



Cuyahoga County Reentry Review

Citizen Circle by Marcus Redfearn

Many things can be, and are, said about the faith-based organization "Citizen Circle," but doing the work and business of helping the reentry population, they are! It is inspiring and encouraging to witness the actions of the Citizen Circle at work. The Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that almost 650,000 criminal offenders are released from prisons every year and returned to neighborhoods across the country. Data from 2004, collected from a 15 state sample, showed that two-thirds of the prisoners released were re-arrested within three years. Nearly one-half were reconvicted, often for committing violent crimes (www.ojp.usdoj.gov). Returning prisoners and low-wealth households require many of the same supportive services to become self-sufficient. However, the ex-offender population has unique barriers that make the work of community development corporations (CDCs) community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), and other key stakeholders critical to the success of the individuals and the communities to which they return.

The Citizen Circles are groups of community members helping ex-offenders make the transition from prisoner to citizen. The Citizen Circle creates partnerships to promote positive social interaction and accountability in helping offenders become productive citizens. The Citizen Circles focus on eight life domain areas of need that are valued for healthy functioning in the community; Employment, Education, Family/Martial, Associates/Social Interactions, Substance Abuse, Community Functioning, Personal/Emotional Orientation, and Attitude. Their mission is to help individuals who are coming out of the Justice System stay out of the Justice System. Their vision is to create a road map to successful community involvement promoting responsible citizenship. Since their inception, in north central Ohio, the Circles have been, or are in the process of, implementing Circles in the seven parole regions in the state. Citizen Circles will target certain neighborhoods and areas in which there are significant concentrations or reentrants. Citizen Circles recognize that it takes a community to successfully transition offenders home.

The reentry coordinator in our district, Sharyna Cloud, is bringing together agencies from all levels of law enforcement, government, support services and community organizations to better serve the needs of prisoners reentering society. She is coordinating efforts with the Cleveland Reentry Initiative, participating in statewide initiatives, and increasing the capacity of our Weed and Seed sites to contribute to reentry efforts. Several other exciting projects are also underway.



Presently, there are three Citizen Circle locations in Cuyahoga County: Downtown Citizen Circle (NorthStar Reentry Resource Center), Mt. Pleasant Citizen Circle (12802 Kinsman Ave.), and The Euclid Avenue Citizen Circle (Church of the Covenant). The Circles are in Collaboration with many different agencies including North Star Reentry Resource Center, Seeds of Literacy, Cuyahoga County Office of Health and Human Services Office of Reentry, and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. The Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry and Recidivism Reduction has adopted a new vision and mission concerning offender reentry. That plan is at the core of the Department of Corrections approach and with the notion that reentry is a "philosophy" not a program. The plan calls for a broad system approach to managing offenders returning to the community. It is prepared to answer the question: "What is needed to prepare offenders for successful reentry?" It is not possible for any correctional system alone to create effective and doable programs for reentry. The connections with key stakeholders and individuals in the communities to which offenders return carry the potential to reinforce and sustain the reintegration of thousands of offenders returning to their communities.

Community members are often resistant to the idea of ex-offenders living in their neighborhoods. As a result, formerly incarcerated individuals are returning to their neighborhoods with little or no support from local citizens. Yet community support is vital to reintegration of ex-offenders. Reentrants who feel accepted by their community and believe they are valued are less likely to re-offend. Citizen Circle contributes to this process in a variety of ways. Ex-offenders seek involvement with a Citizen Circle voluntarily. The Circle reviews applications for membership from offenders who are currently

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The Ohio Association of Local Reentry Coalitions by Marcus Redfearn

The Ohio Association of Local Reentry Coalitions (OALRC) is a Leadership Team throughout Ohio that gathers opportunities and service providers that are relevant to communities. The Coalition takes an honest look at what reentry looks like throughout the state. The Leadership's goal is to develop reentry coalitions in, or to cover, all 88 Ohio counties. The coalition's goal is to provide ongoing mentoring to coalitions utilizing Ohio Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition resources and expertise, to ensure that all coalitions meet minimum standards set by the association, to actively assist new coalitions in starting up, and existing coalitions to add services, and to work to establish best practices to be used by all coalition members. The word 'Task Force' and 'Coalition' are used interchangeably in the reentry population, but The Leadership team is doing sound research to ensure that the standards of services are of quality and equal performance throughout the state. The services the reentry population can get in Youngstown will be of the same quality and standard that you could receive in Cincinnati. The Coalition has a plan of building stronger networks of service and information throughout Ohio for all 88 counties.

Kysten Palmore is the President of the Coalition and she would like people to know that no matter where you're located geographically, you should be able to get the same quality of services. Palmore, who earned her Master's degree in Social Work (MSW) in Social Services from The Ohio State University, has a passion for reentry. Ms. Palmore currently holds the position of Coordinator of Reentry Task Force for the Franklin County Office of Homeland Security & Justice.

