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Ex-Offenders, Future Neighbors: Why we invest in reentry success

BERNIE LIEVING, REENTRY BUREAU CHIEF & SARAH CLAWSON, EDITOR.

A staggering 95 percent of incarcerated people in New Mexico are released and they often return to the community where their crime was committed. Because any offender today may be your neighbor tomorrow, it is important to give them every opportunity to succeed. In fact, it is counterproductive and inaccurate to pit ourselves against offenders in a game where nobody wins. Instead, we should view ourselves as part of a team where each offender is responsible for working toward his/her future success. The stark truth is that ex-prisoners were once our neighbors and most of them will be again. Their success fosters public safety, individual, family, and community well-being, and tremendous savings in fiscal and human capital.

Society largely forgets about the people incarcerated in our facilities. Responsibility for them has been passed to us by taxpayers, and it is our professional obligation to provide offenders with the basic skills they lack, with an eye on facilitating their success upon their return to society. Given the reality of our responsibility, the Reentry Bureau seeks to change the ways in which we think about offenders and to provide them with the opportunities to address some of the

issues that brought them to prison. These issues include, but are not limited to, drug and/or alcohol addiction, lack of education and employment readiness, mental health challenges, poor coping and adaptive skills, and domestic violence. To address these needs, the Reentry Bureau has established goals and objectives, a few of which are listed below:



- Decrease the number of parole revocations
- Provide evidence-based intensive case management for all offenders
- Increase NMCD collaboration with community health and social service providers
- Create organizational change within the department to foster new ideas and behaviors that support reentry and reform efforts.
- Engage in ongoing research and program evaluation
- Establish reentry centers in appropriate facilities statewide
- Increase public awareness and support for NMCD Reentry and Reform efforts
- Ensure reentry programming is effective through quality assurance and quality improvement
- Decrease Probation and Parole Division reentry and reintegration workload burden
- Expand substance use disorder and mental health treatment capacity in prisons and in the community
- Obtain legislative support for NMCD reentry and reform efforts
- Staff the Reentry Bureau with qualified professionals in order to fulfill its mission
- Enhance cognitive educational and life skills programming in communities to increase “free world” aptitude for success and diminish behaviors associated with prison culture
- Increase housing opportunities for ex-prisoners including halfway house capacity



Community Cooperation

NMCD Partners with Family Justice

SARAH CLAWSON, EDITOR
 As the New Mexico Corrections Department struggles to improve service delivery, the growing pains are difficult; however, the department is one step closer to a major reentry goal: enhanced family services. NMCD was awarded a partnership opportunity with Family Justice, a New York City non-profit organization. New Mexico was one of two states selected from a national pool of applicants. Recent changes in the department made New Mexico an excellent candidate to work with Family Justice on this project. Following the release of Governor Richardson's Prison Reform Task Force recommendations last June, NMCD underwent departmental reorganization that has since resulted in monumental changes. These changes are not only structural, but cultural and they are affecting the way Corrections does business.

The department's forward-thinking, evidence-based environment attracted Family Justice to New Mexico as a partner

in their Bureau of Justice Assistance grant. Family Justice is a non-profit organization that focuses on drawing out the strengths of family and social networks and using them to increase offender success. This focus led them to develop assessment tools that identify the strengths in social networks and apply them to offender interventions. One such tool is the relational inquiry tool. This assessment consists of eight open-ended questions designed to disclose information about an individual's social network and the assets it provides. With this information in hand, corrections professionals can draw on network resources to assist offenders in the reentry transition. Being aware of the dynamics of the social network can also improve offender programming during incarceration and give depth to treatments and interventions.

New Mexico's partnership with Family Justice makes it possible to test the relational inquiry tool here and see if it is an appropriate fit. Family Justice will

train case management staff at Central New Mexico Correctional Facility in Los Lunas as well as Probation and Parole staff in Region II which encompasses the Albuquerque area. FJ will provide support as trained staff use the tool and NMCD will track recidivism among participating offenders.

