

## **IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS**

### ***“ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS THROUGH IMPROVED RELEASE PLANNING”***

#### **Re-Design of DOC Offender Re-entry Program**

During FY 2005, the Department of Corrections received a Charter Agency grant of \$25,000 to fund a quality management work project to improve transition planning from the time of admission to prison to release. The purpose of the work was to design an effective and consistent pre-release transition planning process to be implemented across Iowa's correctional system thereby saving prison beds by reducing offender stays in prison and improve offender transition outcomes.

The result of the project is the design of an “Offender Re-entry Program” beginning at the time of reception to Oakdale and continuing until the offender re-enters the community. The new re-entry design addresses such issues such as:

- Release Planning Beginning at Reception
- Standard Assessment Battery conducted at Reception
- Standard Offender Re-entry Case Management Plan
- Targeted Release Dates
- Core Treatment Assignments

This Offender Reentry Program essentially changed the way the offenders are served by the DOC. The reentry process now begins at the point the offender enters the system and follows the offender throughout his/her supervision by the DOC and/or the Judicial Districts.

#### **State Re-Entry Coordinator Position**

In 2008, the DOC established this position that works with all state correctional facilities and judicial district departments of correctional services. This position is responsible for oversight of policy change, process change and development, and training for all DOC program staff. More importantly, this person works closely with Wardens, District Directors, Treatment and Security Directors to develop the necessary processes to make offender transition successful. The result of this coordination is a more integrated method of offender supervision and interventions, better utilization of programming resources, and ultimately increased success in offender reentry and resulting decrease in recidivism.

#### **Institution and Community Release Coordinator Positions**

At the same time the DOC also established these positions to perform the following re-entry coordination:

##### ***Institution Release Coordinator***

- Meets with offender 180 days and 60 days prior to release to verify appropriate release residence.
- Contacts Community Release Coordinator to verify release residence eligibility at 180 days prior to release. If residence is not acceptable, works with case manager to identify other options.
- Reviews case plan for identified follow-up treatment needs in the community.

- Maintains contact with Community Release Coordinator until appropriate release residence is secured.
- Coordinates release programming, as needed, to include Social Security card applications, CPC applications.
- Finalizes Release Plan with offender, counselor, Community Release Coordinator and other interested parties.

### ***Community Release Coordinator***

- Meets with offenders in prison to review release plans and begins to identify the transition team
- Arranges and monitors offender services;
- Provides cognitive and victim impact programming
- Provides for regular monitoring and follow-up with offenders;
- Coordinates offenders' physical and programmatic transition into the community;

### **Re-Entry Case Management System**

Part of the Offender Re-entry Program includes a comprehensive re-entry case management system with the following elements:

- Initial planning for release when offenders are incarcerated;
- Completing assessments to identify risk and needs;
- Developing a Case Management Plan based on the 3 highest needs;
- Identifying a targeted release date that is used to prioritize treatment programming

The case plan also focuses on housing as well as treatment issues. The goal is to have appropriate housing arranged prior to release so that the likelihood of homelessness is reduced.

### **Transition/Release Planning**

A critical aspect of successful offender re-entry is transition planning. Elements of transition planning include:

- A Projected Release Report generated monthly to identify institutional offenders who are within 180 days of release from an institution and who intend to reenter one of Iowa's eight judicial district departments of correctional services.
- Initial contact with Community Based Corrections (CBC) when an offender is within six months of their release date to begin joint planning for the offenders release;
- Second contact with CBC within two months of the targeted release to create a final release plan so that offender is prepared for release
- CBC is prepared to assume supervision when the release decision is made
- Housing arrangements are established prior to release

## **GAPS IN SYSTEM – ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED**

Offenders who Discharge Sentences and are no longer under supervision of the DOC.

Shortage of adequate housing that may require offenders to spend extra time in an institution or a Residential Facility while trying to secure housing.

Offenders who need structured settings due to mental health or substance abuse issues or who just can't return to the address they were at before (parents upset, person doesn't want them back due to arrest and/or related issues, etc.) These cases can be challenging and sometimes when we cannot find a place for them to go, they spend longer time in correctional facilities.

Specific Housing Regulations – some homeless facilities require that the offender be out of jail 24 hours or to provide documentation on their income or lack thereof which is too complicated for some persons to do on their own and too uncertain for DOC. Or persons need to be homeless for at least one night to be eligible for some places.

Housing issues are a constant concern and the frequent threat of homelessness looms right around the corner with many offenders.