

Macon Reentry Coalition:
Working Together to Change Lives

by

Leigh R. Swicord

Public Administration and Community Based Organizations

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Dr. Viviane Foyou

Valdosta State University

Introduction

The economic downturn has exacerbated social problems as more persons are unemployed, homeless, and in need of assistance. If not aided, these persons may be more likely to resort to drug usage and other inappropriate activity thereby posing problems within the community and contributing to the increase in vagrancy and crime. Criminal offenders released from incarceration transitioning into society, referred to as “offender reentry”, have an exceptionally difficult time given the lack of job skills and education necessary to secure employment. Further, these persons oftentimes lack meaningful social and community ties and become a “burden” on social programs within the community. These social problems are exacerbated by the sheer volume of persons being released from imprisonment following the trend towards mass-incarceration in the 1980s and 1990s. In fact, the prison population has increased at a rate of fifteen percent (15%) while the U. S. Resident population experienced an increase of approximately six and one half percent (6.5%). (West and Sabol 2007) Of those persons incarcerated in local jails, approximately half are confined as a consequence of their failure under community supervision. (Beck 2006) Thus, offender reentry has become an increasingly pressing problem for communities in which offenders return from prison every day homeless, in need of treatment, and lacking meaningful community associations.

Based upon empirical research, there has been a shift in philosophy regarding assisting offenders prior to their release from incarceration or immediately thereafter with the goal of assisting the offender to become independent on a long-term basis. (Braught and Bailey-Smith, 2006) This is accomplished through job training (rather than simply job placement), the use of Cognitive Behavior Therapy, and substance abuse / mental health treatment. This pragmatic approach reflects the philosophy of providing offenders with the skills they need such that they

may become independent therefore relying less on social programs at the expense of the community while simultaneously reducing recidivism. Further, diverse groups have recognized the need for collaborative efforts as no single agency can affectively address offender reentry.

Macon, Georgia is not unlike other communities as it struggles for tourism dollars, fights a declining economy, and combats drugs, gang, and violent crime. Various divisions of government and social service agencies who provide the social services for offenders grapple with reduced budgets and resources while they experience an increase in clientele. However, these various agencies in Macon realized they could not succeed in fighting these issues alone. Thus a coalition was formed of various federal and state law enforcement agencies, local government officials, non-profit organizations, and private persons who work together to more effectively address the increasing social problem of offender reentry. This coalition, the Macon Reentry Coalition, provides education for the community, training for offenders, resources for community correction officials, and an alliance which provides greater results from cooperation. This group has garnered significant support from both within and outside the community drawing on other cities' and organizations' experiences in developing offender reentry programs. While the coalition is newly formed, its activities to date demonstrate the commitment of its members and its potential to effect change in offender's lives through agency collaboration.

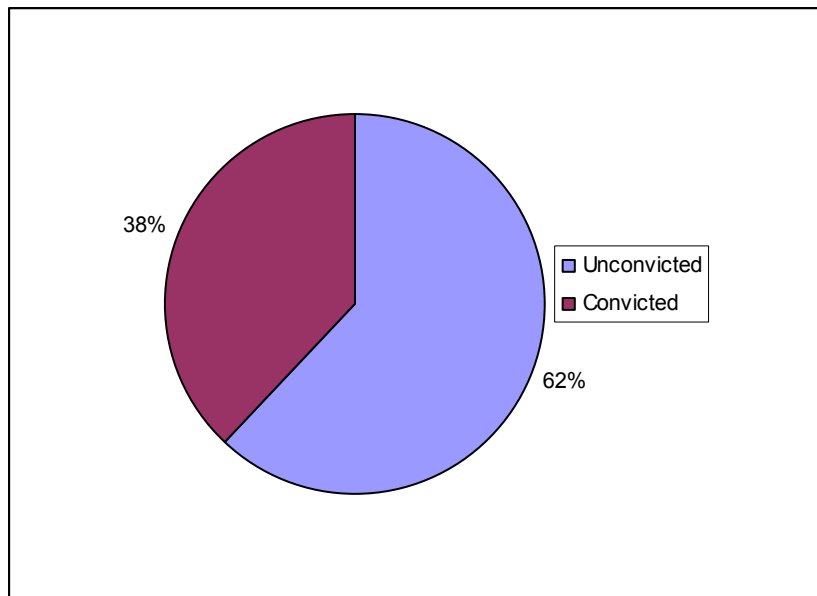
Offender Re-entry

Scope of the Social Problem (Offender Reentry)

