

JUSTICEHOME BREAKING BARRIERS & HELPING FAMILIES VIA ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION

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Caroline Buhse¹ and Adam Schaffer²

JusticeHome is an alternative to incarceration program based in New York City, United States, that exclusively focuses on women. Instead of going to prison, selected women can remain at home with their family and get support from a case worker to access drug treatment, mental health services, and parenting and life skills classes. In addition to being significantly less expensive than incarceration, preliminary results of JusticeHome have shown that it has greatly reduced recidivism rates.

Context and Description

JusticeHome is a program run by the Women's Prison Association (WPA) in New York, United States, to provide an alternative to incarceration with a gender perspective. JusticeHome tailors its services specifically to women, in recognition that they face different challenges than men. The program assists women who are suffering from problematic drug use, poverty, mental illness, and trauma, while also seeking to reduce their involvement in criminal activities. In place of prison, those eligible for the program can remain at home with their family and participate in different health and educational programs, in addition to maintaining or seeking employment.³

Eligible candidates are women who have a minimum sentence of six months in the New York criminal system and are charged with a felony. They participate in the program for six to eight months.⁴ WPA works with the District Attorney in New York to identify eligible candidates who wish to participate in the program.⁵ WPA does not limit eligibility

based on the types of crimes that participants have committed; however, the program's funder disqualifies women with certain gun charges from participating. In order to be accepted into the program, the potential candidate must be willing to address the underlying causes of her criminal behavior. For example, a woman suffering from a mental illness must be fully committed to receiving treatment in order to participate in the program. The program does not only concentrate on the problems recognized by the client's case worker, but also allows the participants to identify aspects of their lives that they would like to change.

As soon as a woman is admitted to JusticeHome, her case is reviewed by social workers. The participant simultaneously participates in a self-assessment exercise to identify issues in her life that she wishes to change. After the evaluation process, she is referred to the services that best fit her needs. While

JusticeHome provides alternatives to prison with a gender perspective.

-serving their sentences at home, the program participants are required to attend specific services identified on a case-by-case basis, such as mental health counseling, drug treatment, life skills, or parenting classes. It is also important to note that if a woman enrolled in the program feels unsafe in her home due to scenarios of domestic abuse, the program assists the client in finding a safe place to live with her children. After the initial evaluation, the woman and her children (when relevant) participate in various assessments throughout the course of the program, all of which ensure that the family is receiving the necessary support, counseling services, and trainings.



Female prisoners in the US. Source: Flickr CC [Lwp Kommunikáció](#)

Moving On and Seeking Safety are two examples of JusticeHome programs in which clients participate. Moving On helps women find alternatives to criminal activity by helping them identify and mobilize personal and community resources. Seeking Safety is a counseling program developed to support women who suffer from trauma, drug dependence, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), in addition to providing coping tools to help participants overcome histories of violence.⁶ Women deemed eligible for Moving On or Seeking Safety attend regular meetings with the group leader and other participants.

JusticeHome also supports its participants in their education and in searching and applying for employment while serving their sentence at home. The program assists participants in enrolling in educational and vocational programs, as many women come into the program with low levels of education and lack employable skills. JusticeHome also supports its participants through the job search process: The program assists them with developing their resume and writing job applications, practicing interview skills, and provides tips for maintaining employment and avoiding recidivism.

The program began in June of 2014. It accepts three to four candidates a month, and plans to graduate about 35 women each year.

Results and Impact

A formal evaluation of JusticeHome is currently in progress – the full statistical analysis and qualitative interpretation of the results will not be complete until late 2017.⁷

JusticeHome was originally financed through the city of New York, with a grant of US\$430,000.⁸ The estimated costs of the program are significantly lower than sending a woman to prison. In 2013, the program cost the taxpayer between US\$10,000 and US\$15,000 per woman per year, whereas it costs US\$129,000 to incarcerate a woman for one year.⁹ Moreover, the estimated cost for incarcerating a woman for a year does not include the expenditures associated with placing her children in foster care, or any additional costs associated with supporting her family during her incarceration. This suggests that JusticeHome is a highly cost-effective program.

Key Resources

National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women, *Innovator Profile: JusticeHome*, <http://cjinvolvedwomen.org/innovator-profile-justicehome/>.

Acknowledgements

This briefing was translated by Nischa Pieris of the Inter-American Commission of Women, Organization of American States.

Endnotes

1. Program Assistant, WOLA.
2. Formerly worked as Program Officer, WOLA.
3. *Women's Prison Association, Alternative to Incarceration*, <http://www.wpaonline.org/services/alternative-to->

[incarceration](#)

4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women, *Innovator Profile: JusticeHome*, <http://cjinvolvedwomen.org/innovator-profile-justicehome/>.
7. Written correspondence with Eric Grossman, Women's Prison Association, June 24, 2016.
8. Berger, J., "Mothers Convicted of Felonies May Get Chance to Stay Out of Prison," *New York Times*, 8 May 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/09/nyregion/program-to-offer-alternative-to-jail-for-women-convicted-of-felonies.html>
9. *Ibid.*

Disclaimer: The opinions set out in this briefing are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the CIM/OAS.

This series aims to share examples of innovative approaches that incorporate a gender perspective and the principles of public health and human rights into drug policy. Such innovations will have the best possible outcomes only when they are accompanied by more fundamental drug law and policy reform. However, in the absence of broader reforms, or carried out in conjunction with such reforms, these innovations can help break the vicious cycles of poverty, social exclusion, drug use, involvement in the drug trade, and incarceration that plague so many poor communities across the Americas today. Global Innovative Approaches is a tool that accompanies the publication [Women, drug policies and incarceration: A guide for policy reform in Latin America and the Caribbean](#).