

Criminal Justice Collaborative Council (Inmate Reintegration Subcommittee)

Meeting Minutes

February 4, 2005

Annex First Floor Conference Room

Ann Arbor, MI

1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Members Present: Scott Patton (CJCC Staff), Michael Echlin (22nd Circuit Court Probation), Ruth Shabazz (Shelter Association of Washtenaw County), Ruby Smith (ETCS Community Programs), Barbara Levin Bergman (Community Corrections Board Advisory Chair), Karen Korte (Corrections Lieutenant), Gary Greenfield (Corrections Lieutenant), Rick Visel (Director of Correctional Services), Patrick Hughes (Department of Corrections Probation), Kirk Filsinger (Jail Commander), Sheila Blakney (Senior Assistant, Public Defender), Delphia Simpson (Public Defender Manager), Deb Pippins (Supervisor Project Outreach, CSTS), George Siasoco (CJCC Intern)

Convened: 1:00 p.m.

I. Introductions

Attendees were given the following supporting documents:

- CJCC Inmate Reintegration Subcommittee Agenda
- CJCC Calendar: February – June 2005 (Draft)
- CJCC Subcommittee Goals and Volunteers

II. Membership

Ruth Shabazz mentioned that Diane Davidson (Executive Director, Washtenaw Housing Alliance) should participate in the meetings as she would be able to provide a unique insight into the housing issues faced by former inmates. She also advised inviting participation from ACCESS which would be able to represent referrals to the substance abuse community. Rick Visel suggested that Amy Klinke may be a good person to invite since she deals with the same populations as corrections personnel.

III. Current Discussions on Inmate Reintegration

Scott Patton reported that reducing recidivism and inmate reintegration have been a continuing discussion with work groups in Washtenaw County. He asked members to report on these discussions already in progress to help identify and narrow the scope of the inmate reintegration issue.

Sheila Blakney reported that the CJCC Mental Health Subcommittee had previously discussed mental health diversion program of individuals with specific mental health needs who enter the criminal justice system. In that process, the system was mapped out and certain intervention points were identified where diversion and possible placements may be possible. Implementation of these programs will depend on the current jail millage proposal that will be voted on February 22, 2005.

Barbara Levin Bergman mentioned that the National Association of Counties will be putting out materials dealing with inmate reintegration, as this has become an issue of national importance. There were best practices and models that Washtenaw County may be able to follow. She will call them to ask for copies of these materials.

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In the corrections community, Rick Visel reported that he was unsure if the National Institute of Corrections provided reintegration training. His feeling was that each state uses its own reintegration process. Scott Patton clarified that the present inmate reintegration process into the community will not include prison reintegration. However, he will present what the state has put together, which could serve as a model.

Deb Pippins noted that there are different best practices for different subgroups of people who will be served by these models. For example, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has best practices approach to community re-entry from jails of co-occurring disorders. Ruth Shabazz added that the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness has a number of subgroups that have just started to deal with various issues such as substance abuse and models for homelessness courts, reduction of AIDS/treatments/education. Scott Patton referred members to the CJCC Calendar: February – June 2005 (Draft), and mentioned these updates on related issues may be included as the subcommittee meets through the year.

Ruby Smith reported on the employment side that deals with inmate reintegration. She said that their department has been distributing general information to inmates on community resources, such as the Michigan Abilities Partners (CEO) Program. Ruth Shabazz and Rick Visel indicated that training funded through the CEO program have been progressing at the shelter and Community Corrections.

Barbara Levin Bergman indicated that a program to reintegrate state inmates back into communities was being developed. Discussions are proceeding on whether inmates from the county jail can be included. Scott Patton identified three major gaps that prevented inmates from successfully reintegrating into the community: housing, employment, and substance abuse. If this program opportunity opens up within the coming year, it could very well help with the housing component.

Rick Visel indicated that the employment problem that former inmates is not in finding jobs, but in keeping them and money/budget management. Another problem compounding underemployment is the reluctance of former inmates to work in the service industry because of lower wages. The opportunity to build a resume using lower-tier jobs is therefore lost. Scott Patton noted that this problem could be worth exploring more in detail in the future.