Approximately 700,000 criminal offenders release to the community each year from state and federal prisons while nearly 9 million people are released from local jails. Of those offenders, roughly sixty-six percent (66%) will re-offend and be returned to incarceration. (MRC, 2008, 3) In Macon, Georgia there are approximately 4,700 persons under local, state, or

federal supervision annually. Of these criminal offenders, it is estimated that approximately 3,000 will re-encounter the criminal justice system, thus costing the community \$31 million dollars in lost tax revenue, confinement expenses, and social services. There appears to be no end to the “revolving door” which turns out criminals into the community ill prepared to reform and take a new direction in life. In fact, forty-six percent (46%) of individuals arrested for new criminal conduct were on probation or parole at the time of their arrest, thereby resulting in probation or parole revocation sentences in addition to sentences imposed on their “new” criminal conduct. (Beck, 2006) Being under community supervision at the time of a “new” offense also results in offenders being denied bond while awaiting prosecution, thereby resulting in local jail populations being comprised predominantly of un-convicted persons. (See Chart No. 1)

Chart No. 1: Conviction Status of Jail Inmates in 2006



Source: Solomon et al, 2008

Most inmates receive treatment while in jail or on community supervision yet they continue to experience treatment failures. Additionally, the offenders share other commonalities, such as high rates of unemployment; family members who were also incarcerated; growing up in an abusive household; and coming from a single-parent household. (Beck, 2006) As such, the expanding prison population and increased recidivism caused community correction officials, politicians, and social service providers to consider “what works?” to change the course so many offenders found themselves.

National attention was brought to the social problem offender reentry creates when, in his 2004 State of the Union address, President George W. Bush proposed “a four-year, \$300 million prisoner reentry initiative to expand job training and placement services, to provide transitional housing, and to help newly released prisoners get mentoring, including from faith-based groups.” (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.)

We know from long experience that if they can't find work, or a home, or help, they are much more likely to commit crime and return to prison. So tonight, I propose a four-year, \$300 million prisoner re-entry initiative to expand job training and placement services, to provide transitional housing, and to help newly released prisoners get mentoring, including from faith-based groups. America is the land of second chance, and when the gates of the prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life. (Bush, 2004)

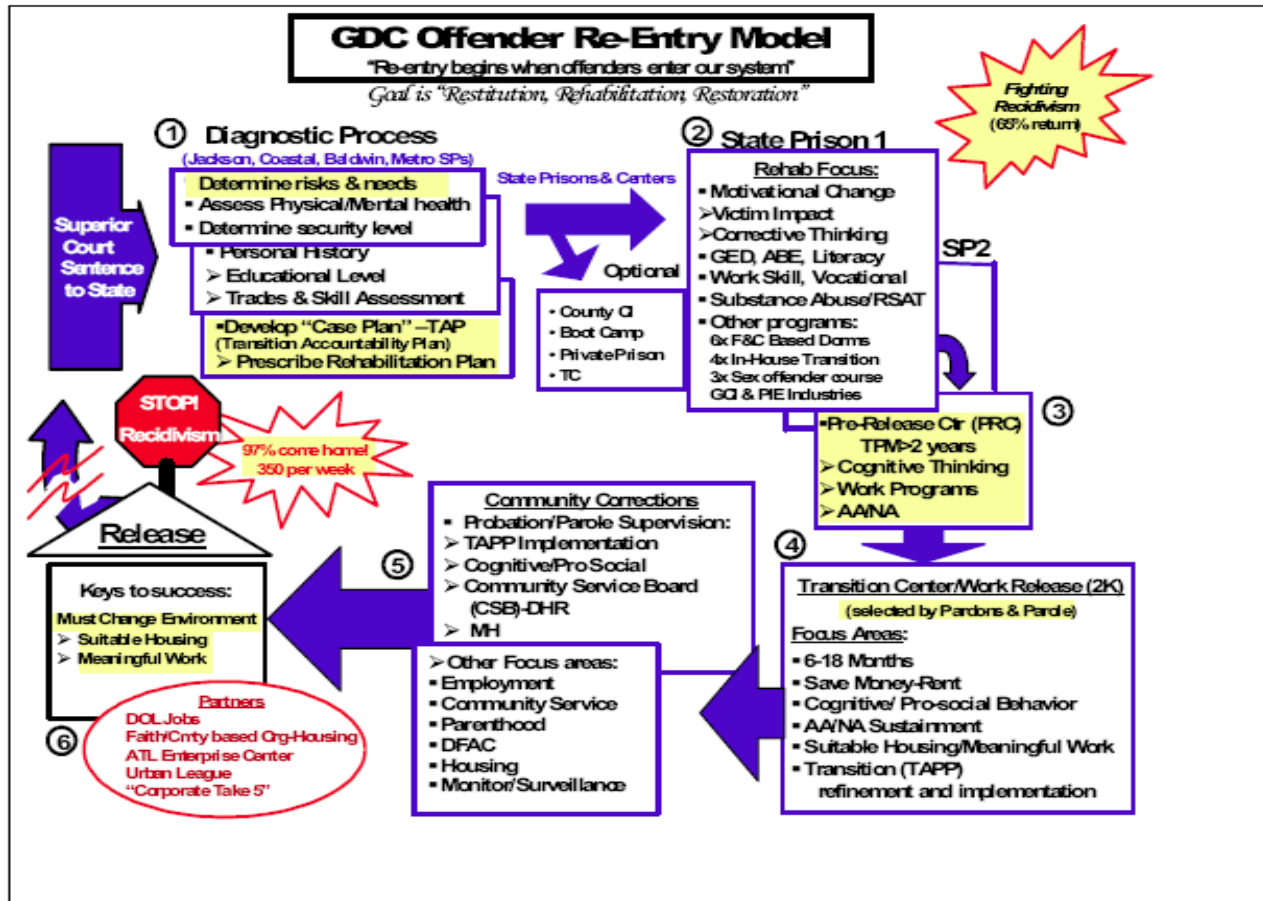
President Bush’s proposal became known as the Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI), which provided grant funding to state and local agencies to develop and implement programs intended to allow for correctional based assessments and services to facilitate the transition of offenders back to the community. The Office of Justice Programs - Bureau of Justice Assistance partnered with the Department of Labor to administer the grants, which focus on employment training and

