

**SOUTH CAROLINA REENTRY  
INTERAGENCY COLLABORATIVE TEAM**



*Interim Report  
February 2005*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the most pressing and complex challenges facing our state government is the reintegration of offenders from prison back into society. Almost all inmates currently incarcerated in our state, 97%, will eventually return to our communities. In FY 2004, the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) released 13,489 offenders back into society. These offenders return home with disproportionately high rates of addiction and mental illness, as well as, on average, limited education and work experience. Currently, most receive little to no preparation for the transition back to the community and little to no support or assistance after release. Almost a third of the inmates released in FY2001 returned to SCDC custody within three years. It is in everyone's best interest that offenders reenter society safely and live as law-abiding, self-sufficient citizens.

In order to address reentry issues, the South Carolina Reentry Interagency Collaborative Team was formed. The team is a collaborative effort among South Carolina stakeholder agencies. The team's mission is to recommend strategic improvements in South Carolina's offender reentry practices that involve the gathering and sharing of information, enhanced utilization of resources, the development of new initiatives and the integration of promising practices, and the identification of potential funding or other resources, as necessary, for each recommendation.

## **PLANNING HISTORY**

In May, 2004, an informational meeting to examine South Carolina's reentry issues was convened by Jon Ozmint, Director of South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC), with Directors and representatives from SCDC, the Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon

Services (PPP), the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Department of Public Safety (DPS), the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services (DAODAS), and the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department (SCVRD). A consensus was achieved among everyone present to explore an interdepartmental collaboration designed to improve reentry practices.

On May 25-27, 2004, representatives from stakeholder agencies attended a workshop entitled *Enhancing the Effectiveness of Collaborative Teams: A Training Workshop for the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative Grantees*. At that time, the South Carolina Reentry Interagency Collaborative Team developed its vision and mission statement, and adopted ground rules and a timetable for its actions. Members of the team are listed below:

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Sammie Brown      | <i>Grants Coordinator/Evaluator - S.C. Department of Corrections</i>   |
| Kelly Cordell     | <i>Executive Director, Planning &amp; Quality Assurance - S.C. Department of Social Services</i>                 |
| Cherry Daniel     | <i>Director, Adult/Community Education - S.C. Department of Education</i>  |
| Mike Easterday    | <i>Senior Policy Advisor - S.C. Department of Health and Human Services</i>                                      |
| Burke Fitzpatrick | <i>Administrator - S.C. Department of Public Safety</i>  |
| Carl Frederick    | <i>Operations Coordinator - S.C. Department of Corrections</i>   |
| Shirley Furtick   | <i>Jail and Correctional Services - S.C. Department of Mental Health</i>   |
| Rhonda Grant      | <i>Director, Programs &amp; Grants Mgmt. - S.C. Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services</i>          |
| Teresa A. Knox    | <i>Deputy Director of Legal Services - S.C. Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services</i>              |
| Wilbert Lewis     | <i>Program Manager, Community Resource Development Faith-Based Programs - S.C. Department of Social Services</i> |
| Geraldine Miro    | <i>Acting Director of Programs &amp; Services - S.C. Department of Corrections</i>                               |
| Michele Murff     | <i>Program Manager, Housing &amp; Homeless Programs - S.C. Department of Mental Health</i>                       |
| Scott Norton      | <i>Director of Field Operations Support - S.C. Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services</i>           |
| Earle Pope        | <i>Client Services Consultant - S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department</i>                                    |
| Lenard Price      | <i>Employment Field Supervisor - S.C. Employment Security Commission</i>   |
| Thomas Scott      | <i>Director of Residential Services - S.C. Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services</i>               |
| June Ussery       | <i>Director, Community Service Coordinators, Alston Wilkes Society</i>   |
| James Wilson      | <i>Treatment Consultant, Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services</i>                                 |

*Former Team Members include Margaret Kherlopian (DAODAS), Wanda Tarpley (SCDC), and Bruce Bondo (HHS).*

The team began meeting monthly in June, 2004. The team's initial efforts focused on identifying and prioritizing issues that surround offender reentry. Eight major areas of critical concern emerged and those formed the basis of the group's subcommittees. The following subcommittees were formed:

- Comprehensive Release Plan Model
- Reentry System Map
- Employment
- Treatment
- Housing
- Education
- Identification Cards
- Shared Database

Each subcommittee was tasked with developing a problem statement setting forth the issue to be addressed, including reliable data illustrating the depth of the problem. The subcommittees each set concise, individual goals. The subcommittees are expected to recommend options for solving the stated problems and provide implementation strategies. Initial work on the subcommittees has revolved around identifying information and research needs, along with identifying additional members needed to complete the work. The subcommittees are at different stages in their work, with each progressing and expected to successfully meet the deadlines imposed by the team. A brief overview of the subcommittees' progress is provided in the following pages.

