

Rebecca Ornelas:

... and I'm a TA consultant with the Corrections and Community Engagement TA Center, a center of the American Institutes for Research. It's my pleasure to welcome you to the Youth Reentry Work Matters convening. Please know that this session was prepared under cooperative agreement number 2020-CZ-BX-K002 from the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the US Department of Justice. Next.

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So again, welcome to all of you. This is our Youth Reentry Work Matters convening that will focus on comprehensive reentry planning and case management. And today's agenda includes a brief overview of the Office of Justice Programs and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Also, OJJDP Youth Reentry grantees will present. They are from Texas, California, and Massachusetts. Immediately following the presentation, we'll move into breakout sessions where you can meet the panelists and ask questions directly. So, during the session we ask that if some questions come to mind, please enter them in the Q&A section and we'll present them in the breakouts. Lastly, we'll wrap up with a summary of key takeaways. Next.

What is the Office of Justice Programs? The Office of Justice Programs or OJP is one of three grant-making components of the US Department of Justice. The Office of Justice Programs has six offices, which are listed here on this diagram, and they provide grant funding, training, research, and statistics to the criminal justice community. The Bureau of Justice Assistance or BJA is one of the six offices under OJP, and they fund Second Chance Act grants and Second Chance Month activities, such as today's, so we extend much gratitude to BJA for these opportunities. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention or OJJDP is also an OJP office, and they oversee the Second Chance Youth Reentry grants. Next.

Please let me introduce you to Liz Ryan, administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. OJJDP provides national leadership coordination and resources to prevent and respond to youth delinquency and victimization, and also helps states, localities, and tribes develop effective and equitable juvenile justice systems that create safer communities and empower youth to lead productive lives. Next.

Also, please meet Ransom Washington, Jr. He is an OJJDP program manager and oversees Youth Reentry grants including Category 1 grants, which are managed by correctional facilities, ah, excuse me, and Category 2 grants, which are managed by community-based organizations. The three reentry grant programs that are presenting today are community-based Category 2 grants. Unfortunately, Ransom couldn't join us today, but he sends his regards to everyone. Next.

Let's move on to comprehensive reentry planning and case management. Next.

So, why the focus on reentry planning and case management? Well, OJJDP's Second Chance Youth Reentry grant program supports efforts to reduce recidivism, promote public safety, and improve outcomes for youth returning to their communities following confinement. Reentry planning and case management are required service components that eligible youth can access before, during, and after

release from confinement. A result of this grants has been that correctional facilities and community-based organizations are joining in collaboration and building reentry program services, supports, and opportunities to help youth succeed, such as learn new skills, complete their education, and discover career paths. Many youth reentry programs are also implementing a strengths-based wraparound approach that engages youth and family throughout the transition back to their community. Excuse me.

The wraparound model is rated as a promising practice in crime solutions. In fact, recent studies have found that juvenile offenders are in most need of reentry services that take a wraparound approach and focus on building relationships and connections that provide more opportunities for successful integration. Today's presenters will elaborate on the wraparound approach. Next.

These are some of the essential planning and case management work procedures that I sort of touched upon. However, reentry programs will look and should look different in every community, due to the diversity of their communities, local challenges, needs, and strengths. However, a key ingredient for reentry success is to actively engage youth, family, and community in your reentry efforts. OJJDP has noted that the community-based programs that involve families as a critical component enhance youth outcomes, increase public safety, and strengthen neighborhoods, all to say that this is why youth reentry work matters. Next.

Now, let's hear how Youth Reentry works from three community-based Youth Reentry grant programs. First up, we're going to start with Youth C.A.N. from Harris County, Texas.

David Ruiz:

Good afternoon, everybody. My name is David Ruiz. I'm a wraparound case manager with Change Happens, Youth C.A.N. Going to introduce myself and then my colleagues.

Just some information about myself. I used to work with Harris County Juvenile Probation in Texas for about seven years. I started off in the facilities, made my way to the field, and I also worked court. All of this to say that I've been able to collect a bunch of information to see what is needed, and as I made myself here with the wraparound case manager position, I've been able to ... Our goal is to be able to reduce recidivism and to hopefully empower the youth that we work with to complete probation, and also become better members of society as they make their transition to the adulthood. And next I have my colleague, Mr. LeDarien.

LeDarien Strauss:

I apologize. Good afternoon, and excuse my voice. My name is LeDarien Strauss. I work with Youth C.A.N. I'm a wraparound case manager. I've been working in the education field, working with youth who are considered to be highly at risk, working in creating behavior intervention plans, and [inaudible 00:09:38] plans to reintegrate them back into society. And next with more intro is Steven Benson.

Steven Benson:

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Steven Benson. I'm the case manager for the mentoring programs for Youth C.A.N. and Change Happens. My specialty is creating those strategies and tools of engagement for successful mentoring relationships of our at-risk youth. Also developing the strategies, training, recruiting, and connecting our youth with mentors in the community and across the world to ensure that there's a positive long-lasting and transformational change, and to avoid recidivism, like my coworkers spoke about. As a mentor and case manager, my job is to ensure that the mentoring relationships have that connection, accountability, resources, and tools that both mentees and the mentors need to empower that relationship. So, the overall goal is to help the youth develop new skills, gain new perspectives, and reflect on their experiences.

Thank you so much. Next slide.