placement and counseling/mentoring programs. In October 2009, the Bureau's Council of State Governments launched the National Reentry Resource Center which provides "education, training, and technical assistance to states, tribes, territories, local governments, service providers, nonprofit organizations, and corrections agencies working on prisoner reentry." (National Reentry Resource Center, n.d.)

These reentry initiatives have been funded, in large part, through the Second Chance Act of 2007, signed into law by President Bush on April 9, 2008. This unique legislation was intended to allow the federal government to assist (through funding) state, local, and non-profit agencies with services intended to reduce recidivism, such as employment training, substance abuse treatment, family counseling, etc. Hundreds of Millions of dollars have been allocated to date and in 2009, Congress approved \$108 million for reentry programs for fiscal year 2010. (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.) Further, the Justice Reinvestment Bill of 2009, jointly introduced in a bipartisan effort by numerous Senators and Representatives, is aimed at "reducing spending while increasing public safety" building upon the foundation established by the Council of State Governments Justice Center. (Reentry Policy Council, 2009, n.d.)

These funds are utilized at all stages of the criminal justice process by state, local, and non-profit agencies, including at the initial phase when an offender is arrested or enters prison. In fact, the Georgia Department of Corrections (DDC) adopted the slogan, "Reentry Begins When Offenders Enter Our System." (Georgia Department of Corrections, n.d.) As reflected in Chart No. 2, reentry is an ongoing process which requires the offender's participation during the various phases in order to avoid recidivism and stop the "revolving door." Services commence upon an offender's arrest and continues throughout their incarceration, while under community supervision, and beyond.

Chart No. 2: GDC Offender Reentry Model



Source: Georgia Department of Corrections (2009, n.d.)

As previously noted, funding has been directed to combat the numerous obstacles faced by offenders to successfully transition back into society following terms of incarceration, such as the lack of housing, unemployment, lack of skills, lack of meaningful community associates, health issues, and the like. These basic needs must be met in order for the offender to move forward thereby becoming self-sufficient, contributing members of society in which recidivism is reduced. In recent years, law enforcement agencies have increasingly recognized that offender reentry is an issue which cannot be solely left to the discretion of social service agencies. Further, governmental officials have recognized that a focus on proactively addressing offender reentry

problems would relieve some strain on social service agencies while reducing recidivism, thus improving neighborhood and community environments.

Offender needs vary from those which require immediate assistance, such as housing problems or health issues, to those which have long term implications, such as job training. Personal needs encompass issues such as housing, employment, health care, transportation, and substance abuse or mental health issues. Oftentimes family members may assist offenders by allowing them to reside at their residences or providing them with transportation while other needs, such as health care related issues, must be provided by outside services. However, assistance to offenders may be delayed if one lacks proper documentation or identification, such as birth certificates, Social Security cards, or proper identification.

Financial needs include beginning or resuming child support payments, payment of court ordered fine/restitution, credit/debt counseling, and potentially assistance with the application for benefits including disability, food stamps, etc. Historically, probation and parole officials sought to provide offenders with “transitional jobs,” or those which pay the minimum wage, provide few if any benefits, and require little education or skill. However, community corrections agents now realize that for long-term success, offenders must develop their skills and further their education to increase their chances at obtaining full time employment with competitive salaries and benefits. This is oftentimes a difficult task as criminal offenders demonstrate educational needs as many discontinue their education due to criminal activity, drug use, or gang involvement. Accordingly, they lack basic education requirements (such as a high school diploma or a G.E.D.) and lack job training skills necessary to compete in a lagging job market.

