

Research on the Importance of Family Conflict Resolution for Returning Inmates

“From Prison to Home: The Dimension and Consequences of Prisoner Re-entry” reports the following important findings about the re-entry experience:

- ❖ A Vera Institute of Justice Study from 1999 found that, “strong family involvement or support was an important indicator of successful reintegration across the board”, including predicting successful employment, lower drug use, and lower levels of criminal activity. (page 20)
- ❖ “Prisoners facing release often feel anxious about reestablishing family ties...” (page 18).
- ❖ Because housing is a major challenge upon release, many people look to their family for support and those without family supported housing may end up homeless. For those who do live with family members initially, this arrangement may not last because, “These familial relationships may also be so severely strained and tenuous that staying with family members or friends is not a viable option.” (page 35)
- ❖ Because the “moment of release” is a crucial period of time, and actions taken within that 24 hour period after release can determine individuals’ success on the outside, the report recommends moving the re-entry preparation into the prison itself, prior to release.

The criminal justice research community, while acknowledging the importance of family in the transition from incarceration through the creation and maintenance of pro-social bonds and consequent informal social controls (Petersilia, 2003, Sampson & Laub, 1993; Travis, Solomon & Waul, 2001), also notes the lack of empirical evidence related to the role of family in the re-entry process (Maruna, Immarigeon & LaBel, 2004; Mills & Codd, 2008; Taxman, Young & Byrne, 2004; Travis, 2005). Despite evidence of the importance of prosocial relationships in the desistance process, few strategies actively and/or directly engage the family as part of a comprehensive integrated rehabilitative re-entry approach. Rossman posits that “partnerships may be needed to (1) offer returning inmates meaningful informal supports that can improve their chances ... and (2) extend both formal and informal service provision to family members who may be instrumental in facilitating (or conversely, undermining) offender’s reentry” (2003, p. 344). Notably, a survey conducted in the United Kingdom found that those who were visited while incarcerated were three times more likely to have housing upon release noting that even a single visit allowed the opportunity to “make arrangements for ... release or operated as a demonstration of support ... [reflecting] a promise of continued assistance after release” (Mills & Codd, 2008, p. 12-13).

References

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Examples of Re-entry Mediation

Through two of its member centers, CMM has begun offering re-entry mediation in six institutions. Community Mediation Program mediates cases in Baltimore facilities (ACT-SAP in the Detention Center, BPRU, BPRUW, and MTC) and Anne Arundel Conflict Resolution Center mediates cases in Jessup facilities (MCIW and Toulson Bootcamp). Mediators report the following successes from these mediations:

- ❖ An Inmate and his ex-father-in-law (and pastor of his church) met to talk about forgiveness and creating a new life. They discussed the inmates hope for reconciliation with family and friends. They developed a plan of communication including who to call for help, how to ask for help and support from people of the congregation and family. Education and ideas about job opportunities were developed. They also discussed what the appropriate response is toward those who do not want to reconcile or forgive.
- ❖ An Inmate and the mother of his child met to talk about re-introducing him to his 2 and a half year old son. During past visits, the child had been uncomfortable. The inmate was sad that his child did not know his father. They spent their time talking about ways to allow the child to get to know him slowly. They explored their philosophies of child rearing and tried to find common ground concerning their goals for the child, discipline, and schooling.
- ❖ An inmate preparing for release knew her two housing options were either with her husband who was still using drugs or her sister, who was still very angry with her for her decisions in the past. She mediated with her sister and talked through some very hard subjects. She commented at the end of the mediation that had this difficult conversation not happened in a mediation setting, she would have punched her sister and walked out on her. She knew there would still be hard work ahead, but she felt hopeful because of the progress they made in mediation.
- ❖ A young couple began the mediation discussing his family and his need to find a housing arrangement that was not with his family. As they continued the discussion, he realized he also need to make plans about their relationship, which friends he would spend time with and which he would not spend time with, and how he would get a job. In the second session, the next week, they resolved those things.
- ❖ An inmate and his girlfriend thought they were just going to plan for the future, but after 30 minutes of the conversation, they realized that past hurts were keeping them from making those plans. They were able to use mediation to work through those past hurts, so that they can make plans and focus on the future.
- ❖ An inmate met with his mother to discuss living arrangement. The first hour of the conversation revolved around the impact the incarceration had on family and friends. From that discussion they made plans around how to best manage the parole period and keep him working and able to pay back bail money he owes.
- ❖ An inmate and her mother spoke honestly about how substance abuse had started her on the path that led to the institution. It was the first time in a long time that the inmate heard her mother tell her how proud she was of the young girl she had been before drugs and the woman she was becoming since she had been in recovery.
- ❖ An inmate who had taken his sister off of his visitor's list years before without telling her why, decided that before his release they needed to mend their relationship so that he could live with her upon his release. The sister, who was in a simultaneous mediation with her other siblings about the plans for house she wanted the inmate to come home to agreed to the mediation. They talked about their relationship, made a plan for his release, and plan to have a mediation once the inmate gets out.
- ❖ An inmate and his girlfriend came together to discuss their relationship. They had lived together but his relapse had damaged her faith in him and they wanted to discuss communication, trust, and financial issues as they looked toward a future that may include marriage. After the first session in which the past was discussed and a list of topics was made, the inmate said with respect to scheduling a second session to brainstorm solutions, "Let's go through the process now so we can do it on our own in the future." After the second session, a productive brainstorm on their communication issue, the inmate commented, "I'm getting a lot out of this, I definitely want to continue. I think it's something we've needed for a long time. I didn't think this would do any good. I didn't expect *this*."