David Ruiz:

Okay, so in Youth C.A.N., we commit to being consistent. We try to make appointments and follow up with them in case they're not able to make it with their families. We commit to meeting the youth where they are. If transportation's an issue or if parents have work hours, we try to accommodate them. We do Zooms. We go in person to do home visits. We follow up with phone calls. Just examples to make sure that the youth are receiving our services. We commit to empower youth to reach their fullest potential.

Typically, on probation, they focus on their criminogenic needs in order to complete their probation, so with Change Happens, what we do as a wraparound case manager, we collaborate with the probation officer, and we talk about what exactly is needed in order to help the youth get off probation. And then also, when we go and meet the youth in the facility, we make sure we do risk assessments and analysis to make sure the youth is ready to receive the services when he gets released.

And lastly, we support youth and their families every step of the way. Typically, before we receive a referral, we make sure the family's on board as well, taking a holistic approach, because it takes every ... I mean, I'm pretty sure everyone has heard, "It takes a village to raise one person." So, we make sure that everybody in the family, in the household, is receptive to our services, and we can help engage them as well. An example that happened recently was we had a family that needed furniture, so we made sure we could tap into the in-community-based resources to be able to find accommodation for those furniture needs. And we were able to transport the furniture to the house, so when the youth did come to the home, everything would be available for youth and that everything would be okay once the youth would be able to figure that out. If you could go to the next slide, please?

Who we serve, we serve justice-involved youth, ages from 13 to 18 with Harris County Juvenile Probation. Predominantly, they are black and brown youth. We typically start our referrals 30 to 45 days prior to their release from a facility. Our intake process, once we receive the referral from Harris County Juvenile Probation, we typically see our youth on a weekly, biweekly basis prior to their release. We do assessments, make sure we know what is needed, before they actually leave so we can fulfill those needs. Also, we do the PAX. We use the PAX Tools in order to help the youth get not only their probation goals but their personal goals too. We focus really hard on what they would like to do in their future if probation wasn't there, so that we could help them become stable young adults.

Holistic, wraparound case management, so just a process. Again, we do pre-release 30 to 45 days prior. We follow up with them post-release, and then we have them from six to 12 months. And we also make connections in the community before they are released to be able to get them resources.

Collaborations, we have a lot of partnerships and MOUs, and one of the strongest things that we also offer is mentorship. So if Mr. Steven, you would like to talk about that, please?

Rebecca Ornelas:

I think you're muted, Steven.

Steven Benson:

Sorry about that. Gladly. As David was saying, mentoring encourages the collaboration among the mentees and mentors. And what we do is so that they can achieve a common goal together and develop, it helps, so we want them to see what it looks like to become the desires of their heart. If you want to be a doctor, if you want to be a lawyer, if you want to work at certain jobs or pick up a trade,

what we do is we collaborate with the schools. We believe that going to our mentees where they are, and we believe that having places where we facilitate those mentoring relationships, and so we reach out to mentors. We have monthly mixers so that we can also recruit. We have recruiting strategies, and that's our monthly mixers where we recruit, all over the city, mentors that are able to come in and meet from all over Houston and connect within each other and to mentor and be matched with our youth.

As well as our external partnerships, we also have internal partnerships that meet the holistic approach, as David spoke about, basic necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, job and career readiness initiatives, mental health counseling. We've outsourced and we have counselors that speak with the youth come in to the school, after school, and that really helps emotional ... We know that the youth go through emotional challenges, so we make sure that we facilitate that and we make sure that we connect with the youth.

And we have tools of engagement. We allow them to work out of journals and we allow them to track their community service, family goals, community goals, personal goals, academic goals, and we hold them to accountability. And acts of kindness, random acts of kindness, because we believe that when they begin to contribute to society, it helps them as a whole. So, that's our collaboration effort, some of our collaborating efforts.

David Ruiz:

All right. Thank you Steven. So in continuation, how we engage youth and family in case management, we make sure that when we see the youth, we involve the family. We understand again that sometimes the family is either working or just not available, so we always try to engage them. We also have events. We create events either at our local office or wherever the youth are located. We go to that zip code and we try to find something there in order for everybody to have a central point to be able to drive there, or we also provide transportation, either through Uber or Lyft, to be able to get our youth to these activities.

How we build relationship in collaboration with juvenile probation department, at all levels, we staff our cases with administration. We staff our cases with the probation officers. We always believe in strong communication, so no matter what happens, we're always, either on a weekly or biweekly basis, giving information to them, and vice versa. If the youth is receiving, for example, free tattoo removal services, we make sure that the probation officer knows, and everybody in that unit, that the probation officer knows and everybody in that unit knows about that service. So they can also tap into that resource as well. We also provide trainings for probation. We do mental health first aid as an example, to be able to show probation how they can be mental health first aiders to be able to assist the youth in a possible crisis situation. We also can be a part of any activities with probation. Another example that we did was one of the units that we work with was hosting a basketball tournament.

So we were able to be invited to that. We were able to provide some tickets that we had originally for a concert that a lot of youth really appreciate and a well-known artist here in Houston, and we were able to give those opportunities for the first, second, and third place winners of that tournament. So just building relationships with Harris County Juvenile Probation also, another thing too is everybody likes to feel appreciated, so we also say thank you. We give them thank you letters. We provide certain events for them as well to be able to just show our appreciation in our collaboration with them as well.

And lastly, how we build awareness of the reentry through partnerships with the community. If Steven, you could come back again and explain that for us please.

