



THE PATHFINDER NETWORK'S THEORY OF CHANGE



Our theory powerfully states:

We recognize the significant impact of the criminal justice system and engage at every point of the system and beyond to walk alongside individuals, families, and communities, co-creating the tools and support they need to be safe and thrive through holistic, responsive, evidence-based programming and practices, with impact now and into the future.

One in two households in the United States is impacted by the justice system. This stark reality demands a new path forward—one that transforms vision into action and hope into measurable change.

Through deep collaboration, we charted that path in 2025. **Our new Theory of Change serves as a compass**—honoring over three decades of walking alongside justice system-impacted individuals and families while pointing

toward the horizon of what's possible. It recognizes that when people receive holistic, responsive support—practical tools, resources, and connection—they build the foundation needed to heal, grow, and thrive.

Guided by our lived experience and strategic vision, PATHforward 2026, this theory illuminates the connections between what we do, why we do it, and the change it creates for whole people, whole families, and whole communities.

Desistance: Our Approach to Transformation

Desistance is the transformative process by which individuals move away from justice system involvement toward thriving in our communities. While recidivism looks backward ("Did they reoffend?"), desistance is forward-looking, strength-based, and rooted in identity, relationships, and purpose. Our approach reframes success through enhancing protective factors, identity transformation, and resilience—all directly linked to reduced recidivism and systems involvement, and public safety for all.

What Grounds Our Work

Four key activities connect our beliefs to action and impact:

- ▶ Cognitive-behavioral and social-emotional learning programming
- ▶ Wraparound support (more resources, fewer barriers)
- ▶ Social, family, and community support and engagement
- ▶ System and community transformation

We measure success not only by participant outcomes, but by how systems transform—becoming more just, responsive, and rooted in dignity and equity.

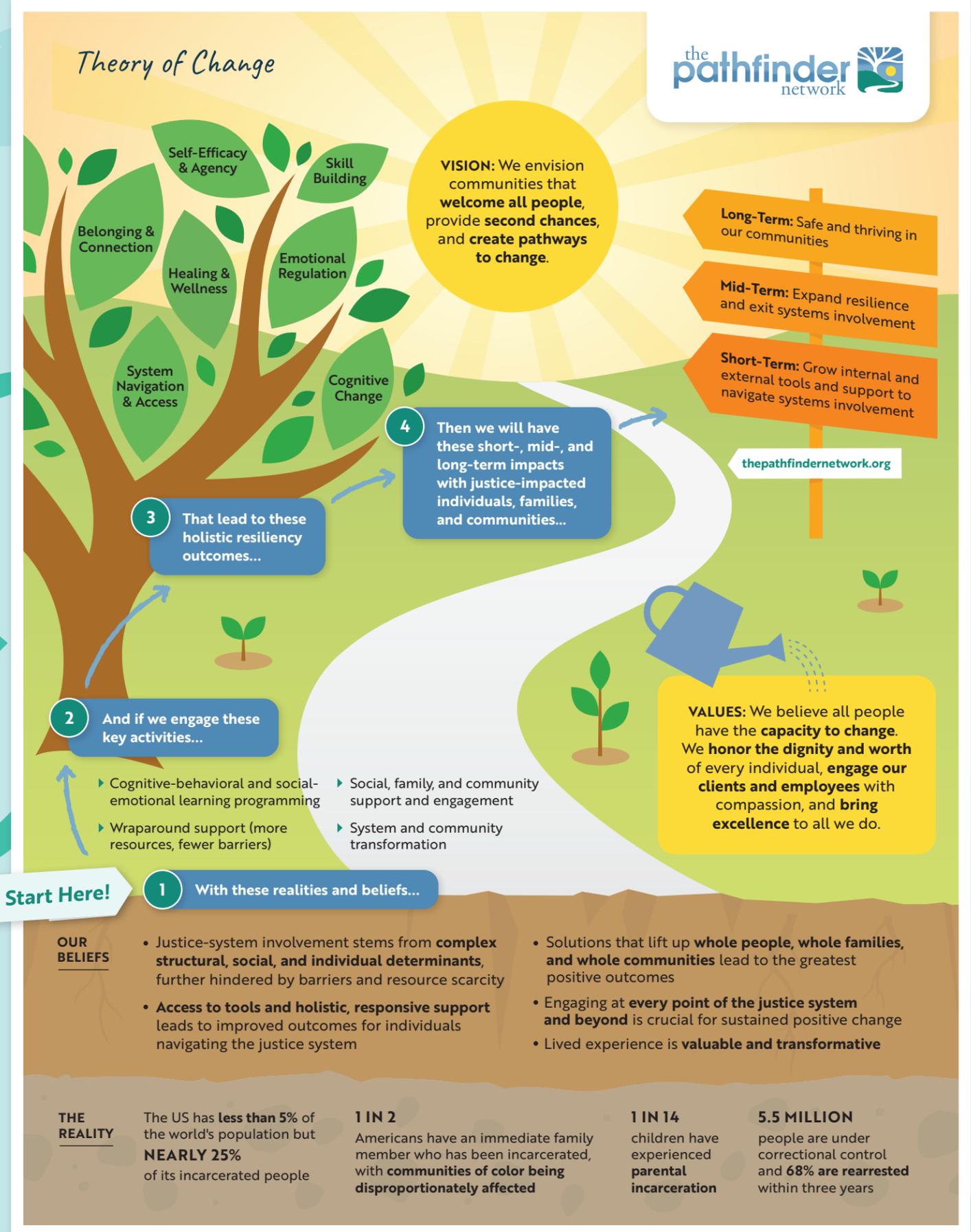
What Change Looks Like

Through our four key activities, we grow seven interconnected areas of holistic resilience:

