

## **Paper on Mindfulness-Based Programs for Adolescents**

### **By Leslie Booker**

#### **Who is represented in this paper**

With over 40 national organizations contacted to contribute to this paper, only 5 responded. These organizations are the Lineage Project (New York City), Art of Yoga Project (Bay Area, California), Lionheart Foundation's Power Source program (Boston/National), UpRising Yoga (Los Angeles, California), and Mind, Body, Awareness Project (Oakland, California). With this acknowledgement, this paper is a general overview from organizations who have the resources, time, staff, and or research, readily available to lend their voices.

#### **How Is Mindfulness Defined?**

In writing about Mindfulness programs that are being offered to system-involved and incarcerated youth across the country, I thought it was first best to understand how organizations are interpreting this ancient wisdom practice. Most organizations are working with a variation of Jon Kabat-Zinn's definition of mindfulness:

"Paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally."

Lionheart Foundation adds that mindfulness is "the quiet engine that drives our programming. It increases distress tolerance and primes participants to benefit from the cognitive-behavioral strategies." While Lineage Project often speaks of mindfulness as an "awareness-based practice that can help one to respond instead of react, stay in the present moment, and understand what is going on in the mind through experiential learning."

Though none of the organizations claim that they directly trace the mindfulness practices back to its Buddhist roots as laid out in the Satipatthana Sutta, most are working with young people through the First Foundation, mindfulness of body and breath. Most of the programs I connected with are based in one of many lineages of asana practice, the embodiment of yoga. Organizations like Art of Yoga and UpRising Yoga add that the state of mindfulness can be achieved through the 8-limbs of yoga.

#### **What Constitutes an Adolescent?**

Depending on what state, what crime, and what facility, the term "adolescent" can refer to a young person anywhere between the ages of 7-24 years old. According to Citizens Crimes Commission of New York City, beginning at age seven, youths in New York can be prosecuted for engaging in criminal behavior.

Under New York State law these youths fall into one of three categories: Juvenile Delinquent, Juvenile Offender, or Youthful Offender. These categories are defined by the youth's age and are contingent on whether the youth is considered to be criminally responsible for his/her behavior. The rational mind, or neocortex, constitutes 5/6 of the human brain and is responsible for higher cognitive functions like language, communication, logical thought and voluntary movement. Research has proven that this part of the brain is not fully formed until the age of 25.

The Raise the Age campaign confirms that as the cognitive skills of adolescents are developing, adolescents' behavior is often impulsive, and adolescents lack the ability to focus on the consequences of their behavior. Because the adolescent brain is still developing, the character, personality traits and

behavior of adolescents are highly receptive to change; adolescents respond well to interventions, learn to make responsible choices, and are likely to grow out of negative or delinquent behavior.

New York and North Carolina are the only two states in the country that have failed to recognize that cognitively, adolescents are still developing, and despite great efforts with the Raise the Age campaign and other advocacy groups, continues to arrest and possibly prosecute 50,000 16 and 17 year olds each year as adults. Furthermore, more than 600 children ages 13 to 15 are also prosecuted in adult criminal courts –seriously diminishing their life prospects before they’ve even entered high school. The state of Oregon does acknowledge this distinction, and allows for youth offenders to do their time in an adolescent facility until the age of 24.

### **What Are Some of the Stressors we are Hoping to Mitigate Through Mindfulness?**

The following is an exhaustive list co-created by the contributing organizations of the stressors that young folks who end up involved in the juvenile justice system face, many are simply the impacts of poverty:

Cycles of violence and victimization, high incidence of sexual trauma, complex, developmental, secondary, and historical trauma and neglect, community violence, under-resourced schools, and family systems challenged with interpersonal violence, substance abuse, and parental incarceration, grief and loss, and the realities of systemic oppression. The primal attempt to mitigate many of these stressors, is often times what leads kids to the high risk behavior that can point them towards incarceration.

*Years ago, a young man told me he had started stealing food when he was 6 years old. He never knew his father, and his mother would leave him and his younger siblings alone for days without any resources. Out of pure survival instinct, he started stealing food to keep himself and his younger siblings alive. Eventually, the older kids on the street took him in. He now had a family that looked out for him, made sure he had food, shelter, clothes and most importantly, attunement with caregivers. This desire to have family to protect and care for him was the beginning of his involvement with gangs, which eventually led to a life of violence and his incarceration.*

Mind, Body, Awareness Project adds that once youth become system-involved, young folks must contend as well with the trauma associated with separation from their family and peers, the stigma of detention/home removal, and the harsh conditions that often plagues secure detention centers and jails.

