



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

*Department of Corrections*

HAROLD W. CLARKE  
DIRECTOR

P. O. BOX 26963  
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23261  
(804) 674-3000

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Senator Charles J. Colgan, Co-Chair  
Senate Finance Committee  
10677 Aviation Ln.  
Manassas, VA 20110

Representative S. Chris Jones, Chair  
House Appropriations Committee  
P.O. Box 5059  
Suffolk, VA 23435

Brian Moran,  
Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security  
P.O. Box 1475  
Richmond, VA 23218

Senator Walter A. Stosch, Co-Chair  
Senate Finance Committee  
4551 Cox Rd.  
Glen Allen, VA 23060

Dan Timberlake, Director  
Virginia Department of Planning and Budget  
1111 E. Broad St., Room 5040  
Richmond, VA 23219-3418

Gentlemen:

Pursuant to the language in the 2014 Special Session I Appropriation Bill, item 385 M., approved June 23, 2014, attached is the Department's report on services to promote family reintegration in Intensive Re-entry Programs.

Please let me know if you have any questions or further requests.

Respectfully,

Harold W. Clarke

# Promoting Family Reintegration in Intensive Re-entry Programs

## Virginia Department of Corrections

September 16, 2014

The Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) has developed an extensive and varied number of programs and services with the direct intent to assist in the successful reintegration of offenders with their families and children. VADOC recognizes the importance that family reintegration contributes to the success of returning an offender to the free world less likely to reoffend and create new victims. But beyond the impact on public safety, the department recognizes the positive impact on the lives of the spouses and most particularly, the offender's children. By reestablishing healthy family relationships, this can help prevent the next generation from following in their parents footsteps into a life of criminal activity. The following describes the programs and curriculum VADOC has applied to the task of fostering successful family reintegration. Each of these programs offers elements that support a healthy family reunification.

**Anger Management:** This program is a cognitive behavioral approach helps offenders learn to think through their feelings before acting impulsively, particularly in moments of anger. The program synthesizes the concepts and tools from both cognitive restructuring and cognitive skills paradigms into an integrated intervention. Activities include guided practice (role play), modeling of pro-social behavior by staff, homework for offenders to practice learning when not in a group session and on-going feedback regarding success and challenges.

**MATRIX:** MATRIX is a copyrighted, research based program that provides a structured approach for treating offenders with substance abuse treatment needs. It is a comprehensive treatment model including program activities that address early recovery skills, relapse prevention, family education, and social support. MATRIX is a widely-employed substance abuse curriculum that has been demonstrated to be effective in lowering recidivism among substance-abusing offenders.

**MILK (Mothers Inside Loving Kids):** In the MILK program incarcerated female offenders meet regularly with guided staff/volunteer facilitation to discuss issues regarding their children, learn effective parenting and communication skills, and plan for special visits that are designed to be child-centric and family oriented. After completing the educational component, the participants are observed interacting with their children and provided feedback and coaching from staff and other participants. This program has operated in VADOC for many years and has strong support among the women who participate.

**Family Reunification Curriculum:** This program targets the offender and family members to help build stronger bridges prior to the return to the community. This program is offered as a precursor to the Parenting curriculum in some sites and requires a high degree of interaction between the family and the offender. The program was developed by Family Therapist Dr. Joyce Byron, who delivers it with her colleague, Janet Roach, at no charge to select VADOC facilities.

**Parenting Curriculum (Inside Out Dads, Parenting from the Inside, Mom's Inc., Dad's Inc.)**

The VADOC uses several parenting curriculum depending on the location and participant population. These programs are designed for both male and female offenders to enhance parent-child relationships and strengthen families. The goal is accomplished by educating and empowering the offender with new techniques for interacting with their children. While participating in this program the offender learns basic parenting techniques, more effective communication, learns realistic expectations of children, practices appropriate anger and stress management, learns alternative methods of discipline, works toward a healthy personal self-esteem and learns how to build their child's self-esteem.

**On-site Visitation and Video Visitation:** Each Intensive Re-entry site allows for visitation of family members at predetermined days and times. Low cost transportation is provided by several non-profit organizations and enables families who cannot afford transportation to rural prisons with access to visiting their loved one. Regular contact between offenders and their family is helpful in maintaining strong family connections. Recently, VADOC has also installed video-visitation technology that allows an offender to both talk to and see their family members for a small fee without requiring travel to the prison site. VADOC partners with two non-profit organizations to facilitate family member access to video visitation in the community.

**PREPS (Preventing Recidivism by Educating for Parole Success):** PREPS was developed by a former offender who experienced first hand the challenges of reentry. The program is designed to help prepare the offender in multiple life areas for the reentry experience and stresses that will occur. One goal of the program is to expose offenders to the realities of readjustment and to prepare the offender for the risks involved in returning to society. Other program goals include: 1) increasing the offender's awareness of areas needing improvement, 2) improving the offenders' coping strategies and skills and 3) assisting the offender in developing appropriate adaptive handling of daily stressors and situations that are likely to be encountered in the community. Much emphasis is placed on reentry into the household and how the relationships may be effected.

