

FINAL REPORT



**RESTORATIVE
JUSTICE
RESPONSE
PILOT
PROJECT**

DECEMBER

2025

PILOT SITE: MCF STILLWATER

Table of Contents

Foreword	Pg 2
Terms of Note	Pg 3
Executive Summary	Pg 4
Project Overview	Pg 5
• Background & Rationale	Pg 5
• Goals & Objectives	Pg 7
• Methodology	Pg 7
• Activities: Positive Behavior Change, Programming, Response	Pg 8
Spotlight: RJ Mentors	Pg 14
Impact of Restorative Justice Philosophy on Implementation	Pg 16
Results & Findings	Pg 17
• Data Analysis	Pg 17
• Violence Reduction	Pg 21
• Culture Change	Pg 21
Recommendations	Pg 27
Conclusion	Pg 28
Appendices	Pg 29
Glossary of Terms	Pg 29

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Foreword

This project focused on violence between incarcerated persons – how to prevent it from happening and respond to it after it has occurred. This report amplifies the voices and experiences of those incarcerated, placing them at the heart of the narrative. While this report acknowledges the positive impact on staff, the primary emphasis remains firmly on the incarcerated population.

Terms of Note

Mentor

In carceral settings, a “mentor” typically refers to an incarcerated individual designated by facility staff to guide or serve as a role model for peers. This title is usually granted to those who comply with facility rules—such as avoiding discipline, completing treatment programs, maintaining sobriety, and participating in educational opportunities.

However, those who meet staff expectations and are favored by staff are not always the most respected or influential among their peers. Individuals with histories of violence often hold significant sway within the incarcerated community. Effecting cultural change in prison environments requires engaging individuals who may not have spotless records but are committed to positive, pro-social change and possess peer influence.

This project identified, trained, and supported Restorative Justice (RJ) mentors based on their peer influence and willingness to employ restorative approaches, rather than relying solely on traditional mentor criteria. This premise was foundational to the pilot.

Restorative Justice

RJ has been part of the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) for over 30 years. Many DOC staff and incarcerated people have come to view RJ in oversimplified terms—as a vague process where incarcerated people “give back” or “pay it forward” to benefit “the community.” This limited perspective focuses too much on individual acts of harm and reparations to a generalized community, allowing both the community and the carceral system to avoid meaningful accountability.

True application of RJ in correctional settings goes beyond ensuring incarcerated people comply with policies and procedures. It requires recognizing that DOC policies, procedures, and culture can also cause harm and must be open to critique and accountability.

Compliance and punishment are not restorative justice methods for achieving safety and security. Instead, restorative justice methods foster mutual respect, dignity for all, and repair of harm through relational accountability among those most affected. These core principles of restorative justice remain constant across all settings. Altering them to support punishment-driven incarceration frameworks undermines the integrity and spirit of restorative justice. The pilot project aimed to use restorative justice philosophies and practices to transform prison culture and reduce violence—not as a means to reduce violence by increasing compliance.

Executive Summary

The RJ Response Pilot Project at Minnesota Correctional Facility (MCF)-Stillwater was initiated by the DOC's Victim Services & Restorative Justice (VSRJ) Unit to address rising violence among incarcerated people and to foster culture change within correctional facilities. Rooted in RJ principles, the project emphasized accountability, healing, and peer influence rather than compliance and punishment.

Objectives:

- Reduce violence among incarcerated people.
- Expand RJ learning opportunities for staff and residents.
- Institutionalize restorative justice practices within facility operations.
- Develop a framework for incarcerated RJ teams.

Key Activities:

- Positive Behavior Change: Incentive programs such as Activity Nights, card tournaments, and RJ Reflection Circles.
- Programming: Orientation sessions, brochures, staff training, and RJ content broadcast through CableCast.
- Response: RJ Mentor Program, where trained incarcerated people conducted daily check-ins, mediated conflicts, and facilitated community-building activities.

Findings:^{1 2}

- Reductions in violent discipline: violent incidents between incarcerated people decreased by 22 percent, with a 14 percent reduction in unique individuals involved in violence, staff assaults dropped by 13 percent, and total violence declined by 14 percent.
- Security lockdowns decreased by 36 percent.
- Reductions in key areas of nonviolent discipline: overall discipline decreased by 14 percent, with a 23 percent reduction in theft, a 17 percent reduction in illicit drug use and possession, and a 4 percent reduction in possession of weapons.
- By the end of the project, requests for RJ Mentor involvement increased by 211 percent and approximately 12 percent of MCF-Stillwater's population expressed interest in joining the project.

Impact:

The pilot demonstrated that RJ can foster dignity, accountability, and cultural change in correctional settings. Quantitative outcomes showed a reduction in violence and qualitative data revealed the effectiveness of peer-led interventions in building trust and preventing violence.

¹ Compared discipline data from pre-project year (Jul '23 – Jun '24) and implementation year (Jul '24 – Jun '25).

² The RJ Response Pilot was not the only initiative occurring within MCF-Stillwater during the time period. A reduction in violence occurred during the pilot period but cannot be solely attributed to the project.

Project Overview

Background & Rationale

In 2020, the Office of Legislative Auditor published [*Safety in State Correctional Facilities: Evaluation Report*](#). Responding to the report's recommendations and a rise in assaults on staff and violent incidents among incarcerated people, Commissioner of Corrections Paul Schnell launched the DOC's Violence in Facilities Framework Project in April 2022. This initiative aimed to prevent violence, raise awareness, improve responses, and learn from violent incidents in Minnesota correctional facilities.

The project's primary goals were to identify facility-based violence-prevention strategies and address violence committed by incarcerated people. Its charter mainly focused on responding to incidents and evaluating data, addressing violence used by incarcerated individuals against staff. The violence-prevention objective was pursued through the MCF-Stillwater RJ Response Pilot Project led by the VSRJ Unit.

VSRJ was tasked with addressing violence between incarcerated people. VSRJ created a pilot project proposal grounded in RJ philosophy and practices.

RJ encompasses principles and practices inspired by relationship-based cultures worldwide. It prioritizes accountability and healing over vengeance and punishment. U.S. criminologist Howard Zehr, a foundational figure in RJ since the late 1970s, defines it as "a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in an offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs and obligations, in order to heal and put things right as possible."

Project Timeline

Feb. 2020: *Safety in State Correctional Facilities* Report

April 2022: Launch of DOC's Violence in Facility Project

Jan – Apr 2023: VSRJ's preparation and planning for RJ Response Pilot Project

March 2023: DOC Executive Council approves RJ Response Pilot Project at MCF-Stillwater

April 2023: RJ Response Pilot Project Charter drafted and signed

May – June 2023: Pilot Project Team assembled

July 2023 – Jan 2024: Weekly project team meetings at MCF-Stillwater

Nov 2023: DOC Executive Council – reported on status and requested resources for implementation

Jan 2024: Pilot Project Launch Event

Spring 2024: Programming activities begin, RJ Mentors recruited and trained



The DOC's RJ efforts, including the RJ Response Pilot Project, are based on the principle that violence and harmful actions violate relationships, creating needs and obligations. These include needs of everyone involved, individuals and affected communities, and obligations for those who caused harm.

Practically, this means creating opportunities for harmed individuals to express and have their needs met, for those who caused harm to fulfill obligations and make meaningful amends, and for community members affected by violence and its root causes

to support all involved and help transform those conditions.

VSRJ's draft RJ Response Pilot Project proposal drew from several sources:

- Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) responses to sexual assault and harassment within Minnesota correctional facilities;
- Peer support models for DOC staff affected by facility violence;
- RJ principles and practices;
- Input from incarcerated members of the RJ Council at MCF-Stillwater;
- Input from the MCF-Stillwater executive team.

"I was forced to not only work on my negative effect in my community, RJ afforded me a space to reflect on myself first, in order to help my community." – RJ Mentor

Quotations from RJ Mentors were drawn from evaluative surveying.

From the earliest stages, VSRJ staff engaged influential members of groups within MCF-Stillwater communities as equals in designing RJ-based processes to respond to and prevent violence among incarcerated people.

In March 2023, the DOC Executive Council approved VSRJ's request to develop and implement the RJ Response Pilot Project at MCF-Stillwater, chosen for its high violence rates and active RJ Council serving as an on-site partner.

VSRJ staff met separately with the MCF-Stillwater executive team, lieutenants, sergeants, and the RJ Council (comprising about 20 incarcerated people and several facility staff). Members from all groups were invited to join the team that would build and implement the RJ Response Pilot Project.

The team included 30 staff (from VSRJ, Stillwater programming and security, and a DOC researcher) and five incarcerated men. Workgroups focused on incentives, programming, and response, each including uniformed and non-uniformed staff alongside incarcerated people. The team met weekly for large-group and workgroup planning sessions.

Goals & Objectives

The goals of the project were to reduce violence among incarcerated people and create culture change within the facility. Objectives included:

- Improving safety in the facility;
- Expanding RJ learning opportunities;
- Institutionalizing effective RJ programming & practices;
- Developing a framework for facility-based RJ teams of incarcerated individuals.

Deliverables included:

- Piloting a framework for staff and incarcerated people to use RJ practices for responding to potential and actual violence;
- Piloting an incentive-based model for living units to reduce violence and create culture change;
- Developing practices for staff and incarcerated people to help with culture change in the facility.

Project Methodology

Project organizers used quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the results of approaches that were intended to reduce violence among incarcerated individuals and foster culture change that would support further violence reduction.

Quantitative data were collected through weekly reports assessing conflict frequency, population buy-in, and perceived effectiveness. Institutional data, demographic data, disciplinary records, and incident statistics were analyzed to contextualize self-reported measures and to identify broader behavioral trends.

Qualitative data were gathered during weekly focus groups that emphasized trust-building, relational accountability, and respect for lived experience, and that allowed participants to describe personal insights, patterns of conflict, and perceived changes over time.

Project Timeline

July 2024: RJ Mentors start work in living units and incentive activities begin

Sept 2024: Incentive approach changed

Jan 2025: National Center on Restorative Justice (NCORJ) RJ Coaching starts

Feb 2025: Family & Friends Meal

May 2025: Phased closure of MCF Stillwater announced

June 2025: Weekly mentor meetings ended

Sept 2025: Final recognition dinner is held for RJ Mentors

Oct – Dec 2025: Project evaluation: Focus groups held at four facilities, surveys conducted, data analyzed, final report written

Data from all sources were integrated using a convergent design in which quantitative trends and qualitative insights were analyzed in parallel and then compared to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and explanatory detail.

Project Activities

Activities in all three project focus areas – ***Positive Behavior Change, Programming, and Response*** – were designed to reduce violence between incarcerated individuals and improving facility culture.

Positive Behavior Change (initially called “Incentives”)

Stillwater staff requested that the project include rewards and incentives to recognize and reinforce positive behaviors, helping participants stay focused on avoiding formal discipline.

The Positive Behavior Change Workgroup initially introduced incentives in one living unit, B-West. This unit was chosen because it housed individuals transitioning from segregation back to their usual living units. Most residents in B-West were not engaged in programming or work and spent much of their time idle. Additionally, B-West experienced higher levels of violence compared to other units.

Implemented Activities

A survey of B-West staff and residents regarding incentives informed the project team and established a baseline for the Positive Behavior Change initiative.

“I get to tell my family what I learned and show them.” – RJ mentor

A key component of the initiative was Activity Night, which served as a reward for positive behavior and an opportunity for pro-social interaction. Residents who remained free from formal discipline for a month qualified for the following month’s Activity Night, featuring activities such as movies with popcorn and soda, bingo with prizes, or games accompanied by snacks and soda.

In September 2024, two months into the initiative, MCF-Stillwater administration suspended Activity Nights and they were not resumed by the project's conclusion in September 2025. The suspension coincided with multiple drug-related incidents in the facility.

