

Anti-Recidivism Coalition Hope and Redemption Program (HART) Evaluation Report

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Cynthia Magallanes-Gonzalez
Kacy Martin, PhD

Executive Summary

This evaluation examines the fidelity of implementation and participant outcomes of the Hope and Redemption Team (HART) program, a rehabilitative initiative designed to support incarcerated individuals in their personal growth, emotional development, and successful reentry into society. The findings indicate that HART has a strong, positive impact on participants' overall wellbeing, with statistically and thematically significant improvements across a range of indicators, including self-esteem, confidence, optimism, empathy, and interpersonal relationships.

The HART program's process evaluation demonstrates strong implementation fidelity, increasing participation, and high levels of participant satisfaction. The curriculum—designed by and for incarcerated individuals—aligns with the program's goals to promote emotional regulation, reduce violence, and encourage pro-social behavior. With clear consistency between intended inputs and curriculum content, the program has steadily grown in reach, graduating over 25,000 participants since 2018. Notably, the number of graduates in 2025 was more than seven times that of the program's first year. Attendance and graduation metrics reflect strong engagement, with 72% of participants completing the majority of sessions and 68% graduating.

Participants consistently report high satisfaction, citing improved emotional intelligence, greater hope, and stronger social support. Testimonials highlight the transformative impact of peer-led instruction, with many participants expressing a desire for a longer curriculum and ongoing involvement with ARC after release. The credibility and relatability of instructors—many of whom are formerly incarcerated—was particularly valued. Overall, the evaluation affirms the HART program's effectiveness in fostering personal growth, reducing harmful thinking, and preparing participants for successful reintegration, positioning it as a model for impactful, peer-led rehabilitation.

The outcome evaluation yielded similarly positive results. Survey data revealed consistent increases in the percentage of participants who reported high levels of wellbeing across all measured outcomes after completing the program. The most notable changes were in the areas of Relationships and Empathy, with participants demonstrating greater connection to others and increased awareness of the impact of their actions. Smaller yet meaningful gains were also observed in Confidence, Self-Esteem, and Optimism, with qualitative feedback suggesting that participants gained a stronger sense of hope and personal agency through the program.

Feedback from participants and Life Coaches highlighted several key themes, including recovery and personal growth, hope and empowerment, trust between participants and Life Coaches, and preparation for parole and reintegration. HART Life Coaches—many of whom are formerly

incarcerated—played a critical role as credible messengers, mentors, and facilitators of change. Their lived experience and ability to build trust deeply influenced participants’ transformation and belief in the possibility of redemption.

Participant satisfaction with HART was exceptionally high. Nearly all respondents (99–100%) reported satisfaction with instructors, content delivery, and the applicability of program materials. A notable 98% reported reduced criminal thinking, and 95% noted fewer violent incidents while enrolled in the program. Participants attributed these behavioral changes to the program’s focus on emotional intelligence, accountability, and pro-social behavior.

However, areas for improvement were identified. Satisfaction was lower regarding family engagement (85%) and perceived program length (92%). While not core focuses of the program, these areas suggest opportunities for expanded support. Additionally, course-level differences revealed that some program components (such as CGA) drove higher gains in wellbeing than others, pointing to a need for more targeted assessment and refinement of curriculum content.

HART’s impact extended beyond prison walls. Many participants accessed reentry services through the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC), which provided transitional housing, job support, therapy, and mentorship. These services were crucial in supporting long-term reintegration and reducing the risk of recidivism.

Recommendations include extending program length and re-enrollment opportunities, developing family-focused curriculum, enhancing support for transitional-age youth, increasing administrative and data capacity, offering follow-up support for graduates, and providing mental health resources for Life Coaches. Piloting and scaling these improvements could deepen HART’s impact and further support incarcerated individuals in transforming their lives.

The HART program is a model of transformative, relationship-centered rehabilitation. It equips participants with the tools, hope, and support needed for successful reentry and long-term personal growth. With strategic enhancements, the program can expand its reach and reinforce its role as a cornerstone of restorative justice in California’s correctional system.

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1. Introduction

The Hope and Redemption Team (HART) program represents a transformative approach to rehabilitation for incarcerated individuals in California, emphasizing personal growth, emotional intelligence, and preparation for successful reintegration into society. Designed and facilitated by formerly incarcerated individuals, HART offers a unique and credible model of peer-led programming that centers on accountability, healing, and pro-social behavior. This study evaluates the impact of HART on participant wellbeing, emotional development, and reentry preparation through both quantitative survey data and qualitative feedback.

The findings of this evaluation are supported by HART participants' self-reported increased levels of self-reported wellbeing across a range of indicators, including empathy, confidence, optimism, and relational interest. These changes suggest not only internal psychological shifts, but also broader implications for behavior, community safety, and prison culture. Particularly notable is the reported decrease in violent incidents among participants and their increased confidence in navigating parole processes—both critical indicators of long-term behavioral change.

In addition to the measurable improvements in wellbeing, participant and Life Coach interviews reveal recurring themes of hope, trust, emotional healing, and empowerment. The relationship between HART Life Coaches and participants emerges as a central factor in the program's effectiveness. Formerly incarcerated Life Coaches serve as mentors and role models, reinforcing the belief that personal transformation and redemption are possible. These trusted relationships underpin participants' increased engagement, motivation, and belief in their ability to create meaningful change.

This study further explores the role of Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) reentry services in supporting HART graduates after release. Services such as transitional housing, workforce development, therapy, and mentorship were cited by many as essential supports in avoiding recidivism and building sustainable futures.

Taken together, the results of this mixed-methods evaluation offer compelling evidence of the HART program's impact. The study not only illustrates individual gains in wellbeing and behavior but also points to system-wide benefits—such as improved institutional safety and reduced recidivism. This report provides insight into the mechanisms behind HART's success and concludes with recommendations for program enhancement and expansion to maximize its reach and long-term effectiveness.

1.1 History of HART

Established in 2017, Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC)'s Hope and Redemption Team (HART) employs trauma-informed, highly qualified Life Coaches to provide programming for incarcerated individuals across the state of California. As a result the state administration's focus on expanding rehabilitative programming inside the state's carceral system, Governor Newsom's 2021 budget allocated funding for the expansion of the HART program statewide. Initially employing four Life Coaches who served six CDCR institutions, the HART program has scaled to employ 26 Life Coaches.

1.2 Aims of HART

The HART program provides several group programs with structured curricula, including courses on Emotional Intelligence (EI), Criminals & Gang Members Anonymous (CGA), and Parole Readiness (YPO). HART Life Coaches, all formerly incarcerated themselves, support incarcerated program participants as they navigate the challenges and barriers to rehabilitation and re-entry.

Through relationships with Life Coaches, engagement with the instructional content, and connecting with fellow group members, HART participants gain prosocial peer support, a continuum of support services from incarceration through reentry, and a clear path to sustained wellbeing. While programming in California prisons has increased generally in recent years, HART is singular in its strategy to connect incarcerated individuals with Life Coaches who have shared experiences.

1.2.1 Logic Model

The program logic model outlines a structured approach to improving rehabilitation outcomes for incarcerated individuals through a progression from resources to long-term results.

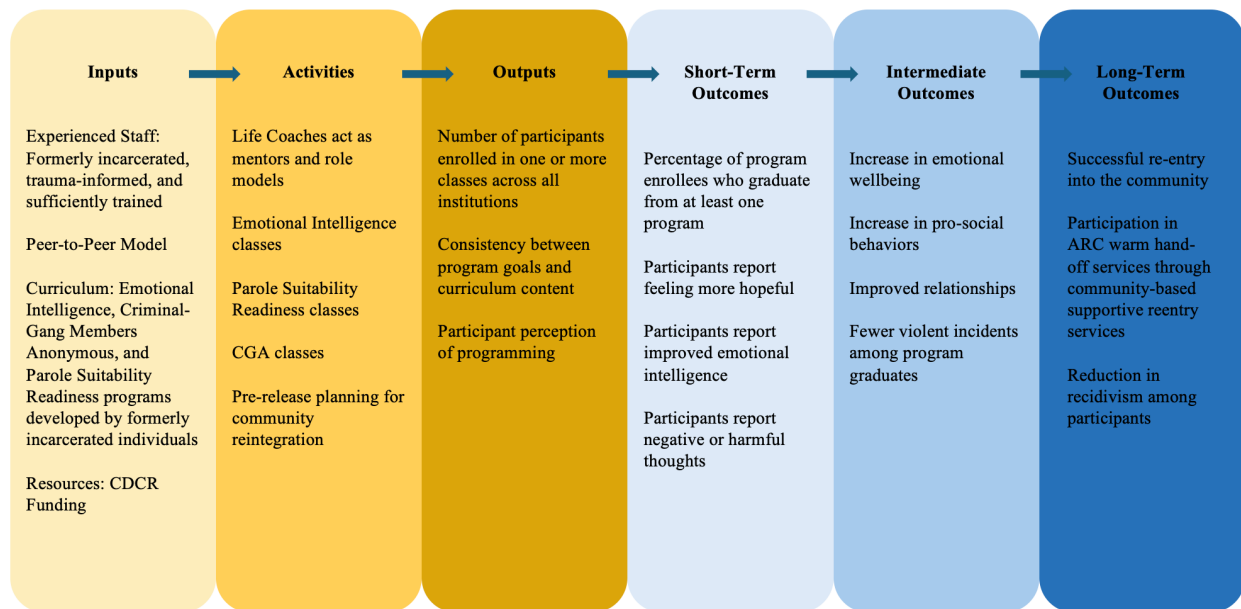
Figure 1 illustrates the HART Program Logic Model, detailing its intended inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes.

Figure 1
HART Program Logic Model

Program Goals

- Goal 1:** Enhance outcomes in correctional facilities to support rehabilitation efforts and improve the institutional culture for incarcerated individuals.
- Goal 2:** Provide incarcerated individuals with more opportunities for rehabilitation and personal growth, preparing them for successful reintegration upon release.
- Goal 3:** Strengthen collaboration between agencies and community organizations, showcasing the effectiveness of the credible messenger approach in in-reach programming.

Progression from Resources to Results



The Logic Model begins with key inputs such as experienced, trauma-informed Life Coaches, a peer-to-peer model, and specialized programming focused on emotional intelligence and parole readiness. These resources support activities including mentorship, emotional intelligence sessions, and reentry planning.

The outputs of these efforts are measured by participation rates, program completion, and participant feedback. As a result, short-term outcomes aim to foster group retention, hopefulness, emotional growth, and reductions in violence and harmful thoughts. This leads to intermediate outcomes such as improved emotional well-being, stronger pro-social behavior, and healthier relationships.

Ultimately, the long-term outcomes strive for successful community reintegration, continued support through reentry services, and a measurable decrease in recidivism, reflecting the program’s overarching goals of rehabilitation, personal growth, and systemic collaboration.

1.2.2 Life Coach Recruitment and Training

Life Coaches are recruited through a mix of public job postings, community networks, and word of mouth—especially from those who previously participated in HART while incarcerated. Life Coaches are formerly incarcerated individuals who demonstrated strong communication skills, mentorship potential, and personal transformation. ARC’s Ride Home program, in which ARC staff pick up individuals released from prison, provide a stipend, basic supplies, and a warm welcome, also plays a role in identifying potential Life Coaches.

Once hired, Life Coaches undergo a four-month training period that spans over a month and includes facilitation techniques, trauma-informed practices, motivational interviewing, professionalism, computer literacy, and compliance-related training such as HIPAA and PREA.

1.2.3 HART Curricula and Format

The HART curriculum was developed by incarcerated individuals and reflects diverse institutional origins: the CGA curriculum was created at Mule Creek, Parole Readiness at Correctional Training Facility Soledad, and Emotional Intelligence at Ironwood. Formats vary by institution and cultural context but generally follow a structured process group model. Sessions typically involve large group circles or smaller breakout groups, with quarterly workshops that bring together 20–30 participants. Classes are held three times daily, four days a week per yard, with about 25 participants per class. Each cycle runs for ten weeks, with three sessions held per year, although scheduling barriers such as holidays and lockdowns limit a potential fourth session.

1.2.4 HART Participant Recruitment

HART participants typically learn about the program through a variety of channels within correctional institutions. Flyers posted in prison yards and buildings by the ARC, institutional television announcements, sign-up sheets, and direct outreach such as meet-and-greet sessions with HART Life Coaches all help raise awareness. Word of mouth from former participants also plays a significant role, as does information circulated through institutional policies.

While HART is a voluntary program, individuals must be placed into it by the institution’s Community Resource Manager (CRM). Those interested can add their names to sign-up sheets, which are submitted to the CRM and used to manage placement on a rolling basis. However, people with existing commitments—such as school, jobs, or clinical groups—are often ineligible due to Department of Rehabilitative Programs (DRP) priorities. Other barriers include limited class space and institutional scheduling challenges. Still, interest in HART is growing, especially

among younger individuals, who view Life Coaches and successful parole outcomes as motivating examples of the program’s value.

1.2.5 HART Participants and ARC Post-Release

After graduation and release, HART participants connect with ARC services through multiple pathways. The Ride Home program ensures immediate support upon release, while ongoing engagement is facilitated through office visits, word of mouth, and outreach from Life Coaches. Participants can access transitional housing, employment support, therapy, retreats, and monthly membership meetings. ARC staff in all roles also visit institutions to offer concerts, sports, and community-building events, creating a bridge between incarceration and reentry support.

Figure 2
Referral Method to ARC Services Post-Release¹

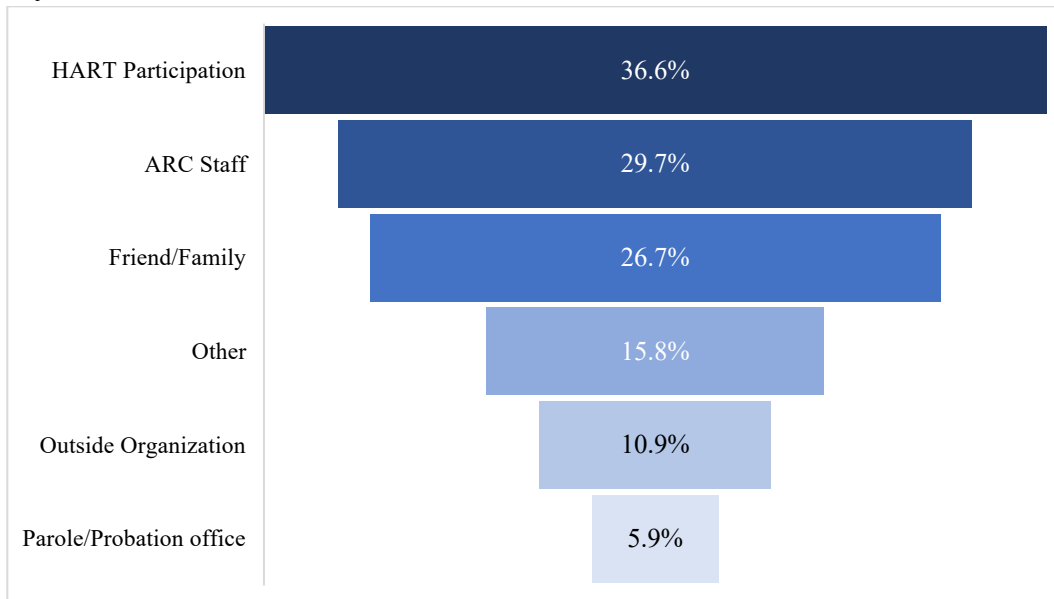


Figure 2 provides some insight into the link between the HART program inside the institutions and individuals’ involvement with ARC services upon re-entry. Among the ways that Cohort members were made aware of the program, more than one third reported being referred by a HART Life Coach while in prison. That is, that 36.6% of the Cohort members surveyed had participated in HART and joined the ARC career readiness program as part of the re-entry process. This suggests a link between HART participation and ARC engagement upon re-entry.

