FREEDOM NETWORK
Supporting Citizens Post-Incarceration

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Email: emanuea2@wwu.edu
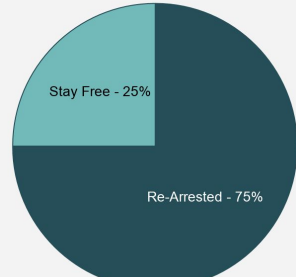
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Motivation

US Prison population has increased by

700%

Since 1970

Average cost of one inmate: $31,286 per year

Prisons are expensive, but the hidden costs affecting communities and families are even higher.

Better reentry outcomes mean money and lives saved!

Arrested Within 5 Years Post-Release
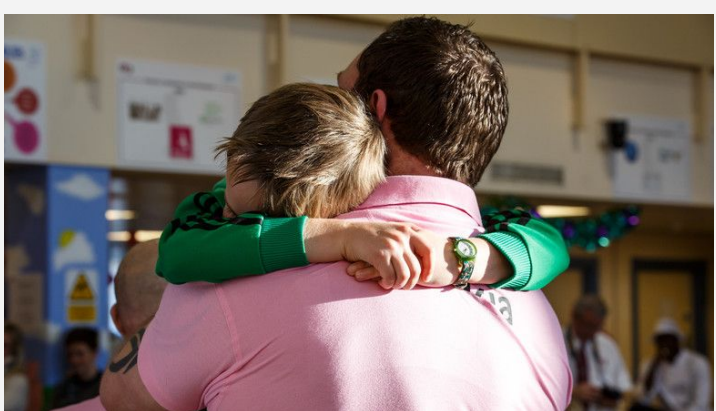- Stay Free - 25%
- Re-Arrested - 75%

Image source: https://www.g4s.com/en-gb/media-centre/news/2017/08/10/family-intervention-at-hm-prison-parc

Findings

- After a period of incarceration, a variety of barriers are encountered.

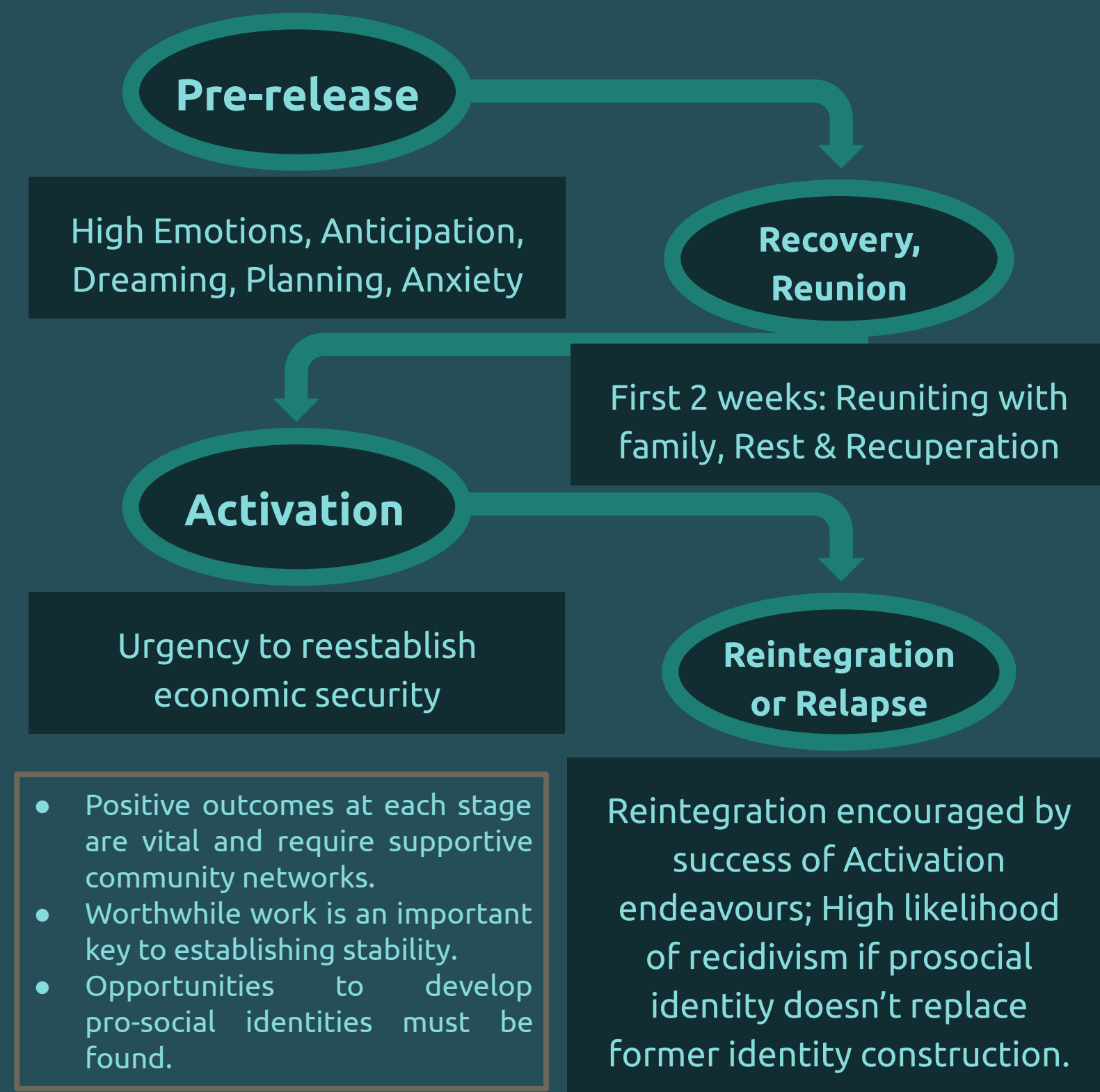| Explicit Barriers:	Implicit Barriers:
• Employment • Housing • Food • Transportation • Tech access • Medical care • Education	• Social stigma • Identity (re)formation • Mental Health & Trauma-informed services • Community & Relationships