Following the suspension, project team members organized alternative incentives, including card tournaments within living units and access to gaming consoles for individuals who remained discipline-free.

Throughout the implementation phase, RJ Reflection Circles were offered to B-West residents who had maintained 30 days without formal discipline. They met weekly for 90 minutes over four weeks and provided opportunities to engage in positive behavior, learn about RJ, and build community. The RJ Council developed the

*“It [RJ Reflection Circle] offered a safe space for change and trauma healing.”
– RJ mentor*

curriculum and facilitated sessions that included mindfulness meditation, in-depth check-ins, dialogue prompted by reflection questions, and curated content aimed at building skills to address grief and trauma.

Programming

The Programming Workgroup actively sought opportunities for both residents and staff to deepen their understanding of RJ philosophy and to develop those skills.

Implemented Activities

RJ Response Pilot Project flyers were posted throughout the facility and distributed by team members.

A presentation by a workgroup member and an RJ Council member introduced RJ and the pilot project during Receiving & Orientation sessions, which all incoming residents attend.

A comprehensive brochure explaining RJ, introducing Council members, and providing information on participating in RJ programming was created and distributed alongside other Receiving & Orientation materials.

A staff member and workgroup member jointly delivered a presentation on RJ and the RJ Response Pilot during MCF-Stillwater's new staff orientation and academy.

RJ videos and online content were broadcast through CableCast, the DOC's facility-based television programming, to residents of Atlantis, the substance use treatment living unit. Atlantis staff facilitated discussions about the content with residents.

Although VSRJ staff received approval to upload additional content onto CableCast, significant technological challenges prevented this initiative from being realized.

Response

The Response Workgroup's RJ Mentor Program was the cornerstone of the project. Originally, VSRJ staff planned to respond to pre- and post-violent incident referrals and gradually develop an incarcerated person-led response model. Instead, the workgroup established a model where

"Instead of saying WTF is wrong with them, started asking what happened to them." -RJ mentor

incarcerated individuals served as mentors within living units, supported by VSRJ staff acting as coaches.

The primary goal of the RJ mentor approach was early violence prevention through building relationships and connections within living units. Mentors conducted daily check-in rounds, creating opportunities to engage quietly with peers who might be facing

challenges that could lead to violent behavior. Often, a brief, discreet conversation was enough to prevent violence.

The RJ mentor approach was built on carefully designed components:

- Clear eligibility criteria for prospective mentors;
- A thorough vetting process including recruitment, interviews, and training;
- A foundational training curriculum for mentors and interested staff covering communication, conflict resolution, cultural competency, trauma, and available support resources;
- A pre-violence referral system;
- A post-violence reintegration process;
- Defined expectations around confidentiality, information sharing, and record keeping;
- Evaluation measures and ongoing considerations;
- Regular meetings to provide support and foster peer learning.

Implemented Activities

Potential RJ mentors were identified by Pilot Project members (staff and residents), focusing on influential individuals, including those with gang affiliations or other peer influence who might not typically be considered for programming. Through group sessions and one-on-one conversations, prospective mentors were informed that the role required stepping into a complex position among peers and maintaining a clean disciplinary record for six months. Interested individuals submitted applications, were interviewed by the RJ Council, screened by the pilot team, and approved by MCF-Stillwater administration. Twenty-seven individuals completed a five-week, 48-hour training, after which 24 were selected to work in living-unit teams. MCF-Stillwater staff were invited to all training sessions, and two staff per living unit were designated as contacts for the RJ Mentors.

“Guys who had shot each other...are sitting down and talking it out, trying to get an understanding. That’s rare.”
-RJ mentor

RJ Mentors checked in daily with each other and unit staff, responded to peer and staff requests, and addressed situations as needed. Every Friday, they met with VSRJ staff to submit timecards, work reports, discuss their activities, receive support, and obtain coaching.

RJ Mentors could choose to perform this role as their sole paid job or volunteer while maintaining other paid work. All mentors were compensated with a family and friends’ meal at the eight-month mark and a concluding meal without family and friends.

Mentors who received discipline during the project were suspended and underwent a reinstatement process which included:

- Completion of disciplinary requirements;
- Meetings with VSRJ staff, the RJ Council, and fellow mentors to discuss the incident and demonstrate accountability;
- Recommendations for reinstatement by the RJ Mentors and VSRJ staff
- Final reinstatement decision by MCF-Stillwater administration.

RJ Mentors also initiated several programs:

- TV and Fan Loaner Program to provide access to these items for those without them;
- Gaming Console Program to allow individuals without active discipline to use a rotating gaming console within the living unit;
- Card Tournaments held on the living unit;
- Trauma Healing Workshop, a 16-week course facilitated by RJ Mentors.

To further support mentors, VSRJ partnered with the University of San Diego's (USD) Restorative Justice Center's RJ Coaching Program. This

"It helped me realize that trauma healing is an ongoing thing and it doesn't make me less of a man." - RJ mentor

federally funded initiative offers one-on-one coaching to individuals engaged in restorative justice within the criminal legal system. VSRJ adapted the model using a three-to-one coaching format, where three RJ Mentors met weekly with a USD coach to enhance their skills. Four teams completed between six and twelve weeks of coaching.

RJ Mentor Work

Throughout the project, RJ Mentors kept track of their work with weekly tally sheets and brief narrative reports that provided specific information on the work they were doing. See appendix material for 12-month RJ Mentor report.

The narrative reports provide information on the specific situations where RJ Mentors intervened to prevent violence. A sampling of those narrative reports follows. The descriptions are directly from the RJ Mentors with minimal editing for clarity.

Reintegration after fight	Type of incident: De-escalation Brief description: Two swamper³ were released from segregation after getting into a fight. They haven't seen each other since the fight, so it was a lot of unanswered questions in the air. So, I engaged in a mediation in order to resolve their issues. Follow-up: Both IPs were on flag at the same time by "accident," but nothing happened. I check in with one of the IPs, the other is extremely reserved.
Preventing Staff Assaults	Type of incident: Mentor/Officer Incident Brief description: I witnessed an IP and an officer in a heated convo, and I intervened and stopped the IP before he threatened to hit the officer all over some ice. As the IP switched in, I got ice for the IP.

³ "Swamper" is a term for an incarcerated person in a janitorial job classification. "IP" is the abbreviation used for "incarcerated person".

Preventing/Intervening in IP Assaults	Type of incident: Violence Interruption Brief description: Stopped 2 people from stabbing each other on flag⁴. And got them to calm down & set boundaries. Follow-up: I did follow up. And they both were good with the outcome.
Staff Requests	Type of incident: Community Need Brief description: Our living unit informed us our weekend schedule would consist of half the unit being locked in all day one day and the other half of the unit would be locked in all day the next day. Another RJ mentor and myself asked the unit staff if we could take a box of toilet paper along with a cart full of ice to the inmates that were locked in for the day. They gave us permission to do so and we distributed the ice and toilet paper during a time that did not interfere with their rounds. Follow-up: The next day we did the same thing for the other half of the unit that was locked in. Many inmates expressed their gratitude and several of the staff as well.
Staff Requests	Type of incident: CIT⁵ Brief description: Srg called me for CIT with an inmate. He was being very aggressive with the Srg about an issue with his cell. I calmed the IP down and told him his issue was not worth going to the hole for and he understood.⁶ The CO⁷ talked with him and everything was good. Follow-up: The CO told me that if I hadn't calmed him down, he was going to send him to the hole.
Prison Adjustment	Type of incident: Staff Request Brief description: Living unit staff approached me in regards to a group of new arrivals from MCF-St. Cloud in need of greeting and introduction to MCF-STW. Each new arrival was very appreciative. Follow-up: Sent a positive kite⁸ to Captain regarding the staff's proper use and respect of the RJ Mentor Program's intended scope and purpose.
Mental Health/Chemical Dependency	Type of incident: Individual struggle/need - Mental and/or behavioral health Brief description: An inmate expressed struggling with anxiety, so I started teaching him yoga and meditation. Follow-up: We have been practicing yoga and meditation almost every day, and he has reported feeling less anxious and sleeping better.

⁴ "Flag" is the term used to describe the open, communal space in each living unit

⁵ "CIT" is the acronym for Crisis Intervention Team

⁶ "The Hole" is the term used for segregation.

⁷ "CO" is a common abbreviation used for "correctional officer"

⁸ "Kite" is an internal, written communication initiated by IPs (similar to a memo)

Mental Health/Chemical Dependency	Type of incident: Interventions Brief description: Several IPs whom are also college students struggling with drug addictions trying to stay sober have sought mentors out for counseling. Follow-up: Several check-ins throughout the week to give support and encouragement.
One-on-One Mentoring of IP's	Type of incident: Individual Struggle/Need - Policy Issue Brief description: IP was frantic about most recent policy change regarding wage compensation. Demonstrated visible anxiety, frustration, resentment and anger at the situation to the point of nearing officer intervention. Follow-up: I pulled the IP aside, sat at a table to listen to his grievances about policy change. By the time he finished, he was much calmer and even appreciative of me allowing him to vent.



James R & Richard S

"I lost my father recently and every one of the D-Hall mentors have made themselves available to me at different times." – STW resident

"Please continue to build relationships with staff so that they utilize mentors first, punishment last." – STW resident



Michael H

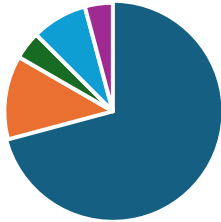
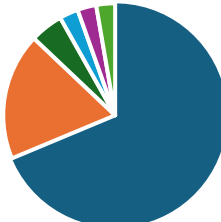
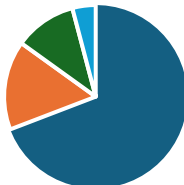


Dao X & Kevin J

"...Just keep being proactive and available to address certain issues. Being innovative in creating activities that create more social engagement. Making sure staff and inmates are held to the same standards of respect." -STW resident

Spotlight: RJ Mentors

The following section highlights demographic data of the first mentor cohort compared to the second, prospective cohort.

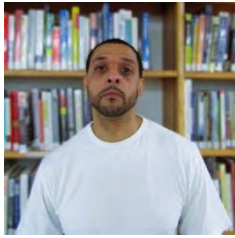
COHORT ONE: 24 people		COHORT TWO: 146 people	
43.5		Avg Age	
39.8			
 Race - Black (70.8%) - White (12.5%) - Latino (4%) - Asian (8%) - Native Am (4%)		 - Black (69%) - White (18.5%) - Latino (4.8%) - Asian (2.7%) - Native Am (2.7%) - Black African (2.7%)	
Yes: 55% No: 45%		Yes: 52% No: 48%	
		STG⁹ Affiliation	
37.87		68	
		Avg MnSafeD Score¹⁰	
 Governing offense - Homicide (87.5%) - CSC and/or related (12.5%)		 - Homicide (69%) - CSC and/or related (15.75%) - Assault (9%) - Property (4%)	
16 Years		10 Years	
		Avg. time Served	

Note: "CSC" is "criminal sexual conduct"

⁹ STG is the acronym for Security Threat Group, definition provided in glossary.

¹⁰ MnSafeD is a discipline assessment tool, definition provided in glossary.

"The truth is that I find myself standing in front of a mentor A LOT. You've done well so far in picking good, approachable, empathetic men that are liked and respected pretty much universally. I feel welcome to ask them pretty much anything." – STW resident



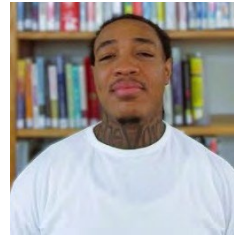
Charles L.



Cornelius J.



Dao X.



Derrick S.



