

Offender Reentry

Defining the Issue

Federal and state prisons currently hold over 2 million prisoners. Eventually 95 percent of them will be released back into the community at a rate of about 650,000 per year. Of those released, 67 percent are expected to return to prison within three years .

Released offenders face challenges that include finding jobs, housing, substance abuse treatment, health care, debt, reunification with families and reintegration into the community. Evaluation of these programs provide evidence that some reentry programs reduce recidivism and improve offenders' success in transitioning back to the community. For example, vocational training and work programs appear to reduce recidivism by improving job skills, and drug rehabilitation and halfway house programs allow offenders to address their substance abuse in a structured and supervised setting.



Evaluations of reentry courts suggest the importance of the following elements in reentry programs:

- ✓ Incentives to increase the number of offenders who voluntarily participate.
- ✓ Services for the offender while still in custody to improve the continuity of service delivery.
- ✓ Rewards for completing phases of the program to boost offender morale and motivation.
- ✓ Coordination among probation and parole agencies, service providers, and other community agencies that work with the offender and his/her family to ensure access to services and to reduce replication and overlap of services.
- ✓ Ability to identify the offender's individual needs and to engage the offender's family in responding to those needs.

State Examples

Tennessee –Funded through the Byrne/JAG Program The Next Door is a faith based non-profit organization dedicated to helping women who are re-entering society from incarceration or rehabilitation. Women enter a six-month planned curriculum accompanied by recovery support services to address issues of the co-occurring disorders of addiction and mental illness. In July 2007 another

component was added to the program in the form of a permanent housing opportunity called Freedom Recovery Community. This 20-unit apartment complex provides safe affordable living for the women and their children. The unique feature of Freedom Recovery Community is the onsite access to services for co-occurring disorders, counseling, parenting classes, and early drug use prevention classes for children.

New Jersey - A JAG grant funded the Greater Newark Cities Initiative, which targets offenders without the benefit of community supervision. Services for inmates focus on: employment and economic stability; mental, physical and spiritual health; housing; and family stability. Social workers increased the network of support services for inmates through partnerships with

federal, state and local agencies.

Rhode Island - The RI Department of Corrections offers a variety of offender re-entry projects targeting nearly 500 offenders annually who are identified as high risk for re-offending upon release. This program offers specialized planning for all high-risk offenders leaving prison as sentenced inmates or released directly from the Intake Centers. Projects feature partnerships with community resources, sex offender treatment, cognitive behavioral programming, and victim's sensitivity and impact training.

New York – The state used Byrne/ JAG funds to improve the current system for transitioning parolees back into the community by conducting assessments of the current reentry system and implementing strategies to enhance accountability and offender management. More than 290 parolees participated in programs providing substance abuse treatment, case management, employment training and placement, mental health counseling, family assistance and other services.