- Rehabilitation, or *desistance*, is only possible when basic needs are met.
- In order to desist from antisocial behaviors, one must be committed to and supported in (re)forming a new, prosocial identity.
- Needs and experiences of every reentering citizen are unique and require a degree of personalization in rehabilitative planning which centers the healing and growth of that person.
- High digital illiteracy after incarceration.

Methodology

- **Systematic Literature Review:**
  As a team, find, read, summarize, and discuss relevant research papers and articles.
- **System Analysis:**
  Locate and analyze platforms serving the target user population.
- **Community Interviews:**
  Face-to-face, semi-structured Interviews with target user population, parallel populations (i.e. veterans), and organizations working with target users; transcribe, analyze and discuss findings.
- **Prototyping Process:**
  Develop solution and platform in response to research; present prototypes to community for feedback to be implemented.
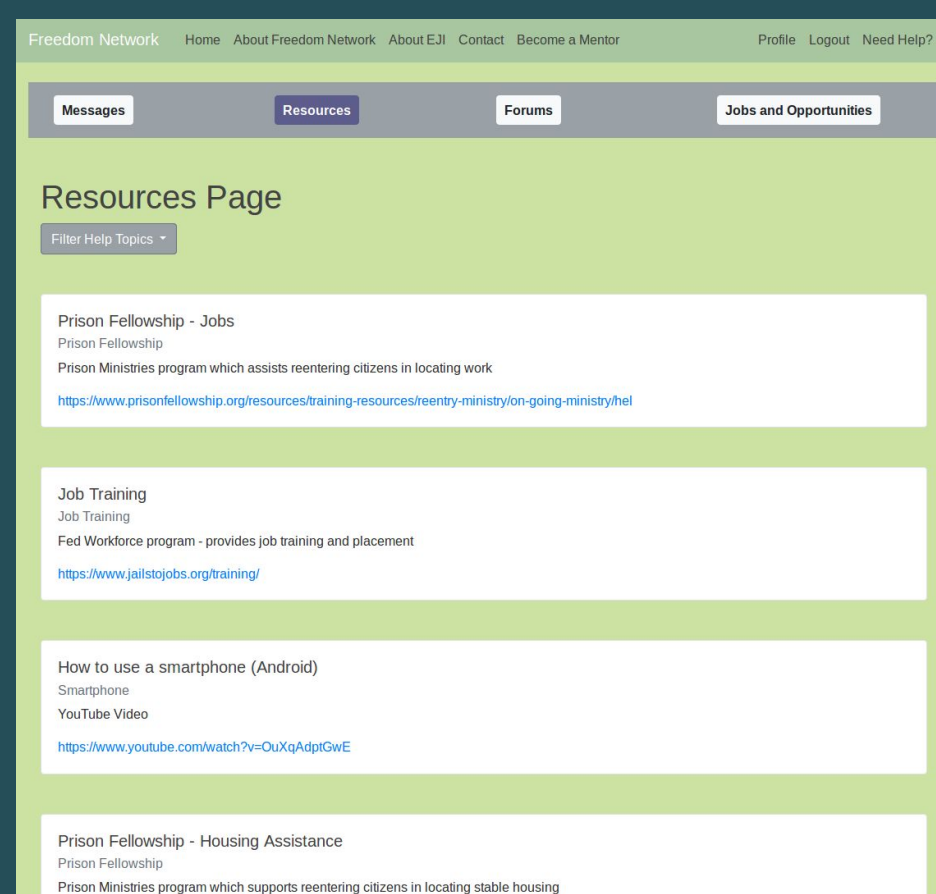
Stages of Reentry

