
Strengthening Incarcerated Individuals

Webinar Question and Answer (Q&A)

September 23, 2015

Question: What would be your top tip or piece of advice on having a successful partnership?

Answer: *Norman Robinson, Deputy Director, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections:*

One of the things about successful partnership is really engaging the institution and the warden and his administrative, or her administrative staff. Here in Ohio, the wardens are the catalyst that, or actually the stick that actually stirs the pot. So we haven't mentioned that yet in this webinar, getting in touch with the institutional staff, but if you're a community organization that looks to want to come into an institution and then visit offenders with their families, get the institutional staff on board.

Like Robyn said, that prime entry officer is really vital. Because, like I said, when I was a warden, I saw families that came in that were very scared on their first visit. They didn't know what to do. They had never been in a prison. And really, how we handled them really sets the tone for their visitation. So definitely engaging the administrative staff at the institutions.

Wendi White, Engaging the Family Program Coordinator, New Jersey Department of Corrections:

I think communication with the partners are really important. With all of the employment agencies that we contract, we go to the agency every single month. We do an audit of the files just to make sure that they're maintaining their end of the contract. But we also communicate, how are the participants doing? What services are they asking for? How can we assist you? Continue that partnership constantly. How can we work with you and you work with us?

And everything that we do has to benefit the participants that we're working with, so it's really key to kind of be on the same page and constantly have communication about what are the struggles, the obstacles, what joys are they experiencing, and how can we continue the process of success for all the individuals involved?

Darryl Grayson, Fatherhood Director, Urban Light Ministries:

Yeah, just a few things. The partnerships are so, so key because, as I said to you, they'll provide you with resources and information that you normally don't get if you don't have it. So what we try to do is say, okay, to a dad, we know you are leaving here at some point. How do we connect you to the right entity that could help you in your transition home? How do we help you while you're here now? And we only can do that if we have partnerships. So we can reach out to, in our particular county, Clark County Department of Child and Family Services, and assist those dads in Clark County while they're incarcerated. Because of our partnership, though, we can reach out to other entities across the state. Because we're part of this wonderful, we call great relationship with the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, we already have other partners that have other

connections or better connections than we have in other areas of the state. So we can really, really leverage the resources.

And I just want to copy what Wendi had said, too, and Norm. Communication, internal and external, is key, meaning we share information between the staff that's there from the warden down. Because again, if the warden's not on board, or if you leave the warden in the dark, they can't support you. And when they see you and the warden working as a tandem to enhance their experience and to bring their families and them together, they have a different perspective on what's going on. Yes, they are incarcerated, but then they get to see that even though I'm incarcerated, I can still be proactive in my kid's life. I can still have engagement with my family and children. And that gives them a whole fresh perspective, because we utilize that as a context to say, "You don't want to be in a place that somebody tells you when you can spend time with your kids or not," or, "You don't want to be in place that you're limited in regards to the reach you have and where are your children."

So now we begin to give them that self-interest perspective and that self-benefit perspective and knowing that now the warden is trying to help me do that, or the unit manager or the staff is trying to do that, the guards are allowing this group of folks to come in and make it accessible to us. They get a whole different perspective on the institution and how that works.

Question: Do the partnerships that you all have described rely on formal memoranda of understanding (or MOUs) or contracts of any sort?

Answer: *Darryl Grayson, Fatherhood Director, Urban Light Ministries:*

We have formalized MOUs with organizations. There are a couple of folks that are on this call representing one of our partners, Marriage Works Ohio. We have non-formalized ones because we've been through a relationship with them or been in a relationship with them so long that we've just been really partners in a sense. So some of them are formalized MOUs. Some of them just want a handshake agreement because we know each other, been working with each other. As required, though, by our funders, when we need to we will formalize them and submit those as part of our applications to funders.

Wendi White, Engaging the Family Program Coordinator, New Jersey Department of Corrections:

As I indicated, our partnerships with the Responsible Parenting Program and the employment agencies have an MOU. We sub-grant the employment agencies, and RPP is funded through the Office of Child Support. So those partnerships, yes. But also, when we refer our participants to other social service agencies for post-release services, that does not involve an MOU. That's where we're just relying on the kindness of those agencies to support our participants once they go home.

Question: How did you go about advocating for the reduction in fees for phone calls?

Answer: *Norman Robinson, Deputy Director, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections:*

We were actually at a meeting where the governor said we needed to fix this at any cost. And our director said he agreed, and we went ahead and, I believe, moved some money around to make this happen. And it was just one of those top priorities that had to be done. And when we were talking about shifting money, we had to shift a large amount of money because that money that we were getting off the phone revenue generated our Recovery Services Department and their budget.

