

The Science Behind Kairos Impact upon Behavior Summary

Introduction

Kairos is a Faith-driven initiative with a goal to impact incarcerated men, women, youth as well as their families to become loving and productive citizens of their community. This is accomplished by inviting leaders (both negative and positive) to attend a Kairos 3.5 day event. This is followed by consistent, encouraging weekly and monthly Kairos programming that creates life change and positively reinforces that change via on-going accountability groups.

This life change not only impacts those attending the Kairos event, but also those around them and those who 'follow' them (if indeed leaders are chosen to attend). In the short term, individuals change, and prison culture can improve; in the long term, families can be healed and recidivism is lowered.

This two-page summary is a brief overview. Scientific principles and psychological theories that undergird the Kairos program and guide the Kairos impact on behavioral change are available in another detailed document.

How does Kairos bring change?

The Kairos Weekend looks simple and enjoyable on the surface. However, it is not just a good time. It is a well-crafted scientific-based program. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, our needs are most often displayed as a pyramid. The lowest levels of the pyramid are made up of the most basic needs, while the most complex needs are at the top of the pyramid.¹

Needs at the bottom of the pyramid are basic physical requirements including the need for food, water, sleep, and warmth. Once these lower-level needs have been met, people can move on to the next level of needs, which are for safety and security. Further up the pyramid, the need for personal esteem and feelings of accomplishment take priority. Maslow emphasized the importance of self-actualization, which is a process of growing and developing as a person in order to achieve individual potential. Maslow termed the highest level of the pyramid as growth needs. These needs don't stem from a lack of something, but rather from a desire to grow and change (behavior modification).

Belonging, community and hope are a few of the self-actualization needs that are met through Kairos and bring change in the form of trauma healing, forgiveness, anger management and restored family relationships.

Belonging: In prison, the need to belong leads to gang membership. The three R's of Reputation, Respect, Retaliation always have bad outcomes. By being placed in a family at Kairos, you belong without initiation rites. It is not unusual to have an individual renounce gang affiliation during Kairos, even knowing the consequences. Here is a short video of this in action: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NshMJLw0ok>

Community: Everyone wants to be a part of something bigger and better than themselves. The community made up of Kairos grads can be a safe place where individuals can attend encouraging programming and see a much larger community of individuals willing to help them, encourage them, protect them, and hold them accountable for their words and actions.

Hope: It is impossible to live without hope. If a person has no hope that anything will ever be different, no amount of education or programming will impact them positively. The Kairos weekend sends a strong message of hope. The message of hope is delivered during talks where volunteers describe often terrible circumstances in their lives that they have overcome. That is the message hope - "I overcame, so can you." Oftentimes success and hope only happens with the help of others. That is community. Hope gives something to look forward to upon release. Hope helps engage current support systems. Hope says change is possible.

How are Individuals changed through attending Kairos?

The outcome of the Kairos program is that graduates have started trauma healing and forgiveness, which leads to a more outwardly centered view (as opposed to the normal self-centered one displayed by those incarcerated). The outwardly focused life is closely tied to Maslow's self-actualization and a need to help others.

Trauma Healing: Everyone incarcerated has experienced trauma. Oftentimes it is the root of their incarceration, anger and poor behavior. If left undealt, it will negatively impact them and everyone around them, including prison staff.

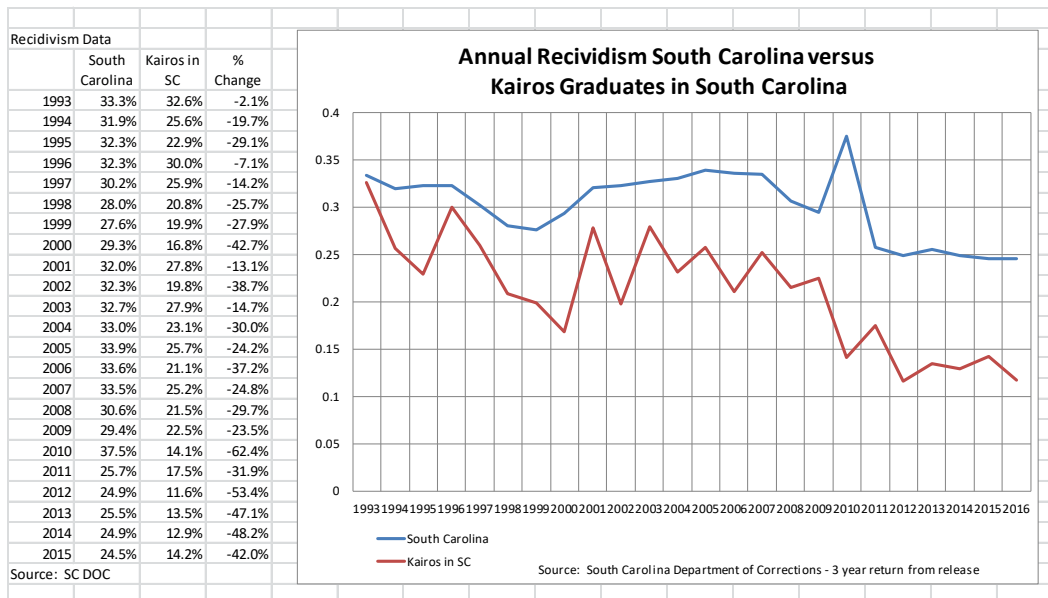
Trauma healing may take a long time; you have to start with knowing yourself, accepting yourself and a process of forgiveness – which often only happens through acceptance of others. Those issues are a focus the Kairos program.

Forgiveness: Kairos places such a premium on forgiveness, that one whole day of the 3 ½ days is devoted to it culminating with a ‘forgiveness ceremony.’ The day is spent talking about the importance of forgiveness. The result can be that the anger that possibly got brought them to prison can dissipate as they forgive those they hate, those who did them wrong, those who caused excruciating pain. They learn forgiveness isn’t so much about the other person, but about letting go of the need for revenge and healing inside themselves.

Family Relationships: A Chaplain at San Quentin Prison saw that Kairos grads were ready to ‘do something’ with respect to changing their thought patterns about their families. Kairos Outside, a program for females impacted by incarceration, was born with healing of family relationships in mind. With this wrap around program, there can be forgiveness, a shared experience and common goals, and the success rate of re-entry increases.

Data

The South Carolina Department of Corrections conducted a longitudinal study (over 20 years) comparing the 3-year return to prison rates of inmates completing the Kairos Weekend versus Non-Kairos offenders. You can easily see that the Kairos Graduate’s rate of recidivism has trended down over the 20-year period. The whole data set is presented in the detailed appendices that follows this summary.



Conclusion

If you belong to an encouraging, positive community of people who give you hope and help you heal from the trauma of the mistakes in your life and your incarceration, you are changed. When an individual changes, those around them change, eventually family relationships are restored. When forgiveness happens within a family torn apart by imprisonment, restoration is the outcome. That restoration has a huge impact on the success of re-entry. One of the success indicators of re-entry is lower recidivism via the support of family and suitable housing. Healing and Forgiveness impacts both. Bringing about these things is built into the Kairos program.

1. Lester D, Hvezda J, Sullivan S, Plourde R. [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Psychological Health](#). J Gen Psychol. 1983;109(1):83-85. doi:10.1080/00221309.1983.9711513

*Credit for this analysis of Behavior Modification Models goes to Calvin Roberson, MHA, MPH, Vice President of Planning and Program Development, Indiana Minority Health Coalition, Inc (IMHC), Adjunct Professor IUPUI Fairbanks School of Public Health