Coming Home:
An Asset-Based Approach to Transforming Self & Community

A Report on Re-Entry by the Phelps Stokes Fund

Co-Production at Work
Volume I

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executive summary

In America, 2.2 million people are in prison. Add those in jail, on probation or on parole and the total jumps to 7.2 million. Each year 650,000 will leave prison. Another 750,000 are already out being supervised on parole. Two out of three coming out of prison will be back in two years. Something has to change.

Children are also involved. Nationwide, 4,000 children are arrested each day. 1.5 million children have a parent in prison. These children are more likely to suffer abuse and neglect, more likely to be among the 40% of children raised in poverty or near-poverty, and more likely to go to prison themselves.

This is not an equal opportunity story. People of color face much higher odds of ending up in prison than white people. For white men, the odds are one out of every 25; for Hispanics, one out of 6; for African Americans the odds are one out of 3. The nation spends $60 billion annually on prisons and corrections. With the possible exception of health care spending, the increase in spending on corrections over the past 15 years is greater than in any other major spending category.

Something has to change. And the changes must be big, not small. The Kellogg Foundation asked the Phelps Stokes Fund to seek out new answers – ones that could be used nationwide as the recent federal legislation on re-entry called Second Chance goes into effect. The Fund brought together a design team that included individuals who have personal experience of being in prison, returning to the community, and turning their lives around. Team members brought years of expertise in the justice system, the non-profit world, academia, and above all, innovation and systems change. This report is the result of intensive brainstorming, collecting information on what has worked and not worked, tapping networks of experts on re-entry, and learning from those just returning and still under court supervision.

First, came the framework. We agreed as a basic principle that groups, agencies, officials and professionals cannot succeed in re-entry efforts unless those who have been in prison become valued partners, co-workers and co-producers of the outcomes we want. So our starting point was Co-Production. Another basic principle was that change must take account of the ways in which people of color are unfairly treated by the justice system – before, during and after incarceration.

Second, came the way we defined the challenge. Who were these people returning to community? How do we and others see them? What do people call them? How do they want to be seen? Together we settled on one word: Homecomers. That summed it all up. Our Co-Production framework meant that Homecomers must play a strong leading role in the design process. Six of the 17 member design team – more than a third – are Homecomers. Two of the Homecomers on the team have Ph.D’s. One has written a re-entry guide for people still in prison. Five of the Homecomers are directors of non-profit organizations – and four of them were founders of those organizations. Every one of them is determined to help others succeed, just as they have. In addition, a community focus group was formed in D.C. to provide feedback on the questions being raised and the possibilities being explored by the team. Homecomers made up the majority of that group.

Third, we asked: Where do we start? What untapped resource could be use? Where would we find the commitment, the energy, the sustained willpower that could make a difference to re-entry nationwide? We determined that new work must build on successful efforts in the field. That means that individuals and organizations that already doing powerful work must be funded and supported.

Fourth, as a team, we explored: What is wanted? What is needed? How can Homecomers who are succeeding help each new wave of Homecomers as they return? For answers, we especially turned to the Homecomer members of the team, who brought personal as well as professional experience and
knowledge to these questions. Together, we identified six priority areas of work: 1. Economic security for Homecomers; 2. change in the language and image to overcome stigmatization; 3. mental health; 4. supportive and supported community; 5. new roles with children and families; 6. systems change in the criminal justice system.

Finally, we agreed that the most effective and powerful approach for achieving successful re-entry calls for work on two broad fronts that must each support the other: One is at the grass-roots level and in community. The second is at the policy and systems level, where strong partners and networks must ally with the efforts on the ground.

Together, these all became a part of the final proposal for a re-entry initiative design.

a national homecomers academy the proposal

All the questioning, brainstorming, and pulling together of information led the design team to propose A National Homecomers Academy with three interlocking parts:

• A national network of projects, organizations and individuals, all working on re-entry
• A process for nominating and funding individuals and Homecomer-centered efforts
• A Board of Regents that will speak for the whole

The network will be a learning network where the principles of Co-Production will lead to mutual sharing, feedback, and self-evaluation. The nominating and funding process will make it possible to seek out and reward excellence by funding the work of outstanding individuals, as fellows, and organizational efforts as grantees. The Board of Regents will have the duty to make sure the Academy stays true to the founding principles and that it works effectively. It will also make final recommendations on nominees to be funded, and ensure that what has been learned in the network will be heard by the criminal justice system and the nation at large.

The two-page diagram of the National Homecomers Academy shows how the Academy is designed to be more than the sum of its parts. While it links together independent efforts, it can also play a leading role in helping them take new approaches to re-entry. It will bring together many communities working around a simple, but powerful idea: that Homecomers who succeed want to help others. They are a resource that is desperately needed.

The collective work of the Academy would include:

• micro-enterprises that help lead to full economic security,
• courses where Homecomers can earn credentials as Change Agents at different levels
• a financial aid strategy for Homecomers to pursue personal development
• models of re-entry work that Second Chance and other funding sources will support
• learn-and-help strategies where Homecomers on the re-entry journey help others succeed as they have done each step of the way
• a force for system change to reduce the barriers that Homecomers face
• a voice for investment in families, community and education that support strong, resilient and economically healthy communities
• challenges at every point to the racism that leads people of color to be incarcerated at rates that are close on ten times the rates for whites

One goal of this endeavor sums up all the others: Homecomers can help our nation remember that those who have committed errors and even wrongs can partake in the American dream. They can join other citizens in claiming the “inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

A National Homecomers Academy, which is founded in hope, can help us to achieve that vision.
This report has its roots in a discussion that I and some others had with Gail Christopher, vice president of the Kellogg Foundation about the unprecedented level of incarceration in the United States and its impact on children, families and communities. That impact does not stop with incarceration; it continues as hundreds of thousands of adults, particularly men of color, return home and take up the struggle of re-entry.

The discussion turned next to the possibilities of grounding a re-entry initiative in Co-Production – an approach to social services that turns the recipients of services into engaged, valued and active co-producers of outcomes. Could such an initiative lead to significant systemic change? How would re-entry look with a Co-Production focus? Those questions led to the commissioning of a Co-Production-centered design for a national re-entry initiative within the framework of structural racism. This report details the challenges faced, the principles at play, and the design that emerged as a result of those discussions.

The principles of Co-Production will be spelled out in the report; here, it is enough to point out that those principles had to guide the design process as well. Thus, consistent with those principles, more than one-third of the 17-member team formed to undertake the work of design either are or have at one time been incarcerated and have successfully achieved re-entry. Meanwhile, a grassroots group in DC also reflected upon the possibilities of Co-Production in a parallel process whose results were regularly reported to the team.

Given the importance of language, naming and titles, we decided as a group that anyone who is now or has at some time undertaken the re-entry journey of transformation should be called “Homecomers.” We use this designation throughout the report. Together, the Homecomer and non-Homecomer members of the national team included leaders from the correctional systems, academia, think tanks and the cutting edge of non-profit work. Law-school students also provided research assistance.

The perspective of Homecomers has been crucial. When team member Dr. NKrumah Lewis, a Homecomer, and founder of the Renaissance and Empowerment Project in the Triad Region (Winston Salem, Greensboro, High Point) of North Carolina, wrote about the housing rehabilitation project he created, he spoke with an understanding that comes from personal experience. Dr. Lewis has written that the true sense of Renaissance comes into fruition when…
We take the people that people have disregarded, and we take the dilapidated houses that the city has planned to demolish, and with a little love, and caring and some sweat equity we make those houses into beautiful homes. We demonstrate that these men have a great deal to offer, starting with talents and skills that they already possess. How then can people believe that this stigmatized population has nothing to offer?1

In designing this Homecomers’ initiative, the design team had a choice: Start from fear and what Homecomers cannot do - or start from hope and what they can. The usual approach is fear. We chose Hope.

