



BRINK



LITERACY PROJECT

Frames Prison Program 2018 Reporting Package

“Literacy is the civil rights challenge of our generation.”
—Amy Friedman, Executive Director of Book Trust



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Introduction

Enclosed in this package, we are thrilled to share with you the findings from the 2018 expansion of the Frames Prison Program. This program, first created in 2015, works in women's max security prisons in Colorado to increase literacy rates, empower students to take positive steps forward, and help to combat growing recidivism rates.

In this package you'll find an overview of the four courses run in the Denver Women's Correctional Facility in 2018, including:

1. Curriculum and education goals
2. Overview of our classes, instructors, and budget
3. Statistical findings and impact data
4. Testimonies from students and prison staff
5. Our 2019 expansion plans

A Special Thanks

Before we delve into the report, we want to extend a huge thank you to all the donors, sponsors, and volunteers who have made this prison literacy program so successful. In particular, we would like to offer our gratitude to the **Morgridge Family Foundation**, the **Armstrong Family Foundation**, and the **University of Denver** for their incredible support of our educational efforts.

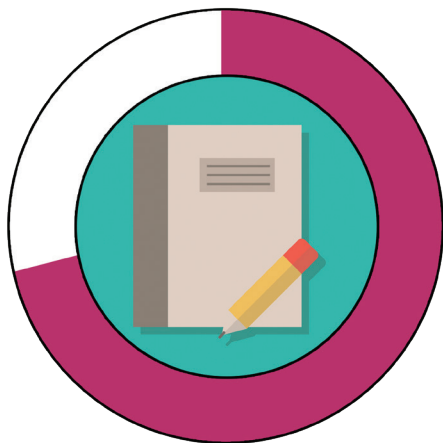
It is only through their generous funding and unerring support that we have been able to not only launch this program, but also lay the foundations to ensure we continue to be as effective and impactful as possible for years to come.

We'd also like to extend a huge thank you to the staff of the **Denver Women's Correctional Facility library**, in particular **Stacy McKenzie**, for her tireless determination and brilliance.

Last but certainly not least, this program would not be possible without **Zach Howard**, our resident comic book artist and creative pioneer. Thank you for inspiring this unique approach to teaching and inspiring those behind bars.

The Problem

There is a *direct* link between illiteracy and prison



**70% of U.S. Inmates
Struggle with Reading**

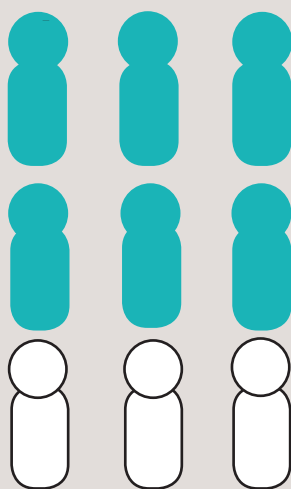


**45% of U.S. Inmates
Lack Functional Literacy**

And these problems start long before incarceration

2/3

**OF STUDENTS
STRUGGLING
WITH
LITERACY BY
4TH GRADE**



**WILL ENGAGE IN
CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

With **recidivism** rates
over 75%,
this creates a cycle of
**incarceration &
reentry** that can
last a lifetime.

BUT THERE IS HOPE....

Studies show that inmates who engage
with literacy programs in prison are
50% LESS LIKELY to reoffend.

But imagine if we could pair that vital literacy enhancement
with something **even more powerful...**

The Frames Prison Program

Innovative Solutions to Break the Cycle of Incarceration and Recidivism

With the Frames Prison Program, we wanted to do more than just increase literacy rates. At Brink, we believe that education is only one part of **closing the achievement gap**. In addition to equipping these students with the vital literacy skills needed to navigate our world, we strive to ensure that each student has the **desire and passion** to use those skills to pursue a new chapter in their lives.



Our Curriculum

In creating and teaching this program, Brink set out to achieve specific aims: increase literacy rates within the prison population, decrease recidivism rates, and use storytelling to empower this community. To achieve these outcomes, the Frames Prison Program is built around three main elements:



The **comic medium** acts as a bridge to engage reluctant and low-literacy readers with reading and writing.



The focus on “**Turning Points**” allows students to gain a personal understanding of how their past decisions shape their current path.