Steven Benson:

Thank you so much. One of our main collaborating partners is credible messengers because that it's important that our youth have those lived experience mentors that they can relate to and guys that are familiar with what our youth go through. So our credible messengers are key and they help us as well with mentoring. But we also partner with local business owners with when we have our mentor mixers just to connect and from business owners to your everyday working class person who wants to be a part of the program. And we don't limit it to, although it's male to male mentoring, we don't limit it to just as far as with gender, because we allow the support. We feel like it's a village approach.

So resources can happen through anyone. We can get resources, we can build a village while maintaining the structure that we have, but having that overall support from each one in the community, we collaborate with our teachers as well that if they see anything, we go to the schools. So because we realize we don't want any geographical limitations to stop us from being able to link our youth with successful mentors so they can have those relationships to thrive. So community and partnerships, it is one of our key elements and we're really big on partnership so that there's no limitations in successful mentoring.

Rebecca Ornelas:

Thank you, Steven, David, and LeDarien. So next we're going to turn it over to Youth for Change.

Sarah Feingold:

Hi everybody. We're very happy to be here. My name is Sarah Feingold. I'm the director of behavioral health programs at Youth for Change and my co-presenter, Karen Eley.

Karen Eley:

Hi everyone. I'm the director of wraparound services at Youth for Change.

Sarah Feingold:

So I'll go ahead and get started and then I'll hand it off to Karen Youth for Changes in nonprofit community-based organization. We've been providing behavioral health and social services and programming for about 30 years. We're located in Butte County and that's a semi-rural county in Northern California. We're about an hour north of Sacramento. Just to start off, I wanted to provide just a little bit of context about how we entered into this funding opportunity with OJJDP. Our application for OJJDP funding coincided with the realignment and closure of the California Department of Juvenile Justice in 2021, Butte County had historically been the most prevalent user of DJJ programming in Northern California housing. And, oops, sorry, I'm having something pop up on my screen.

Hopefully I will stay with you. I'm not sure what just happened. So we had been a primary user of DJJ, housing an average of seven to 10 youth there at any given time. So Butte County Probation, they were preparing to enhance their existing in-custody programming to address a higher risk of need. Serious youth offenders who would now be remaining in Butte County Juvenile Hall.

Youth for Change we have been providing wraparound services for close to 20 years and had received referrals from probation, but because of at the time restricted funding, we would not be able to start our relationship, start our services with family for wraparound until release from juvenile hall or just a few days before release, initiating some of those contacts. As Butte County Probation was planning for a realignment we met with them regarding our plans and we collaborated that the process to start reentry really needed to happen much, much sooner. And we all agreed. So this OJJDB funding really allows us upon referral to start having child and family team meetings months before release takes

place, identifying unmet needs and resources while in custody to plan for successful reentry into the community. Go ahead into the next slide.

So we began in February, 2022. Because we had already been doing wraparound services, we based our services on the wraparound model. The wraparound model incorporates facilitators, parent partners, and family specialists. We are facilitating, as I said, child and family team meetings in and out of juvenile hall allowing for a consistency in treatment providers regardless of custody status. Go ahead, Karen.

Karen Eley:

Yeah, so because we were already providing wraparound services with probation youth, it really allowed us to kind of streamline that process. So as soon as we began in February, we had five kids right off the bat and we already had that relationship with a probation officer. So all we really needed to do was go in and develop some relationships with the juvenile hall staff since we were going to be in there pretty frequently. We're in there about three to four days a week working with our re-entry youth developing skills and just seeing what their goals are. We can work with them about three to six months before release. Six months is about the timeframe that we've usually been doing. And then our referral process is similar to the youth can process. Next slide.

So we use the wraparound principles, family choice and voice team-based, natural supports, individualized. Those are the principles that we operate and really uses our foundation to begin services. We have child and family team meetings in the hall and outside of the hall once they're released and anyone can come to a child and family team meeting. So we try really hard to make sure that a juvenile hall staff that they're bonded with comes to their meeting so that they can share upon those youth strengths. They can talk about what they've seen, what they're good at, and what their goals might be. Natural support. So any sort of family members or anyone that they've identified that they feel close with. Our program does have some 19 and 20 year olds, so sometimes parents and caregivers come, but then sometimes we have to get really creative about who really comes in and supports them because we want to make sure that when they are released, they have natural supports and a sustainable sort of community around them.

But that takes time to build. And so we have to get creative. Who have you known in your life? Who can we call to help repair those bridges? And so when the youth are in the hall, we're working with on them on that. What kind of letters do you need to write? How can we facilitate family visits to repair those relationships? We have a therapist that can work with them to do some family therapy or individual therapy, whatever they might need. So the members and roles of the team really varies upon each youth, and that's what makes it work for the team. Usually it's always a facilitator, a parent partner, and a probation officer. During this time, the parent partner can work with those caregivers or parents that the youth will be released to identify what the challenges are, what do the parents need, and what are the tools they need in order to make this successful.

So we offer some parenting classes. Sometimes parents are in recovery and our parent partner will go with them to a AA or in NA groups. Sometimes they need a job. So we're job prepping the youth and also the caregivers. And sometimes it's housing. And so we're working with the parents on creating stable housing, also providing those basic needs, beds, clothes upon release, food, signing the families up for food stamps or whatever that might be. And then the stages of re-entry. The first stage is just that engagement and preparation, getting to know the youth and getting to know the family. What's their culture, what are the challenges going to be getting out of the program or out of juvenile hall, what are their strengths, what are their interests and what are their goals? I love the idea of that mentor program. We have staff called family specialists, which are behavioral health counselors that act as those kind of mentors.