~ Badi Foster, President of the Phelps Stokes Fund

darryl hunt

On February 6, 2004, Darryl Hunt walked out of prison after serving nineteen years for a crime that he did not commit. Despite exoneration, Darryl has confronted the same barriers that prevent people with prison records from successfully returning to their communities. Refusing to succumb to bitterness and anger, Mr. Hunt determined to make things different for others who came after him. The Darryl Hunt Project for Freedom and Justice does just that.2

eddie ellis

In prison ever since he was 16, the last six in the supermax prison in Florence, Colorado, Eddie Ellis in DC, now 32 years old says:

When you return to the world after 15 years, you are really playing catch-up. I had to learn how to ride the Metro, go on a job interview. It’s still hard to be around a lot of people. Trusting anyone is difficult. I had to learn how to deal with my family. In a lot of ways, I’m still learning how to be free.

Eddie has now compiled an instruction book sharing what he has had to learn on his own about getting an ID, a social security number, a driver’s license and different programs that could help him. He has published that book with his own earnings, distributes it to others coming out, wants help getting it to inmates so they can know what they have to do and start making plans that support hope and possibility. Two years out, Eddie has emerged as a mentor and voice of conscience for those being written off.3
This year, some 650,000 individuals will be newly released from prison to return to their communities across the nation. Next year, the year after, and for years to come, the numbers of those coming home from incarceration will change little. Homecomers, like Darryl Hunt and Eddie B. Ellis Jr. (DC), will face major challenges of re-entry:

- **Re-engaging**, both socially and economically
- **Recreating** their relationships with families, loved ones, and community; and
- **Redeeming** their reputations and their lives.

For most, re-entry has ended or will end in failure unless something changes. Nationally, two thirds of all individuals released from prison are rearrested within three years, and one half of all these arrests will occur within the first six months after release. Those who are rearrested will rejoin the population of 2.2 million individuals currently incarcerated in the United States. In 2006, more than 7.2 million people were on probation, in jail, in prison, or on parole. That translates to one in 31 adults.1
the costs
Sheer numbers alone point to the high costs of incarceration and re-entry, which are carried financially, socially and by families and communities. On all fronts, re-entry failure adds to the cost.

– children, families, and community
One and a half million children have a parent in prison, leaving them without key role models and mentors, and making them more vulnerable to repeat the cycle of incarceration. Eddie Ellis of New York in a paper for the New York Urban League,⁵ points to the epidemic proportions of incarceration that has wreaked havoc upon black families, children and neighborhoods. (“To avoid confusion, this report distinguishes between two Eddie Ellis’ with postscripts of DC or NY) Ellis (NY), who is the founder and executive director of the Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions echoes an observation that “the criminal justice system itself has been a major contributor to breakdown in inner cities.”⁶

In neighborhoods of high crime, where that system is most present, a vicious cycle operates. The Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) calls it America’s Cradle to Prison PipelineSM. The name is justified by the national statistics that CDF cites. Among those statistics: Each year, more than 880,000 children in America are abused or neglected. Each day five children or teens will commit suicide. Every three hours, a child or teen will be killed by a firearm. And, finally, 4,302 children on average will be arrested each day.⁷ On playgrounds and streets, vulnerable children turn to peers who, like them, lack positive adult role models. Those children are actively recruited by adults into crime and substance abuse. Homecomers who successfully re-enter society to take up their roles as productive members of the community could be – and are – a needed force for good. However, failed re-entry and a justice system primed to respond with repeat incarceration means the vicious cycle merely repeats itself.

– financial costs
On the taxpayer end, our country spends $60 billion annually on prisons and corrections.⁸ According to reports by the Bureau of Justice, at any given time, approximately 750,000 Homecomers are on parole supervision. The total costs for the country are difficult to estimate, although Bruce Western, professor of Sociology at Harvard University, has made an estimate of $7 billion.⁹ Those costs do not include the drop in restitution, child support and tax payments that lag when re-entry fails. The financial and social costs associated with criminal justice, including incarceration and re-entry, are noted at every level of our society. Here is an illustrative commentary from Ed Schwartz, former chairman, Philadelphia Tax Reform Commission, testifying before the Philadelphia City Council in 2005 on the financial burden borne by the city of Philadelphia:

The city raises roughly $2.2 billion from local taxpayers to support the entire city budget. The rest comes from other governments. Of this $2.2 billion, $1.1 billion goes to the criminal justice system not even counting the benefits that the police, corrections officers, and court employees also receive. That’s 50% of our budget. The remaining $1.1 billion goes to everything else.¹⁰
Meanwhile, the prison-industrial complex competes directly with priorities such as pre-K and higher education for funding. An example: For every single dollar spent on higher education, the Kellogg Foundation’s home state, Michigan, spends $1.19 for corrections.\footnote{11}

Commenting on the costs of the status quo, the report of the Re-Entry Policy Council states: “Too many are harmed: People are victimized; families are destroyed; communities are overwhelmed; and the lives of individuals cycling in and out of incarceration are wasted.”\footnote{12} As a status quo, it is unacceptable.

**The ongoing legacy of structural racism is compellingly illustrated in Douglas Blackmon’s recent book, *Slavery by Another Name*.**

Blackmon’s book tells of the “re-enslavement” of black Americans that took place from the Civil War to World War II. From it, we learn that the juvenile and criminal justice systems are perpetuating an unbroken narrative that most Americans thought ended with the Emancipation Proclamation. It was in fact perpetuated by the Black Codes, mass arrests for vagrancy, sale of prison labor to corporations and then, the minimum sentences levied upon predominantly black users a minimum sentence for crack that is 100 times the minimum sentence for powdered cocaine.\footnote{13}

**structural racism and failed re-entry**

Historical racism perpetuated by culture and inter-institutional dynamics has resulted in communities of color being disproportionately impacted by incarceration and failed re-entry. The explosion of the United States’ prison population in large measure has been driven by incarceration for drug offenses. For example, African-Americans now serve virtually as much time in prison for a drug offense (58.7 months) as whites do for a violent offense (61.7 months). While African-Americans constitute 14% of the nation’s monthly drug users, they represent 37% of those persons arrested for a drug offense and 56% of those in state prison for a drug conviction. Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics document that one in six black men had been incarcerated as of 2001. Across the criminal justice system the number of convictions will be disproportionately people of color. If current trends continue, **29% of black males born in 1991 can expect to spend time in prison during their lifetime, compared to 16% of hispanic males and 4% of white males.**

The chances of going to jail are:

- 29% for black males
- 16% for hispanic males
- 4% for white males
The socio-structural context for this disproportional rate of incarceration is no secret. Poverty, unemployment and underemployment, substandard housing, inadequate schools, environmental toxicity, and inadequate health care are among the factors that combine to restrict opportunity and diminish life outcomes. Referred to by the Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions as “Crime Generative Factors,” these “debilitating socio-economic conditions” are far too often pathways to the criminal justice system and the stigmatization that brings. Once within that arena, the disparate impacts “continue to have a cumulative effect, whereby decisions made at one stage of the system contribute to increasing disparities at the following stages.”

It should not, and need not, be that way.

achieving re-entry success -- the core challenge

The core challenge is simply this: Change re-entry failure to re-entry success.

