Humanizing Language

The Fortune Society
BUILDING PEOPLE, NOT PRISONS

ENGAGING HUMANIZING LANGUAGE
CHALLENGING STIGMA AND STEREOTYPES
CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

The Fortune Society

Mission

- To strengthen communities by promoting alternatives to incarceration (ATI) and supporting successful reentry from incarceration, thus strengthening the fabric of our communities. We provide education services, employment services, access to government benefits, and much more.

We do this by:

- BELIEVING in the power of individuals to change

- BUILDING LIVES through service programs shaped by the needs and experience of our participants

- CHANGING MINDS through education and advocacy to promote the creation of a fair, humane, and truly rehabilitative correctional system

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Today's Objectives

Learn the importance of humanizing language
- Why words matter
- Key principles

Challenge stigmas and stereotypes
- What are the origins of stigmas?
- Why are stigmas incorrect?
- How do we overcome stigmas?

Examine the connection to the supportive housing space
- Challenges
- Opportunities

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Open Forum

Do you actually know whether or not each person you have interacted with is a person who has been impacted by the criminal justice/legal system?

Do you find yourself thinking about proper terms to use when interacting with people who have been directly impacted?

Open Forum

What language do you typically use? And how have terms you currently use evolved/changed over time?

Challenging Stigma and Stereotypes

What are some stereotypes and stigmas you hear on a day-to-day basis about directly-impacted people? What do we see in the media, television, and more?
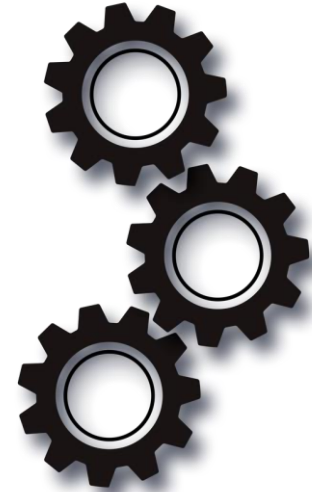
Where do you think they come from?

Challenging Stigma and Stereotypes Cont.

Stigmas Origins

- "Us" vs. "Them"

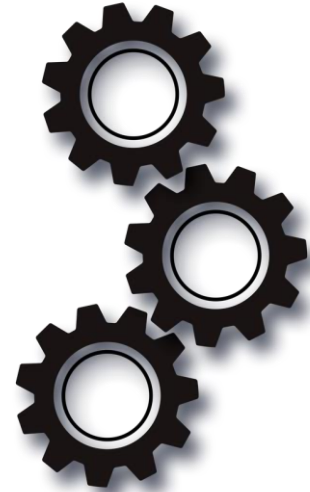- Cross-cultural variabilities
  - Race
  - Morals
  - Religion

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Challenging Stigma and Stereotypes Cont.

Why are these stigmas wrong?

- Locally and culturally constructed

- Instances are either seen as culturally accepted or stigmatized

- Groups view others' valued marks of identity as stigmas
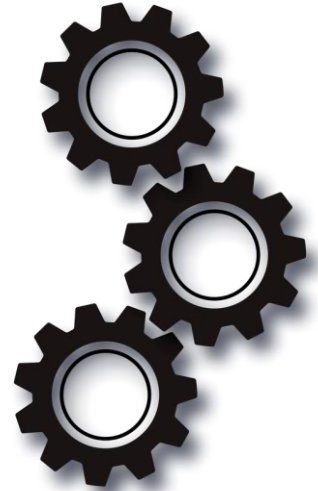
Challenging Stigma and Stereotypes Cont.

Examples

- Fatness - unhealthy vs. wealthy

- Age - sickness vs. wisdom

How do these examples relate to the stigmas directly-impacted people experience everyday?

What are equivalent examples for people who have been impacted by the criminal legal system?

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Engaging Humanizing Language

Eddie Ellis, founder of the Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions

PEOPLE currently or formerly incarcerated, **PEOPLE** on parole, **PEOPLE** recently released from prison, **PEOPLE** in prison, **PEOPLE** with criminal convictions, **WE ARE PEOPLE**

Engaging Humanizing Language Cont.

The Marshall Project callout results:

- 38% preferred "incarcerated person"

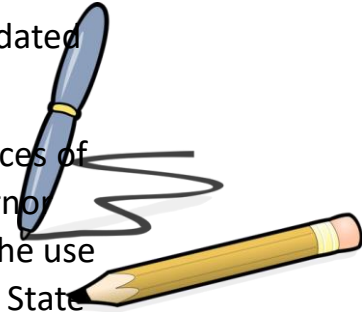- 30% selected "other" ("person in prison", "man or woman", or "the person's name")

Engaging Humanizing Language Cont.

Legislation (A.9273/S.8216) Reduces Harmful Stigma Against Incarcerated People by Correcting Outdated Terminology Used in State Law – signed by Governor Hochul August 8, 2022

State Senator Gustavo Rivera said, "Language matters. I am proud that my bill to replace all references of the word inmate with incarcerated individual in New York State law has been signed today by Governor Hochul. For too long, we as a society have thought of incarcerated individuals as less than people. The use of the word "inmate" further dehumanizes and demoralizes them. This is another concrete step our State is taking to make our criminal justice system one that focuses on rehabilitation, rather than relying solely on punishment."

Assemblymember Jeffrion L. Aubry said, "Penological terms such as felon, inmate, prisoner, offender, and convict dehumanize, degrade, and stigmatize people. Using a term such as 'incarcerated individual' recognizes the humanity of people and exemplifies the redeemable value of human beings. This new law seeks to correct outdated terminology that adversely impacts an individual's transition back into their community."

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Each sentence contains hurtful language. Carefully read each sentence and jot down the dehumanizing term. Next, write proper term examples that can be used to replace the dehumanizing term.

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#1

We welcome ex-cons to rent the premises, but we need to do a background check first.

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#2

There are specific housing guidelines for sex offenders, but we will try to accommodate you.

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#3

I see on your record you were a young delinquent, do you have any current charges?

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#4

We give ex-prisoners the same respect as everyone else.

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#5

We're happy to have you here. As an ex-offender you've been through some trying times, we welcome you.

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CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Follow **key principles** including:

1. Engage people and respect their preferences;
2. Use stigma-free and accurate language;
3. Prioritize **individuals** over their characteristics; and
4. Cultivate self-awareness

STRATEGY

1. Be conscious of the language you use. Remember that each time you speak, you convey powerful word picture images.
2. Stop using the terms offender, felon, prisoner, inmate and convict.
3. Substitute the word **PEOPLE** for these other negative terms.
4. Encourage your friends, family and colleagues to use positive language in their speech, writing, publications and electronic communications.

Contact Information

- Lily Shapiro | lshapiro@fortunesociety.org

- Andre Ward | award@fortunesociety.org

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