

Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative 

MPRI e-news

THE MICHIGAN PRISONER REENTRY INITIATIVE; CREATING SAFER NEIGHBORHOODS AND BETTER CITIZENS

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Creating a Seamless Transition from Prison to Community

A conversation with Warden Vasbinder, Cotton Correctional Facility; Warden Curtis, Cooper Street Correctional Facility; and Deputy Riley, Parnall Correctional Facility on how the prison and parole staff is working together to reduce crime.



The Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative (MPRI) has brought positive change to prisons. Today, prisoners in the MPRI program prepare to successfully transition back to their communities while they are still in prison. “Before the MPRI, prisoners were paroled and there wasn’t the type of preparation there should have been. Prisoners left prison and then began to try to find a job, get back with their family, address a substance abuse problem while returning often to the same environment that led to crime in the first place,” observed Warden Curtis. With the MPRI, prisoners prepare for employment, family reunification, and substance abuse recovery prior to release.

Transition Accountability Planning

Through the MPRI, local transition teams comprised of community service providers, come into prisons to work with prisoners on issues that, if left unaddressed, may lead to crime. “There is no magic wand to make every prisoner successful; we are dealing with human beings but Transition Teams increase a

prisoners’ likelihood of becoming a productive citizen and to not recommit crime,” said Warden Vasbinder. Deputy Riley commented that, “the MPRI fights crime by getting to the root of the problems that lead a prisoner to crime.” At the Cooper Street Correctional Facility, four Parole Agents actually have an office in the prison. They work with the Resident Unit Managers, the Assistant Resident Unit Supervisors, the Transition Team and the prisoner to develop a Transition Accountability Plan (TAP). The TAP is completed using a number of different sources:

- A COMPAS Risk Assessment is given to establish what criminogenic needs exist
 - Prisoners are interviewed
 - Past records are reviewed
 - The family situation is taken into account
- From this information, the TAP is developed with the prisoner. “People need to understand, people in prison have had problems in life and have been unsuccessful in life. Each prisoner has different needs and the MPRI addresses their specific needs through the TAP,” said Warden Curtis.

Although no approach will completely eliminate crime, the MPRI reduces crime and the rate of those returning to prison.

2 Local business gets involved

Cascade Engineering provides training to get former prisoners working. [more >](#)



3 Berrien County

The community spotlight falls on Berrien County in this issue. [more >](#)



4 Safe housing

Safe housing and a safe neighborhood are vital for a truly fresh start. [more >](#)

5 Job training

Michigan awarded \$750,000 grant from the Joyce Foundation. [more >](#)



A Local Business Helps Reduce Crime

For over 30 years, Cascade Engineering has produced plastic parts for furniture, automotive, solid waste materials and industrial markets. Since 2000, they have also worked to improve their community by getting welfare recipients and former prisoners back to work.

At Cascade Engineering, they believe in thinking outside of the system. “If the system isn’t working, let’s think outside the system,” said Ron Jimmerson, Manager of Community Partnerships & Workforce Diversity. Their focus on system improvement fits well with the Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative (MPRI) that is working to link former prisoners to businesses willing to hire them.

Corporate Citizens

Fred P. Keller, Chairman & CEO of Cascade Engineering, believes companies are corporate citizens and therefore need to be part of the solution to the problems that plague a community. Cascade Engineering funds the Community Partnership and Workforce Diversity Department headed by Ron Jimmerson. This department helps local businesses understand the value of hiring former prisoners and assists them in developing equal employment opportunity policies for that purpose. Through its Foundational Training program, individuals are trained in diversity, behavior, attitude, language, and dress and job skills needed to work and fit into a middle class business setting. Jimmerson said they experience a 97% monthly retention rate for people who have completed this training course in Cascade Engineering’s Welfare-to-Career program, and they look for the same impact with the MPRI program.

Work with Kent County MPRI

Cascade Engineering works with Kent County MPRI Community Coordinator, Yvonne Jackson, to identify men and women prior to release from state prisons who can enter the training program. “Problems like crime, school dropout rates and welfare rates affect the community, so Cascade Engineering has created training programs that help to lower those rates,” commented Yvonne Jackson. Michigan Works! also assists former prisoners with felony records who are currently in the community and struggling with barriers to employment. Through this partnership, individuals receive training from which to build upon, regardless of where they are in their reintegration into society. The Reentry Roundtable of Kent County recruits businesses in the Kent County area to hire former prisoners who have completed the training course. These businesses count on receiving workers who have been trained and who will continue to get support while they work.

Less Recidivism

According to Jimmerson, many people who return to prison did not have a job at the time of their conviction. By training former prisoners and preparing them for work, the recidivism rate will be lowered, decreasing crime, making safer communities, and providing a savings to



Mirro Chair, 2004, Herman Miller, Zeeland, MI. Cascade engineering plays a vital role in its production.

taxpayers. It takes businesses like Cascade Engineering to get involved in training and employing former prisoners to create safer neighborhoods and better citizens.

