

A Safer New York City

The Women's Center for Justice:

A Nation-Leading Approach on
Women & Gender-Expansive People
in Custody

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“The women and gender-expansive people at the Rose M. Singer Center on Rikers Island have suffered from trauma and neglect both within the facility and from policies made outside of it... These mothers, sisters, and daughters deserve better. There must be expanded, gender responsive decarceration resources and a humane, accessible standalone facility for those who remain.”

- Senators Julia Salazar and Cordell Cleare and Assemblymembers David Weprin and Michaelle Solages, Letters to Governor Kathy Hochul and Mayor Eric Adams, May 10, 2022

In New York City, an estimated 70% of women in jail are mothers, roughly 49 to 97% are victims of intimate partner or family violence, and over 80% have mental health concerns.ⁱ The Rose M. Singer Center (Rosie’s) jail on Rikers Island is where nearly all women and gender-expansive people in New York City jails are located. Rosie’s is failing to meet the unique needs of the population, and with a median average stay of 13 days, many are returning to our communities with additional trauma and disruption to their lives.

New York City is legally required to close Rikers Island by August 2027 and replace it with four jails located in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens.ⁱⁱ For men in New York City custody, the transition from Rikers Island to a borough-based jails system will be a historical improvement. The City is planning to replace the dangerous, isolated, and outdated jails on the Island with modern facilities that are integrated into neighborhoods and designed to better protect safety and dignity.

However, for women and gender-expansive people, the borough-based jail plan would be, in part, an unsafe setback. The Rose M. Singer Center (Rosie’s) on Rikers Island, a standalone facility that is separate from men, would be replaced by a new Kew Gardens, Queens facility that is part of a larger men’s jail. Women and gender-expansive people would be forced to remain on Rikers for another five years, only to be moved to Kew Gardens, where they would share spaces and staff with men. Furthermore, the physical design changes to jail facilities under the borough-based jails plan have not been accompanied by needed operational improvements, including changes to address the specific needs of women and gender-expansive people.

This is a unique moment of opportunity to shift the path forward by using a holistic gender-responsive approach that reduces harm and improves public safety. A gender-responsive approach would mean addressing the realities of the lives of women and gender-expansive people, their unique pathways into the system, and how they differ from cis-gender men.ⁱⁱⁱ

Decarceration must be at the forefront. The city's borough-based jail plan is based on a population projection of 100 or fewer women and gender-expansive people. Investments in community-based services and programs that prevent and divert system-involvement are critical.

Until the day that New York City is willing to decarcerate all women and gender-expansive people, there should be an accessible, humane center that is separate from men and reduces harm, rather than exacerbating it. Jails are almost always designed with men in mind, and the borough-based plan is no different. Rather than having women and gender-expansive people be part of a men's jail at Kew Gardens, there should be a separate Women's Center for Justice.

Depriving women and gender-expansive people of their liberty with jail should be rare, and if it does occur, they should be treated with dignity and respect, and put on a pathway to healthy and stable lives. The Women's Center for Justice can operate using a new "Reentry at Entry" model that focuses on therapeutic care, family unification, and skills building to break the cycle of incarceration.

Until the day that New York City is willing to decarcerate all women and gender-expansive people, there should be an accessible, humane center that is separate from men and reduces harm, rather than exacerbating it.

Problems with New York City's Current Plan to Close Rosie's

- **Kew Gardens will fail to fully prevent women and gender-expansive people from being exposed to men – and possibly to their abusers – and retraumatized.** In the Kew Gardens facility, men, women, and gender-expansive people will share several spaces – the entrance hall, some medical spaces, and some programming spaces – as well as share correctional staff. For women and gender-expansive people in custody, many of whom have been abused or assaulted, any exposure to men or to catcalling inside a jail can be retraumatizing. Additionally, it is not uncommon for women and their abusers to be in custody at the same time. Women and gender-expansive people who live in Queens will be especially vulnerable to exposure to their abusers as most men facing trial in Queens will be housed in the Kew Gardens facility. National and international standards dictate that there should be completely separate facilities for men and women in custody. For example, the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners states that "men and women shall so far as possible be detained in separate institutions; in an institution which receives both men and women, the whole of the premises allocated to women shall be entirely separate."^{iv}
- **Kew Gardens will isolate women and gender-expansive people from their families and communities.** Harlem, the Bronx, and East New York/Brownsville make up the top eight zip codes for Rosie's admissions over the past five years.^v Families from these communities will face long commutes on public transportation to visit Kew Gardens. A key principle in the borough-based jail plan is keeping people who are detained closer to their communities. That will be the case for most men, who will be jailed in the borough in which they are charged, but not for women.
- **Kew Gardens will not use gender-responsive strategies that address the underlying needs driving women and gender-expansive people into the system.** The City has not announced plans to operate Kew Gardens in a gender-responsive way; instead, we can assume that this jail will be

operated as Rosie's is now, which produces high levels of stress and trauma for staff and residents. By failing to adopt gender-responsive strategies, New York City will fail to promote safety for incarcerated women and gender-expansive people, their families, and their communities.

Lincoln is More Accessible, Readily Available, and Less Expensive

There is a safer path forward. New York City should secure the closed Lincoln Correctional Facility at West 110th Street as a site for women and gender-expansive people that is separate from men. In the 2019 Borough-Based Jails Points of Agreement reached between the Office of the Mayor and the New York City Council, the City agreed to explore the feasibility of a more centrally located, stand-alone center.^{vi} The Lincoln Correctional Facility in Harlem, closed since 2019, meets this criteria.

- **More accessible.** Lincoln at 31-33 West 110th Street in Harlem is more easily accessible than Kew Gardens to the communities with the highest number of admissions to Rosie's. There are several subway and bus routes near the building. In addition, Harlem is home to many community-based service providers and faith-based organizations that specifically serve justice-involved women and families. These groups, including Exodus Transitional Community, Greenhope Services for Women, and Osborne Association, can help provide a continuum of care that promotes successful reentry.
- **More readily available.** Based on recent renovations of Crossroads and Horizon juvenile facilities which took 18 months,^{vii} **Lincoln could be repurposed more quickly than the five-year timeline for new construction of Kew Gardens.** New construction of the Kew Gardens facility will not be completed for five more years. Significant renovations of Crossroads and Horizon juvenile detention facilities were completed in 18 months, indicating that renovations of Lincoln could be completed more quickly than the projected 5-year timeline for completing new construction of the Kew Gardens facility. The sooner that women and gender-expansive people can be moved out of Rosie's.
- **Potentially less expensive. A repurposing budget for Lincoln could be tens of millions of dollars lower than the budget for new construction of the Kew Gardens facility,** if such renovations are similar to renovation costs per square foot at Crossroads and Horizon, which were **\$500/square foot cheaper than Kew Gardens.** New construction of the Kew Gardens facility is projected to cost between \$1,820 and \$2,184 per square foot.^{viii} The City's per square foot cost for significant renovations at Crossroads and Horizon was lower, at approximately \$1,358 to \$1,619 per square foot.^{ix} If approximately 120,000 GSF of Kew Gardens is dedicated to women and gender-expansive people, the estimate of this share of construction costs is between \$218 to \$261 million. Many site-specific factors – such as design plans or state of the building – will impact actual repurposing costs for Lincoln.