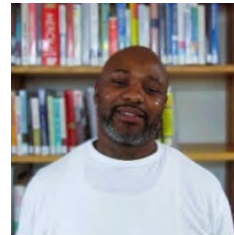
Dimitri H.



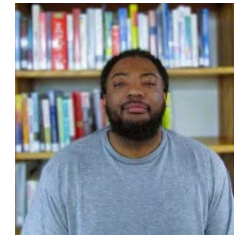
Edson D.



Ivan W.



James R.



James W.



Joe S.



Joseph A.



Kevin J.



Laron H.



Lennell M.



Michael H.



Michael S.



Prentis J.



Prince J.



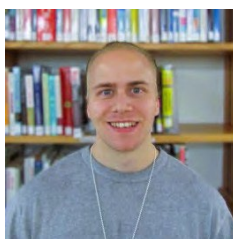
Ramone V.



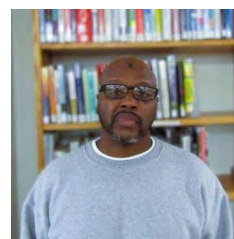
Richard S.



Sarith P.



Shawn B.



Tim B.

Not pictured: Tarellus G.

"The RJ Mentor Program has been great so far. I appreciate the positive influence, the wellness checks, and the continuation of adding things like game tournaments to bring us closer as a community. All I can say is keep up the good work!" – STW resident

Impact of Restorative Justice Philosophy on Implementation

The VSRJ team entered the pilot project committed to applying RJ principles and practices wherever possible. The project charter focused on institutionalizing RJ procedures, resources, and processes to foster culture change within the facility and reduce violence.

Integral to the project's success was the participation of formerly and currently incarcerated people. VSRJ hired a formerly incarcerated person¹¹ with RJ experience to join the team. They brought valuable lived experience and credibility, having served most of their incarceration at MCF-Stillwater.

In forming the pilot project team at MCF-Stillwater, incarcerated people were included as active team members, with efforts made to balance power dynamics. To ensure full participation, all project meetings were held at the facility and an incarcerated person was included in each subgroup. When one incarcerated team member was relocated to a different facility, a replacement was selected from the RJ Council.

The RJ Council played a crucial role as a key stakeholder. They were consulted during the initial exploratory phases to help shape the model and assess whether MCF-Stillwater was the appropriate site for the pilot. Throughout the project, the council provided input, helped implement activities, and supported institutionalizing the work. As the project progressed, the lines between RJ Mentors and the RJ Council blurred, as most Council members were also RJ Mentors. The RJ Council has continued restorative justice presentations during Receiving & Orientation and facilitating RJ Reflection Circles.

VSRJ staff emphasized that participation was voluntary for both staff and incarcerated individuals. Unlike many programs where participation is mandated, this project prioritized voluntary engagement.

A core tenet of RJ is meeting people where they are, recognizing that everyone can cause harm. The focus is on addressing harm within the community by maintaining relationships, encouraging accountability, and facilitating harm repair. This approach meant including incarcerated individuals who were often excluded from programs due to past disciplinary issues or gang affiliations,

"We had the opportunity to take the diamonds in the rough... Oftentimes we get black-balled and seen as a problem. That's what I really loved about this program – we got to say, 'hey listen, we see what's inside of you' and they got to grow into that. We all empowered each other." -RJ mentor

provided they committed to restorative justice principles. When an RJ Mentor faced discipline, they were not simply removed from the program but given the opportunity to return, discuss their actions, and work on repairing harm. The model intentionally allowed room for mistakes to be used as opportunities for growth.

¹¹ Minimum qualifications for this position included that the person must have been incarcerated for at least 10 years within the MN DOC and must have had active participation on a Restorative Justice Council while incarcerated.

Results & Findings

Data Analysis

After the Pilot Project ended, VSRJ staff compared DOC Research (COMS¹²) data for disciplinary actions at MCF-Stillwater during the year before the project (July 2023 – June 2024) and the year the project was in place (July 2024 – June 2025), to evaluate the Project's effects. This data included all levels of discipline, from minor rule violations to severe harms, covering incidents involving both incarcerated individuals and staff.

DOC data show a **14 percent decrease in overall disciplinary actions, a 13 percent reduction in staff assaults, and a 14 percent decline in total violence**. They also show that violence among incarcerated people increased by 31.42 percent. Given that reducing violence among incarcerated individuals was a primary goal of the Pilot Project, VSRJ staff undertook a more-detailed analysis.

DOC discipline statistics are based on the number of Notice of Violation¹³ (NOVs) that result in at least one conviction. A single NOV can include multiple convictions. NOV-based reporting prevents the numerical inflation caused by single incidents that result in multiple convictions, but it can also inflate actual incident rates.

Take for example a situation in which two people get into a fight, they each use a weapon, and they each receive one NOV that includes two disciplinary charges (one for assault and one for assault with a weapon) that result in convictions. One fight. Two NOVs. Four charges that become convictions. The DOC practice of reporting two NOVs instead of four charges and convictions avoids one form of violence inflation. However, it also inflates the number of actual violent incidents by recording each NOV as a single incident instead of the fight as a single incident.

DOC reporting includes five discipline codes for IP-on-IP violence:

- 410: Assault
- 412: Assault of Offender
- 414: Assault of Offender with Weapon
- 442: Assault with Bodily Harm of Offender
- 460: Assault with Significant Bodily Harm of Offender

To better reflect the experiences of those incarcerated at MCF Stillwater, this report expands the definition of "IP-on-IP Violence" to include the discipline code for fighting (321). To supplement and clarify the NOV data, all qualifying disciplinary violations for "IP on IP Violence" from July 2023 to June 2025 were reviewed to identify the number of incidents, the number of unique individuals involved, and the number of guilty convictions contained within the NOVs.

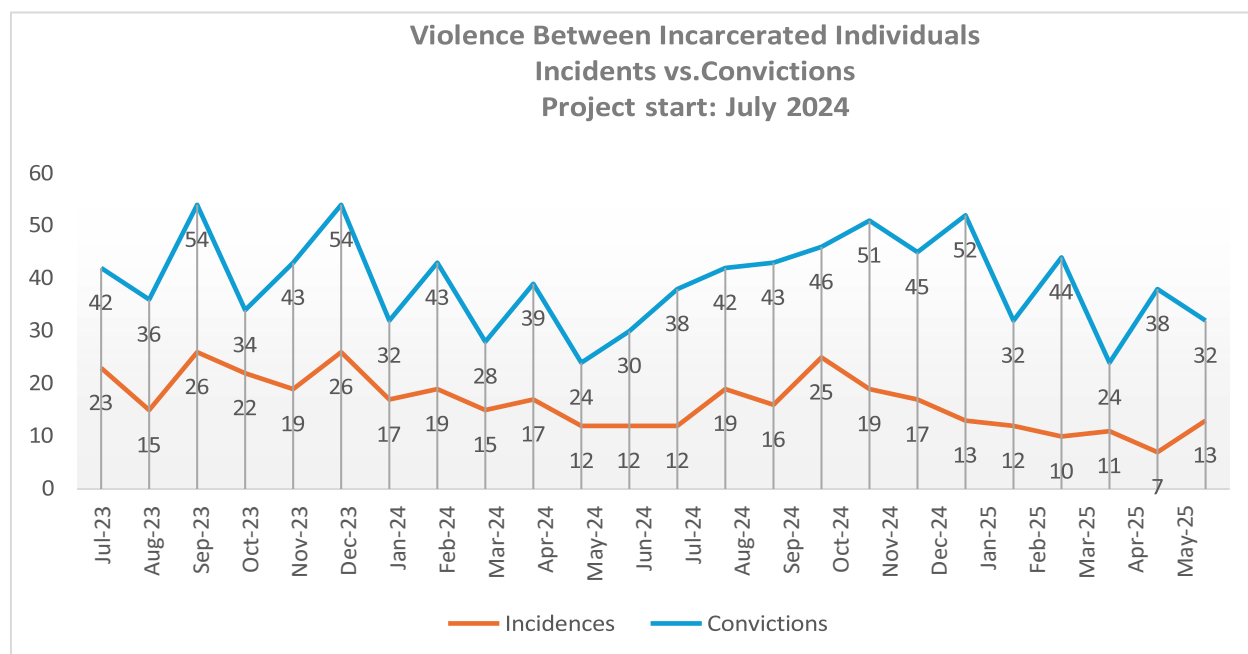
¹² COMS is the acronym for the Correctional Operations Management System – a custom application used by the DOC to maintain information about incarcerated people.

¹³ Notice of Violation (NOV) – The document used by staff to inform an IP that they're being charged with an alleged rule violation(s), the details of the violation, and a date for the discipline hearing.

Incarcerated Person-on-Incarcerated Person Violence¹⁴

<i>Period</i>	Incidents	Unique OIDs¹⁵	Unique NOVs	Convictions
<i>July 23 – June 24</i>	222	422	438	460
<i>July 24- June 25 (pilot yr)</i>	174	364	373	490
<i>Percent change</i>	-22%	-14%	-15%	+6.5%

Despite a **22 percent reduction in *incidents* of violence between incarcerated persons**, a **14 percent decrease in unique individuals involved**, and a **15 percent decrease in NOVs**, *convictions* increased by 6.5 percent. Convictions per incident were 37 percent higher during the pilot year than in the previous year.



The counterintuitive rise in convictions for violence as the number of violent incidents fell during the Pilot Project creates valuable discussion opportunities. Incarcerated people are responsible for violence they use against each other. DOC staff are responsible for decisions about charges, convictions, and other aspects of how violence is defined, reported, and generally represented. One part of any serious conversation about reducing violence used by incarcerated people is making sure that the data accurately and fairly represents what is happening. There are different

¹⁴ Discipline codes included in dataset: 321, 410, 412, 414, 442, 460

¹⁵ "OID" is the acronym used for "Offender Identification", a unique 6-digit number assigned to each incarcerated person upon intake.

questions to answer regarding what is the meaning and impact of multiple convictions for a single incident, why would the convictions to incident ratio vary, and why did it increase during the Pilot Project.

In addition to overt acts of violence between incarcerated people, there are other behaviors in carceral settings that either contribute to violence or indicate perceived safety concerns, such as theft/misuse of property (discipline code 190) and weapons possession (discipline code 383). During the Pilot Project planning phase, staff and residents also identified illicit drug use and possession as significant issues negatively impacting overall facility safety and wellness. The discipline codes reviewed for illicit drug use were 202 (use of alcohol/intoxicants), 203 (possession of illegal drugs), 211 (use of illegal drugs), and 216 (possession of alcohol/intoxicants).

Unique NOVs that contained the discipline codes for; theft/misuse of property, illicit drugs, and weapons possession are as follows:

<i>Period</i>	Theft	Illicit drugs	Weapons possession
<i>July 23 – June 24</i>	108	578	76
<i>July 24- June 25 (pilot yr)</i>	83	482	73
<i>Percent change</i>	-23.15%	-17%	-4%

Discipline Records of RJ Mentors

The discipline records of the RJ mentors were also reviewed. Seventy-five percent of the 24 men selected for the mentor positions had disciplinary records prior to the project, twelve (50 percent) had extensive disciplinary records.

Over the course of pilot project implementation, seven of the mentors had a discipline incident of some type.¹⁶

- Four had minor incidents during the project (non-drug, non-fight). These discipline incidents included missing count, tattooing, disrespectful comments about staff, and removing food from the kitchen.

The remaining three mentors had incidents involving drugs, drug paraphernalia, or fighting charges, reflecting 12.5 percent of the mentors. These incidents occurred in the earlier stages of the pilot project. For each of these incidents, the individual was removed from mentor status and required to demonstrate six months without incident before reinstatement as well as undergo an accountability process. Two of the RJ Mentors were reinstated after going through that process.

