When I was young growing up in Mākaha, there was a homeless drunkard named Raymond who was always sitting at the front entrance of the 7-11 next to Cornets store. Once or twice a month, my grandmother would go to the store to pick up Raymond and bring him to our house. Grandma would feed him and make him clean the yard. When he was finished she would let him wash up, clothe him, and feed him again. Grandma would give him money, and then Raymond would leave, walking back to 7-11. Shortly thereafter, he would be sitting at 7-11 smelling like alcohol again and begging for money. Finally, after witnessing several cycles of my kupuna’s compassion, I questioned my grandmother and asked her why she did what she did for Raymond. My grandmother would smile at me and simply say, “Bumbye you understand.”

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE AT WCCC

This is a story about the Trauma-Informed Care Initiative at the Hawai’i Women’s Community Correctional Center (WCCC), where we are working within the visionary framework of creating a pu’uhonua—a place to live a forgiven life, a place for transformation, a place that nurtures healing within the individual, family, and community. Taking a community-building approach, we use a Mind, Body, Spirit, and Place perspective to address trauma and to work toward community healing and well-being.

I am often asked why I do what I do. For twenty years, I was a correctional officer at Hālawa Correctional Facility and at the O’ahu Community Correctional Center (OCCC). I then became warden at WCCC. How does a twenty-year veteran adult correctional officer walk into WCCC and start speaking about trauma-informed care and sanctuaries of healing for prisoners?

When I first became the acting warden at the Women’s Community Correctional Center, it was important for me to truly understand Hawai’i’s female offender population. So, I researched, studied, and found out that at a national
level, female offenders’ crimes were mostly drug-related and non-violent. Female offenders typically followed pathways that separated them from their peers. Common factors, or points along their paths, included 1) undereducation, 2) few employable skills, 3) a lack of positive relationships over time, and 4) substance abuse. Additionally, I learned that with respect to their substance abuse, a large number of women who become addicts have suffered from some kind of significant trauma.

Violence, and the trauma that it causes, is pervasive in our society. The literature shows that the vast majority of women in prison are trauma survivors, as are the majority of all women with substance abuse and/or mental health problems. An understanding of the impact of trauma on women’s lives, how trauma survivors develop coping mechanisms that can bring them to the attention of law enforcement, and what strategies can help trauma survivors to heal were all key to changing the environment of WCCC.

Healing and reconciliation are crucial to addressing trauma. For many female offenders, healing is complex because it often involves the home and relationships with other family members. The process of healing and reconciliation is about more than the individual woman. With this in mind, the concept of pu’uhonua, or sanctuary, for these females to seek a safe haven, began to become clear. When I became warden, I remember seeking counsel from my high school spiritual guide, Kahuna Pule David Ka’upu, who provided me with a modern interpretation of the ancient pu’uhonua. Kahu Ka’upu talked about creating a place for forgiveness. Kahu said, “When the female offenders reach the walls of WCCC, they are forgiven for their sins; within the walls they are taught how to live a forgiven life.” His guidance has become foundational for me at WCCC.

Working with female offenders and their children requires and produces heaps of compassion. The facts are staggering: usually by the time a woman is convicted and sent to WCCC, she would have already lost custody of her child or children. Indeed, by the time a female offender walks into WCCC, she would have already spent a year in one of the other CCCs on O‘ahu, Kaua‘i, Hawai‘i, or Maui, going through detox. “Waking up” while sentenced in WCCC, the woman realizes she has lost everything. For those women who still have contact with their children, the contact is often limited due to strained relationships between her and her children’s caregiver.

At WCCC, we work at reestablishing familial bonds between mothers and their children during the incarceration period. This is important, because children and family are important for the woman’s successful transition back into the community. Restorative justice circles are conducted by community organizations, and begin the journey of healing between the family and
the incarcerated women. In addition, community faith organizations sponsor events within the prison that allow mothers and their children to participate in activities and share a meal to maintain the familial bond. It is a well-known statistic that over half the children of incarcerated parents will end up in the criminal justice system.

