

FACILITY REENTRY PROGRAMMING

Introduction to Offender Reentry Services

The Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) offers a range of transitional programming to offenders during confinement and in the community. Many of these resources are organized under the Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan (MCORP), a collaborative effort involving the DOC and other state agencies, county agencies, faith groups, community organizations, and private citizens.

This Backgrounder describes some resources available to offenders in DOC facilities. These resources have been developed through identifying “best practice” models in preparing offenders to return to their communities.

Staffing

Under MCORP, the DOC has committed specific staff positions at most facilities to assure integrity and continuity of reentry services. All facilities with a significant number of releases have an assigned transition program coordinator to facilitate reentry resources. These coordinators are managed and supported by a central reentry team.

Employment Seminars

To assist offenders in preparing for their job search, employment seminars are offered routinely at most facilities. Through a contractual agreement, an employment-focused community nonprofit organization

provides staff who conduct a full day of rigorous classroom work, individual coaching, and practice interviews for offenders nearing release.

Resource Fairs

Transition resource fairs are held annually at most facilities. Community resource organizations and agencies from around the state are invited to participate as exhibitors. Exhibitors typically are government agencies, trade unions, faith-based groups, community nonprofits, and volunteer groups. They represent resources in a variety of offender need areas including housing, employment, family support, personal finance, and mental health. Staff and offenders are invited to attend and meet with exhibitors throughout the day.

Prerelease Classes

A three-day curriculum of prerelease classes and activities is offered at all DOC facilities. The curriculum covers housing, employment, personal identification (ID) documents, health, transportation, family issues, living under supervision, and personal financial management. A prerelease handbook covering these topics is provided to every participating offender. This handbook is also available on the DOC website at www.doc.state.mn.us/publications/documents/prereleasehandbook.pdf.

EMPLOY

MINNCOR, the DOC’s prison industry program, has created EMPLOY – a reentry initiative to

serve offenders working in all facets of industry operations. EMPLOY focuses on helping participants capitalize on industry work experiences and skills acquired during incarceration, connect with employers and jobs in their communities post-release, and provide basic employment verification. EMPLOY also collects data by tracking participants’ employment progress as they reintegrate back into the community.

ID Acquisition

Possession of personal ID documents is critical to every newly-released offender. Most offenders do not have these documents when they are admitted to the DOC.

To assure that as many offenders as possible have ID in hand at release, DOC staff work with newly-admitted offenders to apply for two critical ID documents – a birth certificate and social security card. Application mailing costs are covered by the DOC, and fees for birth certificate applications are paid with offender phone revenues. Once these documents are obtained, they are retained in the offender’s file until the day of release.

Initial attempts to obtain a social security card or birth certificate may not be successful. As part of individual release planning and prerelease classes, efforts to obtain these documents are renewed.

The DOC and the Department of Public Safety (DPS) have partnered to provide photo ID equipment at

most DOC facilities, allowing offenders to secure state photo ID cards or driver license renewals closer to their release date. Staff from various local DPS driver services offices come to the facilities as needed and provide this service. The ID card or driver license is then mailed to the facility for retention until the offender's release.

Health Services Discharge Planning

The DOC Health Services Unit provides specialty release and reintegration services related to medical, mental health, chemical dependency, and sex offender needs.

Medical staff identify soon-to-be-released offenders with unique medical care needs and refer them to the medical release planner for continuing medical care. Behavioral health staff offer release planning services to severely mentally ill offenders and as a component of the chemical dependency and sex offender treatment programs. Continued clinical services form the foundation for a comprehensive behavioral health reintegration plan. Also included in the plan are placement in specialized housing, work or education involvement, and family/friends participation in the offender's community reintegration. All planning is in conjunction with the requirements of correctional supervision.

Health Care Coverage

Many offenders do not have health care coverage in the community for themselves or their families. To address this issue, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) has provided training to all DOC facility caseworkers on applying for state-subsidized health care plans for low-income individuals and families. Written application information is

provided to offenders. Upon request, staff assist offenders in applying for health care coverage.

The DHS has also developed policy to provide consistency in the way county workers process applications.

Introduction to Juvenile Reentry Services

The Red Wing facility provides treatment, education, and transition services for serious and chronic male juvenile offenders. Transition risks and needs are assessed early in a resident's stay and include family, education/employment, peer relationships, substance abuse, leisure/recreation, personality/behavior, and attitude/orientation. As the resident progresses through the treatment process, community-based individuals and groups are invited to provide transition services for the resident while he is at the facility and following release.

When a resident achieves pre-release status, he is assigned to the facility's Transition Services Unit to finalize community reentry plans for employment, education, residence, leisure, relapse prevention, and after-care support systems. Community conferences are conducted to ensure that the plan addresses the risks and needs of the resident.

While on prerelease status, residents are afforded three- to five-day furloughs in the community in order to finalize their plans. During furloughs, residents are monitored and assisted by the facility's regional transition caseworkers. Furloughs also provide the resident an opportunity to process difficult-to-manage events that occurred during the furloughs, with a particular emphasis

on the effectiveness of the resident's Relapse Prevention Plan.

When a resident successfully completes prerelease requirements, he is released on a 90-day, extended-furlough status. During this time, regional transition caseworkers, in collaboration with family members, employers, education personnel, court services, staff, and community-based service providers, monitor the youth's progress. They also interact with family members, employers, education personnel, court services staff, and community-based service providers. Residents who fail to meet furlough conditions may be returned to the facility. Approximately 90 percent of residents successfully complete the extended furlough phase and are then paroled to the community.

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