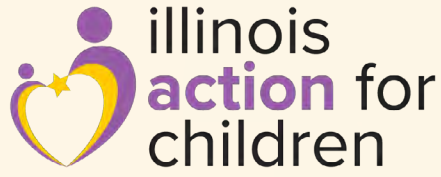




strengthening
FAMILY
connections

A faded background image of a smiling man with a beard carrying a young girl on his shoulders. Both are smiling broadly. The girl has her hair in a bun.

strengthening
FAMILY
connections



A 2023 CHIBYDESIGN COLLABORATION



**It is the sunlight of
parental love and
encouragement that
enables a child to grow
in competence and
slowly gain mastery
over his environment.**

FELICITY BAUER

American Author



ILLINOIS ACTION FOR CHILDREN

Executive Summary

Understanding the Challenges for Incarcerated Parents, Carergivers, and Youth

Nearly one in every twenty children in Illinois (200,000) and approximately 37,000 children in Chicago have had a parent in jail or prison. Black and Latinx children are more likely than others to be impacted by parental incarceration. Nationally, it's estimated that 1 in 4 Black children, 1 in 10 Latinx children, and 1 in 25 white children will experience the incarceration of a parent by their early teenage years. These racial disparities driven by the ever-growing carceral system have led to racially disproportionate outcomes for Black and Latinx families. The incarceration of a parent is known to negatively affect children in a myriad of ways, including but not limited to trauma, lower educational attainment, and the likelihood of justice system involvement. Additionally, parental incarceration significantly harms the families and communities of those incarcerated, creating significant economic and health-related burdens for parents and caregivers, further exacerbating the harm inflicted.

Illinois Action for Children (IAFC) has committed to developing solutions addressing the separation of families by parental incarceration. To break the cycles of poverty and racism that prevent Black and Latinx children from achieving their dreams, IAFC has pledged to engage families and communities to design and test strategies and tools that strengthen relationships among families impacted by parental incarceration. This engagement was designed and executed to achieve those aims.

By facilitating co-design, futuring, and prototyping workshops, we amassed the collective knowledge of formerly incarcerated parents, children of incarcerated parents, caregivers, family support service providers, academics, and justice system stakeholders to identify key outcomes that must be pursued to strengthen connections among families impacted by incarceration. The outcomes include:

¹ Haskins, A. R., Jacobsen, W. C., & Mittleman, J. (2023). Optimism and Obstacles: Racialized Constraints in College Attitudes and Expectations among Teens of the Prison Boom. *Sociology of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380407231167412>

² Saneta deVuono-powell, Chris Schweidler, Alicia Walters, and Azadeh Zohrabi. (2015). Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families. Oakland, CA: Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design. <https://www.whopaysreport.org/>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (CONT.)

1. Sustained family connections that create thriving relationships and stronger communities
2. Prioritized access to healing and wellness supports for Black and Latinx families to enable resilient and healthy communities
3. Continuous investment in family-sustaining employment and financial security for justice-impacted families
4. Assured access to resources that enable families to flourish
5. Improved educational pathways for Black and Latinx communities to create their desired futures

To actualize these outcomes, workshop co-designers developed three concepts to address significant barriers to incarceration-impacted families building and maintaining strong connections. These concepts address the impact of emotional and physical distance on family bonds, economic barriers children and families face, and the emotional, financial, and educational challenges faced by youth forced into the child welfare system. Each concept offers ideas that IAFC and partner organizations can advance, test, and develop into pilot programs that strengthen family connections for incarceration-impacted families.



DESIGN PARTNER



ChiByDesign is a civic and social impact design firm. We partner with systems and organizations, such as governments, NGOs, and philanthropy, to understand the complex civic and social issues of our time through the lens of the people and communities most harmed and impacted.

In every project, one of our requirements is for lived experts to contribute to the project, and this extends beyond sharing their experiences. We create space for them to make decisions. We compensate those who join our team for the duration of the engagement for their knowledge and expertise. With them, we co-create the tools, resources, and experiences pivotal to ensure they can holistically meet their needs and have thriving and self-sustaining communities.



Chris Rudd
Founder + CEO



Justin Walker
Project Lead



Tommie Collins
Design Researcher and Strategist



Kendell Miller-Roberts
Design Research Associate



Mikayla Buford
Design Strategy, Intern



PROJECT SPONSOR

Illinois Action for Children



Illinois Action for Children is a catalyst for organizing, developing, and supporting strong families and powerful communities where children matter most.

Illinois Action for Children exists today because of the recognition that American families, to be self-sufficient, need access to quality, safe, and affordable child care so parents can go to work with confidence that their children are in good hands. We lead the way in the service of children and families, distinguished by our “Strong Families, Powerful Communities” approach to child development.



PROSTOCK-STUDIO // ADOBE STOCK

LIVED EXPERIENCE PARTNERS



Equity and Transformation (EAT) is a non-profit, community-led organization founded by and for post-incarcerated people. EAT was established in 2018 with the mission to uplift the voices and power of Black Chicagoans engaged in the informal economy: the diversified set of economic activities, enterprises, jobs, and workers that are not regulated or protected by the state.



Transforming Re-Entry Services works to create an equitable future for reentry communities. Founded and incorporated by Black women and incarcerated individuals, TRS combine services, advocacy, and research to fill in the gaps in the system, restore families, and build economic and political power.

WORKSHOP CO-DESIGNERS*

Latasia Black

Franklin County Children Services

Joseph Burns

Vincent Carter

Transforming Re-Entry Services

Kisha D. Davis

Illinois Department of Human Services,
Division of Early Childhood

Diane Dennis

Cristina Gonzalez del Riego

Start Early

Brenda Larrue

Jamesha Lathan

Ohio Department of Education

Dr. Keyuana Muhammad

Cook County Sheriff's Office

Minister Lionel Muhammad

Transforming Re-Entry Services

Lauren Simmons

Cook County State's Attorney's Office

Angel Williams-Davenport

Department of Children and
Family Services, Erikson Institute

Dyanna Winchester

Marquese Winchester

* This is not a comprehensive list of all co-designers.
These names represent those willing to share their
participation in our workshops.



BEAUNITTA VAN WYK/PEOPLEIMAGES.COM // ADOBE STOCK



ILLINOIS ACTION FOR CHILDREN

*The ChiByDesign
Approach*

S FANT/PEOPLEIMAGES.COM // ADOBE STOCK

Goals, Deliverables & Methodology

GOALS. Illinois Action for Children engaged ChiByDesign to design and employ a co-design approach to better understand the challenges incarceration impacted families face and co-create interventions that address them. ChiByDesign facilitated a series of workshops that convened formerly incarcerated parents, children of formerly incarcerated parents, caregivers, and stakeholders across the justice and childwelfare systems as well as family support organizations. The workshops aimed to



Convene families who have been impacted by incarceration and other stakeholders to understand the conditions, policies, practices, and experiences that disconnect children and families from incarcerated parents.

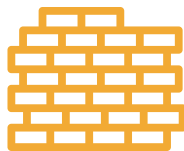


Collectively imagine futures where the needs of families impacted by incarceration are met.



Develop anti-racist infrastructures with lived experts that foster positive connections between incarcerated parents, their children, and those who care for them.

DELIVERABLES. ChiByDesign was ultimately engaged to:



identify barriers to building strong family connections.



