



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION AND REHABILITATION

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Director

PRRS Community Advisory Committee Quarterly Meeting Minutes Thursday, September 12, 2013 @7:30am

Meeting Focus: "Building a Career Ladder"

Attendance

Co-Chairs Thomas DeGonia II, Esq. and Dr. Diane Scott-Jones convened the meeting at 7:35am. A total of 36 individuals participated in the meeting this morning including representatives from Montgomery College, Workforce Solutions Group, Montgomery Coalition for the Homeless, Federal Bureau of Prisons, Catholic Charities' Welcome Home Project, Montgomery County Police, County Council staff; Countystat, Maryland Governor's Office on Grants, and clergy representing three different churches and congregations. In addition to PRRS staff, four current PRRS Residents attended and fully participated. A reporter from the County Gazette also attended the meeting.

Chief's Report

Division Chief Stefan LoBuglio presented a four-page chief's report that highlighted four issues: the recent accreditation of the Pre-Release Center from the American Correctional Association; the current construction project to improve the accessibility of PRC for those with disabilities; the convictions of two PRRS Residents for criminal conduct at the Pre-Release Center (assault on a correctional staff member and theft of money at PRC); and a recently released Grand Jury report that was critical of Pre-Release in the areas of building maintenance and the program's strict employment requirements.

Concerning the Grand Jury report, Stefan indicated that there are significant deferred maintenance issues at the PRC, and that the DOCR is working diligently through County processes to address the deficiencies of an aging building. He disagreed though with the characterization of the PRC as almost "uninhabitable." Likewise, he strongly disagreed with the Grand Jury's comments that the program requirement for Residents to find work within 28 days was too onerous. He indicated that PRRS had provided the Grand Jury with monthly tracking data which demonstrated that the vast majority of Residents are employed and are in compliance with the work requirement. The Grand Jury Report is available at: <http://www6.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/docr/pdfs/grandjury-2013-report.pdf>.

Finally, Stefan discussed two other program developments. First, PRRS has developed an exciting new collaborative project with the Graduate program on Museum Education with George Washington University that has placed a graduate student at PRC to develop a museum education project over the course of the fall semester. The project will involve tailoring a museum experience for PRRS Residents based on their assessed interests and needs, and carrying it out. Second, PRRS has begun measuring and reporting recidivism rates. Principal Administrative Assistant Joanna Henriquez presented an ongoing recidivism metric – called the PRRS Reconviction Index – which she is compiling monthly to track one and three year recidivism rates for individuals released from the program. Preliminary results are presented in the Chief's report.

Main Discussion – Building a Career Ladder

The discussion focused on the challenges of helping Residents both find jobs and develop career plans before their release from PRRS. Concerning the former, PRRS staff members shared that they track monthly employment and unemployment statistics, and that in general, most Residents are able to find a job within the 28-day program requirement and most are released from PRRS with private sector employment and savings. For example, in August 2013, 34 of the 42 released

residents left with private sector employment and savings (81%). Of the eight without jobs, four had been in the program for less than 17 days, two were entering full-day treatment program which leaves only two who would have been expected to leave with employment (5%). Concerning career planning, staff members indicated that Residents who obtain jobs will often immediately lose interest in further planning for advancement to other jobs. Partly, staff members surmised, this is due to an incentive problem. While Residents prove motivated to find jobs due to the program's work requirements, income, and the accumulation of diminution credits (time off sentence), the benefits of career planning are less tangible and direct. Another factor though is that Residents are less familiar and comfortable with career planning. Many of them have checkered work histories of short tenure in multiple entry-level jobs, and have not developed longer-term plans that would have included identifying advancement opportunities and further skill-building activities through training and education that would move them towards longer-term career goals.

PRRS staff members have discussed their efforts to increase incentives and resources for longer-term career planning. Earlier this year, PRRS began providing additional diminution credits for Residents who continue to advance in the program's "six-levels-of-privilege" system. Joyce Reimherr provided a quick overview of several internet-based resources available for Residents in the PRC Career Center to engage in career planning. They include the U.S. Department of Labor's O-Net, American Career Information Network, and American's Job Exchange (<http://www.onetonline.org/> <http://www.acinet.org/> <http://www.americasjobexchange.com/about-us>). Also, Montgomery County representatives shared that their website now includes a career planning resource called Career Coach (<http://cms.montgomerycollege.edu/careercoach.html>).

Several Residents commented favorably on the resources and staff assistance provided in the career center, and indicated that they believed the key was the mindset and motivation of the Resident. They shared that they understood that ultimately they were responsible for selling themselves to employers and for developing solid plans for their futures. One Resident described his progress at PRRS: he initially focused on regaining his driver's license, obtaining clothing, and developing a reentry plan; he then worked with his WRC to obtain a job/training program with DC Central Kitchen; he continues to develop and complete daily "To Do" lists and to improve his computer skills. A Work Release Coordinator added that successful Residents have a game plan, stick to it, and know their strengths and interests.

Montgomery College representatives discussed the efforts to extend college scholarships to individuals leaving the County's correctional systems and to support entrepreneurial interests. They shared that more than ten counselors from the college attended a college fair at the Pre-Release Center in August, and were struck by the interest and respect shown by the PRC residents in the college programs. For some of the counselors, the event highlighted for them the many qualified individuals in corrections who could benefit from classes and programs offered at the college. For those with disabilities, one of the college representatives discussed the need to develop internships through a greater outreach to employers.

Representatives from Montgomery Works added that the success of PRRS Residents at Montgomery College was due to the excellent work between the College, PRRS, and Montgomery Works to conduct real skill assessments and to identify truly motivated Residents. Then, these students were able to succeed in classes without the stigma of their status as incarcerated individuals. Only the College program administrator knew those coming from PRC; the instructor and fellow students were not informed as these Residents had been vetted during the application process. Montgomery Works representative also added the importance of looking for "Returns on Investment" for programs like these that provide soft and hard skill training.

Several of the representatives from the clergy described the need to conduct greater outreach with employers and the larger community. One minister indicated that he is developing a group of volunteers to work with PRC Residents, and in doing so, these volunteers will become larger advocates for opening up opportunities for individuals returning from incarceration.

Pre-Release and Reentry Services Division