

THE TOOL KIT

The Kentucky Department of Corrections Staff Newsletter

Volume 2 Issue 8

Recommendations by the Governor's Reentry Task Force Steering Committee

During the past several months the Governor's Reentry Task Force Steering Committee has examined barriers the offender population face upon release from incarceration. Listed below are the three main barriers and a category of "Other Needs" the Committee identified and maybe considered for legislative action.

HOUSING

- A) Remove housing barriers to enable offenders access to affordable housing options, halfway house facilities and other supportive placements;
- B) Create tax incentives for those who provide housing to ex-offenders to encourage increased access to affordable housing, to include incentives/access to supportive community placement, nursing care facilities and personal care homes;

TREATMENT

- A) Reinvest savings in future fiscal years for treatment services;
- B) Mandate that community substance abuse treatment services be included in Medicaid (Public) benefits;
- C) Create an intensive case management system for justice-involved persons with mental illness;
- D) Ensure adequate Community Treatment Services;

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- E) Review child support obligations (including the criminal process of) during incarceration and post-incarceration treatment to consider implementation of feasible child support payment during treatment/incarceration;

EMPLOYMENT

- A) Create simplified process with reduced cost for expungement of felony and misdemeanor offenses as allowed by law;
- B) Remove/modify permanent employment restrictions based solely on felon status upon reentry;
- C) Promote federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit that provides a tax credit for employers that hire ex-offenders;
- D) Create a state Work Opportunity Tax Credit mirroring the federal tax credit specifically for ex-offenders;
- E) Create and fund prerelease and community-based life skills training for returning offenders to be provided by volunteers;

OTHER NEEDS

- A) Provide automatic restoration of voting rights for ex-felons;
- B) Expand the Department of Public Advocacy's (DPA) Social Worker Program;
- C) Eliminate loss of public assistance and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program assistance.

The Governor's Reentry Task Force Steering Committee is comprised of representative from several state agencies, private citizens and community representatives . The Steering Committee reports to the Executive Committee of the Governor's Reentry Task Force.

"New Direction" Update

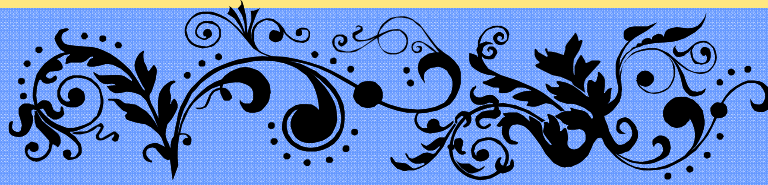
"New Direction" is presently being introduced in all institutions across Kentucky. The offender workbooks are being printed and the classes have started.

In an effort to provide a beginning to address the barriers identified by the Governor's Reentry Task Force Steering Committee specific modules will address some of the identified issues.

Housing Module # 4 describes the types of available housing , where to look for housing , what is affordable for your budget and the Kentucky laws on housing .

Health Module # 10 discusses the importance of health, managing stress, diet, exercise, disease, and a video, "How Healthy Can You Go" that provides the basic tools for care after release from incarceration.

Employment Module # 6 provides information on job seeking and resources, resumes, interview preparation, job applications and mock job interviews.



TIPS FOR INCARCERATED PARENTS

The New Jersey Department of Corrections, Divisions of Programs and Community Services Office of Transitional services has written a guide for parents when they go to prison. Over the next few months we will be providing sections of this guide in the reentry newsletters.

Information provided from "What about Me?"

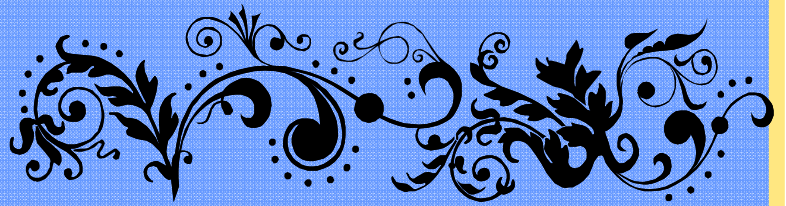
Many of the men and women currently incarcerated are parents of children under the age of 18. It is estimated that 1.7 million children have a father in prison and 200,000 children have a mother in prison in the United States. Approximately ten million, or one in eight children, have experienced parental incarceration at some point of their lives. The link between generations is so strong that half of all juveniles in custody had a father, mother, or other close relative who has been in jail or prison.

Little is known about what happens to children when their parents are incarcerated. Children of offenders have basic needs: a safe place to live and people to care for them in the parents' absence, food, clothing, and medical care. Beyond these basic needs, children have many less tangible needs. When parents are arrested, or placed in jail or prison, their children are often scared, confused, and upset. Often people don't talk about having a family member in prison because it is very personal information. Children, though, may have a lot of questions that need to be addressed.

Children need to be told the truth about their parents' situation. They need someone to listen to their concerns without judging, the friendship of others who share their situation so they can know they are not alone. They need contact with other parents: to have that relationship recognized and valued even under these circumstances. They need to be treated with respect, offered opportunities, and recognized as having potential.

When children are not in contact with their parents, it is a breeding ground for idealization, and when the parent is a big time criminal, they can turn them into legends.

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Why should this information be of interest to you?

Research shows that inmates who stay in touch with their families are more likely to have a smoother transition back into society when released.