In 2008, Congress enacted Second Chance legislation and authorized $165 million to be spent on re-entry. To date, no funds have been appropriated and there is a growing and legitimate concern, given the financial crisis, that these funds will ever be released. Even if the funds are released, the amount has been described as “modest” at approximately $250 per Homecomer. Another $40 million in federal funds – some $60 per year, per Homecomer – is expended through other programs. To support re-entry success, foundations have begun to make targeted investments in reducing recidivism by persons returning from prison.

Given the scale of the challenge, and given the funded programs in existence, what can one more initiative do? We believe that another national initiative really can make a difference by building upon and highlighting the capacity of Homecomers themselves to contribute to re-entry efforts. We see this attested to by successful Homecomer-centered, asset-based programs that exist around the country, including those of the Homecomer members of this national design team. These programs, still too few and far between, are doing extraordinary work. An investment to promote, organize and sustain those efforts and to provide them with needed technical assistance and capacity building would, in the view of this team, enable Homecomers to emerge as a positive force in facing the re-entry challenge and in helping to secure needed systemic change.
premises vision and goals

premises

The underlying premises of this initiative are straightforward:

• The majority of Homecomers want to be successful, and do not want to recidivate or return to prison.

• Homecomers want, need and have the capacity to play a central role in shaping their own success and that of others.

• To succeed, the initiative must lead to systemic change at multiple levels – grassroots, institutional, policy-making and all points between – and the change must include the removal of systemic barriers to re-entry.

vision

Homecomers must be supported in actively taking the steps they want and need for individual and collective transformation to full, engaged citizenship – in their own eyes, in the eyes of their families and communities, and in the eyes of the law and society-at-large.

Achieving the goal of successful re-entry, the initiative calls for a national network of Homecomer-centered efforts grounded in community action. For traction and leverage, that network must incorporate structural supports and funding that will undergird a shared commitment to explicit, basic principles, changed practice, and real measurable outcomes. It must foster local, regional, and national alliances to support successful efforts and to remove systemic barriers to change. That calls for the creation of a network of affiliates and partners so that Homecomers will truly have the opportunity to re-engage and recreate their communities, and redeem their lives.
That means finding, funding, supporting and nurturing those programs, organizations and individuals having a proven commitment to enlisting Homecomers as leaders and producers of outcomes. It also means:

- Piggy-backing regional and national initiatives whose goals and values are aligned with this Homecomer-centered vision and approach;
- Establishing a national body that will express the vision and reinforce the integrity of the network;
- Supporting ongoing, intense and purposeful dialog in support of the work being done on the ground;
- Ensuring that Homecomer-centered efforts get the technical assistance they may need; and
- Advocating actions aimed at the removal of barriers and fundamental systems change.

On the systems change front, the design team has included the CEO and staff of the National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA) as a national organization with offices in communities across the country whose professionals function as a crucial link between individuals and communities on one side and the justice system on the other. Moreover, NLADA member programs across the country provide a ready-made infrastructure to support local Homecomer efforts, provide for the distribution of information and offer a national network civil legal aid and indigent defense professionals and advocates.

**overarching goals**

The following overarching goals seek to articulate that vision. The precise, measurable goals that a fleshed out initiative will require will be crafted as the structures for implementation are designed. The overarching goals are these to:

1. Bring an asset-based, Co-Production\* approach to a national problem deeply mired in fear and deficit based thinking;

2. Enlist those who are returning home in partnership with others seeking to build healthy, safe, vibrant and equity-producing communities;

3. Inspire a movement that can mount effective challenges to the systemic barriers that impede successful re-entry; and

4. Help our nation remember that those who have committed wrongs have not forever forfeited those “inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

\*The Co-Production framework is spelled out in the next section
values and principles

The following are value frames and principles upon which the national design team designed this re-entry initiative. They are woven into every aspect of the recommendations:

Co-Production

Co-Production calls for recipients of services, along with their families and communities, to be enlisted as partners and “co-producers” of the desired outcomes.

The five core principles of Co-Production are:

• **An Asset or Strength-based Perspective.**
  One must build on strengths; one cannot build on weaknesses; every human being has capacities of potential use and value to others.

• **Valuing Real Work.**
  We must honor real work: caring labor, civic labor, social justice labor and life long learning. Rewards for contribution must enhance one’s quality of life.

• **Reciprocity – or Pay it Forward.**
  Giving back empowers the recipient so that receiving help is not regarded as charity and does not create dependency.

• **Community.**
  Building a social infrastructure of help, support, companionship and trust is essential.

• **Respect.**
  The voices of those who are most disenfranchised need to be amplified and respected.

Co-Production expressly involves the building of the informal support systems and social infrastructure needed to address with resilience the “debilitating socio-economic conditions” characterized as crime generative factors by Eddie Ellis (NY). And the “Respect” principle specifically calls for amplifying the voices of Homecomers as necessary to guide and hold accountable officials and others who exercise power. The breadth and depth of experience reflected in the team certainly made us aware of the need to address the multiple barriers encountered by Homecomers – barriers to housing, employment and education.

Programs that seek to affiliate with this initiative in the future will have already formulated their own principles to shape and direct their work. Co-Production will not displace those commitments to principle – but will provide an underlying, shared set of values for all grantees and fellows that are funded to join the network of affiliates.
Applying the principles of Co-Production to the challenge of re-entry means that groups, programs and organizations must go beyond the provision of services and support to Homecomers. Those initiatives must include them as partners of those outcomes. Homecomers have skills, talents and capacities to offer and as they acquire the knowledge and credentials needed for success, they offer them to other Homecomers and the communities that receive them.

As members of the national design team deliberated, a consensus emerged that the initiative should aim to bring together individuals and organizations around the country that are already working within this asset-based framework, and that could provide the energy and form for a national movement. Thus, it would seek out individuals, programs, and organizations around the country that have:

- Created pathways and curricula that Homecomers can relate to, follow, and use;
- Crafted steps for Homecomers to build on their strengths;
- Fostered, trained and supported Homecomers and others as mentors for the recently released;
- Fashioned new forms of “credentialing” to provide Homecomers with proof of credit and trustworthiness when they seek paid work;
- Helped Homecomers become economically secure through Homecomers-based enterprises and/or financial aid supporting the mastery of skills that Homecomers seek;
- Acted in partnership with Homecomers to remove systemic blocks and barriers to successful re-entry; and
- Communicated a new message to the media and decisionmakers about Homecomers, the challenges they face, and the positive contributions they can make.

Given this emphasis on learning at so many different levels, the team determined that designating the initiative as The National Homecomers Academy will capture the spirit and the culture of mutual learning, growth and development that it aims to achieve.
homecomers

From the outset team members viewed the insights, experience and commitment of those who have successfully emerged from incarceration as essential. Homecomers on the team emphasized that:

• A strategy for economic survival for Homecomers is critical;
• Access to legal counsel to navigate the administrative maze of securing housing, health care and employment;
• Traveling the journal of transformation can not be done by Homecomers alone. Successful transformation requires the help and participation of their families and their communities;
• The language we use in “defining” Homecomers must change;
• The process of re-entry and transformation must begin prior to release.; and
• Programs alone are not enough – community is key.

structural racism replaced by racial equity

As the numbers introduced earlier in this report confirm, incarceration rates are heavily skewed against populations of color – especially those who are black, who make up 44% of the incarcerated male population. In its study of health disparities, the Dellums Commission found that race and racism are pervasive and systemic, operating through multiple social systems to circumscribe the life options of young men of color. Given these inequities, any approach to re-entry must also address, at multiple levels, the structural racism that still persists.