Pre-release

High Emotions, Anticipation, Dreaming, Planning, Anxiety

Recovery, Reunion

First 2 weeks: Reuniting with family, Rest & Recuperation

Activation

Urgency to reestablish economic security

Reintegration or Relapse

Reintegration encouraged by success of Activation endeavours; High likelihood of recidivism if prosocial identity doesn't replace former identity construction.

- Positive outcomes at each stage are vital and require supportive community networks.
- Worthwhile work is an important key to establishing stability.
- Opportunities to develop pro-social identities must be found.
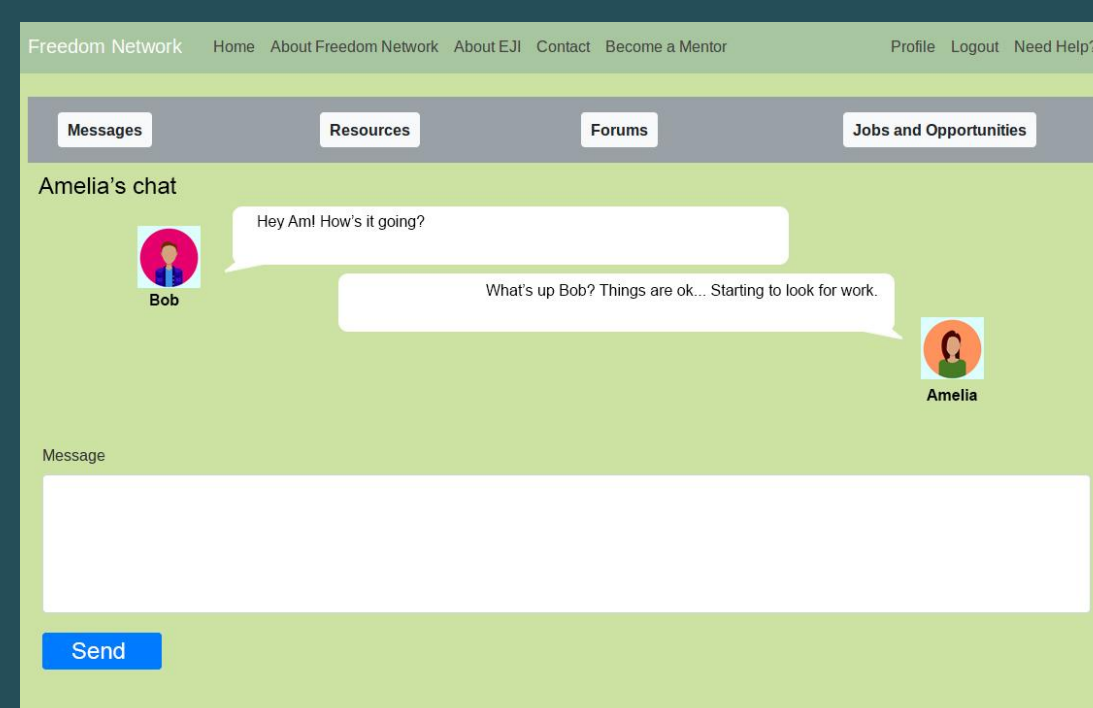
Adapted from Durnescu, 2017 [4]