New York City should transform the closed Lincoln Correctional Facility at West 110th Street into a Women's Center for Justice.

Women's Center for Justice: A New Model of Treatment of Women in Custody

Lincoln can be transformed into a Women's Center for Justice that breaks the traditional model of jail by providing gender-responsive care that puts women, gender-expansive people and families on the pathway to health and safety. Drawing on best practices that have been adopted in New York City and other jurisdictions, the Women's Center for Justice could use a new "Reentry at Entry" model that offers holistic care, family unification and skills building from the moment of arrival. Key principles of the model include:

- **Addressing acute mental and physical health needs of women and gender-expansive people in custody.** As of April 2022, 82% of women detained on Rikers had a "Brad H." designation, meaning they have received mental health treatment on several occasions while in a New York City jail, compared to 48% of men. Women in custody also experience high levels of physical health needs.^x The Center's operations should be designed and operated by a Care Team (see below), including medical professionals, and should prioritize integrated and continuous care.
- **Centering community partnerships.** The Center should emphasize building community both inside and outside of the building. There should be spaces for local civic groups, social service providers, nonprofits, arts groups, and other organizations. Local services providers will be essential partners in ensuring seamless transitions from the Center to NYC communities. In Manhattan, local providers such as Exodus, Greenhope Services for Women and Osborne are located near Lincoln and can offer care and support systems at the center that continue after release.
- **Individualized, trauma-informed care.** At the Center, resources and support should be individualized to each woman/gender-expansive person and use intersectional and culturally sensitive approaches. All staff members should be trained in trauma-informed and gender-responsive care, from cooks to security guards. Institutional physical features and practices that trigger trauma should be eliminated.
- **Privacy, autonomy, and normalcy.** The design would emphasize privacy and preparation for life after jail. For example, there should be private bedrooms and bathrooms and avoidance of institutionalized physical features, an approach that has been shown to promote calm and reduce violence and self-harm within facilities.^{xi}
- **Strengthening family connections support.** The Center should have family-friendly visitation programs and child-friendly spaces that allow for human contact and offer some privacy. The Center should provide on-site family programming and services including parenting classes, therapy and support for children and their caregivers.
- **Staffing and service model.** The Department of Correction's presence should be limited to securing the perimeters, with operations in the center managed by clinicians, social workers, non-profit organizations, and peers, which has been effectively used at the Close to Home initiative for youth in New York. Staff should use a social work approach and there should be a coordinated continuum of care from the moment of arrival between lawyers, community service providers, counselors and other support systems that continues after release.

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In the following pages, we present an assessment of how the Rose. M Singer jail on Rikers – as well as the plans for the new jail in Kew Gardens – fall short of national best practices. We also detail concrete ways that Lincoln could be transformed into a Women’s Center for Justice that reduces harm, promotes healing, and breaks the cycle of incarceration, consistent with research-based practices.

This paper draws on the expertise of Michele Deitch and Alycia Welch with the **Prison and Jail Innovation Lab at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas**. The experts from the **Columbia University Justice Lab**, led by former Commissioner of the New York City Department of Correction Vincent Schiraldi, provide evidence for the feasibility of implementing national best practices in New York City. **HR&A Advisors**, a mission-driven firm that conducts public policy and real estate analysis, provides case study analysis showing that renovating Lincoln could be completed more quickly and less expensively than new construction at Kew Gardens.

We have ensured that those who are most impacted by detention in New York City have played a central role in shaping and vetting the analysis and recommendations in this paper. To inform this report, the **Women’s Community Justice Association (WCJA)** engaged cis- and trans-women recently released from the Rose M. Singer jail on Rikers Island. WCJA also formed a collective of Black women clinicians – all of whom are directly impacted by jail and prison – to shape the operational model recommended in this paper.

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Right now, New York can establish itself as a national leader in how to promote public safety and address the needs of detained women – nearly all of whom are themselves victims of violent crime. Construction is slated to begin at the Kew Gardens facility in the coming months. To capture the possible savings associated with renovation instead of new construction, New York State and New York City should move quickly to designate and repurpose Lincoln as a stand-alone, trauma-informed Women’s Center for Justice.

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New York City should transform a vacant state prison in Manhattan – Lincoln Correctional – into the Women’s Center for Justice

- Lincoln is a safer, more readily available, and potentially less expensive alternative to Kew Gardens
- Lincoln can be transformed into a Women’s Center for Justice that uses gender-responsive design, operations, and programming—a “Reentry at Entry” model—to put women and gender-expansive people on a pathway to safe, healthy, stable lives
- Case studies from New York City and elsewhere prove that principles of the Women’s Justice Center can be effectively implemented

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THE POPULATION

Nearly all women and gender-expansive people (transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and/or intersex people) admitted to New York City jails have experienced profound trauma and abuse. An estimated 70% of women in jail are mothers, roughly 49 to 97% are victims of intimate partner or family violence^{xii} – a staggering fact that compels us to anchor our approach to detention for this population in proven trauma-informed strategies. These strategies can de-escalate conflict, decrease the harm and retraumatization of detention, and break the cycle of incarceration.

As we consider how to design, site, and operate a center for women and gender-expansive people that best promotes safety, we should also consider the distinct needs of this population:

- **Women and gender-expansive people face an elevated risk of sexual abuse and re-traumatization.**^{xiii} Many people detained in the Rose. M. Singer jail on Rikers Island have been sexually assaulted and abused while in City custody.^{xiv} This abuse behind bars has often followed previous abuse in the community: women detained in New York City's jails are more likely to report physical and sexual abuse in their lifetime than men.^{xv} Women and gender-expansive people in City custody are also more likely to experience abuse consistently throughout their entire lives.^{xvi} The kinds of traumatic events to which women in custody have been exposed also differ from those experienced by men in custody: the most common traumatic experiences for women include child and adult sexual violence and intimate partner violence, while for men, the most common traumatic experiences include witnessing someone being killed or seriously injured and being physically assaulted.^{xvii} National studies have found this violence can play a significant role in the criminal allegations people face, and that women's justice involvement is more likely than men's to flow from their relationships with family or intimate partners.^{xviii}
- **Detention for women in New York City affects children and reverberates into communities.** The majority of women detained in New York City's jails are primary caregivers, and are more likely than men in custody to have primary child-rearing responsibilities.^{xix} Among more than forty women facing criminal legal charges in New York City in July 2019 and January 2020 interviewed by the Columbia Justice Lab, 70% were caregivers. Among men interviewed as part of the same study, only 54% were caregivers.^{xx} Of the women who report having children, 87% report having at least one child under 18 years old, compared to 73% of men. For children separated from their parents, there is a heightened risk of traumatic stress, emotional distress, poor school performance, and problems relating to others and to society, manifested in rule-breaking, law-breaking, and risky health behaviors.^{xxi} Parental detention is particularly stressful and harmful for children, and distinct from other forms of separation from parents. Parental detention that has varying and uncertain duration, can exacerbate stress and trauma, and can carry stigma for children.^{xxii}
- **Mental health treatment is significantly higher for women than men in New York City jails.** Of women jailed on April 1, 2022, more than four out of five (82%) were receiving treatment for mental illness, compared to 49% of men.^{xxiii} For women jailed over a year waiting for trial, that number rises to 96%.^{xxiv} This is consistent with national research showing that women in jails and prisons are twice as likely as incarcerated men to take prescription medications for mental health

problems and to receive therapy for their illnesses.^{xxv} The kinds of mental health conditions commonly experienced by women and men in custody are also distinct: among women in custody, depression, anxiety disorders, and eating disorders are more prevalent; among men in custody, antisocial personality disorders are more prevalent.^{xxvi} In addition to high levels of mental health needs, women in custody also experience high levels of physical health needs, including chronic disorders associated with poor nutrition and poverty, such as asthma, obesity, diabetes, hypertension, anemia, seizures, and ulcers.^{xxvii} Women are at greater risk than men of entering jail with sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS because of their greater participation in sex work and the likelihood of sexual abuse. Many STDs, if untreated, can lead to cervical cancer, secondary infections, infertility, and birth defects.^{xxviii}