¹ Data source: ARC administrative data

1.3 Role of Evaluation

As a commitment to empirical evidence as a means of assessing and improving services, ARC is conducting a rigorous evaluation of the program. To triangulate findings and inform conclusions and recommendations, this report employs several data sources, including: (a) Interviews with HART Life Coaches, (b), Interviews with HART program participants, (c) Participant feedback from Innovation Programming Grants Progress reports, (d) Surveys of a sample of HART participants, and (e) Incident report data from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

In July 2021, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) awarded a grant to the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) to expand HART programming to additional institutions across the state. CDCR requires an outside evaluator for grantees. ARC has partnered with Leap and Associates to advise and validate the findings of the process and outcome evaluation. The design of this program evaluation was created by the ARC Learning and Innovation Department in collaboration with Leap and Associates.

1.4 Current Report

The current report details the process and outcome evaluation conducted using data collected from December 2022 through April 2025.

As described in the Logic Model, HART program's primary goals are as follows:

1. Produce positive outcomes in correctional facilities to support agencies' rehabilitative efforts, improving institutional culture and experience for incarcerated individuals.
2. Incarcerated participants will have expanded opportunities for rehabilitation and personal transformation; in turn, participants will be better prepared for successful reintegration into communities upon release.
3. Strengthen collaborative approach to rehabilitative and reentry service provision across agencies and community-based organizations and demonstrate the effectiveness of a credible messenger approach in in-reach programming.

A comprehensive study of HART's efficacy in meeting these goals requires a process evaluation, and an outcome evaluation. Taken together, the process and outcome evaluations provide a robust picture of the fidelity of program implementation and the efficacy of its interventions.

As detailed in the evaluation plan in the appendix, this report evaluates both process and outcome questions.

1.4.1 Process Evaluation Questions

- To what extent is the curriculum consistent with the stated goals of the program?
- How what percentage of enrollees graduated from at least 10-week session?
- What were the demographic characteristics of program participants?
- To what extent were participants satisfied with programming?

1.4.2 Outcome Evaluation Questions

- Is there a relationship between HART program participation and a change in self-reported sense of hope and wellbeing?
- Is there a relationship between HART program participation and a change in self-reported negative thought patterns?
- Is there a relationship between HART participation and members' self-reported commitment to abstaining from gang activity and criminal thinking?
- Is there a relationship between HART program participation and self-reported change in health of relationships?
- Is there a difference in the number of disciplinary infractions before and after participants complete HART programming?

Guided by the program's logic model, the evaluation assesses HART's success in promoting institutional transformation, individual rehabilitation, and cross-sector collaboration through a credible messenger approach. The process evaluation examined fidelity to program goals, participant demographics, graduation rates, and satisfaction levels. The outcome evaluation explored changes in participants' sense of hope, cognitive patterns, gang disengagement, relationships, and institutional behavior. Together, these analyses offer a rigorous assessment of HART's implementation and its potential to support rehabilitation, reentry, and institutional change.

2. Methods

2.1 Data Sources and Collection

The Learning and Innovation team at the Anti-Recidivism Coalition initiated data collection activities throughout the last year (June 2024-June 2025). The activities included interviews with HART Life Coaches, interviews with HART participants, participant feedback from Innovation Programming Grants Progress reports, pre- and post-program surveys with HART participants, and incident report data from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

2.1.1 HART Life Coach Interviews

The research team interviewed 32 current and former HART Life Coaches, the Director of Inside Programs at ARC, and the two regional managers of the HART program. These 45-minute interviews concerned coaches' demographics, incarceration experience, journey to their involvement with the HART program, opinions of the HART curriculum, how they view their role as HART Life Coaches, challenges to their jobs, and recommendations to improve the program. All names used are pseudonyms. These conversations provided important context about the program design, strengths of the program, and recommendations for improvement.

2.1.2 Interviews with HART Graduates

To evaluate the impact of the HART program through firsthand perspectives, we conducted qualitative interviews with a sample of 27 former who had since been released from prison. The sampling approach was purposive, meaning participants were intentionally selected based on specific characteristics that aligned with the goals of the evaluation. This non-probability sampling method was chosen to ensure that the individuals interviewed could provide in-depth insights relevant to the program's implementation, outcomes, and long-term effects.

Inclusion Criteria: Participants were eligible for inclusion in the study if they met the following criteria:

- They had completed the HART program while incarcerated.
- They had been released from custody at least six months prior to the interview to allow for post-release reflections.
- They were willing and able to provide informed consent.
- They had diverse experiences with post-release reintegration (e.g., housing, employment, recidivism status).

The study team sought to include individuals from various geographic regions and institutional settings to capture a range of perspectives across different program delivery contexts.

Purposive Sampling and Representation: Purposive sampling was used to capture a diverse cross-section of participants based on factors such as age, race/ethnicity, time since release, and level of engagement with ARC services after release. This method allowed researchers to prioritize depth over breadth, selecting participants whose experiences would provide rich, detailed insights into the effects of the program. While the sample is not statistically representative of all HART graduates, the diversity within the group enhances the credibility and transferability of the findings to similar populations.

Saturation and Sample Size: Although only 27 interviews former HART participants were interviewed, thematic saturation was achieved—meaning that new themes stopped emerging during later interviews. This suggests that the data collected was sufficient to identify core patterns and experiences across participants. Saturation was assessed iteratively during the analysis process to ensure that the sample size was adequate for the evaluation’s qualitative aims.

Limitations of Research Staff Capacity: The limited number of interviews conducted (27) reflects constraints on research staff capacity, not a lack of available participants. Given the scope of the evaluation and competing responsibilities of a small team, it was not feasible to expand the sample further within the project timeline. Despite these limitations, the selected sample yielded meaningful and actionable insights regarding the long-term outcomes of the HART program.

Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interview protocol included questions regarding employment, participants’ incarceration experience, and their experience with the HART program. Specifically, interviewers asked about participants’ relationships with their HART Life Coach and their engagement with the curriculum. Researchers also inquired about participants’ opinion of the program and how the program impacted, if at all, their transition to society, post-incarceration. All names used are pseudonyms. Interviews with HART participants provided important information about a staple of the program—the peer mentorship received by participants from Life Coaches.

2.1.3 Innovation Programming Grants Progress Reports

Per CDCR requirements, HART Life Coaches distribute Innovative Programming Grants (IPG) Progress Reports to all HART graduates at the conclusion of each course. These evaluations serve as a reflective tool for participants and a valuable measure of program effectiveness. A sample of 50 IPG forms was randomly selected for analysis.

Sampling Methodology for IPG Feedback Form Analysis: To assess participant satisfaction and perceived impact of the HART program in 2025, a sample of 50 feedback forms was randomly

selected from the total of approximately 6,342 completed Innovative Program Grant (IPG) feedback forms. These forms, submitted by participants upon program completion, are an essential data source for understanding how the program is received and the ways in which it may support behavior change, hope, and emotional development.

Sampling Design and Rationale: Given the volume of forms collected and the resource-intensive nature of analyzing each one—especially due to their paper-based format requiring manual digitization and review—a stratified random sampling method was employed to ensure both efficiency and representativeness. The primary goal was to balance rigorous qualitative insight with the practical constraints of time, cost, and staffing.

Stratified Random Sampling Approach: To reduce sampling bias and ensure that the selected forms reflected the broader participant population, the total pool of 4,500 forms was stratified by institution, ensuring geographic and institutional diversity in the sample. Institutions were grouped by type (e.g., minimum vs. maximum security) and region, then feedback forms were randomly selected from each stratum proportional to its total volume of submissions. This approach increased the likelihood that the sample reflected variation in program delivery conditions and participant demographics. ARC researchers took the following steps to select the sample of IPG forms:

- Step 1: Group all feedback forms by institution of origin (e.g., Facility A, Facility B, etc.).
- Step 2: Determine the number of forms submitted from each institution.
- Step 3: Allocate sample size proportionally (e.g., if Facility A contributed 20% of the total forms, 10 of the 50 forms were selected from that facility).
- Step 4: Randomly select the required number of forms from each group using a random number generator.

This method ensured representation across institutional contexts while keeping the total number of analyzed forms manageable.

Constraints and Efficiency Considerations: The decision to sample 50 forms, rather than analyzing all 6,342, was driven primarily by logistical constraints:

- Manual labor required for data entry and coding due to the paper format.
- Limited research staff capacity, which made large-scale transcription and analysis unfeasible.
- Budgetary and time limitations associated with the broader evaluation project.

Despite the reduced sample size, the use of a stratified random approach preserved the analytic rigor necessary to draw meaningful and credible insights about general participant satisfaction and trends in feedback.

Implications for Interpretation: While the findings from the sample cannot be generalized with statistical certainty to all 6,342 graduates, the methodologically sound approach enhances transferability and representativeness. The stratified design improves confidence that key institutional and contextual differences are reflected in the sample, thus supporting valid thematic analysis and formative recommendations for program improvement.

The breakdown of collected forms is as follows: California Rehabilitation Center (4), Calipatria State Prison (16), Folsom State Prison (2), California Correctional Institution (5), California State Prison, Solano (4), California State Prison, Los Angeles County (5), California Institution for Women (4), Ironwood State Prison (4), Substance Abuse Treatment Facility and State Prison (2), North Kern State Prison (2), and California State Prison, Centinela (2).

Each IPG form includes a five-point Likert scale to evaluate five core statements. Participants were given the following instructions: “Participant feedback is required for each participant who has completed the program in this reporting period. Please submit one form per participant. Please circle the number that best reflects your response to each statement (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree). Comments are optional.”

2.1.4 Pre- and Post-Program Participant Surveys

A sample of HART participants, whether they had graduated from the program or not, completed a survey to measure self-reported wellbeing indicators before and after participation in programming. Participants also rated satisfaction with programming by topic.

The study sample was randomly selected over a period of one 12-week program. Of the 25 Life Coaches that held sessions during the study period, 13 were represented in the sample. 381 HART participants completed the pre-program survey, and 490 participants responded to the post-program survey. Paper copies of the survey instrument were distributed by HART instructors prior to the first class, and again at the conclusion of the final class. Data from all surveys were transferred from paper documents to electronic spreadsheets by ARC data entry clerks.

Surveys were disseminated between the period of January and March of 2025 in eight institutions across the state: California Correctional Institution, Folsom State Prison, Sierra

Conservation Center, Mule Creek State Prison, Valley State Prison, California State Prison, Corcoran, and Calipatria State Prison.

Sampling Challenges and Pre-Post Survey Design: The administration of pre- and post-program surveys was subject to several logistical and contextual constraints that impacted the sampling process and data matching. While the intention was to administer surveys consistently across program sites, the specific classes or sessions in which surveys were distributed were not systematically randomized. Rather, survey administration was dependent on logistical feasibility, availability of Life Coaches and institutional permissions at any given time. As a result, site and session selection was partially opportunistic rather than fully randomized, which may introduce variation due to differences in delivery conditions, facilitators, or participant characteristics.

Although the pre- and post-surveys were designed to be linked using participant-generated IDs, which would have allowed for matched-pair analysis, this linkage was only partially successful. In many cases, participant-generated identifiers were missing, incomplete, or inconsistent between the two time points. Consequently, while some data could be matched, a large portion of pre- and post-survey responses could not be reliably paired. This led to analyses that largely relied on aggregate, unmatched group-level comparisons rather than within-subject (matched) comparisons.

Furthermore, discrepancies between the number of completed pre-surveys and post-surveys were observed. This gap may be attributed to attrition over the course of the program, varying survey collection practices at different sites, or logistical issues such as participants being released, transferred, or otherwise unavailable at the time of post-survey administration. Life Coaches were instructed to administer both surveys at the start and end of each workshop, but institutional factors—such as prison staff shortages, class cancellations, or lockdowns—frequently disrupted survey administration timelines.

These challenges reflect real-world implementation constraints common in carceral settings and are important for interpreting the data. While efforts were made to standardize procedures and improve tracking across sites, future evaluations should include more robust systems for ID generation, better training for facilitators on consistent survey administration, and improved mechanisms for securely tracking participation to allow for more rigorous matched analysis.

2.1.5 California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Incident Report Data

The data for this report also included data from a data transfer with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). The data requested were individual-level data of all rules and violations write-ups from January 1, 2017 to October 31, 2024, for the following eight (8) California institutions: California Health Care Facility (Stockton), Valley State Prison

(Chowchilla), Central California Women’s Facility (Chowchilla), Calipatria State prison (Calipatria), California State Prison (Centinela (Imperial), Ironwood State Prison (Blythe), California State Prison, Corcoran(Corcoran), California State Prison, Los Angeles County (Lancaster). We received an excel document with 632,043 cases with the following variables: offender ID, CDCR number, name, violation date, institution, facility, violation, level, verdict, sanction type, sanction quantity, and sanction unit of measure.

2.1.6 Agency-Provided Data

Agency-provided data were exported from ARC’s client database system Neon, which is used to track intake documentation and services throughout the duration of an individual’s membership with ARC. ARC data coordinators downloaded Neon data for all HART participants during the study period. The following information was available in the agency-provided data from Neon:

- Participant demographics (names, ages, location, intake date, assigned Life Coach)
- Types of assessments conducted at intake
- Most recent attendance date
- Number of class sessions attended
- Number of graduations

2.2 Data Analysis

2.2.1 Interview Data

One-on-one, semi-structured, interviews were conducted during the first phase of this evaluation. Participants were recruited from the sample of survey respondents and given a \$15 incentive for the 30-45 minutes required for the interviews. Individuals in the sample were composed of a diverse set of participants of different ethnicities and incarceration backgrounds (i.e., length of incarceration).

The ARC Learning and Innovation team created a semi-structured interview protocol in collaboration with key ARC stakeholders and piloted with at least one ARC member to ensure the protocol is clear, non-invasive, and yields answers to intended evaluative questions. While the researcher should follow the protocol created, semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility. Such that, the researcher can probe, ask clarifying questions, or add additional questions to the protocol at their discretion.

Upon the completion of the interviews, recordings were transcribed and transferred to Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software package, for coding and analysis. A team of three ARC researchers generated a preliminary list of codes based on initial readings of the transcripts.

Preliminary codes within code groups were applied to transcripts, which informed the creation of a structured, hierarchical, mutually exclusive coding scheme. We thus crafted a semi-finalized coding scheme, whose application was more efficient than the previous iteration and allowed for making meaning through the analysis not only of code frequencies, but co-occurrences among codes and between codes and their broader categories.

Following the initial coding, each transcript was reviewed by a second researcher. The second researcher either agreed with each code applied or suggested an alternative code with a brief note explaining the rationale. Where two researchers chose differing codes, the team collectively decided whether to keep only the initial coding, swap the initial coding for the alternate coding, or combine the coding choices in a manner that was both logical and unanimous.

2.2.2 Survey Data Analyses

The survey was disseminated to participants in three programs—1) Criminal and Gang Members Anonymous (CGA), Emotional Intelligence (EI), and Parole Board Hearing Preparation (PBH). The survey included items to measure participant demographics such as race, current age, age at the time of conviction, age at the time of program participation, and length of sentence. The remainder of the survey measured self-reported pro-social behaviors and indicators of participant wellbeing, using identical prompts in the pre-program and post-program questionnaires.