¹⁶ Five RJ Mentors received discipline and served time in segregation for allegations that were later withdrawn. These are not included in this analysis.

Any RJ Mentor who received discipline had to complete the disciplinary process, then appear before Project peers and staff to discuss the incident, demonstrate accountability, and commit to harm reduction. If the RJ Mentors and VSRJ staff recommended reinstatement, the final decision to reinstate was made by MCF-Stillwater administration. For cases involving drugs or assault, a six-month waiting period after discipline was required before potential reinstatement.

Of the 24 RJ Mentors, seventeen or 70 percent had no discipline during the pilot period. That included mentors who had discipline histories prior to the pilot project.

There was a clear reduction in disciplinary incidents for those directly working in the project as RJ Mentors.

Staff Assaults

While the Pilot Project was designed to reduce violence among incarcerated people, it also reduced violence used by incarcerated people against staff. Data related to staff assaults was analyzed in a similar fashion to that for violence between incarcerated people.

The DOC reports IP-on-Staff Violence with these codes:

- 411: Assault of Staff
- 413: Assault of Staff with Weapon
- 441: Assault with Bodily Harm of Staff
- 443: Assault of Staff with Bodily Fluids
- 444: Assault of Staff with Bodily Fluids and Significant Exposure
- 450: Assault with Significant Bodily Harm of Staff

Incarcerated Person-on-Staff Violent Incidents

<i>Period</i>	Incidents	Unique OIDs	Unique NOVs	Convictions
<i>July 23 – June 24</i>	64	58	64	72
<i>July 24- June 25 (pilot yr)</i>	56	54	56	68
<i>Percent change</i>	-13%	-7%	-13%	-5.5%

The number of IP-on-Staff Violence incidents was reduced during the Pilot Project, as was the number of incarcerated persons who used violence against staff members. The number of convictions for IP-on-Staff Violence dropped during the project as contrasted with the increase of convictions for IP-on-IP Violence.

“Using my influence in a positive way instead of in a negative way. I could’ve easily used it in a negative way. This program showed me how to care about other people. I don’t know if the facility staff know how much this program protected them. We hear about it first – we can add gas to the fire or grab a water hose and put it out. I chose to grab the water hose and put the fire out.” -RJ mentor

Violence Reduction

The project did achieve the goal of violence reduction between incarcerated individuals. Comparing the pre-project year to implementation year, there was a:

- 22 percent reduction in violent disciplinary incidents between incarcerated individuals;
- 14 percent reduction in the number of unique individuals involved in violent offenses against other incarcerated individuals;

During the implementation year, the RJ Response Pilot Project was one of several initiatives occurring within facilities, raising the question of how much the violence reduction can be directly attributed to the project. Other initiatives occurring during the pilot time period included introduction of body-worn cameras, new mail program aimed to reduce the introduction of drugs, and discussion about the implementation of the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act. All of these were happening across DOC facilities but the RJ Response Pilot Project was only implemented at MCF-Stillwater. DOC Research highlighted that MCF-Stillwater saw a significantly greater reduction in disciplinary violations compared to similar DOC facilities. The closest comparable facility, MCF-Rush City—another Closed Custody DOC facility housing similar incarcerated individuals—experienced a 17 percent reduction in disciplinary incidents, whereas **MCF-Stillwater achieved a 38 percent reduction**. Based on this data, DOC Research concluded that the RJ Response Pilot Project, while not the sole factor, was the key factor in the greater decrease in violence and disciplinary violations at MCF-Stillwater.

Culture Change

Positively impacting the culture within MCF-Stillwater was a key goal of the project. While culture change is difficult to define and measure quantitatively, the data suggest positive shifts in the prison environment.

- Weapons possession decreased by 4 percent;
- Theft violations, which may indicate increased respect for others' property and the institution, dropped by 23 percent;
- Illicit drugs use and possession decreased by 17 percent.

Prison lockdowns occur due to concerns about potential or actual violence (security lockdowns) or operational challenges like staff shortages (administrative lockdowns). A security lockdown can affect individual living unit(s) and/or the entire facility. During a security lockdown, all affected residents remain in their cells for 24 hours a day until the cause of the lockdown is resolved. During the project's implementation, **security lockdowns decreased by 36 percent**.

A significant indicator of change among incarcerated individuals was their engagement with the Pilot Project.

At the project's outset, there was considerable skepticism about the RJ Mentors. Many feared the mentors would act as "cops," augmenting correctional officers by reporting peers for rule violations. The role of RJ Mentors challenged traditional prison norms. Instead of the usual "mind your own business" approach, RJ Mentors were encouraged to actively intervene and positively influence interactions within living units.

From the first three months to the 12-month mark, **requests for RJ Mentors increased by 211 percent.** Initially, requests focused on mediating issues like canteen requests or staff-related concerns. By the end of the year, mentors were regularly called upon to defuse potentially violent situations.

"The population began to buy into the idea of community and became willing to talk problems out." -RJ mentor

After six months, **about 12 percent of the MCF-Stillwater incarcerated population expressed interest in joining the project.** Over 140 individuals requested to be part of a second cohort.

Research indicates that transforming social norms and culture demands active engagement from at least 25 percent of a population. This finding is supported by studies from the University of Pennsylvania, which demonstrate that when a committed minority reaches this threshold, it can create a tipping point leading to widespread social change. In contrast, political change driven by nonviolent social movements can be achieved with active participation from just 3.5 percent of the population, according to research by Harvard Kennedy School political scientist Erica Chenoweth, who found that movements engaging this proportion of the population rarely fail to bring about change. With over 12 percent of MCF-Stillwater residents serving as RJ Mentors or expressing interest in joining, the project demonstrates meaningful progress toward cultural transformation.

Personal Stories

When evaluating the impact of the pilot project on prison culture, quantitative data alone does not fully capture the changes that occurred. We also gathered valuable qualitative insights.

During Friday morning check-in meetings, RJ mentors shared experiences related to their lives, families, peers, and environments. They frequently offered advice and guidance for navigating challenging situations. Under typical prison dynamics, many of these situations could have escalated into violence or even lethal outcomes. United by a shared commitment to lead by example and break the cycle of harm, many conflicts were peacefully resolved, fostering personal growth. This transformative work impacted not only the mentors themselves but also influenced their peers.

Story One

Early on, a RJ mentor had a situation where the man who killed his close family member was moved to MCF-Stillwater, in a unit across from his. Both men had ties to gangs and had other incarcerated people behind them willing to avenge or defend themselves.

The RJ mentor sought advice from his mentor peers and RJ staff. This was a key moment because typically he would not have thought but rather just engaged in violence. He was under pressure from his peers in the facility and from family members, encouraging him to engage in violence. This mentor decided not to engage and instead asked for guidance. He decided that he would not push the issue if the other person, who was involved in his family member's death, stayed to himself and did not say anything negative about the homicide, his family, or to him. He would be okay with not pursuing further conflict.

Two weeks later, the individual was moved into the same unit as the mentor. This move initially caused a volatile situation. The mentor stayed true to his word and did not engage in violence but sought out advice. He expressed concern about how his peers were looking upon him in a negative manner, how internally he was fighting his own demons of acting out in familiar ways, and the pain he experienced every time he saw the individual who was involved with his family member's death.

The advice to the mentor was if he really wanted to change his life and set an example on doing the right thing, that maybe having a conversation with this person and expressing in a peaceful manner his feelings and desires to move forward without violence might bring some resolution. At first, the mentor laughed and gave a look of "you gotta be kidding me," but immediately he saw the seriousness of the other mentors and felt true concern and support. The mentor said he would think about it.

During the next check-in, the mentor casually spoke, mentioning that he had done it. Everyone was like "did what?" He said, "I had a talk with him, and we did it on the flag with some of his people and some of mine. I expressed how I felt that I didn't want this to turn into something that the two of us could prevent. I expressed that I wanted him to know that he was safe and had nothing to worry about coming from my side and that my hope was that the sentiment could be mutual. The other individual agreed." They shook hands in front of everyone. Both parties resided in the same unit, peacefully.

This success demonstrates the mentor's personal growth and the avoidance of a potential negative effect that could have impacted the entire facility if this wasn't resolved in a peaceful manner. The project created an environment for the safety of all residents and staff.

Story Two

An RJ mentor, incarcerated for over 10 years, found himself in a situation that no one doing time wants to go through. He was living in the same unit as his son.

The mentor was already dealing with emotions of shame and guilt from reflecting on his life and how he got to where he was. Feeling remorse for what he'd done and for the pain he'd caused his victims, their families, but also his own family, especially his children. He found himself navigating being a father and a peer at the same time. Many times, the mentor mentioned the struggles he was having with his son, wanting to show him something different and not be the person his son had known him to be.

The mentor's son was getting into trouble with staff, receiving numerous loss of privilege violations (LOPs), and finding himself in a lot of negative situations. The mentor was intervening and setting the example for his son, often having to mediate conflicts on his son's behalf. This could look like the mentor was taking up for his son in negative situations or that he was taking on the side of staff when he was pointing out his son's wrongs or lack of maturity. But the mentor was setting boundaries with his son as a father, and more importantly set the example of how to conduct yourself as a man and to take responsibility for your actions.

His son started to see things differently, trust was rebuilt, and a father-son bond started to develop. His son stopped getting in trouble, started being respectful to staff, and obtained his high school diploma. His son is now home, being a productive member of society, has a job and home, and is expecting his own first child.

The Project challenged everyone: mentors, family members, and staff, to grow and to look at the bigger picture. An individual became a role model and inspired his son to do something right. This success impacted not only these individuals and their time in MCF-Stillwater but also changed the direction for his son.

Story Three

In 2023, prison phone calls become free. People thought this was a good thing, but it caused issues department wide. The change to free calls was based on knowing the importance of family support and hoping to increase access to family connections through the phone calls. The change led to limiting access to the phones because of overcrowded phone lines. The lack of access to phones caused a lot of conflicts and people being disrespectful over phone access.

With this problem growing more serious every day, mentors in a living unit at Stillwater came up with a solution. They did not want the unit to resort to violence. They decided to have a conversation in the area outside of the cells about the phones and come up with an agreement rather than have individuals use violence. This resulted in about 40 - 60 incarcerated individuals discussing the situation and reaching agreements on phone usage. This discussion was led by the RJ mentors.

The mass gathering alerted staff who, not understanding what was going on, put the unit on lockdown. After investigating, staff learned what had really taken place and the unit was off lockdown the following morning.

This showed the willingness of the mentors to intervene in a situation that was already hostile to come up with a solution. They were able to resolve conflict, keep the peace, and keep everyone safe.

This helped create an environment where men, instead of resorting to violence, created a culture where groups of people talk things out. The RJ mentors' willingness to intervene in this situation resolved an issue that had the potential to affect everyone in a negative way.

These examples illustrate the significant shift in mindset among the men at MCF-Stillwater. The project created a safe space where individuals felt comfortable approaching mentors, whether to address conflicts within living units or personal challenges related to family or mental health. Over

“It became socially acceptable to do the right thing.” -RJ mentor

time, mentors earned the trust of the population, gaining credibility even among initial skeptics. This fostered a noticeable transformation within the facility. By the end of the project, a palpable sense of calmness permeated the environment, felt deeply by the incarcerated individuals. This atmosphere was cultivated through the relationships mentors built by being accessible and leading by example.

Changes in Perception

Another measure of culture change was to look at the changes in perceptions of the project and in levels of participation with the project.

With incarcerated people:

RJ Council members, along with MCF-Stillwater staff and administration, initially expressed concern about how incarcerated individuals would perceive and engage with the project. While the council supported the initiative, the general population was resistant, fearing that mentors might act as enforcers or “cops.” The initial mentor training addressed these concerns by discussing how they should respond if they witnessed violence or prohibited activities, such as drug use.