The powerful, interlocking systems that have led to such high and disproportionate levels of incarceration, along with the barriers they pose to re-entry, must be challenged and changed to achieve racial equity. This commitment to racial equity goes hand in hand with Co-Production. Special attention must be paid to the systemic, inter-institutional dynamics which intensify the challenges of re-entry for Homecomers of color and their communities.
the national homecomers academy

It is one thing to identify successful efforts in the field. It is another matter again to establish the synergies between those efforts and to determine how those synergies can be leveraged. Faced with the challenge of turning scattered efforts into a genuine movement for change, members of the design team put forward the idea of an infrastructure expressly designed to link successful efforts into an aligned force that can push forward even more effectively on the programmatic goals of its affiliates.

To build in resiliency, leverage and impact, the National Homecomers Academy will consist of three parts: A learning network of affiliates, a targeted funding strategy, and a national oversight body. This is not about bricks and mortar; the Academy’s reason for being is to foster linkages and learning, combining the power of networks and the effectiveness of structure. The whole will be supported by a small core staff administered by the Phelps Stokes Fund. The double-spread diagram, on pages 18 and 19, shows each of the three elements described below, and how the elements relate to each other as part of a whole. In the same way that the American Constitution created three branches of government with different and complementary functions, each of these three elements is designed to interact with, stimulate and sustain the other two.

A Learning Network of Grantees and Fellows: This will join together individuals, projects and programs that have been chosen as Grantees and Fellows through the funding strategy below into a strong network of complementary efforts. While their work may be disparate, it will share a common grounding in Co-Production principles. Thus the network affiliates will have proven records of either supporting Homecomers seeking to achieve the transformation they need or else removing the barriers to re-entry – or both. There is no restriction on the goals these efforts might seek, so long as they share a commitment to the overarching goals of transformation and the core principles spelled out earlier.

Funding for the National Homecomers Academy Grants and Fellowships: A funding strategy will be modeled on the Ashoka approach, whereby individuals and programs doing outstanding work in the field are nominated to be funded by existing affiliate members and by members of the public. Nominators will be required to justify why their nominee should be funded. Nominees will be vetted for their adherence to the core principles of the Academy. Awardees will receive technical assistance as needed to strengthen their work. Criteria, processes and procedures for awards based on Co-Production values will be further developed during a ramp-up process.
National Homecomers Academy Board of Regents:
To some degree the Board of Regents will be an advisory body, acting on some issues and advising on others. In its various roles, the Board of Regents will establish strategies, make final recommendations on which nominees should receive grants and fellowships, and help to shape and promote the Academy. The Regents will also advocate for systems change at the State and National level and with the public-at-large. A strategic planning process will refine the Board’s roles and activities.

A culture of Feedback and Evaluation – Supporting all three parts:
The Kellogg Foundation has been a leader in bringing a concern for evaluation and measurement to philanthropic and non-profit endeavors. A culture of feedback and evaluation will be essential in shaping the structure, development and operation of the National Homecomers Academy so as to ensure:

• Fidelity to the principles of co-production in implementation;
• Outcomes that truly reflect the stated priorities of Homecomers;
• Effectiveness of re-entry efforts undertaken by Academy affiliates when compared to the best of the re-entry field across the nation; and
• Policy change outcomes that substantively alter the rules of the game for incarceration and improve the likelihood of successful re-entry, especially in relation to structural racism.

Feedback mechanisms will ensure that work undertaken by affiliates retains its integrity over time. Those feedback mechanisms will include arenas and opportunities for affiliates to convene and learn from each other. They will include: an annual national conference; local gatherings; joint ventures; and the use of the internet to promote sharing, learning and leveraging of the work being done. Together, these will be used to foster a culture of feedback, evaluation and learning that will further encourage the development of best practices as determined by outcomes. Homecomers themselves will decide upon and seek.
Conceptual Overview of the National Homecomers Academy

Three-part structure: Synergies between streams of activity create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Co-Production principles change the producers, the process and the product of Homecomer re-entry efforts. Practitioners, change agents and Homecomers share knowledge to transform existing policy and practice. Co-Production operates as overarching paradigm for systems change.

Phelps Stokes Fund

Network of Affiliates

The National Homecomers Academy Network of Affiliates with internal Feedback Loops

- Grantees and fellows linked in learning network
- Affiliate individuals, projects, programs aligned with values and vision
- Homecomer communities as sites of action, learning and leadership
- Credentialing options for affiliated programs
- Evaluation and technical assistance advance knowledge, build strong practice
- Feedback strategies include annual gathering/conference and online networks
- Advocacy to media, governmental agencies etc. by Academy affiliates
- Exemplars and prototypes for Second Chance programs

Board of Regents

The National Homecomers Academy Board of Regents

- Function as stewards and promoters of the National Homecomers Academy
- Make final recommendations on grants and fellowships
- Develop a movement strategy
- Develop IT strategies to strengthen the learning network
- Advocate for policy and system change recommendations that emerge from the work of National Homecomers Academy affiliates
- Coordinate media/communications strategies

Feedback Loops and Evaluation Strategies:

- Assure fidelity to Co-Production principles
- Place focus on strong, achievable outcomes
- Drive dissemination, learning and rapid pick-up of Homecomer-based efforts
- Amplify the work’s catalytic impact

Grants and Fellowships

The National Homecomers Academy Nomination Process for Grants and Fellowships

- Nominating processes designed to identify change agent projects and individuals
- Grants and fellowships aligned with racial equity, Co-Production principles
- Nominations accepted from within and outside the learning network
- Systematized vetting process to ensure quality of grantees and fellows
- Technical assistance for nominated individuals and programs
- Leveled playing field for grassroots groups and candidates

Co-Production five core principles

1. An Asset or Strength-based Perspective
2. Valuing Real Work
3. Reciprocity – or Paying it Forward
4. Community
5. Respect

More in depth information on the five core principles on pg. 12
This D.C.-based grass-roots group of Homecomers, mentors and life-coaches took on a focus group role providing feedback for the national design team. Its members reflected on the Co-Production principles in the context of re-entry and also on the idea of the National Homecomers Academy.

The group decided to put Co-Production principles to work. Its first two projects call for Homecomer members to contribute by packaging and delivering meals, and spending time with those whom they serve – first, homeless people, then seniors. The mentors and life coaches play their role by offering support, advice, and feedback for the Homecomers as they create, develop and carry out this community-supporting work, and as they learn through helping others.
Operating from the framework of Co-Production, and within the context of seeking racial equity, the Academy will:

- Create a network of existing programs, organizations and individuals with a commitment to deploying and developing asset-based approaches;
- Strengthen the work of re-entry through a process of funding programs and fellowships;
- Use feedback loops to build knowledge and sustain a value-based culture for the whole;
- Enlist national bodies, similar to the National Legal Aid & Defender Association as partners who make available institutional infrastructure and facilities;
- Develop and nurture an overarching vision through the Board of Regents;
- Provide training, technical assistance and support to the Homecomers; and
- Communicate a new message to the society at large that will challenge the prison-industrial complex and reframe understandings about Homecomers.

Overall, the Academy’s infrastructure will be designed to ensure that affiliate programs are aligned with the overarching vision and goals of the initiative. Finally, its explicit principle-based approach and the design of its infrastructure will aim at sustained growth and the emergence of increasing knowledge of best practices over time within the shared framework of values.
The National Homecomers Academy as spelled out in the last few pages is at this point conceptual and visionary. Making it concrete will require thought, preparation and the design and implementation of start-up processes. An initial ramp-up year will provide needed time during which the structure, processes and staff requirements for the Academy can be further developed. Ongoing evaluation will anchor the reflective process as the different elements are put into place.

