



URGENT FUNDING REQUEST: IN-PRISON & REENTRY SUPPORT DURING COVID-19

Insight Garden Program (IGP) is requesting support to meet the crucial reentry needs of people being released from prison during the COVID-19 pandemic and to respond to the needs of our participants who are currently incarcerated in 11 California prisons. COVID-19 has made its way into California’s prisons and after much advocacy, the state is expediting the release of 3,500 people who are incarcerated to reduce overcrowding.

Challenges from COVID-19 in Prisons & Reentry

Given the lack of sanitation measures and close proximity of people within our state’s prisons, we are incredibly concerned about the spread of COVID-19 and the impact it will have on IGP’s participants--especially those who are pregnant, have medical conditions, and are elderly. As a precautionary measure, the state has suspended visitation and programming, leaving those who are incarcerated with few connections to the outside world.

There are reports of surging infection rates of COVID-19 in prisons, due to overcrowding, inadequate medical care, and lack of access to proper sanitation. These factors contribute to a growing crisis that will ultimately reveal how interconnected we are with those who are incarcerated. The spread of the virus will not only affect those who are incarcerated, but also prison staff who transmit the virus, those they interact with in the “free world,” and the general public as people are released from prison.



Last week, CA started releasing 3,500 people from prison early to help prevent the rapid spread of COVID-19. The state has identified 17,000+ more people who may be eligible for an expedited release in the coming weeks. We’re thrilled about this win, but reentry is difficult to navigate in the best of times; now, those leaving prison will have to cope with a pandemic while many service providers have had to close their doors. Right now, we’re working with our partners to support people in prison and reentry during this pandemic. We’re strengthening IGP’s Reentry Bridge Program to safely welcome people being released and help them prepare for their transition back to our

communities. We’ve also designed new ways to reach people in prison since the shelter in place order has suspended all in-prison programming.

Plan to Support People in Prison & Reentry During COVID-19

During this pandemic, there is an acute need for skilled reentry support for people who are suddenly being released from prison and continued support for those who are currently incarcerated who now have no access to people from the outside world. IGP is in need of a total of \$175,000 to launch and implement the following core initiatives:

Reentry Bridge Program Support During COVID-19:

- **Prison Gate Pickups:** Greeting people released from prison at the gate, providing them with a trusted community mentor, hot meal, and transit to the airport bus/train station, or directly to their destination. IGP has also established best practices for safely conducting gate pickups during COVID-19 for volunteers, staff, and partner agencies and co-produced an [instructional video](#) on this topic.
- **Reentry Community Circles:** Hosting weekly videoconference and phone group circles facilitated by people who were formerly incarcerated to provide peer emotional support to people who are in reentry during the COVID-19 crisis.
- **Reentry Phone Tree:** Calling IGP graduates released recently to identify their needs for connection to others, services, or basic household items and helping them access these essential supports. This includes helping them connect to employment, public benefits, and other community-based services and providing them with grocery store gift cards, phones, and other essential items for their families.
- **Reentry Basic Needs Kits:** Providing essential items to people at the prison gates that will help them transition safely into the community such as sanitizer, gloves, mask, ziploc bags, information on COVID-19, and list of local service providers and resources that are currently open.



In-Prison Support During COVID-19:

- **Advocating for People Inside Prison:** Encouraging the CA Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to reinstate credit-bearing alternative programming for incarcerated students that face COVID-19 lockdowns in all 36 state prisons so they can earn “good time” off their sentence while locked down.
- **Reentry Preparation:** Continued 1:1 contact with IGP participants through collect calling and mail who are preparing to be released within the next six months to create a transition plan.
- **Prison Mail Program:** Bringing IGP’s curriculum inside prisons during COVID-19, by mailing participants weekly readings, meditations, and lesson plans to continue their learning and stay engaged.
- **Prison TV Programming:** Working with the Division of Rehabilitative Program TV Channel to create and broadcast IGP programming in every prison facility to bring public service information about health and hygiene, meditations, and IGP lessons on wellness and eco-literacy into all state prison facilities.

Background Information on IGP

Under normal circumstances, IGP facilitates an innovative, year long, environmental education curriculum combined with vocational gardening and landscaping training so that people in prison and reentry can reconnect to self, community, and the natural world. This “inner” and “outer” gardening approach transforms lives, ends cycles of incarceration, and supports safer communities. Our work spans 11 prisons including three women’s, two health, one youth and several men’s prisons throughout California. To provide a continuum of care for those leaving prison, we also have offered a Reentry Bridge Program to support our participants’ successful return to their loved ones and our communities.