Pro-social and wellbeing outcomes were measured by participants' responses to prompts corresponding to each indicator. Wellbeing indicators included Relationships, Feeling Loved, Confidence, Self-Esteem, Dealing with Problems, Empathy, and Optimism. Potential responses to each item in the wellbeing portion of the survey were 1) None of the time, 2) Some of the time, 3) Often, and 4), All of the time. The items used to measure wellbeing indicators are described in the Appendix.

The post-program survey included questions that measured satisfaction with the program across eleven indicators. Participants responded to whether they would recommend the program to a friend, whether the instructor was clear and receptive, whether they applied their learning in their daily lives, whether they experienced reduced criminal thinking, negative thoughts, and participation in violence, whether the program led to an increase in emotional intelligence, hope, and healthy interactions with family members, and whether they perceived the program to be sufficient in length. Respondents were also given the opportunity to add comments in open-ended survey items.

As noted, a limitation of the study is the incongruity of respondents between pre- and post-program survey collection. While data collection activities for each survey took place during the same HART session, many instructors encountered barriers to disseminating and collecting both

pre- and post-program data. The data collected, therefore, is representative of the aggregate opinions of study participants, but it cannot be analyzed to demonstrate individual-level change over time.

Consistent with the Logic Model, survey analysis was descriptive and organized to provide insight into the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of individuals who choose to enroll in HART?
2. What is the average change in the percentage of participants who reported high levels of wellbeing by indicator?
3. Which classes were most associated with change in participant wellbeing?
4. What percentage of participants reviewed the program positively by program component?

Participant characteristics, summaries of wellbeing indicators, and post-program participant satisfaction ratings inform the study's findings. Summaries of these data, triangulated with written participant comments, inform the study's conclusions and recommendations for future programming.

2.2.3 Quantitative Analysis

This study employed a quantitative, within-subjects research design to evaluate changes in disciplinary infractions among incarcerated individuals before and after participation in the HART program. The primary objective was to determine whether the HART program had a statistically significant effect on reducing institutional misconduct as measured by the number of disciplinary infractions recorded for each participant.

Data on disciplinary infractions were obtained from institutional records maintained by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). For each participant, the total number of recorded disciplinary infractions was collected for two distinct time periods: Pre-Program Period: The 6 months immediately prior to the participant's enrollment in HART, and Post-Program Period: The 6 months immediately following the participant's graduation from HART. Infractions included all incidents documented by CDCR that resulted in formal disciplinary action, regardless of severity.

Limitations in Comparison Between HART and Non-HART Participants: One of the original evaluation questions aimed to examine differences in outcomes between individuals who participated in HART programming and those who did not, ideally through a comparison of behavioral indicators such as the number of violent incident reports.

However, the ability to conduct this comparison was limited by data availability and structural constraints. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation provided Rules Violation Report (RVR) data only for HART participants, not for the general incarcerated population. As a result, the evaluation team did not have access to individual-level data for non-participants housed at the same institutions and during the same time periods. While CALPADS public data can offer some insights into rates of violent incidents across institutions, these datasets are aggregated at the institution level and do not differentiate between participants and non-participants or between specific yards, dormitories, or program areas within a facility. Consequently, any attempt to compare HART participants with the broader incarcerated population using this data would be severely limited in precision and validity.

Moreover, such comparisons would likely suffer from selection bias. According to anecdotal evidence from HART Life Coaches and program directors, individuals who choose to enroll in HART tend to be those already contemplating or actively pursuing personal change. These participants may have fewer violent incidents even before program enrollment, making it difficult to attribute differences in outcomes purely to program effects.

Given these limitations, the most methodologically appropriate and data-supported approach is to conduct a within-subjects analysis—comparing the number of RVRs before and after program participation for the same individuals. This design avoids selection bias inherent in between-group comparisons and allows for a more valid estimation of the HART program's impact on participant behavior over time.

While the lack of a formal control group limits causal inference, the within-subject comparison provides valuable insights into changes associated with program exposure and is aligned with both the data provided by CDCR and the ethical and practical realities of working in correctional settings.

Sample: The sample consisted of incarcerated individuals who successfully completed the HART program between 2022 and 2024. A unique analysis was performed on three institutions. A total of 5,943 participants from Valley State Prison (VSP), 6,284 participants from Central California Women's Facility (CCWF), and 9,403 participants from Calipatria State Prison (CAL) were included in the analysis. Inclusion criteria required that participants have available records of disciplinary infractions for both the 6-month period preceding enrollment in HART and the 6-month period following program completion.

Three correctional institutions were selected for inclusion in this evaluation based on guidance from HART program directors, who recommended sites that would provide meaningful variation in context. The selected institutions represent geographical and cultural diversity across the state, offering a cross-section of settings in which the HART program is implemented. This intentional

selection strategy aimed to capture a broader range of participant experiences and institutional environments—ranging from rural to urban locations and including facilities with differing population sizes, staff structures, and institutional cultures.

Program directors, drawing on their deep knowledge of operational conditions and community dynamics, advised that these three sites would offer a representative view of the program’s implementation across diverse carceral contexts. This approach supports the transferability of findings by ensuring that evaluation insights are not limited to a single type of facility or regional norm, but instead reflect the variability of program delivery across the state.

Pre- and Post-Program Comparison of RVRs: To assess changes in participant behavior associated with the HART program, a pre-post analysis was conducted comparing the mean number of Rules Violation Reports (RVRs) issued to participants in the six months before and six months after program completion. RVR data were provided by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) for HART participants only and included the date and type of each incident.

Participants were included in the analysis if they completed the full HART curriculum and had available RVR data for both the pre- and post-program timeframes. A paired sample t-test was used to compare the mean number of RVRs per participant before and after program participation. This within-subjects design helps control for individual differences and isolates behavioral change over time, though it does not include a control group of non-participants. Due to limitations in data availability, this analysis does not account for external factors such as institutional lockdowns or transfers. Nonetheless, it provides a practical and focused assessment of behavioral trends among HART participants during the study period.

3. Results

3.1 Qualitative Results

Program participants and Life Coaches interviewed for this study consistently communicated the HART program's substantial positive impact on the lives of incarcerated individuals. Program participants noted that completing HART courses helped them develop critical life skills, personal insights, and practical tools for navigating life during and after incarceration. Simultaneously, both HART participants and ARC Life Coaches identified challenges with the program.

3.1.1 Themes

The following key themes emerged from the interviews with n=65 participants (n=27 former participants and n=35 ARC staff - 32 Life Coaches, 3 ARC staff): Theme A: Recovery and personal growth, Theme B: Hope and empowerment, Theme C: Trust between participants and ARC Life Coaches, and Theme D: Preparation for parole and reintegration,

Theme A: Recovery and Personal Growth: Many participants highlighted how the HART program facilitated self-reflection and helped them recognize patterns in addictive and criminal behavior. These insights were crucial in their personal transformations. Participants shared how the program helped them critically assess their thought processes, challenge underlying assumptions, and build self-awareness. This critical thinking empowered them to make healthier decisions and understand their criminal thinking better, which was vital in both personal and parole-related contexts.

Several participants emphasized how the HART program reinforced their ongoing recovery from addiction and criminal behavior, providing tools to manage these challenges. When asked about what they learned in HART classes, participants discussed how the program reinforced their understanding of the cycle of addiction and criminal thinking. Thomas for example, said "I was already in my recovery and already during my transformation phase [when I enrolled in HART classes]. But what it [the HART program] did is it reinforced some of the things that I needed to be aware of, as far as far as criminal thinking." On a similar note, John who took HART classes at Ironwood State Prison, stated that he applies what he learned in class in his everyday life, and that HART classes helped him learn about healthier beliefs and about addiction: "I also use what I learned in class like I apply it to my daily life. Like, how do you challenge the war beliefs that you have and replace those with healthy beliefs. How do you understand the nature of addiction, and what is addiction." Edward mentioned learning how to identify his triggers that could lead to negative behaviors and how to develop coping skills through the HART program. All in all, the

HART program helped individuals become more aware of their criminal behavior, recognize their addiction patterns, and transform their habits into something positive.

Several individuals, including Henry who was incarcerated for 18 years and took a HART class inside Pelican Bay State Prison, noted how he learned to manage impulsive behavior and respond thoughtfully to stressful situations via the HART program. The focus on emotional intelligence taught him to be in tune with his emotions and not to react emotionally but to pause and think before acting, a key component in navigating life post-incarceration.

Several HART Life Coaches mentioned the significance of witnessing “aha moments”—the point when a student gains insight, sees things differently, and begins to take ownership of their growth. Michael, who works at California State Prison Solano, describes the unparalleled joy of seeing participants come back from a parole board hearing, not only with the news of their suitability for release but with the pride in their eyes that signals a personal breakthrough. When asked about the best part of his job, Michael said, “The best part of my job is when somebody comes to me and they tell me, I went to the board and I got found suitable to see that look in a person's face. I mean, I can't describe it. I cannot describe it.” For others, the “light coming on” is a moment of realization about personal accountability and the power of empathy. Olivia, who works at California Institution for Women (CIW), highlights how those transformative moments, when students understand their role in their own life story and begin to make amends, are truly special. Olivia believes that these “aha moments” can help incarcerated individuals develop remorse, which can help them when they go to the parole board. These “aha moments” affirm the importance of their work, helping HART participants begin the hard but necessary work of change.

Theme B: Hope and Empowerment: A common sentiment expressed by participants was the hope they gained through the HART program. Donny shared how the program gave him a tangible blueprint for success post-incarceration, making him believe that change was possible, and that freedom was attainable. This message of hope was a consistent theme throughout many participants’ testimonies. Edgar, who took HART classes at California State Prison, Corcoran, mentioned that he was inspired by the HART team. He stated that “their presence, just alone, seeing them dress different, talk different, and knowing that they had jobs and that they came back to prison after serving life in prison, it was moving. It was inspiring. It motivated me to do better.”

HART Life Coaches also mentioned what the desired outcomes of facilitating this curriculum was for them: keeping hope alive for those incarcerated and helping change the violent prison culture, preparing individuals to come home/reduce recidivism, and to align with the California model of prison reform.

Daniel, who is a Life Coach at San Luis Obispo California's Men Colony mentioned the importance of keeping hope alive for those who are incarcerated. He reflected on his own journey while incarcerated and how hopeless he felt. Interacting with his former Life Coach while incarcerated, Daniel mentioned, helped him see that there was a possibility of being free and it motivated him to change. He is now guided by the desire to be that motivation for others. Daniel mentioned that our curriculum helps change the culture inside of prisons from one of violence to one where individuals can "get it together and stop thinking criminally."

HART Life Coaches expressed witnessing the transformative power of hope, connection, and empowerment that incarcerated individuals undergo during the program. Life Coaches identified the most impactful elements of teaching in these environments as the ability to offer support and affirmation to individuals who often feel forgotten by society. As Emma reflected, being able to tell someone on the inside, "I believe in you. I know you're capable," is one of the greatest rewards. For many, such words are rare, and the reassurance that they are not alone can spark profound changes in their self-perception. The act of being a bridge to a better future, helps rekindle hope where it had long been extinguished. HART Life Coaches are not just educators—they become mentors, guiding figures who show incarcerated individuals that there is still a way forward, regardless of past mistakes.

Many of the HART Life Coaches expressed their role as part of a larger mission to help individuals heal from the trauma of their past and build a brighter future. One Life Coach, Daniel, said, "the best part for me is to instill hope in their lives and allow them or help them redeem what they have lost to help them heal." When someone whose life has been marked by violence or despair can look forward to the possibility of parole, reconnecting with their family, or contributing meaningfully to society, it is a powerful affirmation that change is possible. For many HART Life Coaches, this sense of redemption is not just a benefit for the participants, but it is also a deeply personal reward. As Daniel put it, the opportunity to give back to those on the inside is something they have longed for, knowing firsthand the importance of guidance and mentorship in making a successful transition from prison to society.

The HART curriculum contributes to increased hope among incarcerated individuals by offering both a practical framework for change and a deeply human connection to possibility. Through a trauma-informed and peer-led approach, the program provides participants with tangible tools for personal growth, emotional regulation, and reintegration into society. Participants frequently expressed that HART gave them not only skills but also a *vision* for their futures—transforming abstract ideals of freedom and rehabilitation into achievable goals. Donny, for instance, described how the program gave him a "blueprint for success," helping him believe in the attainability of change and life beyond incarceration. Similarly, Edgar was inspired simply by witnessing the professionalism and transformation of the HART Life Coaches—formerly incarcerated individuals who had returned not in chains, but as leaders and role models. Their

presence alone served as living proof that rehabilitation and a meaningful life after prison were possible.

For the Life Coaches themselves, instilling hope is both a goal and a personal mission. Many, like Daniel, draw from their own experiences of hopelessness while incarcerated to fuel their commitment to helping others. He now uses the curriculum to shift prison culture from one dominated by violence to one centered on growth and healing. Life Coaches emphasized the emotional and psychological impact of offering affirmation and belief to individuals who often feel forgotten. As Emma noted, simply telling someone, “I believe in you,” can be life-changing. By delivering this message alongside a structured, relevant curriculum, HART coaches act as both mentors and motivators—rekindling hope in those who may have lost it and helping to transform that hope into concrete steps toward a better future.

Theme C: Trust between Participants and Life Coaches: The rapport between HART participants and their Life Coaches is a cornerstone of the program's success. Based on interviews with 27 HART participants, the feedback consistently highlights the profound impact that the Life Coaches had on their emotional growth, personal insight, and overall rehabilitation journey. The data reveals a pattern of trust, mentorship, and emotional support, which played a crucial role in transforming participants' mindsets and equipping them with the tools needed to navigate life both inside prison and after incarceration.

Many participants spoke about the individualized approach their Life Coaches took in identifying their unique strengths and challenges. The ability of Life Coaches to build rapport by meeting each participant where they were, and then tailoring their approach, accordingly, is a recurring theme. William described his coach as someone who “found everybody's potential” and “built off that,” emphasizing the coaches' ability to identify even small positive attributes and expand on them. This personalized attention not only fostered trust but also empowered participants to push past their self-imposed limitations, growing in ways they hadn't imagined before. Kenn's reflection on his experience illustrates this individualized connection further: “I still apply, you know, all the life lessons that... [my HART Life Coaches] shared with me... they helped me... identify the good qualities that I have as a person.” This personalized mentorship allowed participants to see themselves as more than just their past mistakes, reinforcing the importance of self-identity and self-worth in their rehabilitation process.

The rapport participants had with their Life Coaches was deeply influenced by the lived experiences that the coaches brought to the table. Many participants specifically highlighted how the Life Coaches' own histories—particularly their journeys out of criminality and gang involvement—served as a powerful source of inspiration. Michael found the stories of his HART Life Coaches particularly motivating: “To see two men, you know, come back into prison after serving a life sentence, no longer involved in criminal activity or involved in a gang, was

motivating for me... it showed me like, hey, I can also do that.” This real-life connection between the coach’s experience and the participant’s own struggles fostered a sense of belief in the possibility of redemption and change. The Life Coaches’ ability to share their personal stories allowed them to form a stronger bond with participants, who saw them not just as instructors but as living proof that change was possible.

The trust established between participants and Life Coaches extended beyond mere emotional support; it involved a system of accountability and guidance that was crucial for participants' growth. Participants frequently noted how their coaches held them accountable, not just for their actions but for their personal development. Benjamin reflected on how his coach, acted as a "big brother" figure, guiding him through the board process and providing clear, actionable steps for his transformation that he held him accountable for. The emphasis on personal accountability was also mirrored in Edgar’s interview when he said that his HART Life Coach would tell him: “You don’t owe me anything. You owe yourself everything.” This message, that participants' ultimate responsibility is to themselves and their future, was vital in shaping participants' commitment to their own rehabilitation.