Community Based Organizations and Local Government Agencies

In Macon, Georgia there is a recognition that despite the programs offered in the various penal systems, offenders require assistance once released and oftentimes turn to their probation or parole officers for direction. Further, various community members have discovered that by coming together, they would be more effective thereby drawing on the expertise, knowledge, and resources of one another. Thus, in 2008, the Macon Re-entry Coalition (MRC) was established when U. S. Probation Officer Kevin L. Mason created a partnership with Goodwill Industries and began soliciting other partners to join their efforts. The resulting coalition is unique as it encompasses federal and state law enforcement agencies, local government, non-profit organizations, and private citizens - all of whom joined together on a voluntary basis with the goal of assisting offenders and helping their professional associates. As reflected in Appendix A, the coalition has grown significantly to include various treatment providers, social service agencies, housing providers, employment assistance providers, community corrections agencies, law enforcement, and local government. Additionally, the coalition has gained the support of numerous private individuals such as local pastors, landlords, and employers.

Upon its inception, founding Coalition members aimed to involve stakeholders within the community including local employers, educational institutions, community social service providers, the judiciary, faith-based organizations, and the community at large. Further, while offenders and their families were not considered for partnership, their support and involvement was considered vital for coalition success. According to Officer Mason, some agencies were particularly sought out for involvement while others learned of the coalition and expressed an interest in joining.

Agencies or individuals who are solicited to engage in coalition activities must commit to furthering the mission of the coalition, attend seventy-five percent (75%) of coalition meetings, not make any unauthorized public statements, and agree to maintain a professional, consensus building attitude. (MRC 2008) The mission statement of the coalition is as follows:

The Macon Re-entry Coalition exists to make a positive difference in the lives of the ex-offenders through collaboration, communication, and advocacy. (MRC – Memorandum of Understanding, n.d.)

According to the Coalition Memorandum of Understanding (n.d.), these goals include: to improve collaboration and coordination of procedures, processes, and services for those involved in the criminal justice system; to identify and eliminate gaps and barriers that prevents a successful reentry and advocate for services and programs to increase the opportunity for successful reentry; to advocate for services, programs, and public policies to increase the opportunity for successful reentry; and to increase public knowledge about criminal justice dynamics, including reframing reentry as a public safety issue. While the member agencies formally execute a Memorandum of Understanding outlining their support of the coalition goals, other organizations serve as “contributing members” who are involved in a peripheral manner, such as the NAACP.

The coalition focuses on five primary areas utilizing committees for each as follows: substance abuse, mental health, disabilities; employment; education and training; housing; and supportive services (including medical, transportation, and clothing). The efforts of the coalition to eliminate gaps and barriers for successful re-entry, while increasing public knowledge regarding criminal justice dynamics, is accomplished due to the various resources, dynamics, and missions of the members. While working within each agency’s budgetary constraints, policies,

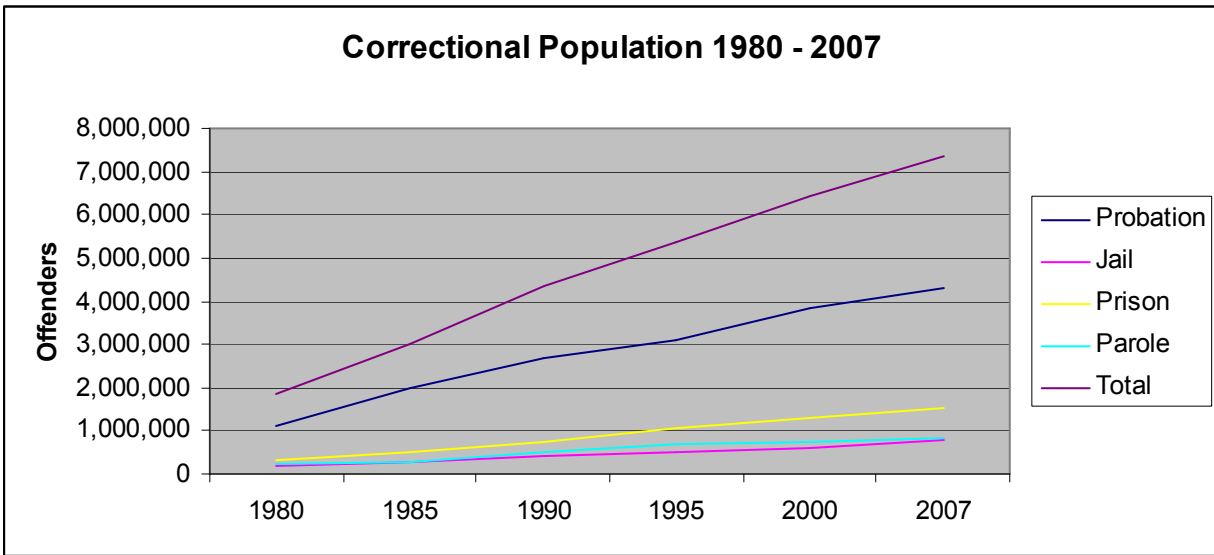
procedures, and politics, these members collaborate and work together to build a consensus to address the needs of offenders or others who are at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system.