The Phelps Stokes Fund, as administrator of the proposed funds, will lead the ramp-up process. Homecomer members of the national team, the National Legal Aid & Defender Association, TimeBanks USA (as the proponent of Co-Production) and others will serve as the Academy’s founding affiliates. In the ramp-up period, however, a major role for the Phelps Stokes Fund will be to ensure that the founding of the Academy in its whole and its parts will hew closely to the conceptual design as laid out in this report.

During the ramp up period, in addition to those programs participating in the development of the Academy, there will be a pilot round of grants and fellowships. Affiliates will be chosen on the basis of their existing commitment to principles that are aligned with Co-Production. Beyond that alignment, they will be both fully autonomous and linked to maximize synergy. Feedback-loops designed to leverage the expertise and the inter-connections of affiliates will stimulate learning at every level and each stage.
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national team members and their work

Around the country, grass-roots organizations and their allies have undertaken work that is entirely in the spirit of Co-Production, with impressive results. However, this section will highlight only the work of the six Homecomer members of the national design team. It also will also provide short descriptions of the three organizations that initially brought the team together. This narrow focus on the national team members and their work is intended to demonstrate the possibilities for the National Homecomers Academy that arise from even a small group of Homecomers and allied individual and organizations. Other individuals and efforts will be sought out to join the learning network over time as part of an expanding, strengthening movement, nurtured by the Academy, that seeks to change the dynamics of re-entry and the criminal justice system.

The descriptions here are brief: a more detailed exposition of the Homecomers’ current work is included in Volume Two: Narratives, Research and Analysis.
homecomers on the team

the triad region of north carolina

Winston Salem, Greensboro and High Point, form the three points of North Carolina’s Triad Region.

In Greensboro and in Winston Salem, NKrumah Lewis and Darryl Hunt have each created non-profit programs to address re-entry challenges in this area.

The Renaissance and Empowerment Project, Inc. (Dr. Lewis)
Training, Role Models, Social Entrepreneurship

Dr. NKrumah Lewis, founder of the Renaissance and Empowerment Project (June, 2005), is assistant professor of Sociology at Winston Salem State University. The project’s goals are gang intervention, conflict resolution, and community re-entry training for youth and adults. Dr. Lewis brings Homecomers and the youth together to learn from each other. The men provide a model for transformation; the youth provide the men with an opportunity to contribute.

Dr. Lewis, like other team members, identified the Homecomers’ ability to secure an income base as a critical issue. In 2007, to create more jobs, Dr. Lewis secured a loan from a local bank to purchase condemned homes and put teams of Homecomers to work renovating them. Through this social enterprise, 100 men have secured employment. The communities in which the homes were located have also benefited. Part of Dr. Lewis’s vision is to expand the renovation enterprise, and to create other social enterprises that bring together Homecomers’ strengths and community needs.
homecomers as leaders ~ making connections

The Darryl Hunt Project for Freedom and Justice
Training, Services, Advocacy

Finally exonerated and released after 19 years incarceration for a crime he did not commit, Darryl Hunt has funded the Project for Freedom and Justice to assist those who have been wrongfully incarcerated; to help ex-offenders succeed in re-entry; and to be an advocate for change in the justice system. The re-entry program offers, among other things, a four-week orientation program, Transition from Corrections to Community and the World of Work, which helps Homecomers find their feet in the crucial first weeks after release. The program includes coping skills; constructive thinking skills; training on how to develop and implement personal goals; and practice in the tasks involved in seeking work. Each entering group mentors the succeeding group of Homecomers. As an advocate for change, Darryl Hunt travels the country as a speaker, sharing the story of injustice, but also of hope, that his own life has embodied.

As team members in the design process, Darryl Hunt and NKrumah Lewis have already begun to explore possibilities for collaboration, seeking ways to strengthen what they do by drawing on the work of the other.

new york

The NuLeadership Policy Group at Medgar Evers College in the City University of New York (Eddie Ellis (NY), Dr. Divine Pryor)
Policy Analysis, Strategic Planning, Curriculum Development, Training and Teaching

The NuLeadership Policy Group was founded and is directed by formerly incarcerated professionals who are part of a national network, and is the first and only academic center of its kind in the country whose entire faculty is composed of this population. At national and state levels, the group conducts research and analysis, makes recommendations for criminal justice policy reform, designs programs, performs project and program evaluations, and conducts educational trainings from the distinct perspective of professional and academic practitioners who themselves have served time in prison.

The group’s methodology and training offers probation, parole and corrections officers, mentors, teachers, service providers and others, insights into the historical experience, contemporary manifestations, nuances and worldview of people in prison, on probation or parole. It enables government agencies, law enforcement, community and faith based groups, working with these populations, to better understand the multi-varied dimensions of the population and it facilitates the work they do. In 2008, the NuLeadership Policy Group created
and implemented a 12 week series of biweekly workshops for troubled and violent youth in secure detention facilities in the Bronx and Brooklyn, in New York City. The group has conducted legislative and policy analysis for federal, state and city legislators, officials and agencies. In November, 2007, it presented a comprehensive written critique of the existing criminal justice system and a non-traditional alternative that reframes the language, roles, concepts, policies and practices of the discipline.21

washington, dc

- Curtis Watkins
Community, Social Support Networks, Action-Learning

In 1996, in one of the most violence-prone neighborhoods of DC, Curtis Watkins founded a program for youth based on the idea of continuous learning through action which serves at this point more than 5,000 youth and their families per year. Seeing the impacts of incarceration, Curtis decided to work on re-entry at a more personal level, and for two years he has been conducting group sessions with men under court or parole supervision through the DC Court Supervision Offender Services Agency (CSOSA). His task is to connect the men with life coaches, mentors and community resources. Their work together emphasizes, first, how each can be an asset to others, and second, the importance of building a community of mutually supportive individuals where each person’s ability to contribute is valued.

- Eddie B. Ellis Jr. (DC)
Transition Tool for Re-Entry, Individual Social Enterprise

As a Homecomer who is in the early stages of the process of re-entry, Eddie B Ellis is driven and inspired by his own, personal experiences and challenges. He is the author of The Window of Opportunity Pre-Release Handbook: A Life Changing Blue-Print of Resources You Need to Succeed. (Serving Metropolitan Washington, DC.) Ellis describes the book as a transition tool for people being released from jails and prisons. “As you start a new chapter in your life,” he writes, “you will need resources, and The Window… represents a tool kit for jump starting your life.” He wrote it because when he left prison two years ago after 15 years in prison, he discovered that understanding the new rules of the game on the outside and finding the help he needed was hard. Working as a janitor for now at nights, Ellis is undergoing his own re-entry journey, finding his own place of contribution. 22
A Grassroots Parallel Design Group

At the outset of the national team’s design process, Curtis Watkins was contracted to put Co-Production into action by forming a grassroots feedback loop for the design process. He created an ongoing focus group consisting of Homecomers and mentors with whom he works. Eddie Ellis (DC) joined the group shortly after it formed. Week by week, the group discussed the principles of Co-Production, reflected on ideas emerging from the team, and explored what action they might take in their own community to change and improve the dynamics of re-entry and the image of Homecomers in their community. At one of those sessions, the men reviewed Eddie Ellis’s book with him. The group’s thoughts and ideas were shared with the design team, became interwoven with the ongoing dialog and helped to shape the ideas and spirit of the National Homecomers Academy.

consultants and other support for the team

The team included a small number of consultants and three law-school students from the David A. Clarke-UDC School of Law who undertook research for the team. (Brief information on all team members is provided at the end of this Volume, with more extensive biographical data given in Volume II.)

the founding organizations

Three organizations — The Phelps Stokes Fund, The National Legal Aid & Defender Association, and TimeBanks USA — initially came together to think through Co-Production’s potential for re-entry work. That deliberation ultimately led to a proposal to the Kellogg Foundation and to the creation of the national design team and this report.

