



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION AND REHABILITATION

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

Arthur M. Wallenstein
Director

PRRS Community Advisory Committee Quarterly Meeting Agenda Thursday, December 4, 2014 @ 7:30am

Meeting Focus: "Spiritual/Emotional Health"

Attendance: 28 individuals including Larry Tremonti, Tap Taplin, Tony Rene, mentors with Welcome Home; Fred Chandler, Coordinator with Catholic Charities' Welcome Home program; Paul Meyer, community resident and White Flint Public Safety Committee; Carole Clem, Insight Meditation; William Sollod, Maryland Parole and Probation; Arnela Hadzisul, Swedish Correctional Service; Rev. Jeffrey Thames, Hope Restored; Eric Brenner, county resident; Athena Morrow, HHS; Stephen Carter, Joyce Reimherr, Erica Nelson, Luke Czochara, Tyrone Alexander, Stefan LoBuglio, Shannon Murphy, PRRS; Hilary Sigkor-Sirleaf, former Assistant Minister of Corrections, Liberia; Lisa Mandel-Trupp, Zac Trupp, Mara Parker, County Council; Thomas DeGonia II, Esq. and Dr. Diane Scott-Jones, Community Advisory Committee Co-Chairs; three current PRRS Residents and one former Resident.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Community Advisory Committee Co-chairs Dr. Diane Scott-Jones and Mr. Thomas DeGonia II, Esq. convened the meeting at 7:40 am. They welcomed attendees, introduced the topic of the meeting on spiritual and emotional health as part of the year-long theme of CAC meetings focused on "Healthy Reentry." After introducing themselves, they asked that all in attendance to do the same.

2. PRRS Chief's Report Highlights/Updates

Division Chief Stefan LoBuglio discussed and provided a 6-page "Chief's" report which details the activities and accomplishments of the program since the previous CAC meeting in September. He discussed in greater detail several items including: first, a recent federal grant award of \$600,000 to HHS and DOCR to improve mental health services to incarcerated individuals pre- and post-release by community providers using evidenced-based practices; second, in September, PRRS was one of four programs to receive a statewide award for providing outstanding reentry services; third, PRRS recently hosted a career job shadowing day for students in criminal justice at The Universities of Shady Grove; fourth, PRRS recently presented before the state Maryland State Victim's Service Board about the DOCR and Divisions efforts to safeguard the rights and safety of victims; and fifth, the positive results of a recent audit of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. For further detail and a presentation of program statistical measures, please see accompanying "Chief's Report."

3. Spiritual/Emotional Health

The Co-Chairs asked the attendees to respond to the following questions: first, how does "spiritual/emotional" health affect post-release reentry success; second, how does the larger environment in which one lives and observes relationships affect overall well-being; third, how does one measure the status of an individual's "spiritual/emotional" health; and fourth, how can PRRS assist clients develop "spiritual/emotional health" both with services offered onsite and those offered in the community?

Mentors from Catholic Charities' Welcome Home program began the discussion. Mentor Tony Rene indicated that he rarely has focused directly on spiritual issues with the 8 mentees he has had over the years but instead seeks to mentor by example. He has taken them to lunch and finds that just having a normal conversation on a variety of issues proves rewarding and helpful to both parties. Having

mentored 5 residents over 3 ½ years, mentor Tap Taplin opined that older residents have been much more receptive to the mentoring relationship, and that he finds that younger mentees are more resistant and need greater assistance in dealing with frustration and disappointment. The third mentor who spoke, Larry Tremonti, shared that he has had 12 mentees over the years, half of whom were young. He too found that the older individuals generally were more receptive to change, and that this receptivity was more than half the battle in identifying ways to assist his clients. He indicated that he has found it important to work with mentees on clear and simple goals one at a time, and not to overwhelm them with multiple suggestions and tasks. For half of his clients, he has assisted them pursue spiritual interests such as helping with transportation to their churches. He stated that he saw his main task as helping his mentees develop a relationship with their community and their family, and that these relationships lead to emotional good health. He gave the example of a recent mentee who had been in prison for 17 years and who had not seen his family in 20 years. As a mentor, he was able to facilitate the resident's re-introduction to his family.

The mentors suggested the need to identify younger mentors to work with the younger population. One shared the idea of Welcome Home seeking out employers who might be open to supporting their workers performing community service in assisting those returning from incarceration. Welcome Home Coordinator Fred Chandler acknowledged that it is easier for retirees to serve as mentors and younger individuals are often busier with career and family issues. He described his plans to contact fraternities and sororities that are devoted to community service to see if he can recruit younger mentors from these groups. Overall, he added that the mentoring relationship provides residents with a safe haven to discuss their current concerns without fear. From his previous experience as a case manager, PRRS Tyrone Alexander described how his clients would present much more calmly and maturely if they had mentors, and how helpful this was to him in assisting his clients with their full reentry plan. Finally, Athena Morrow added that from a treatment perspective, there are some groups such as AA that will have special gatherings for younger individuals, and that this can be a way to engage them in healthy relationships that lead to emotional stability and better treatment receptivity.

