



SAFER COMMUNITIES STRONGER FAMILIES

Mid-Year Report

October 1, 2018 – March 29, 2019

Project Funded by

Michigan Department of Corrections

Overview

Now in its fifth year of service, Safer Communities Stronger Families (SCSF) is a community-based alternative sentencing and diversionary program administered by Goodwill Detroit's Flip the Script employment and training program in partnership with the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) and the Wayne County 3rd Circuit and 36th District Courts.

Throughout its history, SCSF has provided a viable alternative sentencing option that offers cognitive, educational and employment programming to moderate and high risk offenders granted parole by MDOC, as well as those who receive probation from the Wayne County Third Circuit Court Judicial Branch.

Since its inception, SCSF's objective has remained the same: create safer communities in the City of Detroit-Wayne County by decreasing the number of men and women, ages 16-39, committing first and second non-violent but serious offenses and reduce their contact with the criminal justice system.

A 12-week program that begins with five weeks of gender specific, personal accountability training, cognitive restructuring and conflict resolution preparation, SCSF is an immersive process that "re-humanizes" men and women who have long been desensitized to both the trauma they have experienced throughout their lives, as well as the disruption levied upon communities and families as a result of their behavior.

As has been true in previous years, a gradual integration into mainstream society leads to increased success. This means Flip the Script must continue to offer guidance and support beyond the 12 weeks allocated to SCSF. Our experience shows it requires 18-24 weeks of active engagement to see long-lasting and sustainable change in a participant.

The profile of a SCSF participant remains consistent: undereducated, often functionally illiterate, vulnerable brown and black men and women. Due to housing and food insecurities, coupled with the lack of a stable and disciplined home environment, they have developed unconventional and often criminal behavior to survive. Our ability to address the day-to-day needs and "baggage" our trainees bring with them means the difference between someone who is successfully diverted from the criminal justice system and someone who reverts back to an unsavory way of life in an effort to "get by".

Although COMPAS may score some SCSF participants on the low to moderate end of the risk/needs assessment, they remain a concern due to various levels of instability and associations that, without aggressive community based intervention, could lead them to become medium to high risk, and most likely repeat felony offenders.

Beyond the statement of work of providing education recovery, employment placement and career development assistance, SCSF also offers support in obtaining legal identification: state identification, birth certificate, driver's license.

Flip the Script’s Center for Working Families Financial Literacy allows on-site staff to evaluate credit reports and offer guidance on how to safe-guard against identity theft, which is an on-going challenge for vulnerable populations.

To actualize the recommended role of Gatekeeper, our team has implemented a triage approach among several staff members to complete intake and enrollment with a prescribed script for orientation of all participants, one-on-one meetings to discuss their service interest, personal goals, and review of one’s risk assessment prior to official enrollment. This process has resulted in a more effective engagement of participants and awareness of more than one staff person’s involvement with a participant’s service enrollment and related activities for consistency, continuity and accountability.

Logic Models have been developed for enrollment and intake, employment services process and education recovery services and submitted to MDOC at our site visit conducted on February 11, 2019.

We are forwarding to our MDOC Program Manager any referrals that do not meet the risks and needs criteria established for follow-up.

Community-Based Alternative Sentencing Diversionary Program

With current enrollees at 69 and two remaining cohort start dates for this current fiscal year, May 13 and July 15, SCSF is projected to meet its goal of 185 enrollees.

This service component continues to rousing success and further proves Flip the Script’s “Rites of Passage” life and social skills modules, academic and employability skills development, time limited paid transitional work experience, and subsequent job placement and job retention coaching and services “delivers” and lives up to its evidence based model distinction.

30-day employment retention remains a challenge often requiring 2-3 job placements over several weeks before reaching that critical benchmark. That said, once a participant clears the 30-day hurdle, the likelihood of them reaching 60 and 90-day retention improves significantly.

During the October 2017 through September 2018 fiscal year, SCSF showed improvement in the 30/60/90-day retention that allowed us to begin developing strategies that will assist participants in retaining employment for six-months to one-year.

Probationers are assigned social/life skills case managers and a workforce development and placement professional who navigate participants to a level of maturity previously not achieved. Flip the Script works to develop young men and women who are at the most foundational level have severely underdeveloped social, cognitive and educational skills. Without our approach, the majority would be susceptible to incarceration.

SCSF continues to demonstrate that by providing young men and women support that extends beyond the correctional and criminal justice systems, we can effectively prepare probationers for sustainable success.

Additional participant cohorts are scheduled May 13 and July 15.

Education Recovery

SCSF is currently 43% to its goal of providing 175 participants, 18 years of age and older, with education recovery assistance. GED preparation or high school completion has remained consistent; with an upward trend each year.

Education Recovery (GED preparation) enrollees/probationers for FY2018-2019 currently total 76. (This number includes the GED Only enrollees from this fiscal year).

Many of SCSF's participants come from impoverished backgrounds plagued by academic underachievement. Goodwill Detroit's-Flip the Script creates a positive and mentally enriching environment that helps remove the mental blocks our probationers bring into the classroom. Team building activities, puzzles, math, vocabulary challenges, and board games (Scrabble, Brain Quest, and Jeopardy) are used to stimulate learning and to create an atmosphere that will boost their self-confidence.

These techniques help to develop concentration and work to combat self-defeating attitudes in achieving academic success. Many of our probationers lack discipline to focus in a classroom setting for an extended period of time. Most dropped out of school at or around the 8th or 9th grade; therefore, it requires patience, love and creativity to inspire them toward academic success.

Helping our probationers to understand the realities of thriving in the 21st century and the importance of educational success in order to be a productive citizen is essential to their matriculation through GED preparation and progress toward completion.