COGNITIVE CHANGE Mental resilience	HEALING & WELLNESS Physical and emotional resilience
EMOTIONAL REGULATION Internal resilience	SELF-EFFICACY & AGENCY Empowerment-based resilience
SKILL-BUILDING Functional resilience	SYSTEM NAVIGATION & ACCESS Structural resilience
BELONGING & CONNECTION Relational resilience	

The Impacts We Strive For

- ▶ **Short-term impacts** are the immediate changes that participants experience after engaging with our programs and are the foundation that supports long-term behavior change and resilience.
- ▶ **Mid-term impacts** are the shifts in behavior that reflect the use of tools and skills gained, and are the steppingstone to lasting change.
- ▶ **Long-term impacts** are sustained changes that ripple outward—creating safe and thriving families, resilient communities, and more just systems.





THE PATHFINDER NETWORK'S THEORY OF CHANGE EXPANDED

Our *Theory of Change* is both a compass and a promise: a commitment to walking alongside people, transforming systems, and creating pathways to change.

➤ **VISION:** We envision communities that welcome all people, provide second chances, and create pathways to change.

➤ **VALUES:** We believe all people have the capacity to change. We honor the dignity and worth of every individual, engage our participants and employees with compassion, and bring excellence to all we do.

1 THE REALITY

The criminal justice system's impact on our communities is significant:

- The US has **less than 5%** of the world's population but **nearly 25%** of its incarcerated people
- **1 in 2** Americans have an immediate family member who has been incarcerated, with **communities of color** being disproportionately affected
- **1 in 14** children have experienced **parental incarceration**, and **half of the incarcerated population** are parents
- **5.5 million** people are under correctional control and **68% are rearrested** within three years

OUR BELIEFS

- Justice-system involvement stems from **complex structural, social, and individual determinants**, further hindered by barriers and resource scarcity
- **Access to tools and holistic, responsive support** leads to improved outcomes for individuals navigating the justice system
- **Desistance is possible**
- Solutions that lift up **whole people, whole families, and whole communities** lead to the greatest positive outcomes
- **Change is possible** and **resilience can be grown**

SERVICE NEEDS

Support is needed at every point of the system and beyond. Justice system-impacted individuals need support through:

- **Prevention:** Keeping people out of the system
- **Intervention:** Helping people navigate and exit systems involvement
- **System and Community Transformation:** Working to make the system more just and impactful

INPUTS

- Staff
- Participants
- Board of Directors
- Advisory Board
- Partnerships
- Funding
- Evidence-Based Approaches
- Training
- Lived Experience
- Impacted Voices
- Operational
- Resources
- Leadership
- Strategic Vision
- Advocacy

2 KEY ACTIVITIES

- **Cognitive-behavioral and social-emotional learning programming:** Enhances knowledge, skills, and resources for justice-impacted individuals
- **Wraparound support:** Removes barriers, provides access to resources and support paths to self-directed goals
- **Social, family, and community support and engagement:** Strengthens support, community ties and family bonds, vital for resilience
- **System and community transformation:** Advocate for and drive system and community change towards just, equitable, and impactful solutions that address root causes, prioritize positive outcomes, and offer as many chances as needed so that whole people, whole families, and whole communities can be safe and thrive

3 RESILIENCY OUTCOMES

- **Cognitive change:** Mental resilience
- **Emotional regulation:** Internal resilience
- **Skill-building:** Functional resilience
- **Belonging & connection:** Relational resilience
- **Healing & wellness:** Physical and emotional resilience
- **Self-efficacy & agency:** Empowerment-based resilience
- **System navigation & access:** Structural resilience

4 THE IMPACTS WE STRIVE FOR

- **Short-term impacts** are the immediate changes that justice system-impacted individuals, families, and communities experience after engaging with our programs and are the foundation that supports long-term behavior change and resilience. Participants gain internal and external tools and support to navigate systems involvement.
- **Mid-term impacts** are the shifts in behavior that reflect the use of tools and skills gained, and are the stepping stones to lasting change. Justice system-impacted individuals, families, and communities expand their resilience and exit involvement with the criminal justice system.
- **Long-term impacts** are sustained changes that ripple outward—creating safe and thriving families, resilient communities, and more just systems.

Our theory powerfully states:

We recognize the significant impact of the criminal justice system and engage at every point of the system and beyond to walk alongside individuals, families, and communities, co-creating the tools and support they need to be safe and thrive through holistic, responsive, evidence-based programming and practices, with impact now and into the future.

➤ Learn more at www.thepathfindernetwork.org