For organizations like Lineage Project who are also offering their work in more traditional high school settings, these students are also dealing with the stresses of schoolwork, testing, graduation, getting into college, finding jobs, and dealing with family.

### **Where and How these Programs are Being Offered:**

Almost all of the organizations that are featured in this paper offer their programs in many different environments, including Secured Juvenile Facilities, Close to Home Facilities, Shelters/Intermediary Housing, Foster Care, Group Homes, Alternative Learning Centers/Alternative High Schools, Non-secured Facilities, Community Centers, Probation, Non-profit Mental Health Agencies, Re-entry Programs, and within the Department of Education, including an American Sign Language School. UpRising Yoga and Art of Yoga Project also both work with the state in group homes and aftercare sites to support young girls who are CSEC (Commercially Sexually Exploited Children).

All of the programs are working in many different capacities, some in a quasi therapist-patient format, like MBA, which might work with kids in a 1:1 dyad, while others work in larger groups. A lot of this depends on the buy-in of staff, agreement or level of engagement, administration and financial investment of the varying facilities. Art of Yoga works with young women four times a week in some of their sites, following up with many of the young girls in a continuing mentoring program. Offering pilot programs from 8-10 weeks and weekly hour-long classes are pretty standard, though there is a push towards getting programs into sites 2-3 times per week, across the board.

The Power Source program at Lionheart Foundation works quite differently than most. They do not provide direct services to youth. Instead they create mindfulness-based programming that is disseminated nationally to organizations, programs and agencies providing this type of care. Presently, over 70,000 copies of the book Power Source are in circulation in the US and it is embraced by a wide range of agencies.

They summarize all of these mindfulness-based programs succinctly by saying, “The function of [our] mindfulness training program is to equip youth with low-cost, portable, and self-initiated self-regulation tools to use both during their incarceration/detention period and once they are back in the community. Mindfulness practices offer resilience-based coping strategies to compete with less healthy approaches many youth have relied on in the past such as substance dependence and other risky mood-regulation techniques. Healing, Empowerment, Emotional Regulation, using Self-Awareness, Self-Respect, Self-Control are used as measurable outcomes.”

### **Trauma of Racism and Unconscious Bias:**

According to the Trauma of Racism paper published by New York University’s McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research, men of color are disproportionately involved in the criminal justice system. A U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics report showed Black males born in 2001 (currently 14 years old) had a 32 percent likelihood of going to prison in their lives, more than five times the likelihood for White men. A 2012 study found an astounding 68 percent of Black high school dropouts born between 1975 and 1979 had been to prison by 2009. In addition to long-term negative effects on a man’s economic mobility, having a family member in prison creates economic and emotional instability in the home, further jeopardizing the wellbeing of the entire family.

One of the most poignant illustrations of this was when I was facilitating the Power Source curriculum on Riker’s Island. An incredibly powerful exercise is the “Victim Wheel”, where participants are asked to investigate empathy by acknowledging how their actions not only affected them and their families, but also their victim, and the victim’s family, community, teachers, etc. One of our kids in the program said this:

*“There were things that I never learned because there was no one to teach us. Just a bunch of kids passing back and forth what we heard in the town. All the men I knew, that I was supposed to learn from, were locked up or dead. I didn’t have no-one to teach me what was wrong or right.” When I asked him how being another brown man locked up instead of being back “on the town” teaching the younger kids right from wrong felt for him, he broke down in tears. He had never seen how his actions were perpetuating this cycle in his community. He said that no one had ever asked him to step up and take responsibility for his actions before. And as a young man whose brain was still in the process of developing its neocortex where empathy lives, this hit him like a ton of bricks.*

The *Trauma of Racism* paper also underscores how implicit bias and discrimination further impede success for young men and boys of color. Recent research found that Black boys as young as 10 are viewed as older and less innocent than their peers among a sample of police officers from large urban areas. Another study found that people with “Black-sounding” names (e.g., Jamal and Lakisha) were 50 percent less likely to be called for a job than people with “White-sounding” names when sending identical resumes to a random sample of employers.

According to the Raise the Age Campaign, over 70% of the children and youth arrested are black or Latino. Of those sentenced to incarceration, 80% are black and Latino.