“We realized, we are not each other’s enemies.” -RJ mentor

Through discussions involving the VSRJ team, RJ Mentor candidates, the pilot project team, and security staff, it was decided that mentors would not intervene directly in violent incidents. Instead, they would focus on building relationships and facilitating dialogue as strategies to address potential violence, rather than reporting incidents to authorities.

Because RJ mentors consistently positioned themselves as resources and relationship builders—not as rule enforcers—their peers gradually embraced the project. Over time, reports from mentors showed a significant increase in the number and variety of situations where incarcerated individuals engaged with them.

<i>Referral Method</i>	3-months (9/30/24 – 12/27/24)	6-months (12/27/24 – 6/27/25)	TOTAL
<i>IP Request</i>	561	3,383	3,944
<i>Mentor doing Rounds</i>	386	1,963	2,349
<i>Mentor Observing & Intervening</i>	146	1,305	1,451
<i>Staff Request</i>	75	523	598
<i>Referral from Other Mentor</i>	30	275	305

With MCF Staff:

To address concerns around staff perception and engagement, VSRJ staff took these steps:

- Gathered insights from MCF-Stillwater staff and residents on the pilot project team about which past programs had been positively impactful and why.
- Reassured staff that choosing to step back from participation would be fully respected.
- Developed the Pilot Project collaboratively, incorporating voices and ideas from a diverse range of staff roles.
- Scheduled meetings early in the morning to accommodate staff schedules.
- Invited any interested staff to join the project team.
- Distributed flyers and informational materials broadly among staff.
- Engaged staff within each living unit as project contacts.
- Held meetings with staff groups and individuals to share information and address concerns.

Those directly involved in the pilot project team and those working as point-of-contact for RJ Mentors in the living units generally showed stronger belief in and support for the project compared to those not directly engaged. Some of these divides began to narrow as mentors and project staff collaborated more closely, and the VSRJ team established a consistent weekly presence at MCF-Stillwater.

Recommendations

Replicate or Adapt Model for Other Facilities

The DOC should explore adapting and implementing the RJ project at other facilities. It is critical to establish a shared understanding that the focus is on fostering a positive

community environment inside the prison—building constructive relationships among incarcerated individuals and between staff and residents. This work is distinct from RJ efforts involving the broader community or crime victims, which, while important, are not the focus here.

The project’s value lies not only in providing insights for replicating or adapting the model elsewhere but also in developing expertise among staff and residents on applying RJ principles in correctional settings. The enthusiasm from residents and staff who embraced the project was remarkable.

Those directly involved described it as the most impactful work of their correctional careers or incarceration experience. The DOC should find ways to apply these lessons on both large and small scales.

To build a strong foundation for future adaptations, the model should include:

- Extensive initial engagement with facility administration and key staff to ensure a clear understanding of RJ principles and the project’s scope.
- Identification and training of a core staff team responsible for adapting and implementing the model, with clearly defined roles.
- Secure firm commitment from supervisors, facility leadership, and department administration to support staff participation and the model’s implementation.
- Assign at least one staff member who will dedicate significant time to restorative justice within the facility.
- Support a robust RJ Council that includes incarcerated individuals, providing critical expertise and fostering credibility, buy-in, and ownership among residents.
- Include staff with lived incarceration experience to bridge gaps between staff and residents and demonstrate commitment to overcoming the “us versus them” dynamic.
- Adapt the model grounded in the experiences and suggestions of those living and working within the specific facility.

Study the Intersections/Differences between the RJ Response Model and Earned Living Units

In September 2025, MCF-Stillwater began piloting the Earned Living Unit approach for the next 18 months. Approximately half of the RJ mentors and several project staff will live or work within these units, offering a valuable opportunity to compare the discipline-based model with the RJ Response model. DOC should evaluate the Earned Living Unit approach to determine where the RJ Response Project laid a foundation and where differences exist.

“As I help others heal, I also heal. As I create a safe space for others, I am also safe.” -RJ mentor

At the same time Stillwater's Earned Living Unit is happening, MCF-Faribault has also started an Earned Living Unit. None of the RJ Response Project work was conducted within MCF-Faribault. This provides the opportunity to compare and contrast how the Earned Living Unit is implemented within the different facilities and to see where the RJ Response model may have impacted the Earned Living Unit.

Data Collection

Comprehensive data on discipline and violence is essential to understand facility dynamics. Current data limitations make it difficult to assess consistency across facilities or even within a single facility. For meaningful evaluation of programming and incarceration approaches, reliable data is crucial.

"This shouldn't be a secret...that we are people who have potential if given the chance. The proof...look at the past year."-RJ mentor

Conclusion

The DOC committed significant time and resources into the RJ Response Pilot Project at MCF-Stillwater. The positive impact of the project was greater than anyone anticipated.

The project showcased the potential of embedding RJ within correctional environments. The initiative produced notable reductions in all forms of discipline, violence between incarcerated people, violence against staff, security lockdowns, illicit drug use and possession, and theft. It empowered incarcerated individuals to act as credible agents of change and fostered community-based accountability. Mentors proved effective in mediating conflicts and supporting peers, highlighting the value of peer influence in violence prevention.

Minnesota was the first state to embed RJ work into corrections. Now, over 30 years later, Minnesota has the opportunity to advance RJ work in new and exciting ways.

"Y'all accomplished the goal. You're all still here. You finished it. The goal was to make this place better and you accomplished that. We finished it, no matter what is said, we met that goal. Congratulations. Y'all did it." -RJ mentor

Appendices

Pilot Project Charter

12-month Summary Report

ELU vs RJLU Proposal

Media Coverage

- Minnesota DOC changes mail system to address synthetic drugs inside prisons (October 31, 2024). KARE 11. Retrieved from <https://www.kare11.com/article/news/local/breaking-the-news/minnesota-doc-changes-mail-system-synthetic-drugs-inside-prisons/89-64422bab-52a8-43b8-a029-a4769cee1498>

Pilot program at Stillwater Prison emphasizes healing all trauma from crime (December 20, 2024). KARE 11. Retrieved from <https://www.kare11.com/article/news/local/pilot-program-stillwater-prison-emphasis-healing-all-trauma-crime/89-2dae181b-8252-4e01-aa65-ff5118c96e1c>

DOC Communications Coverage

- [Hotline 2023 Issue 1 Part 2](#) – Pg. 9

Glossary of Terms

Correctional Operations Management System (COMS): A custom application used by the department to maintain information about offenders/residents. (DOC Policy 106.320)

Grievance: A written complaint by an incarcerated person seeking formal administrative review concerning issues related to their own confinement, the application of policy, and/or their own health, safety, and wellbeing. (DOC Policy 303.100)

Kite: a form used by incarcerated people to make requests or communicate with facility staff. (DOC Policy 303.101)

Minnesota Severe and Frequent Estimate for Discipline (MnSafeD): An automatic assessment of all individuals for the risk of severe and frequent misconduct while incarcerated, to occur at a minimum during intake and every 6 months until release. (DOC Policy 203.015)

Security threat group (STG): any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, with a common name or a common identifying sign or symbol, and includes members who individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal or disruptive behavior. (DOC Policy 301.110)

DOC Policy 303.010 – Incarcerated Individual Discipline (relevant definitions)

Assault: An act, threat, or attempt to inflict offensive physical contact or bodily harm on a person that puts the person in immediate danger.

Attempt: Any incarcerated individual who takes a substantial step toward violating a rule is guilty of an attempt to violate that rule and is subject to the penalties applicable to that rule.

Bodily fluids: Any fluid, secretion, or excretion commonly created within the body, including urine, feces, blood, saliva, and mucus/sputum. This also includes any substance contaminated with such fluids, secretions, or excretions.

Bodily harm: Physical pain, injury, illness or any impairment of physical condition.

Risk Code Violation (RCV): A designated rule violation which poses a serious risk to safety or security.

Significant Bodily Harm: Substantial disfigurement, substantial loss or impairment of the function of any bodily part or organ, or other serious bodily harm, whether temporary or permanent. This includes fractures and other injuries that require medical intervention, including stitches, but does not mean only bruising, swelling, or scratching.

Significant Exposure: Contact likely to transmit a bloodborne pathogen (for example, hepatitis and HIV), as determined by medical personnel.

Weapon: Any object designed, altered, or used for inflicting bodily harm or physical damage

DOC Disciplinary Violations Included in Report (Policy 303.010 – attachment I)

190. Unauthorized Control, Theft, Possession, Transfer, or Use of Property

A. No incarcerated individual shall steal, transfer, loan, borrow, use, control or possess another incarcerated individual's property or any unauthorized state property.

B. No incarcerated individual shall, without the express approval of staff, waste food; take more food than allowed; or throw out large amounts of food from a meal, the kitchen, or food cart.

C. To conserve energy and resources, no incarcerated individual shall run hot or cold water for heating or cooling purposes and shall not leave their cell/room with any light or electrical appliance turned on.

202. Use of Alcohol or Other Intoxicants: No incarcerated individual shall use alcohol or ingest, inject or inhale any form of intoxicant. Any behavior which suggests an incarcerated individual has ingested, injected, or inhaled any intoxicating substance (including detection by chemical analysis), or is under the influence of such substance, is in violation of this rule.

203. Possession of Illegal Drugs (RCV): No incarcerated individual shall possess illegal drugs, or any paraphernalia expressly or commonly used in the preparation or consumption of illegal drugs.

211. Use of Illegal Drugs (RCV): No incarcerated individual shall use illegal drugs.

216. Possession of Alcohol or Other Intoxicants: No incarcerated individual shall possess any intoxicant, including alcohol, or any items expressly or commonly used in the preparation of intoxicants.

321. Fighting: No incarcerated individual shall participate in a physical struggle or aggressive contact with another incarcerated individual, including hitting, kicking, restraining or other unwanted physical contact.

383. Possession of Weapons (RCV): No incarcerated individual shall possess any weapon.

410. Assault (Opt. RCV): No incarcerated individual shall assault another person or a canine. This includes unwanted or offensive contact, or any act done with intent to cause harm, which may include assault with bodily fluids. Bodily fluids include such examples as urine, feces, blood, saliva, mucus, and sputum.

411. Assault of Staff (RCV): No incarcerated individual shall assault a staff person or a canine. This includes any unwanted or offensive contact, or any act done with intent to cause harm.

412. Assault of Incarcerated Individual (RCV): No incarcerated individual shall assault another incarcerated individual. This includes unwanted or offensive contact, or any act done with intent to cause harm, which may include assault with significant exposure from bodily fluids. Bodily fluids include such examples as urine, feces, blood, saliva, mucus, and sputum. A significant exposure is contact likely to transmit a blood-borne pathogen (for example, hepatitis or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)), as determined by medical personnel.

413. Assault of Staff with Weapon (RCV): No incarcerated individual shall assault another person or a canine with a weapon.

414. Assault of Incarcerated Individual with Weapon (RCV): No incarcerated individual shall assault another incarcerated individual with a weapon.

441. Assault with Bodily Harm of Staff (RCV): No incarcerated individual shall cause bodily injury to staff defined as physical pain, injury, illness, or any impairment of physical condition.

442. Assault with Bodily Harm of Incarcerated Individual (RCV): No incarcerated individual shall cause bodily injury to another incarcerated individual defined as physical pain, injury, illness, or any impairment of physical condition.

443. Assault of Staff with Bodily Fluids (RCV): No incarcerated individual shall assault a staff or canine with bodily fluids as defined as any fluid, secretion, or excretion commonly created within the body, including urine, feces, blood, saliva, and mucus/sputum. It also includes any substance contaminated with such fluids, secretions, or excretions.