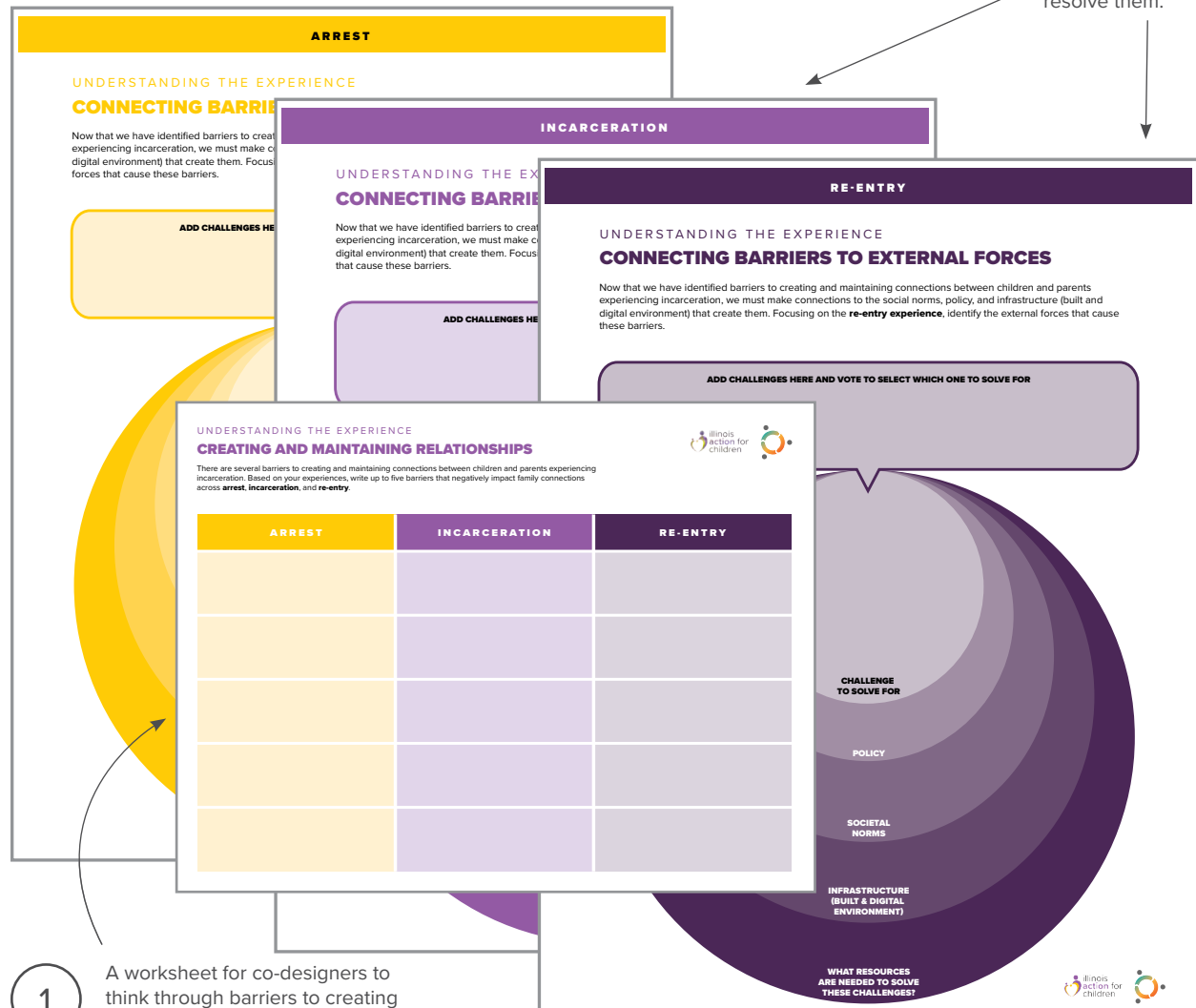
develop and prototype concepts to strengthen family bonds.

GOALS, DELIVERABLES, AND METHODOLOGY (CONT.)

METHODOLOGY. The project's goals were achieved by:

2

Co-designers selected the barrier(s) to focus on. They then considered the entities creating these barriers and determine the elements required to resolve them.

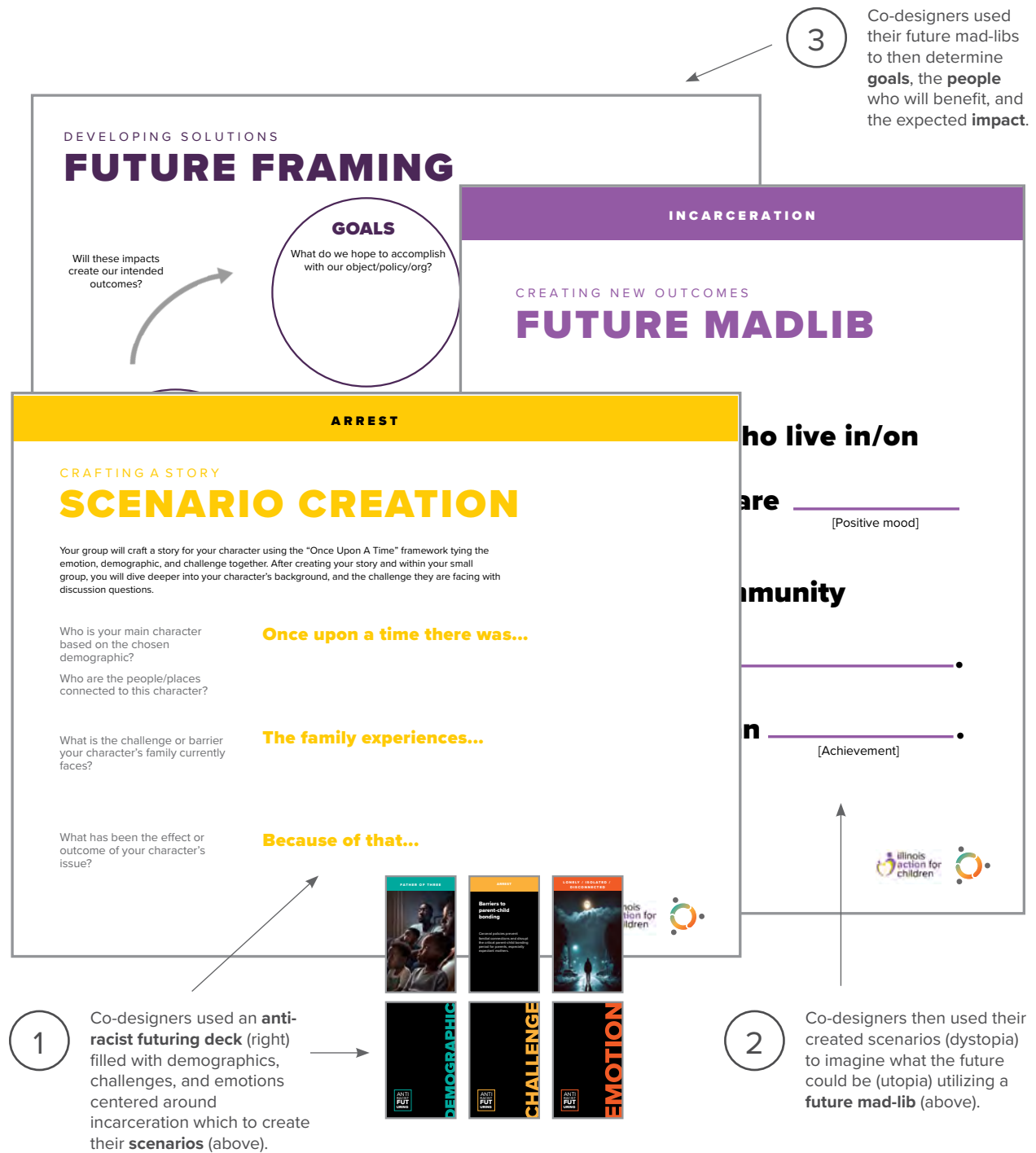


1

A worksheet for co-designers to think through barriers to creating and maintaining relationships between children and parents experiencing incarceration.