### **Ethnoculture Disorientation:**

*At the beginning of my time with Lineage Project, I was invited to assist in the trainings. In this particular training, our new Executive Director was just coming in so this was her first experience with seeing our work first hand. On the last day of our three day training, Ron, an older Black man who was a participant in the training, arrived late. Quite shaken, he apologized for his tardiness and then shared with us why he was late. Coming from Bed-Stuy (Bedford Stuyvesant, a historically Black community plagued by heavy police surveillance) early on a Sunday morning, he had been “stopped and frisked” by the police on his way to catch his subway. This was February 2009, and I had not heard of this term at this point. At the time, stop and frisk was a legalized practice by the NYPD and many states across the country that allowed police to stop, ask questions, and then frisk individuals they thought appeared “suspicious”. An analysis by the New York Civil Liberties Union revealed that innocent New Yorkers have been subjected to police stops and street interrogations more than 5 million times since 2002, and that Black and Latino communities continue to be the overwhelming target of these tactics. Nearly nine out of 10 stopped-and-frisked New Yorkers have been completely innocent, according to the NYPD’s own reports. That being the case, and us being in training about working with predominately Black and Latino youth who had been detained, the woman leading the training downplayed his experience and said that she didn’t believe that the color of his skin had anything to do with him being stopped and frisked, and this was not the time to talk about this matter. I truly believe that she did not mean any harm by this comment, but simply didn’t know how to handle it. This was a huge miss for us as a training community to not address this head on. This was a teachable moment, no matter how awkward it might have been for some people in the room, that this does indeed happen on a regular basis.*

In the paper Ethnocultural Transference and Countertransference in the Therapeutic Dyad, Comas-Diaz and Jacobson, explain this by saying “the ethnoculturally different patient (student) frequently provides more opportunities for empathic and dynamic stumbling blocks, in what might be termed “ethnocultural disorientation.” In traditional therapeutic orientations (in this case, a training), patients’ (students’) racial and ethnic remarks in therapy have been attributed to a defensive shift away from underlying conflict (being late for training), and the therapist’s (facilitator’s) role has been to interpret them as defense and resistance (saying that she didn’t believe the color of his skin was why he was stopped) (Evans, 1985). However, in our own clinical experience (yoga and meditation class) we have found that this approach hinders the exploration of conflicts related to ethnicity and culture” within ourselves and our students, leading to either spiritual bypass or that super uncomfortable feeling of not knowing how to communicate with a student who might be having a different experience than the facilitator due to the color of their skin, culture, level of education, gender expression, sexual orientation, etc.

It immediately became a priority in our trainings to do our work to educate ourselves and to create an environment where we were able to skillfully hold these conversations about class, race, gender expression, sexual orientation, culture, levels of education and our (perceived or real) privilege in relation, so that we could do our work from a place of clear understanding. Throughout the training as participants teach back in practicums, we can see, acknowledge and investigate how our verbal and body language has been conditioned through our own life experiences. Though there’s always the chance that this portion of the training won’t be received well by some, it continues to be the highlight of most people’s experience of the training.

Another example of where there was “ethnocultural disorientation” where we had the skills and training to face this head on, was in working on Power Source. *There is an exercise in the curriculum that asked participants to talk about where they would be in 10 years. As facilitators, we didn’t think twice about it and were excited to see where the kids imagined themselves at 26-28 years old. We didn’t take into consideration, that so many of our kids were facing multiple years, even life sentences. Those who were serving shorter sentences, and who would have the option to live outside of confined walls,*

*didn't see themselves living past the age of 21 without relapsing back into behavior or circumstances that would have them recidivate or losing their lives in the streets due to gang violence or in the hands of police officers. We were both Black facilitators who needed to take a step back and to realize that the kids we were working with, though we looked just like them, were growing up with a totally different set of circumstances than we both had experienced during our adolescence. So, we met them where they were, validating their realities, and changed the exercise to Where Do You See Yourself at 21.*

### **Trainings and Curriculum**

Trainings are offered in various forms across the country from online, to weekend intensives, residential retreats, and many mindfulness-based programs offer continuing professional development for their teachers/facilitators after they've completed their trainings. They also require that after training, there is a period either formally or informally to shadow a lead teacher. All of the programs that are based in asana (yoga) practice, do require for their lead teachers to already have at least a 200hour Yoga Teacher Training certification.

Art of Yoga Project currently offers three yoga and creative arts curriculums. Presently composing a fourth, called Wise Inside, to meet the needs of their most trauma-impacted, emotionally dysregulated girls in juvenile detention and other high-risk, high-need facilities.

MBA has a 10 module curriculum designed specifically for an adolescent and juvenile justice population developed in 2009 with the input and support of folks like Jon Kabat-Zinn. They are currently updating the curriculum to reflect advancements in research.