But we really are looking at what is a sustainable model for that after they get out of our program. The second phase is the plan development. Really having some clear goals, not just the probation goals that are in their mandates, but what do the youth want to achieve and what does the family want to achieve to get that buy-in. And then the implementation stage, that's where we've come up with some temporary releases. So wraparound staff will pick up the youth from juvenile hall and they can spend, we start with a couple hours out into the community and then towards, we're getting towards the end of when they're going to be released. They'll have a weekend out and then we come back and say, okay, what were the challenges? What did you face? What do you think is going to be hard? Maybe they apply for jobs during that time or go interview so that when they come out, they're really prepared and that we know what we're kind of working with.

And then transitioning from the program, we're looking at transitioning to sustainable models. Maybe they've graduated off probation, but they're still feeling like they need a team. So we'll transfer them to community mental health resources. Maybe they have a church or a basketball team or school support, whatever it might be. And the case management aspect is really all inclusive. We do provide that intense level to the families. We have family days where they can come. We have reminders and prompts to the youth, "Hey, you have a session today, we're going to be picking you up." Or "Hey, we're going to meet here. You got to go to that appointment. You have drug testing in two days. What do you need to prepare for that?" So our kind of model is like do four do with cheer on, right? So it just depends on what stage the family's in. Next slide.

So some of the key takeaways that we've found just since we've began is the family voice and choice can be really challenging with the setting of youth juvenile hall, we meet with the youth and they say, "Well, it's my voice and choice, so I want to get out of the hall right now." Well, we don't have that power. We are not able to do that. But we did hear that feedback and that's where temporary releases kind of came out of. So we start small with a couple hours with the staff and then we will work up to that weekend. But that is something that can be a real challenge, even hearing the family's voice or having them say, "I want to live in this place, but the kid wants to live somewhere else." So it's really working together and honoring their voice. Success looks different for every youth and is based on the goals and established child in the child and family team meetings.

So that's key. It's what their goals are in our program, not what their goals are on probation. Our probation officer is great, and we're really lucky that we have a smaller program. So we're really only working with one probation officer. So she comes to every meeting. There's a lot of communication and we can all be on the same page about what those goals look like. But sometimes we have to adjust our expectations of what success looks like. Maintaining a strength-based approach depends on the level of trust and belief in trauma informed care. We're going into juvenile hall quite frequently and working with staff that some have worked there 30 years, that's changed. L trauma informed care has changed. That lens has changed over the years. And so sometimes the strength-based approach in working with them, we're having to teach probation staff and juvenile hall staff what that looks like and how that means.

And they're in a tricky position because they're having to maintain safety and then as well as what we're asking them to participate in these meetings. So it's finding that balance family or natural support sometimes need to be identified and developed in the CFT meeting. Yeah, like we said, sometimes kids come in and they don't have any family. Maybe their parents are in, we had one youth, both parents were in prison, and so when upon exiting they would not really have any family to go to. And so we had to look at what, what's that going to look like? How do we develop some supports for you? And maybe you're in our program a little bit longer for us to be able to do that. And then establishing the team, building rapport and trust with the family and maintaining consistency when participant is remanded into custody for reset has been successful outcome of reentry wraparound.

We see that youth often will break probation mandates or they'll get tempted and they just need a little reset back into juvenile hall. It won't be months, but maybe it'll be a week to two weeks to three weeks. And that's been really successful because as a team, we can kind of come together and decide, "Hey, this youth has missed five meetings this week and not really being responsive to texts or calls, or maybe they've started using again. And we need just to have a reset to figure out how we're going to gain plans to do something differently." With this program, we have that ability for them to go back into the hall and us to continue to have services so that we're really preventing for them to commit a serious crime. So what we see is often those resets are just breaking those probation mandates not reoffending. So that's what we're considering a success as a team and the youth. I think the youth really also can appreciate that, and they depend that the gap of services is happening.

Speaker 5:

I'm on a Zoom, but don't worry about it. Hang on.

Karen Eley:

And we do want to create a sustainable model. And so that's a really important kind of process to this whole wraparound program is what's going to work when we're gone and how do we work with the youth so that they don't re-offend and get back on probation. Sarah?

Sarah Feingold:

So I'll just close by saying that we're very excited about the success of this program and probation has really about the success of this program and probation has really embraced this concept. And with the realignment funds, they've identified some funds that will allow us after this funding cycle ends to be able to continue in juvenile hall providing this important resource to those that are in custody and really expanding that opportunity to more youth that that can be referred. And that's it from us.

Rebecca Ornelas:

So thank you, Sarah and Karen. And next we're going to hear from Straight Ahead Ministries.

Ivy Sweeting:

Good afternoon everyone. Thank you so much for tuning into this very important conversation. My name is Ivy Sweeting and I am the director of the Boston Reentry Center for Straight Ahead Ministries, and I also serve as the DYS liaison for this OJJDP grant that we have received, and I'll pass it over to my colleague.

Jason Ludwig:

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Jason Ludwig and I'm the Northeast director of Straight Ahead Ministries. And just thank you for the privilege. Just be excited to hear the other organizations Change Happens and Youth for Change, you guys are doing amazing work and so happy to be part of this.