The enduring nature of the rapport between Life Coaches and participants is another key finding. Even after release, many participants expressed a continued connection with their Life Coaches, demonstrating that the relationship did not end when the program concluded. For example, Edgar mentioned that he kept in contact with his HART Life Coach once he was released from prison. Edgar knew that if he calls his coach, “he’ll answer,” illustrating the ongoing, supportive nature of these relationships. This continued mentorship speaks to the depth of the bond that Life Coaches were able to establish with their participants, offering a reliable source of support even as participants navigated life outside of prison.

In sum, the rapport between participants and their HART Life Coaches is characterized by trust, mentorship, personalized guidance, accountability, and long-term support. These strong, supportive relationships not only helped participants gain a deeper understanding of themselves but also instilled in them the belief that lasting change was possible. The Life Coaches’ ability to connect with participants on a personal level, share their own lived experiences, and offer practical tools for emotional growth, rehabilitation, and reintegration into society is a key element that contributes to the overall success of the HART program.

The HART program provided participants with crucial tools and insights in the following areas: developing critical thinking and emotional intelligence, preparing effectively for the parole board process, gaining a deeper understanding of past behavior and how to take responsibility, reinforcing strategies to manage addiction and criminal thinking, and offering hope and a blueprint for post-incarceration success. These learnings, combined with the guidance of

experienced facilitators, equipped participants to successfully transition back into society, make healthier decisions, and avoid returning to criminal behavior.

ARC Reentry Services: The HART program has shown a significant positive impact on participants during their transition from incarceration to reintegration into society in that it provides individuals tools to navigate life post-incarceration. Additionally, the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) offers essential reentry services. Participants mentioned relying on ARC reentry services, which included transitional housing, workforce preparation, or becoming a member of ARC. Becoming a member of ARC entails applying online, attending an orientation, and other requirements. Members get access to therapy, career programs, monthly support programs and they are also assigned a case manager to help in their transition back to society.

The data provided from participants highlights several core aspects of ARC's services that have played a pivotal role in participants' successful reintegration into society. These services encompass a range of resources that address the multifaceted challenges of reentry:

1. **Housing:** One of the most impactful services is housing. Participants emphasize the critical role of ARC's housing program in providing a safe place to readjust into society. The housing program offers stability and security during a fragile time when many formerly incarcerated individuals may face homelessness or difficulty securing a place to live. This stability is key to reducing recidivism and creating a foundation for long-term success.
2. **Workforce Preparation:** ARC's workforce preparation services are another vital component. The experience shared by participants such as Donny, who found employment through job fairs hosted by ARC, demonstrates the organization's commitment to helping individuals rebuild their careers. By offering access to job placement programs and networking opportunities, ARC plays an instrumental role in breaking the cycle of unemployment that often contributes to recidivism.
3. **Membership and Case Management:** Membership in ARC provides ongoing support, which is crucial for participants navigating their new lives outside prison. With case managers offering personalized guidance, participants are better equipped to handle the emotional and practical challenges of reentry.
4. **Mental Health and Emotional Support:** The mental health services provided by ARC are a cornerstone of the organization. Participants note the therapeutic support received through the organization, which helped them cope with the trauma of incarceration and transition into society. The focus on mental health is especially important given the stress and emotional toll associated with reentry, and ARC's ability to offer consistent, personalized mental health services fosters long-term stability. John used therapy services and worked at ARC. He said, "It was the ARC support network, the mental health support, the job and to have mentors within that organization, like all those things played

a very important role in my successful reintegration. As a result of all those supports, I have not recidivated.”

5. **Networking and Mentorship:** Another critical aspect of ARC’s program is the mentorship and peer support offered to participants. The strong network of former incarcerated individuals within the organization provides an invaluable resource for newly released individuals. As shared by Donny, ARC’s Life Coaches and volunteers offer “mentorship, guidance, and moral support.” This community, where many of the mentors and Life Coaches understand firsthand the challenges of reentry, creates a supportive and non-judgmental environment for individuals to grow.
6. **The Ride Home Program:** The Ride Home program is also highly praised by HART participants. The program offers essential transportation, clothing, and meals for individuals when they are released from prison. This support is essential for those individuals who have no family or immediate support system. This service not only alleviates logistical challenges but also provides emotional comfort during an otherwise overwhelming experience.

ARC provides crucial support for individuals transitioning out of the California prison system. ARC's services, including transitional housing, workforce preparation, membership benefits, case management, mental health support, and mentorship, have proven to be essential in helping participants successfully reintegrate into society. The stories shared by participants underscore the significant impact of these services, illustrating the organization's role in reducing recidivism, improving quality of life, and providing individuals with the resources they need to build successful futures.

Overall, ARC’s comprehensive approach to reentry—coupled with the HART program’s focus on life skills training—offers a valuable model for supporting formerly incarcerated individuals and empowering them to become contributing members of society. The program’s effectiveness in transforming lives highlights the importance of continued investment in these services to ensure long-term success for individuals and communities alike.

3.1.2 Challenges

While Life Coaches and HART participants believe that the program provides valuable support and opportunities for incarcerated individuals, they also identified several challenges that could limit its effectiveness and accessibility. These challenges, which range from emotional fatigue to institutional barriers, curriculum limitation, and time constraints, can hinder the program’s reach and impact. Addressing these issues is crucial for ensuring that the program can continue to meet the evolving needs of its participants and provide lasting benefits in their rehabilitation journey.

Emotional Fatigue: One of the most significant challenges reported by HART Life Coaches is the difficulty in reaching individuals who are deeply entrenched in addiction or who have not yet hit, "rock bottom" in their lives. HART Life Coaches like Mateo who teaches at California Rehabilitation Center and Charles who teaches at Jamestown State Prison, emphasized how difficult it can be to help participants break free from a lifestyle marked by substance abuse, gang involvement, and emotional numbness. Many of the incarcerated individuals have spent much of their adult lives in cycles of addiction and despair. Mateo notes the difficulty of connecting with those who are stuck in their addiction, while Charles acknowledges that many young individuals in the program glorify the gang life and resist efforts to help them envision a different path. Charles' perspective speaks to the frustrating realization that, sometimes, participants must experience significant suffering and hardship before they are ready to change. This is especially true for younger individuals who may still view criminal life as desirable or unchangeable. As Charles puts it, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." This reflects the challenge of motivating and inspiring change in individuals who may not yet be open to personal transformation.

The emotional fatigue experienced by HART Life Coaches stems not only from the difficulty of reaching participants who are not yet ready to change, but also from the personal emotional toll of doing this deeply relational work. While coaches like Mateo and Charles confront the challenge of motivating individuals entrenched in addiction and gang culture, they must also simultaneously manage the emotional resonance of those experiences with their own pasts. The struggle to inspire transformation in resistant participants is compounded by the emotional burden of witnessing others relive cycles of trauma, incarceration, and relapse—experiences that mirror the coaches' own histories. This dual strain—navigating participants' resistance while carrying the weight of personal connection and responsibility—illustrates the complex and perhaps invisible labor required of peer mentors in correctional rehabilitation settings.

Another challenge that ARC Life Coaches identified was the emotional toll of serving individuals with stories very similar to their own. Several Life Coaches expressed experiencing, "survivor's guilt." John explains that he struggles with the emotional burden of leaving behind fellow incarcerated individuals after each session, often feeling guilty for being able to leave the prison while others remain. Similarly, Alexis, who teaches at a Female Community Reentry Program in Sacramento County, admits that when she sees individuals recidivate after working with them, it weighs heavily on her, as she feels responsible for not being able to help them turn their lives around. The emotional weight of this work is also described by Benjamin, who describes feeling mentally and emotionally exhausted after each session. He notes that the emotional labor of working with trauma survivors is draining, and it takes a significant toll on his energy. The stories of individuals dealing with extreme trauma and violence often require HART Life Coaches to process and deal with those emotions themselves, adding complexity to their role.

Institutional Barriers: Participants mentioned that the current structure of the prison system imposes a range of logistical and bureaucratic obstacles that can significantly delay access to educational programs like HART. These barriers—such as conflicting work schedules, limited class availability, and rigid entry requirements—often fail to account for the individual needs of incarcerated individuals, thereby restricting timely participation in the program.

Curriculum: While the existing HART curriculum provides a valuable foundation, expanding it to offer additional classes or content for participants who have completed the initial four courses could enhance continued engagement. Kenn mentioned “many of the men and women go through the HART program in, like, maybe a year, then after that HART really doesn't have much else to offer them.” Expanding the curriculum can help maintain incarcerated individuals involved in the HART program for longer periods of time, which can help with their rehabilitation journey. An expansion of the curriculum, would necessitate additional resources, including more trainers, facilitators, and time commitments.

Limited Class Time: Participants mentioned not having enough time or running out of time during classes (reminder: each HART class is 2 hours). Participants also mentioned how many people are waiting to get into a HART class but cannot because of the limited seats available. As noted by Joshua, “HART needs to come in more because we’ve got a lot of people who want to get involved, but not enough class space.” Extending the duration of existing sessions or adding more classes could help alleviate this issue, particularly for institutions where there is a waitlist for participation. However, such changes may require careful coordination to ensure that sufficient time and resources are allocated.

Administrative Burden: Another challenge reported by HART Life Coaches is the significant administrative burden placed upon them. Emma notes the enormous amount of data entry required by the program, which detracts from the time and energy that could otherwise be dedicated to direct interaction with participants. This administrative workload is often overwhelming and can detract from the core mission of the program, which is to help individuals develop emotional intelligence and prepare for reentry into society. Emma and others also point out that technology is particularly challenging for her because of all the time she spent incarcerated, where she did not have access to computers.

The HART program offers a compelling foundation for personal growth, emotional healing, and behavioral transformation among incarcerated individuals. Rooted in trauma-informed principles and delivered by credible messengers with lived experience, HART provides participants with tools for self-reflection, identity development, and positive decision-making. Yet, to fully realize its potential, the program must address several structural and operational challenges.

These include overcoming logistical and institutional barriers to enrollment, extending and deepening engagement through expanded curricula and re-enrollment opportunities, and improving administrative capacity for data tracking and program delivery. In doing so, HART can become not only a consistent source of hope and support during incarceration, but also a bridge to successful reentry and community reintegration. With thoughtful investment and refinement, HART is well-positioned to lead a cultural shift in corrections—one that affirms the human capacity for change and builds pathways toward dignity, accountability, and redemption.

3.2 Descriptive Results

This evaluation’s multi-pronged approach to determining the efficacy and areas of growth for HART included a participant survey. The survey was distributed to a random sample of HART participants (N= to compare and triangulate findings from other sources of program data. Participants volunteered their perceptions of change in self-reported wellbeing, as well as their opinions of the program’s areas of strength and potential opportunities for growth.

3.2.1 Participant Characteristics

Racial Distribution: HART participants enrolled in January of 2025 were made up of diverse racial, cultural, and generational backgrounds. Of the pre-program sample, 23% of participants identified as Black, 43% identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 17% were white. Post-program participant demographics were similar—25% were Black, 42% were Hispanic/Latino, 19% were white, and 14% identified as another race. ARC also recorded the number of participants who identified as Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, and multiple races. However, this data has been incorporated in the “Other,” category to enable a comparison with population data available from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR).

Table 1 illustrates the percentage of the study’s participants by race as compared to California’s total prison population and ARC’s Life Coaches.

Table 1*Survey Participant, Life Coach, and California Prison Population Racial Demographics*

Race	Pre-Program Survey Participants		Post-Program Survey Participants		Percent of HART Life Coaches		Percent of 2024 California Prison Population ²	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Black	88	23%	123	25%	8	32%	n/a ³	28%
Hispanic/Latino	163	43%	206	42%	13	52%	n/a	47%
White	65	17%	93	19%	4	16%	n/a	19%
Other	65	17%	68	14%	n/a	n/a	n/a	6%
Total	381	100%	490	100%	25	100%	n/a	100%

While randomly selected, the pre-and post-program participant samples is roughly representative of the racial demographics of the overall prison population. As of 2024, 28% of individuals incarcerated in California’s prisons identified as Black, 47% were Hispanic/Latino, and 19% were white. The consistency in demographic makeup between HART participants and California’s total prison population indicates that ARC Life Coaches have created an inclusive environment that encourages participation among individuals from varying backgrounds.

This inclusivity is further evidenced by the demographic makeup of Life Coaches. HART Life Coaches’ racial and cultural backgrounds are similarly racially diverse when compared with California’s prison population. Like the demographic makeup of the sample and California’s total prison population, HART’s pool of Life Coaches is 32% Black, 52% Hispanic/Latino, and 16% white.

HART Participant Age Distribution: The age range of HART participants in the sample provides some initial insight into characteristics of incarcerated individuals who opt into the program.

Table 2 details the age range of participants at the time of enrollment.

² Source: California Department of Corrections Data Points:

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/cdcr.or/viz/OffenderDataPoints/SummaryInCustodyandParole>

³ CDCR Data Dashboard provides demographic percentages but does not quantify the total number of incarcerated individuals in each group

Table 2

Percentage of Participants by Age at Enrollment

Age Range	Pre-Program Survey Participants	
	<i>n</i>	%
12 to 16	0	0%
17 to 20	0	0%
21 to 26	32	8%
27 to 35	83	22%
36 to 45	117	31%
46 to 55	98	26%
56 +	51	13%
Total	381	100%

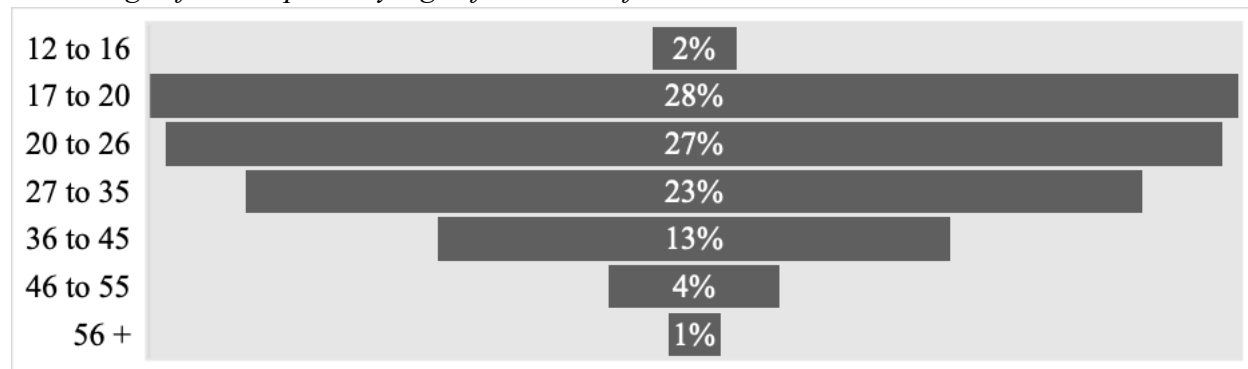
Only 8% of the study participants were 26 years old or younger. Individuals between 27 and 35 years old made up 22% of the sample. One third of participants were between 36 and 45, 26% were between 46 and 55, and 13% were 56 years old or older.

It is notable that the majority (79%) of participants were between 27 and 55 at the time of enrollment. While this composition creates a normal distribution around the mean of 42.3 years, the distribution of participants' age at the time of conviction is substantially dissimilar to that at the time of HART enrollment.

Figure 3 demonstrates the percentage of study participants by age range at the time of their initial conviction.

