

Team **Restoring Justice**

Fall 2023



Meet our team!



Alex Xu
Jones '26



Olivia Jin
Sid '26



Mainavi Reddy
Hanszen '24



Isabelle Adeyinka
Will Rice '25



Sage Sabharwal
Baker '25



Context

What is mass incarceration?

The U.S. jail population has skyrocketed from <200,000 in 1972 to **2.2 million today**.

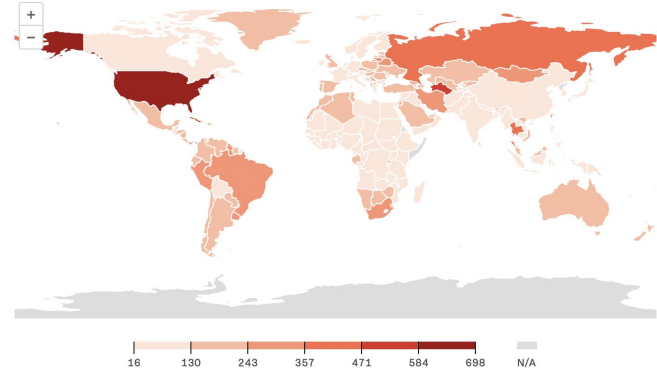
The “land of the free” is home to **25%** of the world’s prison population but only **5%** of the world’s population.

Background

- $\frac{2}{3}$ of released prisoners are **rearrested** within **3 years**
- **1 in 3** Black Males are incarcerated in their lifetime compared to **1 in 17** white males.
- Black individuals are incarcerated for drug offenses at a rate **10x greater** than that of white individuals

The US leads the world in incarceration

Global incarceration rates, per 100,000 people



Past-month illicit drug use

2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health



Drug-related arrests per 100,000 residents of each race

2013 FBI Uniform Crime Reports / US Census Bureau

WHITE 332



BLACK 879



What are the effects of this on people?

According to the DOJ's research mass incarceration makes it harder to:

- Achieve social mobility
- Obtain a job
- Socially and economically reintegrate into society

Harris County:

Jail Population: 10,162

Pretrial Population: 6,361

Probation Population: 32,192

Receiving Indigent Defense: 71,661

Restoring Justice

Mission: Providing holistic and loving legal defense and social services to those who could not otherwise afford adequate representation

Focus: Legal Defense

Other Services: Adelphoi Program, Social Services, Counseling and Healing Circles



Problem Introduction

Users hope Restoring Justice can:

- 1) Offer holistic care and support
- 2) Help clients share their unique stories and perspectives
- 3) Fight the stigma against imprisoned populations
- 4) **Ending mass incarceration**



How are client stories currently shared?

Client stories

We regularly check in with our clients, and many express interest in sharing their experiences. [Find more narratives in our clients' own words here.](#)



OWEN

Owen filed his own handwritten motions in jail, fighting his charges himself before Restoring Justice connected him to a better lawyer.

"While I was incarcerated, I learned a lot. I taught myself about the law in the law library. I had absolutely no knowledge of my rights, anything. I was amazed at what I didn't know and ... how I was being treated so unfairly. That hurt my heart. I realized that by my not having any money at the time, the attorneys that were appointed to me didn't want to hear my story. I realized every attorney that I had before then they were only interested in one thing. And that was to get my signature on a plea bargain."

While weighing the options on his case was stressful, he appreciated being heard by the Restoring Justice team and being able to tell his story. "It was great because they actually cared. Someone actually cared." Owen ended up pleading guilty and receiving a time-served sentence. He is now reunited with his wife and is a truck driver, seeing new places across the country as part of his job - "I've been to Denver, Colorado. I've been to Jacksonville, Florida. I've been to August, Georgia. I've been to Birmingham, Alabama. You gotta realize, you know at this age, I've never had the chance to travel... I've got a chance to see some of America, and it's amazing, it broadens your whole perspective about a lot of things... I love it. Freedom!"

Problem Spaces



Rise of Mass
Incarceration



Ethical and
Community-Centered
Storytelling



Racial Bias and Stigma



Starting Point

Initial Impressions

- The average person thinks that someone who is in prison is inherently a **bad** person
- **People think:**
- imprisoned people = dangerous
- Jailing more people = safer community
- Incarceration = rehabilitation



Defining the Problem

- **Stigma** plagues discussions around incarcerated individuals
- Many individuals are **unaware** that the United States and private institutions **benefit** from imprisoning more people
- Many incarcerated individuals cannot **share** their stories in a **compelling** way because there is **no avenue** for them to do so



The Initial Challenge

How can we empower Houston community members accused of crimes to share their stories to combat the fear narrative?



Conducting User Research



**Informed consent
and ethical
storytelling**



**Community
breakfast**



2 CP Interviews



**Client/volunteer
contacts, past
storytelling,
letters**



Key Insights

Healing & Humanization via Storytelling

- **Dignifying** nature of stories
- **Humanizing** people accused of crimes, **including** those who are guilty
- Monique: “no one can take your story from you”
- Who should be telling the story?