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When I was young, dinner was an important part of our day. It began with the setting of the table. Fork on napkin, place on left side of plate; spoon on right; glass on right above spoon. There were ten of us who sat at the table. My father was at the head, and instead of a fork, we placed chopsticks where he sat. To his right was my mother. Between them was my baby brother on the high chair. My younger brother, Matt, and I sat to her right. To my right was my older brother, Kama. At the other end of the table, sitting across from my father, sat the eldest sibling, Kaleo. To my father’s left was my grandmoth-er and to her left were my two older sisters, Ulu and Brenda.

Dinner started at six, exactly at six; you didn’t want to be late. My grandma or mom cooked the meal. My older brothers would have a hard time making it in on time, especially when surf was up. The latecomers ended up washing dishes. The boys always had to be presentable, with at least a T-shirt on. Dinner began when one of us, picked by dad, said the prayer. Discussion topics would vary depending on dad’s questions and who they were directed at. We had to ask permission to leave the table when we were finished. Clearing the table and washing the dishes was a rotated duty managed by mom. This was the structure I was raised in.

Every crime committed today is preceded by a choice. Each choice is preceded by an experience. Each experience comes from a personal journey. Each journey starts from an all-too-familiar environment. We call that environment: home.

Home. What was once a safe place has become a place of complex social dynamics that has, within our most recent history as a people, produced both the victim and the predator—the best of who we are and the worst of who we are. It is a heavenly place and it is a place of hell. Abuse born within the home is a factual reality. It is that which cannot be spoken of. It is our greatest shame. It has been proven to be a lifelong disease. And as a result of trauma in the home, a life journey of rebellion begins. A search for substances to ease the pain. Entering the criminal justice system.

In ancient times, my ancestors lived in villages—clusters of homes for survival and defense. Each home had a purpose, each person had a gift. A gift that sustained the whole, the village. When an offence was committed within
the village, processes to rebuild relationships were already in place, to main-
tain the balance of gifts necessary for the survival of the whole. When offences
became greater than the village could handle, areas outside the village were
created to sustain the gift. These sanctuaries would house the gift until ready
to return to the community. When the individual returned, he or she was ac-
cepted back into the community and their gift was utilized again for the bet-
terment of the whole.

In today’s world, we have forgotten how to be a village. We have learned
how to be selfish. We no longer need our neighbors to survive. And when of-
fences are committed, we simply send the offenders away to places where the
light of their gifts is smothered.

And upon their return they are shunned, ignored, a gift no more.

**TAKING A BAT TO THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

Sometimes I wake up in the morning and I just wanna take a hard swing at
the criminal justice system with a BAT. This BAT of mine has become an
acronym of my work and leadership at WCCC. In order for our staff to be
successful in all that we do where we are “AT,” I must invite the community
to come into WCCC to share with the women. I must be an advocate for
programs and initiatives that address their lives Before (“B”) they end up at
WCCC, in order to prevent young girls from coming to prison in the first
place. This includes partnerships with community organizations that work in
family court, Child Protective Services, Hawai‘i Youth Correctional Facility,
Juvenile Detention Center, Home Maluhia, etc. Through these partnerships,
we aim to help young women understand the reasons for their entry into the
system, and we think about how we can work together to get them out.

In order for our staff to be successful in all that we do where we are “AT,”
I must also be an advocate for programs and initiatives that address their
Transition (“T”) out of or after WCCC, in order to stop women from com-
ing back. These partnerships with community organizations include provid-
ing support for them in getting jobs, additional schooling, substance abuse
relapse prevention, family reunification, and continual spiritual healing. Ad-
vocating for and supporting community organizations that assist the women
in transition benefit both the women and the government in an inclusive
wraparound service approach that attacks the criminal justice system.

About 600 women are currently incarcerated in Hawai‘i prisons and jails.
They represent several thousand women who are currently in the larger crimi-
nal justice system—either on probation, awaiting trial and parole, etc. If you
add the two together, we are talking about several thousand children. We
haven’t even begun to talk about the thousands of women who are not yet in
the criminal justice system, who are suffering from the same trauma and addiction behaviors but have yet to commit a crime or be caught. These numbers are unimaginable, yet they are a reality. Every woman and child mentioned above represents a family in crisis.

