

MINUTES
WORK GROUP 1 – IDENTIFICATION, ASSESSMENT, AND RECOMMENDATIONS
PROBLEM SOLVING IN FAMILY MATTERS COMMITTEE
MARCH 16, 2009

The work group on Identification, Assessment, and Recommendations met in the 4th Floor conference room at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, CT at 1:10 p.m.

Those in attendance: Chief Family Support Magistrate Sandra Sosnoff Baird (ex-officio), Family Support Magistrate Linda T. Wihbey (Co-chair), Ms. Dalia Panke (Co-chair), Mr. Brian Coco, Atty Joseph Del Campo, Ms. Barbara Geller, Mr. Joseph Greelish, Ms. Michelle Hayward, Ms. Debra Kulak, Mr. Edgar C. Young, and Bernice Zampano.

1. Welcome New Members

Magistrate Wihbey welcomed all members. Everyone introduced themselves and provided a brief statement regarding their role as it relates to the goal set for this workgroup. Clarification was made regarding the difference between the Court Service Centers and CSSD. She reiterated the Workgroup's goal – to help coordinate services for families, identify and assess the challenges of inmates re-entering society, identifying the resources available, and identify the proper delivery systems to provide those services.

2. Approval of Minutes 2/18/09

An addendum will be created in order to reflect minor changes to the minutes draft and to add Mr. Coco's statement on CSSD's overview of services. Minutes will be approved at the next meeting.

3. Progress updates

A. Update on the assessment of challenges to inmates

re-entering society in terms of meeting their responsibilities as parents

Ms. Hayward identified the Department of Correction services provided in a facility. She explained the meaning of having "Incarcerated status" and what services and programs are available for inmates. An explanation of "sentenced v. pre-sentenced" was provided. Ms. Hayward explained the "Extended Family Reunification" program is not mandatory. The Domestic Violence program is highly recommended.

1. Housing update

- Ms. Geller will invite Mr. Kevin Loveland from the Department of Social Services to have a dialogue to address housing challenges and solutions.
- Focus on the feedback of individuals who have the highest inmate contact.
- A representative from Housing Authority Association will be invited. This association has members from federal and state levels.
- The group discussed the role of Housing Authorities. It was noted that each authority operates under its own regionalized rules. A Housing Authority may place restrictions on eligibility. For example, a city Housing Authority may not let individuals with criminal records live in the Housing Authority community.
- A recommendation was made to use wrap certificates, which is a state funded section 8 program with no federal requirements, only federal guidelines. The benefit of section 8 is that these subsidized housing can be set up in a scattered neighborhood, unlike HUD Housing which is all establish in the same place and many communities do not want these type of citizens living there.
- A solution may be to develop a program with the Department of Social Services to facilitate housing. However, there is a huge waiting list. The feedback from representatives from DSS and three cities (Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport) will be sought.
- The New Haven Housing Authority is piloting a housing program focusing on sex offenders and the homeless.
- Housing services are to be attached to the person.
- There are currently greater than 3,000 CT child support obligors in CT prison.
- Two thirds of the CT inmates are released at the "end of sentence" (not under supervision) and they are not on Probation or Parole. Those cases seem to be a good starting point.

- Support Enforcement completed a small study addressing recently released inmates and determined that one-third of those are on Saga or food stamps.
- The Overlap workgroup is looking at the relationships between databases and the connectivity between all agencies in the State.

2. Input from Fatherhood Groups

A concern was voiced regarding non-certification of prison Fatherhood programs, forcing fathers to have to go through another Fatherhood program a second time. Mr. Young explained that they start working with inmates prior to being released. Once they complete the program and that has been verified, they qualify for certain services. He agrees some programs are not certified. Inmates might be willing to start on a program but if they have to start it again, they fall off. Village for Families in Hartford is interested in the certification process.