The **act of telling one's story** enables shifts in identity and rehabilitative progress untouched by other, more common practices.

Our Goals



Introduce storytelling as a means of **positive self-expression**

Engage learners in **creative and flexible education** that unlocks potential



Strengthen the **reading and writing skills** of each participant regardless of current proficiency

Empower inmates to reflect on their lives, **assess** important past decisions, and **set positive goals** for the future



Share student work within a safe group as well as with the greater community

Build students' **individual skill sets** in graphic design, writing, self-expression, and problem-solving skills that will help them **achieve their own personal and economic goals**



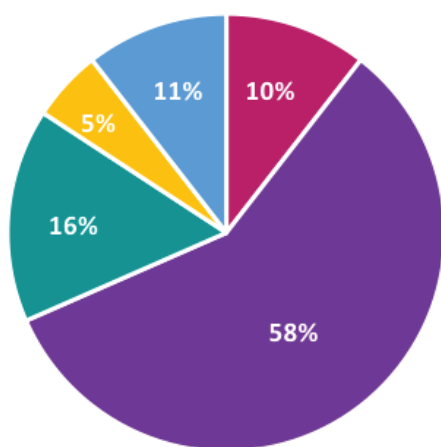
Rethink the way literacy learning is approached and taught, especially within **low-literacy, underrepresented populations**

Overview of 2018's Courses

Our Classroom Demographics

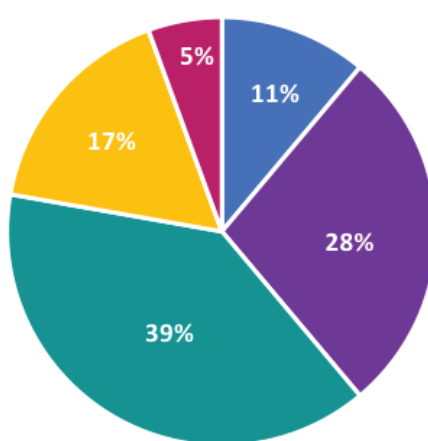
When we first started teaching in 2017, our primary goal was to effect recidivism rates. As such, we centred our classes around students who had less than 5 years remaining on their sentence. However, we discovered that opening up at least 20% of the course spaces to students who were serving longer sentences created a stronger learning culture in individual cell blocks since “lifers” and longer-sentence students have more influence among the population. Since then, we’ve seen a great increase in signups (so much so we had to start a waiting list for the courses) as well as general dedication to the curriculum. Here are our demographics at a glance:

Ethnic Background



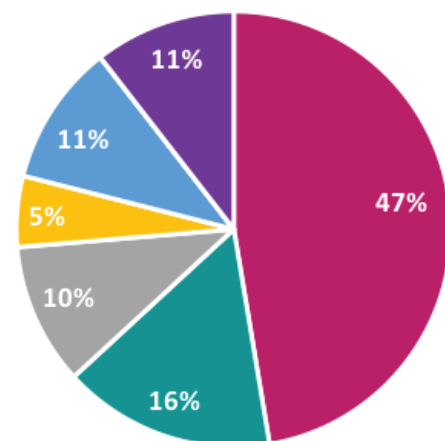
● Black
 ● White
 ● Hispanic
 ● Asian
 ● American Indian
 ○ Other

Age Range



● 18-24 yrs old
 ● 25-34 yrs old
 ● 35-44 yrs old
 ● 45-54 yrs old
 ○ 55-64 yrs old
 ● 65-74 yrs old

Prison Sentence Length



● 0-9 yrs
 ● 10-19 yrs
 ● 20-29 yrs
 ● 30-39 yrs
 ○ 40-49 yrs
 ○ 50-59 yrs
 ○ 60-69 yrs
 ● 70-97 yrs
 ● 80+ Life WP

This year we also opened the courses up to Level 5 students (which is the highest security level). This allowed us to help populations who were in the most flux as well as contribute to a cohesive transition for several students moving between security levels.

Our Instructors



DANI HEDLUND
Lead Instructor

Dani is the CEO of Brink and lead developer of the Frames Prison Program. As the founder and Editor-in-Chief of *F(r)iction*, she specializes in championing new and underrepresented voices.