As reflected in its mission statement, the coalition seeks to change offender's lives through their collaborative efforts. Each member possesses unique attributes which may include providing a specific social service or education program; however, all members are interested in seeing recidivism reduced, lives improved, and collateral damage minimized. For example, Child Support Enforcement recognizes that by referring fathers to the coalition for services, they are likely to remain "on the street," obtain and maintain employment, and be involved in their children's lives. This not only strengthens the familial unit but allows fathers to support their children financially thus alleviating the government of that responsibility.

Cooperation and Conflict Between the Community Based Organizations and the Local Government

In order to successfully address reentry in the community and form meaningful coalitions among stakeholders, there must be a consensus as to the benefits of offender success, thereby incentivizing stakeholders and community members to cooperate towards a common goal. A significant motivator is to reduce recidivism-related costs such as the cost of prosecution and incarceration, property damage/loss, familial strain, and loss of tax revenue.

As reflected in Chart No. 3, the rate of prison growth has been staggering. Between 1982 and 2003, combined correction budgets between the federal, state, and local governments increased 423 percent, or from \$9.5 billion to \$61 billion.

Chart No. 3: Adults in America in the Corrections System

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007

In an effort to reduce recidivism and lower the jail population, the Macon Police Department, Bibb County Sheriff’s Office, and Mayor’s Office joined the coalition and have emerged as leaders for change. Macon Mayor Robert Reichert espouses his support of the coalition and has directed the city’s grant writer to assist the coalition as needed. While law enforcement traditionally play minimal roles in social services, the police department and sheriff’s office have recognized that they alone cannot combat crime, especially as it relates to offenders currently under the criminal justice system. Specifically, law enforcement rarely “comes into the picture” until a crime has been committed. However, the coalition has created a venue in which law enforcement is involved in issues prior to a crime occurring, thereby protecting and serving the community in a manner other than simply patrolling or investigating suspicious activity.

The Macon Reentry Coalition recognized upon inception that coalition members may have conflicting priorities, missions, and protocols which could potentially “negatively impact

the sustainability and effectiveness of the coalition.” (MRC 2008, 10) One method of bringing community organizations together is to advertise how collaborating can be beneficial for the agencies, offenders, and the community. For example, the coalition recognizes that local employers are vital to the success of the coalition, community, and the offenders as there must be available employers willing to hire offenders who are released from confinement. Locating willing employers is not an easy task as there are numerous misperceptions about offenders including that they are uneducated, unreliable, and only capable of performing manual or repetitive type of work. Other employers are hesitant to work with offenders as they consider them high risk and untrustworthy. In fact, many offenders receive specific job training and have skills which oftentimes are developed while incarcerated

The coalition overcomes these misconceptions by explaining to employers how supervision of offenders by community corrections officials actually benefits the employer and produces conscientious employees. For example, offenders are randomly drug tested and monitored for illegal or inappropriate conduct. Further, offenders are required to remain employed as a condition of supervision, thus are further incentivized to work diligently, be timely, and remain respectful to supervisors in order to retain their employment. Finally, employers are oriented to the financial benefits of hiring offenders including the federal work tax credit which provides \$2,400 for each offender employed.

On July 15, 2009, Macon television news station Fox 24 News ran a story on offenders reentering the workforce, which featured the Macon Reentry Coalition. (See Appendix B) The story highlighted Macon Garment, a local clothing manufacturer which contracts with the military. Macon Garment joined forces with Officer Mason and the coalition to take advantage of persons who learned sewing skills in prison. Owner Wade Moore stated, “We started hiring

people because they sewed while they were in prison. They came out with skills of sewing. And then, we also started hiring people without sewing skills to run automotive equipment.” (Fox 24 News 2009) However, Macon Garment, which presently employs eleven (11) offenders, would not have known of this skilled pool of offenders without the collaboration of Officer Mason. As highlighted in the story, this collaborative effort has benefited offender Alfraido Thomas, who served seventeen (17) years in federal prison on drug offenses. Thomas advised Fox 24 News that he “worked for another industry, the prison industry,” which prepared him for his employment with Macon Garment. According to Officer Mason, Thomas is a textbook example of the potential to provide meaningful employment, rather than simply transitional employment, which demonstrates the positive benefits of agencies working together for a common purpose.

