

National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women

January 16, 2018

Dear Colleague:

I am writing to you as the Director of the National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women about an issue that should be of concern to all of us – the alarming increase of women involved in the criminal justice system. It seems that every day there is a news article or report that highlights this issue; the most recent of which is the Prison Policy Initiative’s report, *The Gender Divide: Tracking Women’s State Prison Growth* (https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/women_overtime.html). Despite our best efforts to reduce mass incarceration in this country, whether through legislative initiatives, sentencing reform, implementation of evidence-based practices, technical assistance and training and other initiatives, we are losing the battle with regard to justice involved women – and at a time when we are experiencing reductions in men’s incarceration, and even the closure of men’s prisons in some states.

Why is women’s involvement in criminal justice continuing to increase? Research studies of women’s outcomes have grown in number, and meta-analyses now exist that demonstrate irrefutably that a gender responsive, trauma informed approach is the best way to achieve recidivism reductions and better outcomes for women. Yet, despite this growing body of evidence, I still find myself in debates with others about the legitimacy of gender responsive and trauma informed approaches with justice involved women; and policies, practices and tools in most states and localities typically do not reflect such an approach.

I am writing today to ask you to join me in being more intentional when it comes to women who are caught up in our justice system and who are largely not receiving the interventions that would best serve them and reduce their risk to reoffend. That is, whatever your work—whether in academia, in research, in practice, as consultants— I encourage you to adopt a gender responsive and trauma informed approach. Specifically, I am asking for your support and advocacy in four areas:

- 1. Conduct gender specific research.** If you are involved in policy reforms, research efforts, arrest and crime reporting, and other studies, disaggregate data for men and women. I realize there are challenges in this regard due to low base rates, small program sizes and the like, but it is essential if we are to gain a better understanding of how policies and practices affect men and women the same, or differently.
- 2. Advocate for gender responsive and trauma informed policies and practices.** Gender responsive assessment tools, case planning and management models, and programming are growing in number and have shown through research to have much better outcomes with women than gender neutral tools and programming.

3. **Champion training for all criminal justice practitioners who work with women.** Most criminal justice professionals who work with women will tell you how different it is than working with men; yet, they do not have the education, training, and skills to engage effectively with them. In jurisdictions where corrections staff have been trained in gender responsive and trauma informed approaches, we have seen reductions in institutional violence and misconducts, self-harming behaviors and mental health referrals.
4. **Listen to the women.** When there are opportunities to include the voices of women who have been in the system in our work, it can be extremely beneficial for all of us—we can learn more about what women’s experiences have been and what we can do differently to support them in being successful.

I believe that how we respond with women does matter. So please join me today in adopting an intentional approach to justice involved women. If we are united in our approach, whatever our spheres of influence, we can, together, address the unprecedented increase in the number of women in criminal justice and achieve far better outcomes for women, their families, and our communities.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and your commitment to prevent and reduce women’s involvement in the criminal justice system.

Sincerely yours,



Becki Ney

Director

National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women

www.cjinvolvedwomen.org