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*"A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work"*

**"REMEMBER THE PRISONER":  
UNIQUE OPPORTUNITES TO HELP THE FORMERLY  
INCARCERATED**

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**1. The scope and nature of the needs of offenders, pre- and post-release:**

It is hard to believe but there are over 2.2 million people currently serving time in a federal or state prison or a local jail, an increase of almost 600% from just thirty (30) years ago. Significantly, over 97% of inmates will eventually be released back into our communities. Indeed, every year almost 700,000 inmates are released from federal and state prison alone; this translates into 1,900 people each and every day leaving prison and reentering society.

Unfortunately, the successful integration of former inmates into our communities is very often frustrated, as over 2/3 of those released from prison are rearrested within just three (3) years. Thus, our communities have an important task in front of them, one that must be tackled if we hope to give ex-offenders a better way of life and bring more safety to our citizens.

One thing we know for sure: with such a high re-arrest rate of ex-offenders, the current prisoner reentry strategy is simply not working. In order to change this situation, President Bush believes that we need to empower some of our country's most effective volunteers; that is, people who are in the faith community. The President firmly believes that faith-based groups should be welcome partners with the Federal government, should be treated the same way as any other

organization, and should have their integrity protected when they receive government money.

**2. There are many opportunities for professional ministry of social workers in U.S. prisons or jails and among former inmates released back into the community:**

- counseling and mentoring;
- chemical dependency therapy;
- vocational training;
- advocacy for treatment, government benefits, fair chance at a job, etc.; and
- life skills training (how to get along at work, be a good steward of income, use public transportation, etc.)

**3. Recognize the legal and practical channel markers for navigating in prison/reentry ministry.**

- A Level Playing Field: The Equal Treatment of Faith-Based and Other Community Organizations:

Organizations otherwise eligible to apply may not be denied the opportunity to compete for federal assistance, nor be discriminated for or against, on the basis of their religious character or affiliation. (Title 28, Code of Federal Regulations Part 38) By law, the government is required to be neutral with respect to religion. President Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiative removes barriers to participation by faith-based and other community organizations in federal programs and ensures a "level playing field" for all groups and persons, religious or secular. Faith-based organizations can partner with the government and still retain their religious activities, mission, icons, and form of governance.

- Restrictions on the Use of Direct Federal Assistance.

Most federal assistance to non-government organizations is "direct assistance." Direct assistance includes:

- Discretionary Grants
- Formula and Block Grants to State Governments
- Cooperative Agreements and Contracts
- Pass-through funding—sub-grants, subcontracts, etc., from an entity that received the money *directly* from the federal government

Direct federal assistance *cannot* be used to pay for “inherently religious activities” such as:

- Prayer
- Worship
- Religious Instruction, Scripture Study or Spiritual Counseling
- Evangelization

*However*, faith-based organizations that receive direct federal assistance may:

- carry out their religious activities and display religious signs or symbols inside and outside their facilities;
- use religion as a basis to select their board members and govern themselves on a religious basis; and
- offer voluntary religious activities to program beneficiaries provided such activities are: 1) held at a different time or in a different room from the federally-funded activities; and 2) paid for with private money.

- Indirect Federal Assistance: More Freedom

Indirect federal assistance includes any funding *where the beneficiaries of a government program themselves choose where government money will be spent.*

- Vouchers are an example of indirect government funding. Under a voucherized system, a program beneficiary can choose where he or she receives the government-funded service from a list of local providers. If there is at least one secular provider available, a faith-based provider under a voucher system may legally include inherently religious activities (i.e., prayer, worship, bible study, evangelization, etc.) in the program being paid for with government money.
- Religious Hiring

Faith-based organizations have the freedom to base employment decisions on religious grounds under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, *unless* a program statute contains a prohibition on doing so.

- However, even in this latter case, under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (42 U.S.C. 2000bb), a faith-based organization is entitled to receive government funding *and* consider religion when hiring if it certifies that its religious practice would be substantially burdened if it were unable to consider the religion of employee applicants. (For certification, see <http://www.usdoj.gov/fbci/effect-rfra.pdf>.)
- Operating Within a Prison or Jail

If you will be operating within a prison or jail, you must get trained and badged as a cleared volunteer and then meticulously obey all the prison's rules.

#### **4. Identify and weigh the merits of government funding available for reentry services:**

##### Pros:

- Funding can be used to startup a new ministry or service or to expand the capacity of an existing ministry or service;
- If government funding is disbursed through a voucherized or “indirect funding” mechanism (that is, the clients themselves choose from among religious or secular service providers where government money will be spent), a faith-based organization need not separate inherently religious activities (prayer, worship, bible study, evangelization, etc.) from activities being funded with government money.
- Faith-based organizations may continue to consider religion when hiring staff, either through Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or through the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993.
- Religious programming *within* prisons and jails need not be ecumenical and inclusive in its message; it can be “sectarian” and make spiritual truth claims.
- Volunteers in prison can share their faith with receptive inmates. The prison cannot suppress volunteers’ speech that might persuade an inmate to convert. However, volunteers cannot evangelize during a secular social service that is paid for directly with government funds; they need to do it at a different time or in different room.