After the mentors spoke, a mentee who was a former Resident of PRRS shared how beneficial his mentoring relationship has been with Tap Taplin. When he spoke, mentee Jorge identified himself as a "recidivist" for 35 years, and that during his last stay at PRC, he had finally reached a point in understanding the great necessity of changing his life. He expressed appreciation for the assistance PRRS have given him with job assistance and other areas, but indicated his mentoring relationship has allowed him to "develop as a human being." He said that his mentor serves as a real life example of the type of man that he wanted to be and that he has continued this relationship after leaving PRRS, meeting once or twice a month and exchanging frequent phone calls. He declared that the mentoring relationship was helping him learn how to live in the community, and contrasted this great challenge with surviving in prison, which for him, was not hard at all.

Co-Chair Tom DeGonia called on a current resident of the program to discuss what his interest was in improving his spiritual and emotional health. John, who is a young man, shared that religion was not of interest to him but that he has attended meditation classes that have helped calm him. He attributed meditation in helping him pause and think more deliberately about his choices. Resident Tom indicated that meditation has helped him bring clarity and reduce stress in his life. He shared that his goal was to think of himself as a normal person and to recover his "humanness" after five years in the federal system. He gave examples of how he felt that in prison, that his interactions with staff and bureaucratic processes were always fraught with disrespect, and that how he appreciates that PRRS staff treat him as a human being with respect and without labels. Finally, a younger resident shared that meditation has helped him bring focus to the thousands of thoughts that crowd his head. He said that it helps him achieve a sense of peace by being able to choose.

Carole Clems, one of the leaders of meditation at PRRS from the Insight Meditation group, discussed that her organization is present in many prisons and jails in the metro region. She described that their mission is to assist individuals understand the importance of developing their inner life and teaching them to take control over their thinking processes. As part of the program's focus on mindfulness, they teach residents about basic brain science and the importance of introducing pause and reflection in the thinking process. To pause and to plan is a goal that they seek to instill in participants. Also, they stress the residents have the choice to think about rehashing negative events or rehearsing future positive ones.

For PRRS residents, she gave two examples of how meditation has helped them. One participating resident reported to him that his grandmother noted a significant change in his behavior and thinking, and asked him how and why he sounded so much more mature. In the case of another resident, meditation has helped him develop a relationship with an estranged son. She explained that this resident had been away from his family for 5 years, and that his son was full of anger for the separation. For him, meditation provided the insight that he was reacting to his son's anger unproductively with sarcasm, and was unintentionally mirroring some of the hurtful exchanges that he had had with his father. Meditation helped him converse with his son more directly and empathetically which has improved his relationship.

At PRRS, Case Manager Stephen Carter shared that he seeks to assist his clients develop all dimensions of their being -- emotional, spiritual, and physical. He shared that while many of the younger residents are particularly focused on developing healthy and fit bodies, they are less familiar with notions that they should work equally diligently on the health of their inner lives. As part of his case management style, he "invites" residents to begin thinking about needed changes in these dimensions. He works with the residents to have them explore programs at PRRS and offsite at AA, a church, or mosque, to see if they can discover a key to develop their spiritual and emotional health. He too referenced the importance of the statements by the mentors and mentee about the great benefits of developing healthy human relationships with others. PRRS Deputy Chief Shannon Murphy added that the program and staff work hard to identify many different options with the recognition that one size does not fill all, and each individual must find their own path to improved spiritual and emotional health.

Concerning the role of the faith community, Rev. Thames shared his efforts to develop a program in Silver Spring that provides a welcome support network for the formerly incarcerated. Called Hope Restored, this program recently received a county grant which will allow it to expand its operations. In dealing with the younger population, Rev. Thames made the point that sometimes he needs to relate to them in a direct and sometime abrupt way to gain their attention and receptivity to participate in programs that can help them develop greater emotional and spiritual health while attending to some of the pragmatic necessities of reentry.

The final comment on the discussion was from the former Liberian Assistant Correctional Minister Hilary Sigkor-Sirleaf, who thanked all those present for his being able to participate in the meeting. He indicated that he was struck in the conversation by the level of caring by mentors, mentees, staff, and community providers, and just how lucky the program and Residents were to have these many connections. He affirmed this is true at the program level but also the national level and that a great strength and advantage of the United States is that individuals regardless of political affiliation do have a collective desire to see all in society develop as humans to their full potential in all of the dimensions of their lives.

4. Adjournment

Co-chairs Diane Scott-Jones and Tom Degonia thanked the participants in the meeting for coming and supporting the Community Advisory Committee this year. They announced that next year, the theme of the quarterly meetings is: successful return to citizenship with meetings in March focused on PRC as a community; in June focused on Montgomery County as a community; in September focused on the

families role; and in December, focused on identifying possible legislative and policy changes to assist returning citizens. For the latter meeting, Delegate Kathleen Dumais has agreed to join the Community Advisory Committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05pm.