**Reentry Resource and Employment Fairs:** The purpose of a Reentry Resource and Employment Fair is to introduce returning former offenders to community organizations and agencies that provide post-release assistance and potential job opportunities. Linkages with critical service providers and employment have been shown to be key components associated with successful reentry. Reentry Fairs also provide an opportunity for services providers and employers to understand reentry programming in Corrections and become more amenable to providing returning citizens with post-release assistance and employment opportunities. Reentry

Resource and Employment opportunities are held twice per year at each Intensive Reentry Program.

**Resources for Successful Living:** This program assists offenders with identifying and utilizing resources for successful reentry. The curriculum includes chapters on coping skills, family reunification, successful compliance with probation supervision, maintaining health, developing healthy (non-criminal) new relationships, issues for offenders with special needs and developing reentry plans. The program offers opportunities for practicing through role plays typical situations that the offender will encounter that otherwise may be uncomfortable without prior practice.

**Road to Success:** The goal of the Road to Success is to provide re-entry and transitional services and programming to returning citizens who are currently at VADOC minimum security facilities including Work Centers and Field Units. The program requires that offenders near release complete 12 sessions of re-entry programming during a 4 month cycle. While Work Centers and Field Units typically house offenders who score at a lower security risk, most still have significant gaps in knowledge and experience that create problems for them post-release. The Road to Success curriculum seeks to target the specific needs of this population. Cognitive restructuring, problem solving skills, job skills preparation are just a few of the topics included. A Senior Reentry Probation Officer and an Offender Workforce Development Specialist each provide informational sessions such as “how to succeed on probation” and “how to create an effective resume and how to apply for work”.

**Thinking for a Change:** The Thinking for a Change program designed to teach offenders appropriate social skills, help them develop their problem solving strategies, and teach them appropriate cognitive restructuring techniques; which subsequently may impact criminogenic risk factors. The goal is to decrease criminal thinking through cognitive behavioral changes and skill development in the group participants. The Thinking for a Change curriculum is widely used in correctional settings across the country and is supported by the National Institute for Corrections (NIC) as an evidence-based program.

**Family Information Seminars:** These seminars are held for family members at the Intensive Reentry Program sites or Probation and Parole Districts to help family members understand more about reentry programming and issues that their incarcerated family member will encounter upon their return to the community. Many family members have requested more information regarding the kinds of services their incarcerated family member has received while in the intensive reentry program and need a forum to ask and have their questions answered. The Family Information Seminars provide that opportunity to meet directly with institutional program and community staff working in reentry services.

**Messages Project:** The Messages Project is an award-winning program designed to allow both male and female offenders to prepare a video-tape message for their children while they are in custody. The tape is sent home for the child to view, and may include the offender reading a special children’s book or delivering a heartfelt message of encouragement to their child. In 2008, VADOC staff Carolyn LeCroy was honored as one of 10 International Heroes by CNN for

her creation of the Messages Project and her contribution to offender family reintegration. The Messages Project now serves almost all of VADOC facilities.

**Veterans Programming:** This programming enables participants to become aware of veterans' benefits, instruct them on how to access programs, build self-esteem, self-sufficiency, improving relationships with family and others, and identifying available resources upon release. It provides a support system for offenders who unique experiences, perspectives and needs as a result of their service in the U.S. military. Using a peer support group process with staff assistance this program provides information and access to veteran services and benefits (i.e. medical and mental health, disability, housing, etc.).

**Healthy Relationships:** The goals of this curriculum are to teach offenders to stop their violence and prevent the reoccurrence of future violence. As such, offenders are taught to identify abusive behaviors, identify alternatives to violence, and explore the impact of violent and abusive behavior on intimate partners, children, and others. The cognitive aspects of this program help to assist offenders in examining the beliefs they hold about violence so the awareness can begin to motivate change in behavior. This program was developed from the Virginia Standards for Batterer Intervention Programs (Responding to Male Violence against Women).

**2<sup>nd</sup> Chance Grant:** VADOC was awarded a 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance Grant to assist female offenders to successfully reintegrate with their families and children back in southwest Virginia. The grant allowed for the creation of special parenting curriculum, therapeutic videoconferencing between offenders and their children, and special Client Advocates who facilitated offenders in their transition process back to their communities. While funding for this grant ended in 2011, this prototype produced excellent results and a proven model to foster successful family reintegration. A video featuring the results of this grant was developed by VADOC and was chosen for posting on the Federal Bureau of Justice Assistance web-site.