



SPRING UPDATE

April 2021

Thank you for your interest in Lionheart's work and mission of providing life-transforming programs to prisoners, highly at-risk adolescents, teen parents as well as the direct care workers who serve these youth.

Lionheart has, in many ways, been thriving despite this strange time and, *in great measure thanks to our donors*, we have been developing new resources; distributing our programs (through donations, grant delivery, trainings and sales); preparing for a new outreach and social media campaign; and getting ready to launch our new website (www.lionheart.org). Please check it out and consider sharing our info on social media. We anticipate significant growth and expanded impact in the months and years ahead. As always, I am thrilled to share our progress with you.

THE PRISON PROJECT

As it has done elsewhere, COVID has created a crisis of historic proportions in U.S. prisons and jails, leading to increased restrictions of movement and a resultant form of "segregation for all." One in every five state and federal prisoners has tested positive, a rate more than 4X as high as the general population. Since non-essential staff and volunteers have been kept outside, many therapeutic groups have been suspended, amplifying the need for effective, innovative programming that can be delivered in-cell.

Out-of-cell prison programming has declined precipitously nationwide and consequently so have sales of Lionheart's prison-related resources. Lionheart's delivery of three "Innovative Grants" within the CA Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), has been significantly curtailed due to Covid. But despite this we have been able to deliver programming through our 6 and 13-session Making Time Count Self-study Programs. Making Time Count (MTC) is the workbook that when used in conjunction with the *Houses of Healing* book, enables individuals to complete the program on their own. If there was ever a time to offer this programming to prisoners, it is now.

...not only have I achieved something by doing this course but a healing has been passed on and a curse removed! Making Time Count must reach all persons incarcerated. The impact it will have on our broken lives is tremendous!

Jamal, CDCR

In addition to the three "Innovative Grants" that Lionheart is currently delivering in the CA Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), we are donating resources to prisoners throughout the U.S. who request the program. At the same time we are planning an online fundraising campaign on our new website to respond to requests like the following:

...I am a therapist in San Quentin Prison. Several of my inmate patients have mentioned that the book Houses of Healing was the single most important book in their growth. I would like to be able to hold a group or work individually using your book. The prison does not provide funds to buy material. I am writing to ask if you sometimes provide the books and/or the manual for no cost? I would appreciate any material you may be able to provide.

We also received a request for 75 **Making Time Count (MTC)** Programs from a mental health counselor in California's Pelican Bay State Prison for prisoners housed in its administrative segregation and solitary units – both forms of highly restricted housing. In a new initiative, **Lionheart is committed to getting thousands of the Making Time Count/ Houses of Healing Programs into solitary units nationwide.**

...What was the most helpful concept or skill that I learned? To claim responsibility, claim my faults, learn from my past errors and pivot to the emotional freedom that only the truth can give rise to. MTC participant, CDCR

At the end of this update you will find a letter from a young man in solitary who chose to step out of a gang as a result of the program. He is not the only MTC participant who has made the choice to step out of the gang life. It takes a **LOT** of courage to make this choice. Their engagement in MTC inspired the strength and determination that is required. Thank YOU for supporting them to take this courageous step – and stick by it.

++++++

...Houses of Healing is the most impactful book I have ever read! Over the past ten years I have studied Non-Violent Communication, Restorative Justice, and voluntarily attended group therapy sessions. Your book has interwoven all these disciplines into a contextually relevant resource that is appropriate for all comprehension levels. Simply stated, it is the most necessary book to ever enter any DOC facility!

David Harp Correctional Center, OK

THE YOUTH PROJECTS

Last month Lionheart was awarded a **5th Innovative Grant** from the CDCR. Over the next two years Lionheart will be delivering numerous (on-site) Power Source Programs in two **CA Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)** detention facilities. Lionheart has hired Daniel Silva, a highly experienced Power Source and HOH facilitator to head up the team that will deliver the program. Daniel served 38 years in the CA system. The team of facilitators that he will be working with are all “credible messengers”, people who live/demonstrate the life-affirming impact of transformative programming – and all of whom have had the lived experience of the youth. All have had life-changing experiences as a result of their work with Power Source and Houses of Healing and they have honed the skills needed to be effective facilitators.

Power Source in the Texas Department of Juvenile Justice.

As noted in Lionheart's last update, the Texas DJJ has selected Power Source as its "gold standard" for youth programming. Jess Linick, Ph.D., Lionheart's Clinical Director of Youth Services, recently completed a series of consultations with the Texas DJJ, having trained all of their detention sites in Power Source last February. With many youth having completed the program, facilitators report their positive experience with the PS curriculum. As one facilitator said, "Power Source relates to the context in which the youth are living and growing, how they wound up where they are, not just teaching skills as other programs do."

EQ2

EQ2 is Lionheart's interactive training and support program for direct care staff working with youth that fills a critical gap in building trauma-informed communities. Research shows that the relationships youth create with caregiving adults hold enormous potential for healing and transformation. Yet, unless the adults engaging in these moment-to-moment, day-to-day interactions possess the self-regulation and relational skills required to nurture safety and promote growth, creating trauma-sensitive environments is unlikely. EQ2 is uniquely designed to help staff build the essential and often complex social and emotional regulation skills required to actively manage how they respond to youths' traumatic stress reactions and challenging behavior.

EQ2, which was launched last year, includes an app which is actively being refined as several current subscribers provide feedback and new content is added. This is being accomplished by an amazing team of UX (User Experience) designers from Catchafire (professional volunteers secured through The Boston Foundation) and the programming genius of students and staff at the DALI Lab (Digital Applied Learning and Innovation) at Dartmouth College. If Lionheart were paying a market rate for the UX designers and programmers it would likely cost \$125-150,000 rather than the \$25,000 we anticipate paying to Dartmouth. It is an intensely productive time as the Lionheart staff and app team develop an interactive app to empower direct care staff to provide environments where young people can flourish.