NMCD is working toward an improved reentry process that draws on existing strengths of family, social, and community networks. Working to build capacity in these networks is an increasingly important goal as incarceration and re-offense rates climb. Through this partnership with Family Justice, NMCD is attempting to ensure that offenders will have a stronger network to return to that is willing and able to assist in the reentry transition. Though this partnership is an important step, it is only the beginning of an evolutionary process that is changing the way New Mexico deals with offenders.

Wings Ministry

SARAH CLAWSON, EDITOR & ANN EDENFIELD SWEET, WINGS MINISTRY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/FOUNDER

As the incarceration rate continues to climb, increasing numbers of families suffer with the loss of a family member to imprisonment. These innocent families are often treated as though they too committed a crime. They are cut off from friends and family, living in poverty, or separated by the incarceration of the primary caregiver. Wings Ministry seeks to unite these unfortunate families with Christian congregations in their communities. These congregations can become a source of support and encouragement as families endure the incarceration of a loved one. Wings also seeks to prepare these

families to receive the returning offender upon release.

The mission of the Wings Ministry is to bring families of prisoners and Christian volunteers together as children of God by:

- Building relationships that transform the lives of families, volunteers and Christian communities
- Conducting joyous celebrations of Christ's unconditional love that break down barriers
- Providing interdenominational mission opportunities for Christian communities worldwide

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Transition planning and case management

SARAH CLAWSON, EDITOR. Over the last six months, new reentry buzz words have been floating in the air. Intensive case management is one of them. The purpose of intensive case management is to promote change and encourage self-guidance and self-control. The case manager acts as a coach, such that he or she is not there to rescue the offender, but offer services and opportunities for success. Since each offender has differing needs, personalities, and motivations, the approach and interventions provided are individualized. The case manager is responsible for continually assessing and referring his or her client to needed department or external services. When an offender is receiving intensive case management, his/her period of incarceration and supervision is carefully planned with interventions, treatments, and programs tailored to specific needs. Intensive case management provides the support that offenders need while increasing the effectiveness of program delivery. Though a case management system is not yet in place, intensive case management is the future of corrections in New Mexico.

Central to successful case management is an appropriate risk and needs assessment that allows for individualized case planning. NMCD recently began a pilot of the Correctional Of-

fender Management Profile for Alternative Sanctions or COMPAS risk and needs assessment. Administered at RDC, the assessment identifies an offender's risks and needs in several categories so that service delivery can be tailored to them.

Following the risk and needs assessment, a plan is developed that guides service delivery and records progress. For New Mexico Corrections, that plan is called the Transition Accountability Plan or TAP. During the term of incarceration, goals and activities are added to the plan that addresses the identified risks and needs. The case manager then uses this tool to track progress and record important observations about how this individual can be best served. As different internal departments interact with the offender, they make reference to the TAP and assist the case manager in recording progress or areas where additional services are needed.

The TAP will be computerized and shared via corrections networks so that its use can be universal. The wonder of modern technology is now making it possible for us to increase our capacity to serve each other, offenders, and communities. As we each interact with the TAP, we will find ourselves performing different functions whether it be entering assessment results, entering goals and activi-

ties, inputting progress, or noting important information. No matter what your interaction with an offender's TAP, you are contributing a vital service to the Corrections Department, the offender, and to the community.

The benefits of such a system are far-reaching. Because the offender assists in the laying of the plan, he or she is invested in it from the beginning and is more committed to its success. In addition, each offender is given responsibility for the success or failure of his or her plan as every opportunity is presented for achievement. The universal use of the plan also eliminates duplication of services between departments and increases the flow of communication regarding treatment. The team-like approach of this system increases collaboration between departments, staff, and offenders. As departments interact to increase the success of each offender, the value of each department's input can be appreciated. Staff members that rarely interact are given an opportunity for free exchange that is focused on the offenders they have in common. With this kind of focused attention and value placed on individual input, offenders will join with corrections staff in working toward reentry success. This united effort is a new hope for all of us that we can make a difference, one offender at a time.