LEAH SCOTT
Junior Instructor

Leah is a graduate of the University of Denver and has worked in Brink's Education department for four years, developing new approaches to storytelling and classroom interaction.



ZACH HOWARD
Celebrity Artist

Based here in CO, Zach is an Eisner-nominated illustrator who has worked with Frames since day one. His most notable employers include Marvel, Disney, DC, Warner Bros., Image, and IDW.

Our Impact and Reach



Resulting In...

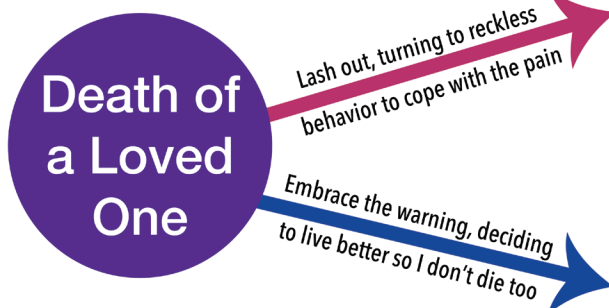


The Power of Turning Points

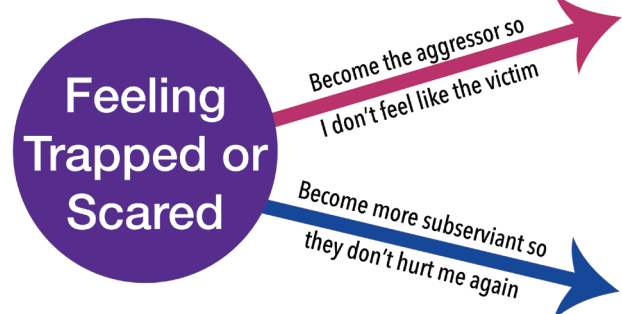
At the heart of our curriculum is the idea of **turning points**. A turning point is a moment in your past when you were faced with a difficult choice. Whichever path you choose leads to a radically different life. In class, we zoom in on that moment, highlighting the power of our decisions.

For example, turning points range from the incident that led to our students' incarcerations to events that took place in their childhoods that forged their personalities and lifestyles. Here are some samples of the most powerful and common turning points from our 2018 courses:

Turning Point Resulting Choices



Turning Point Resulting Choices



Turning Point Resulting Choices



Regardless of what their turning point is, evaluating these pivotal moments unearths truths about why our students have become the women they are. Through the lens of the power of their decisions, they start to see how choices they make *right now* can radically change their current paths.

Our goal is that a new turning point blossoms in class, one where they choose to learn from these experiences and make positive changes to live safer, happier, law abiding lives.

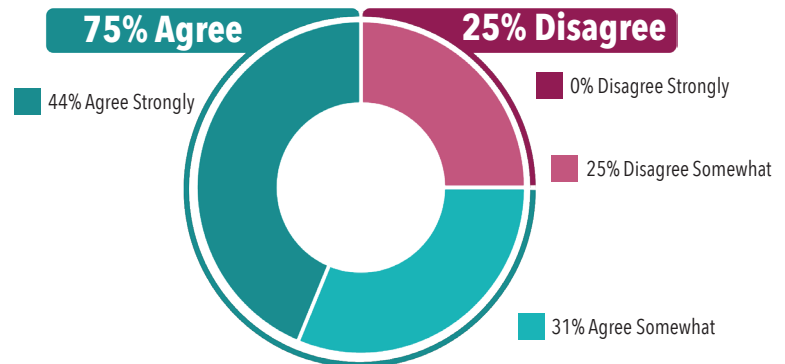
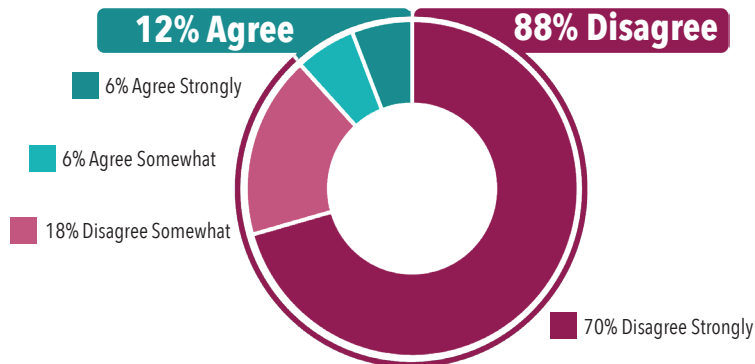
Our Data