In addition to soliciting the involvement of employers, coalition members collaborate with each other through the shared use of individual agency programs and “subject matter experts.” For example, the State of Georgia Board of Pardons and Parole have been utilizing Cognitive Skills Classes resulting in each parole officer being certified as a course instructor and all parolees being required to participate in Cognitive Skills Courses. These classes are intended to “un-teach” inappropriate behavior, which includes the use of positive reinforcement. Cognitive Therapy has proven to be especially useful with high risk offenders as they have more needs and “flawed” behavior than do lower risk cases. (Alexander, VanBenschoten, and Walters 2008) The U. S. Probation Office lacks trained instructors and due to the district’s large geographical area (which stretches from Columbus, to Athens, to Valdosta) is in process of partnering with the parole office to allow federal releases to participate in Cognitive Skills classes at parole offices throughout the district. While the state parole office is a coalition member and willing to work with the federal probation office, the workbooks for each participant costs approximately \$10.00

each and the state parole office is unable and unwilling to provide workbooks for federal offenders. As such, the federal probation office is currently seeking funding to purchase the workbooks for federal offenders thereby eliminating the obstacle and allowing federal offenders to participate in the classes.

One significant area of conflict is competition for grant funding and agreement upon designation of limited financial and personnel resources. Federal governmental agencies are more often than not ineligible for federal grants. Accordingly, federal agencies involved in the coalition are limited as to their resources which they may contribute. The U. S. Probation Office plays a pivotal role in coalition development and growth but can contribute little other than personnel resources. However, these resources are critical as they include time, expertise, and access to programs and resources which state and local agencies may not have access. In contrast, non-profit groups and local and state governments are eligible for grant funding. However, existing funding is designated for agency specific projects and functions.

Accordingly, a coalition member from legal aid has agreed to assist the coalition with incorporating, thereby rendering it eligible to apply for and receive grants funding. Further, as previously noted, Mayor Reichert has authorized the city grant writer to work with the coalition to seek and prepare grant applications. This prospect has numerous benefits but also presents challenges as the coalition would need to hire staff and obtain office space. Additionally, grant funding directed to the coalition may mean a decrease in grant receipts of existing agencies. Coalition members are understandably anxious regarding this prospect as no one wants to see the coalition expand to the detriment of existing agencies.

Evaluation of the Success of Local Efforts to Address Offender Re-entry

There is stigmatization of the prisoner reentry population in any community and government officials and agencies must be careful not to appear “soft on crime” by working with these groups or diverting what may be perceived as excessive tax payer dollars to programs for offenders. It would appear that the local government in Macon, and specifically Macon Mayor Robert Reichert, is successfully balancing these concerns as he and the city have provided tremendous positive support and reinforcement for the coalition.

The Macon Reentry Coalition has garnished support for their mission and goals from dozens of organizations who all share a common vision of reducing unemployment, recidivism, and crime rates while simultaneously increasing their tax base and improving familial units. In comparison with other reentry coalitions, the MRC has worked “backwards” in the sense that it solicited members and stakeholders prior to establishing a specific program whereas most coalitions evolve when an agency pushes a specific program and must then seek to locate members to support that program. By establishing its large membership base first, the coalition has provided a foundation which includes a diverse group of supporters who are committed to sustainability of the coalition. Further, a valuable information exchange has been established which is eliciting strong support from member officials and staff. The law enforcement agencies within the coalition play a vital role as they provide surveillance, intelligence, and collaboration between offenders and the various social service providers within the community. According to the Council of State Governments, these law enforcement agencies enjoy a shared responsibility of reducing recidivism, can pool their limited resources, and improve their intelligence gathering abilities through peripheral activities unrelated to offender reentry. (2009, 4) This differs from past law enforcement strategies as previous collaborative efforts revolved around “fugitive

apprehension units, specialized enforcement partnerships, and interagency problem-solving partnerships” (2009, 5).

As coalition membership has increased, knowledge of community resources available to address offender reentry has expanded, thus resulting in increased participation in programs. While the coalition does not formally advertise, it solicits new members through networking and by inviting potential coalition members to attend their monthly meeting to demonstrate the numerous services provided by various coalition members. Offenders are reached through the various community correctional agencies, such as the state probation and parole offices and the U. S. Probation Office, as offenders are referred to various coalition members for services. Additionally, representatives of the coalition attend local job fairs, speak at government or agency events, and have conducted both newspaper and television interviews with local news agencies regarding the coalition’s efforts.

Despite the referrals for social services, treatment, job training, and employment placement, it is difficult to conduct an impact assessment of the coalition as it lacks documentation and record keeping. Specifically, referrals are not funneled through the coalition thus there is no documentary evidence of the number of referrals or success of the same. As such, there is no mapping of prisoner reentry, which could provide valuable information as to specific community areas which should receive attention or funds. However, such data could be provided to policymakers and public officials when attempting to further the coalition’s reentry efforts. While each community corrections agency maintains employment statistics, including referrals for social services, it is impossible to discern those which are directed to the coalition. For example, a parole officer may refer a parolee to a housing provider who accepts the parolee specifically due to the coalition relationship between the housing provider and parole office,

however there is no record of the same, thus rendering the successful referral undetectable. The coalition recognizes that its sustainability will be jeopardized if it is unable to provide statistical evidence of its activities and successes. Accordingly, it is developing a mechanism for tracking those transactions relating to the coalition – which likely will not occur until the coalition is formalized through non-profit corporation status.