To learn more about Cascade Engineering’s programs, contact Ron Jimmerson, at jimmersonr@cascadeng.com or visit Cascade Engineering’s website at: www.cascadeng.com.

MPRI & Law Enforcement: Creating Safer Neighborhoods Together

BY PEGGY SCHAFFER, BERRIEN COUNTY COMMUNITY COORDINATOR

The Berrien County MPRI builds on strong partnerships with state, county, and local law enforcement to increase public safety and prisoner accountability.

Building Partnerships Takes Time

Partnerships with the various law enforcement agencies within Berrien County did not develop overnight. When the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) closed the corrections center in Benton Harbor, the law enforcement community was disappointed. The main concern from the Sheriff's Department was that the already overcrowded county jail would be the sole resource to house former prisoners who had violated their parole. "When the MDOC shut down the corrections center, it put the burden on our county jail for parole violations and took away an option for the road patrol officers when they encountered a former prisoner," explained Berrien County Sheriff Paul Bailey.

Accountability Is the Key

Thus, the Berrien County Sheriff's Department became involved in the MPRI Steering Team almost immediately. Chief Deputy Samuel Harris of the Berrien County Sheriff's Department is a member of the Steering Team. "Accountability is the key. Each parolee must be held accountable to the conditions of parole and to the community...the MPRI will motivate returning prisoners to not repeat their crimes, and will get the community involved in the care and supervision of parolees."

The Responsibility Is on the Parolee

"When the community coordinator started contacting me, I had some apprehension. I've been in law enforcement for 35 years and have seen many programs come and go. So I thought, there is another program, more meetings, and more things to take up my time. But the more I found out about the program, the more I thought if this doesn't work, nothing will," said Chief Al Mingo, Benton Harbor Police Department. "By looking at the needs of prisoners and planning for their release by addressing those needs, the responsibility is on the parolee to succeed. There are no excuses."

Peg Schaffer, Berrien County Community Coordinator states, "From a public safety perspective, law enforcement agencies countywide are willing to work with the Field Agents to increase the prisoner's perception of accountability. Under the MPRI the local parole office has agreed to share basic information such as criminal history and home addresses of high-risk former prisoners with local law enforcement. Extra patrols have already begun in the evenings and on weekends in areas where there is a high concentration of parolees."



State, county, and local law enforcement are key partners in the Berrien County MPRI. L to R: Sheriff Paul Bailey, Berrien County Sheriff's Department; Lt. Willie Mays, Commander of the Bridgman Michigan State Police Post; Chief Al Mingo, Benton Harbor City Police Department.

Sheriff Bailey adds, "Law enforcement is also willing to partner with parole to do home checks on off hours and on the weekends, when former prisoners know the parole office is closed."

Rojelio Castillo, Berrien County Parole Supervisor explained, "Visits by a police officer and Field Agent traditionally were for arrest, but can now be focused on addressing parolees' adjustment in the community. It is anticipated there will be a development of mutual trust within the community, and the former prisoner will strive towards becoming a more productive member of the community." [click for more >](#)



MPRI & Law Enforcement:
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Through public education and outreach, the MPRI and law enforcement agencies are encouraging the citizens of Berrien County to take part in creating safer neighborhoods. “We are asking citizens to work with law enforcement to report crimes (through programs like the Crime Stoppers Program). Law enforcement and the MPRI can be more effective if we work with the community block clubs and neighborhood watch programs,” stated Lt. Willie Mays. “We are also hopeful that through educating the public, the MPRI will go a long way towards taking the negative label off the former prisoner and give them a chance to start over.”

“Will the MPRI be 100% successful in eliminating crime? No. There is a certain percentage we will never save, but the idea is to reduce recidivism. MPRI has a better chance at success than previous programs or practices,” stated Sheriff Bailey.

Safe Housing- Safe Neighborhoods

By Pat Eagan, Capital Area Community Coordinator

“We are fortunate in Ingham County to have Ferris Development provide transitional housing for homeless parolees in the Capital Area. Historically, homeless parolees reside in shelters which not only creates a burden for the parolee but in some cases sets them up for failure. With the assistance of Ferris Development, through the MPRI funding, the chances of successful re-entry of the parolee increases significantly because we are providing a stable residence when needed. Transitional housing is one of many tools used to assist the parole agent in providing effective case supervision for the individuals who have no other family or financial support,” states Stephen A. Robinson, Supervisor Ingham County Probation/Parole/CRP Office.