The Phelps Stokes Fund

The Phelps Stokes Fund is a 501(c) (3), nonprofit organization whose guiding motto is Education for Human Development. The Fund was established in 1911 by the will of Caroline Phelps Stokes, one of the first female philanthropists in the United States, based on her lifelong concern for the educational needs of the underprivileged. Over its 94-year history, the Phelps Stokes Fund has initiated, conducted, and sponsored hallmark educational surveys and research studies that were fundamental in shaping the improvement of education for African Americans, Native Americans, and Africans.
The National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA)

Founded in 1911, the National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA) is the nation’s oldest, largest, nonprofit membership Association devoting all its resources to advocating equal access to justice for all. The equal justice community that NLADA represents is more than half of all nonprofit lawyers in America. Our vision is to have consistently well-funded legal aid and public defense delivery systems, which provide high quality legal representation that secures economic and racial equity in every state and territory. NLADA’s leadership model brings together attorney, client and community advocates to “co-produce” justice. “Lawyers alone cannot make equal justice a reality. ...And if achieving equal justice is more than we can do ourselves we must make our work function as a catalyst that unleashes the capacity of clients and communities to contribute and help us make a better world.”

To date, NLADA has more than 700 program members, representing more than 12,000 attorneys in the 50 states, and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Micronesia.

TimeBanks USA (TBUSA)

TBUSA is an activist think tank and membership association whose mission is to build an economy that rewards decency, caring and a passion for justice. It created “Time Banking” as a means to reward people for the contributions they make to help others, build communities and fight injustice. Through the Co-Production framework, it develops and sponsors collaborative initiatives that enlist the traditional beneficiaries of social programs as partners and co-producers of social action, system change and social justice. Many, but not all of those initiatives use Time Banking. In 2006, TBUSA completed the development of Community Weaver, a Web-based Time Banking software now in use throughout the network.
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six priorities

Over the course of its deliberations, the national team identified six priority areas of re-entry work. The need for programs and resources is real. But here, they are recast through the asset-based, strength-based lens of Co-Production. Given the need for resources and action, what contribution can a National Homecomers Academy make to co-produce the world where barriers to success are confronted and removed and where Homecomers can embark on a successful journey to re-entry?

The analysis and suggestions for each of the priority areas below are illustrated by the current work of members on the team, and demonstrate how, in accordance with Co-Production principles, Homecomers can play a central role in each of these areas. Homecomers are the recipients of services but they are also contributors, service providers, thought and action leaders and co-producers of outcomes. The analysis and the examples also show that within the small network of team members a foundation for the Academy’s learning network already exists. (More extensive supporting and illustrative materials are included in Volume Two: Narrative, Research and Analysis.)
Priority Area One:

ECONOMIC VIABILITY

The key elements:

- Preparation before the journey home, replacing the uncertainty that undermines hope and purposeful action with the confidence arising from informed preparation;
- Triage to ensure transitional support from families, from Academy affiliated shelters providing food, clothing and safe space; and
- Paths to earned income that are coupled with personal growth and the development of strong and effective personal support networks.

Service/learning projects leading to employment:

- Homecomer mentorships and partnering to successive waves of Homecomers
- Homecomer friendly or Homecomer initiated enterprises generating needed goods and services for the Homecomers, their families, and their communities
- Credentialed personal development in a multi-level change agent degree program carrying access to student aid
- Public works, housing renovation, crime and violence prevention, green collar jobs

The pre-release handbook that Eddie B. Ellis Jr (DC) created, including the research process he undertook and the use made of it by Curtis Watkins, could be replicated in other jurisdictions to prepare Homecomers for release while they are still incarcerated. Additional pioneering efforts that illustrate the kind of support that Homecomers can look for from the class of Homecomers that have preceded them have begun to take shape. Examples include the Renaissance and Empowerment Project that NKrumah Lewis has created in Greensboro, NC, and the grassroots support network created in Washington, DC by Curtis Watkins, where mentors with skills and connections look out for and create opportunities for Homecomers in the network. Development could be accelerated if the Academy housed a micro-enterprise incubator that captured the success stories and best practices of previous Homecomers. Such an incubator could house internet-based sites of information that expand the network of information and contacts and learning.

On the systems change front, the Academy in partnership with the National Legal Aid & Defenders Association, the NuLeadership Policy Group and other natural allies is a starting point for the networking and dialogue that is needed to challenge onerous and unnecessary state, local and federal laws that create impediments to Homecomers seeking licensing and credentialing. The pre-release handbook could be the jumping-off point as well for a nationwide paralegal network sponsored by National Legal Aid & Defender Association member organizations.
The range of possible economic enterprises that could be developed as Academy sites might include:

- food preparation enterprises (e.g. DC Central Kitchen)
- a housing rehabilitation and construction school (e.g. Renaissance Project)
- a transportation school that trained commercial drivers, taught car repair, operated its own car pool and jitney system, leased and sold used cars, and ran a delivery system (Winston Salem delivery service)
- a paralegal service and school specializing in Homecomer’s legal issues (e.g. Eddie Ellis (DC) work expanded to other fields)
- a neighborhood security program that trained returning offenders to operate a neighborhood watch program, a security program, a conflict resolution program, a gang intervention program (e.g. Curtis Watkins work with Homecomers)

To these, we might add additional Academy sites that offered to develop other enterprises:

- a child care/child development school operating both a day and night division child care program (providing day care for offender’s children and TANF families)
- a “fashion school” that taught tailoring and fashion design as well as training in dry cleaning and operating laundry services
- a “street academy” school that trained literacy instructors (utilizing cross age peer tutoring methods) and that also offered training via apprenticeship in pre-school education and after school tutoring programs for latch key kids
- a public health vocational school that offered a range of specialities such as community health education, environmental health, HIV and AIDS education, substance abuse prevention and treatment (including conducting 12 step programs), physical fitness programs, recreation and sports programs for teens and young adults

We know some of these already exist in some form; they need to be developed and refined as models for replication.
Priority Area Two:

OVERCOMING STIGMATIZATION - CHANGING THE LANGUAGE AND IMAGE

Definition begins with language - words are not neutral. They pinpoint the facts that define a person or a situation. The Homecomers shaping this report have taken the first steps:

- They are Homecomers - not ex-offenders;
- They are coming Home - not re-entering as aliens or tourists or lepers;
- They can elect to characterize themselves, by enrolling in the work of affiliate members of the Academy, as students embarking on a journey of personal development; and
- They can find ways to “give back” to each other, to the community, to their families beginning with Academy designed and sponsored service learning projects.

Eddie Ellis (NY) of the NuLeadership Policy Group at Medgar Evers College asserts that a change in language is an essential element of a new, strength-based paradigm. “When we are not called mad dogs, animals, predators, offenders and other derogatory terms,” he writes, “we are referred to as inmates, convicts, prisoners and felons.” These terms are accepted by the media, law enforcement, the corrections system, and public policy agencies without criticism. The labels reinforce stigmatization and perpetuate the status quo because they implicitly deny the possibility of transformation.

