

Sustainability in Prisons Project Newsletter



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“Just
Sustainability”

Introducing Just Sustainability

by Joslyn Rose Trivett, SPP Education & Outreach Manager, and Liliana Caughman, SPP Lecture Series Coordinator

This issue is dedicated to Just Sustainability—sustainability redefined to include the needs and inputs of all populations and demographics.

Historically, the environmental movement has focused on the needs and views of a relatively small segment of Americans. This approach has often overlooked the sustainability needs and interests of people beyond the environmental mainstream. People of color, people without college degrees, people from the working class or living in poverty are rarely afforded the benefits of the environmental movement, such as sustainability education and easy access to



Dwayne Sanders talks about growing starts for the prison gardens and houseplants. His program is in Washington State Penitentiary's Sustainable Practice Lab, which hosted nearly 300 program tours in a year. Photo by Ricky Osborne.

nature. These populations also bear the brunt of most environmental hazards in the country. Just Sustainability sees cultural diversity as essential to the environmental movement, and resolving long-ignored environmental injustices as the primary focus.

Even less attention has been paid to how cultural diversity would benefit the environmental movement itself. To take on the scale and complexity of

environmental challenges, the environmental movement needs more diverse buy-in and input. Extending ownership opens up myriad new ways for taking on environmental problems and



Butterfly technicians pose in front of educational poster set up for visiting Girl Scouts Behind Bars. Photo by Seth Dorman.

creating solutions. Affluent, highly educated people cannot achieve national or global sustainability without help. “Sustainability will be achieved, if at all, not by engineers, agronomists, economists and biotechnicians but by citizens.” (Prugh, Costanza and Daly 2000) Inclusive sustainability, Just Sustainability, is a path of mutual transformation.

What does inclusiveness look like? It means inviting input and investment from all citizens and promoting sustainability programs in all communities and institutions.



Paula Andrew, a member of DOC staff and a champion of SPP programs, and Green Track program coordinator Emily Passarelli enjoy the chickens at Washington Corrections Center for Women. Photo by Ricky Osborne.

In Washington State prisons, we have found willing, inventive champions of sustainability. They have transformed prison culture and operations. Because of their work, we are better prepared to transform the world at large. SPP staff asked a few incarcerated SPP partners—most of them [Roots of Success](#) instructors—if they would write what Just

Sustainability means to them. This newsletter shares five responses, and we will publish several more on our [blog](#) in the coming months.

Sustainability & Justice

by Jonathan Bolden, Roots of Success Instructor, Coyote Ridge Corrections Center
Photos by DOC staff



Jonathan Bolden was certified as a Roots of Success instructor in May, 2015. Since then, he has co-taught the environmental curriculum six times.

Too often we assume that the concept of sustainability is exclusive to the realm of environmental justice. That somehow the idea of conserving natural resources, protecting endangered species and habitats, or reducing our energy consumption will automatically result in a healed earth.

This assumption overlooks the most important factor in actually employing sustainability approaches and practices to meet the growing demands of environmental justice—the human being.

Transforming our earth requires the transformation of people, more specifically, the transformation of people's attitudes and behavior, as it relates to the environment. The greatest potential and need for this change to occur exists within prisons.

Society has condemned and confined prisoners to prison because of their unsustainable (criminal) behavior. Their behavior has wreaked havoc and devastation within communities similar to the unsustainable human behavior that has led to the environmental crises we currently face. In this sense, the sustainability concept not only applies to radically improving



Roots instructors Julian Reyes, Jonathan Bolden, and Master Trainer Eugene Youngblood pose at a graduation event.

our relationship with the earth and environment but also in our effort to redeem, reform, and rehab[ilitate] prisoners.

Einstein once said that the current dilemmas we face could not be solved at the same intellectual level in which they were created. We are going to have to revolutionize our thinking in how we establish responsible environmental and criminal justice practices. What better way to achieve this goal than to incorporate the solution of one with the other.

The Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) and [Roots of Success](#) program (Roots) puts this wisdom of Einstein into practice. These types of programs provide prisoners with the necessary skills and experience to successfully reintegrate into society and find employment in the green economy.