The case manager acts as a coach, such that he or she is not there to rescue the offender but offer services and opportunities for success.

Have an idea?

- Do you want to submit an article?
- Do you have an opinion to share?
- Do you have a topic you want us to cover?
- Do you have a great reentry idea?
- Do you have reentry successes to share?
- We want to know!

STATE OF NEW MEXICO CORRECTIONS DEPARTMENT



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The mission of the New Mexico Corrections Department Reentry Bureau is to reduce the potential for reincarceration by providing prisoners in state custody, and former prisoners on probation or parole, with the comprehensive programming and support services necessary to prepare for, and maintain, successful community reentry and reintegration.

Wings Ministry, Cont.

Wings accomplishes this mission by hosting Christian parties for the family members where they feel welcome and experience Christ's unconditional love through music, an interactive Bible story, doing arts and crafts together, and eating in groups, where they get to know one another and build relationships.

Wings for L.I.F.E. – Life-skills Imparted to Families through Education, is Wings support/empowerment group which just won the APPA – American Probation and Parole Associations' Award of Excellence. Wings for L.I.F.E. teaches manners, life-skills, and much of the educational material for Wings for L.I.F.E. is drawn from Search Institute's^R 40 *Developmental Assets*. These assets are common sense, positive experiences and qualities that help influence the choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible adults. Families are prepared for the return of their incarcerated member through the

Wings for L.I.F.E. Homecoming Workshop. The ministry continues to offer support after the incarcerated individual returns home. Wings also reaches out to local Christian congregations, spreading awareness of these families in need and inviting congregation members to volunteer at Wings Parties.

At Wings for L.I.F.E. meetings families are seated around a dinner table and are given brief instruction on table manners before enjoying a donated meal with volunteers. Volunteers and families in need are able to build friendships and support one another in this setting.

Dorothy, whose grandson is currently incarcerated, attends the Wings for L.I.F.E. meetings for support. "It was good to find others in my situation. Others who gave me hope for my grandson," she said. "Finding people who were not judgmental helped me." Dorothy attends parties regularly and draws encouragement from them that helps her to support her grandson.

Volunteers believe that serving these families has enriched their lives and given them an opportunity to share their faith. The evenings often end with a brief lesson and inspirational message. One such message focuses on the behavioral patterns of geese and how they can be an example for families today. It is included here:

The Goose Story

When geese fly south for the winter, they fly in a very noticeable "V" formation. This instinctive flight pattern has great purpose. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in a V, the whole flock adds at least 71 percent greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own. When a goose falls out of formation it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of solo flight and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the groups lifting power. When the head goose gets tired it rotates back in the formation and another goose flies point. The geese flying behind, honk to encourage those flying up front. Finally, and this is important, when a goose gets sick or wounded and falls out of formation, two other geese fall out with it. They stay with the fallen goose to lend help and protection until it is able to fly or until it dies. Only then do they launch out on their own, or join another formation to catch up with their group.

From the geese we learn that we all need support and sometimes you provide the lift and other times you ride it. When you provide the lift you need the encouragement of those you are lifting and when you ride the lift it is your job to provide encouragement. Each member of the unit, family or community, takes a turn providing lift to the whole unit. We also learn that life is easier when you are working with others who are headed in the same direction that you are heading. We could all learn a little from the geese.

Wings Ministry and Wings for L.I.F.E. was founded by Ann Edenfield after her experiences during the incarceration of her husband. Ann is also the author of a book for families surviving the same experience entitled, *Family Arrested: How to Survive The Incarceration of a Loved One*. If you would like to contact Wings Ministry you can call Ann at 505-291-6412 or E-mail her at AnnEdenfield@WingsMinistry.org.