##### Cons:

- An organization can become addicted to government funding and may not adequately explore other sources of funding. As a result, an organization can experience serious difficulties if the government funding ever dries up.
- If direct government funding is involved, an organization may not engage in inherently religious activities (prayer, worship, bible study, evangelization, etc.) using government money; rather, the organization must separate these activities by time or venue from the activities being paid for with government funds.
  - Exception: voucher program (i.e., indirect funding).

## **5. Federal Funding & Services for Prisoner Reentry**

*(Programs in italics denote on-going funding opportunities and/or services)*

### **President Bush's Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI)**

#### **U.S. Department of Labor PRI grants**

- The U.S. Department of Labor is the lead federal agency on PRI. In November of 2005, 30 grantees<sup>1</sup> in 20 states were awarded \$660,000 per year for up to three years of post-release services beginning in the spring of 2006 (<http://www.dol.gov/cfbci/PRIcontacts.htm>).
- For more information, contact Scott Shortenhaus, Center For Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, U.S. Department of Labor at 202-693-6450.

#### **U.S. Department of Justice PRI grants**

- During summer 2006, \$450,000 - \$1,800,000 was awarded to 20 state prison systems<sup>2</sup> (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/grant/06PRIawards.pdf>).
- Awards are for pre-release services for state and local (not federal) inmates who will receive post-release services from Labor grantees.
- For more information, contact Andrew Malloy, Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice at 202-514-9909.

### **Department of Justice**

#### ***Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative***

- Voucher-based demonstration project designed to combat gangs using a combination of prevention, law enforcement, and prisoner reentry strategies.
- \$500,000 was awarded to each of ten cities: Cleveland, Dallas-Ft. Worth, E. Los Angeles, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Oklahoma City, Raleigh-Durham, Rochester, Tampa, and "The 222 Corridor" between Lancaster

and Easton, PA (<http://www.psn.gov/>).

- For more information, contact the U.S. Attorneys Office covering each city: <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/offices/index.html>

### ***Weed & Seed***

- The aim of the Weed & Seed program is to prevent, control, and reduce violent crime, drug abuse, and gang activity and facilitate prisoner reentry in designated high-crime neighborhoods across the country (“weed out” crime elements and “seed in” positive programs). US Attorneys can apply for designation of high-crime neighborhoods as Weed & Seed sites.

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<sup>1</sup> Tucson, Phoenix, San Diego, Oakland, Sacramento, Fresno, Denver, Hartford, Ft. Lauderdale, Des Moines, Chicago, Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Boston, Baltimore, Pontiac (MI), St. Louis, Kansas City (MO), Egg Harbor City (NJ), Brooklyn, Astoria (Newark), Bronx, Cincinnati, Portland (OR), Philadelphia, Houston, San Antonio, Dallas, Seattle, Milwaukee.

<sup>2</sup> AZ, CA, CO, CT, FL, IA, IL, LA, MA, MD, MI, MO, NJ, NY, OH, OR, PA, TX, WA, and WI

- The Steering Committee for each site consists of local faith-based and community representatives, who determine how to invest funding in law enforcement and prisoner reentry (\$1.1 million spread over four years).
- Weed & Seed contact directory: <http://contacts.weedandseed.info/>

### **Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP)**

#### ***Residential Reentry Centers*** (Halfway Houses)

- Contractors are paid to provide returning ex-offenders with short-term, secure housing with some programming (<http://www.bop.gov/locations/cc/index.jsp>).
- For more information, contact Jerry Vroegh (BOP) at 202-305-8906, or Ron Hayes (BOP) at 202-305-8741.

#### **Faith- or Character-Based Pre-Release Program** (“Life Connections”)

- Voluntary 18-month curriculum in federal correctional institutions in five states<sup>3</sup> which covers ethical decision-making, anger management, victim restitution, etc.
- BOP contracts with faith leaders to provide programming and mentors.

### **Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention**

#### **Juvenile Sex Offender Treatment Program Development and Capacity Building**

- This program provides support to develop or build capacity of residential treatment programs for juvenile sex offenders, in particular regarding reentry of youth into their home communities.

### **Department of Labor**

## **Ready 4 Work**

- A three-year, \$22.5 million program – jointly funded by the Departments of Labor and Justice and a consortium of private foundations – to assist faith-based and community programs that provide mentoring and other transition services for men and women returning from prison.
- Grantee sites: 11 for adult non-violent felons<sup>4</sup>, six for juvenile offenders<sup>5</sup>.
- More information: [http://www.dol.gov/cfbci/Ready4Work\\_contacts.htm](http://www.dol.gov/cfbci/Ready4Work_contacts.htm)

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<sup>3</sup> Federal Correctional Institution, Milan, MI; U.S. Penitentiary, Leavenworth, KS; Federal Medical Center, Carswell, TX; Federal Correctional Institution, Petersburg, VA; U.S. Penitentiary, Terre Haute, IN;

<sup>4</sup> Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, Memphis, Milwaukee, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.

