

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

We are Project FLEX





# Where we're taking you...

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**| 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.**



# PROJECT FLEX

*We leverage the power of sport to unite individuals and develop a culture of opportunity for incarcerated youth.*



# Project Flex Snapshot



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## Prison Programming

*Sole sport-based university/prison partnership*

Sport Sessions  
1-on-1 Mentoring  
NIU Leadership Retreats



# Project Flex Snapshot



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## People

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





# Project Flex Snapshot



## Numbers

5 years

3 sites (2 male, 1 co-ed)

\$180K annual contract

14 research papers

22 national presentations



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**

# 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.**



# Impact on Youth

“[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



**43% vs. 93%**

Reduced Recidivism Rate

# The Future of FLEX

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





# Thank You

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