Curtis Watkins works with a group of Homecomers in Washington DC who wear T-shirts proclaiming they are “Brothers Who Care.” Eddie Ellis (NY) has chosen the term “Nucomers” because he sees the formerly incarcerated entering in so many cases as strangers in a strange land, displaced persons seeking sanctuary and entering neighborhoods on a scale that he asserts needs conceptualization as a resettlement community. From the very first step of reacquaintance that Homecomers must make with the rhythms, rules and requirements of the outside world, the Academy can create and legitimate authentic roles: as learners and mentors, as contributors and local heroes, as award winners and as storytellers who can share the truths learned in their journeys. Language matters.
Priority Area Three:

MENTAL HEALTH

For Homecomers, a diagnosis of mental illness is the primary path to receiving government funded health care and related services. This in turn fosters the acceptance and internalization of that diagnosis. In *The Medicalization of Society*, Peter Conrad writes that medicalization can obscure the social forces that influence well-being, and that “the focus on the individual has reinforced the proclivity of treating complex societal problems with technological fixes rather than by changing the social structure.” The National Homecomers Academy will support work at the grassroots level of community that challenges medicalization and its impacts by shaping structured opportunities that:

- Build upon strength;
- Generate mutual support from fellow homecomers, family and community;
- Incorporate the golden rule - do unto others - as the moral standard;
- Insist on reciprocity to counter dependency;
- Reward contribution;
- Generate mutual support; and
- Enable each to redefine one self as a change agent for the good.

Transformation involves getting beyond learning how “to play the system.” It requires taking charge of one’s own life, and refusing to accept defeat. The Homecomers Academy provides the setting for a many-staged journey to take on the daunting challenges of re-entry. As Darryl Hunt notes, “Barriers to successful re-entry often include society prejudice against Homecomer’s minimal education and job skills, lack of affordable housing, and addiction, health, and family issues.”

One key to mental health is the formation of informal support systems built on trust and reciprocity. Homecomers helping other Homecomers to deal with problems they have encountered redefines self. Self-esteem is built through small, but cumulative victories. It grows through the opportunity to give back and contribute to others’ successes as well as one’s own. These are what generate transformation.

That is what has driven Eddie Ellis (DC) to put together his instructional manual. It is the glue that binds the group of Homecomers and community members with whom Curtis Watkins works. And it is at the core of the mission of the work done at Medgar Evers College where the intimate knowledge of Homecomers issues is turned into an asset that reshapes education at the college level and in community. Homecomers know the barriers, the discrimination, and the injustices that they had to overcome – and they can reach out to others as a way of creating a legacy in which they can take pride.
Priority Area Four:

SUPPORTIVE AND SUPPORTED COMMUNITY

“All of the recent research literature suggests that criminal punishment policies and practices that focus on ‘fixing’ or ‘correcting’ the behavior of ‘damaged’ individuals, in the absence of also repairing damaged neighborhoods, have not proven to be successful over time.”

Yet, social services on re-entry focus on individual deficiencies and needs. Confidentiality preserves isolation.

To become transformational, personal achievement must include contribution to the health of the whole and a willingness and capacity to receive from and work with others. The Academy, with its focus on Homecomer-centered action at the grassroots level, reflects a commitment to creating and strengthening community in many forms:

- Providing unqualified acceptance as in Twelve Step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous;
- Providing occasions to have fun, to celebrate, to share, to remember;
- Accepting outreach from others who care, who seek to further social justice, who are trying to give meaning to their faith;
- Creating vehicles and forums to hold officials accountable and to address unjust policies, practices and laws affecting Homecomers;
- Creating community of place in neighborhoods;
- Reclaiming habitat where children and families can thrive; and
- Partnering with other groups who are subjected to injustice: neglected children, abused partners and spouses, homeless persons, refugees and immigrants, and isolated elderly persons.

Homecomers connect most powerfully with community when they have a chance to contribute. That understanding was reflected in the work, for instance, of the Renaissance and Empowerment Project of NKrumah Lewis, in the mentoring relationships being developed by Homecomers in Washington, DC, and on a personal level, by Eddie Ellis (DC) with his creating the Window of Opportunity Guide and other projects aimed at helping other Homecomers. Repeatedly, it was stressed that Homecomers want to contribute, though the ability to do so is not immediate because other pressing needs must come first. However, in the course of the re-entry transformation, becoming an integral member of a supportive and healthy community becomes a powerful element of the journey of re-engagement, re-creation, and redemption.

There is no naivete or ignorance regarding systemic barriers and structural racism. The NuLeadership Policy Group has drawn attention to the destructive impact of interlocking systems which it characterizes as crime generating factors.

Building community gets much lip service. But the Academy must deal with the reality that Homecomers are regarded as a threat to community by those very communities and by households that have been the victims of crime. Yet Homecomers represent a massive labor force that could be enlisted to rebuild communities where the criminal justice system and the prison industrial complex have depopulated households and neighborhoods. By partnering with, nurturing, creating and strengthening community-based, grassroots groups, by utilizing various forms of service-learning to build community, the Academy can make a unique contribution that transforms Homecomers and their communities.
Priority Area Five:

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND HOMECOMERS

The Academy can provide a portal to:

- Repopulate the village;
- Provide role models for children and teens;
- Rebuild families for their own children;
- Be a presence, a listener and a surrogate family member for the children of others;
- Shape new kinds of extended family for all children;
- Reach out to the elderly and enlist them as de facto grandparents and elders;
- Make streets and empty lots safe places where children can play;
- Coach them in sports, arts, crafts and help shape a peer culture of contribution;
- Offer a compelling alternative to subcultures that entice children into illegal activity.

Homecomers are returning to families and children who may or may not want them; whom they may have abused, deserted or injured; and yet, who are often the last resort - the only safe haven a Homecomer has. It takes a village to raise a child, but villages to which many Homecomers return have been depopulated and depleted in many ways. Young males in the community are being incarcerated at higher and higher rates; mothers on public assistance have had to return to work leaving children alone; seniors without formal or informal care systems stay behind locked and barred doors, having them feeling isolated, unvalued, unsupported and afraid. 27

The barriers to successful re-entry are formidable. Sociology professor Dr. NKrumah Lewis reports that in his experience, the authorities are openly against interaction between Homecomers and delinquent youth, disallowing contribution recovering substance and alcohol abuse addicts can make to youth struggling with similar issues. Dr. Lewis also speaks to the power and impact that comes from bringing together men who have experienced life in prison with youth who are looking forward to prison as a rite of passage: “When we go out and speak, we are tangible role models for something greater than ourselves. The response from the kids is amazing - you should see how they feel a connection and respond with respect. I see the results, and the results don’t lie.” As a Homecomer who has undergone his own transformation and as a professor of sociology, Dr. Lewis speaks not from fear of what might be, but from a position of genuine knowledge.

He sees influence working both ways – on the youth and on the Homecomers. Youth need positive role models who speak from positions of experience, while Homecomers “want to be wanted.” Dr. Lewis urges men who are turning their lives around to think about helping young men in need of a father, uncle or elder brother by becoming a role model. Youth need people who rather than teaching them criminality, will instead, provide them with love, structure, guidance and discipline. Even if their own children have rejected them, Homecomers can help other kids. In Dr. Lewis’ experience “nothing combats disenfranchisement like coming into the knowledge of being needed.” The Academy provides a vehicle to tap the power and the passion that Homecomers can bring.
Priority Area Six:

SYSTEMS CHANGE IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The prison-industrial complex is a growth industry. With the exception of health care, no sector of the domestic economy has a faster growth rate. It competes directly with funding for pre-school, child care, public education, higher education, community building, and eldercare.

There is already a movement to halt this growth. But the prison-industrial complex maintains its hold based on fear in the public mind and on the economic power that it, like any major industry, has to supply jobs. Private correctional corporations now offer a seemingly efficient way for cash strapped state and local governments to grow their budgets and income – and the private sector, driven by the profit motive knows how to use money to secure political power to entrench itself. It can mask its true cost and appear cost efficient only if it keeps all cells full.

