By Dr. Errol Toulon, Jr.
Suffolk County Sheriff

DECONSTRUCTING the Prison Pipeline
MISSION STATEMENT FOR DECONSTRUCTING THE PRISON PIPELINE

Safe schools and neighborhoods depend on a caring community where everyone feels they will be equally protected, supported, and heard. Deconstructing the Prison Pipeline seeks to address the root causes of youthful crime and racial inequities in the justice system -- and brings together law enforcement, lawmakers, school officials, human service professionals and impacted individuals to innovate and create systemic change.
HISTORY OF INTEREST IN JUSTICE REFORM

• 30-year career in law enforcement
  • New York City Department of Correction at Rikers Island
• High-level administrative roles in law enforcement
  Witnessed generations of families affected by mass incarceration
• Later in career, pursued a doctorate in Education,
  and began to study the underlying causes of cyclical crime and incarceration
ELECTED SHERIFF OF SUFFOLK COUNTY, NY

STARTED TERM: JANUARY 2018

Prioritizing Prevention – Visiting At-Risk Schools & Communities

- Visits to Schools
- Gang Resistance Education
- Sandy Hook Promise “Say Something & Know the Signs”

Rehabilitation

- Choose Your Path
- Choose to Thrive
- Building strong partnerships with non-profit and faith-based groups
WHAT ARE THE PRISON PIPELINES?

The “School-to-Prison Pipeline” (STPP) often refers to the policies and practices that push our nation’s schoolchildren, especially our most at-risk children, out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

• Policies such as “zero tolerance” contribute to the prison pipeline
• Studies indicate that students with disabilities and students of color are more likely to enter the pipeline as a result of harsher disciplinary practices.
PRISON PIPELINES ARE MUCH MORE COMPLEX

- Labeling – being labeled troubled or at-risk
- The social norms of family and friends – being around others with criminal histories; including gang members, drug dealing and substance abusers
- Incarcerated young women who were victims of sexual and physical abuse in their early lives – especially those who were also part of the foster care system or child welfare system.
- **Behaviors associated with psychiatric conditions** are punished rather than treated with medical care
- **A high number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)**
MENTAL ILLNESS IN JAILS AND PRISONS

• Approximately 5% of the non-institutionalized population suffers from Serious Psychological Distress (SPD) -- mental health problems severe enough to cause moderate-to-serious impairment in social, occupational, or school functioning and to require treatment.

• This number is much higher in jails and prisons across America.

• The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that 15 percent of state and federal prisoners and 26 percent of jail inmates reported experiences that met the threshold for serious psychological distress.
Women report a history of mental illness at a rate of almost twice the percentage of men. Incarcerated women have higher rates of mental illness than men.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Prevalence of mental health indicators among prisoners and jail inmates, by type of indicator, 2011–2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental health indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No indication of a mental health problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current indicator of a mental health problema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Serious psychological distressc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of a mental health problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ever told by mental health professional they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>had mental disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Major depressive disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bipolar disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Schizophrenia/other psychotic disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Post-traumatic stress disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Anxiety disorderd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Personality disorderd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UNTREATED MENTAL ILLNESS CAN BE A PIPELINE TO CHRONIC CONFINEMENT

• 14% of prisoners and 10% of jail inmates who met the threshold for SPD in the past 30 days were written up while incarcerated -- or charged with assault

• Additional charges often lead inmates with serious mental illness to spend significantly more time in jail and prison over the course of their lifetime

• Most jails and prisons are not adequately staffed to treat these cases
JT’S STORY – SUFFERS FROM SCHIZOPHRENIA

• First Incarceration was 9 days after his 17th birthday

• Presently 22 years old

• He has been incarcerated for most of the last 6 years of his life. Eleven incarcerations.

• Original charge was a domestic assault

• Raised by a chronically ill grandparent

• Mother was addicted to drugs and periodically in his life. No visitation over 6 years.
• Few appropriate housing options and the individual must be stabilized

• Applications for specialized housing requires intensive case management and coordination and most counties have failed to invest in appropriate levels of staffing to handle these cases

• Like JT, people with severe and persistent mental illness will continue to fill our jails and prisons
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES FUEL THE PRISON PIPELINE

“The 1998 seminal ACEs study identified 10 traumatic childhood events related to abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. The researchers found that approximately two-thirds of the population have experienced at least one ACE and nearly one in eight have experienced four or more ACEs. **People who engage in excessive substance abuse, suicidal comments, or workplace violence are seeking a physical response to an emotional pain.** When a person has not developed proper coping or resiliency skills because of previous trauma, then the struggles that we call “life” often become overwhelming.”