- **Women and gender-expansive people detained in City jails have higher levels of social service involvement than men in custody.**^{xxix} On Rikers, both cis- and trans-women are more likely to be unemployed than men. Recent interviews of women and gender-expansive people involved in New York City's criminal legal system, conducted by researchers from Columbia University, found that 60% of those interviewed were unemployed before their arrest.^{xxx} Women and gender-expansive people are also more likely to receive social security income, support from charitable organizations, and housing benefits, such as public housing residency or Section 8 vouchers.^{xxxi} In 2022, at jail intake, 25% of women and gender-expansive people reported they were homeless before being jailed or had nowhere to go upon release.^{xxxii} Unemployment and unstable housing, and associated economic instability, are proven drivers of criminal justice involvement. And conversely, a criminal record makes it more difficult to find housing and employment.^{xxxiii}
- **Harlem, the Bronx (Morris Heights, Melrose, Williamsbridge), and East New York/Brownsville make up the top eight zip codes for admissions to Rosie's over the past five years.**^{xxxiv} The Lincoln site would be more accessible to these neighborhoods and is at the heart of many community-based service providers who address housing and employment needs and can help ensure successful reentry.
- **Women are quickly released back to their communities.** Women discharged in 2020 spent a median of 13 days in Rikers Island jails, usually returning right to our communities, likely worse off. These disruptive, short stays temporarily incapacitate people, but fail to address the reasons people were arrested in the first place, and likely exacerbate any underlying mental illness, drug addiction, or housing instability people face.
- **Women have especially low recidivism rates.** National research has long indicated that re-arrest rates – especially for violence – are significantly lower for women than men.^{xxxv} In New York City, women arrested in 2019 were 49% less likely than men to be re-arrested for a violent felony within 1 year (2.7% vs. 5.3%) and 40% less likely to be arrested for any reason within 1 year (16% vs. 26%).^{xxxvi}

Women have especially low recidivism rates. In New York City, women are 49% less likely than men to be re-arrested for a

- **Within facilities, women and gender-expansive people have much lower rates of institutional violence and escape risk, as compared to men.**^{xxxvii}

Additionally, it is critical to acknowledge that within and among the identities of women, transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and intersex people there is significant diversity and distinct needs. To promote safety and dignity, it is imperative that design and operational plans for future facilities acknowledge the distinctions among these populations and adhere to evolving national best practices on gender responsiveness.

THE CURRENT PLAN

New York City is legally required to close Rikers Island by August 2027.^{xxxviii} The City's current plan is to close the Rose M. Singer jail on Rikers Island and build a new facility for women and gender-expansive people as part of a larger men's jail in Kew Gardens, Queens. The jail in Kew Gardens will be completed, at the earliest, in 2027.

While the plans for the Kew Gardens jail – and the overall borough-based jails plan – represents a historic departure from the dangerous and outdated physical plant in the Rikers Island jail, the Kew Gardens facility still falls short of national best practices on how to design and operate a jail in a gender-responsive and trauma-informed way. The plans for the Kew Gardens facility undermine safety and rehabilitation.

- **Kew Gardens will fail to fully prevent women and gender-expansive people from being exposed to men – and possibly to their abusers – and retraumatized.** In the Kew Gardens facility, men, women, and gender-expansive people will share several spaces – the entrance hall, some medical spaces, and some programming spaces. For women and gender-expansive people in custody, nearly all of whom have been abused or assaulted, any exposure to men or to catcalling inside a jail can be retraumatizing. Additionally, it is not uncommon for women and their abusers to be in custody at the same time. Women and gender-expansive people who live in Queens will be especially vulnerable to exposure to their abusers as most men facing trial in Queens will be housed in the Kew Gardens facility. National and international standards dictate that there should be complete separate facilities for men and women in custody. For example, the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners states that “men and women shall so far as possible be detained in separate institutions; in an institution which receives both men and women, the whole of the premises allocated to women shall be entirely separate.”^{xxxix}
- **Kew Gardens will isolate women and gender-expansive people from their families and communities.** Harlem, the Bronx and East New York/Brownsville make up the top eight zip codes for Rosie's admissions over the past five years.^{xl} Families from these communities will face long commutes on public transportation to visit Kew Gardens. A key principle in the borough-based jail plan is keeping people who are detained closer to their communities. That will be the case for most men, who will be jailed in the borough in which they are charged, but not for women.
- **Kew Gardens will not use gender-responsive strategies that address the underlying needs driving women and gender-expansive people into the system.** The City has not announced plans to operate Kew Gardens in a trauma-informed or gender-responsive way; instead, we can assume that this jail will be operated as Rosie's is now, which produces high levels of stress and trauma for staff and residents. By failing to adopt gender-responsive and trauma-informed strategies, New York City will fail to promote safety for incarcerated women and gender-expansive people, their families, and their communities.

THE SAFER PATH FORWARD

There is a safer, more readily available, and potentially less expensive alternative to Kew Gardens

Lincoln Correctional Facility, a vacant state prison at West 110th Street, could be repurposed into a healing and holistic Women’s Center for Justice more quickly and less expensively than building a new jail that is shared with men in Kew Gardens.

In the 2019 Borough-Based Jails Points of Agreement reached between the Office of the Mayor and the New York City Council, the City agreed to explore the feasibility of a stand-alone facility for women.^{xli} A former state prison – Lincoln Correctional in Harlem, which closed in 2019, meets the criteria. The site is currently owned by the State and could be leased or transferred to the City.

The location is more accessible to visitors and would be at the heart of an extensive network of community-based organizations that serve justice-involved women and families in Harlem. In addition, Lincoln has sufficient space to accommodate the population, and based on recent renovations of Crossroads and Horizon juvenile facilities, could be opened more quickly and for less money than the Kew Gardens facility.

More Accessible to Visitors & Community Providers

Lincoln at 31-33 West 110th Street in Harlem is more easily accessible than Kew Gardens to the communities with the highest number of admissions to Rosie’s. There are several subway and bus routes near the building that would make it easier for visitation and maintaining community connections. In addition, Harlem is home to many community-based service providers that specifically serve justice-involved women and families. These groups, including Exodus Transitional Community, Greenhope Services for Women and Osborne Association, can offer services that start when women and gender-expansive people are at the Center, and continue after release to promote successful reentry.