To ensure that we are **closing the achievement gap**, correctly **developing our programs**, and creating **lasting change**, data collection and evaluation is a major component of our classes. We use a range of collection techniques—the below examples demonstrate the use of “self-evaluation” as a way for students to develop a sense of control over their own learning. Not only do we track the increase of literacy skills, we also pay careful attention to changes in identity, views on education, and understanding of their crimes. Here’s a glance at our most striking data:

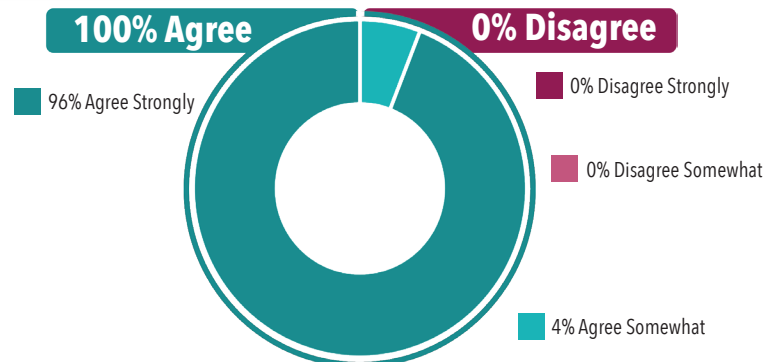
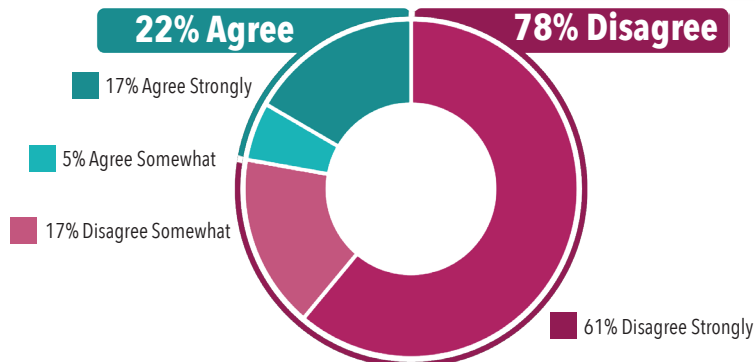
Before

After

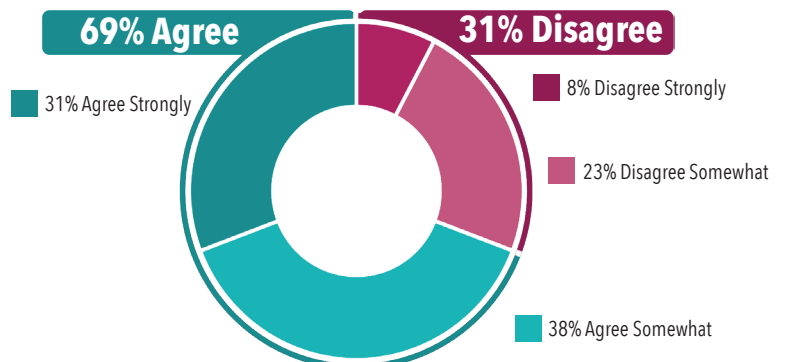
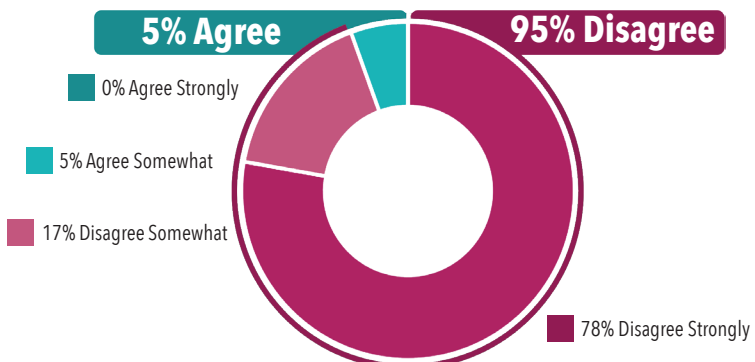
“I am comfortable expressing my feelings in writing.”



