

Community Colleges & Re-Entry

A Panel Discussion at the “Raising the Bars”
Conference at the Rutgers Center for Women and Work

October 17, 2008

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Why it is important for community colleges to get involved in prisoner re-entry efforts?

CCs can respond to a problem which has huge implications for:

- The economy (e.g., state budget, readiness of workforce, willingness of employers to locate in communities...);
- Public safety (e.g., livability of neighborhoods);
- Public health (e.g., mental health, HIV-AIDS);
- Family welfare (e.g., viability of families of offenders).

Some funding is available to support re-entry services.

How are NJ community colleges already involved?

CC' s are providing:

- (a) educational and other services to prisoners and ex-offenders, including:
 - non-credit and credit courses;
 - links to jobs (through courses and job development);
- (b) leadership to build awareness, coordination, and resources for local re-entry services, and
- (c) professional development to providers of re-entry services.

Union County College *(part 1)*

Long history of serving ex-offenders, especially in its non-credit adult education and workforce programs.

In 2007-2008, UCC has (with support from the Nicholson Foundation) launched a prisoner re-entry initiative with:

- instruction and job development at Elizabeth Community Resource Center (and possibly other locations);
- leadership to build awareness, coordination, and resources for local re-entry services;
- professional development to UCC staff who will be providing re-entry services.

Case Study #1

Union County College *(part 2)*

instruction and job development at Elizabeth Community Resource Center (and possibly other locations) UCC offers:

- educational assessment, counseling, referrals;
- instructional activities in:
 - career planning,
 - work readiness,
 - computer,
 - financial literacy,
 - occupational certificate classes,
 - guest speakers, and
 - media studies.

(Technology is integrated into above activities.)

- job development.

One Stop will provide links to social services.

Case Study #1

Union County College *(part 3)*

UCC is also providing leadership to build awareness, coordination, and resources for local re-entry services:

- Hosting monthly meetings of Union County Parole Board Task Force (to share information, identify needed actions to develop a system for coordinating services);
- Writing funding proposals and testifying on behalf of local re-entry services;
- Reaching out to other agencies (e.g., faith-based organizations, law enforcement, mayor's offices, County Jail) to explore options for joint re-entry initiatives;
- Included prisoner re-entry as a focus in "White Paper on Workforce Learning in Union County" for WIB.

Case Study #1

Union County College *(part 4)*

UCC is also providing professional development for re-entry service providers. This includes:

- staff workshops and a Professional Certificate Program for Adult Educators, to build UCC staff expertise to deliver high-quality adult basic education services to various populations, including ex-offenders;
- program improvement projects in which UCC staff are developing curricula to use with ex-offenders;
- (possible) Continuing Education certificate course for re-entry service providers.

Case Study #1

Union County College *(part 5)*

Lessons learned to date:

- Partnerships take time. Leadership; good planning; willingness to try something new; clear goals, roles, and MOUs are needed.

- Need to understand and use effective practices including:
 - curricula customized to the special needs of various inmate and ex-offender populations,
 - well-prepared staff (paid and volunteer),
 - career pathways (with employer and union involvement) and non-credit-to-credit transition,
 - well-equipped facilities,
 - integration with social services (including housing, healthcare, etc.)

- Other agencies need to take active roles to build a re-entry system which starts prior to inmates' release.

Atlantic Cape Community College

- Long history of working with local community providing workforce and literacy training in Atlantic and Cape May Counties:
 - Leveraged NJDOL and Title II funds
 - Job Readiness-Beyond Bars (2002)
 - Literacy services at Atlantic County Justice Facility. Partner with Cape May Vo-Tech to provide literacy services at Cape May County Justice Facility.(2002-present)
 - Provided Job Readiness skills/Job Coach for Borgata Casino and Spa (pre-opening to post-opening)

Atlantic Cape Community College

- Working with WIB, community and faith based organizations to do a needs assessment, and identify gaps of service.
 - Goal is to increase services in the community not duplicate services existing in the community.
- Atlantic County Parole Board's Education and Employment Task Force
- Atlantic County Criminal Justice Advisory Board
 - Focus-Reduce recidivism rate

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