



The Partnership

Quarterly Newsletter – Fall '09

National Offender Workforce Development Partnership

The mission of the partnership is to facilitate a transitional approach to apprenticeships and employment strategies for ex-offenders. The ultimate goal of the partnership is to enhance reentry success through increased opportunities for career-oriented employment of ex-offenders.

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DISABILITY PROGRAM NAVIGATOR ASSISTS CENTRAL MINNESOTA RE-ENTRY PROJECT

Central Minnesota is fortunate to have the Central Minnesota Re-Entry Project (CMREP) that serves ex-offenders recently released from jail or prisons. Its mission is: **Create safer communities by providing ex-offenders the opportunity to transform their lives through mentoring, resources, and community partnerships.** The Department of Labor's Disability Program Navigator (DPN), along with other community partners, attends the Reentry Committee Meetings to share information on WorkForce Center (WFC) services. CMREP refers their clients to me at the St. Cloud WorkForce Center. The DPN's role is to introduce them to services within the WFC and provide job search and career information. The DPN also provides information on the Federal Bonding Program and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), two incentives for employers to hire ex-offenders.

Typically, the DPN meets with each individual one time, targets specific concerns about his/her job search, and makes appropriate referrals. The DPN helps them find keywords to describe their skills and stresses the importance of networking. The DPN focuses particular attention on the job application. Although the importance of honesty is stressed, if the employer does not know the potential job candidate or his/her background, the DPN suggests leaving the felony question blank. Answering it will be a red flag and may stop the process. The DPN subsequently explains that the job seeker: 1) has to be prepared to bring the subject up at the interview, and 2) needs to make sure that the employer knows s/he is not trying to hide information rather it is just that s/he prefers to talk with her or him directly about it. In preparation for this, the ex-offender must be ready to acknowledge the crime, explain how s/he has paid for it, how time was spent during incarceration, lessons learned, changes made, ending with a list of job skills that match the position s/he is applying for and assurance that the job requirements will be met.

The DPN has observed that ex-offenders are often humiliated by the job seeking/interviewing experience and set themselves up for failure because they believe that no one will hire an ex-felon. Their self-esteem will benefit by making a list of activities, experiences, education and skills that reflect their abilities as a valuable employee. If they write it down and rehearse it, they will believe it and be able to look the employer in the eyes to tell their story.

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT ON-SITE OFFICE ESSENTIAL TO BRINGING CHILD SUPPORT MESSAGE TO MINNESOTA'S INCARCERATED PARENTS

Working from inside a prison cell block in St. Cloud, MN, Lori Lofrano is changing the way incarcerated parents view the child support program. Lofrano is not a fellow prisoner; she is the "Child Support Liaison," and her office is housed in a cell block within the Department of Corrections' intake center for adult males. The department places offenders in St. Cloud prison to learn the prison rules and to receive their security classification. Lofrano, a former Child Support Officer and Supervisor, is currently employed by the Minnesota Department of Corrections. Her job is to educate and inform offenders, facilitate communication between offenders and county child support agencies, and help families provide for their children when parents are incarcerated. Lofrano's position, which she began last August, is the centerpiece of a contract for services with the Minnesota Child Support Enforcement Division (CSED).

Strategies to Help Low-Income Parents Applied to Incarcerated

The concept behind the Child Support Liaison position came from a project called SHLIF (Strategies to Help Low-Income Families) that CSED implemented about 2 years ago. In planning SHLIF, project members formed a county work group and also met with representatives of various community organizations. They discussed how to address child support barriers facing their mutual customers and identified tools CSED could develop to assist community partners and the clients they serve. "We wanted a



comprehensive project that looked at multiple barriers, and we needed to improve our work with community partners, including faith-based agencies," says Pat Krauth, CSED Direct Services Manager. At an initial meeting with representatives from 60-some organizations, Krauth began with the question: "What do you need to know about the child support program to deliver the best services to your clients?" "SHLIF focuses on the management of arrears through early intervention and other strategies directed at assisting low-income families, including incarcerated obligors. Timely modifications prevent or minimize the accumulation of arrears that are often considered uncollectible," says Krauth. According to Jill Hausman, SHLIF project manager, "The reality is that we are changing our approach to child support enforcement. We're excited about the number of county IV-D agencies that are on