A Safe, Clean Place

“In collaboration with the Lansing Parole Office and local law enforcement, we create a halo of scrutiny around the houses, so that troublemakers and their friends find it uncomfortable,” said Ferris’ housing specialist, Don Williams. “We provide a safe, clean place from which a returning client can get their feet under them. As a result, we have had no crime problems and good relations with our neighbors.” The focus is to find a job and their own place to live. Their clients are allowed to stay in the housing for up to 60 days and only if they comply with strict house rules.

Providing Structure to Returning Prisoners

The house has a set of rules that must be followed, plus residents must comply with all the MPRI program requirements and parole



By no means luxurious – but a dry, clean, safe place to call home during transition.

conditions. The MPRI program requires that participants seek employment, and once employed, save their earnings to have the first month’s rent to move into their own place. Ferris Development assists their clients find apartments that are safe and affordable, and assists in communications with the property owners.

Serving the Community

Since first accepting their clients in January 2006, Ferris has provided transitional housing to more than 40 people. “Don Williams has done an excellent job of managing the transitional housing,” said Roger Newcomb, Director of Ferris Development. “What he does is more than managing – it’s mentoring.” Williams believes that the most important quality that he brings to his job is his passion. “I have a passion for the people involved, the people who have made mistakes. The program is about people. Not prisoners, numbers, parolees, or clients, but people. In order to do this job, you have to know that it could be you in their shoes.”



State Receives Job Training Grant for the MPRI

Recently, Michigan was awarded a \$750,000 grant from the Joyce Foundation to conduct transitional employment programs for former prisoners. Due to the leadership of the Granholm administration, Michigan is one of five recipients, nationally, to receive this grant to provide temporary, subsidized employment combined with education, counseling, and placement assistance for former prisoners. This program will provide an excellent tool to assist in getting former prisoners working.

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Beginning in January 2007, Wayne County MPRI partners will begin enrolling former prisoners from the Mound and Ryan Correctional Facilities. The “Ready4Work” program will, test two different approaches to help former prisoners obtain employment, retain employment, and advance to better employment.

Programs Will Be Evaluated

The five programs will be evaluated by MDRC, a New York-based research and evaluation firm, in collaboration with the Urban Institute and the University of Michigan. Evaluators will examine long-term employment, income, and incarceration rates

for participants who complete transitional job programs and will compare them to those who receive standard job placement services.

Identify What Works

The results of the study, due in 2009, should both establish whether transitional jobs are effective and, by comparing different initiatives, identify models that work especially well and people who benefit most.

The evaluation is jointly funded by the Joyce Foundation, at \$2.3 million over four years; the New York-based JEHT Foundation, which is contributing \$1.1 million; and the

U.S. Department of Labor, which is committing an additional \$99,500.

Participants Assigned Randomly

In Wayne County, the programs will be administered by Goodwill of Greater Detroit, Inc. and Jewish Vocational Services, Inc. Participants will be randomly assigned to either job group. Enrollment will begin in January 2007 and run through the year.

To sign up for the Re-Entry Policy Council’s newsletter, visit this site and click on: “Register” <http://www.reentrypolicy.org/>

Michigan Seeks to Improve Services for Children and Families of Prisoners

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, more than seven million children in America have a parent who is incarcerated or under criminal justice supervision. Researchers at the Oregon Social Learning Center report that these children may be at greater risk for depression, aggressive behavior, withdrawal, and criminal involvement. At the same time, caregivers for children of incarcerated parents often do not have sufficient resources to meet their basic needs.



Effective programs and strategies to support the needs of prisoners and their families are essential to reducing delinquency and intergenerational incarceration. Indeed, prisoners who maintain family ties have shown to be less likely to recidivate.

Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative

Officials from the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) have taken steps to address these issues by developing programs in collaboration with human services agencies for children and families through the Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative (MPRI). Last December, MPRI representatives participated in a forum hosted by the Council of State Governments (CSG) in San Diego to help state corrections and human services administrators identify ways to improve outcomes for incarcerated parents and their families. Following the meeting, the MPRI outlined its goals regarding children and families in its Issue Brief, “Children and Families: Coping with Prisoner Re-Entry.” The Issue Brief, which draws heavily on the Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council, can be viewed [here](#).

The MRPI recently received technical assistance from the CSG, with the help of expert consultant Dee Ann Newell, co-founder of Arkansas Voices for Children Left Behind, to develop a family advocacy program in Michigan. The family advocacy program will ensure that families not only have access to legal assistance, but also to support groups, child-centered visits, parenting classes, and family reunification sessions in order to strengthen relationships between the children, parent, and caregiver.

The CSG will continue to provide Michigan with technical assistance to support the program’s implementation.

To learn more about the Re-Entry Policy Council’s recommendations relative to involving children and families in the re-entry process, [click here](#). To register for the Re-Entry Policy Council’s newsletter [click here](#).

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