For Lineage Project, teachers bring in relevant themes of mindfulness to share with students, this can be through quotes, a story, or personal anecdote that relates back to a theme of mindfulness. Our teachers follow the Lineage model, which includes an opening discussion, mindful movement (Tai Chi, Qi gong, or yoga) meditation, and a closing. This model is designed to be a complete package as we don't always get to see our kids more than once. Half of Lineage Project's teachers have gone through at least one of the three multi-year training programs through Spirit Rock, so it's also not unusual for class to be predominately based in meditation practice. Please find more information on training in section on **Ethnoculture Disorientation**.

Facilitators engaged in Power Source research are trained by the studies' principal investigators to assure adherence to protocol. Facilitators from outside organizations using PS are encouraged to watch Lionheart's 6 hour PS training on DVD and to use the meditation video produced by Lionheart with youth. Facilitators are encouraged in the facilitator's manual to engage in their own meditation practice.

Art of Yoga facilitators receive bi-monthly trainings on topics such as Mandated Reporting, Counseling 101 and Working with Trauma. It is strongly preferred that they (teachers) have an existing mindfulness/meditation practice.

UpRising Yoga also provides a trauma informed yoga training that they (teachers) are required to take before teaching for URY in juvenile hall.

### **Best Practices:**

#### **The ritual of opening and closing circles:**

More often than not, populations who are system involved or incarcerated tend to be a bit more transient. It is common practice for kids to have multiple court dates, have a visitor, barber shop/beauty salon appointment, be transferred to a different hall, for kids to be participating in one of several other programs that might be running simultaneously, engaged in working on extra-credit on the school floor, or simply taking a nap when programs are offered. At Lineage Project, we treat each of our classes as a one off as opposed to a series as we might only see a kid one time, or several months later. A common practice for most programs is to have an opening and closing ritual, usually practiced in a circle. This

ritual of practicing in a circle has been adopted from several ancient indigenous cultures, and also supports a trauma-informed space where kids can keep an eye on everyone in the room, and they can release a bit more fully into positions that might feel more vulnerable to them. The opening ritual can be as simple as lying the mats out together, wiping them down, and doing a quick check in about their feeling temperature at that moment. Lineage Project views the opening and closing rituals as the most important part of the class as that's where buy-in from kids can happen, validating their experience of feeling weird about trying something new, and to open the floor for everyone's voice to be heard, even if it's just to say their name.

We often start with establishing ground rules or agreements so that everyone collectively agrees on how the space will be run. This allows the facilitator to be able to step back and just teach, as there is now a verbal agreement on how each individual has agreed to conduct themselves while in the circle. The closing ritual has a lot of the same elements and tend to be more reflective on what their favorite part of the class was and why, and to ask if there was anything they think they could practice on their own during the week. This often surprises kids, but gets them to really think about what they learned and to review anything before the facilitator leaves.

### **Understanding the Importance of Offering a Trauma Informed Class:**

Over the past few years with Peter Levine's Somatic Experience work, and the collaboration between trauma researcher Bessel van der Kolk and yoga teachers Elizabeth Hopper and Dave Emerson has emerged, yoga and mindfulness practices are being utilized more and more in supporting populations dealing with great amounts of trauma in their bodies.

Two working definitions of trauma are:

- 1) an event that is overwhelming to a person physically or emotionally where they are not able to bring themselves back into balance; it is a dis-regulation in an attempt to regulate. When we are not resourced this dis-regulation causes communities and individuals to continue in this cycle of trauma.
- 2) anything that is trapped or unresolved inside our bodies, causing disturbances, physically, mentally, emotionally and behaviorally.

In Hopper and Emerson's book, 'Healing Trauma through Yoga', based on the research they did with Dr. van der Kolk, they offer a great baseline with four components of a trauma informed class. The first two on this list are mine, the last four marked with an asterisk, are from Hopper and Emerson's book. Of course, this compilation can continue to be added to, but provide a solid beginning:

#### **1) Creating a Container**

Continuing off of the importance of creating an opening and closing ritual, it's so important to create a container that can be opened gently, maintained, and then closed up at the end. I've very much enjoyed the simplistic and formulaic roll out of Lineage Project's model, as well as the flow of the Power Source program. Most of the kids we work with have had such chaotic lives, so it's imperative to offer them something, even if it is just once a week, that they can rely on to be true and consistent. It's always a best practice to give kids a lay of the land before you begin to lessen any sense of anxiety or stress that might arise from trying something new and different. Introducing yourself and why you are there, what you are going to offer and why, and how that's going to look, can begin to allow minds to feel a bit more at ease. This can also open a plethora of questions, especially for those who have mastered the art of procrastination. When this happens, I always say, "Well let's just try it and then you can tell me what it was like for you."