Figure 3

Percentage of Participants by Age of the Time of Conviction



The majority (57%) of individuals in the sample were 26 years old or younger when they were incarcerated. The mean age of conviction in the sample is 27.3 years, or 15 years younger than the average age of participants at the time of enrollment in the HART program.

The 15-year lag between average age at conviction and average age upon enrolling in HART may be attributable to a variety of factors. One such factor is the number of years in prison prior to HART participation.

Table 3

Percentage of Participants by Number of Years Served at the Time of Enrollment

Years in Prison	Percent Participants
1 to 5	32%
6 to 10	13%
11 to 15	12%
16 to 20	16%
21 to 25	9%
26 +	18%

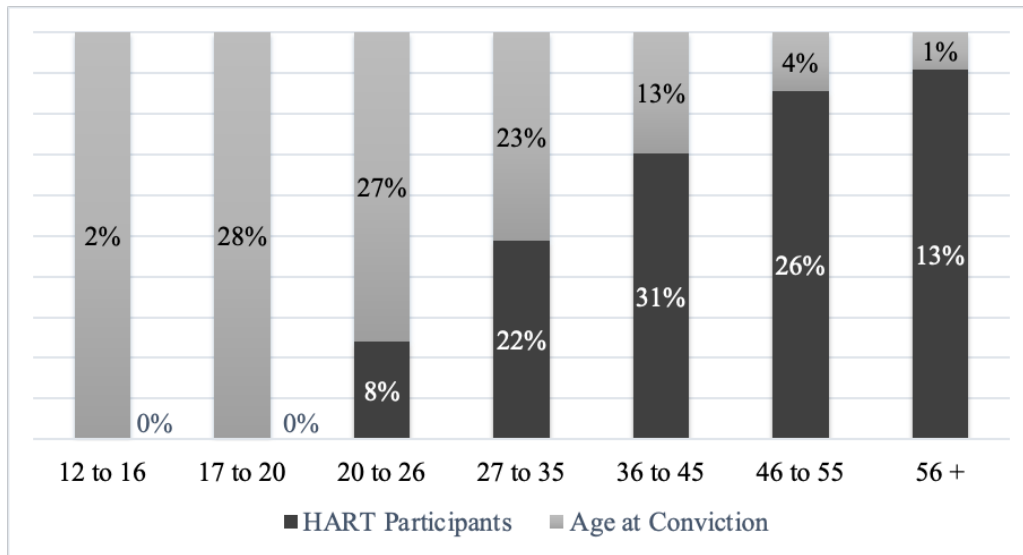
Table 3 details the percentage of participants in the sample by the number of years they had served before entering the HART program. Roughly one third of participants had been incarcerated for five or fewer years, those incarcerated between 6 and 20 years had similar representation across categories (between 12% and 16%). Individuals incarcerated for 21 to 25 years before entering HART programming made up only 9% of the sample, and 18% of participants had served over 25 years. Further exploration of the implications of this distribution will be discussed in the Findings section.

The 15-year difference between participants’ average age at the time of incarceration and age at the time of enrollment invites exploration of factors that may contribute to this disparity. Despite more than half of the sample reporting being younger than 26 at the time of conviction, very few HART participants fall into the Transitional Age Youth age range. Rather, just 8% of HART participants were 26 years old or younger. Twenty-two percent of participants were between 27 and 35, and the remaining majority of participants (70%) were 36 years old or older.

Figure 4 illustrates the discrepancy between the average age of participants when they entered prison and their average age upon deciding to enroll in HART.

Figure 4

Percent of HART Participants by Age Group and Age at Conviction



For example, 27% of participants in the sample were between 20 and 26 at the age of conviction, yet only 8% of HART participants were between ages 20 and 26. Conversely, only 13% of HART participants were convicted between the ages of 36 and 45, yet 31% of all participants fell within this age range.

The contrast between participants' age at the time of conviction and the average age of HART enrollment suggests that young people experience obstacles enrolling in programming. Factors that may impede young people's participation are work and school obligations or challenges being referred to programming by Correctional Officers.

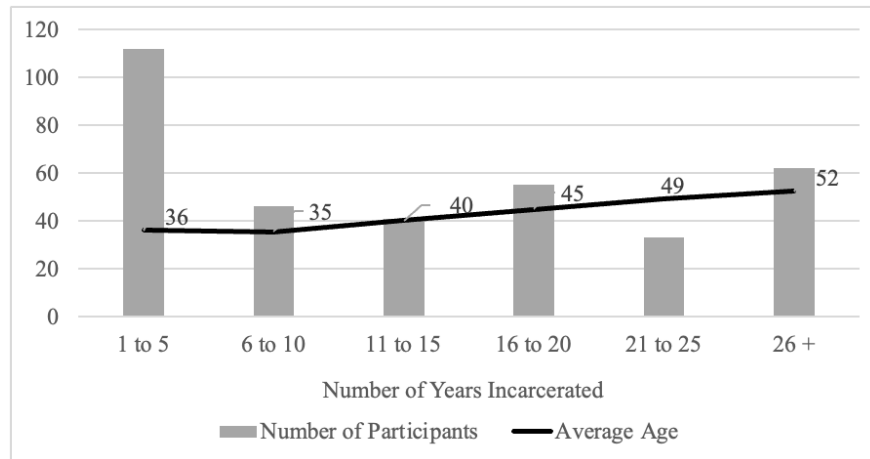
Other obstacles may be cultural and developmental, such as a perceived need to participate in gang culture within the institution or a perception that groups and classes would provide little benefit in the short- or long-term. One Life Coach described priorities among young, incarcerated people as focused on survival: "[At that age] the most important things are prison politics, staying healthy, staying alive, getting to know the environment, and building a reputation to move up the ladder." Older participants, on the other hand, were presumably arrested at a younger age and have spent several years incarcerated.

Given that most participants were convicted at a young age but came to the HART program in middle age, there may be an association between number of years served and HART participation. Other factors leading to participation in HART programming may be an increased sense of hope, a search for purpose, or a shift in the social acceptability of enrolling in the program as one ages. Likewise, participants with longer sentences may experience an increased sense of hope for release after witnessing peers achieve parole after decades of incarceration.

Time Served and HART Enrollment: Contrary to the assumption that most HART participants waited years or decades to enroll in the program, the evidence below illustrates that the HART participation rate was highest among incarcerated individuals who had served five or fewer years. Figure 5 details the relationship between years incarcerated average age, and number of HART participants.

Figure 5

Number of HART Participants by Years Served with Average Age



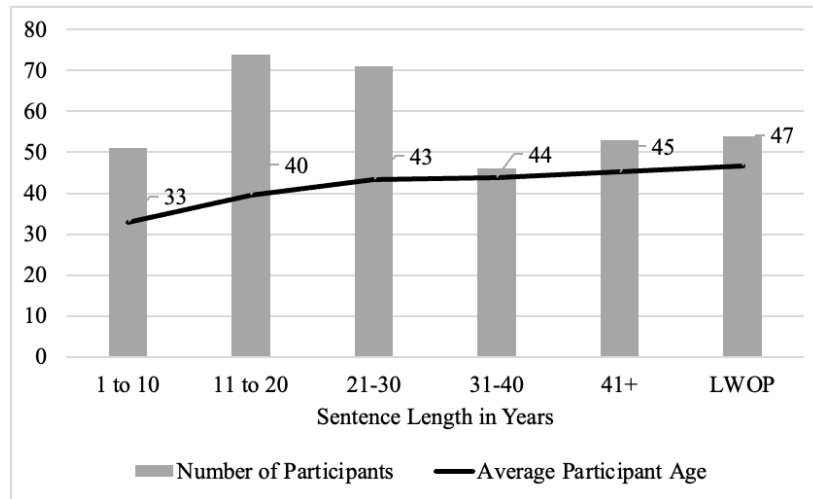
This suggests that individuals with fewer years to serve are more likely to participate in HART programming, particularly if the promise of re-entry is within reach. Additionally, the average age of those with a sentence of five years or fewer had an average age of 36. This suggests that this group experienced incarceration at a later phase of life than did the 53% of individuals arrested as youths, supporting the idea that more mature individuals are more likely to elect to participate in HART programming than their younger counterparts.

Sentence Length: The average age of HART participants was ten years younger among those with a prison sentence of 10 years or less compared with most other groups. This suggests that while younger people, on average, participate less in HART, young people with fewer years, and perhaps more hope for the future, are more likely to enroll in HART than their peers with longer sentences.

Figure 6 illustrates the relationship between the average age of study participants by sentence length.

Figure 6

Number of Study Participants by Sentence Length with Average Age



The age range across the remaining sentence length categories was relatively uniform. However, individuals serving Life without the Possibility of Parole had a slightly higher average age, suggesting that, paradoxically, those who had previously not had hope of re-entry because of their sentence may have gained that hope through learning of the experiences of their peers who had previously completed the program.

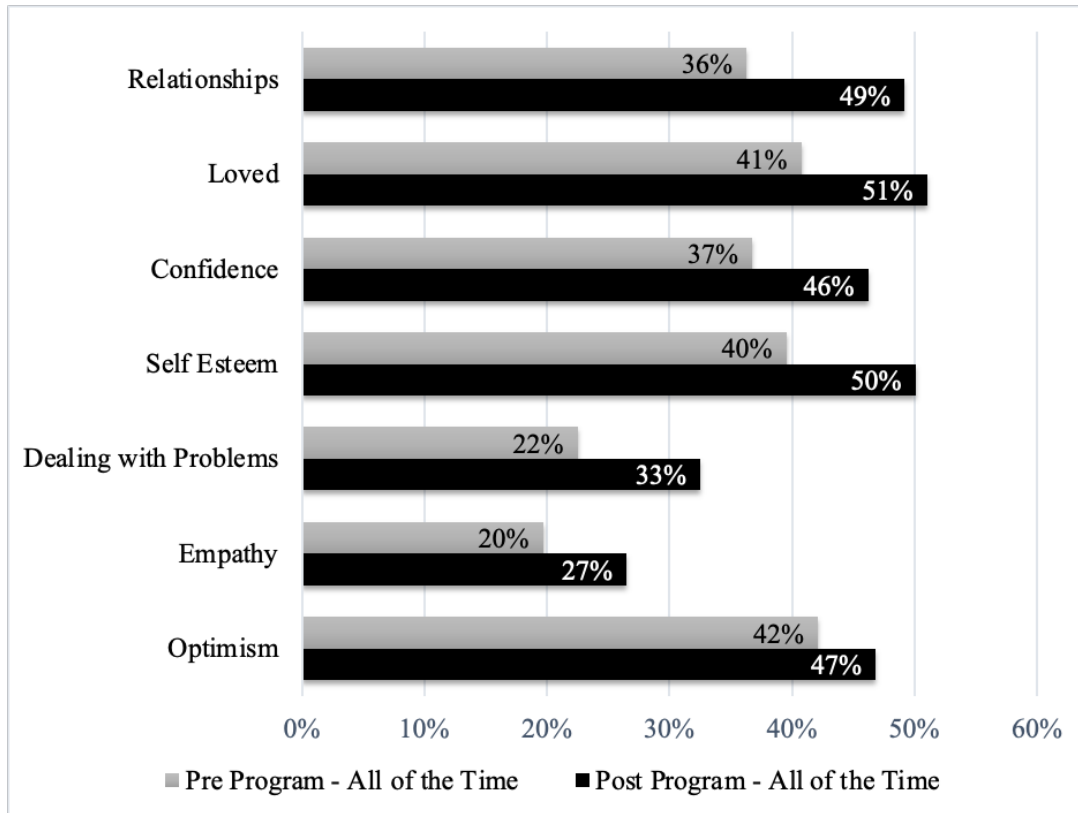
3.2.2 Wellbeing

The average percentage of participants who reported the highest level of wellbeing on the survey's corresponding indicators increased across all outcomes at the conclusion of programming.

Figure 7 illustrates the proportion of survey respondents who reported high levels of wellbeing by indicator before and after graduating from the HART program.

Figure 7

Percent of Participants Reporting Highest Level of Wellbeing, “All Of The Time,” Before and After Program Participation by Indicator

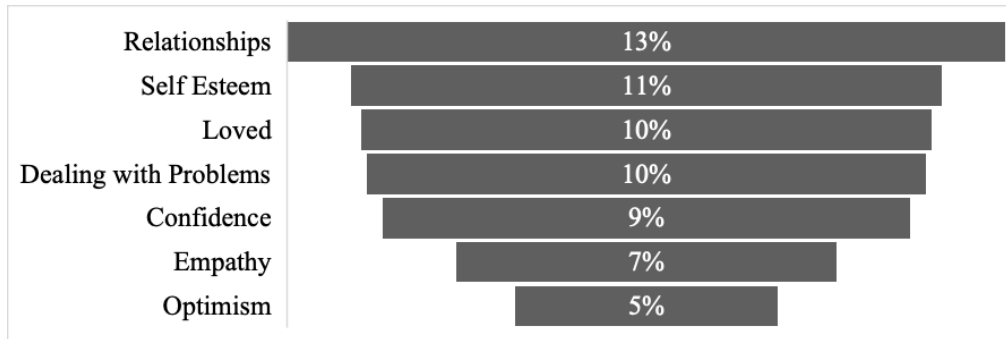


The increase in the proportion of HART participants reporting wellbeing across all metrics indicates that the program had a positive impact on incarcerated individuals overall. However, some indicators had a larger proportion of participants who reported high levels of wellbeing at baseline. Among others, fewer participants responded affirmatively at the beginning of the period. Most important to the evaluation was the change in the percentage of respondents who reported wellbeing before and after participating in HART.

Figure 8 illustrates the change in the percentage of participants who reported high levels of wellbeing by indicator in descending order. For example, 36% reported feeling interested in other people (Relationships) before the program, while 49% described feeling interested in others after the program, as demonstrated in Figure 8. This produces a change of 13 percentage points before and after HART programming.

Figure 8

Average Percentage Point Change In Wellbeing By Indicator



Change in the proportion of participants who reported positive outcomes, coupled with respondents' comments, provides greater detail about the areas of personal development and pro-social behaviors that participants gained through the program. Findings will be discussed thematically below.

Relationships and Empathy: Participants reported the greatest average change between the pre- and post-program surveys when asked about feeling interested in other people ("Relationships," above). Thirty six percent reported an interest in other people before the program, while 49% described felt high levels of interest in others after the program. Similarly, average levels of empathy increased throughout the program. Twenty percent of participants responded that it was important to them to contribute to the happiness and well-being of others prior to the program ("Empathy," above), while 27% reported high levels of empathy at the conclusion of programming.

While the change in Empathy was more modest than the change in Relationships, the two indicators, taken together, demonstrate a substantive increase in participants who felt more connected to those around them after completing the HART program. One participant described this feeling of connection, writing, "I am not alone in my journey toward freedom." Others volunteered comments about the impact their actions have on others and the empathy they gained through HART. One wrote, "I learned to let go and forgive. I learn how I hurt and affect others in the past I have a sense of remorse." Another shared learning, "so much humility, [to care] about the well-being of others."

A rise in the number of self-reported ratings for positive relationships and increased empathy among HART participants is notable not only because of the benefit to the individuals in the program, but also to the larger institutions and communities in which they reside. Incarcerated people who feel interested in others and actively contribute to the happiness of those around them may be less likely to participate in acts of violence while incarcerated or upon release. Likewise, their pro-social behavior might serve as an example for those around them. HART

graduates, therefore, may improve the safety and wellbeing of other incarcerated individuals, prison staff, and, once released, members of the community outside of prison.

Self-Esteem and Confidence: The percentage of HART participants who reported high levels of Self-Esteem and Confidence also increased over the course of the program. 9% more participants reported feeling confident upon graduation than before the program, and 11% more of the respondents reported feeling good about themselves.

