

A Transformation Story: Finding Connection & Inspiration from Others Half-Way Around the World



➤ Introduction

Prisons across the U.S. often struggle to foster trust and respect between staff and people who are incarcerated. But Jorrell Hicks, a man who was incarcerated in Washington, was shown that a different way was possible when he was introduced to Norway's more humane approach to incarceration.

● Jorrell's Story

When Jorrell was a teenager, he turned to the streets for support. "If you don't have the father figure, most of us feel like we have to seek that elsewhere. So that's where I ended up—in the streets—and then doing a lot of crime. And eventually it did catch up to me." At 24-years-old, Jorrell was incarcerated and faced the harsh reality of a potential 40-year sentence. "As soon as they were talking about how much time I was going to get, I was like, okay, this is a reality check." Jorrell became committed to changing his surrounding environment for the better.

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- Jorrell Hicks

Peer-led initiatives in prison may help foster social relationships and support—important factors in reducing recidivism.

Perrin, C. (2022). Maximizing the utility of peer support in carceral settings: A few stumbling blocks to consider. *European Journal of Criminology*, 19(4), 730-745.

● Amend's Intervention

In 2022, Stafford Creek partnered with Amend, a university-based program that aims to reduce the harm inflicted by prison environments on incarcerated people and the correctional officers who work with them. Jorrell, who had advocated for improvements to his housing unit in his role as the unit's tier representative and who was a member of the prison's violence prevention committee, was eager to learn about Amend—although he, like many others, was initially guarded. "We were all skeptical," Jorrell admits. "But there was something different about the way Amend was presented. They didn't just talk—they listened. They came back every month, asked for our ideas, and genuinely worked with us to find solutions."

Amend emphasized human dignity and rehabilitation by bringing together residents and staff to create a new culture of understanding, support, and accountability.

One of the key programs, inspired by Amend’s training program for staff and initiated by Stafford Creek residents, was “Cell2Cell”—a virtual exchange program where residents from Stafford Creek met regularly with people incarcerated in Norway, a country known for its humane prison practices. Through this program, Jorrell and other residents participated in video exchanges with Norwegian prison residents, alongside a couple of prison staff on each side of the exchange. They discussed their experiences, learned about the differences in their prison systems, and shared ideas for how to improve their environments. These exchanges broke down barriers and challenged long-held stereotypes about what prison could and should be. Stafford Creek residents were exposed to a prison model based on trust, human dignity, and rehabilitation. “Out of everything that has been spearheaded with Amend, Cell2Cell is the tip of the spear,” Jorrell explains. “It brought residents and staff together, helped us learn from each other, and really pushed the idea of human connection in a system designed to isolate us.”

And, the impact of the program extended beyond the residents. Correctional staff who participated in or observed the exchanges began to see residents in a different light, recognizing their potential for curiosity, introspection, growth, and change. This shift in perception is crucial to breaking down the “us vs. them” mentality that often pervades prison environments. By humanizing the experiences of both residents and staff through mutual learning, Cell2Cell laid the groundwork for a more collaborative and rehabilitative environment.



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✓ The Outcomes

Jorrell quickly became a leader within the Amend Cell2Cell program, helping bridge the gap between residents and staff. He worked to get others on board, asking questions, facilitating conversations, and engaging both residents and staff who were initially resistant to the broader culture change work in the prison. His role as a tier representative for his housing unit gave him a meaningful platform—he became a voice for others, gathering concerns and advocating for positive changes. In December 2022, Mr. Hicks’ dedication to positive change was recognized, and he was granted clemency. Even after his release, Jorrell has continued participating in the Cell2Cell program, becoming a mentor for current residents and demonstrating for them the power of successful reentry. Today, Jorrell owns his own software development business and started a nonprofit focused on reentry support, youth development, and health and wellness.

> What’s Next

Inspired by the program’s success, a women’s prison in Washington state adopted the Cell2Cell model. Jorrell hopes to continue partnering with Amend and the Department of Corrections to expand the program to even more facilities and continue building culture change in prisons driven by the principles of human dignity and rehabilitation. Jorrell’s leadership and partnership is an example of how Amend aims to inspire, teach, and collaborate with people in prison to create safer, more humane, healthy, and supportive environments.