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REENTER INTO SOCIETY EMPOWERED

Nonprofit brings mindfulness-based interventions to prison



The Prison Mindfulness Institute (PMI) is a nonprofit that promotes mindfulness practices for people who are imprisoned or who work in correctional fields. It supports the use of mindfulness as a tool for healing, harm reduction and public safety.

There are many mindfulness practices in the world, especially in religious traditions. One way to describe mindfulness is that it involves being aware of the breath and body in the present moment. PMI's founder Fleet Maull says, "The basic instruction is to sit up, if possible, with a relatively erect and uplifted posture that is at the same time relaxed and stable, and then to gently bring one's attention... to the actual tactile, physical sensations that make up the lived experiences we call body and breath."

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBI's), like the ones PMI offers, have been shown to reduce stress and benefit emotional, mental and physical wellness for people both within and outside of corrections facilities. Mindfulness meditation can reduce recidivism, too.

PMI evolved out of the Prison Dharma Network (PDN), which was formed in the 1980s by Maull, a Buddhism student and meditation teacher who was incarcerated on drug charges. PDN became PMI in 2010. Over the years, it expanded its in-person, online and mail-based programming. Maull, PMI's current board president, has a Ph.D. in psychology, is a senior Buddhism and mindfulness teacher, and also founded the Center for Mindfulness in Public Safety, National Prison Hospice Association and several other groups.

PMI runs many programs, including mindfulness initiatives in prisons and underserved communities; mindfulness book distribution, research, and publishing; a Center for Mindfulness in Public Safety, which provides programs for public safety and corrections professionals, and first responders; and more. During the pandemic, Maull says PMI has been running limited Zoom classes and mailing out materials.

"We hope prisons and jails will begin opening their doors again soon," he says. "We regularly mail books on mindfulness and related topics to incarcerated persons, free of charge. Our address is: Prison Mindfulness Institute, P.O. Box 206, South Deerfield, MA, 01373." PMI supports justice reforms, upholding the perspective that nonviolent crimes can be addressed in community-based programs, with the help of MBI's. In secure facilities, PMI envisions people who have been found guilty of carrying out violent crimes receiving "humane, mindfulness-based treatment and rehabilitation."

There are multiple other groups working to bring mindfulness, Buddhism, yoga and other practices and belief systems to incarcerated populations and the people who work with them, including the Liberation Prison Project, Boundless Freedom Project and Prison Yoga Project.

[JULIA TRAVERS](#)

N E X T

Prisons can deny non-mainstream religious practice