Potentially Faster and Less Expensive

The passage of Raise the Age in 2017 required an 18-month renovation period of Horizon and Crossroads, so these two facilities would be ready for 16- and 17-year-olds once they were transferred from Rikers Island into the juvenile justice system. New York City met this tight timeline, reporting that **“all significant construction [had] been completed”** on schedule, and costs were significantly lower to renovate the facilities than those projected for a new Kew Gardens jail.^{xlii}

- **Based on recent renovations of Crossroads and Horizon juvenile facilities which took 18 months, Lincoln could be renovated more quickly than the five-year timeline for new**

construction of Kew Gardens. New construction of the Kew Gardens facility will not be completed for five years. Significant renovations of Crossroads and Horizon juvenile detention facilities were completed in 18 months, indicating that renovations of Lincoln could be completed more quickly than the projected 5-year timeline for new construction of the Kew Gardens facility.

- **A renovation budget for Lincoln could be tens of millions of dollars lower than the budget for new construction of the Kew Gardens facility,** if such renovations are similar to renovation costs per square foot at Crossroads and Horizon, which were **\$500/square foot less expensive than anticipated Kew Gardens’ costs.** New construction of the Kew Gardens facility is projected to cost between \$1,820 and \$2,184 per square foot. The City’s per square foot cost for significant renovations at Crossroads and Horizon was lower, at approximately \$1,358 to \$1,619 per square foot. If approximately 120,000 GSF of Kew Gardens is dedicated to women and gender-expansive people, the estimate of this share of construction costs is between \$218 to \$261 million. Compared to new construction cost estimates for Kew Gardens, renovating Crossroads and Horizons was \$500/square foot cheaper, which could indicate similar savings to renovate Lincoln. Many site-specific factors – such as design plans or state of the building – will impact actual renovation costs for Lincoln.

Lincoln Has Sufficient Spaces for Gender-Responsive, Trauma-informed Design

New York City’s current plan for the Kew Gardens facility includes 824,200 gross square feet, of which 634,000 square feet will be accessible to staff and people detained within the facility (net square feet).^{xliii} The Department of Correction is currently projecting that 100 women and gender-expansive people will be at Kew Gardens on an average day. To accommodate a population of this size, the Department is planning to build sufficient space for 126 beds.^{xliv} Based on this information about the plans for Kew Gardens, the estimated total square footage for women and gender-expansive people will be approximately 93,000 (net) or approximately 120,000 (gross).^{xlv}

Lincoln has an estimated 72,000 square feet^{xlvi} and is zoned for the addition of two additional floors.^{xlvii} With the addition of two floors, Lincoln could have sufficient square footage to accommodate the Women’s Center for Justice design and operational principles described in this paper.

Figure 1. The City’s planned space allocation for Kew Gardens in net square feet

| Use | Men Only | Women and Gender-Expansive People Only |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| Housing (Beds) | 760 Beds (~86% of Beds) | 126 Beds (~14% of Beds) |
| Housing (Square Feet) | 280,000 SF (~82% of Housing Space) | 60,000 SF (~18% of Housing Space) |
| Program, Recreation, & Staff/Admin Space | 123,000 SF (~46%) | 33,000 SF (~12%) |

Figure 2. Anticipated Per Gross Square Foot Cost Breakdown at Kew Gardens

| | Low | High |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Total Budget | \$1.5 Billion | \$1.8 Billion |
| Gross Square Feet | 824,200 GSF | |
| Cost per Square Foot | \$1,819 PSF | \$2,183 PSF |

Figure 3. Renovation costs at Crossroads and Horizon

| | Crossroads | Horizon |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Total Budget | \$129 Million | \$170 Million |
| Gross Square Feet | 95,000 GSF | 105,000 GSF |
| Cost per Square Foot | \$1,358 PSF | \$1,619 PSF |

Lincoln can be transformed into a Women’s Center for Justice that uses holistic, healing and gender-responsive design, operations, and programming to put women and gender-expansive people on a pathway to safe, healthy, and stable lives.

Research, experience, and experts have aligned on a set of recommended design principles, operating practices, and clinical strategies, if enacted, can create a center that is gender-responsive, addresses trauma and healing, promotes safety and calm, and breaks the cycle of incarceration.

Key Principles

- *Dignity and Respect* – the Center must be a place that respects the dignity, inherent worth, and potential of each individual who lives and works there; a person who is in custody should not be subjected to conditions that have the effect of humiliating or demeaning them, or that otherwise communicate a message of disrespect.
- *Normalization* – to the extent possible, life inside the center should resemble positive aspects of life in the outside world; the Center should be as non-institutional as possible in design, operations, and programming, and should facilitate community contact and support as part of daily operations.
- *Safety* – the Center should protect the psychological and physical safety of both residents and staff and should promote nonviolence in all aspects of operations.

- *Wellness and Health* – the center should be focused on wellness and successful re-entry and should avoid any features perceived or intended to be punitive. The center should promote the physical and mental health of all residents and staff, and promote their personal and emotional growth through positive accountability.
- *Family and Community Centered* – the center should encourage the development and maintenance of positive and healthy relationships, among residents, between residents and their families and loved ones, and between residents and the community at large.
- *Responsive to Special Needs* – the center should be designed and operated with women in mind, and should be responsive to their special needs, circumstances, and concerns; services, interventions, and responses to women’s behavior should be individualized wherever possible; and there should be consideration given to vulnerable populations with special needs.
- *Trauma-Informed* – the center’s design, programs, and operations should take account of the many ways in which the women’s preexisting trauma can affect their behavior and challenges, should seek to address that trauma, and should change practices that cause further trauma.
- *Culturally-Responsive* – the center should operate in a manner that recognizes, respects, and responds sensitively to the differential cultural experiences, values, and needs of a racially and ethnically diverse population of residents.
- *Staffed for Success* – staff should be supportive of the center’s philosophy and approach and should be appropriately trained to meet the needs of the women and gender-expansive people in the facility.

Design

Studies have shown that facilities with well-maintained, comfortable, home-like (rather than institutional) environments where residents can move freely, have lower rates of suicide,^{xlvi} vandalism,^{xlvi} and violence.¹ This approach to design communicates respect to residents and staff, treats them with dignity, and creates positive expectations for behavior.^{li} It increases the feasibility and attractiveness of the activities that comprise rehabilitation and normalizes those activities – making the facility more likely to effectively support residents’ successful reentry.^{lii}

Poor design, in converse, can cause lasting harm. It can reinforce trauma, reduce opportunities for residents’ engagement in rehabilitative programming, contribute to poor interpersonal dynamics and facilitate conflict, and compromise the health and safety of residents and staff.^{liii}

The following chart includes the design principles that have been shown to promote safety, calm, and rehabilitation. For each design principle, we include an assessment of the current evidence-based practice in the Rose M. Singer jail on Rikers Island; the modest progress planned at Kew Gardens; and the opportunity to fully implement this principle at the Women’s Center for Justice.