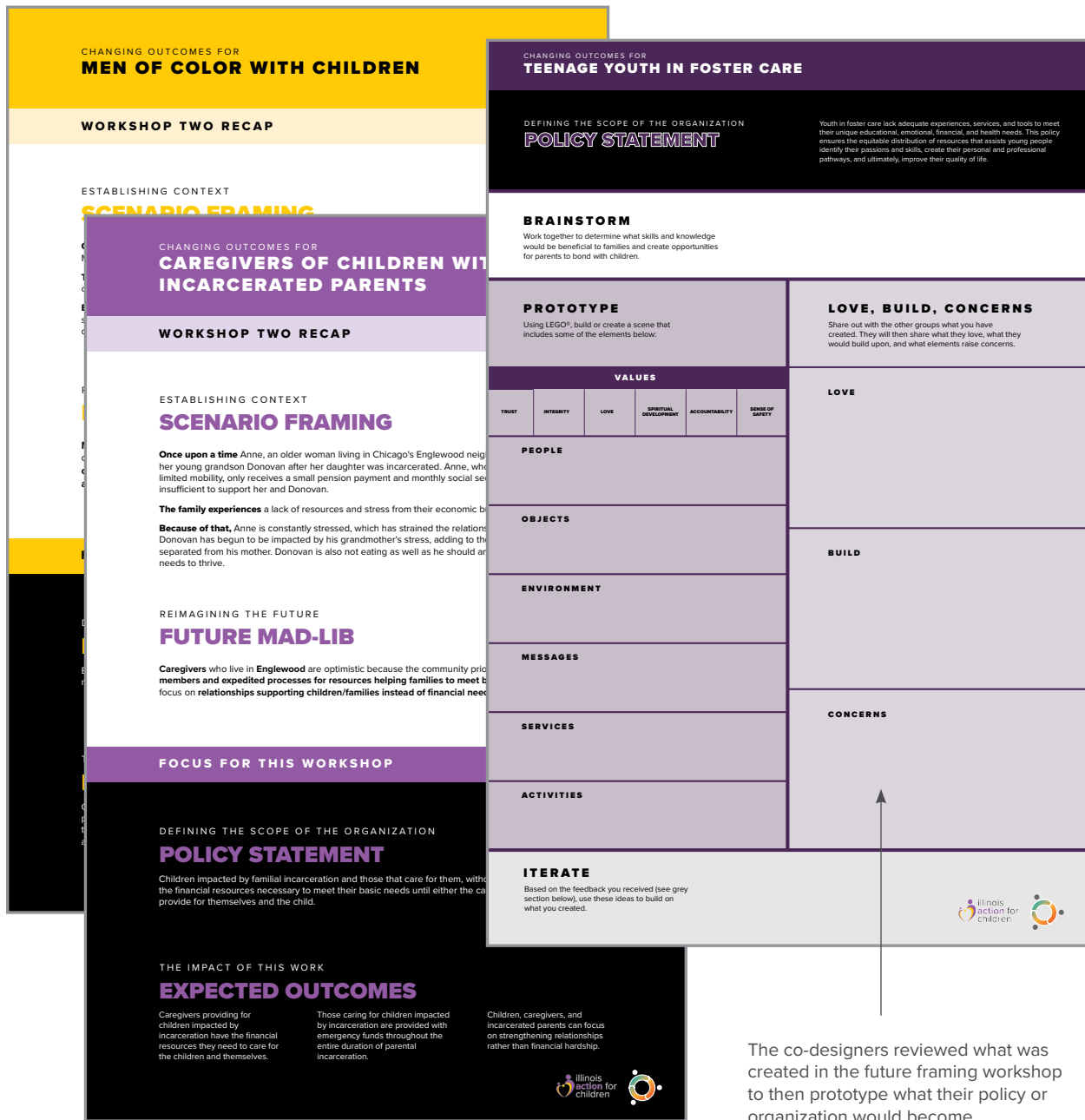
Understanding. Convening a diverse group of stakeholders (formerly incarcerated parents, those who've had incarcerated parents, caregivers, and other stakeholders) to make connections between their experiences and the policies, practices, and infrastructures that influence them.

GOALS, DELIVERABLES, AND METHODOLOGY (CONT.)



Future Framing. Collectively imagining futures in which families impacted by incarceration have developed and maintained strong connections and are supported by one another and their communities.

GOALS, DELIVERABLES, AND METHODOLOGY (CONT.)



Prototyping. Collectively prototyping new policies, practices, and infrastructures that address the challenges incarcerated parents and their families face. These prototypes will inform future programming for parents and children within Cook County.



ILLINOIS ACTION FOR CHILDREN

Key Learnings

JEFF BERGEN/PEOPLEIMAGES.COM // ADOBE STOCK

CO-DESIGNER IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

Barriers to Strong Family Connections

The co-design workshops surfaced many challenges hindering the ability of families to build strong connections due to a parent's incarceration. The barriers were wide-ranging, from mental health to carceral policies and procedures inhibiting parent and child bonding.

Co-designers identified 22 key challenges that serve as barriers to developing and maintaining strong family connections. These challenges must be addressed to foster and sustain positive family connections.



OVER-INCARCERATION IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

1

Overly punitive school disciplinary approaches ostracize and criminalize Black boys with learning and behavioral needs. Instead of receiving services or being properly diagnosed, they are removed from the classroom and heavily disciplined, perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline and infringing upon their quality of life.

2

Disinvestment in Black communities creates environments that lack resources and community-supporting spaces. Subsequently, these communities are over-policed and over-surveilled, leading to disproportionate involvement with the justice system.



PARENT-CHILD BONDING BARRIERS

1

Carceral policies prevent familial connections and disrupt the critical parent-child bonding period for parents, especially expectant mothers.

2

The carceral system penalizes families when placing incarcerated parents in geographically inaccessible prisons. Because of the lack of proximity, family visitation becomes significantly limited and costly, inhibiting critical bonding time.

3

Carceral policies and infrastructure, such as restrictive physical contact, limited visitation time, and glass partitions create dehumanizing and non-child friendly environments that immensely strain parent-child relationships by inhibiting critical parent-child bonding time.

4

Prison culture and infrastructure force incarcerated parents to have dual identities—adopting mindsets and practices that ensure their survival but ultimately conflict with being an active and loving parent.