So it really took from the executive level of the government to really help us move the needle forward on this. And I can tell you, we see a lot of benefits, particularly from an institutional level, on the behaviors and attitudes and rule infraction violations. You know, we've seen a good benefit in that. Now, once again, GTL, our partner, has installed more phones. But we don't have any data as far as [unintelligible], but when people get a chance to use the phone, they inherently act better and different.

Darryl Grayson, Fatherhood Director, Urban Light Ministries:

What we found out is that fathers live for that moment. So when we're engaging them, when they can communicate with their kids, we've seen the change from a father that didn't have no date to be able to reach out to their child via those phones. Some of those dads live for that moment. They live for that opportunity and don't miss. In a good way, they will find a way to be able to make that call and/or be able to connect with each other. Even when there's a lack of resources. Even when things are tight, they'll find a way to do it and, from a practitioner's standpoint, to hear from the feedback that they're beginning to share what they're learning with their families, that's invaluable.

Question: I'm a therapist with a clinic that works on maternal mental health. We're hoping to increasingly focus on incarcerated fathers and the pipeline from cradle to prison. We're looking for any recommendations on how to best partner or where to begin.

Answer: *Wendi White, Engaging the Family Program Coordinator, New Jersey Department of Corrections:*

That's a great question. I think you really need to speak with your participants and see what their particular needs are. I think a lot of times it's based on where you are located and the demographics of your agency. So it might be different for your particular population. But a lot of what we spoke about I think is really valuable, in terms of family. You said that you work with mental health. The mental health and substance abuse, those different agencies that can help assist in those areas would be so valuable. So you have to see what's around you and how they can assist.

Now, in terms of incarcerated fathers, it's really important to get the Department on board, and that's not always easy. If you want to work a specific prison, you can speak to the administrator or the warden, but you might have to contact the actual commissioner of the Department and see if they're willing to allow you to come in and kind of make that partnership and that connection. I'm going to say it's not always easy, but I would keep pursuing it and if you can show them the value of how it can help not

only the people you're working with, but the community as a whole, they usually will jump on board.

Robyn Cenizal, Director, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families:

The Resource Center does, actually, offer a good bit of information around partnerships, including some discussion around different types of partnership structures, organizational readiness, and there are some tools that are available. There are also some sample MOUs. I heard that mentioned earlier. There are some partnership agreement templates, and also, performance-based contract examples that organizations can feel free to take advantage of.

All of these resources are located on the Resource Center website under "Integration Strategies" in the section referred to as Level Two on Partnerships. So do feel free to take advantage of all of those tools, as well as there are some other resources there on the Resource Center's website under the tab marked, "Resources" that can lead to some other potential partnerships that might be of use to organizations who are trying to connect the dots within their communities to better serve either incarcerated families or their individuals on the outside. So please feel free to take advantage of all of that.

Question: Could you talk a little bit about how you determine eligibility?

Answer: *Darryl Grayson, Fatherhood Director, Urban Light Ministries:*

We serve dads from any age bracket as long as they are a father or father figure. We have some constraints around funding and how we juggle funding to serve dads or non-custodial dads or fathers that have children that are older than 18, but we'll serve any male that's coming through because we want to teach the principles of healthy, responsible fathering.

And so, whether they're a father or grandfather, or maybe a great uncle, we want to make sure those principles are shared, because a father can provide and share those principles with other men, with their children, nephews, nieces. Those healthy principles are key. So for those restrictions we have from our funders, we abide by those, but then we have this other funding stream that allows us to work with fathers that don't fit the constraints that we may have with the funder.

Wendi White, Engaging the Family Program Coordinator, New Jersey Department of Corrections:

Well, for the next week while we're grant-funded, all our participants must be a parent of a child under the age of 18. They must be in a committed relationship. They must be within three to six months of their max date, and they also have to have an addiction severity index score of above 3.

We find our participants by going through our inmate management system and running a participant pool to see what inmates are currently incarcerated and fall under these eligibility criteria. However, post-grant, as of October 1st, as I indicated, we're going to work with all incarcerated parents that have a child of any age. So like was just mentioned, if they're a grandfather, they can participate. You can, just because your

child is 30 or 40 years old doesn't mean you don't need to work on that parenting relationship. So we're not going to discriminate based on the age of the child.

We're also going to invite -- they don't have to be in a committed relationship. As I said, it can be any support member of their family. And as far as the Addiction Severity Index score goes, we're going to use that as a preference because we are, as I said, I work for the Office of Substance Abuse Programming and Addiction Services, so that isn't one of our focuses is addiction. But it's going to be a preference if they have a high ASI score. We have found, even if they don't present as having an addiction, a substance abuse issue, everybody that comes into the prison system is usually dealing with some type of addiction. Something brought them into the facility, so we are going to address all those addictions. So we're not going to put such a focus on the ASI score.