## **2) Acknowledging and validating other's experiences, even if they are not our own**

The young people we work with will have all different experiences of the practice. It's important to validate all of these experiences, even if they are not our own, or if their experience seem unlikely. As we all know through going through childhood and adolescence, our thoughts, opinions, feelings and experiences were not always heard or taken seriously. Compound that with a kid who is dealing with even a couple of stressors mentioned earlier in this paper. Here are a few examples of things that have often come up during or after meditation practice, and how to skillfully validate them, even when it feels hard to do:

### **Scenario #1**

*Experience of Student: Meditating makes me feel like I just smoked some weed!*

*Response of Teacher: What does it feel like for you to smoke weed?*

*Experience of Student: I feel relaxed, like I could breathe deep and then just let it out, I feel calm.*

*Response of Teacher: Well yeah, it is pretty similar then. Plus, it's free and you won't violate your probation with it!*

*So often our instinct is to push away any talk of drugs, fighting, sex, violence in their home or anything else that we might be uncomfortable with. No matter how benign your class is, kids will find a way to talk about these things as they're trying to navigate through adolescence. It's important that we always go back to the practice of "paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and not judgmentally." The kid is saying that he wants to feel relaxed and calm, but up until this point, his only access to those feelings was by smoking pot. So letting go of the words that might make us uncomfortable, and really listening deeply beyond that to truly hear them, opens up a dialogue and trust can begin to arise.*

### **Scenario #2**

*Experience of Student: I feel more tight than when I started!*

*Response of Teacher: What does "tight" feel like to you?*

*Experience of Student: I don't know like, angry, like I want to fight.*

*Response of Teacher: So how do you know you're feeling that in your body? Do your palms get sweaty, does your heart start beating faster? How do you know?*

*Experience of Student: Yeah, something like that.*

*Response of Teacher: Then you did it exactly right! We're not always going to feel calm after we meditate. Some people do and for some people, they feel all kinds of other ways. But noticing how you feel, being aware of it and not judging it, THAT is the practice.*

*I often hear staff tell students, "Go practice meditation, it'll make you calm down." I quickly, and gently, nip that in the bud because it's not always true, as anyone with a practice will tell you. Sitting practice, practicing hip or heart openers in our yoga practice can bring up all kinds of things for people. So when a kid is experiencing feelings of anger, sadness, or simply feeling confused after meditating, they might feel like they were "doing it wrong" if the expectation was to feel calm. Validating all experiences and emotions that arise during sessions will empower the student to keep coming back and seeing what happens next. This is a great way to introduce them to watching their feelings or emotions arise and watching them float away.*

## **3) \*Experiencing the Present Moment**

As a culture, we're so separated from our bodies. In the practice of yoga, we're invited to hit the pause button and to begin to notice that our body does give us cues. We can begin to understand our reactions and are empowered to respond rather than react.

#### **4) \* Making Choices**

Trauma is an experience of having no choice. Whether you are a soldier being attacked in battle, a child in an abusive home, or a person walking alone who is assaulted, your choice about what happened to you did not matter. Something happened that severely undermined your agency in this world, and is a common denominator among all trauma survivors. Fear and helplessness can stop people from being active participants in their own lives. This kind of yoga gives participants a choice to be kind, gentle and caring to their bodies, a choice that was not given to them during their trauma.

#### **5) \*Taking Effective Action**

When we are in danger, all of our energy is put towards trying to get away, but we are not able to. Our hormones, muscles and breath all rally, but we cannot change our environment at that moment. Our heart and breath accelerate so that we can get more oxygen to our muscles to move, but we cannot. When our body's natural protective response fails us, many survivors find themselves in frozen states long after the traumatic event has passed. Changing a sitting position, closing a window, moving out of the sunlight, moving from the floor to a chair, etc, are all ways that folks can take effective action.

#### **6) \* Creating Rhythms**

Dys-synchrony or dissociation are common struggles for all trauma survivors. They will often report being out of step with themselves and out of sync with others. Trauma isolates people. Yoga is one way to experience being in sync with others, by sharing our breath, movement and experience, we can begin to sync back up with the world.