At Coyote Ridge Corrections Center (CRCC), SPP creates programs and opportunities for prisoners to engage in sustainability activities. For instance, the [sagebrush](#) project allows prisoners to acquire experience with the native plants of Washington State. The sagebrush plays an essential role in the eastern Washington landscape, as it provides numerous species with food and shelter. If the sagebrush were to become threatened or even extinct, this would



A technician in the sagebrush program at Coyote Ridge Corrections Center checks the health of a plant plug. Photo by Jeff Clark, Bureau of Land Management.

have serious implications for the Washington State wildlife.

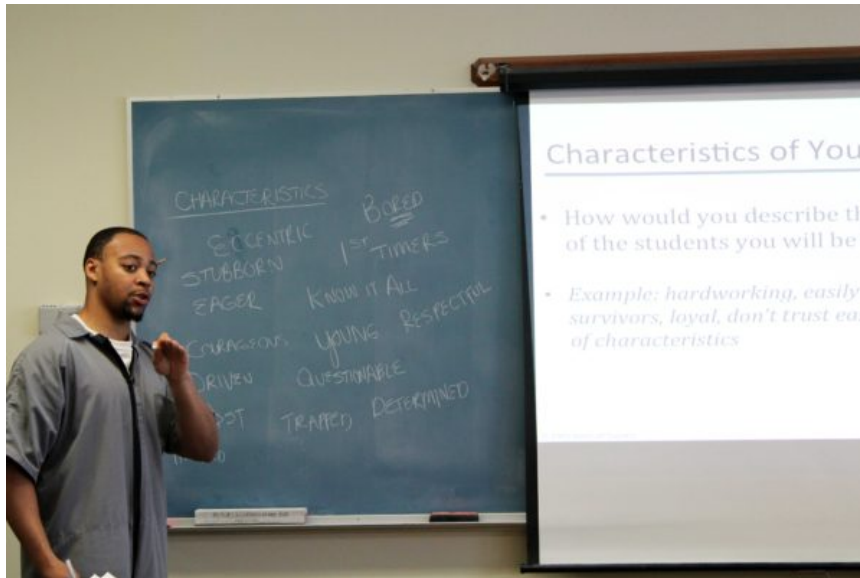
In addition, the Roots course empowers prisoners with its environmental literacy curriculum. While it builds environmental understanding, it also focuses on building the individual student. This means students are challenged to assess their attitude and behavior toward the environment and by extension their attitude and behavior toward society. By introducing the green economy and green jobs to students, Roots

highlights the opportunity for students to become gainfully employed and be a veritable solution to our environmental problems.

Ultimately, what we do today determines our tomorrow. SPP and Roots are planting seeds that are sure to bear the fruit of sustainability and justice. So let us take a cue from these programs and dig our hands into the dirt to cultivate a better future.

Reaching the Unreachable

by Cyril Delanto Walrond, Roots of Success Master Trainer/Instructor, Stafford Creek Corrections Center.



Cyril Waldron teaches a class of soon-to-be Instructors how to teach the Roots of Success curriculum. Photo by Joslyn Rose Trivett.

Just Sustainability must be about all of us and not just some of us. It must be less about policies and procedures and more about the people. It must be less about corporations and capital and more about the community. To have true just sustainability we must be willing to reach those deemed unreachable, those who have been marginalized and incapacitated by

institutions that have been capitalizing on their ignorance and celebrating profit margins.

True just sustainability is sustainability that is no respecter of persons' status; it is equal opportunity. A sustainability that is non-discriminatory and is accessible to all regardless of one's race, ethnicity, social class, political affiliation, or even geographical location. However, we face a problem to this end that is much greater than the corporation or the market. In fact, I don't believe the corporation and market are the problem at all as they both can be tremendous levers for great change. The problem lies in the institutionalized racism, sexism, and even classism that is embedded with bigotry running through its veins.

We can point to cases of environmental racism as a perfect example, where groups of people are targeted because of their race, ethnicity, lack of political power and representation, and capital. Or, what about where zoning laws perpetuate an environmental gerrymandering by drawing lines in the proverbial sands to protect the rich while victimizing the poor and disenfranchised.

This does not have to be the case, should we as a collective decide to stop lying down and allowing decisions to be made about us without us. Then we can change the narrative of how we see sustainability by changing the way that we see people.

Ironically, it is *the people* who are typically left out of the equation of sustainability. Trees are seen as sustainable while human life is not and has become more and more obsolete. We have gotten to the point where we have cut the thread that interconnects our natural

environment to our humanity, forgetting the fact that human life is also a part of the natural environment. It is sad when we value the life of plants and animals more than that of humans.