5

Carceral systems lack the established procedures and mechanisms that ensure consistent communication between incarcerated parents and their children and families. Additionally, the capitalistic nature of carceral communication restricts familial [contact] to those who can afford it.



ECONOMIC BARRIERS

1

Current policies limit formerly incarcerated citizens' employment opportunities by including criminal records in background checks. This limitation prevents them from supporting themselves and their families, thus increasing recidivism.

2

Parental incarceration causes stress and creates undue financial burdens for families, which can cause household instability and pressure for caregivers and children to provide.

3

U.S. culture reinforces a negative and harmful stigma upon citizens who have experienced arrest, particularly those who are parents. Consequently, the stigma follows them throughout their arrest, incarceration, and re-entry—significantly affecting the financial, social, emotional, and mental wellbeing of their children, family, and other loved ones.

4

Prison culture and infrastructure force incarcerated parents to have dual identities—adopting mindsets and practices that ensure their survival but ultimately conflict with being an active and loving parent.



TRAUMA AND MENTAL HEALTH BARRIERS

1

Carceral facilities produce and reinforce trauma which extends beyond incarceration. Post-traumatic prison disorder and other mental health challenges negatively impact formerly incarcerated parents' relationships and interactions with their children, increasing disconnection and toxicity.

2

The dehumanizing and racist interactions experienced due to the criminal justice system's processes and arrest protocols produce and reinforce mental health challenges, trauma, and intense emotions for incarcerated parents.





TRAUMA AND MENTAL HEALTH BARRIERS (CONT.)

3

Acclimation to civilian life after incarceration is a multi-layered process that the formerly incarcerated cannot bear alone. They require services to meet their unique needs—repairing relationships, grief of personal and material loss, finding employment, and more.

4

In an era where technology is at our disposal, the recording of an arrest amplifies the lasting effects of the experience—requiring those arrested to relive the mental and emotional trauma and potentially disrupt their attempts to tread a new path.

5

Prisons, jails and other carceral environments can instigate intense emotions such as grief and sorrow that have profound mental health effects and leave incarcerated parents feeling abandoned and isolated from their families and the outside world.

6

The incarceration of a parent instigates immense physical and emotional distance from their children and families, which strains the parent-child relationship and creates knowledge gaps that prevent families from understanding each other's circumstances and supporting one another.



DENIAL OF PARENTAL RIGHTS AND AUTHORITY

1

The child welfare and education systems strip parents of their parental rights during and after incarceration, severely limiting their ability to parent and make decisions on behalf of their children.

2

City and county housing policies preventing returning citizens from living in public housing have led to the loss of family homes and increased homelessness and recidivism—creating considerable barriers to family reconnection.

3

Carceral separation creates a parent-child disconnection that fractures the relationship, diminishing children’s perception of parental authority and inhibiting parents’ ability to lead and guide.



LACK OF CROSS-SYSTEM/INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION & COLLABORATION

1

The lack of inter-agency collaboration between county and state agencies creates significant barriers for incarcerated parents and families to comply with requirements and navigate the carceral and child welfare systems.

2

State agencies, jails, and prisons lack coordination and the necessary policies and resources to provide all incarcerated parents the tools, programming, and resources needed to develop strong relationships with their child(ren) and fulfill their role as parents.



JULIAIX // ADOBE STOCK

Connecting Barriers to Stages of Incarceration

The diagram below connects the 22 identified barriers to strong family connections to the three stages of incarceration—arrest, incarceration, and re-entry.

ICON LEGEND

-  Over-incarceration in Black communities
-  Parent-child bonding barriers
-  Economic barriers
-  Trauma and mental health barriers
-  Denial of parental rights and authority
-  Lack of cross-system inter-agency coordination and collaboration

ARREST



Overly punitive school disciplinary approaches ostracize and criminalize Black boys with learning and behavioral needs. Instead of receiving services or being properly diagnosed, they are removed from the classroom and heavily disciplined, perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline and infringing upon their quality of life.



Disinvestment in Black communities creates environments that lack resources and community-supporting spaces. Subsequently, these communities are over-policed and over-surveilled, leading to disproportionate involvement with the justice system.



U.S. culture reinforces a negative and harmful stigma upon citizens who have experienced arrest, particularly those who are parents. Consequently, the stigma follows them throughout their arrest, incarceration, and re-entry—significantly affecting the financial, social, emotional, and mental wellbeing of their children, family, and other loved ones.



The dehumanizing and racist interactions experienced due to the criminal justice system's processes and arrest protocols produce and reinforce mental health challenges, trauma, and intense emotions for incarcerated parents.



In an era where technology is at our disposal, the recording of an arrest amplifies the lasting effects of the experience—requiring those arrested to relive the mental and emotional trauma and potentially disrupt their attempts to tread a new path.



Carceral policies prevent familial connections and disrupt the critical parent-child bonding period for parents, especially expectant mothers.

INCARCERATION



Prison culture and infrastructure force incarcerated parents to have dual identities—adopting mindsets and practices that ensure their survival but ultimately conflict with being an active and loving parent.



Prisons, jails and other carceral environments can instigate intense emotions such as grief and sorrow that have profound mental health effects and leave incarcerated parents feeling abandoned and isolated from their families and the outside world.



The incarceration of a parent instigates immense physical and emotional distance from their children and families, which strains the parent-child relationship and creates knowledge gaps that prevent families from understanding each other's circumstances and supporting one another.



The lack of inter-agency collaboration between county and state agencies creates significant barriers for incarcerated parents and families to comply with requirements and navigate the carceral and child welfare systems.



State agencies, jails, and prisons lack coordination and the necessary policies and resources to provide all incarcerated parents the tools, programming, and resources needed to develop strong relationships with their child(ren) and fulfill their role as parents.



The carceral system penalizes families when placing incarcerated parents in geographically inaccessible prisons. Because of the lack of proximity, family visitation becomes significantly limited and costly, inhibiting critical bonding time.



Carceral policies and infrastructure, such as restrictive physical contact, limited visitation time, and glass partitions create dehumanizing and non-child friendly environments that immensely strain parent-child relationships by inhibiting critical parent-child bonding time.



Prison culture and infrastructure force incarcerated parents to have dual identities—adopting mindsets and practices that ensure their survival but ultimately conflict with being an active and loving parent.



Carceral systems lack the established procedures and mechanisms that ensure consistent communication between incarcerated parents and their children and families. Additionally, the capitalistic nature of carceral communication restricts familial [contact] to those who can afford it.



The dehumanizing and racist interactions experienced due to the criminal justice system's processes and arrest protocols produce and reinforce mental health challenges, trauma, and intense emotions for incarcerated parents.

RE-ENTRY



Current policies limit formerly incarcerated citizens' employment opportunities by including criminal records in background checks. This limitation prevents them from supporting themselves and their families, thus increasing recidivism.



Carceral facilities produce and reinforce trauma which extends beyond incarceration. Post-traumatic prison disorder and other mental health challenges negatively impact formerly incarcerated parents' relationships and interactions with their children, increasing disconnection and toxicity.



Acclimation to civilian life after incarceration is a multi-layered process that the formerly incarcerated cannot bear alone. They require services to meet their unique needs—repairing relationships, grief of personal and material loss, finding employment, and more.



