

Data Science Capstone:
Creating a Resource for Transgender Incarcerated
Individuals

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1 Introduction

Transgender incarcerated individuals face alarmingly high rates of sexual assault—over five times more likely to be victimized by facility staff and more than nine times as likely to be assaulted by other incarcerated people compared to the general population [1]. When examining the intersection of transgender identity and incarceration, two already extremely vulnerable populations, we find a group that is subject to violence and often ignored. In fact, we shouldn't see these two separate populations that just overlap by chance, but recognize the criminalization of people because they are trans. Often police will target and arrest transgender people for lack of identification, using the "wrong" bathroom, and increased profiling in general. This leads to a disproportionate number of transgender individuals in the carceral system where they are subject to a number of abuses. In addition to sexual violence, they are denied access to trans-specific health care and verbal harassment [2]. There are also reports showing that about 85% of LGBTQ+ incarcerated individuals have been placed in solitary confinement [3]. Trans people in particular are placed in isolation as a form of "protection," but solitary confinement is a known form of torture and has serious physical and mental health effects. There are few organizations that support incarcerated individuals, and even fewer that respect transgender folks, but one of them is Critical Resistance. Critical Resistance is a California-based prison-abolition organization that connects incarcerated people with resources and advocates for their rights through community organizing. For my data science capstone, I will assist them in creating a digital toolbox for transgender incarcerated individuals to more easily access reliable resources and gender-affirming organizations.

2 Goals

This project will be two-fold: collecting the information on organizations and then creating the digital toolbox. For the first goal of gathering data on various Californian organizations that support incarcerated people, I need to find information such as location, services provided, intake process, etc. Since Critical Resistance already has LGBTQ+ specific organizations, my aim is to find general non-profits assisting incarcerated people and find out if they are gender-affirming. Since most of the organizations do not have this information on their website, I will need to call these organizations and ask them directly. My second goal originates from the lack of accessible databases of resources. Most resources for incarcerated individuals provide only a sentence or two on the organization or is a spreadsheet with rows of information. My hope is to create a free, searchable database where volunteers of Critical Resistance or family members of incarcerated individuals can easily find the most helpful organizations.

3 Ethics

This project will affect the lives of real people, so ethics is an essential aspect of this capstone. Although I will not conduct experiments on people, I am providing a resource to marginalized members of the community. It is important to keep the needs of incarcerated transgender individuals at the forefront of this study. Even though the research process is tedious, I have to collect the most updated information about each organization and the resources they provide in order to create the most effective resource. Additionally, since every organization is not explicit about whether or not they are gender affirming, I will have to contact each organization by phone call. It is crucial for the research process to be meticulous and intentional to prevent any event in which someone does not receive gender affirming care or is refused services because of transphobia.

4 Process

There are two main parts to this project: collecting data on organizations and then creating a searchable database that any user can easily use to find the organization they need. For the data collection aspect of this project, I started my search using basic web browsers like Google and took a few minutes looking at each individual's organization's web page. If I could find programs or mission statements that insinuated they helped formerly or currently incarcerated people, I linked the website to a spreadsheet. The organization wanted me to specifically look at four areas where they assist the largest number of people including the Bay Area, LA, Kern County, and San Bernadino. I also included a section for statewide organizations or ones not based in any of the four previous categories.

After I felt like I had exhausted the web search resources, I would move on to finding organizations through social media. The challenge with many grassroots, incarceration-focused organizations is that they are difficult to find and might not have a professional website. Some of them might exclusively be on Instagram or Facebook which makes it difficult to find. Additionally, it sometimes the services or resources they provide are also unclear. However, I was able to find a few organizations through by looking in the followers/following section of the incarceration organizations I found in my initial search. After this process was completed, I was satisfied with the number of organizations I found, and moved on to the next step. This part was the most tedious and time consuming because I had to go on each website or social media page that I found and fill out the necessary information I needed. The categories I included were: Name of Organization/Agency, Location (of where they offered support), Services, Contact Info, Eligibility and Language, Applications and Intake Process, and Additional Notes.

For the location, while some websites listed the specific prisons or jails they served, others were not this specific. I was often forced to write the general area of the main office which could be an incorrect assumption to make. For service