Implementation

User: Mentee

Reentering citizens who are supported by Mentors via Freedom Network chat and Resources located in one easy place (see below).
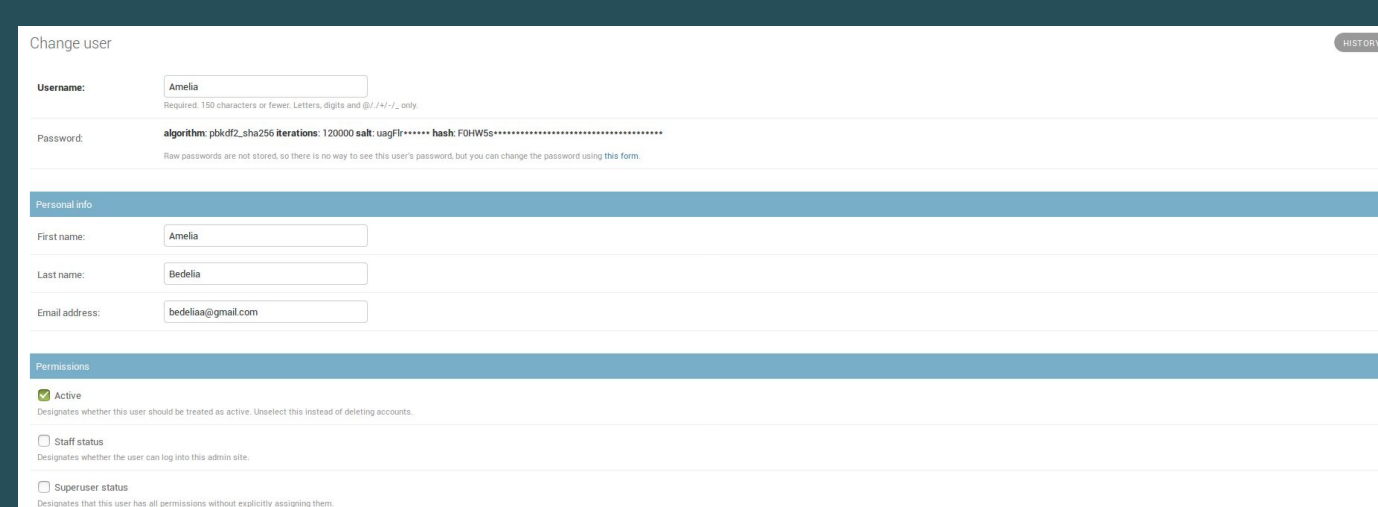
Resources Page

User: Mentor

Rehabilitated citizen who is dedicated to supporting a group of Mentees via chat (see below) and shared knowledge/experience.

Mentor/Mentees are assigned by Partnering Organization.

User: Partnering Organization

Organization which creates users in backend (see below); Associates Mentor/Mentees via internal program.

Solution

1. **Overcoming barriers:**
   Resources such as referral lists, tech tutorials, and job-search tips provide reentering citizens with life-saving and life-changing information that is often hard to find. While using simple technologies like Freedom Network, new skills which help users navigate the modern world are developed - particularly after long-term incarceration.

2. **Identity (re)Formation - Why Mentorship?**
   The development of prosocial behaviors and identity requires persistence, dedication, and the support of others. Mentorship often gives Mentees guidance and encouragement while providing real-world experiences and knowledge in navigating a complex reentry process wrought with barriers.

   Partnering Organizations which work with the formerly-incarcerated population have the opportunity to design relevant reentry plans. Mentors with similar stories are matched to newly released citizens. Communication is supported by Freedom Network's easy-to-use and confidential *chat* function. Because having a way to give back to society and perform prosocial behaviors is the best way to develop a new identity, becoming a Mentor is an excellent goal while in the reentry stages and allows those who have achieved this status a way to give back directly to their community.

3. **Simplicity = Accessibility**
   By enrolling users into a mentorship program and *training them to use Freedom Network in person*, Partnering Organizations facilitate a learning edge which enables users to access technology, support, and updated skills. Because Freedom Network is a simple platform which brings resources directly to users in one place, it is accessible and facilitates levels of growth beyond the user's capacity at the time of release.

Future Work

Two areas of future work are identified:
(1) Immediate implementation, or further website features planned in Freedom Network, and (2) Systemic change, which is outside the scope of this solution.

Immediate implementation	• Email hosting • Social forum • Blog and user stories/bios • Check-in feature • Text-enabled chat
Systemic change	• Changes to justice system and prison reform • Development of community-based resources, including robust mentorship programs • Rehabilitative and therapeutic programs within justice system experience

References

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