



Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable Newsletter

June 2012

Greetings!

The Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable (A/TCRRT) recently held its Annual Community Forum and Policy Reform Forum seeking public input on which issues are most relevant to reentry. As in the past, a few rose to the top: employment, housing, family involvement/reunification, and evidence based practices. This newsletter highlights these issue areas and provides you with updates on advances being made. We also want to take a moment to thank you for your involvement in the A/TCRRT as we would not be a community-wide collaborative without the participation of all our members.

Looking for a Better Way to Use Criminal History Records in Employment Decisions

Employment is integral to successful reentry, but people with criminal histories are often screened out of the hiring process. Sometimes good workers even lose their jobs when management changes policies and terminates those with criminal histories. Both practices are potentially discriminatory according to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Recently, the EEOC updated its [enforcement guidance](#) on considering arrest and conviction records in employment decisions. The guidance contains explanations of what constitutes discrimination and best practices employers can follow. Overall, the EEOC recommends that employers eliminate policies or practices that exclude people from employment based on simply having any criminal record and take an approach which considers only criminal history information that is directly related to the position. If you would like to know more, the [National Employment Law Project](#) has in depth information on the [employment rights of workers with criminal records](#).

Reentry in Public Housing Authorities

Almost a year has passed since U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan and Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing, Sandra B. Henriquez sent a [letter](#) to the nation's public housing executive directors reminding them about the federal guidelines regarding criminal histories and access to public housing. The letter asked those executive directors to offer a second chance to people with a criminal record. Several public housing authorities across the nation are on the forefront of addressing the issue. The [National Housing Law Project](#) has collected examples of public housing authorities which have taken innovative approaches to housing people with criminal records. To learn more about these programs, click [here](#).

Prison Family Bill of Rights

Since most ex-offenders returning home expect to rely on family for financial and emotional support, family plays a crucial role in reentry. Research has shown that incarcerated individuals who receive support from their families are less likely to return to prison. Knowing that, it is imperative to find ways to maintain the connection between people who are incarcerated and their loved ones. At this year's [National Prisoner's Family Conference](#), a coalition of prison family members and representatives of secular and faith based organizations serving prison families drafted a [prison family bill of rights](#). The authors want to see this document used as a tool in advocacy efforts on behalf of prison families. The fifth annual National Prisoner's Family Conference will be held in Houston on February 22-23, 2013.

New Website on What Works in Reentry

The A/TCRRT advocates for effective reentry programming, but to know which programs are effective, we need rigorous program evaluations. Once a program demonstrates its effectiveness through a study with a strong research design, we call it an evidence-based practice. (For more on evidence-based practices, see our [FAQ](#).) Recently, the National Reentry Resource Center launched a new website to help reentry practitioners stay on top of current research. You can find it [here](#). The Council of State Governments Justice Center and the Urban Institute developed the website with funding by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance through the Second Chance Act.

Recognition for Members of the A/TCRRT

In April, your hard work was publicly recognized and appreciated! The A/TCRRT received a prestigious [Governor's Criminal Justice Volunteer Service Award](#) presented by Oliver Bell, Chairman of the Texas Board of Criminal Justice and signed by Governor Rick Perry. Additionally, Lee Leffingwell, Mayor of the City of Austin, presented us with a [Certificate of Appreciation](#) and proclaimed you "Champions" for your support, commitment, and efforts with the Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Office. A big thanks goes out to all our stakeholders who provided feedback on the City's housing priorities and selflessly give their time to advocate in this important focus area. The A/TCRRT Planning Council would like to acknowledge the work and dedication our volunteers have given to reentry and reintegration efforts through participation in our activities and committee work. These recognitions belong to YOU!

Forums Get People Talking About Reentry

A special thanks goes out to everyone who made our two community forums a success. Whether you were a panelist, a small group leader, or a member of the audience, you are a catalyst for change.

The Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable wants, needs, and IS you! Find out more about how you can [get involved](#).

Sincerely,

Jeri Houchins
Administrative Director
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Save the Dates!

Evidence Based Practice Committee

Date: June 15, 2012
Time: 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Support Systems Committee

Date: June 18, 2012
Time: 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Policy Reform Committee

Date: June 27, 2012
Time: 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

More Information on Reentry

Interest in reentry is rapidly expanding around the country. The Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable has a page on its website where you can find resources for keeping up with nationwide trends in reentry. To see it, click [here](#).