| Design Component | Rose M. Singer <i>Current Facility</i> | Kew Gardens <i>Current Plan</i> | Women's Center for Justice <i>Evidence-based best practices</i> |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|
| Housing Areas | | | |
| Resident Rooms | Dormitory rooms where there is potential to house up to 40 people at the same time. Few private toilets, sinks, or showers. | Private cells, each 75 square feet, with a toilet and sink separated by a partition | Private rooms to allow for women to personalize their space and to have privacy. Rooms should have individual, partitioned toilets and sinks that allow for privacy. ^{liv} Lack of privacy, among other dynamics, keeps women in a state of emotional distress, preventing them from feeling safe or relaxed and from effectively participating in rehabilitation activities. ^{lv} |
| Furniture | Metal, institutional furniture | Wooden, non-institutional furniture | Comfortable furniture made of natural materials that feel homelike and contribute to a normalized environment, ^{lvi} dressers that can be locked to store personal items. ^{lvii} |
| Housing Units | No small group housing units | Housing units with the potential to house 25 or fewer residents | Small groups of rooms with 12 or fewer residents to foster a sense of community. ^{lviii} |
| Bathrooms | Shared bathrooms. Some cell units include a toilet | Common shower areas | Individual showers that allow for privacy and have controllable hot water. ^{lix} |
| Homelike Living Spaces | No homelike living areas on each housing unit | Limited homelike living spaces on each housing unit | Homelike living environment with opportunities for cooking, laundry, grooming, and dining. ^{lx} |
| Central Community Areas | Institutional dayroom space | Housing pods radiate from a central area | Living spaces would radiate from a central area for community activities. ^{lxi} |
| Cluster Areas | | | |
| Community Spaces | No cluster spaces | Limited access to cluster spaces from each housing area | Community spaces are centralized. ^{lxii} Spaces for community-based providers and civic organizations that serve residents inside and outside the facility. |
| Service Provision | Largely based on the availability of jail staff to escort women to services or service providers to the women; depending on staffing levels or alarms in the building, services can be delayed or canceled. | Programming services and medical services provided in central area, with some medical services accessible from each housing unit | Services should be in a central area and be visually distinguished/non-institutional feel. |
| Multipurpose Spaces | Many different spaces for different services all requiring there be enough staff to move people. | Two multipurpose rooms as well as spaces for education, worship, culinary arts, horticulture, and a gym | Offer both specialized and multipurpose spaces; reduce monotony of using the same common spaces for all activities. ^{lxiii} |
| Visitation Spaces | Communal visiting spaces with limited privacy. | Videoconferencing rooms, private interview rooms, communal visiting spaces | Should have comfortable waiting areas, facilitate privacy, provide child-friendly furniture and activities, have indoor and outdoor spaces. ^{lxiv} |

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| Outdoor Spaces and Biophilic Design | No direct access to outdoor space; limited natural light; no dedicated decompression spaces | 750 square feet of directly accessible outdoor space from each housing area; respite room located in housing areas | Outdoor spaces should be landscaped, immediately accessible, and include a communal garden. Center should include plentiful natural light and have comfortable air flow and temperature. Center should have a “blue room” where residents can decompress and participate in activities such as watching nature videos. Access to nature and natural elements can significantly improve residents’ behavior and mental health. ^{lxv} |
| Program Areas | | | |
| Recreation Spaces | Limited access to gyms and the outdoors | Large gym | Include gym with equipment and space for running and walking to support residents’ physical and mental health. ^{lxvi} |
| Wellness Spaces | No dedicated wellness or respite spaces | Respite room located in housing area | Include rooms to accommodate yoga, classes on nutrition, weight loss, sexual health, etc. to support residents’ physical and mental health. ^{lxvii} |
| Operational Spaces | | | |
| Co-location | Women and gender-expansive people have their own facility on Rikers Island, separate from the men’s jails | Shared entryway with male residents | A separate building, miles away from the men’s jail, which will reduce the potential for re-traumatization. ^{lxviii} |
| Meeting Rooms | Private interview rooms | Private interview rooms | Include private rooms for attorney-client meetings. ^{lxix} |
| Care Team | Distinct spaces for case managers; limited access for residents | Case managers located in cluster areas | Locate care teams in central activity hub to increase their accessibility. ^{lxx} |
| Staff Spaces | Separate administrative areas for staff | Separate administrative areas for staff | Create spaces for staff to rest and recharge. ^{lxxi} |
| Interstitial Spaces | Numerous blind spots | Unknown | No blind spots, except in areas where privacy is important. ^{lxxii} |

Operating Practices

Not only are most jails and prisons physically designed for men, with women’s needs as an afterthought, but these facilities are also operated with approaches developed for men in custody.^{lxxiii} As detailed in this paper, women and gender-expansive people in City custody have needs distinct from men. Many women and gender-expansive people in custody are victims of violent crime and/or abuse and have significant physical and mental health needs. Most are caregivers, and many were experiencing housing and employment insecurity before jail admission.

Studies have found that an operational approach that acknowledges the distinct needs of women and gender-expansive people can support effective rehabilitation and reinforce calm within the facility.^{lxxiv} Given that women present lower security risks than men in custody, facilities for women and gender-

expansive people should operate as the least restrictive environments possible.^{lxxv} All practices and staff should be trauma-informed, should promote rehabilitation as a goal, and should encourage healthy relationships and family engagement.

The chart below includes the operational practices that have been shown to promote safety, calmness, and rehabilitation. For each operational practice, we include an assessment of the ways in which the Rose M. Singer and Kew Gardens facilities fall short, as well as the concrete strategies the City should adopt in a stand-alone center for women and gender-expansive people.

| Operations Element | Rose M. Singer Current Facility | Kew Gardens Current Plan | Women’s Center for Justice Recommended Best Practices |
|----------------------------|--|---|---|
| Staffing Approach | | | |
| Staff Role | Corrections Officers control movement and operations within the jail, determining punishment and access to services and family visitation. | New York City has not announced any plans to change the staffing model from the current approach on Rikers Island. | Staff should adopt a social work mindset, encouraging support services, solving problems, and providing coaching and mentorship to support effective rehabilitation. ^{lxxvi} |
| Staff Profile | Corrections Officers are assigned to the Rose M. Singer jail without regard to the officer’s sex or training. Some social workers, employed by contracted non-profit organizations, provide services and support within the jail. | New York City has not announced any plans to change the staffing model from the current approach on Rikers Island. | Use peer-support counselors with lived experiences, LGBTQIA staff, and recruit staff with strong interpersonal skills from social work backgrounds to more effectively serve residents’ needs. ^{lxxvii} New York City’s rich network of service providers should be contracted to provide most day-to-day programming during detention along with reentry services upon release. |
| Supporting Staff | | | |
| Support Services for Staff | The Department of Correction offers support services to staff, both internally through the Corrections Assistance Response for Employees system and externally through the City’s Office of Labor Relations Employee Assistance Program. DOC says that it provides access to trauma services as needed and has early Intervention Support System which allows staff flagged for use of force to receive counseling and monitoring. | The City has not announced plans to change its approach to staff support in the transition to the borough-based jails system. | Provide staff with support services for secondary trauma, wellness, and counseling to help them more effectively do their jobs. ^{lxxviii} |