“I can name at least 2 teachers who encouraged me positively.”



“I believe that I have a **bright future** ahead of me.”



If you have interest in seeing the entire data sets, please let us know! We’d love to share the research with you!

Personal Transformations

From the Students

“This class has **impacted my life** and will continue to do so when I get out of prison. It has built my confidence, self-worth, self-esteem, and helped my healing process.” —JC

“I’m determined to use what I’ve learned through this program to **propel my success.**” —AS

“I’ve definitely found my **passion in life** through this class.” —SA

“As I built my graphic memoir, I was **held accountable to my actions** but also supported in making sure the readers not only understood my pain but my remorse and empathy. The teachers were patient and extremely encouraging in reminding us that **we do have futures and a voice.**” —KS

“Thank you so much for caring about our stories. **We all need a voice** and this is a chance to be our own voice.” —MBJ

“It feels good to **not be forgotten** about and to know that people care about who we are despite what we’ve done.” —RT

“I truly believe this class will help many more individuals and give **not only therapeutic help** but a **voice to the voiceless.**” —EJ

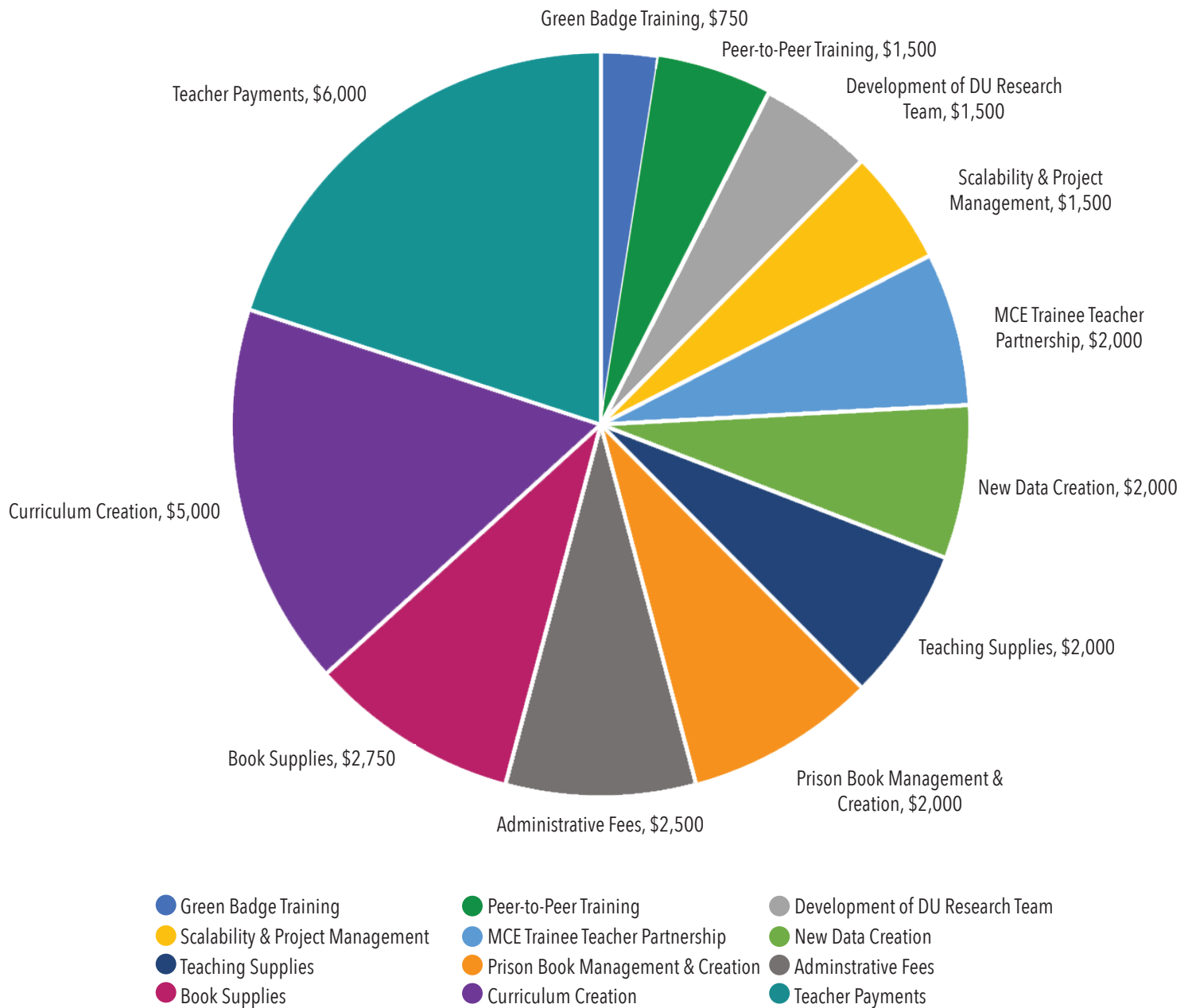
“Without this team and support, I do not believe that **my confidence** and **understanding of my crime** would have been as clear. I attribute a lot of my success to **making parole** to this group.” —RB