One participant described a newfound sense of confidence and self-esteem, saying that he felt, “capable of completing what needs to be done to show my positive change.” This sense of agency was echoed by another participant, who said, “the group made me feel good about myself and I learned how to express myself more respectfully.” Several other HART graduates expressed a simultaneous sense of accountability harms they caused in the past and belief in their own ability to shape their futures.

Optimism: The percentage of HART participants that expressed high levels of Optimism increased only 5% over the course of the program. However, 42% of respondents felt highly optimistic before the program began, suggesting that hope for the future is a prerequisite for enrollment in HART. Participants remained optimistic throughout the, and 47% of all respondents felt highly optimistic for the future upon graduation.

Optimism was among the most dominant themes in participants’ survey comments. One graduate wrote, “I have an actual belief that there can be success after prison, that my recovery isn't just a stage, it’s a lifelong process. [I believe] that I'm more than the substance of my past and that real change can be accomplished.” Another participant shared, “It is very uplifting that there are people striving to make me feel human. The HART program makes me feel that there is hope for a better future.” Finally, one graduate wrote, “I love this program so much. they give me hope that I can go home someday and have a career helping others that are like me.”

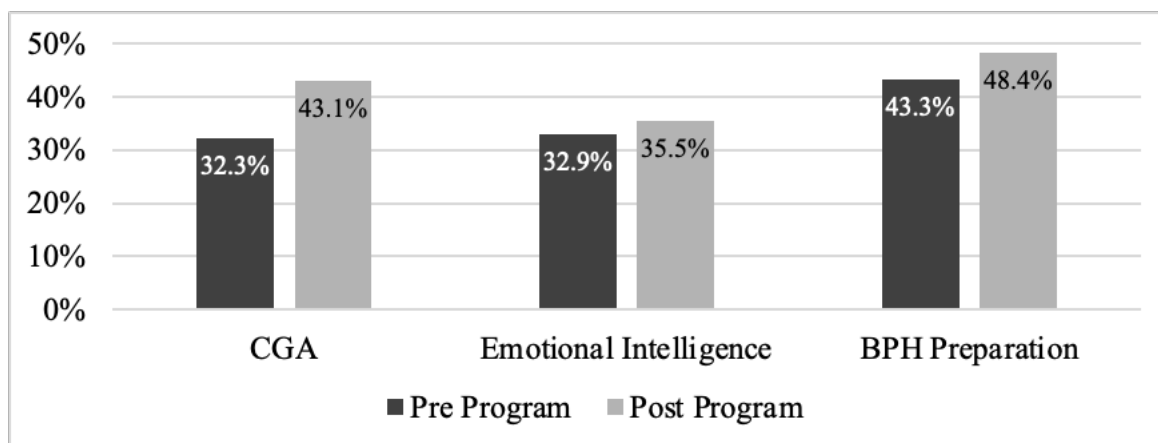
Participant comments on the topic of optimism illustrate the interconnected nature of each of the wellbeing indicators suggesting that the hope, community, and confidence participants gained in the HART program contribute to an overall change in attitude and behavior.

Course-Specific Outcomes: The overall change in self-reported wellbeing varied slightly by course type within the HART program. Wellbeing among participants in Criminal and Gang Members Anonymous (CGA) increased by over ten percentage points. Roughly 3% more participants reported high levels of wellbeing after completing the Emotional Intelligence (EI) course, and the proportion of participants reporting high levels of wellbeing after completing BPH preparation increased by five percentage points.

Figure 9 illustrates the percentage of participants who reported high levels of wellbeing before and after each course.

Figure 9

Percentage of Participants Reporting Highest Level of Wellbeing, “All of The Time,” Before and After HART Program by Class



The greatest increase in the proportion of participants reporting high levels of wellbeing was among individuals enrolled in CGA. Participants’ comments supported this observation. As one respondent shared, “CGA is what made my life worth living. I thought like a criminal. I thought it was normal.”

The transition away from criminal thinking and toward restorative behavior was a common theme. One participant detailed what he had learned in the course: “Lifestyle addiction defines our common problem of being addicted to illegal activity—we cannot change anything unless we make personal decisions to act - helps provide reliable solutions.” Another respondent described the shift in thinking and behavior that the program catalyzed: “Now I understand my behavior from when I was growing up. I learned how to listen and figure out my triggers. I learned of all the hurt I caused to my victims and his loved ones.”

It is worth noting that CGA is a nationwide program, similar to Alcoholics Anonymous and other peer-led recovery groups. However, the comments indicated the specific impact that HART-led CGA programs had on their outlook and changes in behavior. One participant observed that the HART credible messengers, “provide structure, hope, and accountability – the Life Coach brings the world inside”

The role of HART Life Coaches as credible messengers was equally apparent in comments about the Emotional Intelligence and BPH Preparation courses. Likewise, participants described anticipating seeking ARC’s services upon release. As one participant shared, “[the Life Coach]

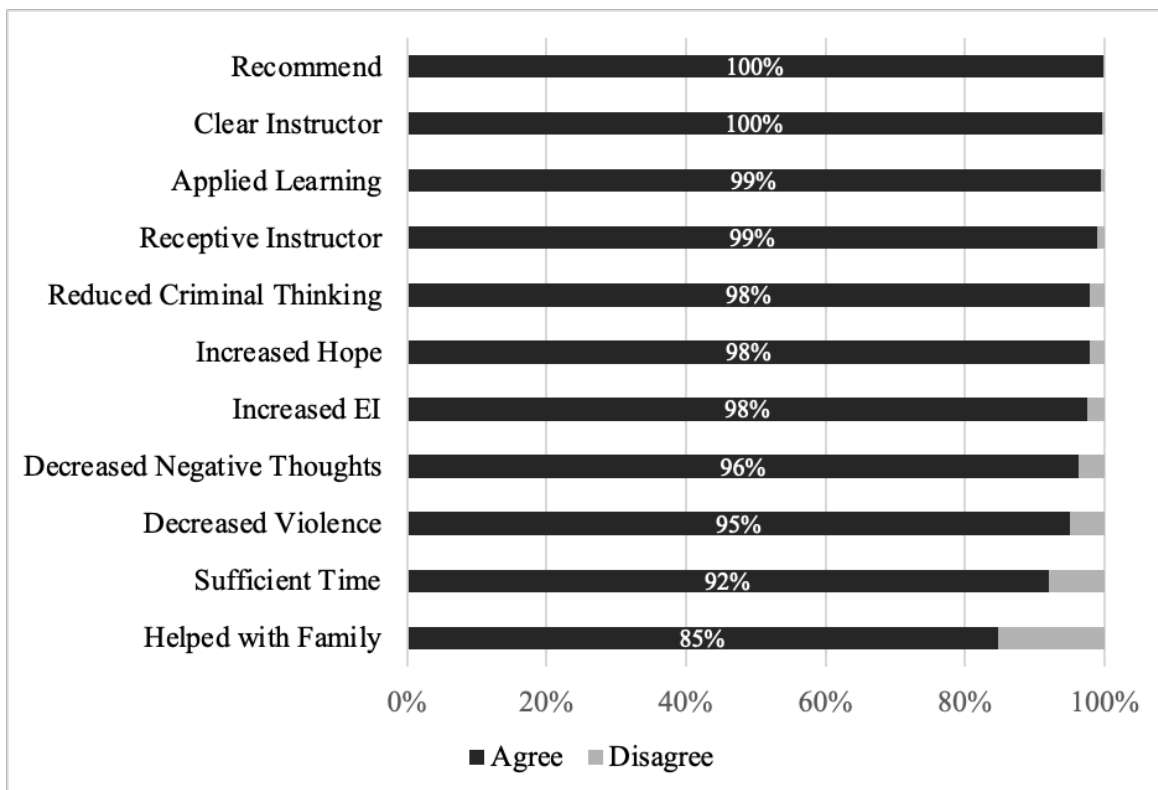
gave me hope after prison, [that I can] be more than a second class citizen. ARC will be there on the outside to assist in helping myself and others reintegrate back into society.”

3.2.3 Participant Feedback

In addition to their responses to survey items measuring wellbeing, HART participants evaluated the content, delivery, and duration of programming at the conclusion of the program. The post-program survey included questions that measured satisfaction with each component of the course, as indicated by participants’ True or False responses (See Appendix B).

Overall Satisfaction: Participants overwhelmingly indicated satisfaction with HART programming overall. Figure 10 illustrates the percentage of participants that reported program satisfaction for each indicator measured.

Figure 10
Percentage of Participants Reporting Program Satisfaction by Metric



One hundred percent of participants would recommend the program to others, and all participants responded that instructors were clear in their explanation of the material. 99% of participants reported planning to apply what they learned to their daily lives, 99% reported that the instructor was receptive to ideas and questions, 98% reported a reduction in criminal

thinking, and 98% of HART participants agreed that the program contributed to an increased sense of hope and improved emotional intelligence. 96% of respondents reported fewer negative or harmful thoughts after completing the program, and 95% agreed that the program decreased the number of violent incidents they experienced.

Of the topics measured in the feedback portion of the survey, Sufficient Time and Helped with Family received the lowest levels of satisfaction. 92% of participants agreed that the program length was sufficient, and 85% reported that the program helped them connect with family. Participant comments assist in illuminating major themes and common takeaways among HART program graduates.

Decreased Violence: Nearly all HART graduates reported taking part in fewer violent incidents while enrolled in the program. While possibly attributable to the characteristics of incarcerated individuals already willing to change their behavior, the decrease in violence among participants is also likely a result of the program's content.

Participants reported learning how to recognize triggers and interrupt patterns of reactivity. One participant described this skill: “[I learned to] understand the important things that lead me to my life crime so that I can address them and prevent them from causing me to resort back to old actions. I stay in my change even when temptation presents itself. Understanding my causative factors and trigger so that I can continue to move forward.” Another described it simply: “I learned how to keep a level head and not blow up at stupid things, think positive always.” Assuming that many participants will employ these skills while incarcerated and after release, HART graduates contribute to public safety both inside and outside of prison.

Instructor Feedback: All participants agreed that HART instructors were clear in delivering the material and facilitating the programs. To elaborate on this observation, one participant shared that, “the Life Coach was in touch with all of the needs the group was in search of. I was never lost during the discussion. There was a feeling of acceptance throughout the program.” Another participant described his instructor's attributes and approach to learning: “[The instructor was] very helpful, enthusiastic, personable, relatable, funny and a role model for myself and others for how to conduct ourselves in and out of person. He gave me hope for my future, that freedom is truly possible and a reality if I want it.”

Beyond their clarity and pedagogical skill, participant feedback indicated that instructors' experience as formerly incarcerated individuals was an asset to the program. One respondent shared that, “Having an instructor that's been in our shoes helps us connect more and encourages us to take that step to better ourselves and be successful for when we leave this place.” Another HART graduate agreed, sharing the opinion that “[this is] the greatest idea any organization has had, allowing a group to be led by former lifers/inmates. It restored hope where hope was lost

and someone showed that there is a life worth living right now and after prison.” Again, the intersection of interpersonal connection and hope for the future appears to contribute to participants’ overall satisfaction with the program and potential changes in long-term behavior.

Program Length: Given the high level of participant satisfaction with the content of HART programming, it is perhaps unsurprising that 8% of survey respondents reported that the program’s duration was insufficient. Additionally, many participants who reported satisfaction with the program’s length in the evaluation portion of the survey added comments expressing interest in a longer or more comprehensive program. Below is a sample of such comments:

- *I love this program a lot, I wish I could [participate] all year long*
- *Great program, not long enough*
- *Awesome - Maybe a bit more longer in weeks to fully grasp it all*
- *I believe it ought to be televised on prison T.V.*
- *I wish it was longer or at least twice a week. It gives inmates something to look forward to when released.*
- *I got a lot out of the class. I wish I could take this same class again.*
- *We should have more programs/Groups in our facility that are sponsored by ARC*
- *I think everyone should have the opportunity to attain this class because it is life changing.*

The comments indicate a widespread desire among former participants to repeat or continue with the programming offered by ARC’s HART instructors.

Family Engagement: The metric of participant satisfaction with the lowest level of approval was Family Engagement. 15% of HART graduates did not agree that HART programming helped them connect with their families. This relatively low rating may be a function of the program’s focus; HART curriculum is not specifically focused on family relationships. Rather, the programs evaluated in this study aimed to break cycles of criminality, prepare participants for parole board hearings, and increase levels of emotional intelligence.

Many participants did report improved relationships with family members. One respondent described how developing emotional intelligence impacted relationships with loved ones: “I really felt like [the HART program] helped me understand myself and why I feel the way I feel. It has helped me express myself and communicate with my friends and family.” Indeed, it stands to reason that the direct program objectives may indirectly or eventually contribute to healthier family relationships.

The survey portion of the HART program evaluation illuminated several conclusions that may be used to inform future programming. First, an examination of the average age of HART

participants in the sample differed substantially than the average age of individuals at the time of conviction. Transitional Aged Youth (TAY) are more likely to experience incarceration than all other age groups combined, yet most surveyed HART participants were between 27 and 45 years old (53%), indicating that TAY either spend years inside without participating, or that they face some barriers to participation. Second, there were substantial increases in all wellbeing metrics among participants before and after HART programming. While the present study cannot establish causality between the relationship between HART programming and increased overall wellbeing, the uniformity in positive change between the pre- and post-survey wellbeing scores across all indicators supports the argument that HART participation leads to greater wellbeing among participants.

Innovative Programming Grants Progress Reports: Feedback findings from the Innovative Programming Grant Reports (IPGs) were consistent with the results of the post-program survey data. The average ratings across all 50 evaluations were overwhelmingly positive. The first statement, “This program/class has been a learning experience,” received an average rating of 4.84. The second, “The program instructor was knowledgeable in the subject,” garnered the highest score of 4.88. The third, “The length of this program course was sufficient,” received the lowest rating at 4.3, suggesting a desire for extended class time. The fourth statement, “I would recommend this program course to others,” was rated 4.86, and the final statement, “My overall program experience was positive,” achieved a 4.84 rating.

3.3 Quantitative Results

The quantitative portion of this evaluation examined the question of whether HART programming was associated with changes in the number of disciplinary infractions, on average, incarcerated individuals received. Within CDCR institutions, these Rules Violation Reports (RVRs) are formal records of misconduct committed by incarcerated individuals that violate institutional rules or state law.

RVRs are categorized based on severity into administrative violations and serious violations. Administrative RVRs typically involve non-violent or lower-level infractions—such as being out of bounds or failing to report—while serious RVRs include behaviors like fighting, possession of contraband, or assault. These violations carry a range of consequences, from loss of privileges (e.g., phone, visitation, or yard time) to disciplinary housing, loss of credits toward early release, or even referral for criminal prosecution. RVRs can also negatively affect parole suitability and program eligibility, reinforcing cycles of disadvantage for individuals and exacerbating tensions within the institution.

Reducing RVRs is therefore critical—not only for improving individual outcomes and enhancing opportunities for rehabilitation, but also for promoting a safer, more stable institutional

environment that benefits staff and incarcerated populations alike. Fewer RVRs mean less institutional strain, reduced administrative burden, and a climate more conducive to constructive programming and personal change.

To address the question of a relationship between HART programming and RVRs, this study used paired-samples t-tests conducted using data from three California correctional facilities. The test compared the average number of RVRs recorded in the 6-month period prior to enrollment in the HART program with the 6-month period following program completion. The analysis of rule violation reports (RVRs) before and after program participation revealed statistically and practically significant reductions in disciplinary infractions across all three institutions.