Many of our probationers require a minimum of a year to accomplish their educational objectives. Many probationers return after completing their 12 weeks with SCSF and later achieve GED completion.

Our motto is: success is the best motivation for academic progress and achievement. We are in constant pursuit of ongoing success, providing incentives and positive verbal feedback. Our classroom is set up to engage smart board and white board instruction, as well as one-to-one learning instruction. We remove distractions to learning: cell phones, ear plugs, etc., and help participants build up their concentration.

Every trainee is given individual support in specific areas where their skill level is lacking. Every four weeks we test our trainee's progress and identify those who have shown grade improvement.

About 75% of probationers dedicate a minimum of 10-12 hours of classroom participation per week (at least three days, three hours) and many of them take worksheets home regularly.

From October 2018 through March 2019, we have averaged 128 hours of classroom instruction (per month), serving a total of 20-25 trainees per day and an estimated 60 per week.

Education Recovery has averaged 13 new enrollments per month. A total of 56 probationers have made one grade improvement during the past three months. More than 80% of new SCSF probationers are in need of GED preparation instruction and training services. Of those, an estimated 12-15% are functionally illiterate. An estimated 60% of our new enrollees are at or below a 6th grade reading and mathematics skill level according to their TABE Test scores upon entry into the program.

Those individuals who test below 3rd grade are placed on our remedial track with a focus developing their basic reading and math skills. These individuals are unlikely to improve their skills enough to acquire a high school equivalency, many having undiagnosed deficiencies such as, dyslexia, ADHD, or some other mental health challenges.

This factors heavily as it relates to educational outcomes/result percentages. The majority of functionally illiterate probationers require extensive one-on-one instruction in order to progress toward meaningful employment. Many would be better served through a traditional literacy program.

During the first four -weeks of GED instruction the educational staff helps the probationers discover their learning style, current academic level, and identifies specific barriers like anxiety taking tests, learning math or writing phobia, comprehension problems, that may have previously impeded their ability to learn in a traditional setting.

The TABE Test is used to evaluate the individual's readiness for GED success. Those who score at or above 9.0 (9th grade) in any of the four subject areas (Reading, Basic Math, Applied Math, Language Arts) will require four to six weeks of classroom preparation before beginning their GED track. Those who score between 5.0-8.0 (5th – 8th grade), traditionally require four to six months' preparation to make adequate grade improvements to begin their GED track.

Participants who score below 5.0 (below 5th grade) will likely require an intensive literacy program in order to gain the foundation needed to pursue their High School Equivalency test; while those who have serious academic deficiencies (grades 3 or below) need one-on-one assistance in a special needs environment.

Any probationer's grade improvement is contingent upon three factors: regular attendance (three or four times a week, for a minimum of 3 hours); identifying and supplementing academic weaknesses (i.e. reading, decoding and/or comprehension, basic math functions: addition, subtraction, multiplication, division; science and social studies language, chart and graph reading, etc.); and documented daily successes in their course work.

A hindrance to academic success for some participants is the requirement that they be employed while pursuing their GED. As a result, approximately 95% of our participants once employed, no longer have access to daily classroom instruction in order to complete their GED.

Although we offer Saturday courses from 8:30 a.m. to noon, for the majority of probationers, the hours of Flip's GED program, 9:00 a.m. - 5:45 p.m., does not allow time for persons that are employed an after work option to attend class. Especially considering the majority of probationers rely on public transportation.

To formally address this challenge, in the spring of 2019, trainees who work and are unable to attend GED classes will have access to our GED Online Academy. This will allow them to complete their GED prep work from home with access to a computer or tablet. With this additional option, we will be able to better service those probationers who are employed, and increase the number of those working and who are ready to matriculate through their GED.

During this quarter, 10 individuals completed their GED, and 34 probationers have passed one or more tests in their GED matriculation.

Partial GED Completers October 2018 through March 2019: 34

Total GED Completers October 2018 through March 2019: 11

Current GED Pass Percentage: 70%

Beyond Jobs Women's Empowerment Services

One of the new key challenges identified for the Women's Program is our inability to service low to medium risk COMPAS scores of our women. SCSF was required to decline six women who met all program criteria, but their COMPAS scores were deemed too low to qualify for our services.

Court Ordered referrals/MDOC referrals have increased from the Third Circuit Court Judges and Michigan Department of Corrections- MDOC. However, after the completion of the COMPAS with MDOC probation officers, the women's scores are resulting in low/med Violent Risk factors (due to their crime history or lack thereof) and the answers to their questionnaires which result in individual's ineligible for services.

The COMPAS Scores are used to determine the supervision monitoring level of that probation; however the MDOC Probation Officers and the Third Circuit Court Judges know that the barriers that exist with many of the offenders can be addressed and possibly eliminated with the program services FTS offers such as the employment placement assistance, work readiness clothing, GED preparation, testing services, housing, childcare and shelter resources which can aid in the probationer staying focused on completing the requirements of their probation.

Modification of the women’s COMPAS Score requirements will allow the acceptance requirement at minimum the Med/ Low or Low/ Med VFO- (Violent Felony Offense) and Non VFO- (Violent Felony Offense) Risk Factors that would potentially increase the number of women referrals for services.

With current enrollment at 16 women and 10 job placements, we project to enroll up to 40 women in cohorts scheduled May 13 and July 14.

Corrective Action/Continuous Improvement

1. Fully implement in April, new GED and academic testing tools and computer systems to expand participant’s acceleration towards their education equivalency achievement.
2. Continue internal strategies focus on team efforts to facilitate competitive employment placement achievement and retention stability at first job placement, thereby reducing the the need for second and third job placements.
3. Continue case managers’ direct communication access with probation officers for ‘real time’ conversation and feedback regarding participants program non-participation for timely follow-up action.