The child welfare and education systems strip parents of their parental rights during and after incarceration, severely limiting their ability to parent and make decisions on behalf of their children.



City and county housing policies preventing returning citizens from living in public housing have led to the loss of family homes and increased homelessness and recidivism—creating considerable barriers to family reconnection.



Carceral separation creates a parent-child disconnection that fractures the relationship, diminishing children's perception of parental authority and inhibiting parents' ability to lead and guide.



ILLINOIS ACTION FOR CHILDREN

Recommendations

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Co-designers identified 5 key outcomes that must be pursued in supporting families impacted by incarceration. These outcomes represent co-designers' collective vision of a future in which children and their parents are connected and supported.



Sustained family connections that create thriving relationships and stronger communities

Developing thriving family relationships requires constant and consistent positive interactions between incarcerated parents, their children, and the caregivers caring for their children. It also requires establishing conditions that allow them to focus on building relationships rather than the hardships typically associated with parental incarceration.



Prioritized access to healing and wellness supports for Black and Latinx families to enable resilient and healthy communities

Beyond financial resources, families impacted by incarceration require resources and supports that facilitate healing and holistic wellness (social, emotional, spiritual, and physical).



Continuous investment in family-sustaining employment and financial security for incarceration-impacted families

Increasing families' financial security requires the sustained provision of financial resources and employment opportunities required for caregivers and returning parents to care for their children and themselves.



CO-DESIGNER DRIVEN DESIRED OUTCOMES (CONT.)



Assured access to resources that enable families to flourish

Families impacted by incarceration (parents, children, and caregivers) require guaranteed access to resources and infrastructures that enable them to meet their basic needs, promote wellness, and expand access to knowledge and digital tools.



Improved educational pathways for Black and Latinx communities to create their desired futures

Enabling Black and Latinx communities to create their desired futures requires increased access to traditional and non-traditional education pathways, enabling parents to support and provide for themselves and their families and children to pursue their dreams.



BEAUNITTA VAN WYK/PEOPLEIMAGES.COM // ADOBE STOCK

RECOMMENDATIONS

Principles

Developed from co-designer discussions, the following principles should be incorporated into interventions and utilized as a metric for creating positive connections between incarcerated parents and their children.

Champion family and community bonding.

Elevate and facilitate the development of strong bonds beyond the parent-child relationship by creating spaces and programming that strengthen connections amongst parents, children, caregivers, and extended family.

Advance youth agency and empowerment.

Create environments that empower youth to exercise agency and decision-making, especially decisions directly impacting their well-being.

PRINCIPLES (CONT.)

Prioritize family preservation. Develop policy that cultivates cross-sector action to equitably distribute resources to families and ultimately, prioritize preservation and prevent separation.

Equip justice-impacted families with mental health resources and support. Guarantee family access to mental health resources and support (i.e. family therapy) and ensure community service providers are fully equipped to foster and sustain family well-being and healing.

Prioritize autonomy and self-determination. Empower justice impacted families to exercise agency over resource acquisition and build confidence in financial decision-making.

Cultivate inter-agency data sharing and collaboration. Design interventions that validate, educate, and empower children and youth to flourish and reduce retraumatization.

Develop centralized relationship-nurturing spaces. Create spaces that are geographically accessible to caregivers and youth and nurture existing and new relationships.

Curtail justice and child welfare system involvement. When supporting justice-impacted families, develop policies and practices that prevent unnecessary child welfare and justice system involvement.

Advance digital literacy. Ensure technology access and education for children, caregivers, and returning parents, enabling them to utilize available services and improve family communication.

Provide hyper-local and culturally responsive services. Ensure caregivers, returning parents, and children can easily access culturally responsive support services and family-sustaining resources close to their homes.

Leverage public infrastructures to promote family bonding and community empowerment. Transform public infrastructures into welcoming community spaces that facilitate relationship-building, learning, and self-efficacy.

Cultivate inter-agency data sharing and collaboration. Enable caregivers' immediate access to financial resources by implementing mechanisms that foster cross-agency data sharing and collaboration.

Leverage play to strengthen parent-child bonds. Provide various indoor and outdoor play-based activities for parents and children to connect, create positive memories, and develop stronger relationships.



ALLSTAR/PEOPLEIMAGES.COM // ADOBE STOCK



ILLINOIS ACTION FOR CHILDREN

Recommendations to Strengthen Family Connections

Co-designers selected challenges inhibiting families' ability to create positive connections and collectively developed prototypes to address them. They determined which of the previously identified challenges they preferred to build interventions for. Next, co-designers determined what the future might look like if that challenge was solved and identified outcomes that interventions must deliver. Finally, they collectively built solutions that addressed the selected challenges and enabled positive connections for families impacted by incarceration.

CO-DESIGNER-CREATED CONCEPT

Play-Centered Family Support Spaces



CONCEPT DESCRIPTION

Co-designers chose to address the impact of emotional and physical distance on family bonds. They created an accessible, family-centered space that utilizes play-based activities to help parents, children, and families connect and support each other. A non-profit collaborating with state agencies to make programming possible will run this new family-centered space. Co-designers developed the following concept to demonstrate the possibilities of leveraging family-

CONCEPT DESCRIPTION (CONT.)

centered spaces to strengthen the bonds between parents and children:

To sustain and build relationships between incarcerated parent(s) and their child(ren), non-profit organizations will create programming for incarcerated parent(s), children, caregivers, and extended family members to bond outside of carceral facilities. At its core, this new programming will focus on creating support groups for families in the space. This new family support programming will necessitate and strengthen cross-agency collaboration by developing partnerships between jail/prison facilities, state agencies, and a lead non-profit organization running programming working with each other to bring families together. Whereas carceral facilities are not children or family-friendly environments, this programming will take place in a child-centered and family-centered green space with a diverse infrastructure (i.e. pools, basketball court, library) that prompts parents, children, and family members to engage in various activities. This space will be accessible to all family members, not just incarcerated parent(s) and their children. Facilitators and volunteers will help run the family space, creating opportunities for parents and children to bond through community support.

Transportation. Transportation to the family space is key to ensuring all family members can access the space. The family center utilizes buses to transport incarcerated parent(s), children, and families.

Play-based activities. The family space will host a variety of play spaces such as a basketball court and other sports, a swimming pool, swing sets, and arts and crafts. Utilizing a space with various activities means families with children of all ages can find something to enjoy.

Educational and learning resources. In addition to play-based activities, the family space will also host indoor facilities with more activities as well as learning-bonding resources such as a small library where parents and children can read together and a digital and technological space where children and parents can bond over and learn about technology together (e.g., video games, computers, etc.).

Green with natural elements. Immersed in natural elements creates a peaceful environment for the family space. Trees, and other natural elements, such as bodies of water and plants, directly counter the tone of carceral facilities and allow parents, children, caregivers, and families to bond in a welcoming and serene environment.

Food and nourishment. Food will be a key leverage point to encourage bonding. The imagined family space created by lived experts envisioned food trucks adjacent to where the buses would drop parents, children, and families off. So when people arrive, food is waiting for them. Integrating picnic tables and other areas to enjoy a meal together into the space encourages conversation and bonding.