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| Staff Spaces | Staff do not have dedicated spaces within Rosie's to recharge and decompress; staff spaces are in other facilities on the Island. | Staff will have some dedicated spaces to recharge and decompress. | Provide restorative spaces for staff to recharge and decompress to support their mental health. ^{lxxxix} |
| Overtime | Overtime and working multiple shifts in a row are common practices in New York City's jails. ^{lxxx} | New York City has not announced any plans to change the staffing model from the current approach on Rikers Island. | Limit overtime to support staff mental health and reduce turnover. ^{lxxxi} |
| Care Model | | | |
| Trauma-Informed Care | DOC is legally required to provide trauma-informed staff training, and it purports that it partners with program providers to offer trauma-informed programming through group counseling sessions and evidence-based curricula, including Seeking Safety, Beyond Trauma, and SELF. ^{lxxxii} However, DOC's approach to custody management has been criticized for decades as overly reliant on traditional "command and control" tactics and excessive use of force. | New York City has not announced any plans to change their care and custody model from the current approach on Rikers Island. | Continuous staff training in gender-responsive, behavioral health, mental health, trauma and wellness practices. |
| Discipline Practices | Corrections Officers have discretion to implement rules and punishments. | The City has not announced plans to change the model currently used on Rikers Island. | Staff should be trained in therapeutic, rather than punitive, discipline that addresses underlying behavior. ^{lxxxiii} |
| Institutional Procedures | | | |
| Communication About Justice Information | Women recently detained on Rikers Island report difficulty accessing information about their court cases, which is a significant contributor to stress and conflict. | The City has not announced plans to change the model currently used on Rikers Island. | Implement effective communication about court and release dates, help facilitate better planning. ^{lxxxiv} |
| Rule Enforcement | Punishments for rule infractions are based on a static model that does not account for individual circumstances and has the potential for biased enforcement. | The City has not announced plans to change the model currently used on Rikers Island. | Facilitate respectful relations among staff and residents by asking rather than ordering residents to do things. ^{lxxxv} |
| Stakeholder Engagement | | | |

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| Community Engagement | Some contracted non-profit organizations provide re-entry planning within Rose M. Singer jail. | The City has not announced plans to change the model currently used on Rikers Island. | Survey local residents to identify gaps in services and programs and identify opportunities to support the community both inside and outside the facility; provide spaces in the Center for satellite offices/shared workspaces of various social service providers, charitable organizations, nonprofit groups, arts groups, and others. Partner with nonprofits and women’s groups at every opportunity to normalize in-custody and reentry services, supports, and opportunities. |
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Clinical Strategies and Supportive Services

The Women’s Center for Justice should be a place of holistic care for women and gender-expansive people. The center’s design, operations and programs would be tailored to meet their unique needs, with a focus on trauma-informed care, family unification and skills building. It should use a “Reentry at Entry” model that sets goals for successful community reintegration and healthy, stable, productive lives from Day One.

To break the cycle of incarceration, the services provided within a detention center for women and gender-expansive people should address the systemic causes of women’s involvement in the criminal legal system in an individualized and personalized way. From the day of arrival, there should be needs assessments and individualized plans implemented by a coordinated “Care Team” – including social workers, medical professionals, lawyers, peer counselors and community-based providers – that promote safety, wellness and stability during and after their time at the Center.

Programs and services should include education, employment, and vocational training, as well as leisure activities. Services should be gender-responsive – meaning they should acknowledge that women have different paths to detention, different issues and challenges during detention, and different service needs than detained men.^{lxxxvi} Research has shown that gender-responsive services in detention facilities are more effective at reducing recidivism than services that do not incorporate gender-responsive practices.^{lxxxvii}

The chart below includes the clinical strategies and supportive services that have been shown to promote safety, calmness, and rehabilitation. For each, we include an assessment of the ways in which the Rose M. Singer and Kew Gardens facilities fall short, as well as the concrete strategies the City should adopt in a stand-alone center for women and gender-expansive people.

| Programming Element | Rose M. Singer <i>Current Facility</i> | Kew Gardens <i>Current Plan</i> | Women's Center for Justice <i>Recommended Best Practices</i> |
|--------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Continuum of Care | | | |
| Assessments | At intake, a safety risk and medical assessment is conducted for individuals, without a formal needs analysis. | The City has not announced plans to change assessments. | Conduct gender-responsive, validated needs assessment immediately upon admission and create an individual care plan for programs and services. Needs assessments should be separate from risk assessments and should reflect residents' changing needs over time. ^{lxxxviii} |
| Care Teams | Interviews with criminal justice stakeholders indicated a lack of coordinated care teams for those at Rosie's. | The City has not announced plans to create care teams. | A coordinated team, including social workers, attorneys, medical and mental health professionals, peer counselors, and community-based providers would, in consultation with family members or caregivers, implement individual's needs plans. |
| Transition Planning | DOC policy requires reentry planning for each person at Rikers with a Brad H designation and who is there over a certain period of time. However, implementation and monitoring of these plans is insufficient, according to criminal justice stakeholders interviewed for this report. | The City has not announced plans to change transition planning. | Care team should lead transition planning to continue providing services after release. This system can ensure seamless delivery of services from admission to release and reduce the likelihood of recidivism. ^{lxxxix} |
| Programs and Activities | | | |
| Program and Service Providers | In 2020, only two of 27 program/providers at Rikers were specifically dedicated to women: SMART/Greenhouse & Girl Vow. ^{xc} | The City has not specified which providers will offer programs and services in the Kew Gardens facility. | Expand upon partnerships with community-based organizations that provide gender-responsive services to ensure a continuum of care. ^{xci} Relationships between community-based providers and individuals should be facilitated upon arrival at the Center for Justice to develop trust and connection that extend after release. |
| Program Types | SMART/Greenhouse is an evidence-based initiative focused on vocational training, reentry services, and family supports. ^{xcii} Girl Vow offered female empowerment and mentoring group sessions. ^{xciii} GED and other educational programs are also offered. | The City has not specified which providers will offer programs and services in the Kew Gardens facility. | Offer education, skills building, arts and wellness programs for healthy habits (nutrition and diet classes, gardening, exercise and yoga, smoking cessation skills). ^{xciv} |
| Employment Training | Rosie's has a hair salon and kitchen, although it is unclear | The City has not specified employment training to be | Create partnerships with job-training programs and employers to train in |

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| | what type of programming is offered at these sites. | offered in the Kew Gardens facility. | fields with in-demand jobs, etc. Have employment specialists on site. ^{xcv} |
| Visitation | | | |
| Visitation Environment | No private or child-friendly visiting spaces. | The City has not announced plans to explore creating more child-friendly visiting spaces. | Create spaces that allow for some privacy during visitation and offer spaces for children to play to support positive visitation experiences for both residents and children, and by extension, contribute to greater family stability. ^{xcvi} |
| Operation of Visitation | Visiting hours are limited. It can take families hours to travel to Rikers Island from their homes within New York City. | The City has not announced plans to change the model currently used on Rikers Island. The Kew Gardens facility will require long commutes on public transportation for families from Harlem, the Bronx and East New York, which have had the highest admissions to Rosie's in the last five years. | Remove biggest barriers to visitation – offer flexible visiting hours and a centralized location. ^{xcvii} |
| Staffing | Staff do not have special training in child development and protocols do not foster a warm and welcoming environment for visitors. | The City has not announced plans to change the model currently used on Rikers Island. | Staff who are trained in child development should greet families and acclimate them to the center to contribute to positive visitation experiences for visitors. ^{xcviii} |
| Health Care | | | |
| Preventative Care | No preventative care, uses a “sick call” system. | The City has not announced plans to change the model currently used on Rikers Island. | Offer primary/preventative care. ^{xcix} |
| Screenings and Assessments | Screenings are mandated at intake. Women recently detained on Rikers Island report that intake screenings failed to identify acute physical and mental health needs. | The City has not announced plans to change the model currently used on Rikers Island. | Offer gender-responsive, comprehensive intake screenings for all physical and mental health needs, suicide risk, trauma history immediately after arrival, following National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC) standards. Offer additional health assessment and exam within 14 days of admission, per NCCHC standards, with opt-out option. ^c |
| Treatment | Limited engagement between health care providers and case managers. | The City has not announced plans to change the model currently used on Rikers Island. | Treatment plans should be implemented collaboratively by health care providers and Care Team members. Address co-occurring mental illness, substance abuse disorder, and trauma. ^{ci} |
| Pregnancy and New Mothers | Dedicated nursery for small babies. | Dedicated nursery for small babies. Onsite maternity care services. | Detaining pregnant women should be a last resort. ^{cii} |