### **Comprehensive Release Plan**

The subcommittee has determined that one of their greatest challenges is to identify how agencies can coordinate services and improve access to resources. Their goal is to develop a comprehensive release plan and create a visual display of services and decision points in

coordination with the System Map Subcommittee. The subcommittee plans to examine developments in other reentry sites and visit several states to learn more about best practices. The subcommittee members are Sammie Brown (Team Leader, SCDC), Carl Frederick (SCDC), and Scott Norton (PPP).

### **Reentry System Map**

The services provided to the reentry of inmates into the community are not provided by a single agency. A number of agencies provide services which may be overlapping or duplicative. The provisions of services available have not been documented in any comprehensive manner. The goals of the subcommittee are to identify all the services available to offenders by system providers and to “map” these in a comprehensive illustration highlighting service delivery points throughout the reentry continuum. This subcommittee plans to examine developments in other reentry sites and visit several states to learn best practices. The subcommittee members are Sammie Brown (Team Leader, SCDC), Rhonda Grant (PPP), Teresa Knox (PPP), and Rob McManus (DPS).

### **Employment**

Offenders exhibit a variety of characteristics that greatly limit their employability and earnings capacities. The goals of the subcommittee are to assist inmates in becoming employable and to assist offenders who are reentering society to obtain sustainable employment. Some options being explored by the subcommittee include programs to increase the number of offenders who receive education, GED, literacy, and life skills programs during incarceration; the expansion of vocational training for inmates; allowing inmates access to one-stop center services before release; the establishment of case managers and employment specialists to ensure the

job readiness of inmates; and, the creation of a reentry resource guide for inmates. The subcommittee members are Earle Pope (Team Leader, VRD), Kelly Cordell (DSS), Carl Frederick (SCDC), Lenard Price (ESC), and Brent Garvin (ESC).

### **Treatment**

Among the multitude of issues facing inmates in the reentry process, those which require treatment are significant barriers to the offender being able to gain and sustain employment, provide for families, pay taxes, and live a law abiding life. In South Carolina, 10% of all inmates have mental health issues and nearly half are chemically dependant. This subcommittee has focused its work on the development of the “treatment mall” model that provides comprehensive assessment and service provision and is applicable both inside the institution and in the community. The group has also worked toward identifying low cost programming options and alternatives to traditional treatment approaches addressing single and co-occurring disorders. Cross training for institutional staff and training for those who supervise offenders in the community is a component of a holistic approach to reentry treatment need. The subcommittee members are Shirley Furtick (Team Leader, DMH), Keisha Perry (SCDC), Jodi Gallman (PPP), James Wilson (DAODAS), Mike Easterday (HHS), Ernie Shaw (SCDC), Joette Scarborough (SCDC), Horace Smith (DAODAS), and John Brown (DMH).

### **Housing**

There is a lack of quality affordable housing options available to former offenders. Key barriers to providing these housing options for former offenders include the lack of dedicated and flexible funding sources for development and supportive services, resistance from residents in local communities, and local land use regulations that affect housing cost and affordability. This

committee's goal is to develop an action plan that will address the housing needs of former offenders reentering the community after incarceration, as well as those sentenced to probation who have not necessarily been incarcerated. Some strategies being explored by the subcommittee include: reviewing the identified barriers to addressing housing needs of the former offender populations and identifying specific strategies to overcome these barriers; considering creative ways to partner with local supporters of housing programs for former offenders to address possible resistance from residents in local communities (faith-based groups, community organizations, political leaders); identifying private nonprofit housing developers interested in and capable of providing housing for former offenders; and identifying possible funding sources for development and supportive services that are dedicated and flexible for the former offender populations. Members of the subcommittee are Michele Murff (DMH), Wilbert Lewis (DSS), June Ussery (AWS), Mike Chesser (Upstate Homeless Coalition), and Thomas Scott (PPP).