board." "CSED decided to move forward with the SHLIF project to improve outcomes for Minnesota families. The SHLIF project team analyzed various national studies and worked with fatherhood and family advocacy groups in Minnesota. This work identified not only an increase in the nonpayment of current child support and mounting child support arrears balances, but also the affect of inappropriate child support obligations and large arrears balances on the relationship between noncustodial parents and their children. We anticipate that the SHLIF initiative will not only improve child support outcomes for children, but will have other significant benefits to the family as well," says Hausman. Lofrano's position at the St. Cloud Correctional Facility was one of the first things to come out of the series of meetings between CSED and their community partners. The SHLIF project team also developed a DVD designed specifically for incarcerated obligors that is broadcast daily in all State prisons through the prison's internal broadcast system. The DVD, "Getting the Right Order While Incarcerated," is narrated by a popular local news anchor, selected for her easily recognizable face and voice. She graciously agreed to a small stipend, making it a low-cost, in-house production. Even before the SHLIF project began, when Legal Aid funding was cut, CSED began onsite visits to Minnesota prisons and jails to explain parents' options in the child support program. "We were encouraged to learn that offenders are genuinely interested in their child support cases," explains Mike Caris, a Policy Advisor with the State office. "This was also evident when we participated in 'transition fairs' at the correctional facilities where representatives from nonprofit and government agencies talk to offenders about resources available to them during their transition back to the community," says Caris. "These resources include help with finding suitable housing, aftercare and treatment facilities, child support, employment and training, health care, and so forth. The effort has paid dividends for CSED because it cemented working relationships with Department of Corrections' staff and other stakeholders in the corrections network."

Breaking Down Barriers

Inside the prison, Lofrano has identified many barriers that incarcerated parents face in navigating the modification process. For example, if incarcerated parents want to appear at a hearing by phone, they must request it in advance and the Child Support Magistrate must approve it. In addition, the incarcerated individual must put in a written request to use the corrections case manager's phone for the hearing. If the hearing is delayed, which is often the case, it's burdensome for the case manager, who can't work on confidential files with the offender sitting there waiting for the hearing to begin. Occasionally, an offender's participation in a court hearing is immediately terminated because there are several times during the day when offenders must return to their cells to be counted, which takes priority. There are also occasional lock-downs for security reasons. One possible solution is to ask court

personnel to schedule the hearing for the first position in the afternoon session on any given day. That would ensure a timely start right after the lunch break and the hearing would be concluded before the afternoon count. "The complexity of the modification forms is another problem," adds Krauth. "But now we have the advantage of having Lori Lofrano there to help parents better understand the forms and the modification process." Lofrano has been holding biweekly child support sessions at the facility. Offenders who attend a session can get information on the entire child support program, from how orders are established to paternity issues. "Offenders come with lots of questions," says Lofrano. "Some have had negative experiences with child support. It's rewarding to take the time to explain the program and how it can benefit all of the parties involved. Most offenders will not be incarcerated forever. At the time I see them, they are somewhat of a 'captive' audience. If I can engage them in their child support cases, and help them view the child support program in a more positive light, the hope is that they will continue to participate in their child support cases upon release." Of the State's 186,152 obligors this March, 4,141, or 2.2 percent, are incarcerated. "The odds that they'll pay are slim," explains Krauth, "but by using the SHLIF strategies and by having Lofrano in the prison to assist incarcerated parents early on, we expect these obligors to get appropriate orders based on their ability to pay now and in the future."

COLLABORATION AT FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS FCC LOMPOC AND U.S. PROBATION OFFICE IN CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA TO PREPARE OFFENDERS FOR REENTRY

Ready-to-Work & 7 Steps Program

The Federal Correctional Complex, Lompoc, California and the United States Probation Department, Central District of California have partnered to provide a new re-entry program to releasing offenders. The program titled "Ready to Work and the Seven Steps to a Quick and Successful Job Search for Ex-Offenders" has become a highly successful program to prepare offenders for employment searches upon release from custody. Feedback from the Job Developers and Facility Directors from the Residential Reentry Centers indicates those offenders who complete the program have greater success in securing employment quickly.