B. Update on the Identification of existing resources in the Department of Corrections

Ms. Hayward brought information regarding Offender Programs available to inmates and their families through DOC and some that are correctional specific. Also, she distributed a handout which itemizes the efforts made by DOC to enhance family reunification. Some issues were raised regarding the programs:

- Once prisoners are transferred within the Department of Correction, they have to go back into a waiting list to receive the service.
- The issue of losing certification can be unfair to inmates. In the past, the problem was that documentation was not being processed on time.
- The person may go through the program, but no arrearage adjustment done. However, at times the person is eligible but chooses not to go through the adjustment process. Perhaps, because they misunderstand the program or the wording. A recommendation would be to look at the process and make improvements to the statutes through policy changes.
- If too much time owed in arrears, the person can seek an adjustment. A two-step recommendation would be feasible – first, look at DOC programming, open dialogue between DOC and DSS, and open a gate for an arrears adjustment process; second, review the application of statutes that apply.
- Each inmate gets an Inmate Accountability Plan. A suggestion was made to include a provision in the plan to have all offenders with a child support order attend a Fatherhood program.
- The key component is to be able to identify the programs available, who the target population is, and where are these programs available. A possible solution is to have access to the “RT3M” screen from a DOC database.
- Ms. Hayward will work on finding out how to add the question “Do you pay child support?” to the intake form DOC counselors use.
- Another suggestion was to tie conditions to a financial modification. For example, individual must sign up or participate in a specific program.
- Create statutory language that broadens the magistrates’ authority so that, if the court orders it, DOC recognizes it.
- The idea of reserving spaces in groups that are open to the entire population was presented.

4. Recommending additional resources and proper delivery systems to meet the challenges

1. Through existing systems

- **CSSD** - does not keep track of the support data. Mr. Coco will look into making changes to the intake form that require probation officers to ask “Do you have a current child support order?” at intake. It was noted that there is a need for a “capias registry” that is publicly known (not criminal). The Overlap workgroup is looking at the connections to avoid entering conflicting orders.
- **DHMAS** - offers substance abuse treatment, from prevention to recovery. Mental illness treatment is offered only for serious and persistent illnesses. Ms. Geller clarified that DOC and DHMAS have an ongoing relationship

established where they work together with an inmate before the person is released. However, the population being addressed is a different one. She also commented how the person's SSI benefits are easily suspended when the person goes to prison but they are difficult to re-activate upon being released from prison. A suggestion was to start them on Saga and then move them to SSI. There is a concern: the statute includes a "presumption of indigency" but cash assistance is considered income. It was recommended to look at the statute. Ms. Geller also stated that Saga medical makes them eligible for a substance abuse treatment. It is for anyone who is poor, unable to pay and has no insurance. The waiting period is 2 weeks. The suggestion made was to bring the DSS van to reach out to the inmates.

- **DOL** - The Department of Labor has many services available. Re-employment is the current need. Most of the funds from the Stimulus Package will most likely go to re-employment, some may go to re-entry from other resources. However, nothing is certain at the present time. The DOC job centers feed from the DOL job center computers. A challenge with applying for jobs is the need to have an email address to submit employer's applications and conditions of release or half way houses do not allow an email. A suggestion made was to have the half way houses set up a general email account that is monitored by management at the half-way house. Another challenge faced by inmates is that DOC gives them paper resumes but that is an outdated system since electronic resumes are the preferred method today. The DOL works with partner agencies -both public and private- under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). Another suggestion made was to have someone available at the courthouse to do the intake which would be extremely helpful because people do not get lost. However, that is not a viable option since DOL staff is extremely stretched right now. Ms. Zampano suggested that the Career Development Specialists at DOL can deal with the many employment barriers. Many times they refer to supportive services and ask that the client returns once the issue is resolved. She explained how services work and how unemployment is granted. Also, she provided a handout containing an overview of the different programs and public services the Department of Labor offers.

2. Additional resources: identification

a. Through judicial branch

b. Regional - members agreed that regional based delivery of services is perhaps one method to employ.

c. State wide -

3. Other

Each member will provide ideas on how to best coordinate services. Interagency training could be helpful.

5. Future meetings

The next meeting will take place on Monday, 4/27/09 from 9:00am to 10:30am in Conference Room 4B at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40p.m.