If we see people as having value, we will value them. If we see people as valued resources, we will begin the work to protect them. Many don't value life because many feel their lives have no value. One gorilla gets killed in a zoo and immediately policies are being changed. How many unarmed people were killed by law enforcement this year? ...and counting! Cecil the lion gets killed and there is a public outcry. How many people have died this year alone as a result of gun violence in Chicago? How many people have lost their lives due to opioid overdoses? Or, how many lives have been aborted since Roe v. Wade? This is unsustainable! All Life matters! Black lives, white lives, blue lives, brown lives, plant lives!

To sociologists, economists, ecologists, and conservationists coming up with a uniform definition of sustainability seems elusive, like chasing the wind. All of these groups see the issue of sustainability uniquely from the perspective of their discipline, which is myopic while in fact addressing that sustainability is much bigger than one discipline. For us to have just sustainability these groups of esteemed intellectuals cannot work individually but rather collaboratively with each other, with the people and the environment.

We are caught in a conundrum of sustainability as we face the same hard questions we have been asking for decades. One such question being, "What is just sustainability?" While we seek ways to be more just in our sustainability practices, we must ask ourselves: What does it mean for something to be just? And, what do we mean by sustainability?

These terms are relatively subjective. Depending on how many people you ask, "What is just sustainability?" will be the determining factor how many answers you will get. Why is this? Because just for you may not be just for another. Sustainability for you may not be sustainability for anyone else.

The word 'just' denotes fairness and equality. It suggests that something is to be righteous or morally right. However, what qualifies one to be the author of morality or righteousness, equality or fairness? As a human race, we are fallible and tend to see life through our lenses and from our vantage points, which produce our perceptions of life.



Roots of Success students work in small groups to discuss strategies and solutions to an environmental problem. Photo by Joslyn Rose Trivett.

For many, when the term just is being used, it warrants a response of “I just don’t care!” ‘Just’ was often indicative of one’s social class or economic status. ‘Just’ice could be bought for ‘just’ the right price—a concept that has never truly sounded ‘just’.

How can we as a nation justify injustice when we have a moral obligation to the next generation? We

speak about ‘just sustainability’ but no sustainability can be just or sustainable if it is inherently unjust and unsustainable. Encrypted in much of the corporate greenwashed rhetoric and falsified promises of justice are capitalistic practices of injustice, where the power to decide and the power to define fall into the hands of a few, versus being of the people, for the people and by the people. Yet we have the audacity to preach sustainability to the world but practice instability and unsustainability at home.

On the other hand, sustainability is a concept that we loosely throw around by the masses. A term typically associated with economic and community development as well as how this development seeks to meet the needs of the immediate or present generation without compromise the ability for needs being met for generations to come.

It is time we guard the treasures that have been entrusted to us. For far too long we have lived comfortably in the confines of our unsustainable lifestyles, selfishly retreating to our plethora of possessions while ignoring the plight of those suffering in silence.

As my colleagues and I prepare to teach another Roots of Success class, we are not only bringing a new world to our students but are introducing them to the world, a world they never knew existed, by exposing them to concepts that were previously foreign to the vast majority of them. It is not that they do not have the aptitude or attitude to learn, but have been denied the opportunities.

These previously unreachable students can no longer use that as an excuse because they have been touched by the gospel of sustainability. So one thing that we can say with all the

work we have been doing and the success that our program has had, is that this is no longer about just sustainability but rather **'just sustainability'**.

Healing People and the Environment

by Susan Christopher, Butterfly Technician at Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women

In the past, our environment has suffered from many injustices inflicted by society. Over-development, air and water pollution, toxic waste production and irresponsible use of natural resources have negatively affected our environment in ways it may take generations to overcome.

Incarcerated individuals also feel the affliction of societal injustices. While most of us assume responsibility for our actions that led us to prison, the underlying reasons for those actions many times stem from injustices we have suffered at the hands of others. Unlike environmental injustices, broken homes, neglect, abuse, and abandonment are issue most of us can relate to.



Susan Christopher holds a butterfly larvae so PBS Newshour's Cat Wise can take a photo. Photo by Kelli Bush.

This is where the sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) steps in. SPP offers the amazing opportunity to simultaneously heal both the environment and incarcerated individuals by bringing science and nature together, inside prison walls.

