

**Employment Services for
Ex-Criminal Offenders
Pilot Project**

2010 Report to the Legislature



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BACKGROUND

Laws 2007, Chapter 54, Section 21, mandated the commissioner of corrections to issue a grant to a nonprofit organization to establish a pilot project to provide employment services to ex-criminal offenders living in the North Minneapolis community. The legislation further directed the commissioner to submit a report on the activities conducted by the grant recipient and the effectiveness of the project.

The pilot project was required to provide the ex-offender participants with a continuum of employment services that identified their needs; intervened with them through case management if they were struggling; and provided them with work readiness, skill training, chemical and mental health referrals, housing support, job placement, work experience, and job retention support. The pilot project was also required to work with community corrections officials, faith-based organizations, and businesses to create an array of support opportunities for the participants.

The grant was awarded to Emerge Community Development, which is located in the heart of North Minneapolis. The mission of Emerge is to enhance the social and economic status of disenfranchised people.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Emerge developed a 21-month pilot project called the Northside Reentry Connection (NRC) that sought to assist ex-offenders, who were reentering North Minneapolis, to secure employment. NRC stressed the following evidence-based practices in its delivery: 1) strong worker/client relationships; 2) aggressive job development, placement, and career laddering; and 3) partnerships with community organizations to help stabilize and support ex-offenders in the reentry process. Key program outcomes centered on job placement and retention, connections to community supports, and recidivism reduction.

The NRC facilitated the following services:

- **Work Readiness** – Based on participant assessments, NRC case managers worked with ex-offenders to prepare them for entering the workforce by addressing a number of areas including: interviewing skills, completing job applications and resumes, reviewing basic employer expectations, and developing strategies that take into account personal and scheduling needs and transportation to and from work, where needed.
- **Skill Training** – Assisted participants in accessing two Emerge/City Skills customized trainings done in collaboration with local employers and a number of other external training opportunities.
- **Chemical and Mental Health Referrals** – NRC case managers facilitated and monitored participant connections to mental health and chemical assessments, relapse prevention, and outpatient treatment and ongoing therapeutic counseling.
- **Housing Support** – Case managers worked with participants to secure affordable housing, sustain housing, and provide landlord/tenant advocacy.

- Job Placement – A job developer increased the number of potential employers via two distinct job development strategies including: 1) securing a growing number of social enterprise service contracts from businesses, non-profits, and government units to provide Emerge (temporary) Staffing and StreetWerks community beautification services; and 2) developed a larger pool of employers to hire ex-offenders in permanent jobs.
- Job Retention Support – Once participants were placed in jobs, case managers provided job retention services to foster job and economic advancement. A heavy emphasis was placed on worksite monitoring to ensure a successful transition into work.
- Formalized Partnerships – Partnerships were developed with a wide variety of faith-based and community organizations, businesses, and community corrections officials to meet the needs of ex-offenders reentering North Minneapolis. Organizations included: 180 Degrees, St. Stephen’s Housing, Amicus, Reentry Metro/Ashland/7th Street, Midwest Challenge, Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan, RS Eden, Volunteers of America, Damascus Way, Recovery Resource Center, After-Today Group Home, The NetWork, Salvation Army Harbor Lights, Alpha House, FreedomWorks, Portland House, Micah House, Northpoint Health and Wellness Center, and various faith communities.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

During the October 1, 2007, to June 30, 2009, reporting period, the NRC achieved the following outcomes with North Minneapolis ex-offenders recently released from a Department of Corrections’ facility.

Enrollment and Work Readiness

- 226 participants enrolled and were served by the NRC. Of these:
 - ✓ 81 persons (35%) were classified as Intensive Supervised Release.
 - ✓ 50 persons (22%) Work Release.
 - ✓ 60 persons (27%) Supervised Release.
 - ✓ 35 persons (16%) were not on supervised release or had expired supervised release status.
 - ✓ Of the total served, 43 persons (19%) were identified as sex offenders.
- 86 NRC participants successfully completed at least 6 hours of work readiness training at Emerge:
 - ✓ Internal training offerings were expanded to include both daytime and evening sessions to accommodate participant and halfway-house schedules.
 - ✓ 11 NRC participants benefited from additional external training opportunities.
- 147 participants received referrals to obtain housing and mental and chemical health services.

Project Outcomes

- 90 NRC participants (40% of total participants served) secured 121 positive employment outcomes during the contract period, including:
 - ✓ 90 participants were placed into initial jobs with an average hourly wage of \$8.78/hour.
 - ✓ 23 of the 90 participants were placed in a second or third job during the contract period (due to either loss of their initial job or securing a better-paying job).
 - The average initial wage for second or third job placements was \$9.30/hour (7% increase from initial job placement).
 - ✓ Of the 121 jobs secured by NRC participants, 33 (27%) were temporary or transitional work experiences with Emerge Enterprises (StreetWerks and Staffing).
 - 15 NRC participants provided community beautification services to North Minneapolis and surrounding neighborhoods at \$8.00/hour; 18 were employed in temporary positions at business partner locations.
 - An additional 63 ex-offender participants were employed by Emerge Enterprises during the contract period.
 - Employees of Emerge Enterprises who worked in positions not readily accessible by public transit were provided ongoing van service to and from their worksites by Emerge’s Access to Jobs van transportation.

Job Retention

- 76 percent of employed NRC participants positively retained their employment more than 90 days.
- 51 percent of employed NRC participants were still working at 180-day follow-up.

Recidivism

- Emerge reported that of the 90 participants that obtained an employment outcome:
 - ✓ 9 participants (10%) recidivated - all due to technical violations.¹
- Emerge reported that of all 226 project-enrolled participants:
 - ✓ 33 persons (15%) were known to have recidivated, largely (79%) due to technical violations.¹

¹Information garnered from participant/emergency contact communications, the Department of Corrections’ Offender Locator information, and/or supervising agent communications.

CAPACITY-BUILDING STRATEGIES

Volunteer Development

Emerge has initiated significant efforts to further develop its volunteer base to continue to build capacity and sustain operations. Through the Minnesota Offender Reentry Americorps VISTA project, two full-time job developer positions will be starting in early August (positions last 3-5 years) and will be responsible for agency capacity-building efforts in the area of building key relationships with employers. The positions will similarly be responsible for developing program-marketing materials and implementing new technology within the agency to better track the activities and services provided to area employers.

Technology Improvements

A new wireless computer lab will be opened for use in facilitating basic computer/internet job search classes. Through the Community Technology Empowerment Project (Americorps) a new position will be responsible for developing and facilitating the classes. The new lab will allow development of computer-focused training curriculum geared at further increasing client work readiness and job skills.

Implementation of a comprehensive client-tracking system for agency staff will simplify and improve case management procedures, program evaluation efforts, and program reporting to funders.

Fund Development

Emerge submitted proposals to numerous foundations and government agencies throughout the reporting period and has secured grants from several foundations to help sustain operations and staffing. EmERGE was selected to receive a Justice Assistance Grant American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds in the amount of \$400,000.