- Christopher Freeze, (Ret.) FBI Special Agent in Charge of the Mississippi Field Office
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of childhood exposure*</th>
<th>Prevalence (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abuse by category</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Did a parent or other adult in the household . . .)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often or very often swear at, insult, or put you down?</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often or very often act in a way that made you afraid that you would be physically hurt?</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Did a parent or other adult in the household . . .)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often or very often push, grab, shove, or slap you?</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often or very often hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Did an adult or person at least 5 years older ever . . .)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch or fondle you in a sexual way?</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you touched their body in a sexual way?</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Household dysfunction by category</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance abuse</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic?</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with anyone who used street drugs?</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was a household member depressed or mentally ill?</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did a household member attempt suicide?</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mother treated violently</strong></td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Was your mother (or stepmother) . . .)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes, often, or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her?</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes?</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever threatened with, or hurt by, a knife or gun?</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criminal behavior in household</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did a household member go to prison?</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any category reported</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*An exposure to one or more items listed under the set of questions for each category.
In 2017, 582 young adults between the ages of 16-21 entered the Suffolk County Correctional Facility. Approximately 20% were reported homeless prior to incarceration.

932 children were arrested in the year 2017

- 214 under 16
- 718 17 and 18-year old

- Incarcerated youth are disproportionately black and brown male youth

- African American youth comprise approximately 8% of the school age population in Suffolk County, and 38% of the young inmates in the county jail.
Common factors associated with incarcerated youth and adults:

- Oppositional Defiance Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Depression, Anxiety
- Complex trauma
- Poverty
- Homelessness or Inappropriate Housing (couch surfing)
- Educational deficits
- Frequent reports of close family members who have also been incarcerated
- Addiction and substance use
- Gang involvement
ONCE SOMEONE ENTERS THE PRISON PIPELINE THERE IS A HIGH LIKELIHOOD OF RECIDIVISM
THE CYCLE OF RECIDIVISM

Juvenile detention is often a precursor to adult prison. Close to 55% of youth who go into juvenile detention end up in prison by the age of 25.

According to a 2015 study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics:

• An estimated 68% of released prisoners were arrested within 3 years, 79% within 6 years, and 83% within 9 years
DECONSTRUCTING THE PRISON PIPELINE IS ABOUT CREATING A SCHOOL AND SOCIETAL CULTURE THAT ENCOURAGES “UPSTANDER” BEHAVIOR AND DEVELOPING MORE ROBUST GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS TO ADDRESS THE UNDERLYING FACTORS THAT LEAD TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE CONTACT AND RECIDIVISM.
DECONSTRUCTING THE PRISON PIPELINE
GETTING TO THE KIDS BEFORE THEY GET TO ME

Recognition that in order to end the prison pipeline we need to take a more holistic approach to addressing behavioral problems and vulnerabilities before kids reach the justice system.
• Assessment
• Intervention
• Case Management
• More Social Workers and Mental Health Professionals
• Restorative Justice Practices
Kicked off Deconstructing the Prison Pipeline in November 2018

• Held May Public Hearings
• Comprised of elected officials, educators, law enforcement, and human service agencies
Deconstructing the Prison Pipeline ultimately means *discovering opportunities* for *assessment and intervention* before people end up in the prison pipeline.

- Our schools, medical professionals, law enforcement professionals, government and human service agencies – and ALL OF US -- can all play a role in assessment and intervention.
- We must create a culture where children and adults take on the role of empowered UPSTANDERS.
The Suffolk County Sheriff’s Office adopted two methodologies in 2018 to move this vision forward:

- **SANDY HOOK PROMISE’S SAY SOMETHING AND START WITH HELLO PROGRAMS**
- **School-based initiatives:**
  - **Know the Signs/Say Something**
  - **Start with Hello**
THE JULY 2019 FORUM WITH SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

The Task Force Introduced Sandy Hook Promise’s ASSESSMENT AND INTERVENTION Program to school superintendents

• Proposed as an alternative to more punitive measures to school disciplinary issues.
• The goal is to encourage school leadership to connect at-risk youth and their families to services in their schools and communities to prevent escalating violence and the overuse of school suspensions.
The Assessment and Intervention Program offered through Sandy Hook Promise is based off the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG), which was formally recognized as an evidence-based program by the federal government's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices in 2013.

VSTAG was developed by Dr. Dewey Cornell from the University of Virginia.
ASSESSMENT AND INTERVENTION

The program can be used to detect serious issues like gun related crime and suicide, but also can help identify and prevent issues like alcohol and drug use, physical abuse, criminal activity and more.

Uses a decision tree and triage approach to resolve conflicts; protects victims and also helps to identify the underlying problem that initiated the behavior.

Engages a multidisciplinary team of school staff. In the process it can also include community partners.

The team approach helps identify issues and divert youth into appropriate treatment and/or services.
ASSESSMENT AND INTERVENTION APPROACH AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

Published research findings from 2 field tests, 5 controlled studies and 1 state implementation study:

- Reported violence reduction
- Students reported fewer threats carried out
- Reductions of 50% in long-term suspensions
- Reductions in bullying infractions
- Increased use of school counseling
- Increased parent involvement
- Students reported greater willingness to seek help for threats of violence
- Students reported a more positive view of school personnel
- No racial disparities in disciplinary and legal consequences
- No disparities between regular and special education in disciplinary and legal consequences
DECONSTRUCTING THE PRISON PIPELINE TASK FORCE IS ALSO WORKING ON NUMEROUS OTHER PROJECTS

• Connecting county inmates to service providers to reduce recidivism
• Connecting the children of inmates to human service agencies
• Safe Spaces for children vulnerable to gang involvement – Judge Fernando Camacho
• Working with other groups to improve access to social and mental health services
QUESTIONS?

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