'Don't settle': Carol discusses necessary change in the criminal legal system

Final Problem Statements

How can we utilize Restoring Justice's current resources (story archive) to empower clients to share their stories?



**All hands on
deck with
fundraising**



**Not actively
taking on new
cases**

Cases last 2-3 years in
Harris County



Financial Struggles

Understaffed

Kevin is the only lawyer



Need people to
believe this work
is **“worth it”**



Final Problem Statements

How can we harness the power of community storytelling to help Restoring Justice overcome its financial barriers?



Pushing to End Mass Incarceration

- Monique: not about ending mass incarceration for those who are innocent, but **for all**
 - Building culture/narrative that if we let everyone out of jail today, society would be okay
- Injustices in system
 - **Arrest warrant never shown**
 - **Resets** of court dates; lawyer not even showing up
 - **Separation** and alienation from family



Final Problem Statements

How can we build lasting infrastructure so Restoring Justice can continue storytelling efforts?



Culture of Healing & Relationship-Building

- **Relationship-oriented** client advocacy/care
- **Culture-building** around **healing harm**
- Past clients spoke of Restoring Justice as...
 - **Family**
 - **Catalyst** for physical/mental **transformation**
 - A **team** that **fought together**
 - People to **call/visit** after a frustrating day



Final Problem Statements

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How can we harness the power of community storytelling to help Restoring Justice overcome its financial barriers?

How can we build lasting infrastructure so Restoring Justice can continue storytelling efforts?





**Moving
Forward**

Short Term Measures of Success



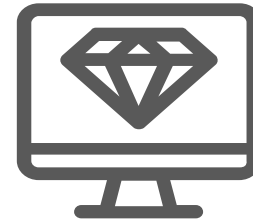
25%

Increased website traffic



10

Organizations helping
with sharing audio
stories



8

Client stories
represented on the
website

Long Term Measures of Success



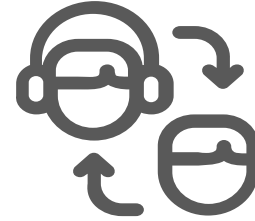
10%

Increase in community
survey responses



25%

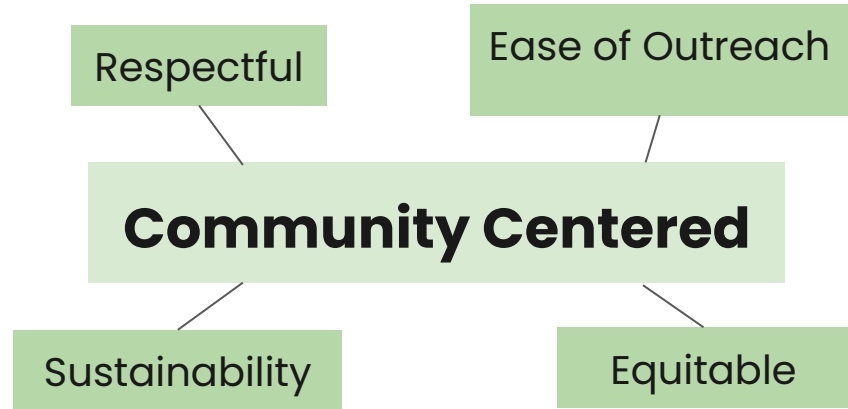
Increase in fundraising
due to storytelling



15%

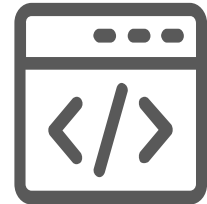
Increase in size of
volunteer cohort

Design Goals



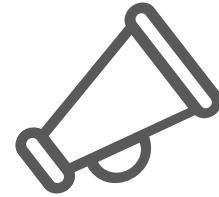
Initial Feasible Solutions (1)

- Fortifying a **storytelling platform**
 - Presenting current video content in a **digestible** manner
 - Design a **humane** forum
 - **Wall of letters!**
 - Dismantle preconceived notions stemming from lack of knowledge, through anecdotes
- Creating **personalized introductions**
 - Individual profile/inmate
 - Addressing the gaps in communication
 - Allow inmates' stories and experiences to serve as education, as well as a reminder of progress (or lack thereof)



Initial Feasible Solutions (2)

- Expanding **outreach** efforts
 - Connecting RJ with local radio stations
 - NPR, Houston Matters, etc.
 - Rice KTRU
 - Broadcasting stories beyond RJ's immediate reach
- Fortifying a **podcast**
 - Allow for **active discourse** regarding mass incarceration
 - Aligns with storytelling platform
 - Engage individuals on both sides of the platform to share and learn from one another



Next Steps

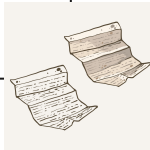
Reach out to clients
and volunteers

User Interviews



Potential
collaboration with
student artists

Letter Exploration



Start with Rice KTRU

Outreach



Narrow down and
further develop ideas

Finalize Solutions





FREEDOM FOR ALL

Any questions?