

Missed a meeting? Here's some of what we've been talking about...

**Hot Topic: *Prioritizing Re-entry***

**The Discussion**

- Regarding how they decided what should be prioritized, one member stated, “Coming home I didn’t instinctively think ‘what do I do now [for my future]’—I was more focused on finding somewhere to stay.”
- While basic needs, employment, and education were all considered priorities for successful re-entry, there was clear disagreement in what members expressed regarding what types of re-entry services are needed and which should be prioritized. Some members expressed that agencies should focus on basic needs (housing, food, etc.) while others felt the focus should be on giving people access to “ways to better themselves.” Almost everyone agreed that employment should be prioritized given the difficulties they faced due to having a criminal record.
- Members agreed that while it was important to address their mental health and/or substance use, the programs they attended “only focused on that”. One member stated, “They try to give you a lot of stuff to get your mind right, change your thinking, but they need to put more vocational programs in place too—a trade you can use to earn a living.” Another added, “We need alternatives [to engaging in criminal activity for money] because you can get sanctions for not being employed, but no one really wants to hire you—ban the box is a joke.”
- Members also expressed a need for individuality when it comes to re-entry. One member stated, “Solutions to the *individual’s* process are needed—everything don’t work for everybody but there ain’t a lot of options out there, or I don’t know [where to find them].”
- Regarding their physical health, one member made his priorities upon release from prison pretty clear saying “My health was very low on my list when I got released...I needed money—a job.” Members also expressed difficulty navigating the health care system and having limited resources to attend doctor’s appointments. One member stated, “Medical transportation is not the easiest to use and you can forget it if you have a same-day appointment, but at least it’s available.”

**Member Recommendations**

- If one is able to find a job, then what? ”Members recommend offering classes on how to keep a job and the “do’s and don’ts” of the workplace.
- Make people aware of programs and opportunities to better themselves. “There might be a lot of stuff out there, but the workers don’t always know about it. We need to learn how to navigate [felony friendly employers], healthy [alternatives], recreation—life.” Have “Life Fairs,” not just job fairs.
- Develop a “re-entry fund” – financial assistance for job training and sober housing.
- Thoroughly explain what types of programs are out there and the differences between them to help people decide what works best for them.
- “Give people strategies that help them connect with world, not just for staying sober or taking medication. People have personal demons that can be alleviated, but not in traditional therapeutic ways.”

### What's Being Done

- NSC members are currently looking for community partner agencies throughout the state to host “Life Fairs” at their organizations. If you know of an agency willing to host a “Life Fair” or of any services/supports, or felony friendly employers who would like to participate, please have them contact Barry Pinckney at [barryw.pinckney@gmail.com](mailto:barryw.pinckney@gmail.com).
- The [Federal Bonding Program \(FBP\)](#) is a hiring incentive tool for employers to hire individuals whose backgrounds can pose significant barriers to obtaining employment such as justice-involved citizens, individuals in recovery from substance use disorders, welfare recipients, individuals with poor credit records, economically disadvantaged youth and adults who lack work histories, and individuals dishonorably discharged from the military. This program is available in all 50 states. Many people are currently lobbying for the federal government to offer a similar bonding program for housing.
- There are programs dedicated to re-entry which offer services across the “needs” spectrum. One such program is the New Jersey Re-Entry Corporation (NJRC). In addition to employment services, NJRC offers substance abuse counseling, educational services, expungement assistance and much more. You can find more information about NJRC by clicking [here](#).
- The New Jersey Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) offers “Justice Involved Services” in various counties throughout the state. This targeted case management program is designed to help people with serious mental illness avoid incarceration and assist with re-entry from jail. To learn more about this program please click [here](#).
- The Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD) and the New Jersey State Parole jointly offer the Parolee Employment Placement Program (PEPP) to help reduce recidivism and increase the likelihood of people on parole obtaining and retaining employment. For more information please click [here](#).
- There are many officers, counselors, and case managers working on an individual level to enhance re-entry efforts that do not always receive, nor want, recognition for what they do. The members of Next 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance, however, felt it was important to acknowledge them as well.

*“The main challenge was getting over my own fears...my shame.”- NSC Member*