Table 4 details the mean and median number of RVRs before and after programming.

Table 4

Paired T-Test Results Comparing Pre- and Post-Program RVRs by Institution

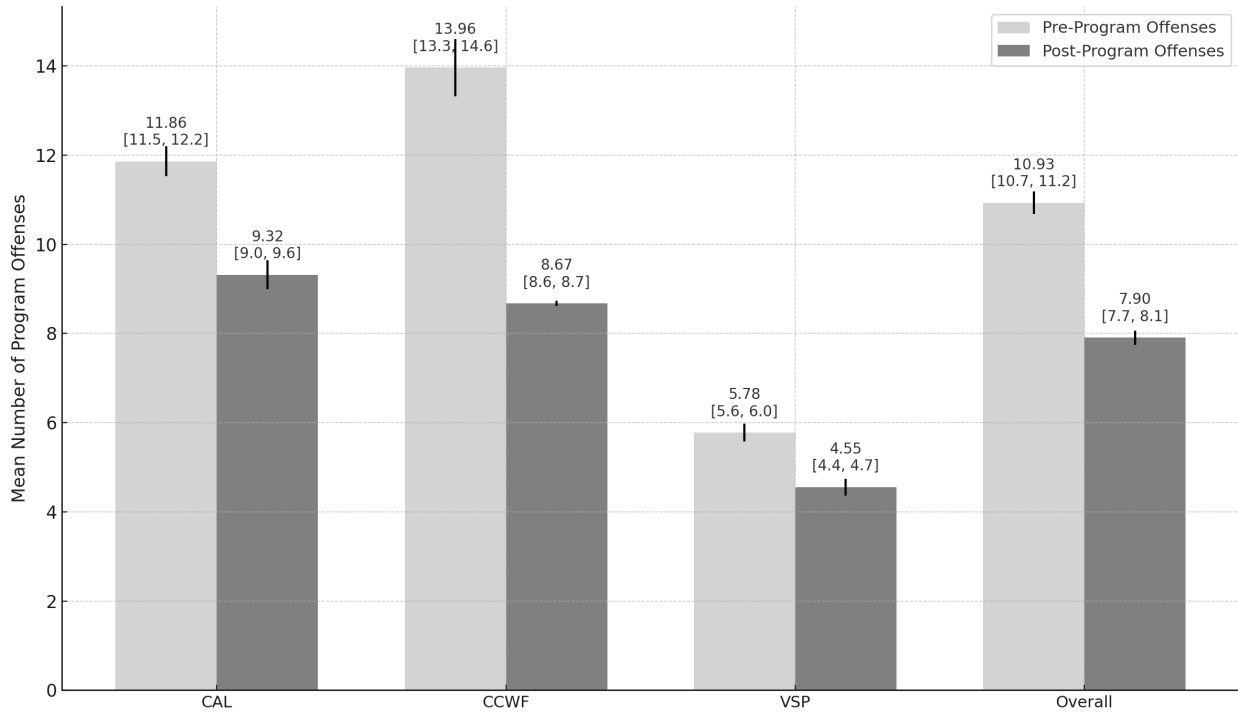
Institution	Mean Pre	Mean Post	Mean Reduction	Median Pre	Median Post	Median Reduction	t-stat	p-value
CAL	11.86	9.32	2.55	6	3	3	43.91	0.00
CCWF	13.96	8.67	5.29	4	9	-5	16.14	0.00
VSP	5.78	4.55	1.22	3	2	1	30.53	0.00
Overall	10.93	7.90	3.03	4	6	-2	29.61	0.00

On average, participants saw a 3.03-point decrease in RVRs after completing the program ($t(N) = 29.61, p < .001$), with mean reductions observed at CAL (-2.55), CCWF (-5.29), and VSP (-1.22).

As illustrated by Figure 11, confidence intervals for pre- and post-program means did not overlap, reinforcing the strength and consistency of these findings. While the overall median number of RVRs decreased from 4.0 to 2.0, site-level patterns varied—most notably at CCWF, where the median increased despite a substantial reduction in the mean, suggesting a wider distribution of outcomes.

Figure 11

Comparison of Mean RVRs Pre- and Post-Program RVRs by Institution with Confidence Intervals



This is consistent with existing literature on the role of cognitive-behavioral interventions in correctional settings. Wilson et al. (2005) and Van Voorhis et al. (2010) demonstrate that targeting distorted thinking and cultivating emotional regulation can meaningfully reduce disciplinary infractions and improve prison climate. The present results suggest that the program under evaluation contributes to this broader trend. By fostering pro-social attitudes and interpersonal skills, HART enhances not only individual outcomes but also may also contribute to institutional safety and stability. These findings affirm the program's value as both a rehabilitative and operational asset within correctional environments.

4. Overall Takeaways

4.1 Process Evaluation Findings

The process evaluation portion of this report examined fidelity of implementation, attendance and graduation, and participant satisfaction. The quality of the HART curriculum, growing numbers of program graduates, high rates of program graduation, and characteristics of the ARC staff indicate fidelity to the inputs that ARC intended.

4.1.1 Fidelity of Implementation

HART Program Curriculum: One indicator of the program’s fidelity to its intended inputs is ARC’s HART Life Coaches’ use of curricular materials that are trauma informed, accessible, and relevant to the needs of participants. The stated inputs for the Emotional Intelligence curriculum are as follows:

Emotional Intelligence Workshop Goals:

- Regulating emotions, relating to others, and cognitive restructuring
- Focus on violence and aggression reduction through emotional self-awareness

The following excerpts from the curriculum demonstrate the consistency between these stated goals and the material used to meet them.

Excerpt 1

Curriculum Introduction

The Anti-Recidivism Coalition is proud to present its rehabilitative course, *Emotional Intelligence: Regulating Emotions, Relating to Others, and Cognitive Restructuring*. This course was written by prisoners for prisoners. Emotional ineptitude is one of the root causes of crime. Consequently, we decided to focus our efforts on understanding, regulating, and expressing emotions in a healthy manner.

Excerpt 2

List of Sessions by Topic

Session Topics:

1. Emotional Intelligence Defined
2. Emotional Self-Awareness
3. Emotional Self-Management
4. Self-Motivation
5. Social Awareness (Empathy)
6. Handling Relationships (Interpersonal Communication)

7. Cognitive Restructuring
8. Big Picture Philosophy

Excerpt 3

Example of and End of Session Reflection Prompt

What are some examples of warped beliefs that may trigger violence?

We must see violence for what it is, a feeble-minded response that inevitably leads to pain and suffering for both the perpetrator of violence and the victim. If we truly love our families and are willing to sacrifice for them, then we must refrain from violence so that we can get out of prison and return to them. We need to live up to our own expectations instead of living down to the expectations of others. Remember, violence is the ultimate expression of weakness while humility is the ultimate expression of strength.

The Emotional Intelligence curriculum, developed by formerly incarcerated individuals, illustrates its adherence to the stated goals of the HART program. The content of the curriculum successfully aligns with the Logic Model's intended outcomes of fewer harmful and negative thoughts, increased emotional wellbeing, and increased pro-social behaviors.

4.1.2 Participation and graduation

Another key indicator of fidelity of implementation is the count of program graduates over time. Graduation from the program is defined by participants having attended and fully participated (as assessed by the Life Coach) eighty percent of class sessions of one course. Participants can therefore graduate from more than one of the HART courses offered.

The average percentage of participants who attended at least eight out of ten sessions was 68%⁴ during the study period, suggesting that most participants who began a workshop committed to the series throughout its duration. The 68% graduation rate demonstrates an adherence to the program among most participants. Likewise, individuals who graduate from the HART program participate in a ceremony and are awarded a certificate. These milestones may provide incentive for participants to prioritize the sessions and gain a sense of accomplishment. Future iterations of this study will investigate variations graduation rates variation among years, as well as motivations for persisting in the program.

4.1.3 Participant Satisfaction

Overall program satisfaction was high, with 100% of post-program survey respondents reporting positive experiences across key areas such as instructor ability, emotional growth, and increased hope.

⁴ Data source: ARC Agency Data

Participants reflected on the personal growth they experienced during the course. One individual wrote, “I love this course. It taught me what to do to stay out of trouble.” Another participant shared a deeper reflection: “I never thought about the pain and trauma that I had impacted on my family. This class opened up my eyes, that I hurt a lot more people than just my victim.” Many others expressed similar revelations, citing newfound awareness and a desire to make amends and pursue a more constructive life path.

Other testimonials further highlight the course’s transformative potential: “I have learned much from this program; it has opened my eyes to the depth of the remorse, as well as how to replace my criminal behavior with conduct that is decent and reasonable.” In addition to helping participants understand remorse, the program also helps prepare individuals to re-enter society and avoid recidivism: “[The program] provides us with knowledge and resources to succeed in going back into society.”

Desire for More Programming: Comments from participants echoed the numerical feedback, particularly regarding the program’s duration. Several individuals expressed a strong desire for a longer curriculum. One participant shared, “I want to learn more, so I need more time in this program,” while another added, “There needs to be more weeks in this class.” Another comment read, “Program could be longer. ARC should have more classes because they are some of the good teachers due to once being in prison and understanding our situation.” This sentiment led naturally to the second major theme found in the comment section—appreciation for the instructors themselves.

Life Coach Feedback: Life Coaches are formerly incarcerated individuals, and many participants emphasized how this unique perspective added authenticity and relatability to their learning experience. One participant noted, “There is nothing like getting first-hand knowledge from someone who has been in our shoes and has done better.” Another stated, “Our instructor has walked the path we are currently on. Going from incarceration to giving back to others.” The profound impact of this peer-led approach was evident across the evaluations.

ARC Programs as a Path to Hope: Engagement with ARC beyond the classroom was also a recurring theme: “This was the best self-help program I’ve ever experienced. I will be contacting ARC once I am given parole and will be doing more ARC groups.” Another participant stated, “I plan to become a part of ARC when I parole.” Overall, these statements suggest that ARC is viewed not just as a short-term program but as a vital support network for reintegration and continued development after release.

Participants’ willingness to recommend the program to others was emphatic and consistent: One participant stated, “I will definitely recommend this program to others.” Another participant

commented that ARC was the “Best program CDCR offers in my opinion.” This strong endorsement underscores the participants' high regard for the program, suggesting that they view ARC as not only beneficial for themselves but also as a valuable resource for others facing similar challenges. This widespread enthusiasm highlights ARC's effectiveness and its potential to positively impact a broader community.

Taken together, the data and participant narratives affirm the value of HART's work and the life-changing potential of peer-led rehabilitation programs. These Innovative Programming Grants Progress Reports serve not only as feedback tools but as testimonials to the enduring impact of education, mentorship, and second chances.

4.2 Outcome Evaluation Findings

4.2.1 Hope and wellbeing

Findings from qualitative and survey data clearly demonstrate that the HART program has a positive and measurable impact on the hope and wellbeing of incarcerated individuals. Across all surveyed indicators, the percentage of participants reporting the highest levels of wellbeing increased by the conclusion of the program, signaling meaningful personal growth in areas such as relationships, empathy, self-esteem, confidence, and optimism.

The most significant changes were observed in participants' sense of connection to others and empathy, reflecting a shift toward more pro-social attitudes and behaviors. These improvements not only enhance participants' own emotional health but also contribute to safer and more supportive institutional environments. Increased confidence and self-worth further underscored a growing belief among participants in their ability to change, heal, and succeed beyond prison walls.

Though optimism showed a smaller percentage increase, high baseline levels suggest that participants entered the program with hope—and left with that hope reinforced. Participant reflections consistently described the HART program as transformative, citing new perspectives, stronger accountability, and renewed purpose.

The differentiated outcomes by course type highlight the particular strength of HART's Criminal and Gang Members Anonymous (CGA) offering, though all components of the program contributed meaningfully to participant wellbeing. Crucially, the trusted guidance of credible messengers and Life Coaches played a central role in this transformation, providing the structure and encouragement necessary for participants to reimagine their futures.

The HART program cultivates emotional growth, community connection, and hope—all essential elements for successful reintegration and long-term personal development. These outcomes suggest that HART is not only effective within the prison setting, but that it holds promise for broader efforts to support restorative justice and reduce recidivism through human-centered, evidence-informed programming.

4.2.2 Change in Thought Criminal Thought Patterns

This study provides compelling evidence that the HART program not only improves participants' wellbeing but also contributes to a meaningful reduction in criminal thought patterns. The observed increases in empathy, self-esteem, and connection to others reflect a broader cognitive and behavioral shift away from antisocial attitudes and toward restorative, pro-social thinking.

Participant reflections particularly underscore this transformation. Many described abandoning beliefs and behaviors once seen as normal within criminal subcultures. The most notable gains were observed among those enrolled in Criminal and Gang Members Anonymous (CGA), where individuals explicitly articulated a rejection of criminal identities and thinking. As one participant put it, "I thought like a criminal. I thought it was normal." The program's impact in this area was reinforced by participant insights into personal accountability, remorse, and a new understanding of the consequences of their actions on others.

These changes suggest that HART programming disrupts deeply ingrained cycles of criminal thinking by fostering emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and community responsibility. The guidance of Life Coaches—credible messengers with lived experience—emerged as a crucial component of this shift, offering both structure and hope. Participants not only developed tools for managing behavior and decision-making, but also began to envision themselves as positive contributors to their communities.

By decreasing criminal thought patterns and instilling pro-social values, the HART program prepares individuals for successful reentry and reduces the likelihood of recidivism. These outcomes highlight HART's value not just as a rehabilitative effort within prison walls, but as a catalyst for long-term transformation, public safety, and community healing.

4.2.3 Relationships

The results of this study demonstrate that the HART program significantly improved participants' ability to build and sustain healthy, pro-social relationships. Among all indicators measured, "Relationships"—defined by a participant's interest in and engagement with others—a substantial increase, rising by 13 percentage points from pre- to post-program surveys. This

growth signals a fundamental shift in participants' orientation toward community, empathy, and interpersonal connection.

Participant comments further emphasize the depth of this transformation. Individuals described learning to express care for others, practicing forgiveness, and taking accountability for the harm they caused. Many reported feeling a renewed sense of connection to people around them—both peers and facilitators—underscoring the program's role in reducing isolation and fostering emotional openness. As one graduate wrote, "I am not alone in my journey toward freedom," capturing a broader sentiment of restored social bonds.

The increase in empathy, while more modest, complements this change by reinforcing the emotional capacity needed to sustain meaningful relationships. These relational gains extend beyond personal wellbeing; they contribute to safer prison environments and healthier reentry outcomes. Participants who are more invested in others are less likely to engage in violence or conflict and more likely to contribute to a positive community culture.

4.2.4 Potential for Public Safety

Participants consistently noted that the program fostered a strong sense of social support, disrupted harmful cognitive patterns, and cultivated greater emotional intelligence and optimism about the future. These shifts in mindset are not merely individual improvements—they can have broader, systemic implications.

Pro-social attitudes, such as empathy, self-regulation, and constructive communication, are strongly correlated with reductions in antisocial behavior and violence. A growing body of research supports this connection. For instance, a meta-analysis by Wilson, Bouffard, and MacKenzie (2005) found that cognitive-behavioral programs in correctional settings significantly reduced recidivism by targeting distorted thinking and encouraging pro-social behavior. Similarly, research by Van Voorhis et al. (2010) demonstrated that programs fostering emotional regulation and interpersonal effectiveness led to safer prison climates by reducing disciplinary infractions and inmate aggression.

