Reimagining the power of sport for youth in the juvenile justice system

We are Project FLEX
Where we’re taking you...

01 Illinois Incarceration
The problem in our backyard

02 Societal costs
How it affects all of us

03 Project Flex overview
A transformative solution

04 Flex Growth & Potential
A pathway out of the pipeline
Illinois Youth Incarceration

85%
Youth of color are 5 times as likely to be incarcerated vs. white peers

700%
The rate of increase of incarcerated female youth over the last 30 years

$187,765
The cost to incarcerate one youth per year
What $187,765 gets you...

- Seclusion in rooms
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Subpar nutrition
- Modified education
- Limited recreation
- Understaffing
Yet, 93% of youth return to prison within 5 years.
We leverage the *power of sport* to unite individuals and develop a culture of opportunity for incarcerated youth.
Project Flex Snapshot

Prison Programming

*Sole sport-based university/prison partnership*

Sport Sessions
1-on-1 Mentoring
NIU Leadership Retreats
Project Flex Snapshot

People

17 Graduate Students
600 Youth (ages 13-20)
NIU Community
Project Flex Snapshot

- 5 years
- 3 sites (2 male, 1 co-ed)
- $180K annual contract
- 14 research papers
- 22 national presentations

Numbers

Chapter
Co-Creating a Sport-Life Skills Programme for Incarcerated Youth
By Jennifer M. Jacobs, Kalyn McDonough, Zachary Wahl-Alexander

Book: Sport, Physical Activity and Criminal Justice
Edition: 1st Edition
Impact on NIU Institutional Goals

“Transdisciplinary Scholarship & Curricular Innovation”

“Research questions with multiple lenses that seek to address inequitable conditions”

Goal 3A & 5B

“Attract new students and retain high quality students to contribute to NIU community”

• 30% out of state recruits
• 35% retention of undergrads

Goal 2A

Our clients

Impact on NIU Institutional Goals
Impact on Graduate Students

“FLEX has brought unconditional growth to my life and the youth we serve. This is the first time I’ve felt 100% valued and supported.”

Izaiah Webb, M.S.

“My life was leading me down a bad path, but when I made the choice to work with Flex, everything changed. And now I’m working towards my PhD at UGA.”

Javon Davis, M.S.
“[My coach] is the brother type for real. I’m the little brother. We have real conversations. He motivates me to be better and see the bigger picture.”

M. T., 2021

“It’s crazy that I had to go to prison to get an experience like this.”

S. J., 2019

Impact on Youth
Impact

43% vs. 93%

Reduced Recidivism Rate
The Future of FLEX

Cementing our foothold as the premier university-prison partnership in the country
Thank You

Projectflex.niu@gmail.com
Dr. Zachary Wahl
Gabrielle Bennett, M.S.