Ivy Sweeting:

Thank you. And we can go ahead to the next slide. Straight Ahead Ministries is a faith-based organization that began in the late 1980s, which exists to see the lives of justice involved youth transformed by the power of Jesus Christ. We operate five youth reentry programs here in Massachusetts and cover each of the DYS regions. DYS is the Department of Youth Services, the juvenile

justice agency here in Massachusetts. We serve major cities such as Boston, Fall River, New Bedford, Lawrence, Lynn, Worcester and Springfield. We also have reentry sites in New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Maine and operate a global initiative, which is called Every Youth Every Facility where we partner with over 60 other juvenile justice agencies that offer a variety of services for youth as they leave the juvenile justice system and transition back into their communities.

With the support of case managers, mentors and peer leaders, youth work towards personal and professional goals as they work through different educational services, job readiness training, leadership development programming and volunteer service opportunities, as well as biblical based discussion groups. Our youth reentry programs offer a strategic and successful response to the high rate of recidivism among justice involved youth and young adults, primarily from the ages of 14 to 24. And we just wanted to show a brief video which outlines a snapshot of the services that we offer at Straight Ahead Ministries.

Male Video Speaker 1:

I know for me, when I was released two days before I turned 18, it was the scariest thing. I spent most of my life going from programs to lockups and just never really ever having stability.

Male Video Speaker 2:

When I was ready to get out of [inaudible 00:39:33], I remember the night before, I couldn't believe it, but sure enough, I woke up and they're like, "You going home." I didn't know what I was coming out to because for two years and some change, I never talked to my family member.

Male Video Speaker 3:

I've been getting locked up since I was 13 years old, on and off, on and off. Oh, I'm going to go out there and I don't know how it's going to be. It was was scary. I was scared. So now I got to get out there and get an apartment and get a car. And how am I going to do all this?

Male Video Speaker 4:

I get the privilege to go into facilities and meet with young men, and sometimes it gives me the opportunity to really build a relationship with them. One of the things that they need is really a trusting relation from an adult male.

Male Video Speaker 3:

I needed everything. I needed a place, a car, everything. Hector, he paid for my license, he bought me over there to the spot. He helped me get the license, the road test. They helped me find in the house. They helped me put all the furniture in the house. They put everything that I needed in there. I needed a car. They helped me find a car. They were just there for everything, literally everything after I came out of jail.

Female Video Speaker 5: They started introducing me to jobs and insurance and all this stuff, helping me grow up the support that I need.

Female Video Speaker 6:

I found out I was pregnant. I was scared. That was my first kid and I was 18 years old and Olivia really helped me go through my whole pregnancy and everything. And I was just having problems at my house and she was just helping me.

Male Video Speaker 7:

I remember when I was even a youth being locked up in and out for nine and a half years, I needed healthy relationships. I needed people in my life who truly loved me.

Male Video Speaker 1:

Every time that I have something to talk about, they would listen to me. Like my emergency contact is Ritu on my application, I put his phone number. That's how much I trust him.

Female Video Speaker 6:

No one's going to sit here and judge you for who you are. You could go there the most messed up situation, and people are going to be like, I understand what you're going through and this is what we could do to help you.

Female Video Speaker 8:

We're building the family that we haven't had because these girls and myself have come from broken homes. We've come from places where promises aren't kept, and so it's important that we have that relationship amongst each other and that we build that because in that place is where we can grow.

Ivy Sweeting:

And we can advance to the next slide. And so as you can see, and as one of the other presenters had mentioned as well, it takes a village and every case, every young person has a unique story and unique needs. And how we are able to operate in case management and wraparound services all starts with relationships. That is the foundation in our starting point of all the work that we do. And that is where we feel as though successful reentry begins. And what effective and successful case management is reliant upon, the strength of relationships. So you'll see here that relationships is the first category. Moving on to pre and post-release, we believe that true reentry happens prior to release with the best practice of being able to develop rapport, preferably 90 days before a young person is discharged. And this will allow us to start to develop a community plan, develop smart goals, and identify interests and necessary resources upon reentry.

However, not only are relationships important with the youth that we have the pleasure of working with, but also relationships as we collaborate with DYS from the executive level staff to those that are working directly with the young people on the units. A large part of our ministry also involves Straight Ahead Ministry volunteers who go into the facility and run discipleship groups and meet with youth on a weekly basis, which helps in providing a continuity of care between the volunteers and us as reentry staff. Considering that we serve the entire Commonwealth of Massachusetts collaboration across regions between us as staff and DYS is equally as important as it is very common for youth to be placed out of region for various different reasons. One of the things that I wanted to stress and highlight in the collaboration and inter-agency partnership is the importance of court advocacy.

For example, I had a young man who I have been working with and was originally from another region and his case was transferred to Boston due to safety. He has been enrolled in both Straight To Work and Ready For Life, which Jason will discuss further in a moment. However, he does still have an outstanding

case. I was able to accompany him in court alongside our reentry specialist who was working with him prior to his case being transferred. And we wrote letters of support documenting his goals, his involvement in Straight Ahead, as well as his education and community programming that he is involved with in the Boston area.

Not only did the judge, excuse me, grant the request for an increase in his curfew, but when we realized that because of his GPS monitoring system and the organization that monitors his GPS not allowing for two residential addresses in which we were requesting as to maximize his work schedule and family engagement opportunities, the judge removed his curfew entirely. Largely due to his accomplishments upon reentering the community and the support that was physically present and advocating for him in court. In fact, our reentry specialist from the southeast region had built a great working relationship with the chief of probation in the New Bedford area who was also in the courtroom advocating for this young man. So from this example, you can see the importance of relationships that are developed both pre and post-release and how we can continue to walk alongside individuals in their journey. And I'll kick it over to Jason to talk about the other three opportunities here.