When individuals internalize pro-social values, they are more likely to engage with others in cooperative and nonviolent ways, even in high-stress or restrictive environments like prisons. This shift contributes to a more stable and respectful social dynamic among peers and between incarcerated individuals and staff. In this way, fostering empathy and social connection serves not only personal well-being but also institutional safety.

Consequently, the program's impact extends beyond the individual growth of its graduates. By equipping participants with tools to manage emotions, reframe harmful thought patterns, and

build healthy relationships, such interventions contribute directly to safer and more supportive institutional environments. These outcomes are critical not only for improving quality of life within correctional settings but also for reducing recidivism and enhancing public safety upon reentry. The findings align with the broader correctional literature, which emphasizes that social-cognitive transformation is a key lever in both behavioral change and institutional reform (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

4.3 Strengths

The HART program demonstrates significant strengths in promoting the wellbeing, personal growth, and pro-social development of incarcerated individuals. Survey results show consistent increases in self-reported wellbeing across all indicators, with the most notable improvements in participants' sense of connection to others and empathy. Participants also showed improvements in confidence, self-esteem, and optimism, with many expressing a renewed belief in their ability to change and contribute positively to their communities. Course-specific outcomes, especially in the CGA track, suggest that the program is particularly effective at transforming criminal thinking into restorative behavior. Across all courses, the role of credible messengers and Life Coaches emerged as a powerful influence, providing structure, support, and hope. Taken together, these strengths underscore HART's effectiveness in equipping participants with the emotional tools and relational insight needed to foster healing, accountability, and successful reintegration.

4.4 Areas for Improvement

While the HART program demonstrates clear strengths in improving overall wellbeing, several areas offer opportunities for enhancement. Although each wellbeing indicator showed positive movement, some—such as optimism—exhibited more modest gains, suggesting the potential benefit of curriculum elements that more directly nurture sustained hope and future planning. Additionally, self-reported growth in empathy, while notable, lagged slightly behind increases in relationship-building, indicating that deeper engagement with emotional awareness and interpersonal accountability could be further emphasized. Variation in outcome improvement across course types also suggests that not all programming components yield the same impact; for example, the Emotional Intelligence and BPH Preparation courses produced smaller gains in reported wellbeing compared to CGA. This variation highlights the need to assess course content, delivery methods, and participant engagement levels. Lastly, while participant testimonials reflect powerful transformations, the data suggest that certain changes remain incremental—pointing to the potential benefit of extended programming, follow-up support, or increased access to courses to deepen learning and reinforce personal development.

4.5 Recommendations

This study offers the following recommendations to further strengthen and expand the HART program:

4.5.1 Extend Programming and Re-Enrollment Opportunities

Extending the duration of HART programming or allowing re-enrollment after course completion would reinforce long-term behavior change and support participants' continued personal growth. Adult learning and trauma-informed approaches emphasize that sustained engagement, repetition, and time for reflection are crucial for lasting transformation—especially for individuals who have experienced chronic adversity or institutionalization. Short-term interventions may not be sufficient for deep cognitive restructuring or healing.

Participant feedback further supports this recommendation. Many individuals reported that the curriculum was impactful and expressed a desire for more time to process and apply its lessons. Re-enrollment or extended programming would allow participants to revisit material as they reach new stages of readiness, encouraging deeper internalization of the curriculum's values. Longer engagement also enhances peer mentorship and group cohesion, creating a supportive learning environment where experienced participants can model growth for others.

Finally, this flexibility addresses the practical challenges of delivering programming in correctional settings, where classes may be disrupted by lockdowns, staff shortages, or transfers. Re-enrollment ensures continued access to transformational content despite institutional barriers and reflects best practices in trauma-informed, identity-based rehabilitation.

4.5.2 Expand Outreach to Transitional Age Youth

Expanding outreach to Transitional Age Youth (TAY), typically defined as individuals between 18 and 25, is a defensible and strategic recommendation grounded in both developmental science and correctional research. This age group is at a critical life stage marked by identity formation, increased autonomy, and heightened vulnerability to peer influence and risky behavior. Neuroscientific research has shown that the brain's prefrontal cortex—responsible for impulse control and long-term decision-making—is still developing during this period. As a result, TAY are particularly responsive to mentorship, skill-building, and rehabilitation when given supportive, developmentally appropriate interventions.

Within correctional settings, targeted outreach to TAY can serve as a powerful means of early intervention. Many HART Life Coaches and facilitators have reported that younger participants are more likely to resist programming or glorify criminal behavior due to immaturity or limited

life experience. Tailoring programming specifically for this group—such as by incorporating peer mentors closer in age or addressing issues uniquely relevant to TAY—can increase receptivity and reduce the likelihood of reoffending. Ensuring that youth receive early exposure to rehabilitative content may help interrupt the trajectory toward chronic involvement in the criminal justice system.

Outside of prisons, preventative outreach in schools and community organizations can address the root causes of incarceration before they take hold. Engaging TAY before they encounter the justice system allows programs like HART to offer alternatives to gang involvement, substance abuse, and violence, ultimately reducing future incarceration rates. Expanding outreach efforts not only broadens HART's impact but also aligns with the principles of restorative justice and the broader goals of California's rehabilitative model by investing in youth before their lives are defined by incarceration.

4.5.3 Develop Family-Focused Curriculum

Strengthening family relationships plays a critical role in emotional healing and successful reentry for incarcerated individuals. Research consistently shows that maintaining strong, healthy family connections can reduce recidivism, improve mental health, and support long-term reintegration outcomes. A curriculum focused on rebuilding trust, improving communication, and addressing intergenerational trauma would provide participants with tools to repair and strengthen these bonds.

Including family members—when feasible—can also foster mutual understanding, rebuild support systems, and prepare both parties for the challenges of reunification. Programs such as parenting classes or facilitated family dialogues have proven effective in improving post-release outcomes and helping participants assume more constructive family roles. Even in cases where direct family participation is not possible, exercises that explore identity, forgiveness, and generational healing can be deeply impactful.

Finally, family-focused programming aligns with HART's trauma-informed and restorative approach by addressing the social and emotional roots of incarceration. Many participants come from fractured or dysfunctional family environments, and helping them navigate these relationships is central to their healing. Providing structured opportunities to reflect on and rebuild family ties can create a stronger foundation for sustained transformation beyond prison walls.

4.5.4 Enhance Administrative and Data Support

Investing in administrative and data support is essential to the HART program's continued effectiveness and scalability. Currently, Life Coaches and facilitators often shoulder time-consuming administrative tasks—such as attendance tracking, data entry, and documentation—that detract from their primary focus: engaging and supporting participants. Providing dedicated staff or trained interns to manage these responsibilities would allow program leaders to spend more time on mentoring, instruction, and emotional support, which are central to the program's impact.

Moreover, accurate and timely data collection is critical for evaluating program outcomes, securing funding, and informing continuous improvement. With additional administrative support, the program can more reliably track participant progress, analyze pre- and post-program metrics, and document success stories. This enhances transparency and provides the evidence base needed to advocate for the program's expansion and integration into broader correctional reform initiatives.

Finally, improved administrative capacity ensures that logistical barriers—such as incomplete records or delayed reporting—do not undermine program integrity. Having specialized staff focused on backend operations creates a more sustainable model and helps Life Coaches avoid burnout caused by multitasking across roles. In short, strengthening the administrative infrastructure is a strategic investment that amplifies both program quality and long-term outcomes.

4.5.5 Implement Follow-Up Workshops and Ongoing Support

Offering regular check-ins and follow-up workshops for HART graduates is a strategic way to reinforce long-term behavioral and emotional growth. Behavioral change and trauma recovery are ongoing processes, and post-program support helps graduates retain what they've learned and apply it in real-world contexts—especially during high-risk periods like reentry. Structured follow-ups create opportunities to revisit key lessons, re-engage with mentors, and troubleshoot challenges that may arise after completing the program.

Continued engagement also strengthens participants' sense of connection and accountability. Many graduates express a desire to remain part of the HART community, which fosters positive identity development and supports desistance from criminal behavior. Follow-up sessions can reinforce the pro-social values emphasized in the curriculum while also encouraging graduates to serve as peer mentors—promoting leadership and continuity of transformation within the incarcerated community and beyond.

Finally, recurring workshops provide valuable feedback loops for program improvement. They offer facilitators insights into how content is retained over time, where additional support is needed, and what real-world barriers participants face after programming. This ongoing dialogue not only enhances participant outcomes but also helps the HART program evolve in ways that remain relevant and responsive to graduate needs.

4.5.6 Provide Mental Health Resources for Life Coaches

Offer no-cost therapy or mental health support for HART Life Coaches. Supporting the emotional wellbeing of facilitators ensures they remain equipped to guide participants through their own healing and transformation.

1. Addressing the Challenge of Motivating Unreceptive Participants: Develop and implement pre-program orientation or motivational readiness assessments.

To increase the effectiveness of HART programming, especially with individuals who may not yet be ready to engage meaningfully, ARC could explore a brief pre-program orientation or assessment tool to gauge a participant's readiness for change. This could include a motivational interviewing component or a structured readiness scale.

Participants not yet at a stage of openness could be offered alternative programming or peer-led introduction sessions to help build engagement before fully entering the HART curriculum. Additionally, ongoing training for Life Coaches in techniques such as motivational interviewing could enhance their ability to connect with and gradually inspire more resistant participants.

2. Address the Emotional Toll and Re-Traumatization Experienced by Life Coaches: Establish dedicated wellness and peer support structures for Life Coaches.

Given the emotional labor involved and the risk of re-traumatization when working closely with participants who share similar life experiences, ARC should prioritize institutionalizing wellness support for Life Coaches. This might include access to regular clinical supervision or trauma-informed counseling, as well as structured peer debriefing groups where coaches can share and process difficult experiences in a supportive setting. Creating clear guidelines around caseload limits, offering optional mental health check-ins, and training in self-care strategies are also important components to ensure the sustainability and well-being of this uniquely qualified workforce.

4.5.6 Pilot and Scale Modifications

Piloting recommended enhancements—such as extended programming, family-focused curriculum, and follow-up workshops—allows HART to test new strategies in a controlled and cost-effective manner before committing to full-scale implementation. This approach enables the

program to gather data on feasibility, participant response, and logistical challenges, ensuring that any scaled efforts are evidence-informed and responsive to real-world conditions.

High satisfaction levels and qualitative reports of improved wellbeing suggest that the HART model is already achieving meaningful outcomes. Building on this success through carefully monitored pilots offers an opportunity to deepen impact without disrupting current operations. It also aligns with best practices in program development, where iterative testing is essential for long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

Scaling successful pilot modifications statewide could significantly expand HART's positive impact. By tailoring enhancements based on pilot data, leadership can ensure that program growth maintains fidelity to core values while adapting to diverse institutional environments. A phased, data-driven expansion strategy ensures responsible use of resources and maximizes the likelihood of sustained, system-wide transformation.

By pursuing these recommendations, HART can build upon its proven strengths to reach more individuals, deepen its impact, and continue transforming lives through healing, accountability, and restored trust.

5. Conclusion

The HART program stands as a promising model for trauma-informed rehabilitation within California's correctional facilities. Through a curriculum rooted in identity transformation, emotional healing, and pro-social skill development, HART fosters meaningful personal change among incarcerated individuals. This evaluation has shown that participants and Life Coaches alike view the program as transformative—supporting shifts in mindset, behavior, and hope for the future. Life Coaches play a pivotal role, not only as facilitators but as credible messengers who embody the possibility of redemption and reintegration.

Despite the program's strong foundation, several opportunities for growth emerged from the evaluation. Recommendations such as extending program duration, offering follow-up support, strengthening administrative infrastructure, and expanding outreach to specific populations like Transitional Age Youth and families are all grounded in data, participant feedback, and established best practices. Piloting these modifications would allow for thoughtful, scalable enhancements without compromising the core integrity of the program.

Ultimately, HART contributes to a broader cultural shift within correctional settings—one that values rehabilitation, human dignity, and the potential for transformation. With continued investment and refinement, HART can serve as a leading example of how restorative programming can not only change individual lives, but also support a safer, more hopeful future for incarcerated communities and society at large.

6. Appendix

Table A1

Wellbeing Survey Items: Pre- and Post-Program Prompts

Survey Item	Metric
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	Optimism
I've been feeling interested in other people	Relationships
I've been dealing with problems well	Dealing with Problems
I've been feeling good about myself	Self Esteem
I've been feeling confident	Confidence
I've been feeling loved	Loved
It is important to me to actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others	Empathy

Table A2

Post-Program Participant Satisfaction Survey Items

Survey Item	Metric
The HART Program helped me connect with my family	Family
I applied what I learned in the HART program to my life	Application
My HART instructor explained things clearly	Instructor
My HART instructor was receptive when I had questions	Instructor
I would recommend this program to others	Recommend
The length of the program course was sufficient	Sufficient Time
The HART program increased my sense of hope	Increased Hope
The HART program increased my emotional intelligence skills	Emotional Intelligence
The HART program decreased my negative or harmful thought patterns	Decreased negative thoughts
The HART program reduced my criminal thinking.	Reduced Criminal Thinking
The HART program decreased the number of violent incidents I partake in	Decreased Violence

Life Coach Interview Protocol

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What gender do you identify with?
4. What race/ethnicity do you identify with?
5. Tell me, how long you have been working as a HART coach?
6. Can you tell me a little bit about how you became a HART coach?
 - a. Probe: How long were you in prison?
7. Were you a HART participant on the inside?
8. Talk to me a little bit about how you transitioned back into society after serving your time
9. Why did you want to become a HART Life Coach?
10. What is the best part of your job?
11. Are there any students that had stood out to you over the years?
12. Do you have any recommendations to improve the program?
13. What is the best thing about the program?
14. What are some areas that you think we can do better in?

HART Participant Interview Protocol

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. What gender do you identify with?
4. What race do you identify with?
5. What do you do (for work)?
 - a. Probe: salary – how much do you make?
6. When were you incarcerated?
 - a. Probe: for how long
 - b. How old were you when you went in?
 - c. When did you come out?
 - d. How long was your initial sentence?
7. Where were you incarcerated?
8. Why were you incarcerated? (optional)
9. While incarcerated, did you participate in the HART program?
 - a. Who was your instructor?
 - b. How do you feel about your instructor?
 - i. Do you still have a relationship with them?
10. How did the HART program help you?
 - a. Did you go to board of parole?
11. Do you have any recommendations to improve the HART program?
12. Did you participate in other groups while you were inside?
 - a. If yes, what were they?
13. Can you tell me how you transitioned back to society after serving your time?

HART Participant Pre-Program Survey Questions

Demographics

1. What is your name? (optional)
2. What is your age?
3. What race/ethnicity do you identify with? (circle all that apply)
American Indian or Alaska Native
Asian
Black or African American
Hispanic or Latino
Middle Eastern or North African
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
White
Other: _____
4. What gender (if any) do you identify with? (circle all that apply)
Male
Female
Transgender
Other
5. How long have you been in prison?
6. How long is your prison sentence?
7. What facility are you in?
8. When is your release date?
9. When is your board date?
10. Who is your HART Life Coach?
11. Do you participate in other programs or groups? If so, what are they?
12. What is your CDCR number?

Mental Health and Well-being

(circle the answer that best applies to the following questions)

None of the time
Rarely
Some of the time
Often
All of the time

1. I've been feeling optimistic about the future

2. I've been feeling interested in other people
3. I've been feeling good about myself
4. I've been feeling confident
5. I've been feeling loved
6. It is important to me to actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others

Feedback

(Open ended)

1. What HART class did you take and what was it about?
2. Were there any takeaways from this class? If so, list the top 3
3. What is your opinion of the HART program?

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