<sup>5</sup> Boston, Brooklyn, Camden, Houston, Los Angeles, Seattle

## ***One Stop Career Centers***

- Centers offer training referrals, career counseling, job listings, and similar employment-related services. Centers can assist ex-offenders in finding jobs.
- More information: <http://www.careeronestop.org/>

## **Beneficiary-Choice Contracting Program**

- \$5 million to five grantees<sup>6</sup> to assist ex-offenders ages 18 to 29 with transitioning from prison to the workplace.
- Participants will be able to choose service providers from pools of faith-based and other community groups, thereby encouraging them to take personal ownership in choosing the services they believe best fit their needs.
- For more information, contact Scott Shortenhaus, Center For Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, U.S. Department of Labor at 202-693-6450.

## ***Federal Fidelity Bonding Program (FBP)***

- Secures the job placement of ex-offenders and other high-risk job applicants. The FBP functions as a job placement tool by providing employers with a special incentive to hire the hardest-to-place jobseekers.
- More information: <http://www.bonds4jobs.com/>

## ***Federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit***

- Federal tax credit that encourages employers to hire ex-offenders by

reducing employers' federal income tax liability by as much as \$2,400 per qualified new worker.

- More information:

<http://www.doleta.gov/business/Incentives/opptax/>

***Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP)***

- Provides services to assist in reintegrating homeless veterans, including ex-offenders, into meaningful employment. Program competed yearly, based on funding availability.

- More information:

[http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/fact/Homeless\\_veterans\\_fs04.htm](http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/fact/Homeless_veterans_fs04.htm)

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<sup>6</sup> Arizona Women's Education and Employment Inc. of Phoenix; Colorado's Department of Labor and Employment; the City of Chicago; the Indianapolis Private Industry Council Inc.; and the Director's Council of Des Moines, Iowa.

**Department of Health & Human Services**

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

***Access To Recovery (ATR)***

- A substance abuse treatment initiative which fosters consumer choice and increases treatment capacity by providing individuals with vouchers to choose and pay for the care they need.
- Grantees in CA, CT, FL, ID, IL, LA, MO, NJ, NM, TN, TX
- More information: <http://atr.samhsa.gov/>

**Substance Abuse Prevention and Prisoner Reentry Program**

- \$50,000 to between 12 and 15 faith- and community-based organizations with existing reentry programs to facilitate capacity-building and collaboration with other crime prevention efforts to reduce substance abuse and recidivism rates.
- More information: <http://prevention.samhsa.gov>

**Administration for Children and Families (ACF)**

***Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)***

- Provides assistance and work opportunities to needy families by granting states federal funds with wide flexibility to develop and implement their own welfare programs. Citizens may apply for assistance at their local TANF agency.
- More information: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/>

***Centers for Disease Control (CDC)***

- HIV testing and services:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/testing/index.htm>
- Minority Aids Initiative:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/omh/Populations/HL/HHP/MAI.htm>
- For more information, contact Mike Costigan, HHS Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives at 202-358-3595.

## **Department of Housing and Urban Development**

### ***Section 8 Rent Subsidies and Public Housing***

- Most ex-offenders are not categorically banned.
- For more information, contact Ana Farias, HUD Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives at 202-708-2404.

## **Department of Veterans Affairs**

### ***VA Programs for Ex-Offender Veterans***

- Substance abuse, mental health, disability compensation, vocational rehabilitation and employment.
- Veteran Affairs' Montgomery GI Bill (<http://www.gibill.va.gov/>) and Veterans Workforce Investment Program; Health Care for Homeless Veterans; Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program.
- National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV). NCHV provides a comprehensive source of information for America's homeless veterans (including current and ex-offenders) and the programs available to them in each state (<http://www.nchv.org/>).
- For more information, contact Darin Selnick, Center For Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, US Department of Veterans Affairs: 202-273-7499.

## **Corporation for National and Community Service**

### ***VISTA***

- Partnerships began in August 2005 in 15 cities<sup>7</sup> between VISTA and Weed & Seed in which full-time VISTA recruits volunteer as mentors for prisoners nearing release.
- More information:  
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ccdo/programs/reentry.html#vista>

## **U.S. Courts**

### ***Office of Probation and Pretrial Services (OPPS)***

- OPPS provides comprehensive reentry services during supervised release.
- More information:  
<http://www.uscourts.gov/fedprob/supervise.html>

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<sup>7</sup> Austin, Charleston, Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, Dallas-Ft Worth, Houston, Indianapolis, Miami, Oakland, Philadelphia, Portland (OR), Providence, San Antonio, Washington DC