Jason Ludwig:

Thank you, Ivy, you did a fantastic job. Again, my name is Jason Ludwig. Little context, I've been doing reentry since 2004. I've been with Straight Ahead since 2012. Another organization from '04 until then. Prior to that from the age of 13 to 25, I was incarcerated in and out of the juvenile justice system, also the adult system for nine and a half years. And I battled with a serious addiction. So I come with this perspective from literally both sides of the defense. And so I wanted to talk about our Straight To Work program in Ready For Life essentially. They're kind of like one and the same in our approach anyways. So as Ivy was saying, a lot of the work that we start, everything begins from the inside, but when these youth do return to the community, we collaborate with an organization in Gloucester, Massachusetts called the Cornerstone Creative, gentleman by the name of Adam Quinn.

And so it's a woodworking shop. So we're up there three to four days a week with our youth teaching them how to work with wood. And so a lot of things that we do right now, it's kind of rolling into spring season. So we're making a bunch of cornhole sets. We're doing some custom cabinets right now. Actually, we did Ivy's cornhole set for her wedding coming up. And so we're doing cutting boards. And so we use a lot of these different things and we'll sell them and then the money will come back into the organizations to help pay for the youth. We pay the youth about up to 20 hours a week, give them about \$15 an hour, and we give them pay raises as the time goes on until they're able to make about \$17 an hour. And so, one of the key components, one of the things that we really focus on in Straight To Work is not so much of the skills.

I mean, they can learn the woodworking skills and all that stuff, but let's face it, most of these youth, when they get out, most of them can't even keep a job. I know sometimes we think about setting these youth up for a future to have a career. Maybe it's in the medical field, maybe it's in a trade field. But most of the youth that I work with anyways really aren't even on that level yet to even think about working in a career field. And so most of the jobs they're going to, again, are entry level positions. And so what we use Straight To Work force to really work out their ways of being. And so how do you move a youth from being uncommitted to committed, to learn how to come to work and be to be sober minded. And so we use the Straight To Work program, the wood shop, to work them things out.

And what happens usually is over a period of time, most of these youth, when they feel like they need to make more money or they want more hours, it's usually become because they've shown and demonstrated that they were able to sustain working at the wood shop for six to nine months. And then what happens then is they'll normally just kind of transition out onto their own, looking for another

place of employment. The Ready for Life, I'd love to chat a little bit about the Ready for Life. Ready For Life is a three-day leadership seminar that myself and my boss, Scott Lawson, we conduct all throughout the country. And so typically a Ready for Life will host about 20 to 40 youth to start off with. And some of the key distinctions that we look to go after inside of theirs future and vision, forgiveness and victim responsible.

And what victim responsible really means is so victim really looks like not in a sense of they've been victimized before, but think of it in a sense of... I'm sure you heard this many times, some of you will say, well, you don't understand what I've been through and this is why I've done that. Or if my father wasn't the way he was then I wouldn't have done the things I did. And so victim essentially is when we talk about them playing the role of a victim, it's them really abandoning choice in their life. It's allowing their circumstances to dictate the way they show up and act in life. And so when you move from being a victim to being responsible, responsible just means that you're taking back your power to choose that you're choosing a different future, one that's different from your past. And so what does it look like to have a different future, to have an actual vision for your life? How do you move these kids?

Most of these guys that I'm working with, most of these kids, they can't even think about thriving yet because they can't even survive. Most of the youth that I'm working with, they're homeless. And so it's meeting them with a right foot on their basic needs, trying to get them a place to stay, to try to get them food in their bellies. Each day when we pick these guys up, we pick them up at work, pick them up at their house and bring them up to Gloucester. I mean, the first thing we do when we get them there is we got to feed them. And so really just helping them with their basic needs, helping them get their IDs, helping them get insurances, and when you can stabilize them, then we can start to talk about a future and what that looks like. And there's a big gap between their current reality, where they are and in their future. And a few things happen in between there. One is transformation is the obvious thing. And the other thing is a lot of tension.

But what happens sometimes with a lot of these youth is when they start to move towards that future, there's a big identity crisis that happens inside of them. And so the future a lot of times can look external. It can look like, you stepped out of the gangs. It can look like, you know, have different surroundings. It can look like you have stable housing, but there's a lot of stuff that happens internally before that even happens. And so what happens a lot of times is they experience this identity crisis that happens inside. How do you move from being dishonest to honest? How do you move from being uncommitted to committed? How do you move from constantly relying on substances to being sober minded? And so when this identity crisis happen inside of them, a lot of times when they start to hit that ceiling, it becomes very uncomfortable.

It's an unknown area. And so two things happen. Either transform and push through it, or we see it a lot of times, I'm sure you have too, is they'll sabotage it. And they'll start to lower that vision back down to the current reality, to a place where they can tolerate, a place that's very familiar to them. And so that's a lot of what we do inside of Ready For Life. Another big thing too, we deal with so many youth that trauma involved, and a lot of it, when we look at it through the faith lenses, unforgiveness, right? And so it's funny, every time. Unforgiveness, right? And so it's funny, every time I run these seminars, I ask everybody, "Who in here has resentment or unforgiveness towards somebody? Raise your hand." Every single time, every one of them raises their hand. And so a lot of times when we start to... Because Ready for Life is very improv, and so the teacher material we have is not really there to teach, but it's there essentially to pull things out of them, to meet them where they're at. So when we start to talk about forgiveness, this one young man, he was from Haiti, just to give you a little example. His name was Joseph. And so he grew up in Haiti and he had a very verbally and physically abusive father that would physically just beat him a lot when he couldn't control him, or whatever the reason was, a lot of times just unjustified reasons for him to get physically abused by his father.