From the Prison

“I have **never seen offenders dedicate so much** of their free time to an optional program like they do to the Frames Program. Many of the students say that this is **the first time they have felt comfortable sharing their stories** because they find the graphic art process so relatable and feel more free to express their feelings in this format.” —Stacy McKenzie, *MLS, Library Supervisor for the Denver Complex Correctional Facility*

Our Budget

Thanks to our 2018 gala, we were able to raise more \$30,000 to expand our prison program. This allowed us not only to move from one course per year to four, we were also able to make vital adjustments to our curriculum, expand our reading list, start a data collection team, and pilot “master classes” for students who are particularly excited about continuing their education after the initial courses.



Please Note: There are several reasons that we are able to offer these programs at such a low rate, but most importantly it is worth noting the primary contributing factors:

- 80% of the Brink staff team are volunteers so program administration, management, and curriculum development have vastly reduced costs.
- We carry out targeted outreach before each course in order to get as many books donated as possible.
- We forge partnerships with organizations and institutions that contribute expertise, advice, educational experience, and strategies for improvement and research.

Maximizing Impact

Scalability & International Expansion



In order to expand this program across Colorado, we will begin rolling out a scale-up model this year. This model weaves together our developing partnerships with new prisons, a peer-to-peer training system for new instructors, and our original curriculum to allow us to push into two new prisons in Colorado and one in Scotland by the end of 2019.

After we have honed our scalability model during our 2019 expansion, we'll select two or three key states to expand this program into, working in one prison per state and then expanding out once the flagship programs have stabilized.

The rate of expansion will be determined by our fundraising efforts at the 2019 gala and our foundation and grant support.

Peer-to-Peer Instructor Training



Brink has partnered with the Morgridge College of Education to offer graduate teachers the opportunity to gain literacy and teaching experience through this innovative program. In August 2018, we went live with this new application process. Following candidate selection and the necessary prison training, our first trainee will begin teaching in prison in February 2019.

This system is rooted in the concept of teaching teams. Each new teacher is paired with an experienced Frames instructor who has already taught at least one course, thus allowing for a process of mentorship and collaboration. After the initial 12-month foundational period, this scheme will allow Brink to scale up the delivery of this program. Dependant on funding (and prison bureaucracy), we aim to expand to 2-3 prisons in Colorado each year.

2019 & Beyond!

Research Team



Since May 2018, Brink executives have been working with a number of researchers at the University of Denver to begin the process of putting together a research team. Thus far, experts in restorative justice, homeless youth social work, literacy, and arts-based prison initiatives have joined the team.

This interdisciplinary team will seek to incorporate enhanced data collection into the prison program itself over the next year. The quantitative and qualitative data sets gathered will be cycled back into the program to improve effectiveness and thus enhance impact. Additionally, researchers will focus on narrative analysis within the criminal justice context in order to consider how our program may have the potential to impact future prison and education reform.

Prison Book

To further empower these students and amplify their voices, we are currently in the process of pairing students with celebrity comic artists, writers, and editors, so that Brink can bring together a collection of short graphic stories.

Through the publication of this book, we aim to increase awareness about the effects of illiteracy and shine a light on this often-overlooked population.

Funds from the book will allow Brink to create scholarships for inmates, enhance libraries, and provide vital resources to help end the cycle of incarceration.





Thank you for making this
program a reality!