Despite the lack of formal record-keeping, there are numerous success stories provided by member agencies which can be attributed to the coalition. These accomplishments range from providing housing to the homeless, food for the hungry, jobs for the unemployed, and medical care for those with pressing health problems. Officer Mason advised of one such example of successful collaboration between coalition founding members - the U. S. Probation Office and Goodwill Industries. Goodwill placed large bins at the probation office which were quickly filled, several times over, by probation employees with clothing, household items, toys, etc. In return, Goodwill provided “coupons” for clothing which probation officers distributed to offenders in need. By personally giving for this better cause, probation employees developed a stake in the success of the program and were able to observe first-hand the results of their efforts. These types of success stories demonstrate the “collaboration, communication, and advocacy” at the heart of the coalition mission statement.

Example of Successful Collaboration

A convicted Bank Robber with a violent background was released from federal prison to the supervision of the U. S. Probation Office. The offender was homeless, lacked ties to the community, had significant medical issues (was confined to a wheelchair), was diabetic and required insulin, and was not receiving any form of benefits. While the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) attempted to prepare the offender for his release by assisting him with applying for Social Security Disability Insurance benefits and providing him with a thirty (30) day supply of medication, the BOP was unable to locate housing or other services upon his release. The U. S. Probation Office, through email, personal, and telephonic means, contacted coalition members seeking emergency housing assistance and medical care. A coalition member who runs a boarding house agreed to allow the offender to reside at her group home rent free until his disability payments commenced. Further, a health care facility provided the offender with diabetic testing supplies, insulin, and syringes. Through the ongoing direction of the probation office, the offender is accessing other community resources to continue his transition to the community, including attempting to assist him in re-establishing ties with out-of-state family members who had previously disregarded his requests for assistance.

The Macon Reentry Coalition has a bright future as it is looking to develop a formal community impact program similar to that of the Savannah Impact Program (SIP). The SIP emerged from a previously existing Community Oriented Policing program in Savannah, Georgia in 2001 when a coalition between the Savannah Police Department, Chatham County Adult Education, State Board of Pardons and Parole, Georgia Department of Corrections, Juvenile Justice, and Department of Labor was established using \$539,000 in State funding and \$500,000 from the City of Savannah. (Flynn 2003) Upon implementation of the program, Savannah saw an immediate decrease in violent crime which motivated officials to continue the collaboration which became a model for other jurisdictions. Recently, several MRC members toured the SIP facility in Savannah and hosted the SIP director at coalition meeting to assist them in planning a similar program in Macon. Mayor Reichert has demonstrated strong support for such a program and even facilitated MRC membership travel to Savannah. Further, the coalition has solicited advice from officials in Atlanta, Georgia who have created a similar program. By involving these

outside parties to speak to coalition members and share their community's successes, the coalition founders have legitimized their goals and mission, demonstrated the potential of the MRC, and garnered support for a community impact center in Macon – which could have a significant, positive impact on Middle Georgia.

Macon Mayor Robert Reichert has also proposed utilizing the coalition to fill in unpaid city positions, which were eliminated due to city coffer shortages, with offenders in need of employment. Specifically, the city had postponed filling numerous vacant positions due to budgeting concerns and on November 10, 2009, Reichert announced that thirty-one (31) city employees would be laid off effective January 15, 2010. Reichert has indicated to the coalition he desires to put offenders in various positions for job training purposes which may eventually lead to full-time, paid positions. This arrangement would be mutually beneficial as offenders would receive job training and would have a positive work experience while the city of Macon could meet its needs in an otherwise unattainable fashion.

Conclusion

Criminal offenders are released in mass from various state and federal correctional institutions back into the community without the skills necessary to become contributing members of society. These offenders then shuffle through a “revolving door” between the community and jail while causing collateral damage within their communities and familial units. However, a recent shift in philosophy has emerged, based upon empirical research, which reflects that offenders who are provided training and assistance to meet their basic needs, such as housing and employment, experience a decrease in recidivism which increases their long term prognosis. This research demonstrates that by investing in offenders on the “front-end,” long term benefits to society are realized through decreased crime rates, increased tax revenue, etc.

Macon, Georgia is home to many social service agencies, community corrections offices, and state and federal agency divisional offices which strive to meet offender needs. Services provided in the community include long-term and emergency housing, drug and mental health treatment programs, medical care, and employment placement. While these agencies have provided adequate, and oftentimes, exceptional service in the past, they have joined together to form the Macon Reentry Coalition to specifically address social problems confronting offenders in the criminal justice system and those at risk for engaging in criminal conduct. This coalition consists of federal and state law enforcement agencies, local and state government, non-profit organizations, employers, and private entities and individuals.