And even one point, his father held him down and threw hot sauce in his eyes. Most kids in America would run off and drink alcohol or get high. Well, in Haiti, Joseph used to run off to a school and just read books. And so when you met this young man, he's just so bright. But unfortunately, what happened was as he grew older, this wound in his life became to affect every relationship in his life. He became abusive in... He also became abusive. He was in for domestic violence and his relationship was suffering with his son, with his fiance. And so we were talking about forgiveness. And so I was telling the story about my father and how I forgave him. And on day two, the second day when they came back and we would... I'm sorry, that was my dog.

When we came back, we were just kind of doing some open sharing. And Joseph stands up and he says, "I get it. I get the forgiveness thing. I'm able to forgive my father. It ain't even anger management. It's about forgiveness." And you just see the transformation happen inside of his life. Well, Joseph got out a few months later, and still to this day, he is doing fantastic. He got married. He's got an amazing relationship with his son. And so these are just some of the things that we work through in our Ready For Life three day seminar. And then onto the EMF system. EMF, for us, is just simply a data-based collection system. And so we collect everything from your basic demographics all the way down to minute to minute time that we are with every single youth.

And so we record every time that we're inside of a juvenile facility with the youth, what we're doing, every time we're with the youth in court, every time we're with the youth family, every time the youth aren't Ready For Life or in the Straight to Work program. And so we collect all types of data with that, recidivism rates. One of them, I think is pretty cool. Straight has been around for, well, 35 years now. And our recidivism rates are just a slight above 16%. And so it's pretty remarkable, because our approach, when we think about it, it's all relational. And so our approach really comes through the motivation of love and just really being with these youth where they're at and meeting him where they're at, and just allowing God to do what he wants to do in their life. Thank you.

Ivy Sweeting:

Thank you so much, Jason, for providing such context. And I love that you said and really stress the importance of meeting young people where they're at, and just showing up for them regardless. And so some of our key takeaways, as we had spoken about a lot already, is the importance of meeting youth prior to release and being able to bridge the network of supports that youth may have. So whether they still are committed to the Department of Youth Services and have a case worker, they're juvenile or adult probation or parole officer, lawyers, clinicians in the community, and also within the facilities and their family. And this list can go on to other community organizations and partners that the young person is involved in. Also, the employability training and providing stipends for young people. I know all of us that do professional development or employment, none of the work that we're doing, or a lot of the work that we're doing is paid opportunities.

And so we stress the importance of allowing young people to know that their work is valuable and that they are valued in the workplace. And honoring youth voice and creative expression is something that is very important to us. We have also started here in Boston, a Christian hip hop program inside the facilities, in which young people are able to tap into their gifts and their passions of music and how to speak about certain things and tell their stories in ways that are productive. And also, bringing on staff and volunteers with lived experience is another one of our key takeaways and something that drives success within Straight Ahead Ministries. As you saw in the video that we shared, Jason was in there, as well as a few of our other staff. I believe it's about 75% of our reentry staff come to the job with lived experience. Many of them that have been, themselves, a participant in Straight Ahead Ministries programming. Jason, if you want to add anything to that, feel free.

Jason Ludwig:

Yeah, I think you covered it pretty good.

Ivy Sweeting:

Well, that wraps up our portion of today's presentation. So thank you all very much

Rebecca Ornelas:

And thank you very much, Ivy and Jason, and I'm going to pass the mic over to Vivie.

Vivie Satorsky:

Hey everybody. It was so wonderful to hear from all three organizations. And I know that everybody probably has lots of questions. I know we've gathered some in the Q&A boxes. So what we're going to do now is break into two breakout rooms. There'll be representatives from each of the organizations in both of the breakout rooms, and both myself and Cassie will be there to help facilitate as well. So we're going to pose the questions that we've already gathered and have an opportunity to discuss further questions with the presenters. So with that, Elizabeth, would you mind breaking us out into the breakout rooms?

Elizabeth Chagnon:

Yeah. Sounds great. Thanks so much. Here we go.

Cassy Blakely:

Unmute myself first. And it looks like we've got just a few questions in the chat that maybe we could follow up on with our last few moments of today. So I'm going to ask... Ooh, and this was one of my friends in my breakout room. You've got some great questions, Patricia, so thank you for keeping those coming. This one is for Straight Ahead Ministries. Who in Connecticut do you work or partner with?

Ivy Sweeting:

Yes. So I saw Doran Wright, and he's on, and I just saw that he took himself off of mute, is our reentry director for the Connecticut area, so he may best be able to answer that question.

Doran Wright:

Hello everyone. I'm driving right now in the state of Maine, but happy to [inaudible 01:02:01] the question.

Cassy Blakely:

Yes. So who from Connecticut does Straight Ahead Ministries work with?

Doran Wright:

We work with the Department of Juvenile Probation in the state of Connecticut. We work with also Boys and Girls Village in Connecticut and various other community partners, such as the Workplace and just other agencies that deal with the youth serving organizations generally in the Bridgeport and Hartford area, not so much the eastern end of the state, but we have an active presence in Bridgeport and

Hartford Juvenile Detention, and we work through the local LIST as well, the Local Interagency Service Task Force, and an organization called RYASAP in Bridgeport-

Cassy Blakely:

Beautiful.