### **Education**

Education is a critical factor in an offender's ability to succeed in making permanent life changes. Nationally, 2 out of 3 inmates lack a high school diploma. Half of SC inmates cannot read at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level. With diminishing staff and other resources, many times educational and vocational related initiatives are often neglected in favor of security and custody priorities. Inmates in education programs have a recidivism rate 15% lower than those who do not participate in these programs. This subcommittee has focused its efforts on identifying barriers to education, both in the institutional setting and throughout the reentry process. As with other issues, there is a definite need for more partnerships between agencies and organizations to provide educational programming for inmates and address gaps in educational services. One program that the subcommittee has identified is a model for a pilot program in partnership



between technical colleges and local Adult Education Offices. Subcommittee members include Dr. Cherry Daniel (Team Leader, DOE), Gerri Miro (SCDC), and Kathy Jackson (SCDC).

### **ID Cards**

Picture identification cards and Social Security cards are needed in order for offenders to gain and sustain employment and thereby provide for their families, and become productive members of the community. A survey of SCDC institutions revealed inconsistent practices and uneven cooperation from local DMV and Social Security offices. Yet if picture identification cards and Social Security cards are consistently provided, offenders can seek, gain and sustain employment, provide for their families, and become contributing members of the community. Providing proper identification to offenders upon release also has implications for the safety of local law enforcement officers and Homeland Security issues.

The goal of this subcommittee is straightforward: to ensure that when inmates are released they are in possession of a valid state recognized picture identification card. The subcommittee has explored several different solutions. One proposal has been the establishment of a single point of contact at SCDC to coordinate state picture identification cards and Social Security cards. Another proposal is to use SCDC digital pictures as the photo accepted by the Department of Motor Vehicles. The digital photos would be securely emailed to DMV who would in turn create the cards prior to release. Because the Department of Corrections can positively identify their inmates (via fingerprints and DNA) to the satisfaction of outside agencies, the remote preparation of ID cards is feasible. The Director of DMV has been advised of this proposal by letter and a request has been made for technical and policy assistance. The committee also plans to work with representatives the Social Security Administration on this issue. The goal of the ID card initiative would be to insure that every inmate left their institution with a valid state-issued identification

card, resulting in quantifiable improvements in recidivism. Subcommittee members are Rhonda Grant (Team Leader, PPP), June Ussery (AWS), Burke Fitzpatrick (DPS), Earle Pope (VRD), Brent Garvin (ESC), and Thomas Scott (PPP).

### **Shared Database**

The goal of this subcommittee is to establish a statewide database or system for effective exchange of critical information between participating agencies/organizations regarding a common client population. A key issue identified was that most agencies were willing to work together to accomplish the goal, as long as “legacy” systems were not affected. The subcommittee is exploring the possibility of addressing its goals through utilization of the South Carolina Data Warehouse Project being developed by the Budget and Control Board, Office of Research and Statistics. This system is an integrated data base for a broad spectrum of service providers including Legal/Safety Services, Social Services, Claims Systems, Health Care Services, Behavioral Health Services, Health Department, Education Services, and Employment/Disabilities Services. Subcommittee members include Scott Norton (Team Leader, PPP), John Ward (SCDC), Sammie Brown (SCDC), Gerri Miro (SCDC), Rob McManus (DPS), and David Stagg (PPP).

## CONCLUSION

Each subcommittee will report back to the team with its recommendations as the full collaborative team meetings continue on a monthly basis. While there are numerous challenges posed by the realities of offender reentry, the team recognizes that this is also the time of considerable opportunity to tackle these issues. Relying on the combined wisdom of experts and stakeholders here in the palmetto State, the team's goal is to recommend strategic improvements in offender reentry practices. The team's final report will be given later this year and will include detailed implementation strategies for each of its recommendations. The team recognizes that for constructive changes to occur, there must be sufficient political will and commitment of this State's leadership to move forward. The team appreciates the support and commitment of the leadership of stakeholder agencies in empowering the collaborative team to find systemic solutions to the complex challenges associated with offender reentry.

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