As a [butterfly rearing and breeding](#) technician at Mission Creek Correction

Center for Women (MCCCW), I can personally speak for the tremendous impact this opportunity has made on my life. This awe-inspiring collaboration of partners includes scientists, biologists, students, administrators, inmates, and other, from several state and federal agencies, zoos, colleges, and prisons. It is astounding to be involved with such a large partnership that works so well together.



A technician shares a close up of an adult butterfly in the lab during the 2016 breeding season. Photo by Seth Dorman.

SPP's vision of creating an intellectually stimulating environment in which we have key roles in conservation, sustainability, and the advancement of scientific knowledge has, without a doubt, been the most positive endeavor I've ever been associated with. The successes of our program have proven the worth of everyone's efforts. It is so personally rewarding to be asked for

my opinions and insights on such a complex subject matter, especially when I see some of those ideas are incorporated into program protocols.

The amount of healing I've received through my involvement with SPP has been immeasurable. There is also an overwhelming satisfaction in knowing that we are contributing to our environment's recovery.

Thank you SPP for righting some of the past's wrongs. I really do believe justice is being served through your hard work.

See Susan Christopher in the PBS Newshour interview [here](#):

Accountability: Brainstorming article

By Julian Reyes, Roots of Success Instructor, Coyote Ridge Corrections Center

The planet is what provides us with food, cycles our water, filters our air, and shields us from harmful atmospheric gases. The planet is where we thrive. How can something so intricate to the survival of human life become the bearer of such disregard and disdain.

People must learn the practice of sustainability. The ability to keep up a practice or habit that is beneficial for many is something important for everyone. Being in prison allows people the opportunity to take a moment to examine the world and its practices. Prison is a closed environment where one small thing can affect everyone, and only a handful of corporate entities provide the prison system with the necessities for survival.



Julian Reyes speaks at a Roots of Success graduation event. Photo by DOC staff.

Corporate sponsorship has slowly taken over the global market place. No longer can society rely on the family run organizations or businesses. **Once ownership becomes nameless and faceless, ownership becomes emotionless.** The motivation for profit becomes absolute.

Corporations employ practices that cause harm to what they come into contact with because of cost cutting measures that cut too many corners which are environmentally friendly. All of the damage causes harm to the earth, deterioration to the ozone, while also polluting the water table.

Heavily toxic chemicals are in use in a variety of occupations, and many of these chemicals are rarely disposed of properly. The places Corporations establish, like mines and factories, soon become

danger zones and areas of contamination. People must quickly realize that they only are harming themselves.

Creating a sustainable lifestyle culture is paramount, and [Roots of Success](#) is teaching people a new way to think. Being aware of the environmental injustice is the first step to finding a solution. The second step is continuing to hold people accountable for their actions.



Roots of Success Instructor Julian Reyes and Master Instructor Eugene Youngblood. Photo by DOC staff.

Allowing corporate interest to shape societies attitude of more, more, more must stop. Consumerism, instant gratification, and newer is better are the ideals being professed by these corporate entities.

Bigger is not always better. New is not always the answer. American society has become a throw away and waste it culture, and we must continue to try to open the eyes of the people.

Just Sustainability and Restorative Justice

By David Duhaime, Roots of Success Master Instructor, Stafford Creek Corrections Center



David Duhaime teaches the first module of Roots of Success at Stafford Creek Corrections Center. Photo by Joslyn Rose Trivett.

When I consider what's sustainable I realize that I don't believe anything is. I am new to environmental issues; teaching Roots of Success is what sparked my interest. Over the past three years my thought has developed into a belief that all systems will continue to evolve, sustaining only the dynamic process. Society continues to change as does the justice system. All things change, people, the planet, all systems considered by environmentalists. If change ends, wouldn't that mean the end of existence?

There can be no Just Sustainability without a complete education, meaning that everyone has to understand all issues. This would be more than a political education. We would have to revamp how we raise our children to include cultivating their understanding of how they

interact with the whole, what impacts they will have and what right to equal access we all have to everything, plus stewardship and responsibility for the inheritance we will pass to future generations. Most people in prison often miss any part of that. We generally don't know about stewardship and responsibility and those charged with keeping us don't set that type of example. Perhaps we were all brought up with similar ideals.