This program was designed to provide inmates with the skills they need for a quick and successful job search as data shows those ex-offenders that are unemployed or underemployed upon release to the community are three to five times more likely to recidivate. This program provides the inmates with practical information that aids in finding jobs fast.

Taught by the Complex Inmate Skills Development and Reentry Coordinator often in conjunction with the United States Probation Office, the first class was offered in December 2007. Upon completion of the first program provided positive feedback from the inmates was positive with the exception they would like more hands on training and experience with job interviews. The class grew to include mock interviews and is now a six hour program. To date over 390 offenders have completed the program within the institution and another 189 have completed the program at the Residential Reentry Center. There is an extensive waiting list and the program is now automatically provided to all Residential Drug Abuse Program participants as they enter the Transition and Recovery Maintenance portion of the program and near their transfer to a Residential Reentry Center.

The program has become so popular that it was extended from one class per quarter, co-facilitated by the Inmate Skills Development and Reentry Coordinator and the United States Probation Office to two classes per quarter. There are two additional classes per month being taught at the institutions by the Inmate Skills Development and Re-Entry Coordinator. In addition, the United States Probation Office is now offering the program at The Vinewood Residential Reentry Centers.

The program includes seven steps. Step 1: Creating a positive image and environment. Information is provided concerning how to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing and other necessities so that the participant can conduct a successful job search. Additionally, training is provided on how to manage money, establishing a support network, different assistance programs to include, the probation officer, nonprofit organizations, government agencies and programs and faith based organizations. Special emphasis is placed on creating a positive self-image. Step 2: Identifying your skills. Participants learn to identify the three basic types of skills to include self management, transferable skills, job related skills and how to relate those skills in a resume, application and during an interview. Step 3: Identifying job targets. Participants learn to identify the factors to consider when identifying job targets. These include what skills they want to use, what types of special knowledge they have, what industries or employers are most likely to hire a person with their record, where do they want their next job to be located and what benefits or income do they hope to have. Participants complete an interest and skills checklist to determine the type of job they would be best suited for. Step 4: Getting your documents in order. Information is provided to assist the participants with securing a number of documents they will require for their job search. These include, how to order a copy of their birth certificate (including the necessary forms), how to request a replacement social security card, and how to secure a driver's license or state identification card.



Some additional documents include such items as resumes, cover letters, and job applications. Special emphasis is placed on dealing with prior convictions and the proper way to address these on applications and during the interview. Individuals are provided information on how to prepare summary statements and deal with gaps in employment due to incarceration. Tips for effective resume writing are discussed including the recommendation of using skilled based resumes rather than traditional chronological resumes. Step 5: Using the most effective job search methods. Emphasis is placed on how to network and get your resume out there to assist in finding employment, as most jobs are found by word of mouth or people who happen to be in the right place at the right time. Other methods such as newspaper, internet help wanted ads and employment agencies are also discussed. Step 6: Teaching participants the key to success. The key factors to a successful job search is to make their search for a job a full time job and how to create a daily job search schedule. Step 7: Improving your interviewing skills and follow up on all job leads. Participants also need learn the top 10 problem interview questions and how to handle them. Special emphasis is placed on how to answer that dreaded question “have you ever been convicted of a felony?” The class learns how to address their record honestly while providing employers with much needed information on the positives to hiring an ex-offender.

All participants are given a number of items to provide to potential employers to include: Fact Sheets on Fidelity Bonding and Fidelity Bonding Certification Requests, instructions and forms for the Unicorn Bonding Program, the Work Opportunity Tax Credit Fact Sheet, Instructions for the Pre-Screening Notice and Certification Request for the Work Opportunity Credit as well as Form 8850 to request the Work Opportunity Tax Credit. Additionally, participants are encouraged to use their probation officers as an additional reference. They are taught to explain that they have a standard condition to maintain employment and that they will be at work, on time, every day as their probation officer will be checking to ensure they do. They can also inform the employer that should drug testing be a condition of employment they are all ready being tested by the probation office. Mock interviews are also conducted during this phase of the training.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION FINDS MORE EX-OFFENDER JOB PLACEMENT SERVICES ARE PROVIDING DIRECT EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

