

NEWSLETTER



As the Women's Gender Responsive Coordinator for the Reentry Division of the San Francisco Adult Probation Department, you are charged with developing, implementing, and advancing a clear and actionable gender-responsive pathway for cis and trans women and gender-nonconforming individuals who are involved in the criminal justice system. What drew you to this area of work?

Well, the simple answer is my own justice involvement and the journey I took to regain my life. I was indicted by the federal government on drug trafficking charges. At the time of my arrest, I had been using methamphetamine for over 20 years. While on pretrial, a magistrate gave me the opportunity to go to residential treatment. Honestly, I didn't go to treatment to stop using. I went to treatment to get out of the county jail I was in. At the time, I didn't believe that people recovered, the only time people in my circle stopped using was when they were incarcerated, and sometimes not even then, or when they died. It just wasn't something that I thought was a possibility for my life, but something happened for me while I was in treatment.

People there had higher expectations for me than I did. They knew that people could recover if given the opportunity and were held accountable for their actions. I was convicted and sentenced to 57 months. Thankfully, when I entered prison, I had enough recovery time under my belt to make a very conscious decision that I was going to be a better woman on the other side of prison. While in prison, I did another demanding treatment program. I took every psychology class they offered. I did cognitive behavioral therapy, dialectical behavioral therapy, trauma work, Seeking Safety, self-esteem art, transaction analysis, everything. I worked with a therapist one-on-one to address the issues I had never addressed—the death of my mother, the death of my twin, and the incest I experienced as an adolescent. All of the work I did played a role in me leaving prison mentally and emotionally healthier than I had ever been in my life.

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LGBTQ+ Individuals at the Intersection of Mental Health and Criminal Justice

By *Cassandra Moore*

June was Pride Month, a time when Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, + (LGBTQ+) people and their allies pour into the streets to celebrate their identities and experiences, and an opportunity to raise awareness around the challenges that those in this community face. This article looks at those specific challenges, especially what LGBTQ+ people contend with when caught at the intersection of the mental health and criminal justice system and highlights a few hopeful approaches that encourage the equal treatment and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people who are struggling with substance use and seeking recovery or who are justice-involved.

Because LGBTQ+ people often face discrimination, bias, harassment, violence, and challenges that heterosexual people do not face, they are at an increased risk for various mental and substance use disorders. LGBTQ+ people are 12 times more likely to use amphetamines and more than 9 times more likely to use heroin than heterosexual individuals. LGBTQ+ populations also have higher rates of tobacco and alcohol use.

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Advocating from Experience: Peers Serving the Legal Needs of Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated People

Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (LSPC), based in Oakland, California, began serving women who were incarcerated more than 40 years ago, when their needs were largely invisible. The program, staffed in part by formerly incarcerated people, began in response to the large numbers of women being incarcerated as a result of the war on drugs. But as it pursued measures to improve conditions at a more systemic level, the organization went from serving individuals to joining class action lawsuits, writing policy manuals on topics ranging from parental rights to sentencing reform, and creating other resources to help both women and men who are incarcerated and their families, in California as well as nationwide, according to Dorsey Nunn, executive director of LSPC and co-founder of All of Us or None (AOUON). Nunn, himself, was charged, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison when he was 19 years old. In 1984, at age 33 and after 3 years on parole, he was discharged.

"When we started hiring formerly incarcerated people to work in the office of Legal Services for Prisoners with Children, we began daydreaming about what it would be like to have a movement that was about us and led by us," Nunn explains. That daydream informs the wide range of work that LSPC does to benefit the lives of people who are justice involved; from making systemic changes in legislation and providing courtroom representation, to promoting community connection and individual wellbeing.

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Resource Spotlight

- [Standing with LGBT Prisoners: An Advocate's Guide to Ending Abuse and Combating Imprisonment](#) | National Center for Transgender Equality