

Spring 2022

What's New at Praxis!

As we close out this contract year, we want to offer a few new learning opportunities for you and your staff. We encourage you to register for all of the trainings that interest you!

Register Now:

- [Urban Trauma 101](#) — May 25 at 12:00 PM ET
- [Learning Community on Leading Educational Groups for People in SUD Treatment](#) — Tuesdays, June 7 - July 12 from 12:00 - 1:30 PM
- [How to Talk to your Clients about PEP & PrEP](#) — June 10 at 12:00 PM ET
- [How to Support Staff Post Overdose](#) — June 22 at 12:00 PM ET

Meet the Praxis Team: Daisy M. Hernandez



Daisy M. Hernandez is one of our new trainers and joins us with vast experience as a community mental health and substance use direct care clinician. She holds a Master's degree in Social Work and has focused on women who struggle with mental health disorder and substance use disorder and women who have been incarcerated and their children. Daisy identifies as a woman in long-term recovery and has successfully reintegrated with her family and community after incarceration. Her lived experience motivates her passion. In her free time, she is a creative writer and artist of fresh cut flowers and resin. She is originally from Caguas, Puerto Rico and currently resides in Western MA with her fish Betta, snail Larry, and chihuahua Chiquitin.

Interrupting Urban Trauma: Harm Reduction for Incarcerated Mothers & Their Children

By Daisy Hernandez

The COVID-19 pandemic, opioid pandemic, and mass incarceration have had devastating effects on all aspects of life for women within the correctional system in Massachusetts and nationally. Even before mass incarceration rates exploded in the 1980's, women were struggling to keep their families together. Statistics by the U.S. Census Bureau report that [of the 11 million single parent families with children under 18 years old in 2021, the majority were headed by single mothers](#). The most troubling and consistent data is the number of women who report being primary caretakers of their children at admission to a correctional facility. Since the start of the war on drugs in the 1980's, [the number of children with incarcerated mothers has increased 100 percent](#). Mass incarceration has devastated many families and communities within my own Latinx cultural group.

Locally, Massachusetts has made significant efforts to steadily decrease the prison population. Between January 2020 and January 2021, [the population of incarcerated women decreased by five percent](#). Currently, the levels of incarcerated women within the MA Department of Corrections stands at [10 per 100,000](#)--the lowest since 2000. Historically, [women have been incarcerated at higher rates than men for poverty crime and drug offenses](#) (e.g. stealing food, trading sex for money, shoplifting, etc.). Since the COVID-19 pandemic de-carceration policies, for public health reasons, incarceration and arrest rates of women for violent offenses have increased again. Although we started to see a decline in the disproportionality of women of color being incarcerated compared to white women, [as of 2020, Black and Latinx women are still being imprisoned at 1.7 and 1.3 times the rate of white women](#), respectively. A November 2020 Sentencing Project publication reported [1.2 million women in the U.S. were under the supervision of the Criminal Justice System](#), and it is estimated that 80 percent have children younger than 18 years old. [Parental incarceration causes psychological strain, antisocial behavior, educational challenges, and economic hardships](#) for mothers and their children.

As a Latina that has checked off all women of color statistics, and as ironic as it might sound in a country that has historically and systematically oppressed the rights of people of color, I can stand and say that I was lucky to have served my time in Massachusetts--and specifically Hampden County. Trying to parent an early teen son and support my elderly grandmother over expensive jail house calls was not an easy thing to do. My grandmother did what she could, but she did not speak English. Because the Hampden County's Sheriff Department had a housing reentry program and the All-Inclusive Support Services Community Reentry Program, it was possible for my son and I to be reunified in safe and independent housing after I was in and out of the MA Criminal Justice System for almost 10 years. Because of programs like these and people in the system fighting for our rights, my son and I were the first family reunified with support of the CHSS Housing Program; this was unheard of in the Pioneer Valley and in many cities, counties, and states around the country.

I may be an optimist, but one of the silver linings that I have found from COVID-19 is the data and evidence supporting comprehensive policy strategies for alternative sentencing for women. To me, these policies say that alternatives to sentencing are possible. Most women are held in jails pending pre-trial for poverty crimes because they cannot afford bail. Every day a woman spends in jail is another day their children are exposed to the potential of urban trauma and poverty. Utilizing alternative sentencing policies to support specialized courts would have a positive impact on the education system, child welfare system, and most importantly, on the future of our nation.

Mother's Day was earlier this month, and to think that at this time every year, millions of children are separated from their mothers feels heavy and is hard to fathom. Incarceration punishes more than just the individual; it impacts their children, families, and communities. In 2018, Massachusetts passed the [Primary Caretaker Act \(S.770\)](#) as part of a criminal justice omnibus bill. This bill provides community-based sentencing alternatives for primary caretakers of dependent children who have been convicted of non-violent crimes. Studies have shown that [the rate of incarceration decreased mostly due to low admissions instead of releases](#). The Primary Caretaker Act and the public health policy responses to COVID-19 can serve as proof that comprehensive policies to alternative sentencing do work. Alternative sentencing for women also helps decrease the cycle of poverty and urban trauma and supports the development of healthy children and communities. Keeping children and parents together is the healthiest approach to sentencing.

Harm Reduction approaches are central in all aspects of the work done by providers working with parents who are incarcerated or facing incarceration. The effects of incarceration negatively impact families for a long time after the commitment is completed. Having the knowledge and advocating for policies and resources that support keeping families together is one way to bring harm reduction practice to a system that is built on opposing values.

Join Us to Complete Your Required Trainings

We are still offering our standard trainings and technical assistance. Please note that these trainings are 90-minutes long and provide 1.5 CE credits. They are being held on Zoom. [Please register here.](#)

Contact Us

Contact us to request training or technical assistance at praxis@c4innovates.com.