The coalition, while relatively new, addresses offender reentry through education of the community, assistance to offenders, and forming networks such that the agencies may work together to provide a foundation for the offender in which to survive and thrive while on supervision and beyond. Based upon its current structure, it is not possible to assess the coalition's program impact through numerical statistics of program completions, referrals made, or successful placements. However, it is apparent through the rapidly growing membership and diversity of the diverse membership base that the coalition has a strong foundation on which to expand. Key officials, such as the city's mayor, police chief, probation and parole chiefs, and agency directors have committed to the coalition mission and are demonstrating their commitment through agency resources.

Resources

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Appendix A

Macon Re-entry Coalition Founding Partners:

Organization	Contact Person
United States Probation Office	Kevin L. Mason, U. S. Probation Officer*
Dismas Charities	Reginald Banks, Director
Georgia Department of Corrections	Stacy Rivera, Chief Probation Officer Devona Bell, State Probation Officer AJ Saabree, Director of Reentry Services
Central GA Technical College	Sallie Devero, Dean of Adult Literacy
Bibb County, Georgia	Alisha Hall, Human Resources Officer
Georgia Department of Labor	Rick Henderson, TOPPSTEP Regional Coordinator Ed Leysath, Vocational Rehab Unit Manager
Macon Transitional Center	Terry Jones, Employment Manager
Goodwill Industries	Angeline Ndonyi, Program Manager*
River Edge Behavioral Health Center	Greta O'Dell, Mental Health Coordinator
Georgia Board of Pardons and Parole	Tammy Stubbs, Chief Parole Officer*
Mayor's Office of Workforce Development Macon, Georgia	Betty Toussaint, Adult/Dislocated Coordinator*
*Denotes Key Informants	

Macon Re-entry Coalition Contributing Partners:

- Bibb County Board of Education
- Macon Housing Authority
- Georgia Department of Driver Services
- Macon Rescue Mission
- NAACP
- Georgia Legal Services
- Central Georgia Technical College
- Macon Police Department
- Macon City Council
- Bibb County Sheriff's Office
- United Way
- Numerous other churches, homeless shelters, and ministries

APPENDIX B**Ex-Prisoners Re-Entering the Workforce**

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Sewing is Alfraido Thomas' specialty.

"I can take a pattern and start from the raw material. I can cut it. I can assemble it. I can also pack it," Thomas says.

These skills helped him stitch together a new life.

"Because I worked for another industry, which is the prison industry," Thomas says.

Thomas spent almost 17 years in prison on drug charges. After his release, he started working at Macon Garment as a sewer. Now, he's a supervisor.

"He's worked for a year and a half and never missed a day of work," says Wade Moore, the owner Macon Garment. "He has a great attitude and he's just a great person. And I'm grateful to have him as an employee."

Macon Garment supplies clothing for the military and makes about 10,000 shirts a week.

Moore says a few years ago, they realized many ex-prisoners have sewing experience.

"We started hiring people because they sewed while they were in prison. They came out with skills of sewing. And then we also started hiring people without sewing skills to run automotive equipment," Moore says.

His business now employs 11 ex-offenders.

According to the Georgia Department of Corrections, 97% of the people currently incarcerated will eventually return to the community. And experts say a major component for an ex-prisoner's success is finding employment.

The Macon Re-Entry Coalition was created to help ex-offenders find work.

Coalition Chairperson Kevin Mason says, "The unemployment rate for the ex-offender is probably about 10 to 15 points higher than the state average right now. So you're going to run anywhere from 20-25% unemployment."

The Coalition includes representatives from probation offices, the Georgia Department of Labor, Goodwill Industries and faith based organizations.

"What we're trying to do is make sure that these guys get training. We work with them with adult literacy to obtain a GED and to obtain better skills," Mason says.

Jesse Anthony has computer skills, a college degree and training in quality assurance. But there's a problem when he meets a potential employer.

"They always ask if you have been convicted, and some of them ask if you have been convicted in the last several years," Anthony says.

Drug charges landed Anthony in prison for 18 and a half years. He says times are tough and jobs are competitive, but being unemployed is especially difficult for an ex-prisoner.

"If you feel like you can give us an opportunity, we'll take that opportunity," Anthony says. "And I pray that when we take that opportunity, we'll be wise and faithful to our employers."

It's an opportunity that Thomas thinks everyone should have.

"We are trained. The only thing we want is just a chance. That's all we ask for," Thomas says.

And he says their work will speak for itself.

If you are interested in learning more about the Macon Re-Entry Coalition or would like to hire an ex-offender, you can reach Chairperson Kevin Mason at (478) 207-2163.