IV. State Models for Inmate Reintegration

Scott Patton shared with members the state model which illustrated the reintegration process of former inmates from offense, sentencing, admission to prison, assessment (behavior), programming, exit, to law-abiding citizen. Failure to conform means recidivism and re-entry to prison system. The state realizes that the prison system and Community Corrections are only involved with some parts of the process. Few initiatives engage former inmates after serving time in order to reduce recidivism. Human services agencies should be involved all through the process. However, as transitions proceed from one phase to another, there is less accountability among departments. In response, this model advocates the use of accountability plans.

In Washtenaw County, this model can also apply but needs to be developed more. A year before release, an inmate is assigned a transition accountability plan that captures who is accountable for what, what the individual is accountable for, who is providing services for him/her, and how do we measure success of these programs. Upon release, the information from the institution is transferred to the parole officers to enable them to be better supervisors. This is repeated in the transition phase, where the housing, employment, other human services agencies agree on the accountability plan.

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Scott Patton clarified that this process may not be appropriate for everyone in the jail, such as those who will only be in the jail for a very short period of time. The format for the accountability plans for the “re-entry” and “staying home” phases is in development.

V. Mentoring Program

Discussion ensued on the possibility of setting up a mentoring program for former inmates who need assistance during reintegration difficulties. Karen Korte indicated that several former inmates are already calling into the Department of Correctional Services to update staff on their progress or when they encounter difficulties.

Deb Pippins agreed that a mentoring program is a significant component that assists former inmates become established and functioning in the community. Without it, these former inmates fail to maintain housing, are unable to handle their budgets, and engage in substance abuse. The “staying home” phase of the process is therefore critical to reduce recidivism among former inmates.

Barbara Levin Bergman indicated that if faced with limited funding streams, the program may staff with knowledgeable and well-trained volunteers. She emphasized the importance of training for potential mentor and effective screening for capable applicants. Gary Greenfield that there is currently a population of former inmates who would lend their experience and time to help other former inmates reintegrate more effectively and prevent mistakes. However, opportunities are not present for this type of mentoring program.

Sheila Blakney added that peer advice would be an effective strategy that would counter former inmates’ defensiveness and feelings of alienation from those who have not been through the prison experience. It also reinforces the MRT/cognitive behavior strategy of questioning decision sets and thinking of one’s behavior. She mentioned that this type of mentoring program is already being used by such agencies as Dawn Farms, which could provide best practices models. This could also be an opportunity to involve faith-based groups (such as the Ministerial Alliance) who could provide support and mentors. These groups have already initiated mentoring programs, involving domestic violence, with high success rates.

VI. Suggested Formal Charge

Scott Patton indicated that at the next CJCC meeting, he would like to present a suggested formal charge for the Inmate Reintegration Subcommittee. The CJCC will review this charge and decide on whether to formally accept it. He asked members to assist in developing a formal mission statement.

Kirk Filsinger noted that the mission statement should focus on reducing recidivism. However, before the staying home phase can proceed, strategies for capacity building, skills training, cognitive therapy should be in place. The transition accountability plan will assist in these developments. He suggested incorporating some elements from the MPRI program in Ohio to the inmate reintegration plans for Washtenaw County.

Scott Patton said that the strategy to reduce recidivism should include a housing, employment, and substance abuse component. Michael Echlin acknowledged that the problem would be in coordination of services to facilitate access by former inmates and greater interaction between different actors responsible for delivery of services. Deb Pippin indicated that one of the responsibilities of the group should be the development of a coordinating plan to ensure that no gaps in service will occur.

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Sheila Blakney suggested that the subcommittee mission statement could include: “works to ensure a safe and just community by providing individuals with the competencies, skills, and resources that they need to become law-abiding citizens.”

VII. Next Steps

George Siasoco will send out invitations to future meetings to Diane Davidson, Amy Klinke and to a representative from ACCESS. Scott Patton will talk to Donna Sabourin (Director, CSTS) to find out who would best represent ACCESS.

Scott Patton will put together a one-page document that will state what the group’s formal charge could be within the components identified in the meeting, as well as indicating some connection with the county’s mental health diversion efforts. It will also offer a summary of the transition accountability plans.

Sheila Blakney advised that a mapping process of the inmate reintegration system similar to the one developed for the mental health diversion process would be very helpful to identify gaps in system and intervention points. Scott Patton clarified that the current process uses the same methodology. However, the group can certainly avail of the same mapping process and identify what are different. The group can also talk about what programming is available at the jail.

Adjourned : 2:05 p.m.

Next Inmate Reintegration Subcommittee meeting will be on 3/02/05, **1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.**, at Annex Large Conference Room.