

## Challenges and Accomplishments August 2017

In less than two years, Project New Opportunity has met and exceeded the challenge of Obama Administration officials and justice reform advocates. Federal prisoners released early by presidential commutations and the US Sentencing Commission's retroactive changes to federal sentencing guidelines needed a proactive and well-planned approach to reentry and to establishing independent, self-supporting lives after years of incarceration. PNO embraced and accomplished this goal.

Attorney Malcolm C. Young, with Marsha Weissman (then Executive Director of the Center for Community Alternatives), designed PNO to improve the federal reentry process. For its clients, PNO improved coordination between the Bureau of Prisons, the BOP's contract halfway houses, and Federal Probation. PNO helped its clients communicate and prepare for their release back to their families and communities after years of separation.

The Open Society Foundations quickly supported the project by awarding a grant to CCA to implement PNO as a pilot project. Even before PNO launched in Washington, D. C. on April 27, 2016, it had selected federal inmates returning to the Eastern District of Virginia and the Northern District of Illinois for service. Two months later, in July 2016, Project New Opportunity hired Norman Brown, to whom President Obama granted clemency by commuting his life sentence, as PNO's Deputy Project Director. That same month the Eastern District of Pennsylvania became the third location selected by PNO for services. Today, PNO is delivering reentry support daily in all three regions and is achieving positive results.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Speedily designed and built a nimble, first-of-its-kind reentry program to benefit federal prisoners:
  - Interview guides, training materials and surveys of leading reentry directories and services in selected areas.
  - Customized intranet (the "Iglou") for secure file-and information-sharing among Project Staff and Consultants across localities and a repository for case data.
  - Email and phone systems to ensure a professional setting, accessibility and confidentiality in client communications.
  - A rich web presence ([www.projectnewopportunity.org](http://www.projectnewopportunity.org)) with information for clients and their families, resources for research, descriptions of key reentry-related organization and a platform for PNO's policy statements.
- Forged a dynamic team: Attorney Malcolm C. Young with four decades' achievements in criminal justice and sentencing reform; Norman Brown with years of experience counseling inmates on the inside and teaching courses on reentry for fellow inmates; Reentry Consultants, the majority of whom have been incarcerated and all of whom are informed and sensitive counselors for PNO's clients; and, the CCA research and leadership team under Executive Director David Condliffe.
- Successfully implemented strategies to inform federal prison inmates of PNO's services: through their Federal Defenders; with notices posted by BOP's reentry coordinators; by word of mouth

and through social media; with a campaign utilizing Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM's) 30,000-inmate email contacts; and, by announcements sent by Federal Probation in Washington to district offices.

- Reached across agency lines to collaborate with: BOP's senior staff; leading local reentry organizations; federal defenders; federal probation officers and offices; administrators of federal Halfway Houses in Chicago and Philadelphia; Reentry Coordinators in the Philadelphia offices of the U. S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania; and, Federal District Court Reentry Courts.

#### SERVICE TO CLIENTS

- Assistance and advice provided to more than 150 federally-incarcerated individuals.
- A client-driven reentry planning process that focuses on one or more goals and/or challenges.
- Provide assistance on personal issues by engaging PNO Reentry Consultants, most of whom have themselves experienced reentry. These types of concerns are typically overlooked by reentry programs and include: client's anxiety in advance of release; post-release fears of being watched, confronted from ahead or jumped from behind; inability to make a firm decision or respond to multiple choices; desire to reunite with a child or lost relative; or, the urge to retreat from contact with others.
- PNO Reentry Consultants connect their clients to resources to assist with material problems confronting them: from homelessness and unemployment to dealing with accumulated traffic tickets or child support.
- Developed and disseminate a "PNO Returning Citizens Checklist" for applicants and other federal inmates not eligible for PNO's services due to location or the manner or timing of their release.

#### OUTCOMES

- PNO clients are striving to succeed. To date none are known to have been arrested or charged with a violation of conditions of release.
- PNO clients are making the transition from prison to freedom, into employment and responsibility. With assistance by PNO staff and Reentry Consultants, they have been more fully prepared for release, surmounting hurdles and overcoming obstacles.

#### NEXT STEPS

- PNO is in the process of documenting the quantitative outcomes of the pilot project.
- With resources, PNO will develop the capacity to assist new clients over a twelve month period. At present, a budget of \$335,000 supports PNO's research, advocacy and a caseload target of 180 clients who are coming home through three federal jurisdictions. With additional funding PNO could add jurisdictions and serve additional people.
- In order to expand capacity, within the first three months of new funding, PNO will identify, orient and train additional Reentry Consultants.
- The long-term goal is to introduce and expand PNO's highly-replicable program model to community-based organizations led by impacted individuals, faith communities and non-profit service providers, greatly extending the reach of PNO's successful program model.

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