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	K	L	M	N	P	Q	R
INCL	LOCATION	SERVICE CATEGORY	CONTACT INFO	ELIGIBILITY & LANGUAGE	APPLICATIONS & INTAKE PROCESS	OTHER NOTES									
Cal State San Bernardino Reentry Initiative (CSR)	San Bernardino, Victorville, Moreno Valley, and Indo	Job assistance, career planning, housing, life skills, parole classes, adult basic education, vocational training, counseling	https://carcenters.org/ // info@carcenters.org // 909.327.2983	Formerly incarcerated individuals, English	https://carcenters.org/get-started/ , they have to get their parole agent to submit a form	Reentry service, does seem to help currently incarcerated individuals									
	Visitor Centers at every California Prison and Friends Center at Friends Center at Stockton, California Services provided at SJC Jails? Unclear at what prisons/jails they provided services for currently incarcerated individuals	Writing programs for children of incarcerated parents, reading programs, support systems, parenting classes, creative conflict resolution, resource and guidance, parenting classes, in Stockton, California Case Management and Mentoring, Employment Readiness, GED, Job Training, Mentoring for children and families. Services at SJC Jails: Case management services, Peer education, education, creative conflict resolution	https://www.friendsoutsid.org/ // P.O. Box 4682 Sacramento, CA 95824 // 1148 W. Fremont Street Stockton, CA 95203 (209) 655-0734 FAX	Incarcerated individuals and their families , English	Call for an intake appointment	They have this on their website: "We are a gender affirming organization in gender and sexuality, including lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer, questioning people, and recognize the significance of those differences in addressing an individual's challenges and opportunities."									
Friends Outside						This could be extremely helpful if this is still running efficiently									
Anti-Recidivism Coalition	Many Prisons and jails including juvenile jails	Felony Expungement, HART: 10 week reentry program, housing and reentry planning, Creditile Messenger Program: Mentoring for incarcerated youth, Life skills, job training, life coaches, therapy, addiction support, etc.)	http://www.expungecalifornia.org/ // Los Angeles Office 601 N. Alvarado Street Suite 1000, Los Angeles, CA 90026 213.955.5885	Incarcerated Formerly incarcerated Individuals, English	Unclear	Temporarily ceasing to accept applications for expungement assistance									
Light House Social Service Centers	Reentry org for Riverside and San Bernardino County	Rental assistance program, outreach, housing case management, housing navigation services, public benefits assistance, temporary rental subsidy payment	https://lighhouse-ssc.org/ // info@lighhouse-ssc.org // 1003 E. 10th Street, Suite 100, El Cajon, California 92320 (619) 571-3553	Formerly incarcerated individuals	Unclear										
Center for the Study of Corrections Education California State University San Bernardino	California Rehabilitation Center in Norco, CA	Inside Out Class and Project Rebound: Program for formerly incarcerated individuals who want a degree at Cal State San Bernardino	https://www.csusb.edu/cosec/ found IIE-mail: cavallero@csusb.edu Department of English Phone: (909) 537-3831 https://csusb.edu/project-rebound	Incarcerated individual at the Norco Rehabilitation Center	Unclear	Unclear if this program is still going on									

Figure 1: This is the spreadsheet on the organizations.

category, I tried to write as much information as I can on the specific services they provided. This was difficult as some organizations had their services on several different pages of their website or vague terms such as "mental health services" or "Job Assistance." Overall, a challenge with the research was that it was sometimes hard to tell if an organizations website was up to date. One of my biggest concerns is that my toolbox will be based on outdated or false findings. For contact information, I made sure to include the mailing address and phone number if possible. Most of the time, incarcerated people do not have access to computers on which they could email or look at the Contact page of an agency. They are mostly limited to calls and handwritten letters which is crucial for me to collect the number and address of the organizations. In the "Other Notes" column, I included why some of the categories might not have been filled out or some of the concerns that I might have about the organization.

By the end of this process, I had around 60 organizations in total to include in my toolbox. However, as I addressed in my ethics section, I have to make sure these organizations are reliable, specifically for transgender individuals. After a discussion with my supervisor, we decided it would be best for me to call the organizations and ask them directly on their stance. We judged there would be no reason for people to lie about the organization's position on serving transgender individuals and whether or not they are gender affirming. This was also a time-consuming process because not every organization answered the first time. Thankfully, my supervisor also recruited people from their class to assist me with the research aspect of this project. Although even with their help, I anticipate this project will extend beyond one semester. Since this project could potentially have real-world impacts, it is crucial for me to remain diligent and not rush because the semester is ending.

At the same time I started calling organizations, I also began working on the searchable database through Shiny. There were many app developers I could

have used, but I landed on Shiny because it was free and easy to publish on the web. Additionally, it is easy to customize, unlike other websites I tried that required a premium account for more advanced modifications. My initial vision for the database included a map where users could find resources near them or in a specific mile radius, a searchable box where people could insert the name of an organization or the resource they are trying to find, and lastly, check boxes of resources people can select to narrow the search process. For this last aspect of the model, I needed to sort all of the services I collected into seven to ten general categories. This was particularly challenging because not all the descriptions fit neatly under a category and different organizations had different terms for potentially the same service. For example, some organizations used mental health services instead of counseling, but it is unclear what exactly the mental health services are and if it includes counseling. To remedy the former problem, I decided to add an other category to include services that don't fit into any other one, although I will try to include every service into a category even if it is a little bit of a stretch. I would rather there be more organizations in a search than an user miss a potentially important agency just because they could not find it. The categories I ended up with are: education, reentry, housing assistance, mental health services, family services, case management, and other. Using the Shiny app, I was able to use R studio and R to create the dashboard.

5 Conclusion

For the final product, I was able to add the search bar, checkbox, and map. To make the design less chaotic, I decided to put the search bar, checkbox on one tab and then the map on another tab. When the user searches for the services they need or the location, the same organizations should appear on the first and second page. I am able to easily publish this information on the web, so users do not have to access this toolbox through my computer. [Once the final project is done, it will be displayed here]. I hope the volunteers at Critical Resistance and family members of incarcerated individuals are able to use this toolbox to easily find helpful resources to assist others. Transgender, incarcerated individuals are extremely marginalized members of society and often denied their dignity. I hope to assist in connecting them with the appropriate resources and organizations that will help them instead of perpetuating systems of harm.

References

- [1] S. E. James, J. L. Herman, S. Rankin, M. Keisling, L. Mottet, and M. Anafi. The report of the 2015 u.s. transgender survey, 2016.
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- [3] J. Lydon, K. Carrington, H. Low, R. Miller, and M. Yazdy. Coming out of concrete closets: A report on black & pink's national lgbtq prisoner survey, 2015.