444. Assault of Staff with Bodily Fluids and Significant Exposure (RCV): No incarcerated individual shall assault a staff or canine with bodily fluids as defined as any fluid, secretion, or

excretion commonly created within the body, including urine, feces, blood, saliva, and mucus/sputum. It also includes any substance contaminated with such fluids, secretions, or excretions. A significant exposure incident is contact likely to transmit a blood-borne pathogen (for example, hepatitis and HIV), as determined by medical personnel.

450. Assault with Significant Bodily Harm of Staff (RCV): No incarcerated individual shall cause significant bodily injury to staff defined as substantial disfigurement, substantial loss or impairment of the function of any bodily part or organ, or other serious bodily harm, whether temporary or permanent. This includes fractures and other injuries that require medical intervention, including stitches, but does not mean only bruising, swelling, or scratching.

460. Assault with Significant Bodily Harm of Incarcerated Individual (RCV): No incarcerated individual shall cause significant bodily injury to another incarcerated individual defined as substantial disfigurement, substantial loss or impairment of the function of any bodily part or organ, or other serious bodily harm, whether temporary or permanent. This includes fractures and other injuries that require medical intervention, including stitches, but does not mean only bruising, swelling, or scratching

PROJECT CHARTER

1. General Project Information

Project Name:	Violence In Facilities - Incarcerated Participant Restorative Justice (RJ) Response Plan MCF-Stillwater Pilot
Executive Sponsor:	Assistant Commissioner Connie Jones
Business Lead/SME:	Director of Victim Services/RJ - Liz Richards
Impact of Project:	The project impact is agency-wide as its overall goal is to improve safety in the facilities.
Strategic Priority:	Transformative Programming and Safety-Wellbeing
Start Date: 04/03/2023	End Date: 09/02/2024

2. Project Team

Name	Position	Location	Role	Communication
Sarah King	Restorative Justice Coordinator	Central Office	Responsible/Accountable	Weekly Meeting
Tito Campbell	AWO	Central Office	Responsible/Accountable	Weekly Meeting
Chris Godsey	AWA			
Lisa Stenseth	RJ Staff	MCF-Stillwater	Responsible/Consult/Inform	Weekly Meeting
Dan Moe				
Michael Lussier	Atlantis	MCF-Stillwater	Responsible/Accountable	Weekly Meeting
Ashley Nelson	A East B East/Recreation B West D Hall Segregation			
Natalya Kandakova	Discipline Staff	MCF-Stillwater	Responsible/Accountable	Weekly Meeting
Lt. Nicole Riemenschneider				
Lt. Marisa Williams				
Lt. Shane Jones				
Lt. Sam Marks				
Lt. David Spels				
Lt. Mike Warner	Behavioral Health	MCF-Stillwater	Responsible/Accountable	Weekly Meeting
Mena Otoo	Education	MCF-Stillwater	Responsible/Accountable	Weekly Meeting
Shannon Owens	Case Manager	MCF-Stillwater	Responsible/Accountable	Weekly Meeting
Andrew Hathaway	Transitions	MCF-Stillwater	Responsible/Accountable	Weekly Meeting
Nicole Vee	Health Services	MCF-Stillwater	Responsible/Accountable	Weekly Meeting
Kathy Reid	Religious Services/Chaplain	MCF-Stillwater	Responsible/Accountable	Weekly Meeting
Scott Westphal	IT	MCF-Stillwater	Responsible/Accountable	Weekly Meeting
Andrian (Drew) Warsito	Research and Planning	MCF-Stillwater	Responsible/Accountable	As needed
Valerie Clark	AWO	Central Office	Responsible/Accountable	As needed
Susan McNeeley	AWA			

Incarcerated Person Team Members

Name	Position	Location	Role	Communication
Michael Stewart	D Hall RJ Council Member	MCF-Stillwater	Responsible/Accountable	Participation determined by MCF-

				Stillwater Leadership
Michael Ebinger	D Hall RJ Council Member	MCF-Stillwater	Responsible/Accountable	Participation determined by MCF-Stillwater Leadership

- MCF-Stillwater Leadership will determine allowance of participation by incarcerated individuals in project meetings, based on topics and discussion planned for meeting.
- Meeting agenda will be sent to MCF-Stillwater Leadership at least 5 days in advance and facility will be responsible for issuing direct order passes for an in-person meeting or arranging for virtual participation in the event the meeting is on Microsoft Teams.
- RJ Council Members will not participate in any discussions around confidential and/or security related topics.

3. Stakeholders (e.g., those with a significant interest in or who will be significantly affected by this project)

Stakeholder	RACI – Responsible, Accountable, Consult, Inform	Communication
DOC Leadership C.Jones-Project Sponsor, P.Schnell, N. Larson, S. Khan, A. Skoogman	Accountable, Consult, Inform	Memos/Monthly Updates
OSI - CO and MCF-Stillwater - J. Melvin, Brady Scott	Consult, Inform	Memos/Monthly Updates
Violence In Facility Project- Warden Pugh	Inform	Memos/Monthly Updates
MCF-Stillwater Leadership Warden Bolin, AW Stenseth, AW Moe, Captains, Directors	Responsible, Accountable, Consult, Inform	Memos/Monthly Updates
MCF-Stillwater Staff	Responsible, Accountable, Consult, Inform	Memos/Monthly Updates
DOC Research and Planning	Consult	Memos/Monthly Updates
Incarcerated Population	Inform	Memos/Monthly Updates
RJ Council	Accountable, Consult, Inform	Updates
Community	Inform	As needed

4. Project Overview

Project Purpose/Business Justification (Describe the business need this project addresses)

This project is an extension of the larger DOC Violence in Facility Project. The agency goal is improving overall response to violence and safety in Minnesota Correctional Facilities.

There has been an increase of incarcerated person-on-incarcerated person violence and the agency is dedicated to exploring ways to prevent, grow awareness, educate, and respond to incidents through restorative justice practices.

The RJ Response Plan will first be tailored for, and pilot tested at MCF-Stillwater. The Incarcerated person-on-Incarcerated person Restorative Justice Response Plan can help to reduce violence among incarcerated persons and long-term shift of facility culture. The development of the RJ Response Plan will create a generalized framework that can be adapted for the unique needs of each facility.

Objectives (in business terms) (Describe the measurable outcomes of the project, e.g., reduce cost by xxxx or increase quality to yyyy)

- Improve safety in the facilities by adopted restorative justice practices through engagement of facility staff

- Expand Restorative Justice learning opportunities
- Institutionalize new effective Restorative Justice procedures, resources, and processes for programming and practices
- Develop a framework for an individualized Restorative Justice Response and institutionalize
- Develop framework for facility-based incarcerated population Restorative Justice response teams and institutionalize
- Engage DOC Research for data collection and evaluation measures

Deliverables (List the high-level “products” to be created e.g., improved xxx process, employee manual on yyyy)

The deliverables of this project are specific to the MCF-Stillwater pilot.

- Assess and review current/past Restorative Justice services and update/revise accordingly with influence from the facility staff and the RJ Council
- Implement a new or reestablish Restorative Justice services in MCF-Stillwater
- Create the framework for how staff and incarcerated persons can use Restorative Justice practices as additional responses to potential and actual violence in MCF-Stillwater
- Explore the feasibility an incentive-based model for living units to reach violence reduction and culture change in the facility
- Develop practices throughout MCF-Stillwater for both staff and incarcerated persons to assist with the culture change in the facility.
- Create written report through collaboration with DOC Research and Planning, articulating baseline and findings of pilot project
- Prepare and distribute fact sheets, marketing materials, etc. through collaboration with DOC Communications
- Present restorative justice practices findings/lessons learned, framework, and incentive-based living unit program to the Executive Council for approval and next steps
- Pilot framework for how staff and incarcerated persons can use Restorative Justice practices when responding to potential and actual violence in MCF-Stillwater
- Pilot incentive-based programming if approved by Executive Council
- Create the framework for responding and providing Restorative Justice based recommendations to individualized incidents between incarcerated persons
- Create the framework and document process for facility-based incarcerated person RJ Response Teams
- Implement incarcerated person RJ Response Teams through recruitment, training, and support
- Present framework for incarcerated person RJ response to Executive Council for approval and next steps

5. Project Scope Statement

Scope (List what the project will address)

- Developing the Incarcerated Person RJ Response Model
- Data Collection/sharing; trends
- Identification of best practices
- Prevention measures for Incarcerated Persons
- Development of framework for deploying resources and staff
- Making recommendations to Executive Council and Leadership

Out of Scope

- Recommendations outside of the DOC
- Expansion to other facilities
- Changing or modification to the processes of discipline and segregation in MCF-Stillwater

6. Project Milestones

Project Milestones (propose start and end dates for Project Phases [e.g., Inception, Planning, Construction, Delivery] and other major milestones)

Initiation/Planning 4/3/2023-9/1/2023

Pilot Implementation at MCF-Stillwater by 9/1/2023

Monitoring/Controlling 9/1/2023-9/1/2024

Project Evaluation 8/1/2024
Project Close - 9/1/2024

Major Known Risks Identify obstacles that may cause the project to fail.

Risk	Risk Rating (High, Medium, Low)
Staff Perception and Buy-In (more is being done for incarcerated population than employees, as related to safety)	High
Change in Facility Leadership	Med/Low
Incarcerated Population Perception and Buy-in	Med/Low
Creating Incarcerated Population power balance	High
Facility incidents that cause shutdowns/disruptions	Med/Low

Assumptions List any items that are believed to be real, true, and certain.

- Collaborate, engage, and gather feedback and thoughts from MCF-Stillwater staff
- RJ responses to violence will not change the facilities' immediate response and discipline approach
- RJ is an optional additional resource in responding to violence
- Staff have an appetite for Restorative Justice approach to population conflict
- Incarcerated population have an appetite for Restorative Justice approach to conflict

Constraints List any conditions that may limit the project team's options with respect to resources, personnel, or schedule (e.g., predetermined budget or project end date, limit on number of staff that may be assigned to the project).

RJ staff resources and time
Facility resources and time
Staff resources to implement resources and prevention practices within facility
Staff resources to evaluate responses and learn from incidents
Project Team's resources and time

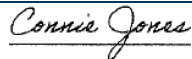
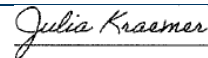
External Dependencies Will project success depend on coordination of efforts between the project team and one or more other individuals or groups? Has everyone involved agreed to this interaction?

Collaboration with community-based partners
Communication and media sources

7. Project Communication Strategy (specify how the project manager will communicate to the Executive Sponsor, Project Team members and Stakeholders, e.g., frequency of status reports, frequency of Project Team meetings, etc)

MCF-STW Leadership meetings as needed
Implementation with Facility - frequency of meetings determined by project team
Business Lead will be providing updates to sponsors and ILT

8. Project Sign-Off

	Name	Signature	Date (MM/DD/YYYY)
Executive Sponsor	Assistant Commissioner Connie Jones		7/10/23
Department Sponsor	Director of Victim Services/ Restorative Justice Elizabeth Richards	Elizabeth J Richards	7/11/23
Project Manager	Julia Kraemer		7/11/23

Notes

Notes from project learning meetings for PM

Pre-Work approval from Executive Council 03/2023 with a pilot at MCF-Stillwater

Met with MCF-Stillwater Leadership and started engagement sessions

Created a 1-page informational document

To the knowledge of RJ staff, no work has been done on Incarcerated person v. Incarcerated person violence through the lens of an incarcerated person.