As a result of grants from the Gardiner Howland Shaw Foundation and the John W. Alden Foundation, Lionheart is providing EQ2 at no cost to staff at 8 Teen Parenting Programs (TPPs) in MA where teen parents, many who have been in the foster care system themselves, live with their babies during the first few years of parenthood. We have applied for an additional grant that would pay for the distribution of EQ2 at four additional TPPs and cover an agency wide EQ2 training. We are very grateful to be in a position to support the TPP staff. Senior staff at the MA Dept. of Children and Families, under whose auspices the TPPs function, are thrilled to have EQ2 support their staff.

Lionheart's Board of Directors

After 13 years on Lionheart's Board of Directors, Scott Curvey, a very thoughtful advisor and loyal and generous friend to Lionheart has stepped off the board. We are enormously grateful to Scott for his service and support over the years. Bringing new skills and experience to our board, Lionheart is excited to have True-See Allah and Tim Uygungil join us. No doubt they will both bring great value and presence to Lionheart. I hope you visit Lionheart's website to meet all members of our Board of Directors and Advisors.

Interns, Staff, and a Quantum Leap in Social Media

In addition to 6 professional volunteers – (the 3 UX designers, 2 translators, and 1 marketing expert), Lionheart currently has 7 interns with 2 more joining the team this summer. Most interns find us on Handshake, a website where college students find jobs and internships. In addition to creating the new website and spearheading the social media campaign, Lionheart's new Director of Partnerships, Amanda Casarjian, hires, directs and supervises all the interns. Amanda volunteered full-time for Lionheart for six months prior to joining our staff. It was clear from her vision, experience, creativity and unique skill set as a social psychologist, that she would be a tremendous asset in propelling Lionheart in the direction we want to go. In addition to facilitating trainings in restorative justice, she came to Lionheart with many years of experience as a high-level strategic planner for the Chicago Public Schools. Lionheart is blessed to have her as a team member.

Moving Forward: *The Sky is the Limit*

In describing the impact of the Making Time Count program on his life, one participant wrote that he now felt that **"the sky is the limit."** *We feel that way at Lionheart as well!*

At the core of our work and success is our expanding staff of five full-time and three part-time employees. Salaries coupled with overhead, printing and postage costs, and numerous other expenses makes your support critical to our success. As Lionheart moves forward, the goal is to not only continue to create exceptional programs that have a life-changing impact, **but to also be relentless about getting them to more and more of our target populations.**

We are so grateful to those who have been an integral part of making a life-changing impact on so many lives. With continued donor support thousands more will see their way onto a positive life trajectory. *The sky is the limit.*

Most sincerely and gratefully yours,

Robin Casarjian

The following letter offers a look into the response of one young man:

From a Making Time Count/Houses of Healing Self-Study participant

This is for real a life changer. I promote this book 2 everyone I interact with. I truly thank you for the opportunities yall have gave me. Everything that I have picked up on the book and course, I've instilled in my everyday life. Everyday I got up and dedicated my time to this course and I even fought my old celly, he said I was turning soft. I've made the biggest choice. I stepped back from a prison gang. I'm disposable to them, but to my kids and family I won't be. So to me I'm on the right track. Im done with this life. At the end of the day I will go home a changed man. This is the kicker to my new beginning.

I'm just so thankful for the opportunity of the course, its no hidden agendas. Day in and day out I gave it all I got and I won't stop now, and best trust you guys, every positive mind that I speak to I promote this book, cuz its my purpose. My buddy ... he introduced me to the book and quizzed me on it. He thought I was bullshitting and I'm sure he judged me by the tattoos and perhaps thought I was an ignorant kid who wasn't about to read a self help book, but lil did he know that I'm fed up being a lost cause. I won't let my past dictate my future.

I'm going to excel and push for my family and my kids. I wont stop until I'm making big impacts in my community, positive impacts. This program has showed me that I had to dig deep in my childhood, to see the roots of why I'm in the system. It's not my fault that I was abused as a child. The ass beatings, the mental beatdown, all I wanted was to be loved, have that father figure, the guidance. Unfortunately I didn't get that, but I now know that it wasn't my fault. I'm not a bad person. I just made a lot of fucked up choices.

That's a shame but without the mistakes, I wouldn't have known how to make shit right. I'm far from perfect, but one day at a time, and soon I will be home, in society, able to be a civil young man with an educated & dedicated mind frame. One day I do hope to impact the youth and I'm sure not all will listen- But as long as I got ones attention, then there's hope. I got a perspective that I have to express. How could those people say they're my friends while they're getting me strung out and grooming a monster. I knew how to sharpen a piece of metal rod but now I've been taught to sharpen my mind. Now that Ive broken free from those chains my perspective is to show youth & loved ones how to sharpen our minds. As a minority they expect me to fail.. but failure is no longer an option. Honestly I have a long way to go and I don't know what the future holds. But I know that I have direction now. I will prosper.

I have been reborn, it's no lie, my way of seeing life and thinking. All I want to do is be a hero to my kids. I sat here and cried to think wow my baby girl, never had me out there and I'm still her hero, I felt like a coward. But you know what -fuck this. I won't be another lost cause or bad statistic. I refuse not to make peace with this life..Negative behavior should never be rewarded. I will love myself. I will count all of my blessings. I will not stop seeking healing. I thank god for all the oppurtunities he has blessed me with. I'm not perfect but I'm far from the worthless scumbag I thought I was. I seen life and live for the greater good. Thank you Lionheart real talk. Thank you all for your time and patience. God bless you.

Sincerely M.