

## **UBUNTU: Building Social Fabric**

When I present Fair Shake in both state and federal institutions around the country I hear a lot of incarcerated people hoping to connect and consult with those who have gone through the transition back into society successfully.

I also hear many incarcerated people expressing an interest in giving back to the community, frequently with the hope to guide youth away from the path that leads to prison.

Fair Shake believes these desires, and many more, (including supporting children of incarcerated parents, creating safer communities, and building relationships between seemingly disparate communities) are best addressed by working together, intentionally and carefully building a strong social fabric.

This is difficult today because, as Americans, we are encouraged to believe that we are in the land of opportunity and that to be successful we need to 'pull ourselves up by our bootstraps' and 'do it yourself'. Our culture is suffering from a staggering number of social challenges that are very difficult to recognize or address on an individual basis. We are daunted by the magnitude of effort required to improve how we live together in society and feel we need experts or elected representatives to improve our quality of life. While we wait for them to 'fix' the 'broken system' we sheepishly accept a steady increase levels of anti-social ailments: depression, social anxiety, mental illness, physical illnesses created by stress, fear, addictions, loneliness, and many more.

Unfortunately, we will never find the solutions by addressing the symptoms alone; what we need is to realize that we need each other and must build a better future together.

We need not look backward, however, beyond recognizing and owning how we got to where we are to avoid going there again. What we need to do right now – wherever we are – is to reflect, study, converse, and collaborate TOGETHER to conjure and create solutions to our challenges.

Once we realize that we need to build ourselves (rather than waiting for some governmental repair person to fix our problem), we can begin the powerful and enriching hard work of improving our listening skills, our communication skills, and our compassion while developing a deeper understanding of what a healthy society within a democracy looks like. Soon, we will begin to problem solve and create more of what we want to improve everyone's quality of life! (Okay, 'soon' is a relative term, but we can't let that hinder us.)

To encourage people to see a more empowering picture, I consulted with the author of *The Business of Belief*, Tom Asacker. He reminded me that we are not motivated by logic; that we shift our beliefs based on our experiences and feelings and, most importantly, that we need a clear picture of where we can go to move to another path. When we change our belief of what is possible, we can change our attitude and approach to solving our problems, which will change our behaviors and, eventually, our lives.

After consulting with family members, colleagues, and anyone who will listen, Fair Shake is presenting this series of images for your consideration.

We hope you will share your thoughts on what you see below. We are currently developing, with incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, and never incarcerated people, ways to build out this vision. Your opinion is important!

**Your creative skills are important, too! We need to make this a story that we can share and use to stimulate others. We also need to create a flowing image from the individual to the social fabric.** If you see where you would like to contribute - even if your contribution is to critique our present work or to look ahead to where it might not work down the road - please contact us!

We're looking forward to building the future with you! Ubuntu!!

## Fair Shake view of building social fabric: (view from overhead)



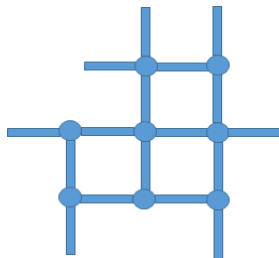
One person, arms outstretched, ready to connect with others to build community strength and to demonstrate prosocial understanding and interest through engagement.



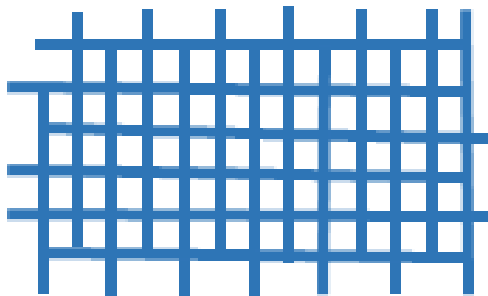
Two people, strongly connected to each other.



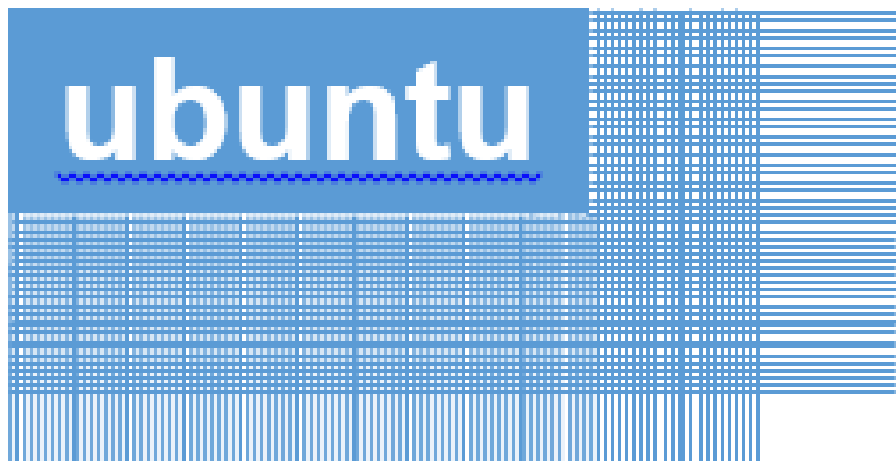
The clasp builders use: a 'rescue' hold, for optimal strength.



People supporting each other inside begin to build the reentry safety net. Some builders may not go home for a long time, some may not be coming back to society at all, but we must acknowledge and honor our connection. We can be aware of our strength as an individual as well as the strength of the group: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. As people go home from prison, the net flows from the inside to the outside...



Those who do come home make themselves available for those who are coming home now once they feel safe or that they are in a position to give (over 1700 people come home every day). What starts as a safety net for the reentering community then weaves naturally into building and repairing the social fabric.



Ubuntu: A society that recognizes and embraces interdependence, cooperation and compassion.

A society that seeks safe communities and 'United We Stand' strength, must vigilantly review how it cares for all of its members.