The project will not make changes to the facilities' immediate response and discipline approach

The project should be looked at in two phases:

Phase 1

Institutional prevention work

- RJ team with RJ council will review current RJ resources and pilot options
- Form a list of RJ resources
- Create a framework for how the resources can be implemented

Phase 2

Individualized response

- Staff and individuals within MCF-STW will be developing a way for incarcerated people to flag potential referrals for prevention or after an incident
- How would RJ team and RJ Council respond to incidents, care, and then recommendations
- Not changing segregation or discipline

End Goal

- Reduction in violence incidents
- Culture change

Complete end goal - create framework to recruit individuals to have a internal response team

Set a baseline of data

Set up a peer mentorship program

Explorative meeting (2) discussed modules

Captions, OSI's

RJ Council- Incarcerated participant, STW staff

Stillwater Restorative Justice Response Project

1 Year Overview of RJ Mentor Work

7.3.25



About The Project

The Restorative Justice Mentors at Stillwater have been serving as ambassadors of restorative justice values, actively preventing and mitigating violence within the facility, and serving as supports for the incarcerated population.



11,867*

Total
Interactions
Logged



27.5

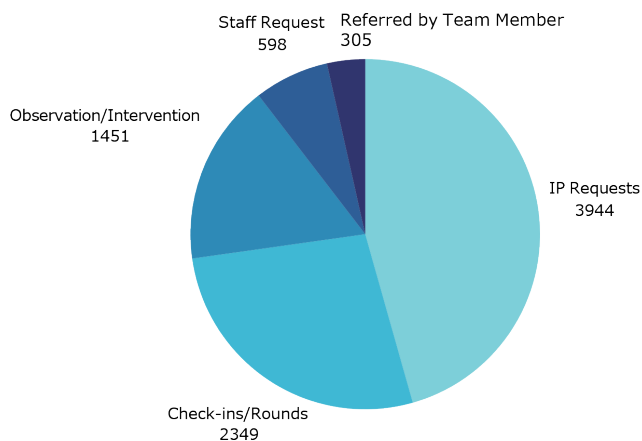
Average Number of
Reported Interactions
per Mentor per Week

Mentor Interactions

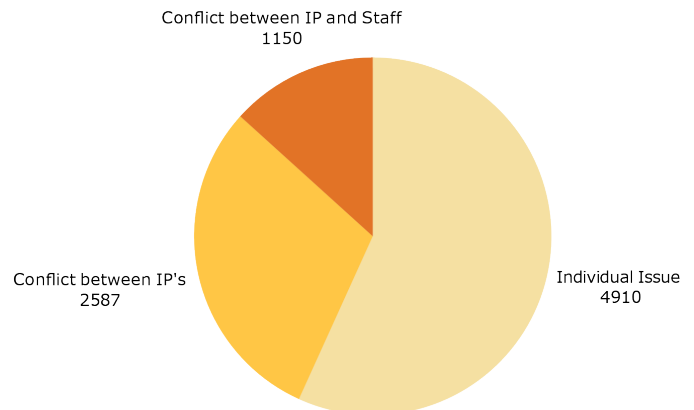
9/30/24-6/27/25

*Graphics represent a subset of 8,647 interactions.

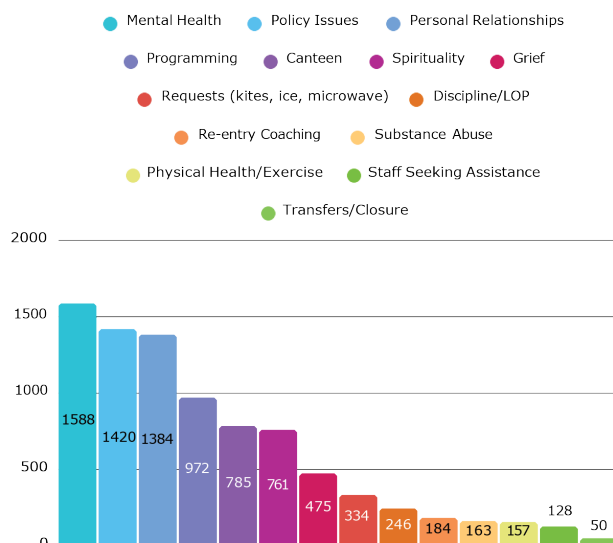
How Mentors Are Becoming Aware of Issues



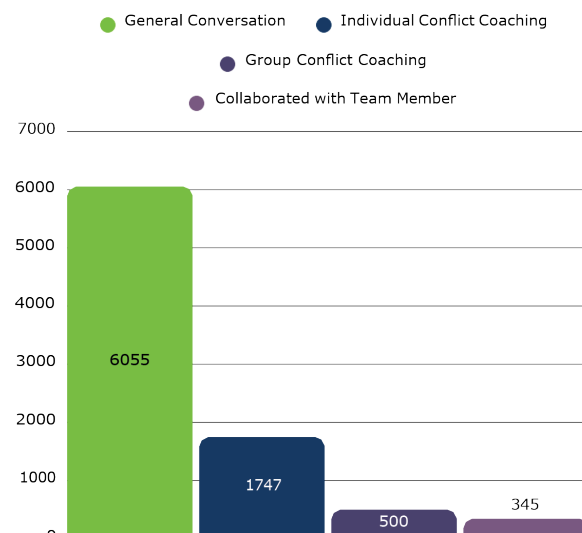
With Whom is the Issue or Conflict?



Primary Presenting Issues



Mentor Responses



Stillwater Restorative Justice Response Project

Excerpts from Mentor Reporting Forms

6.10.25



Conflict De-escalation Between IP's

Description: An argument between two IP's almost turned into a large-scale fight that would have involved several people. As I saw a crowd forming, I went to the scene and began advocating for a resolution between the two groups of IP's.

Follow-up: Both parties involved are now at peace with each other.

Staff Request - I.P. Mental Health Concern

Description: Sgt. requested me to address a potential mental health issue of a specific I.P. who has a history of acting out. In my introduction with said I.P., I recognized behavioral patterns conducive with a health crisis forming

Follow-up: I advocated for the I.P. to receive medical assessment by an RN from health services. Responding RN took my report, confirmed my suspicions by I.P. verbal/somatic symptoms and past medical experience. I.P. was then referred to Psychology for an immediate emergency consultation appointment.

Individual struggle/need - Requesting favors

Description: Our living unit informed us our weekend schedule would consist of half the unit being locked in all day one day and the other half of the unit would be locked in all day the next day. Another RJ mentor and I asked the unit staff if we could take a box of toilet paper along with a cart full of ice to the inmates that were locked in for the day. They gave us permission to do so and we distributed the ice and toilet paper during a time that did not interfere with their rounds.

Follow-up: The next day we did the same thing for the other half of the unit that was locked in. Many inmates expressed their gratitude and several of the AW staff, as well.

Conflict De-escalation Between Staff and I.P.

Description: I witnessed an offender and an officer in a heated convo, and I intervened and stopped the IP before he threatened to hit the officer all over some ice.

Follow-up: As the IP switches in, I go get ice for the IP.

Supportive Response to Closure of Stillwater

Description: R.J. Mentors and Unit Reps were briefed by admin team that the facility has ceased normal operations and the[re] will be modified lockdown until population is down to 550 people by Sept. 15, 2025.

Follow-up: Informing population and staff of the changes we learned of- spent last 48 hours just being present for everyone.

Staff Request for Welcoming New Arrivals

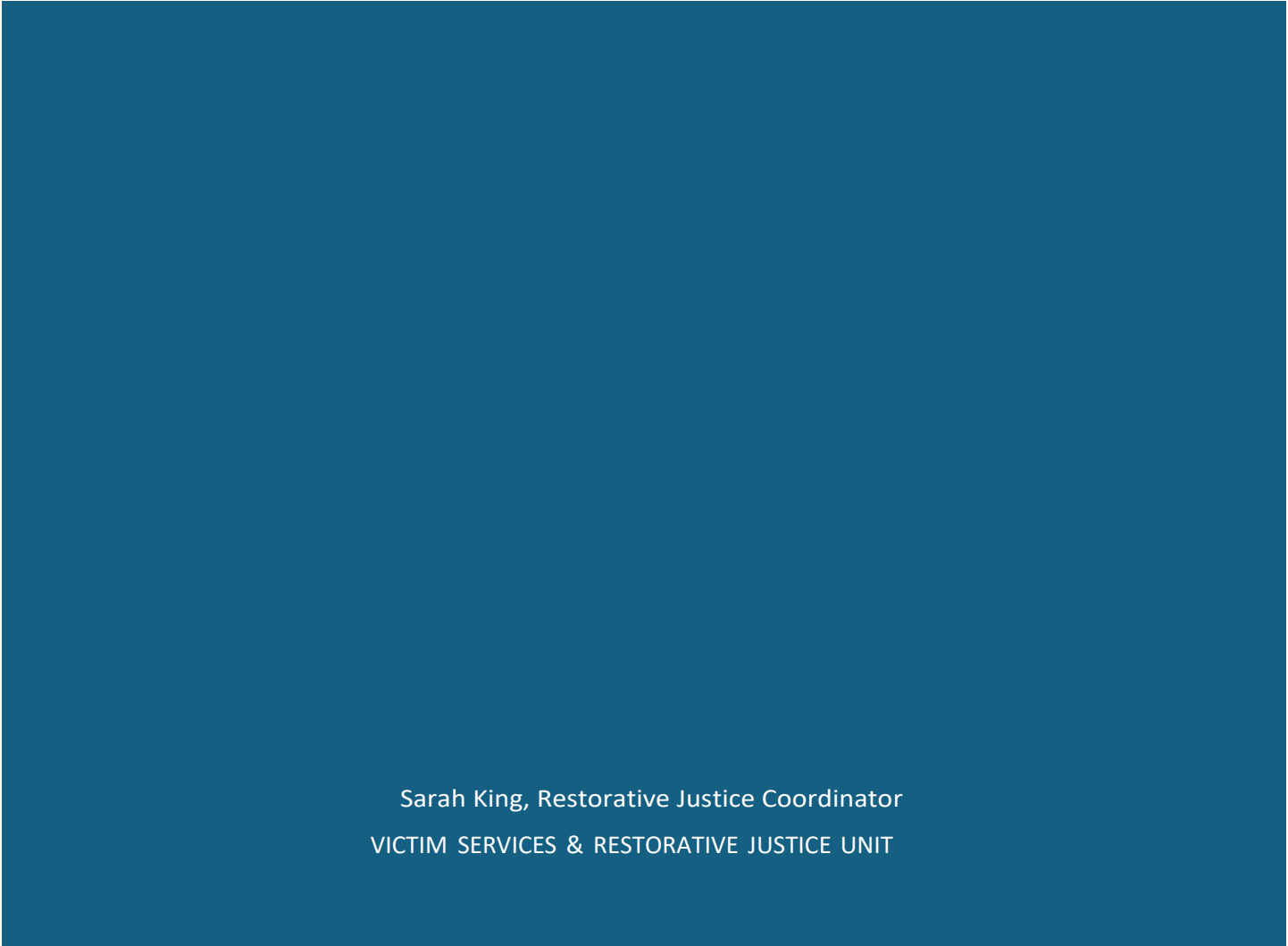
Description: Living unit staff on 2nd watch approached me in regards to a group of new arrivals from MCF-St. Cloud in need of greeting and introduction to MCF-STW. Each new arrival was very appreciative of it.

Follow-up: Sent a positive kite to Cpt. regarding the staff's proper use and respect of the RJ Mentor Program's intended scope and purpose.



PROPOSAL

Creating a Restorative Justice Living Unit at MCF Stillwater



Sarah King, Restorative Justice Coordinator
VICTIM SERVICES & RESTORATIVE JUSTICE UNIT

Table of Contents	Page 1
Purpose & Current Context	Page 2
Making the Case	Pages 3-4
How to Create a RJLU	Pages 5-6
Indications of Readiness & Proposed Next Steps	Page 7
Sources & Relevant Research	Page 8

Purpose of Proposal:

- Provide information and data on the differences between Earned Incentive Living Units (EILU) and Restorative Justice Living Units (RJLU)
- Explain RJ unit's work that lays the foundation for a RJLU at MCF Stillwater
- Propose the creation and implementation of a RJLU to run alongside the EILU at MCF Stillwater in alignment with the DOC's mission and vision statements.