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| Behavioral Health Care | Mandated reentry planning for people who meet the legal criteria of the Brad H settlement, meaning that they have accesses mental health services on multiple occasions during a single detention. | The City has not announced plans to change the model currently used on Rikers Island. | Adopt a “Reentry at Entry” model. Integrate mental health and substance abuse interventions in a continuum of care from entry through release. Use partnerships with community providers to ensure continuum of care. ^{ciii} |
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Case studies show that the vision for the Women’s Center for Justice is viable in New York City

Below we present four case studies that provide evidence for the feasibility – and positive impact – of implementing the design principles and operational strategies recommended in this paper. Each of these innovative approaches represents a transformation in the approach to custody and care people in custody – and because two of the approaches below were effectively implemented in New York City, we know that similar models could be used in the Women’s Center for Justice.

NEW YORK CITY

Case Study: **Close to Home**

Homelike facilities operated by non-profit organizations

Crisis in youth corrections

In 2010, the youth correctional systems in New York City and State were in crisis. Human Rights Watch and the New York Civil Liberties Union issued a damning report decrying conditions for girls in youth prisons run by the state’s Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).^{civ} Darryl Thompson, a 15-year-old boy from the Bronx, was killed in custody by staff at the state’s notorious Tryon Youth Center.^{cv} These shocking conditions prompted an investigation, and later a lawsuit and consent decree, by the United States Justice Department that found:

Staff ... consistently used a high degree of force to gain control in nearly every type of situation ... Anything from sneaking an extra cookie to initiating a fistfight may result in a full prone restraint with handcuffs. This one size-fits-all control approach has not surprisingly led to an alarming number of serious injuries to youth, including concussions, broken or knocked-out teeth, and spiral fractures.^{cvi}

These highly publicized scandals prompted Governor Andrew Cuomo to create a state commission to investigate facility conditions, which concluded:

New York’s juvenile justice system is failing in its mission to nurture and care for young people in state custody. The state’s punitive, correctional approach has damaged the future

prospects of these young people, wasted millions of taxpayer dollars, and violated the fundamental principles of positive youth development.^{cvii}

The solution: homelike facilities operated by non-profit organizations

This dire situation, combined with the exorbitant costs and poor outcomes from the state's youth prisons, led Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Governor Cuomo to partner on legislation dubbed the *Close to Home Act* (C2H), which would remove all of New York City's youth who are adjudicated in Family Court from state youth prisons. Instead of confinement in brutal, expensive and distant state youth prisons, the city developed a network of alternatives to confinement for family court youth to substantially reduce the number of youth placed out of home.^{cviii} **Under C2H, when youth were placed out of home, they went to small facilities run by non-profit organizations within or near the five boroughs that were more homelike and rehabilitative than upstate youth prisons.**^{cix}

When Mayor Bloomberg proposed C2H, which ultimately diverted all youth adjudicated in the City's family court out of state custody, he immediately established a planning body—the Dispositional Reform Steering Committee (DRSC)—co-chaired by Ronald Richter, Commissioner of the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), and Vincent Schiraldi, Commissioner of the Department of Probation (DOP). The DRSC contained membership from the city's relevant agencies (DOP, ACS, Education, Mental Health, Corporation Counsel), the judiciary, Legal Aid, and community advocates, providers, and family members.

Close to Home was implemented rapidly towards the end of the Bloomberg Administration and beginning of the de Blasio Administration. The legislation passed in April 2012 and by September, youth were being housed in C2H facilities run by non-profit organizations instead of being sent to distant, upstate facilities. Although started originally with 300 contracted beds, today, Close to Home facilities house under 100 youth due to the success of the alternatives to incarceration and the drop in youth crime.

Impact: improved safety and remarkable educational and treatment outcomes

The outcomes generated by C2H were impressive. In the four years following C2H's passage (2012-2016), the City not only completely ceased placing young people in state youth prisons, but it also had a 68% decline in placing youth in C2H facilities. In other words, most youth went home with wraparound services instead of *either* state OCFS facilities *or* the new C2H facilities. This did not jeopardize public safety as the city experienced a 53% decline in youth arrests over that same period, compared to a 24% decline in youth arrests in the four years preceding C2H's enactment.

The small facilities run by non-profits had remarkable educational and treatment outcomes as well. Ninety-one percent of youth passed their classes in C2H facility schools (which were run by the city's Department of Education) in the 2016/2017 school year; 82% of youth transitioned home to a parent, family member, or guardian; and 91% of youth were enrolled in community-based programs upon discharge.

Implications for the Women's Center of Justice

While no two systems are completely alike, New York City and State's youth justice reform story has several lessons for closing the Rose M. Singer Center. In a short period of time, New York's Mayor,

Governor, State Senate, and State Assembly partnered to make watershed, rather than incremental, changes for young people. The city's elected and appointed officials then collaborated with community organizations and advocates to implement that legislation to:

- Create a continuum of alternative programs and reentry support;
- Substantially reduce the number of youth in custody; and
- Make profound changes to conditions of confinement.

Given the toxic environment women (and men) are in right now in city jails, and the fact that closing Rikers Island and moving to borough-based facilities are official city policy, there is no reason that city leaders cannot partner with the state and community groups to close the Rose M. Singer Center and enact analogous reforms to the treatment of women in the city's legal system as their counterparts once did with a larger population of youth confined in similarly shocking conditions.

Case Study: **Young Adult Project on Rikers Island**

Designing detention facilities in close partnership with the people who will reside and work within them

Responding to a humanitarian crisis through cultural healing

In 2021, violence in the young adult units on Rikers Island was three times higher than in other units. To stabilize this humanitarian crisis, New York City began a process to design a new operational model for young adult living units. This was not a *program*; it was a *process* to implement systemic and sustainable change. The project centered around values of cultural healing and antiracism, which were practiced first and foremost by partnering and strategizing directly with the people most impacted – incarcerated young adults and frontline staff. To lead this project, the City engaged a team of consultants that included people who have led similar efforts in jurisdictions around the country with expertise on cultural healing with young men of color in carceral settings and antiracist policy change.

The solution: reimagined and redesigned units for young adults

Following engagement with 75 incarcerated young adults and 80 frontline staff, the City opened four new young adult living units with capacity for 15 young adults per unit for a total capacity of 60 young adults. While opening the units was the headline outcome, this required several important transformational approaches to take root. In addition to the work to cultivate buy-in across rank and retrain staff, the consultant team worked with young adults and staff to:

- **Redesign the physical space**, including completing renovations to remove bolted furniture, empty cells to become “activity rooms” and a laundry room, cleaning and painting throughout the unit including using bright colors selected by staff and young adults.
- **Purchase new, home-like furniture** including day-room tables, chairs, ping pong tables, as well as bedroom furniture including beds and chalkboard paint. Members of the religious community, along with Commissioner Vinny Schiraldi, [participated in](#) a “Day of Prayer and Service,” to clean and paint the units, alongside youth and frontline staff.