John Linton reports that a current research project to examine community based correctional education programs has been developing some interesting information. ED’s researcher is finding that organizations created to support ex offender job placement have become more active in providing direct educational services. The Safer Foundation in Illinois and CEO in New York have both been building educational programs within their organizational structures – finding ways to provide general

academic skills development for their clients in need of development – but seeking to do so in ways that more directly support the employment aspiration of their clients. Both organizations have taken an innovative and somewhat experimental approach. (John sees potential here for a workshop session at the DOWD conference next year!)



Grants have recently gone out to “State Correctional Education Agencies” to implement their Workplace and Community Transition Training for Incarcerated Individual Program projects in State correctional facilities. This program was reauthorized and expanded in scope in 2008 (as part of the Higher Education Opportunity Act), and is currently funded at just over \$17million.

Reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is a topic of strong interest in the Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Bills filed to date in the House (Kennedy) and Senate (Webb) would create set asides for correctional education in the federal adult education program and thus increase investments in prisoner education. Also, a WIA oriented report of the prestigious Council of Economic Advisors titled “[Reach Higher America, Overcoming Crisis in the U.S. Workforce](#),” is drawing attention as it outlines national educational and training needs, including especially those that must be addressed with undereducated and out of school Americans. Interestingly, it particularly calls for greater integration of basic skill instruction and occupational training. These recommendations will be influential in the development of the final version of WIA, and will certainly impact how we “do” education and training with offender populations.

NEW REPORTS FROM THE EVALUATION OF OFFICE OF FAMILY ASSISTANCE’S MARRIAGE AND FAMILY STRENGTHENING GRANTS FOR INCARCERATED AND RE-ENTERING FATHERS AND THEIR PARTNERS

Recent research suggests that the partners and families of incarcerated men are an important resource for men’s successful reentry into society. However, programming to support couple and family relationships through incarceration and community reintegration is relatively rare. The Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Re-entering Fathers and Their Partners (MFS-IP) were designed to meet this need. Administered by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), these programs provide services to families during and after a father’s incarceration to enhance family functioning and improve reentry outcomes.

Two new evaluation reports document implementation challenges and lessons from the grantees' first 2 years of program operations. Brief Number 3, **Strengthening the Couple and Family Relationships of Fathers Behind Bars: The Promise and Perils of Corrections-Based Programming**, identifies four main challenges to service delivery of family-strengthening activities within the correctional environment, including: (1) institutional constraints; (2) logistical issues; (3) recruitment and motivation of the target population; and (4) retention of participants. The key findings in this report show how MFS-IP grantees made innovative programmatic adjustments that were respectful and responsive to the safety concerns and standard operating procedures of their host facilities while delivering needed services to their target populations.



Brief Number 4, **Bringing Partners into the Picture: Family-Strengthening Programming for Incarcerated Fathers**, suggests that the challenges to involving partners in family-strengthening activities are significant and involve every component of the program: recruiting partners, retaining partners in correctional facilities, and working with partners in the community. The brief also identifies innovative ways of meeting these challenges. It is anticipated that these initial grantees' experiences will be helpful to faith-based and community organizations, human services agencies, and correctional systems that are developing programs to assist families affected by incarceration.

Funded by the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) and the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), the National Evaluation of Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Re-entering Fathers and Their Partners is focused on exploring the effectiveness of relationship and family-strengthening programming in correctional settings. Future implementation reports on the twelve projects, which will be based on additional years of program operations, will document additional challenges and lessons learned.

Data collection for the impact study started in December of 2008. Couples participating in MFS-IP programming and a set of similar couples not participating in programming were enrolled in the national impact study and completed the first of three longitudinal surveys designed to collect information about relationship quality, family stability, and reentry outcomes. Baseline data collection is expected to continue on a rolling basis for a total of 3 years, with follow-up data collection extending another 18 months beyond the final baseline interview.

Publications related to the MFS-IP evaluation are available from the [HHS ASPE website](#). A program overview and evaluation summary, as well as links to publications of interest and other web resources, may be found at the [national evaluation website](#). For additional information about the MFS-IP projects or the evaluation contact Linda Mellgren at 202-690-6806 or Linda.Mellgren@hhs.gov.

BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE AWARDS REENTRY PROGRAMS

The U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance announced more than \$28 million in grant funding to states, local governments and non-profit organizations under the [Second Chance Act Prisoner Reentry Initiative](#) has been awarded. Funding, awarded through five separate grant programs, will be used to support reentry programs that assist individuals' transition from prison back into the community through a variety of services such as mentoring, literacy classes, job training, education programs, substance abuse, rehabilitation and mental health programs for adult and juvenile offenders.

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) further announced the release of [funding results](#) for the FY2009 Second Chance Act Mentoring Grants to Nonprofit Organizations solicitation. The Second Chance Act of 2007 (Pub. L. 110-199) reflects a comprehensive response to the increasing number of people who are released from prison and jail and are returning to communities. The Second Chance Act will help ensure the transition people make from prison or jail to the community is safe and successful.

This solicitation was released under Section 211 of the Act, which authorizes grants to nonprofit organizations and federally recognized Indian tribes that may be used for mentoring projects to promote the safe and successful reintegration into the community of individuals who have been incarcerated.

Lastly, BJA announced the release of funding results for the [FY2009 Second Chance Act Adult and Juvenile Offender Reentry Resource Center](#). The Second Chance Act of 2007 (Pub. L. 110-199) reflects a comprehensive response to the increasing number of people who are released from prison and jail and are returning to communities. The Second Chance Act will help ensure the transition people make from prison or jail to the community is safe and successful. Section 101 of the Act provides funding to establish a National Adult and Juvenile Offender Reentry Resource Center. Eligible applicants were limited to national nonprofit organizations that provide technical assistance and training to, and have special expertise and broad, national experience in, offender reentry programs, training and research. The solicitation for funding was released on March 2, 2009 and closed on April 20, 2009.

HIGHLIGHTS

WHITE HOUSE CONDUCTS PRISONER REENTRY MEETINGS

Beginning in October, the Office of the Vice-President held a series of meetings on prisoner reentry. The meeting brought together federal agencies including: the Department of Labor, Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Education, Health and Human Services, Office of Probation & Pretrial Services, Bureau of Prisons and many others to review the challenges of prisoner as well as how these federal agencies can overcome these challenges. Topics ranged from: Education, Employment, Housing, Health and much more. Also during these meetings researchers and reentry professionals were in attendance to provide thoughts and ideas of how to proceed.



SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME AND DRUGS

On November 5, Prison and Jail Reentry experts testified to the [Senate Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs](#). The Presentation labeled the First Line of Defense: Reducing Recidivism at the Local Level, provided great insight from reentry professionals on eliminating the barriers to prisoner reentry as well as requesting additional assistance from Congress in supporting prisoner reentry.

DIRECTOR TESTIFIED ON MENTAL ILLNESS IN PRISONS BEFORE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE



On September 15, Director Harley G. Lappin testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee's Human Rights and the Law Subcommittee, on the topic "Human Rights at Home: Mental Illness in U.S. Prisons and Jails." During his testimony, Director Lappin stressed the Bureau's commitment to providing appropriate mental health treatment to all inmates needing assistance, but, he noted that the combination of an increasing number of mentally ill inmates and budget constraints pose real challenges for the agency. While the most severe cases are handled at Federal Medical Centers, the majority of mentally ill inmates are housed in non-medical facilities. As in the community, the majority of mental health care is provided on an out-patient basis, with Psychology Services staff working in conjunction with therapists, counselors, social workers, psychiatrists, and tele-psychiatry services. The Director also highlighted a number of the Bureau's intensive treatment programs including the Challenge Program for high-security inmates, the Resolve Program for female inmates with trauma-related mental illness, the Step-Down Program for inmates who lack the skills needed to function in general population, the Skills Program for medium-security inmates, and the Habilitation Program for high-security inmates who cannot adapt to the penitentiary environment. He emphasized that suicide prevention is a high priority throughout the Bureau. He noted that the Bureau's inmate suicide rate is about one-half the rate for males in the general population.