FROM MODALITIES OF PUNISHMENT TO MODALITIES OF CHANGE

We need to move away from modalities of punishment to modalities of change. Recently I visited the new Juvenile Detention Center in Kapolei. As a professional corrections officer, I was very impressed with the correctional state-of-the-art design and security software. The front entrance included metal detectors, x-ray machines, and private security officers, and was overlooked by a one-way mirrored central control that reminded me of the TSA checkpoint at the Honolulu International Airport. Of the four jails and four prisons in the Department of Public Safety within Hawai‘i, none of them has a front entrance security screening process as rigid as the new Juvenile Detention Center.

This example reveals how we create environments that contradict our ability to truly care for our troubled youth. We did not create a place of healing for our children; instead, we built a state-of-the-art Juvenile Correctional Facility, straight out of western thinking and influence. If we build an environment like that, we are going to create people like that. Instead, we need to create environments where people can feel safe enough to change internally. Over 90 percent of female offenders are going to be released. What state of mind do we want them to be in when they return to their communities?

And the problems begin way before people reach the prison, so building better prisons is not enough. How can we create places of healing outside the prison, before the prison? Places of healing, safe places—to feel vulnerable, to trust. When you’re going into relapse, or going into hard times, you need to be able to go to a place where you can revitalize your spirit and become pono with yourself. Can Family Court be a place of healing? Can the Department of Education be a place of healing? Can the Juvenile Detention Center be a place of healing? I don’t even know what this would look like. But I do know that we need to be a village again. Like an ancient village, public and private agencies have gifts. We need to manage these gifts together, strategically, to align them in ways to collectively change the criminal justice system.

It is wrong for us to believe that changing prisons alone will solve everything. We need to think bigger, and partner with others to think about ways to heal our communities. For example, Hina Mauka, a community-driven Substance Abuse Treatment Center under the leadership of Alan Johnson has adopted more trauma-informed care in its treatment approach. They believe they are a place of healing. Another example—The Pū‘ā Foundation, under
the guidance of Executive Director Toni Bissen, is the lead community organization involved in the WCCC trauma-informed care initiative. The foundation’s goal is that in a world of differences, it chooses to make a difference. Another example—AhLan Diamond is currently leading restoration efforts to return Waimea Valley to its historic role as a pu’uhonua. The partnership created between WCCC and these three organizations has goals to treat clients and offenders, and their families, and provide them with experiential opportunities within the valley that can enhance internal transformation and create a sacred place for them to come to. It is our cultural belief that the land will heal the hands that work it, and then the land and its people will flourish.

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When we started training WCCC staff and community volunteers in trauma-informed care, I began sharing the story of my grandmother and Raymond. It was my intent to tell them of their kuleana to care not only for each other, but to those among us who have nothing. We are all connected. Together with understanding and compassion we are stronger and can make a difference. Stronger children, stronger families, stronger communities. Grandma, I understand.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND INSPIRATION

1. TEDx, “The Criminal Justice System: A Place of Healing: Mark Patterson at TEDxHonolulu.” You can watch this online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8uCC3DedyfU.
2. Wellspring Covenant Church, “Kids day with care givers June 2013/Prison Monologue.” You can watch this online at https://vimeo.com/71799573.
3. Office of Hawaiian Affairs and the Department of Public Safety, “OHA Pu’uhonua Summit: Creating a Place of Refuge.” featuring Ted Sakai (PSD), Kamana’opono Crabbe (OHA), and Toni Bissen (Pü’ä Foundation). You can watch this online at http://vimeo.com/52980300.
4. Kimberlee Bassford, “Prison Monologues Opening 2012.” You can watch this online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3m1JtTbPFN0.
5. “A Road to Pu’uhonua” discusses the concept of pu’uhonua from the pa’aahao point of view. You can watch this online at ‘Ōlelo.net, at http://olelo.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=30&clip_id=32625.