

TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMMING

Introduction to Adult Offender Transition Services

The Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) provides transitional programming to offenders at all facilities. These services help to prepare offenders for release to the community. This document describes some of the transitional services currently provided to offenders. Not all of these services are available at all facilities; rather, some efforts are concentrated at facilities with the greatest amount of offender releases.

MCORP

The DOC recently embarked on a major, multi-year offender reentry initiative. The Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan (MCORP) is organized around three basis phases: institution, transition, and community reentry. A staff reentry team has been established to identify reentry “best practices,” select a target group of offenders, and implement strategies to coordinate services into a comprehensive approach for offenders returning to the community. These strategies will require a collaboration of multiple agencies and organizations throughout Minnesota. For more information about MCORP, visit www.forums.doc.state.mn.us/mcorp.

Mock Job Interview Fairs

Mock job fairs for offenders nearing release are held annually. Through a contractual agreement, a community nonprofit organization works with DOC transition staff to recruit employers to participate as interview-

ers at these events. Employers are advised that the purpose of the fair is to assist offenders in developing job-seeking skills. There is no premise that employers will hire any of the offenders interviewed.

Participating offenders receive training to prepare them for several interviews, with different employers, to polish their interviewing skills. Employers unanimously have described the job fair experience as an excellent investment of their time and energy. Many are surprised by the high commitment and appreciation expressed by offenders.

Resource Fairs

Transition resource fairs are held annually. Community resource organizations and agencies from around the state are invited to participate as exhibitors. Exhibitors typically are government agencies, trade unions, faith-based groups, community nonprofits, and volunteer groups. They represent resources in a variety of offender need areas including housing, employment, family support, personal finance, and mental health. Facility staff and offenders are invited to attend and meet with exhibitors throughout the day.

Pre-Release Classes

A pre-release class curriculum handbook is provided to every offender completing mandatory pre-release classes at all adult facilities. The curriculum covers housing, employment, personal identification document acquisition, health, transportation, family reunification, living under supervision, and personal

money management. The handbook is also available on the DOC website (www.doc.state.mn.us/publications/pdf/prereleasehandbook.pdf).

EMPLOY

MINNCOR, the DOC’s prison industry program, has created EMPLOY – a reentry initiative to serve offenders working in all facets of industry operations. EMPLOY will focus on helping participants capitalize on industry work experiences and skills acquired during incarceration, connect with employers and jobs in their communities post-release, and provide basic employment verification. EMPLOY will also collect data by tracking participants’ employment progress as they reintegrate back into the community.

Photo Identification (ID) Project

A widespread and chronic problem for confined offenders is lack of appropriate ID documents. At release, they are paralyzed if they cannot prove their identity to police, potential employers, banks, etc.

Strategies have been put in place to address this problem. Admission, casework, and transition staff identify and provide assistance to offenders in securing a social security card and birth certificate. (Fees for birth certificate applications are paid from offender phone revenue at the facilities.) Once these documents are obtained, they are retained in the offender’s base file until the offender is returned to the community.

Offenders at medium-security facilities may also obtain a state photo

ID card or renew their driver's license. Through a partnership with the Department of Public Safety's Driver and Vehicle Services, equipment and staff are provided to process these materials at the facilities.

Health Services Discharge Planning

The DOC Health Services Unit provides specialty release and reintegration services related to medical, mental health, chemical dependency, and sex offender needs.

Medical staff identify soon-to-be-released offenders with unique medical care needs and refer them to the medical release planner for continuing medical care. Behavioral health staff offer release planning services to severely mentally ill offenders and as a component of the chemical dependency and sex offender treatment programs. Continued clinical services form the foundation for a comprehensive behavioral health reintegration plan. Also included in the plan are placement in specialized housing, work or education involvement, and family/friends participation in the offender's community reintegration. All planning is in conjunction with the requirements of correctional supervision.

Career Exploration Workshops

A Perkins Educational Grant Award allows the DOC to provide career exploration workshops to offenders nearing release. Participating offenders are those involved in vocational education programs, industry work programs, or the Challenge Incarceration Program.

Workshops provide nine hours of classroom instruction and interaction in investigating career opportunities, building-self confidence, industry and job market aspects, resume and portfolio development, interviewing skills,

and job retention. Workshop size is capped at 17 offenders to optimize individual attention and participation. Materials and assistance are provided to participants so they may complete a resume and portfolio. Professional employment placement staff from the private sector are contracted to facilitate the workshops.

Health Care Coverage

Many offenders do not have health care coverage in the community for themselves or their families. To address this issue, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) has provided training to all DOC facility caseworkers on applying for state-subsidized health care plans for low-income individuals and families. Written application information is provided to offenders. Upon request, staff assist offenders in applying for health care coverage.

The DHS has also developed policy to provide consistency in the way county workers process applications.

Introduction to Juvenile Transition Services

The Red Wing facility provides treatment, education, and transition services for serious and chronic male juvenile offenders. Transition risks and needs are assessed early in a resident's stay and include family, education/employment, peer relationships, substance abuse, leisure/recreation, personality/behavior, and attitude/orientation. As the resident progresses through the treatment process, community-based individuals and groups are invited to provide transition services for the resident while he is at the facility and following release.

When a resident achieves pre-release status, he is assigned to the facility's Transition Services Unit to finalize community reentry plans for employment, education, residence, leisure, relapse prevention, and aftercare support systems. Community conferences are conducted to ensure that the plan addresses the risks and needs of the resident.

While on pre-release status, residents are afforded three to five-day furloughs in the community in order to finalize their plans. During furloughs, residents are monitored and assisted by the facility's regional transition caseworkers. Furloughs also provide the resident an opportunity to process difficult-to-manage events that occurred during the furloughs, with a particular emphasis on the effectiveness of the resident's Relapse Prevention Plan.

When a resident successfully completes pre-release requirements, he is released on a 90-day, extended-furlough status. During this time, regional transition caseworkers in collaboration with family members, employers, education personnel, court services, staff, and community-based service providers monitor the youth's progress. They also interact with family members, employers, education personnel, court services staff, and community-based service providers. Residents who fail to meet furlough conditions may be returned to the facility. Approximately 90 percent of residents successfully complete the extended furlough phase and are then paroled to the community.

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