

PNO's Program and Accomplishments

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) is the largest prison system in the country: 196,455 inmates at the end of 2015, almost 13% of the nation's 1,526,792 total. Each year the BOP releases 60,000 individuals from its custody. But the BOP has long lacked a proactive, well-planned and coordinated approach to reentry and to providing the assistance that would help each returning prisoner establish independent, self-supporting lives after years of incarceration. Among officials and criminal justice experts, concern grew in the fall of 2015 because of the "early release" of federal prisoners by presidential commutations and as a result of the US Sentencing Commission's retroactive reductions in sentences for drug crimes.

Attorney Malcolm C. Young, with Marsha Weissman (then Executive Director of the Center for Community Alternatives), designed PNO as a pilot project to improve the federal reentry process, focusing exclusively on recipients of clemency and of shortened sentences in drug cases. They created a program model that helps each individual prepare in advance for their return to their families and communities and that provides continuity as individuals were transferred from distant federal prisons to the BOP's contract halfway houses and then to the supervision of Federal Probation. PNO's program is strengthened by the leadership of formerly incarcerated individuals who have successfully navigated a difficult path to freedom to advise and guide PNO clients as they make the same transition.

PNO launched in Washington, D. C. on April 27, 2016 by which time it had arranged to serve federal inmates returning to the Eastern District of Virginia and the Northern District of Illinois. 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, establishing a model for federal reentry that can readily be replicated in many federal jurisdictions.

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 "Igloo") 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) 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: 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.

≈