"Very few individuals are in Ohio prisons forever. Eventually, the majority will return to Ohio communities," she states. Unfortunately, more than four in ten offenders nationwide return to state prison within three years of their release, despite a massive increase in state spending on prisons, according to a Pew report (State of Recidivism: The Revolving Door of America's Prisons). "Reentry is a public safety issue. When offenders are released we want to be able to give them the best possible chance to become productive." Palmore goes on to say, "You can't paint reentry with one broad brush stroke." This year, 860,000 men, women, and juveniles—1.8 million over the next three years—will be released from federal, state, and local correctional facilities. Without intervention, over two-thirds of these individuals will be re-arrested for serious new felony offenses within three years. (Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics and Public/Private Ventures).

Employment is a key to stopping recidivism. Focus groups conducted by the United States Department of Labor (DOL) and the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships (CFBCI) found employers willing to help – if faith-based and community leaders' work with and vouch for the reliability

of the ex-offender. Oftentimes, former inmates face numerous barriers to successful employment, including: (1) employers often are hesitant to hire ex-prisoners for various reasons; (2) ex-prisoners often lack skills to properly market themselves to potential employers; and (3) ex-offenders frequently lack the needed social supports that allow them to enter and remain in the workplace. These and other obstacles to reentry, such as substance abuse and lack of stable housing, create a demand for structured reentry programs. Employers in need of qualified workers are more likely to hire ex-offenders who are supervised by a reentry program than those who are not. A well-structured and highly-regarded program can make a big difference in the lives of ex-prisoners.

A 1996 study in New York State showed that 89 percent of parole and probation violators were unemployed at the time of re-arrest (Source: State of New York Department of Labor, 1996). A State of Ohio study found that 22 percent of all Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections prisoners released in 2001 returned to Cuyahoga County; of these, 79 percent were returned to the City of Cleveland. (Source: Urban Institute). An unemployed ex-offender is three times more likely to return to prison than an employed ex-offender.

The Second Chance Act (SCA) offers offenders a safe and successful reentry strategy. Signed into law on April 9, 2008, the SCA (P.L. 110-199) was designed to improve outcomes for people returning to communities from prisons and jails. This first-of-its-kind legislation authorizes federal grants to government agencies and nonprofit organizations to provide employment assistance, substance abuse treatment, housing, family programming, mentoring, victims support, and other services that can help reduce recidivism. Cuyahoga County was awarded a grant under the SCA.

OALRC's goal is to have programs and service available throughout Ohio. Its objectives are the: reduction of public expenditures; utilization of cost benefit analysis (Return on Investment); coordination of reentry efforts based on HB86 outcomes; reduction of recidivism rates throughout Ohio counties, and the availability of reentry services in all 88 counties. More information can be found on their website at <http://www.reentrycoalition.ohio.gov>.



HUD Secretary Urges Balance for Subsidized Housing

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recently provided some authoritative guidance to all HUD –assisted housing programs regarding admitting people with criminal records. In a letter sent to all owners and agents of HUD-assisting housing, asking them “to seek a balance between allowing ex-offenders to reunite with families that live in HUD subsidized housing, and ensuring the safety of all residents of its programs.”

The March 14th letter, signed by HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan and Carol J. Galante, the Acting Assistant Secretary for Housing – Federal Housing Commissioner, made reference to research “that shows that ex-offenders who do not find stable housing in the community are more likely to recidivate than those who do. It went on to note that reentrants from prison often face significant barriers to stable housing.

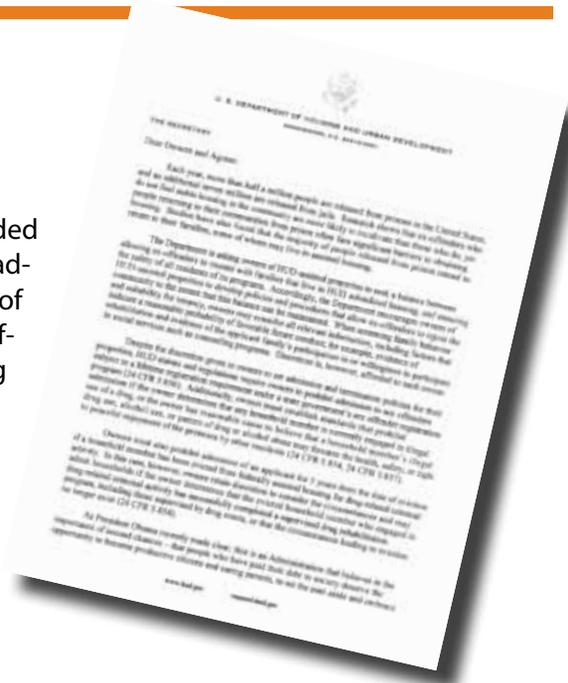
Secretary Donovan encouraged owners of HUD-assisted properties to “develop policies and procedure that allow ex-offenders to rejoin the community” to the extent that it can be balanced with the safety of the other residents.”

