incarcerated or having a family member who is incarcerated is a significant issue that affects individuals and communities worldwide. Children in particular may suffer from bullying, discrimination, and a sense of shame that can have profound social, economic, and psychological consequences. Parents tend to conceal the truth from their children as a form of protection. However, children value transparency and will ask questions about the situation. Setting clear expectations for the child can help make the visit a more positive experience and encourage further visitations. To address this problem, education, transparency and sensitisation to the prison system can all be powerful tools.

Recommendations

- a. Prisons and jails can provide system impacted parents with documentation guiding them on how to answer questions children might have about their conditions during the visits
- b. Associations focusing on prisoners rights can organize assemblies at schools to raise awareness and sensitize younger generations to the prison system
- c. Providing resources to reassure children's concerns about their parents' safety while incarcerated
- d. Providing resources for children to relieve and process stress related to visiting an incarcerated parent

Questions to keep in mind

- a. What will help children be better equipped to prepare themselves for a visit to a correctional facility?
 - b. How can we utilize the waiting room to better support children in their personal lives when one of their parents is system-impacted?
 - c. How can we utilize the waiting room to better support a child after the visitation and encourage future visits?
 - d. How can we extend what happens in the waiting room to the visitation room?
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4. Create opportunities to foster connection and build meaningful relationships

During a child's visit to a system-impacted parent, it can be difficult to maintain a meaningful conversation. Often, the parent wants to learn a lot about the child's life and what they have been doing recently, but the child has a difficult time giving meaningful answers. This can be due to many factors such as stress brought on by the environment, a lack of connection with the system-impacted parent, and a lack of emotional awareness to express how they are feeling. Other times, the parent may not have access to the background information necessary to contribute fruitfully to the conversation. This may be due to a lack of access to consistent updates on current events such as sports, and pop culture. This can further exacerbate the feelings of disconnect between the parent and child and discourage future visits.

Recommendations

- a. Include activities in the waiting room that prompt conversations in the visiting room
- b. Help children feel safe to freely speak to their parent
- c. Help the system-impacted parent stay informed about their child's interests

Questions to keep in mind

- a. How can system-impacted parents better relate to their children?
 - b. What can help create an opportunity for a system-impacted parent and their child reflect on their relationship?
 - c. What can help children feel more comfortable when visiting their parent and open to sharing about their life?
 - d. How can we provide ways for the conversation to continue outside of the visitation?
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5. Design a waiting room experience that meets stakeholders' needs

In this section we outline recommendations to the existing waiting room that would both improve the quality of the waiting experience. We understand that no two waiting rooms are the same. The access to materials and waiting rooms will vary as well as the ability to maintain the space over time. Ultimately, the design of the waiting room should be informed by the real needs of the people using the space.

Recommendations

- a. Providing ways for all children to play and learn in the space. Such as:
 - i. Video games for older children
 - ii. Books tailored to different reading levels
 - iii. Magnet tiles and building blocks
 - iv. Coloring pages
- b. Ways for children to play with one another such as board games
- c. Providing child-sized seating and shelving for easy access to materials
- d. Providing adult seating options with a direct line of sight to the children
- e. Rules of play and boundaries of play should be clearly defined
- f. Providing activities to match energy levels
- g. Integrate existing prison programs into the experience if possible

Things to keep in mind

- a. Parents need to be able to supervise their children while in the space
 - b. Children of different ages have different needs
 - c. Children will have different energy levels when entering the waiting room and it may change while they wait
 - d. Waiting room times vary and it can be difficult to keep children entertained for longer periods of time
 - e. The design of the space should match the ability of the staff to maintain it
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Acknowledgments

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude for the invaluable assistance from our professors, Liz McChesney, WJI, and all the people that contributed to the creation of this playbook. Your support was critical in our efforts to identify the challenges that system-impacted people and their families face and to advocate for changes that would improve their lives.

Becca's place and the work conducted by WJI have been a beacon of hope for those who have been impacted by the system and are struggling to receive fair treatment. The work you do to advocate for better conditions, access to education, and fair legal representation has been instrumental in changing many people's lives.

Once again, we would like to extend our thanks to you for the help you provided to our project. We look forward to continuing to work together toward a brighter future for prisoners and their families.

Team Palmy





Resources on Abolition

[Are Prisons Obsolete? by Angela Y. Davis](#)

[If You're New to Abolition: Study Group Guide](#)

[Critical Resistance's resource guide for teaching and learning abolition](#)

[Decarcerating Disability by Liat Ben-Moshe](#)

[We Do This 'Til We Free Us by Mariame Kaba](#)

[Imagine Freedom Artworks for Abolition](#)

[Transform Harm Website](#)

[Interrupting Criminalization Website](#)

[Justice Arts Coalition Galleries](#)