CO-DESIGNER-CREATED CONCEPT

Play-Centered Family Support Spaces

INFRASTRUCTURE ANATOMY

To critically analyze the concepts created by co-designers in the prototyping workshop, we adapted the 'anatomy of infrastructure' tool to learn from the concepts created in the workshop. The anatomy of infrastructure is a tool designers use to understand and communicate complex concepts. It is a tool that combines principles of multi-level systems mapping with the POEMS-A* design framework. POEMS-A is a framework used in the workshop to help the co-designers expand their ideas.

GOALS. The primary goals the co-designers sought to address through prototyping and concepting.

IMPACT. The impacts that can be created given the primary goal. They were driven by co-designers' vision of the future and informed by the affordances and identified features.

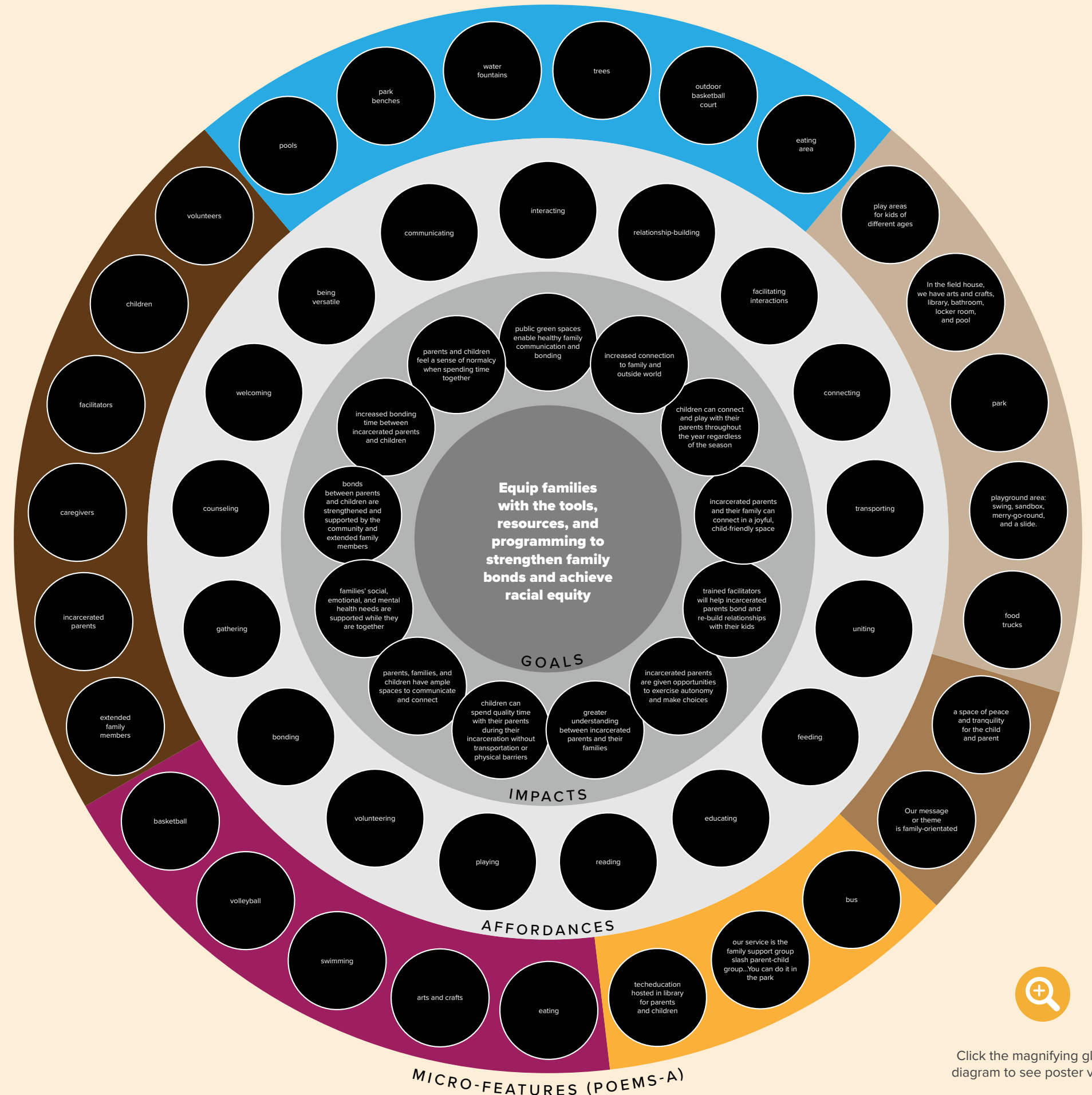
AFFORDANCES. The actionable properties that need to be created/afforded to reach the identified impacts and goals. Affordances are specific capabilities that a user is enabled to do.

FEATURES. The elements identified drive the enablement of the identified affordances to achieve the identified impacts.

The four levels of the anatomy (features, affordances, impacts, goals) help us to analyze the co-designer-created prototypes. These also help us to visualize how various elements can be integrated into new system interventions.

MICRO-FEATURES (POEMS-A) LEGEND

- People
- Objects
- Environments
- Messages
- Services
- Activities



Click the magnifying glass or diagram to see poster version.

CONNECTED DESIRED OUTCOMES



Sustained family connections that create thriving relationships and stronger communities



Prioritized access to healing and wellness supports for Black and Latinx families to enable resilient and healthy communities

CONNECTED BARRIERS



Over-incarceration in Black communities. The incarceration of a parent instigates immense physical and emotional distance from their children and families, which strains the parent-child relationship and creates knowledge gaps that prevent families from understanding each other's circumstances and supporting one another.



Lack of cross-system inter-agency coordination and collaboration. State agencies, jails, and prisons lack coordination and the necessary policies and resources to provide all incarcerated parents the tools, programming, and resources needed to develop strong relationships with their child(ren) and fulfill their role as parents.



Parent-child bonding barriers. Carceral policies prevent familial connections and disrupt the critical parent-child bonding period for parents, especially expectant mothers.



Economic barriers. The carceral system penalizes families when placing incarcerated parents in geographically inaccessible prisons. Because of the lack of proximity, family visitation becomes significantly limited and costly, inhibiting critical bonding time.