This letter was sent approximately nine months after a similar letter was sent urging public housing authorities (PHAs) to exercise discretion when evaluating applicant with criminal records. Recipients of the March letter, however, included representatives of all other HUD-assisted housing programs, such as project-based Section 8 and Shelter Plus Care.

While calling on owners of HUD-assisted properties to use their discretion in setting admission and eviction policies, the Secretary also reminded them of some limitations on that discretion. HUD regulations and the federal Fair Housing Act impose permanent bans prohibiting admission to sex offenders who are subject, by state law, to a lifetime registration requirement. The other permanent ban is for anyone who has been convicted of manufacturing methamphetamine on federally-assisted property.

The recent letter was sent in response to requests by housing advocates across the country and, especially, the efforts of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law. While very appreciative of Secretary Donovan’s action, the Shriver Center is already encouraging HUD to take further steps to encourage program administrators, owners, and managers to exercise their discretion to remove barriers that ex-offenders face in securing stable housing.

Secretary Donovan referenced President Obama’s recent statements that his administration believes in the importance of second chances. Part of that support, Donovan said in his letter, means helping ex-offenders gain access to a stable place to live—in Donovan’s words, “one of the most fundamental building blocks of a stable life.”



We want to hear from you...
 Your comments are important to us.

Write to us at

Cuyahoga County - Office of Reentry
 310 West Lakeside Avenue, Suite 550
 Cleveland, OH 44113
www.reentry.cuyahogacounty.us

Citizen Circle (continued from front cover)

incarcerated, who are under community supervision, and from halfway houses or community-based correctional facilities. An in-depth interview is conducted prior to the applicant's attendance at his/her first meeting.

The Citizen Circles meet on a regular basis to discuss offender's progress, review plans, interview new applicants, and admit new members, but the goal is to discharge successful offenders. These successful ex-offenders are considered to be productive "citizens." Circles involve the offender, his support systems, victim advocacy groups, and community members. This helps offenders recognize the harm their criminal behavior has caused others--especially to their victims--and to develop a plan of action to promote responsible citizenship.

Service areas represented:

- Education/Vocation
- Child Support Education
- Housing
- Counseling Services
- Job Readiness
- Legal Assistance
- Medical/Dental
- And many more



CITY OF CLEVELAND
Mayor Frank G. Jackson

Sponsored in partnership with:

- The Office of Reentry
- Oriana House
- Center for Families and Children
- Greater Cleveland Reentry Strategy
- Cuyahoga County Probation

For more information contact
Shayna C. Doud #8
216.694.2620
Scout@city.cleveland.oh.us

City of Cleveland Community Relations Board

Blaine A. Griffin, Executive Director

2nd Reentry Resource Exposition

Wednesday, May 30, 2012

10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Public Auditorium

500 Lakeside Ave.
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

Reentry Review Staff

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The Citizen Circles Concept



Citizen participation and guidance is essential for correctional practices inside and outside institutions. The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction has embraced the needs related to offenders returning home from correctional settings and as such one strategy is the implementation of Citizen Circles. i Circle members address risks that contribute to criminal activity by taking ownership of the solution. It is an opportunity for citizens to communicate expectations for successful reentry and help offenders recognize the harm their behavior has caused others. Offenders are able to make amends and demonstrate their value and potential to the community.

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Citizen Circles Locations

The Euclid Avenue Citizen Circle

216.421.0482 ext. 282

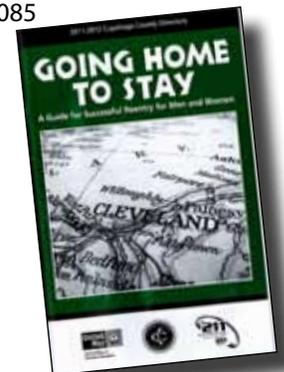
CEOGC

North Star Resource Center

216.751.1382

Mt. Pleasant

216.751.1085



COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS:

Cuyahoga County Office of Reentry
email: ReentryInfo@cuyahogacounty.us
phone: 216.698.2501

To receive a copy of
Going Home to Stay

contact First Call for Help at 216.436.2000 or go online and download a copy at www.211cleveland.org/pdfs/communityreentry.pdf

GREATER CLEVELAND STRATEGY

Cuyahoga County Reentry Review

