



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## *Department of Corrections*

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Gentlemen:

Pursuant to the language in the 2016 Virginia Acts of Assembly, item 394.L, attached is the Virginia Department of Corrections' 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  
Director

Enclosures

# Promoting Family Reintegration in Intensive Re-entry Programs

## Virginia Department of Corrections

September, 2016

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 supports 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.

**Parenting Curriculum:** Following an initiative in 2010 designed to expand family reintegration services for VADOC offenders and their families prior to reentry into the community, the core elements of that initiative have continued in the pilot facilities. The key element of this initiative was the development of evidence-based parenting curriculum and family reintegration activities at five VADOC facilities: Chesterfield Women's Detention & Diversion Center, Virginia Correctional Center for Women, Deep Meadow Correctional Center, St. Brides Correctional Center, and Green Rock Correctional Center. These five sites offer diversity in terms of gender and security levels. A sixth female site, Brunswick Women's Work Center Reentry Program was already delivering parenting curriculum, but was not counted as one of the pilot sites.

The staff at female sites was trained in *Parenting from the Inside: Making the Mother Child Connection*, a curriculum developed by Dr. Ann Loper and her staff at the University of Virginia. The staff at the male institutions was trained in the *Inside Out Dads* curriculum. Four of the six sites continue to offer these parenting programs in their reentry program, and a fifth site, Green Rock Correctional Center, continues to offer the curriculum to offenders who are outside of the 12-month window of eligibility for the reentry program. Both the male and female parenting groups are voluntary, and require participation from the offender and their family members. Both parenting curriculum allow for gender-specific parenting training that incorporates practice opportunity.

These programs are designed 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, effective communication skills, realistic expectations of children, and alternative methods of discipline. The offenders are able to practice appropriate anger and stress management and how to reinforce positive behaviors and attributes to build their child's self-esteem.

**MILK (Mothers Inside Loving Kids):** Another parenting program currently being delivered at Virginia Correctional Center for Women and Fluvanna Correctional Center is the MILK curriculum. 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.

**Anger Management:** This program is a cognitive behavioral approach that 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. VADOC staff are currently being trained in an updated evidence-based Anger Management curriculum soon to be implemented across multiple sites to replace the older curriculum.

**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. MATRIX is provided not only at reentry sites but throughout VADOC facilities at various security levels.

**Family Reunification Curriculum:** Since 2011, Family Reunifications Seminars have continued to expand in urban and rural localities across the Commonwealth of Virginia. State probation districts have collaborated with various local stakeholders to educate, engage and empower families of offenders so they will be better prepared to support their loved ones as they return to the community. Unique approaches to addressing this need have included multi-agency events where partner agencies share resource information on topics like pre-employment services and healthcare options. This, along with the families learning about supervision expectations from the probation district, helps them become more informed in how to help and support the reentering offenders. It is also noted that recent family reunification seminars in the community have been held at churches, libraries and the offices of community partners. This change of venue has enhanced the level of engagement for the family members and corrections staff.

On the facility level, pre-release seminars continue to focus on the reentry process and programs that were provided to offenders in preparation for release. Also included in the seminars is information and resource material on the phases of transitioning and adjusting to release from incarceration, along with upcoming supervision requirements. A specific curriculum was developed for Intensive Reentry Facilities to utilize that enables them to meet the goal to engage family members in the reentry process. The program was developed by the late Dr. Joyce Byron, a renowned Family Therapist, and is delivered by her colleague, Janet Roach and other

volunteers, at no charge to select VADOC facilities.

Overall, the agency is working as resources allow to incorporate families as a vital part of our reentry successes. These efforts contribute to VADOC's efforts to promote lasting public safety and building stronger communities, as well as reduce generational patterns for crime.

**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. 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 a non-profit organization 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 affected.

**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 pro-social relationships, meeting special needs through community resources and developing reentry plans. The program offers opportunities for practicing through role playing 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 correctional units. The program requires that offenders near release complete 12 sessions of re-entry programming during a four-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, and 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 is 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 ~~criminal~~ risk factors. The goal is to decrease criminal thinking through cognitive behavioral changes and skill development in the group participation. 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.

**The 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 with 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.). VADOC also has forged closer ties with the Virginia Department of Veteran Services (DVS) which has led to a significant increase in DVS staff

visiting all VADOC facilities and serving incarcerated veterans and their families.

**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).