Before Roots I worked as a literacy tutor and within self-development groups. In both I came to the idea of *interest*. If one has no interest, fairness is forfeit. My literacy students could not make significant progress until their interest peaked. They had to want to learn. Only then had the learning become interesting. Getting someone else interested seems to me analogous to Stephen Covey's "Circle of Influence": How do I get another interested in learning about what to them is peripheral or non-existent? I need to find the way to expand my influence. One of the first techniques I learned was the "Life Experience" method where the tutor listens to the student's personal story, writing it down verbatim, and then has the student read their own words back.

Environmental Justice, I believe, requires active involvement, which is predicated on interest. Roots, environmental issues, and one's stock in the world around them are often outside students' experience or interest. "Scotoma" is a word I once learned that refers to a blind spot in our psyche or attention, something we ignore unconsciously. If we want to have genuine environmental justice, we must find a way to get all parties interested, which means getting past our automatic process of ignoring, which has developed through nature, a process which may eventually lead to our extinction.

Everyone has scotoma. Leaders in politics, leaders in industry, educators, and prisoners all have interests and areas of personal blindness. If we can find a way to get a student involved in their own education, perhaps we can find the way to make sustaining the environment a way of life for people. We can find a way to believe in their ability to make a difference and have a fair share of bounty and security without taking from others. To help people make the leap to a sustaining life style we have to ask what they need and how their interest can be developed.

How do we get people in prison involved? Here, the facility has started some agricultural and recycling practices, as a result of the SPP lecture series and a realization that it can reduce expenses. Prisoners who could see a value to themselves have embraced similar practices and looked for ways to learn more.

I am interested in those that still do not have the ability to see the value of learning how they are affected and in turn are part of the cause leading to the affect. Some believe that they should do anything to cost DOC more money, that imprisoning humans should not be cheap,

not making the connection to their taxpaying families. Others have no idea about how they affect the world by their actions.

There are as many variations as people, staff and prisoners. Lectures and Roots are steps to include more people, but have also, for me, highlighted the blind spot. We need to find something to make it personal, not about saving DOC money or getting a certificate to get some good-time back. How is taking care of the environment related to me and my life, the lives of my loved ones and the world I will live in when I leave this place? Though we focus on personal benefits in Roots, students often have already put on the blinders putting in only the minimum effort and thought. Part of that is due to personal habit and discipline. We may know something is right to do, but have been doing it this way for so long that we don't have the motivation or discipline to change. Bad examples are drug, alcohol and tobacco use. We know what is harmful about them but we keep using them anyway. Can we learn methods to *cure* these issues while making it a broad enough *cure* to use in all aspects of our lives and behavior?



David Duhaime sits with his teaching team and graduating students at a graduation ceremony. Photo by Emily Passarelli.

We talk about *grassroots* methods of making something happen. However, in prison, I see that prisoners emulate authority. Prisons behave so similar to prison staff that I often tell people that if you switched clothes, and roles, nothing would change. But take that thought

further. Think of clothes as the Habit or uniform

we wear to fit in. How we behave is also the habit we wear to fit in to our lives. If the people in authority were also encouraged and educated and involved in EJ issues and how to model (mentor) the behavior we are looking for, learning stewardship and treating everyone fairly, could we then make progress in developing habits that may lead us closer to the fantasy of Just Sustainability, and a realistic *Justice System*.

At SCCC I ran into groups with staff as sponsors and had to work with them, a new experience for me; making me uncomfortable, threatening my comfort zone. I worked through it and found value and personal growth in the experience. People everywhere experience something

similar with anything that challenges us to think and act in ways not habitual to or supportive of our lifestyle. An idea that may terrify proponents of the status quo and *us against them* is to include DOC staff, prisoners, law makers, law enforcers, citizens, students, and educators in a **popular education** dialog about moving forward with environmental justice and how to evolve our communities so we are the dynamic force for change and sustainability. Some might call that a Restorative Justice approach.

Can we perceive our own blind spots and see beyond them?!



Wild daisies bloom at Olympic Corrections Center. Photo by Ricky Osborne.

[Sustainability in Prisons Project](#) (SPP) brings science and nature into prisons. We conduct ecological research and conserve biodiversity by forging collaborations with scientists, inmates, prison staff, students, and community partners. Equally important, we help reduce the environmental, economic, and human costs of prisons by inspiring and informing sustainable practices. To learn more, contact us at spp@evergreen.edu and visit our social media:

sustainabilityinprisons.org

facebook.com/sustainableprisons

twitter.com/SPP_WA