#### **Letting Go of What You Think the Practice Is:**

A few years into my work, someone invited me to view the practices that we were offering to our students as a gift, meaning they can choose to use it, put it up on a shelf to collect dust, or re-gift it by sharing with another. I loved this way of looking at it, and it really allowed me to let go of the outcome, my expectations, and my ego about how things are supposed to be. We don't know how our students are going to apply the teachings to their lives, and we have to let go of that piece and trust in the practice to land in the body and to be accessible when one needs it.

*A great example of this is how Carlos used the practice. He was one of the young men (16-18 years old) detained in the adolescent cell blocks on Riker's Island between 2009-2011, and was part of Lionheart Foundation's Power Source intervention. After release, Carlos got back involved with gang violence, landing him in the hospital with a slashed face and multiple stab wounds. One of these would collapse a lung, narrowly missing his heart. When the follow up researchers found Carlos he was still in the hospital, slowly healing from his wounds. When they asked him quantitative questions about the intervention, they reported back that he responded with a lot of "I don't know" and "I don't remember". When they turned their focus on what was happening presently with his healing process, Carlos said, "I can't do much but just lie here, watching my breath as I breathe in, and noticing my breath as I breathe out." He had inadvertently cultivated a meditation practice. This was a gift that Carlos had been offered, and though he wasn't cognizant of this formal meditation practice he was engaged in, it was a gift that he accessed when it was most needed.*

*Another story is from my girls when I was teaching in the South Bronx at Horizons, a secure facility for adolescents. Mariah was definitely the Alpha Female of our group of young women. She had been locked up for a while, but always seemed especially grounded, connected and optimistic. Without being too much of a bully, she was able to have all the girls fall into place, including getting them to participate*



*in yoga and meditation sessions. One day Mariah seemed agitated and asked to step out of the circle to get some water. While on the other side of the room, we heard this primal scream come out of her body. For maybe 2-3 minutes, which seemed like an hour, Mariah screamed and yelled and cried, swinging her arms wildly if anyone tried to come near her. We all (staff included) just waited for this to run its course through her body. Eventually, she made her way back over to the circle. Still not able to articulate what had triggered her, she just sat in the circle and continued to sob. The girls, ages 12-16, slowly and gently began to circle around her, intuitively dropping into ujayyi breath, the sound of the ocean. When all of our breaths were aligned, the girls began to lay hands upon Mariah. I had never seen anything like it, my teaching partner and I just sat back and watched as this community, this Sangha, took care of one of their own in her time of need. This had typically been an incredibly challenging group of girls to work with. My teaching partner and I had taught them ujayyi breath in an attempt to gather all of the energies of this incredibly intense and complex group of girls. It was astonishing for us to watch them reach for this tool at that moment.*

### **Gender-based Programming**

Art of Yoga Project was founded by a nurse practitioner/yoga instructor Mary Lynn Fitton. The following is from their paper 'The Art of Yoga Project: A Gender-Responsive Yoga and Creative Arts Curriculum for Girls in the California Juvenile Justice System' (Harris, Fitton).

Teen girls are the fastest growing segment of the incarcerated population in the United States. Both theory and practice are trying to catch up with this shift and discover the best way to cater to this group. Adult men have traditionally been the standard population managed by the criminal justice system. Men are also overrepresented at all levels of the criminal justice system, including service providers and management. For this reason, there is an acute male bias in existing juvenile justice programs. Many existing programs are based on a male model, and although boys and girls face some similar risks, they do so at different rates and with different sensibilities. Juvenile girls warrant age-appropriate, gender-responsive, and culturally sensitive services, and a substantial shift is required to attend to the needs of offending girls.

A gender-responsive approach comprehensively addresses the unique and specific needs of girls, creates an environment that reflects the realities of girls' lives, and acknowledges their unique developmental experiences and pathways to problem behaviors. Girls entering the Juvenile Justice System (JJS) are at a difficult developmental period, in which they are treated like children for the commission of mostly adult offenses. Further, many of them are forced to cope with adult life circumstances (such as unsupported living or pregnancy) with a child's abilities and limited resources. The vast majority of offending girls have been sexually abused, come from violent and dysfunctional households, and are gang-affiliated. Thus, these girls are in considerable need of adult support. Research also now indicates that there are many important differences between the emotional and cognitive development of boys and girls. For example, when compared to their male counterparts, girls are more empathic and better able to understand consequences; have stronger verbal skills; are better at recognizing and responding to facial expressions and emotions; tend to look to external sources for self-esteem; and are more susceptible to media influence. Girls entering the JJS (as victims or offenders) are more likely than their male counterparts to have experienced physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Further, while boys tend to experience physical trauma at the hands of enemies or strangers, girls tend to experience psychological, sexual, or emotional abuse at the hands of acquaintances, family members, or caregivers.