Doran Wright:

... their juvenile review board. Yep.

Cassy Blakely:

Thank you for letting us put you on the spot there. Please drive safely.

Doran Wright:

No problem.

Cassy Blakely:

All right. This one is for Youth for Change. How do you work with probation and implementing the wraparound model? What is the frequency of your CFTs?

Karen Eley:

Well, we're lucky because we've been working with probation closely for a number of years on the wraparound model, so they have a pretty good understanding of it. Of course, we need to do training, so I have gone to probation and introduced the wraparound model and the concepts to them during their staff meetings about once a year just to kind of do a refresher. Our child and family team meetings are weekly at the beginning, and then it's up to the team kind of decide the frequency once the goals, and we're in the implementation phase.

Cassy Blakely:

Perfect. Thank you so much. All right, I've got another one. This one is not directed at any particular person. And Angelo, if we need clarification, I may ask you to come off mute, clarify this question. Can we get information about [inaudible 01:04:09] engagement? I'm not sure what you mean by [inaudible 01:04:12] or engagement. Angelo, if you're willing to come off of mute and add a little context to your question for us.

Angelo:

It was answered in the break room. Thank you.

Cassy Blakely:

Perfect. Wonderful. All right. I've got a couple more questions. We might be able to get one more in before we wrap up today. What are the main challenges when bringing... Excuse me. What are the main challenges when bridging the gap between families, participants, and your particular youth service team? David, or do we want to have our Paris, Texas folks answer this one since we haven't heard from them in the large group yet?

David Ruiz:

Sure. Can you repeat the question one more time?

Cassy Blakely:

I sure can. What are the main challenges when bridging that gap between families, participants, and your youth service team?

David Ruiz:

So from just my personal experience, we try to promote a lot that we're all on the same team, that we're advocating for the family and the youth, because sometimes there is a disconnect between the participant and the family. Sometimes there's a disconnect between probation and the family. So what we try to do is to just create that relationship to show that we're going to be there for them. And any barrier that they have, we try to help them with that barrier. Just a quick example, transportation, finances, or just wanting to talk because they think we're part of probation. We try to share with them that we're not part of law enforcement. We're just a nonprofit organization in the community that just wants to help the family in the long run, that there's no consequences, obviously working with us or not working with us, that... Our program six to 12 months. If the youth decides to end the program because he completed it with us, we still offer services after, in case they need it.

Or if they fall off, recidivate, or sometimes we get youth that don't want services, we still are put on the table and let the family know we'll still be able to help as long as they contact one of us. So just again for the bridging, just showing the family that we'll be there regardless of the situation. I don't know if that answers the question, but that's just from my personal experiences with my cases.

Cassy Blakely:

I want to give maybe a 30 seconds or a minute for our other two presenter organizations to answer that same question about bridging the gap between families, participants, and youth service teams. Straight Ahead... Oh, go ahead.

Ivy Sweeting:

Yeah. Just to piggyback on that, definitely assistance with transportation and the importance of kind of having an open door policy where you're not terminating a young person or that your doors are really closing, but that programming is optional. So if there's ebbs and flows to their participation, then that's okay. And I also think just in being able to manage relationships and different personalities as a case manager with the family or the agency, and kind of being that non-biased person that's advocating as well.

Cassy Blakely:

Beautiful. Thank you so much. And Youth for Change?

Karen Eley:

I think it's very similar to what the other two programs said, building that relationship. And we do have a really wonderful probation officer that connects with the youth really well, and so we're all able to work as a team and just communicate with one another. I think communication's key, and being able to really communicate to the youth that they can bring their concerns and needs up to anyone, and it's a safe place.

Cassy Blakely:

Beautiful. I'm going to throw this last question out, not for y'all to answer, but just to put out there to our presenters and to anyone else that's willing, we had a question in the chat, or in the Q&A box, about policy and procedure manuals that there is a participant on the phone that has to develop one for their reentry project and would love to see examples. So if you're open to sharing yours, you could certainly send that to us here at the Corrections and Community Engagement Technical Assistance Center, and we can share it directly with that individual participant. And I am putting my email in the chat box to help facilitate that. So can't promise we'll be able to make that happen, but if anybody's willing to share, we're happy to facilitate that connection. With that, I want to acknowledge that you will receive a feedback form after this webinar to help us get feedback on how we can continue to improve these communications and learning opportunities with you.

We also encourage you to keep connected to the National Reentry Resource Center. There are a number of wonderful resources and recorded webinars, write-ups on young people who have made the transition, as well as a ton of resources that, while centered on adults, may still have some impact for your youth serving program. So please check that out, and tweet or Snapchat, or whatever hashtag you want to have on there about reentry efforts happening in your state or territory. With that, sharing a little bit about the National Reentry Resource Center works with three technical assistance agencies, one of those being the Corrections and Community Engagement Technical Assistance Center. We serve all of the OJJDP, Youth Reentry, Second Chance Act grantees, and are happy to help anyone else that may have questions. We are based at the American Institutes for Research.

With that, I want to give an enormous thank you to the participants, to our speakers for sharing the work that you are doing in your communities. Thank you for loving on the young people who are trying to just do better for themselves and for their families. This work really is possible because of what you do, and we appreciate you taking just a little bit of time out to spend with us today. So we hope you stay safe and committed in the work you do leaving here, and we hope to see you on a future learning opportunity. Please take care of yourselves.