Also, as I indicated, for the grant, they have to be three to six months from their release date. Post-grant, we're going to work with people that are 12 months from their release date, so it opens the program up to a larger amount of people. And we also have a longer amount of time to work with them while they're inside and prepare them for that journey home.

Norman Robinson, Deputy Director, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections:

When we look at programs, there's a couple factors for our department when we look at determining eligibility. First of all, we want to know what is the location of the program? Where are you coming from? Are you going to be able to serve the capacity of offenders coming back to your area? Are you going to have any type of post-release?

We also look at the needs of the offenders and if their program design fits that need. So, when we look at eligibility from a global aspect, and I know someone asked a question about MOUs, MOUs are really good because the MOUs spell out specifically what your program addresses as far as the needs. And then we'll be able to say, as institutional staff, we probably need to get this demographic of individuals to make sure that they're eligible to go into that. And that's really important is to have that assessment piece, because we don't want to put the wrong offenders in the group. So there has to be some sort of delineation of where you want to put individuals.

Also, when you start talking about funding and things like that, our department doesn't have any funding for this as of yet. However, we are big in writing letters of support supporting MOUs for funding. So for example, we have two or three entities that have sought federal grants, and we have written letters of support supporting their MOU to come in and do services for us.

Now, one thing I also kind of want to talk about is resources. If you're a community agency, and let's say the institution is 60 miles away, you want to ensure that you have the resources, and I mean staff and money, to be able to come in and do what you say you're going to do. So often, one of the things that we see that fail programs is that everybody comes in with these great ideas and the program is moving really good and steady, but they run out of funding. They run out of funding, or somebody quits and the program just drops off. The damaging effect to that is, particularly when you're dealing with families, is that you're impacting the child or the spouse, and you're impacting the

inmate. And really, it just would have been best to leave it all alone. So ensure that you have the capacity to deliver when you do write up that MOU.

Question: What types of certifications are inmates receiving in Ohio, and how many hours roughly do they spend completing and receiving the certifications?

Answer: *Norman Robinson, Deputy Director, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections:*

Well you know, I'm up here at the Northeast Reintegration Center, and I won't say certifications, because we have a lot of different certifications when it comes to employment certifications and things of that nature. But what I will talk about are some of the specialty units we have in Ohio that prepare people for being released, like our reintegration dorms with a minimum eight to 10 hours of meaningful activity. And also, within the reintegration dorms, there are programming tracks. So think of it like a college curriculum that they can go into employment. They can go into wellness. They can go the faith-based track. We also have what's called a veterans unit, where we are teaching people the core responsibilities of being in the service. And up here at Northeast Reintegration, they're looking at having recruiters come in and see who's eligible to be recruited into the armed services.

We just heard from the Aramark program to where they are teaching people culinary arts and how to serve food and to get their state certification. So in Ohio, we just have a lot of different units that actually prepare individuals, and if there's a certification involved in the track that they're looking at, we try to achieve that certification.

Question: What effects have you seen from adding family engagement into treatment? What kind of personal impact do you see versus inmates who receive treatment without involving their partner or family?

Answer: *Wendi White, Engaging the Family Program Coordinator, New Jersey Department of Corrections:*

I think it's made a great impact. A lot of times the offenders have burned a lot of bridges. So this, as I indicated, it gives the opportunity to kind of start mending those fences and have discussions about what happened and where do we go from here. And, you know, we do a lot of work in relationship strengthening. As Jessica said, it's not just about intimate relationships. Those skills can apply to parent-child and your boss, and even the CO's and their bunkies inside the facility. But those skills that they learn resonate in so many different places, and that really helps mend those relationships with their family that are so very important to them pre- and post-release.

I have also seen a lot of decrease in depression. Having made connection with your family, it does a lot for your self-esteem and also gives you hope. So that's been pretty amazing. Seeing them with their children, because there are times where we invite the children to come into the prison, that's been incredible. It also has given us an opportunity to be role models for them in how to interact with their children and give them some insight into how healthy communication with their children is.

I think it just really has established strong ties which, as we've talked about, there are so many powerful places that can go. It could end the cycle of incarceration. A lot of times, when the parents are inside prison, their children end up in prison. So if we start teaching them ways to communicate and end the cycle and become stronger families, it really makes a huge impact within that family and then within society. So I think involving the family is just key to changing something so much bigger than just that family. It's really pretty powerful.