Current Context:

In 2023, the staff of the Restorative Justice Program volunteered to design and pilot a violence response and prevention initiative to be implemented at MCF Stillwater. The RJ Pilot Project is under the institutional umbrella of the "Violence in Facility" work and specifically focuses on IP-on-IP violence. The pilot project, grounded in restorative justice philosophies and approaches, implemented RJ-specific education and programming, incentives for residents in the living units, and trained approximately 30 incarcerated people as mentors. RJ Program staff continue to supervise, support, and coach 20 mentors working in MCF Stillwater's living units.

While there have been barriers and challenges along the way, the pilot project has been successful overall per staff and IP feedback. (We have requested and are awaiting quantitative data to confirm this.) One indicator of success is that over 140 STW IPs have indicated interest in being selected for a second cohort of mentors. The plan was that these IPs would be vetted, interviewed, trained, and placed in mentoring positions by September 1st. To date, VSRJ has invested a significant amount of unit funds and staff time to build relationships with residents and staff, to test out restorative approaches, and to engage outside partners to enhance the work. This investment is the foundation that this proposal is built upon.

It was announced in May 2025 that MCF Stillwater will undergo a phased closure over the next four years. Shortly after that, it was announced that at least one living unit at MCF Stillwater will be designated as an Earned Incentive Living Unit. The phased closure of MCF-Stillwater offers a unique opportunity to implement a RJLU, to test out possibility for development of RJs within other facilities, and to compare/contrast a RJLU and EILU. The RJ Pilot Project has created a strong foundation that is necessary for an RJLU. The Restorative Justice Program staff along with staff and IPs at MCF-Stillwater are ready to launch this work.

To date, VSRJ has not been meaningfully included in any planning or discussion about the phased closure and creation of an earned incentive unit.

Making the Case

Restorative Justice Living Units (RJLUs) and *Earned Incentive Living Units (EILUs)* are two distinct models used in correctional settings to promote behavioral change and safer prison environments. While they may share some goals, their frameworks, philosophies, and methods differ significantly.

A restorative justice living unit offers a fundamentally deeper and more sustainable approach to prison culture change than an earned incentive living unit. While EILUs focus on behavioral compliance in exchange for privileges, RJLUs are grounded in accountability, healing, and community—values that not only reduce harm within prison walls but also support long-term transformation. In an RJLU, incarcerated individuals engage in trauma-informed dialogue, conflict resolution, and relationship-building practices that address the root causes of harm and promote personal growth. This leads to meaningful shifts in behavior, lower violence rates, and improved reentry outcomes. Unlike the transactional nature of EILUs, RJLUs foster intrinsic motivation and collective responsibility—key elements for restoring dignity and building safer communities inside and beyond prison.

Feature	Restorative Justice Living Unit (RJLU)	Earned Incentive Living Unit (EILU)
Core Philosophy	Accountability, healing, dignity, and community	Behavioral compliance for privilege access
Primary Motivation	Intrinsic – values-based transformation	Extrinsic – rewards-based compliance
Key Practices	Circle processes, peer mentorship, trauma-informed programs	Rule adherence, point-based systems, privilege tiers
Staff Role	Mentorship, facilitation, relational engagement	Enforcement, monitoring, rule reinforcement
Impact on Violence	Significant reduction (e.g. 73% fewer violent infractions)	Mixed; often minor or temporary decreases
Use of Solitary Confinement	Drastically reduced (e.g. 83% less use)	Typically unchanged
Sense of Community	High—focus on mutual responsibility and support	Low—individual performance focus
Sustainability of Change	Long-term personal growth and reduced recidivism	Change dependent on continued reward access
Victim-Informed	Yes—prioritizes repair, empathy, and understanding	No—rarely includes victim or community voice
Evaluation Support	Positive RCTs, qualitative & quantitative support (e.g. Vera, NIJ)	Limited or mixed evaluations; often internal or pilot-stage

Restorative Justice Living Units (RJLUs)

Purpose & Philosophy:

RJLUs are grounded in restorative justice principles, emphasizing accountability, healing, community, and transformation. They aim to create a culture where individuals reflect on the harm they've caused, repair relationships, and contribute positively to their environment.

Key Features:

- Participation is usually voluntary and based on readiness to engage in restorative practices.
- Regular circle processes, dialogues, and accountability sessions.
- Focus on healing from trauma, understanding harm, and building empathy.
- Strong emphasis on community-building, often involving staff, facilitators, and other residents.
- Programming includes victim impact, conflict resolution, emotional regulation, and trauma awareness.

Intended Outcomes:

- Reduced violence and infractions.
- Increased emotional literacy and conflict resolution skills.
- Strengthened prosocial identity and internal motivation for change.
- Foundations for post-release accountability and community reintegration.

Earned Incentive Living Units (EILUs)

Purpose & Philosophy:

EILUs operate within a behavioral incentive framework, rewarding incarcerated individuals for following rules and participating in programming. The aim is to encourage short-term compliance and improve institutional safety.

Key Features:

- Participation is often earned through points, clear conduct, or participation in work or education programs.
- Privileges may include enhanced canteen options, extra visitation, or more comfortable living conditions.
- Emphasis is on behavioral compliance, not necessarily internal transformation.
- Programs offered may vary, but participation is often instrumental (i.e., done to gain rewards).
- Less focus on addressing harm, healing, or relational accountability.

Intended Outcomes:

- Immediate reduction in disciplinary infractions.
- Incentivized participation in rehabilitative or educational programs.
- Orderly and safer prison environment.
- Increased efficiency in managing incarcerated populations.

How to Create a RJLU

Creating a Restorative Justice Living Unit inside a correctional facility requires intentional design grounded in restorative values, trauma-informed care, and practical institutional integration.

1. Foundation & Philosophy

Core Principles:

- **Accountability:** Encouraging responsibility for harm caused.
- **Healing:** Supporting emotional, relational, and sometimes spiritual recovery.
- **Community:** Emphasizing interconnectedness and mutual support.
- **Participation:** Voluntary engagement based on readiness, not compliance.

Align with:

- Trauma-informed approaches
 - Victim-centered values
 - Cultural responsiveness
 - Equity and inclusion frameworks
-

2. Institutional Buy-In

Engage:

- **Warden & Leadership:** Emphasize safety benefits, behavior outcomes, and long-term change.
- **Line Staff & Security:** Offer training in RJ principles and trauma-informed interaction.
- **Policy Team:** Adapt policies to allow flexibility for RJ programming, movement, and schedules.

Build Agreements Around:

- Safety protocols within circle and group spaces
 - Programming priorities for RJ unit residents
 - Use of RJ responses to interpersonal conflicts
-

3. Resident Selection Criteria

Consider:

- Voluntary participation and motivation to change. Provide clear information on the model so that IPs are providing an informed consent to participate.
- Willingness to participate in community agreements and circles
- Balanced inclusion of people who have caused harm and those who have survived harm (where safe and appropriate)
- Ensure racial, cultural, and linguistic representation

Avoid exclusion based solely on sentence type (e.g., life sentences), STG affiliation, or past infractions—these units are often most impactful for long-term residents and for incarcerated persons who are not typically identified as positive leaders.

4. Programming Model

Core Elements:

- **Daily and weekly circles:** Check-ins, accountability, community decisions
- **Victim impact curriculum:** Centering survivors' voices and needs
- **Trauma education:** Understanding personal and collective trauma
- **Conflict transformation:** Using RJ processes to address interpersonal harm
- **Restitution planning:** Giving back (e.g., service projects, letters, storytelling)

Additional Supports:

- Peer mentoring
 - Reading groups and RJ literature
 - Arts and expression workshops
 - Preparation for victim–offender dialogue (if appropriate)
-

5. Staffing Model

Key Roles:

- **Restorative justice facilitator(s):** Lead circles, provide coaching, model values
 - **Correctional staff allies:** Trained to support restorative responses and emotional regulation (staffing models suggest 2-3 officers for 40-60 residents)
 - **Mental health or trauma specialists** (as needed)
 - **Community partners:** For training, storytelling, victim impact, or reentry support
 - **Peer mentors** (incarcerated elders): Live alongside residents; provide daily mentoring, conflict support, and co-facilitate circles.
 - **Please note:** RJLU staff should go through an application process to work in the RJLU; priority given to those with high emotional intelligence and interest in restorative work.
 - **Train all staff in:**
 - De-escalation
 - Implicit bias and cultural humility
 - Survivor-informed, trauma-informed approaches
 - Basic restorative justice philosophy and principles
-

6. Evaluation & Accountability

Metrics to Track:

- Disciplinary infractions (before vs. after RJLU enrollment)
- Self-reported empathy, trauma understanding, and conflict resolution skills
- Community agreement violations and their resolution processes
- Staff and participant satisfaction
- Post-release success (if applicable)

Indications of Readiness

To date, the resources listed below are what the RJ Program staff and STW RJ Mentors have either created, implemented, or been supported by during the RJ Pilot Project.

Staffing resources:

- STW program and security staff who have helped develop the current RJ Pilot Project and have an investment in an RJ model. (These staff include case management, behavioral health, treatment, security, discipline, education, religious services, transitions, and administration)
- RJ Council – (approximately 3 STW staff and 15 IPs)
- RJ Mentors (approximately 20 IPs)
 - Over 140 IPs expressed interest in being a member of the second RJ Mentor cohort
- Central Office RJ Staff with high level of familiarity with STW

Programming resources:

- Trauma Healing Workshop (16 week curriculum, created and facilitated by RJ mentors)
- 4-week RJ Reflection Group (was made available to B West residents, facilitated by RJ mentors)
- RJ 101 curriculum (6 week curriculum, created and facilitated by STW RJ Councilmembers)
- 40-hour RJ Mentor training curriculum
- Positive activities like gaming consoles, game tournaments, films on CableCast

Evaluative data:

- DOC Research (Valerie Clark) is supporting the evaluative components of the RJ Pilot Project.
- Additional research of existing RJLUs is included on page 8.

Proposed Next Steps

1. Meet with MCF-Stillwater Programming Subcommittee to coordinate RJLU development alongside the EILU.
2. Restorative Justice Program staff meet with current RJ Mentors and interested STW staff to generate the following:
 - Selection criteria for RJLU residents and staff
 - Create an application for interested residents and staff
 - Create an initial plan for training and on-going support for residents and staff
3. In order to achieve the above, as efficiently and effectively as possible, request that all current RJ Mentors be held at MCF Stillwater during this planning process.
 - Any RJ Mentor who has been transferred to another facility in the past month would be asked whether they want to return to MCF-Stillwater to be a part of the RJLU work.
4. If able to start immediately, Restorative Justice Program staff estimate that the deliverables identified in #2 will be ready by August 1, 2025.
5. In August and September 2025, Restorative Justice Program staff conduct basic training for staff and potential RJLU residents with a target of launching the RJLU by end of September.

Sources & Relevant Research

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Example Models to Study:

- **North Dakota DOC:** Unity Village (North Dakota State Penitentiary)
- **Connecticut DOC:** TRUE Unit (Cheshire Correctional Institution), WORTH Unit (York Correctional Institution)
- **South Carolina DOC:** CORE Village (Turbeville Correctional Institution), Cadre of HOPE (Lee Correctional Institution)
- **Colorado DOC:** Change Maker's Village (Arkansas Valley Correctional Facility)
- **Massachusetts:** PACT Community (Middlesex Jail & House of Correction)