Fear has been used to persuade the public that stiff minimal mandatory sentences are imperative. The fear cannot be discounted; its impacts on public policy are real. But Homecomers have an essential role in helping to counter that fear through their voice and their actions. In specific communities Homecomers have made exceptional contributions, whether patrolling streets or the hallways of schools plagued by violence. More use needs to be made of their potential to speak with unique authenticity to what prisons now do and to awaken a frightened public to the insanity of spending between $20,000 and $200,000 a year to produce the outcomes that the prison-industrial complex consistently produces.

The system needs change. Laws now bar Homecomers from as much as 40% of all employment (public and private) in Florida. Large numbers of Homecomers have been sent back to prison not for committing a new crime but for violation of a technical condition of parole: coming late to a meeting, failing to get a job. The Academy, the grants and fellowships and the Board of Regents all seek to enlist Homecomers as change agents bringing a new voice, new information and a new critique of the assertions, the fears and the myths upon which the prison industrial complex relies.

National Team members know the power an academic institution has in credentialing and serving the Homecomer community. This report reflects the collective knowledge of those team members, drawing from a diverse base of institutions to undergird that knowledge. Those institutions are: Medgar Evers College, Winston Salem College, Howard University School of Social Work, and the UDC School of Law. The team seeks to add another chapter to the longstanding record of the Phelps Stokes Fund in reshaping educational institutions and the educational process to advance the struggle for equal justice. The National Homecomers Academy is about systemic change as well as personal transformation. The Homecomers who enroll in the Academy will embark on a journey of transformation to becoming change agents in their communities. They will provide a different kind of insurgency, an indigenous force needed to wage a different struggle in an era where interdependence is the key to creating healthy, resilient, economically sustainable communities.
homecomers as leaders

making connections

six priority areas of re-entry work

\[\text{a planning and ramp-up year}\]

The alignment with Co-Production and the ongoing re-entry work of team members means that these individuals and/or their organizations or programs will be among the Academy’s founding affiliates and pioneers. As its first grantees and fellows, they will help to shape the operational foundations of the three parts of the Academy over the course of the ramp-up year.

the affiliate learning network

The pioneers will come together to consider how as affiliates their own work can:

- Most effectively contribute to the overarching vision of the Academy; and
- Strengthen the synergies within the mosaic of programs and approaches that is being formed.

Already, Darryl Hunt and NKrumah Lewis have begun that process in the Triad Region of North Carolina, mapping out possibilities in their program capacities so they can each strengthen their own programs by calling on the other. Similarly, Curtis Watkins in DC has brought Co-Production principles to his work on re-entry in Washington, DC in a process that has brought together the deliberations of the design team and their action and deliberation on the ground. (See Volume II: Narrative, Research, Analysis for more detail.)
leadership

In a similar manner, the pioneer affiliates will exercise leadership in the ramp-up year by:

• Establishing a culture of mutual support and learning, including technical assistance;
• Participating in (and thereby helping to shape) the feedback loops that will become characteristic of the Academy, including the Academy’s first national conference, the IT-based networks that are constructed for the Academy, and user-oriented evaluations; and
• Conveying to relevant audiences in the world of corrections and beyond the significance of the work they are doing as affiliates of the National Homecomers Academy.

applying co-production

The pioneers will also take a leadership role by modeling for others how the five core principles of the Co-Production framework can be manifested and measured in their own work and programs. In the ramp-up year, they will be called on to refine tools by which affiliates and affiliate nominees will:

• Assess the alignment between their work and its values with the principles of Co-Production;
• Determine how strongly their work gives expression to each of the five core principles;
• Examine whether their work is dynamically moving forward to greater expression of the principles over time; and
• Incorporate processes that build Co-Production principles into the day-to-day operation of their work.

Eddie Ellis (NY) has identified six specific components as characteristic of all successful programs, services and policies that focus on Homecomers.

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<th>In brief, the characteristics are:</th>
<th>All are consonant with and further expand Co-Production as an underlying set of principles. How the two sets of principles relate in practice requires dialogue, reflection – a kind of appreciative inquiry – and, possibly, reflective observation of practice as well. This process of gaining mutual familiarity with and appreciation for differing sets of principles will apply to all nominees and awardees as they become Academy affiliates.</th>
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<td>(1) demographic matching;</td>
<td>(4) a strength or asset-based approach;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) cultural competency;</td>
<td>(5) non-generic, custom-tailored approaches;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) linguistic competency;</td>
<td>(6) community specificity that is rooted in the community dynamics of those receiving services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the future, all affiliates — that is, all grantees and fellows — will be called on to seek out and recommend new nominees. During the ramp-up year, however, the pioneer affiliates will have an additional role. They will help construct and give feedback on the nominating, vetting, assessment and award processes, which will be designed by Phelps Stokes staff in collaboration with the affiliates and with guidance from the Board of Regents.

The Board of Regents will serve as an advisory body on some fronts and an acting body on others. The question of whether all board members should be Homecomers was explored and the group unanimously concluded that the board must also include other community and national leaders. Homecomers in particular urged the importance of selecting members with the access and influence that would be needed to advocate effectively for the goals of the Academy and its members.

The board will establish strategies, make final recommendations on which nominees should receive grants and fellowships, help to shape and promote the Academy, and advocate for systems change at the state and national level and with the public-at-large. Equally important to these responsibilities, the board will ensure that all of the Homecoming activities and processes stay true to the values of racial equity and co-production.
**final statement**

Successful re-entry requires a journey of transformation for each and every Homecomer. Currently, far more fail in that journey than succeed. Fear of Homecomers in the public mind leads powerful, interlocking institutions to use punitive, not supportive responses to failure. Based on the principles of Co-Production, this initiative takes a different approach. It seeks to engage and support Homecomers as the change agents needed to recreate and rebuild their own lives, to contribute to the rebuilding of the communities they rejoin, and to challenge the systems that have led to such overwhelming numbers of incarceration and re-incarceration.

The initiative will also actively seek to achieve racial equity through systems change. The design team has repeatedly noted the disproportionate impact of the justice system and the prison-industrial complex on persons of color – particularly black Americans – and their communities across the United States. By partnering and collaborating with national organizations and networks, The National Homecomers Academy will mount effective challenges to current systems and policies.

Finally, the National Homecomers Academy has been designed so that Homecomers, first and foremost, can take a lead role, joining with others as indispensable leaders and partners in the work of transformation and systems change that successful re-entry requires. Alongside the members of their communities, Homecomers are entitled to contribute to the common good and to their own pursuit of happiness and well-being. We must create partnerships that unleash the Homecomers’ potential for good, and that support them in becoming a voice of conscience and authenticity, and a source of moral authority that is listened to and heard.

**Successful re-entry requires a journey of transformation for each and every Homecomer.**
members of the homecomers initiative design team*

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In addition:
Christine Gray was the overall facilitator and the lead writer/editor for this report. Dara Baldwin assisted with the project management and administration of information for the team. Wellington Waters designed the logo, cover and National Homecomers Academy diagram. He is the principal of Watersedge Grafixx. Debra Handel and Sandra Flotow were the graphics art team from Newcomb Integrated Marketing Solutions that designed and printed the document.

*Biographical details of team members are provided in Volume II: Narrative, Research and Analysis.
endnotes


6 Jerome Miller, Search and Destroy: African American Males in the Criminal Justice System p. 9 (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press 1996)


12 Re-Entry Policy Council, Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council - Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community


14 Ellis, “Criminal Justice in New York: Just Us.”


16 Ellis, “Criminal Justice in New York: Just Us.”


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