

MARCH EDITION

# THE PILLARS

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## HEALTH IN BLACK NEW MEXICO

## WOMEN'S HER-STORY MONTH

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March is Women's Her-Story Month. This is our opportunity to honor all women whose stories and efforts have shaped our lives. But there is a group of women that we seem to forget, and our stories and efforts are important too; incarcerated and re-entering women. These are women released from prison attempting to readjust to life on the outside. A 2017 study in New Mexico of newly incarcerated women revealed that 85% of women were mothers. Those 529 incarcerated women had a total of 410 children between them. How those women got to prison is a complex combination of trauma, mental health problems, substance use, lack of family support, choices born out of poverty, and abusive relationships. We want you to know about us because acknowledging and supporting incarcerated women can help prevent recidivism, improve our future, protect our kids, and keep our families whole.





I was incarcerated by the NM Department of Corrections for 6 years. The day I started my sentence I lost my son to gun violence. Then, 8 months later I lost my mother to cancer and I couldn't attend her funeral. I lost custody of my daughter due to my incarceration; the state stripped me of my rights as a mother. Throughout it all, I was denied mental health treatment. So, I determined that I would heal myself. I decided to acquire knowledge about the mental health of incarcerated women and share what I learned. It started with a Mental Health First Aid certification in both the adult and youth curriculums. Next, I became a Naloxone overdose prevention trainer and Narcan distributor focused on preventing opioid overdose in this population. I continue to do everything I can to improve my own mental health, and that of other women.

That's how Women in Leadership (W.I.L.) was born. My cofounder, Carissa McGee, and I use our own experiences to educate, empower and advocate for women, children, and families trying to adjust to life after incarceration. These women and families, impacted by known social determinants of health, are some of our most vulnerable citizens. We also utilize Returning Citizens as our team's subject matter experts to aid in the reunification of mothers and children and to get access to care and resources. Returning is a critical stage for incarcerated mothers.

**“Power is not given to you. You have to take it.” —  
Beyonce Knowles**



In collaboration with others such as the New Mexico Black Mental Health Coalition, we strive to meet the needs of women transitioning out of incarceration. Each year, about 500 women are released from incarceration into New Mexican communities. Out of 518 women that released from NMCD in 2017, 226 (43.5% ) did not get the support and resources they needed and got locked up again within 3 years. While most are released into the Albuquerque Metro Area, others are released into more rural areas with even fewer available resources. The mission of W.I.L. is to address returning women's needs with innovative virtual workshops and meaningful connections with these women with powerful herstories. Look us up at [womeninleadership.org](http://womeninleadership.org).

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