\*This program currently does not take into account the growing number of transgender girls who might be locked up with either girls or boys. At least in New York, there is no standard, and placement is based on what the child “looks more like”, according to my experience. Transgender kids are typically placed in the SHU (Special Housing Unit).

After the success of the Power Source program, Lionheart Foundation created a book and program for young mothers who are system involved. They explain that the impact of mindfulness-based programming has the potential to transform some of the most basic and essential elements of life quality if youth have access to it. For the past 3 years, Lionheart’s mindfulness-based parenting program for system involved and underserved young mothers has powerfully impacted not only the mother’s development, but that of her child. By helping young parents create a blueprint of sensitive, attuned and mindful caregiving, cycles of abuse, neglect, and high-risk behavior are pre-empted. Making these programs available to larger audiences (tailored to the unique strengths and needs of the population being served) has the potential to promote health, independence and wellness in terms of both prevention and remediation.”

**Anecdotes from Power Source:**

Between 2009-2011, Lionheart Foundation conducted what continues to be the largest research study done with adjudicated youth. We investigated the impact of cognitive behavioral therapy and mindfulness training (CBT/MT) on attentional task performance in incarcerated adolescents. Attention is a cognitive system necessary for managing cognitive demands and regulating emotions. Yet persistent and intensive demands, such as those experienced during high stress intervals like incarceration and the events leading to incarceration, may deplete attention resulting in cognitive failures, emotional disturbances, and impulsive behavior. We hypothesized that CBT/MT may mitigate these deleterious effects of high-stress and protect against degradation in attention over the high-stress interval of incarceration.

I was greatly honored to be part of this team as the meditation teacher and co-facilitator. Here are some anecdotes from participants, boys 16-18 years old who were incarcerated on Riker’s Island in New York City at this time:

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When I first started meditating, I had to scratch and a lot of other distractions, but now, it calms me down, I can hear the air exhale/inhale. It gets your mind right. At first, I thought it was so boring, thought it was crazy, but practice makes perfect. Just the other night, I swear I was meditating, I sat down, crossed my legs and started breathing. It relaxes me. I was stressed, a lot of noise, so instead of listening to music, I just meditated and didn’t hear anyone but myself. The whole bit in the box, I’ve been meditating. At night, first I pray, then meditate while everyone screaming, makes everything feel so much easier, better. It was perfect for the box, number one new rule because in the box, you stress more, need to calm, cool, and collected – and I get tired so go right to sleep. I told my friends about it, I said it sounds stupid, but let’s try it I bet you’ll like it because when I first tried it, I thought it was stupid. My friend also meditates now, he wasn’t in group, but I taught him how to do it.

12035

The meditation was a way to take out anger, before I would take out on someone else. Now just go in my cell and do a breathing exercise. Before group, I was upstate in juvy, and some lady put on music and make us think about the beach, but only did it once and never thought about doing it again. The first

time that we meditated in group, I wasn't going to do it because I wasn't going to close my eyes in a room full of people like me – so I waited until everyone else closed their eyes. I was still skeptical but it worked, I don't know but when you're doing it, drifting off, thought about being in a town, seemed like I was really outside. I felt gay at first, think about all of this for what – but then I see everyone else doing it. First time, didn't get too crazy about it, second time all relaxed. Once since group, there was something, I was heated, really upset – it worked a little bit, fell asleep but I think that's what it's supposed to do, put you asleep.

(You said the program helped you get through your case and apologize, can you speak about that more?)

I took the letter to court and showed the judge the letter – I am guess the letter made a difference and nothing I did because now I have concurrent sentences (instead of having to serve both full sentences). I apologize to my Moms, always close, but big arguments. I saw the wrong, before never saw the wrong because always wrong so it seemed right. I never took responsibility.

12054, 12058

The program clears your mind, releases all your stress. The program comes to you, it's there for you to give you a second chance. Most programs look at us like animals because we're in jail and can't help us, but you all looked at us like humans.

At first, I was swollen fat, now I work out, meditate, read – starting seeing other people, don't want that mindset, I don't want to be here no more – I am more positive.

I'll be telling people that you all changed me.

Meditate – It's like from Bad Boys, just play with it. When I end up in a mood, I'd go in my cell and meditate. Especially with the charges that they facing, a lot of people did it.

I was angry, didn't want to be around nobody, we be fighting, so went in cell, started meditating, gives you relief.