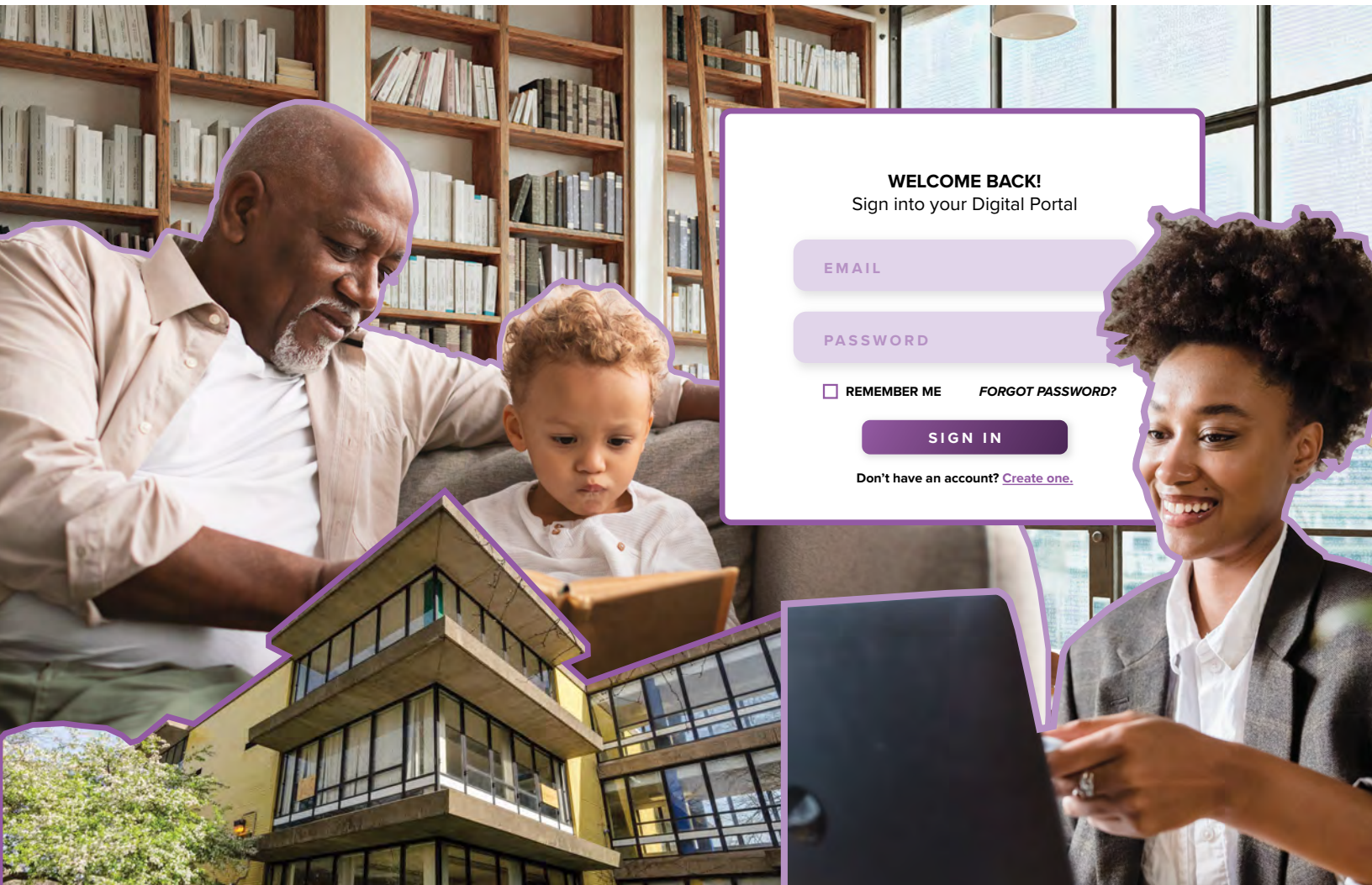
Trauma and mental health barriers. Prisons, jails, and other carceral environments can instigate intense emotions such as grief and sorrow that have profound mental health effects and leave incarcerated parents feeling abandoned and isolated from their families and the outside world.



Economic barriers. Prisons, jails, and other carceral environments can instigate intense emotions such as grief and sorrow that have profound mental health effects and leave incarcerated parents feeling abandoned and isolated from their families and the outside world.

CO-DESIGNER-CREATED CONCEPT

Guaranteed Resources for Children and Caregivers



CONCEPT DESCRIPTION

Co-designers chose to address the economic barriers families face after the incarceration of a parent. They determined that a policy should provide guaranteed financial resources to families impacted by incarceration and the caregivers responsible for the children without restriction.

CONCEPT DESCRIPTION (CONT.)

Co-designers developed the following concept to enable and support this policy:

To ensure children impacted by incarceration and their caregivers can meet their basic needs, they will receive financial resources until the caregiver can provide them. Caregivers include family members and others the parent has entrusted to care for their children. To improve the probability of reunification, incarcerated parents will also receive financial resources that enable them to care for themselves and their children upon release.

Caregivers and parents have the autonomy and agency to spend their financial resources as they see fit as long as they contribute to their and their children's physical, social, emotional, and economic well-being.

Financial advisors are available to caregivers and re-entering parents to support them in responsibly managing their financial resources and assets.

Educational hubs within public libraries and other welcoming public spaces provide caregivers and returning parents with the knowledge necessary to support their children. These hubs also provide technology-centered education, enabling them to navigate relevant digital technologies and platforms.

A digital portal aggregates data from the Illinois Department of Corrections, local corrections departments, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, and other relevant agencies. The portal aims to expeditiously identify the children of incarcerated parents and their caregivers to ensure the immediate provision of resources needed to sustain and support families.

Local re-entry organizations operate as pass-through organizations, providing culturally responsive support services and financial resources from the state to caregivers and returning parents.

CONNECTED DESIRED OUTCOMES



Assured access to resources that enable families to flourish



Continuous investment in family-sustaining employment and financial security for incarceration-impacted families



Improved educational pathways for Black and Latinx communities to create their desired futures

CONNECTED BARRIERS



Economic barriers. Parental incarceration causes stress and creates undue financial burdens for families, which can cause household instability and pressure for caregivers and children to provide.



Lack of cross-system inter-agency coordination and collaboration. The lack of inter-agency collaboration between county and state agencies creates significant barriers for incarcerated parents and families to comply with requirements and navigate the carceral and child welfare systems.



Economic barriers. Current policies limit employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated citizens by including criminal records in background checks. This limitation prevents them from supporting themselves and their families, thus increasing recidivism.



Lack of cross-system inter-agency coordination and collaboration. State agencies, jails, and prisons lack coordination and the necessary policies and resources to provide all incarcerated parents the tools, programming, and resources needed to develop strong relationships with their child(ren) and fulfill their role as parents.

CO-DESIGNER-CREATED CONCEPT

Ecosystem for Advocacy, Skillbuilding and Wellbeing



CONCEPT DESCRIPTION

Youth in foster care lack adequate experiences, services, and tools to meet their educational, emotional, financial, and health needs. Through policy, co-designers addressed critical barriers that create traumatic events once families become formally involved with the child welfare

CONCEPT DESCRIPTION (CONT.)

and justice systems. The co-designer-recommended policy also provides youth with essential support once they age out of the child-welfare system.

This new policy creates an ecosystem of services and people with the knowledge and tools to support youth in foster care and their families. Currently, child welfare prioritizes family separation over preservation, impacting parent-child bonding and healing. Under this new policy, families remain intact unless preservation causes more harm than good.

The advocacy center is the hub for guardian ad litem (GAL), court-appointed special advocates (CASAs), and other system actors who will validate youth's pain and connect them with the resources and knowledge needed to navigate the system. These actors prevent behaviors detrimental to children's and youth's well-being.

Updated mandated reporting and other policies prepare reporters to recognize and act on signs of physical, emotional, and mental abuse and neglect. Also, it implements mechanisms to prevent unnecessary child welfare system involvement and family separation.

Sustainable and supportive communities, fostered through critical connections with family, friends, and community members, bolster their self-agency and empower them to succeed and pursue their passions and interests.

Essentials for wellbeing such as apparel, food, and nutrition, housing, and other vital resources equip youth to holistically ensure their well-being.

Skill and career-building programming such as financial literacy workshops and career coaching, are critical tools to assist youth in succeeding in their chosen career pathways and pursuing their passions.