- **Add libraries.** The consultants and DOC staff also facilitated the integration of Dwayne Betts' Freedom Reads project to bring in 600 book libraries in each unit as well as one for staff common space.
- **Address trauma.** Given the history of Rikers Island as a site of extreme terror and trauma, the consultant team on this project engaged Black and Indigenous Elders to support a series of healing workshops, including Indigenous sweat lodge ceremonies for frontline staff and young adults. This was the first Sweat Lodge in known history at Rikers Island, marking an important moment of honoring the Indigenous history of the land. In addition, the consultant team facilitated a series of workshops for Black and Brown women working at Rikers to build solidarity and community across their own experience and to prepare to step into their new roles within the reimagined young adult units.

The impact: Reduced violence and “a rare glimmer of hope on Rikers Island”

The units ultimately achieved a high level of buy-in amongst staff of all ranks and young people. In a jail where violence among young adults was three times higher than in the overall population, during the time of the consultant team's involvement, **there were no fights on the new units and no assaults on staff, a significant change in a relatively short time.** The New York Times dubbed the transformation of the young adult facilities a “rare glimmer of hope on Rikers Island,” one that brought about in a formerly very dangerous environment in a relatively short period of time.^{cx}

BEYOND NEW YORK CITY

Case Study: Los Colinas Correctional Facility in San Diego, California

Using environmental and behavioral psychology to guide design

The Los Colinas Correctional Facility was the first of its kind in the U.S. to use environmental and behavioral psychology in its design.^{cx} The facility resembles a “nice college campus, with large windows, cheerful interior color schemes, noise proofing, [and] murals on the walls.”^{cxii}

The “child visitation rooms” are welcoming and have less “institutional” environments than traditional visiting areas. There are toys, games, recreational spaces, and bathrooms designed for children.^{cxiii}

The dayroom is adjacent to a common dining hall that is available for meals to both residents and visitors.^{cxiv} Designers also implemented biophilic design by bringing “nature into the interior of the space” using large-scale photographic murals of natural settings.^{cxv} Bathrooms were normalized: toilet stalls had porcelain toilets and regular plastic toilet seats as well as doors that closed for privacy. Mirrors are made of glass and showers provide privacy.^{cxvi}

Programming keeps eligible residents occupied all day with campus-wide educational activities, rehabilitation, employment training, and recreation.^{cxvii} There were four vocational programs run by the facility – sewing, culinary, grounds keeping and laundry. All of them included a part-day educational component with teachers from non-profit organizations, local education staff, and Sheriff's staff.^{cxviii}

The programs are integrated into the operations of the entire facility. For example, the sewing program makes uniforms for people who are incarcerated. The culinary program cooks the meals for everyone in the facility. Individuals in the groundskeeping program maintained the grounds meticulously and are taught by an individual who is a professional groundskeeper.^{cxxix} Their lessons involved not just the actual work of groundskeeping, but also business management as well as the science of plants, insects, and pesticides.^{cxx}

Women in the “incentive unit” were in rehabilitative programming all day long. They earn additional privileges in this unit through an incentive structure, whereas much of the disciplinary system for the rest of those incarcerated was based on disincentives.^{cxxi}

Former Department of Correction Commissioner Vincent Schiraldi noted when he toured the facility in 2017 that “the ambiance of the place was very positive, staff and incarcerated women greeted me normally wherever I went, there did not seem to be an aura of tension throughout the facility.”^{cxxii}

Case Study: The Nordic Model

Supporting a continuum of care by “importing” service and healthcare providers from the community into the facility

Although the Nordic prison model is designed primarily for men and serves a demographically different population than New York City jails, it proves that key principles of operations recommended for the Women’s Center for Justice are viable.

For example, the Nordic model requires that staff have positive, professional relationships with people detained in the facility based on firmness and fairness. Staff may be trained in skills like motivational interviewing. They understand prisoners’ personal situations and invest in their successful return to the community.^{cxxiii}

It also uses an “import” model that provides non-security services to detained people using local and municipal – non-correctional – service providers.^{cxxiv} Prisons do not have their own staff for medical, educational, employment, clerical, or library services; these services are imported from the local community. This makes continuation of care post-release easier, and those inside get the same services as the community.^{cxxv}

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Michelle Feldman is the Director of the #BEYONDrosies campaign, led by the Women's Community Justice Association (WJCA). She has led successful issue advocacy, communications, and electoral campaigns from both inside and outside of New York City and State government for more than 15 years. Her background includes serving as Director of State Campaigns at the Innocence Project, a national organization that addresses wrongful convictions. There, she oversaw criminal justice reform campaigns that passed more than 30 laws in over half the states in the country. Previously, she was Legislative and Communications Director for New York City Council Member Jessica Lappin, where she spearheaded efforts to bring the Cornell-Technton campus to Roosevelt Island. Her career started in Albany, advising Assembly Democrats in swing districts on policy and communications. She has also managed electoral campaigns for state and city candidates. Michelle has been featured in The New York Times Magazine, Washington Post and other major new outlets. She received her B.A. from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and is an AVODAH fellow.

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Alycia Welch is the Associate Director of the Prison and Jail Innovation Lab (PJIL), a new policy resource center at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin focused on efforts to improve conditions of confinement and expand independent oversight of prisons and jails. She also co-

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Vincent Schiraldi is an Adjunct Professor at the Columbia School of Social Work and Senior Fellow at the Columbia Justice Lab. He has extensive experience in public life, founding the policy think tank, the Justice Policy Institute, then moving to government as director of the juvenile corrections in Washington DC, as Commissioner of the New York City Departments of Probation and Correction, and Senior Policy Adviser to the NYC Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. Schiraldi gained a national reputation as a fearless reformer who emphasized the humane and decent treatment of the men, women, and children under his correctional supervision. He pioneered efforts at community-based alternatives to incarceration in NYC and Washington DC. Schiraldi received a MSW from New York University, and a Bachelor of Arts from Binghamton University.

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Sarah Solon is a leader in HR&A's Inclusive Cities practice, which works with partners inside and outside of government to build greater political power for marginalized communities, increase accountability of local governments, and institutionalize mechanisms for more just and equitable cities. A significant portion of the Inclusive Cities practice is devoted to systemic change, including developing strategies to help cities divest from the criminal legal system and invest in communities. Prior to joining HR&A, Sarah was the Deputy Director of the NYC Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. In this role, she was an author of the City's strategic plan to close the Rikers Island jails and oversaw the team responsible for community-based jail diversion programs.

HR&A Advisors is a mission-driven, employee-owned firm that conducts rigorous analysis to support real estate projects, economic development, policy, and planning. HR&A contributed to the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, which advocates for justice reform, the closure of Rikers Island, and new uses for the 400+ acre site would enable the Island to transition from a site of injustice to the site of next generation infrastructure that creates over 50,000 jobs, produces enough renewable energy to power up to 30,000 homes, and reduces the amount of waste sent to landfills by 40%, positively contributing to the city's economic growth and environmental quality. **Benjamin Cole**, Analyst, and **Claire Summers**, Senior Analyst, contributed research and writing to this paper.

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