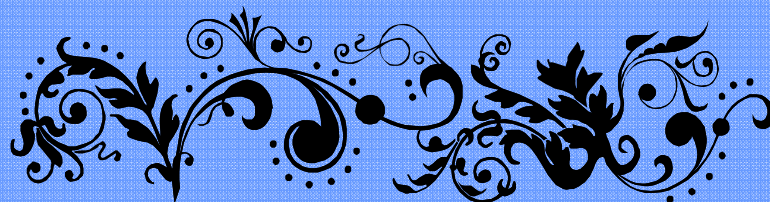
Unless determined by a family court judge, serving time in prison does not mean that offenders have lost the right to make decisions about the care of their children or that their relationships with the children have become any less important. Parenting from prison isn't easy. The offender will probably get frustrated and feel overwhelmed at times. Some family relationships may be strained. Sometimes it may feel like it is impossible to stay in touch with their children. All of these challenges are real, and must be overcome. It will require patience, creativity, and persistence on their part. It is possible to play an active role in the children's lives. The major concerns for most incarcerated parents are:

- 1. Dealing with the emotions of being separated from their children*
- 2. Making decisions regarding the placement and care of their children*
- 3. Maintaining contact with their children during their incarceration*
- 4. Reuniting with their children once they are released from prison.*

In the next several editions of the newsletter we will be providing tips from this guide on the following:

1. Understanding how incarceration affects their children
2. How to establish a working relationship with the person who is taking care of their children
3. What you can do to assist the offender in this situation.

Next edition will discuss "Common Stress Points" for children and family during the arrest, pre-trial, trial, sentencing phase and the initial incarceration.



Why be a Reentry Coordinator?

By Anna Valentine-Kentucky State Reformatory

I can't count the times that I have heard, "I wouldn't want your job." At one time I probably would have said the same thing. But it wouldn't have been based upon the fact I knew what a Reentry Coordinator did but because of the mindset that we are here to keep them confined...why are you helping them leave?

I have been with the Department of Corrections around 9 years. I had no idea what Corrections was about but I was looking for a career change and was hired as a Correctional Officer at the Kentucky State Reformatory. I really liked the job and over the years promoted until I was the dayshift Captain at KSR. Over my years in Security the only interaction I had with an Inmate was basically making sure they were following policy. As Captain, I rarely talked with an Inmate unless he was in trouble and then I talked, he listened and then I sent him to Segregation.

In 2009, I was asked to attend the Reentry conference the Department of Corrections was hosting in Lexington, Kentucky. What I learned at the conference about the challenges Offender's face upon release surprised me. It was something I had not really given any thought to. It never occurred to me that what they face incarcerated is nothing compared to what they will face when they are released. In 2010, I decided I wanted to be part of the process that helps an Offender succeed when he is released and was given the opportunity to promote to a Reentry Coordinator position.

At KSR we have two Reentry Coordinators. My caseload consist of all "odd" numbered inmates. We are also unique as we have several offenders with special needs through the Correctional Psychiatric Treatment Unit and Nursing Care Facility. At any given time I am actively trying to work with 250+ inmates helping them with their reentry needs. Add to that all the other duties like teaching prelease classes, maintaining community contacts, meetings, etc. it is a busy and challenging schedule.

Recently I had an Offender who was serving out on 15 years. He did not have any family contact at all for the last 10 years of his incarceration. Through some internet research I was able to find some previous addresses for his relatives. We sat together and wrote about 15 letters asking them to contact me. Within one week, three of his sisters had called. When he left prison it was to the home of one of his sisters. About 5 months after he was released he called and asked me if I knew of any apartments he could rent. He told me that he was working two jobs and had saved enough money for his own place.

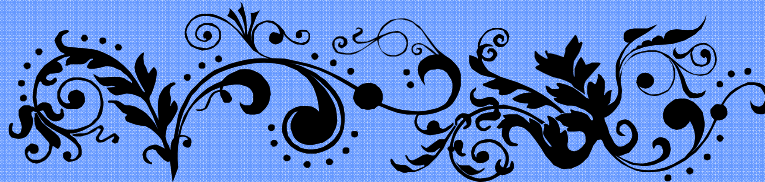
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Anna Valentine, KSR

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Sure we have the Offenders that come back to prison but we are also seeing so many more succeeding and that is one of the most rewarding parts of being a Re-entry Coordinator. So now when people make the statement that they wouldn't want my job I reply back, "Why wouldn't you want my job? My job is to help people succeed."



MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

QUESTION: What is the Risk/needs assessment (RNA) information used for?

ANSWER: RNA information is primarily used today by the supervising agency in the development of an effective case management plan for the felony offender. The case management plan is designed to target the offender's most critical dynamic risk factors. Use of RNA information also allows the staff to focus on those specific risk factors in his or her personal interactions with the offender.

QUESTION: Is RNA information also helpful to the court in the sentencing process?

ANSWER: Yes. Increasingly courts are finding that the availability of accurate RNA information at sentencing allows judges to ensure that the special conditions ordered by the court with respect to the felony level of supervision, treatment, monitoring, and control are properly designed to address the offender's specific and most critical dynamic risk factors. Those special conditions establish the legal framework (the terms and conditions) for the offender's supervision, and thus provide appropriate direction and authority to the staff. Imposition by the court of special conditions that do not address the individual offender's most critical dynamic risk factors are ineffective and needlessly distract and impede both the supervising agency and the offender. Dynamic risk factors also change over time; special conditions must therefore also provide maximum flexibility for the staff.