When I came back from court, I have to wait two more months to go back, that upset me – so I went back in my cell to meditate.

Before learning how, would fight or punch a wall. At first, felt weird – they tell you to close your eyes and hard to trust one each other, grew to love one another.

Learned how to control my anger – learned to chill out, read, meditate – working out is like meditating to me. Calms your nerves down.

Told my family, friends, girlfriend – told that helped me, they started seeing a change, why you so calm? I told them some program.

12071

Meditation. I had never heard of it, but I remember the bong/bell. The first time I did it, I didn't like it because too boring – thought really useless, sitting there quiet – but then started doing it in my cell. I count backwards, calms me down so won't react the way that you were doing, the whole demeanor of it – liked it, but didn't. When we do it, everybody want to make a joke about it but really helped in the long run – a lot of people do it, count to 10. When we do get mad/upset, can start breathing, let me breathe first before get in more trouble, it's really easy to catch new charges. I still meditate, every time I get angry, could be every day, get mad at the little things, but don't make sense to get all uptight when can't do anything – I meditate a couple times a week. I had enough practice in group, so I know how to do it myself.

11021

“Just yesterday. Got in an altercation with a guy in the kitchen. Guy said, ‘We gonna fight. We gonna

fight.' At first thought, my initial response was to fight. Then I thought about the consequences – I'd lose my job, don't want to go to court and don't want to hear the judge mouth about my fights. She wants to always mouth about my fights [laughs]."

11023

"I knew meditation was a quiet, relaxed thing, but I didn't know how you do it. We did a lot of exercises. I learned a lot; how to breathe [and] the right posture for meditation. We did a walking meditation and I remember that bell exercise."

In terms of meditation, this participant is confident that "I can do meditation on my own. I learned a lot about it. When I was in building 4, I got into like hundreds of fights. After, living in 6 building, and after the sessions, I got in like 1 fight. I learned to just sit in the dorm on my bed, relax, watch people think and stuff, just relax. Chill."

And a friend that came home [from Riker's], we talked about the meditation and how it can help you. Meditation calms me down, really helps me with anger."

Always think about if it's worth it before getting in a fight. I learned that from the group." He added that he hasn't put himself in the same kind of situations [high risk behaviors] since getting out of Riker's that landed him there:

"Things that involve me getting in trouble, I am not trying to do none of that. Friends who want to go out and rob, I don't want that."

The program helped me a little bit too, having a tool like 'Always think before you do. Relax first, act later.'

His favorite thing about the PS sessions was the, "Walking meditation. Everybody participated, everybody would have something to say about it. You could see the guys really into it. It made it feel like we were all in it."

11039

He described that meditation was "cool, thought it was going to be some corny shit, but it alright." He noted that he particularly liked the meditation bell, "thought real soothing." He added that he had a particularly good instructor, "she explained how to get focused, how to set your hands." Although he had enjoyed meditating during group, he had only tried to meditate once or twice post group, explaining that "personal issues got in the way." He recommended that the group have more meditation sessions "to get you used to it, to make it part of your daily routine."

When asked what thought about meditation before group started, he said "thought it wasn't going to work, but it calmed you down, mind in a blank state – at peace with yourself."

11077

"Not hard for me to do. I do it in the dorm and I just think and breathe to myself. I don't count though. I sit up on my bed and rest and think. Breathe very slowly; in my nose and out my mouth."

"Do it by myself; nobody notices. They know I be mad, but they leave me alone. They don't know I'm meditating."

He mostly meditates when he is angry:

"I need to do it. When I get mad, I get physical. So I gotta meditate to not go there."

He told me that "it always works for him." He hasn't been in any fights since he has been at RI and he believes the meditation is the primary way that he "controls his anger."

He usually takes 10 seconds to meditate when he is angry. He also said that his body temperature rises when he gets mad and that meditating helps him to "cool down physically."

I learned always your decision if you want to do it or not. The book gives you excuses to say when your friends want to rob a store, give me a lot of warnings –stomach hurt, nervous.

Think before you react – always reaction to your action. Just the other day, I was about to beat up some new kids that came to our house, but then I said, let me think – if we beat him up then catch new charge, pack up and go to box.

It taught me how to focus. Say you in school and friend tells you to cut school, I know that I should stay in school, better myself for the future – GED, graduate, get a clean record. If I didn't go to group, I would be the same person that I was when I get here. I would act childish. People look at me different, always someone watching you, judging you. I'm here for myself. I've talked to some older guys and life is more than just fighting, jail is to learn – be calm, collected, mature.