Question: What parenting skills-based education program do you use in New Jersey?

Answer: *Wendi White, Engaging the Family Program Coordinator, New Jersey Department of Corrections:*

It's a program called "Active Parenting in Three." I believe it's written by Michael Popkin. It's three chapters -- that's why they call it "in three" -- and it focuses on communication with your children, punishment versus discipline, how to encourage your children, how to help them thrive and grow, have mutual participation and respect. I think it's a great curriculum that we use, but also, the case managers always throw in their -- I always tell them, make sure you add your spice. So a lot of them have different creative activities that they use and worksheets, but we use the Active Parenting in Three as our guideline for the information that we give to the participants.

Question: How do you address participants with a history of domestic violence in your programming?

Answer: *Norman Robinson, Deputy Director, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections:*

That's one of the things that we do with all of our family programming. In the previous question, I was asked about the eligibility. We screen everybody who is interested in our program, and our victim services is very involved in that. Not to say that we haven't had anybody who are victims of domestic violence, but that would be one of the things in a collaborative decision with our Office of Victim Services. For most programs, they try to steer away from that, but so often, we may not be able to see that until we do start the programming. So once again, we address it at that point. But for the most part, most of the criteria is [that] they haven't any charge of domestic violence and they are the victim.

Wendi White, Engaging the Family Program Coordinator, New Jersey Department of Corrections:

Part of our relationship programming, we do do one session, sometimes two, on domestic violence education. We talk about the definition, how it affects families, phases of the violence cycle, red flags, and then how does domestic violence impact the family. And we give a talk beforehand, just like [unintelligible], we also, in our intake process, ask questions about this so we have a little understanding of the individual and their family background. But while we're giving this lesson, of course we mention if anything is brought up that you need to talk about further, certainly the case managers are willing to meet with them individually and talk about that. We have referral resources that we can give them in regards to domestic violence.

But if any of our co-participants have a restraining order against the inmate participant, they actually are not allowed to come to the facility. So depending on where that relationship is at and if they share children, we might be able to communicate to that co-parent to help facilitate a relationship for the parent, but they would not be able to participate if there is a restraining order.

Darryl Grayson, Fatherhood Director, Urban Light Ministries:

What we ended up doing when it comes to incidents is to go back to the intake documentation. We ask questions in regards to history of domestic violence. And that then begins to trigger a couple things. One, if we have a large group of fathers that show that as an issue, we'll bring in some of our community partners who are experts in that area to provide training. And we'll actually give them a whole session and/or two if we need to, and more to address that issue if we find that to be something really, really deeply needed.

We also cover a lot of that with our facilitators and staff. They go through domestic violence training. They go through all the different training certifications. As part of our partnerships, we're allowed to take advantage and leverage those things so that we have a domestic violence response plan. So our staff is trained to see what those things are and then respond accordingly. And so we provide those services as necessary. We'll get the father to, if he needs battering, we'll get him to a particular batterers place. If it has been identified that the mom, let's say she is the victim, of course, we provide referrals to community services as well, all a holistic approach trying to address the issue of [DV]. But we have a plan in place to address those issues that allow us to do it both internal and external. If we note that, we communicate that, of course, with the staff at the particular facility.

Robyn Cenizal, Director, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families:

The Resource Center does [have resources on domestic violence], actually. We have a very, very nice Family Violence Prevention Toolkit that provides a lot of really great resources and information related to family violence. Anytime we talk about healthy relationship education, safety is always paramount. It's always important to make sure that everyone is safe in the family, whether it's domestic violence or child maltreatment issues. Sometimes the perpetrators are incarcerated because of domestic violence, and sometimes it's because of child maltreatment issues. And so there are lots of things to consider there. But the Resource Center has lots of resources, so again, visit the website and check those out, particularly the Family Safety tab, and download that Family Violence Prevention guide.

Question: What are the number of hours in the New Jersey Workshop?

Answer: *Wendi White, Engaging the Family Program Coordinator, New Jersey Department of Corrections:*

So the program is 12 weeks long. The participants meet for group twice a week -- each group is two hours long -- and they also do individual case management. For relationships, we spend about six weeks or 12 sessions on relationships, and then

there's three weeks on parenting, so that's six sessions, and then the rest is devoted to financial literacy and preparing to go home. And then the substance abuse piece is actually for all 12 weeks.

Question: Where can I find the slides from this webinar?

Answer: Visit the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families website at www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org/events-archive to download a copy of the slides, recording, transcript, and a Q&A document from this webinar.

Question: Who should I contact if I have more questions about this webinar?

Answer: Visit the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families website at www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org or email us at info@HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org.