Ecosystem for Advocacy, Skillbuilding and Wellbeing

INFRASTRUCTURE ANATOMY

To critically analyze the concepts created by co-designers in the prototyping workshop, we adapted the 'anatomy of infrastructure' tool to learn from the concepts created in the workshop. The anatomy of infrastructure is a tool designers use to understand and communicate complex concepts. It is a tool that combines principles of multi-level systems mapping with the POEMS-A* design framework. POEMS-A is a framework used in the workshop to help the co-designers expand their ideas.

GOALS. The primary goals the co-designers sought to address through prototyping and concepting.

IMPACT. The impacts that can be created given the primary goal. They were driven by co-designers' vision of the future and informed by the affordances and identified features.

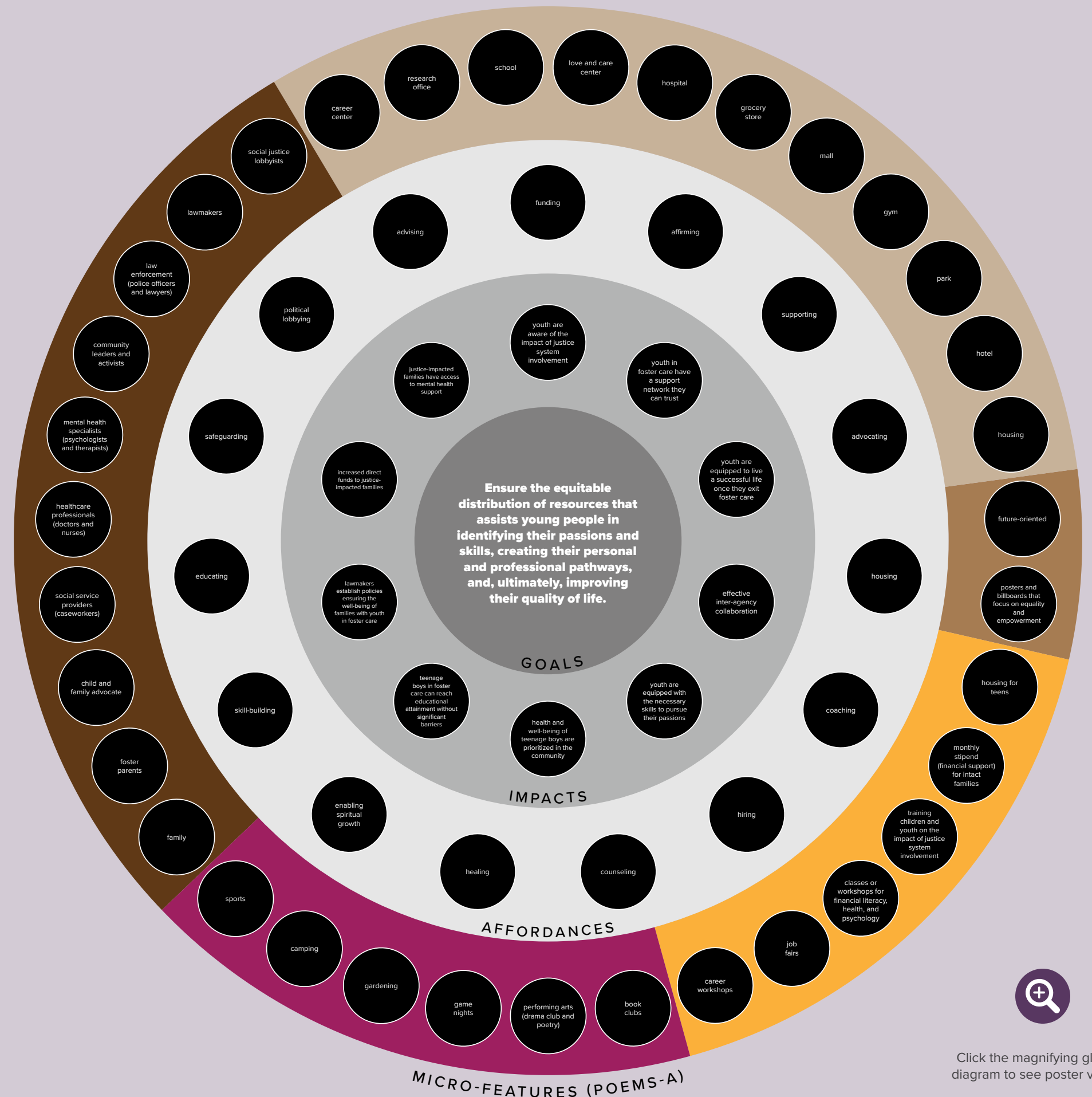
AFFORDANCES. The actionable properties that need to be created/afforded to reach the identified impacts and goals. Affordances are specific capabilities that a user is enabled to do.

FEATURES. The elements identified drive the enablement of the identified affordances to achieve the identified impacts.

The four levels of the anatomy (features, affordances, impacts, goals) help us to analyze the co-designer-created prototypes. These also help us to visualize how various elements can be integrated into new system interventions.

MICRO-FEATURES (POEMS-A) LEGEND

- People
- Messages
- Objects
- Services
- Environments
- Activities



Click the magnifying glass or diagram to see poster version.

CONNECTED DESIRED OUTCOMES



Sustained family connections that create thriving relationships and stronger communities



Prioritized access to healing and wellness supports for Black and Latinx families to enable resilient and healthy communities



Improved educational pathways for Black and Latinx communities to create their desired futures

CONNECTED BARRIERS



Economic barriers. The carceral system compromises family wellbeing through parents' arrest and subsequent removal from the household. Thus, creating social, emotional, and economic distress upon the family.



Trauma and mental health barriers. Carceral facilities produce and reinforce trauma which extends beyond incarceration. Post-traumatic prison disorder and other mental health challenges negatively impact formerly incarcerated parents' relationships and interactions with their children, increasing disconnection and toxicity.



Trauma and mental health barriers. The incarceration of a parent instigates immense physical and emotional distance from their children and families, which strains the parent-child relationship and creates knowledge gaps that prevent families from understanding each other's circumstances and supporting one another.



Lack of cross-system inter-agency coordination and collaboration. City and county housing policies preventing returning citizens from living in public housing have led to the loss of family homes and increased homelessness and recidivism—creating considerable barriers to family reconnection.



ILLINOIS ACTION FOR CHILDREN

The Work Ahead

Strengthening bonds between incarcerated parents and their children will require implementing multi-level interventions, practices, and policies that prioritize building and maintaining family connections. Intentional cross-agency collaboration with other adjacent systems (e.g., child welfare and housing) will be critical in ensuring families, children, and caregivers have the social, financial, emotional, and mental health resources they need to navigate a parent's absence from the family and maintain strong family connections.

The findings presented in this report highlight family and community-created concepts to address many of the challenges faced during and after the incarceration of a parent. These concepts aim to strengthen family connections and are grounded in co-designer-determined (visions/outcomes) and design principles. IAFC and its partners should ensure their alignment with them as the concepts are further developed as they demonstrate critical pathways to holistically support families and build thriving and resilient Black and Latinx communities.



ERNARDO BODO // ADOBE STOCK



FRONT AND BACK COVER
PROSTOCKSTUDIO // ADOBE STOCK