

**Promoting Family Reintegration in
Intensive Reentry Programs
Virginia Department of Corrections**

FY2020 Report



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Authority

This report has been prepared and submitted to fulfill the requirements of the Appropriation Act Chapter 1289 Item 402 Letter K of the Acts of Assembly of 2020. This provision requires the Department of Corrections report information pertaining to the agency's actions to overcoming obstacles to reentry and to promote family integration in the correctional centers designed for intensive reentry programs to the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees, the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, and the Department of Planning and Budget on October 15th of each year.

Background

The Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) is committed to helping people to be better through its mission and operations that fosters a healing environment and promotes family reintegration in intensive reentry programs and throughout the Department. The VADOC has numerous programs and services that have been developed to assist in the successful reintegration of offenders with their families and particularly, their children. The VADOC recognizes that family reintegration enhances the quality of life for offenders prior to release and once the returning citizen has transitioned to the community. There is also a direct correlation between family reintegration, a decrease in recidivism, and crime victimization.

Beyond the impact on public safety, the Department acknowledges the positive impact on the lives of the spouses and most particularly, the offender's children. Reestablishing healthy family relationships, helps prevent the next generation from following in their parent's footsteps into a life of criminal activity. The following describes the programs and curriculum VADOC has implemented for successful family reintegration. Each of these programs offers elements that support healthy family reunification.

Programs and Activities

Parenting Curriculum: In 2010 a pilot initiative was designed to expand family reintegration services for VADOC offenders and their families prior to reentry through the implementation of parenting curriculums. That initiative has expanded over the years with enhancements to programs and family reintegration activities. Originally, the *Inside Out Dads* curriculum was implemented at facilities with male offenders. Even after recent research of various parenting curriculums, *Inside Out Dads* remains the parenting curriculum of choice for male offenders. Female facilities have utilized various curriculums over the years including *Moms Inc.* and *Parenting from Within*. However, the VADOC has recently implemented the *Partners in Parenting* curriculum at pilot locations. Within the reporting period, staff trainings occurred for both the *Inside Out Dads* and *Partners in Parenting* curriculums to expand group facilitation. Parenting classes are offered on a voluntary basis to the offender population. These programs are designed to enhance parent-child relationships and strengthen families. The programs educate and empower the offender and provide new techniques for interacting with their children. While participating in the program, the offender learns basic parenting techniques, effective communication skills, realistic expectations of children, and alternative methods of discipline.

Offenders practice providing positive affirmations to their children, stress management skills, and steps to reinforce positive behaviors.

Circle of Parents Peer Groups: Following completion of a parenting curriculum, offenders are offered an opportunity to participate in a parenting peer support group. Circle of Parents is a nationwide program designed to provide peer-to-peer assistance based on the principles of family support, mutual self-help, and shared ideas. This program offers 92 lesson plans for parents, as well as a separate curriculum for their children. Recently, Virginia Correctional Center for Women served as the initial pilot site for Circle of Parents peer-led groups. The groups offer meaningful dialogue to help deepen parent-child relationships. Today, multiple sites are being trained to ensure active, parent-led peer groups are being offered within VADOC facilities statewide.

Building Family Bridges Grant: In 2018, the VADOC was awarded the Building Family Bridges Second Chance Grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. As a result of the grant, an Advisory Committee was established to enhance community collaboration regarding parenting services with the agency. The Advisory Committee reviews and suggests revisions on the protocols, procedures, and practices of VADOC pertaining to family reunification. The committee examines current practices within VADOC that impact family engagement, facility security, child safety, parenting programs, and reentry planning as it applies to family connectivity. Committee members each bring their unique experiences and expertise to the committee.

As a result of committee recommendations, the transformation process of creating a child-friendly visitation environment for children is underway. St. Brides Correctional Center has completed the revamp of their visitation room making it more child-friendly with colorful artwork throughout the room. For example, the no contact booths have been painted to take on the image of a school bus, making them less intimidating and more welcoming.



To ensure sustainability, the grant also provides for an evaluator from the College of William & Mary who continues to help capture and assess the data as the parenting programs expand. To foster family connections, the Building Family Bridges grant arranged for the first cohort of

offenders to create a video message to their children, even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Messages Project: The Messages Project is an award-winning program designed to allow both male and female offenders to prepare a video message for their children while in custody. The DVD, accessible through a television or computer, 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. Offenders at St. Brides Correctional Center, Sussex I State Prison, and Sussex II State Prison had the opportunity to send messages to their children just in time for the holidays. This program promotes child-parent engagement while allowing offenders to creatively communicate with their kids utilizing innovative forms of communication. For example, in the past parents have sung child-friendly songs, helped with challenging homework, and even taught their child how to dribble a basketball. VADOC recognized that when parents meet their children where they are, family bonds and healthy relationships are established.



VADOC Prison Nursery Project: The VADOC is actively exploring the development of a prison nursery program to be located at the Virginia Correctional Center for Women (VCCW) facility, for incarcerated state-responsible pregnant female offenders. Female participants will deliver their baby and continue to provide care for up to 24 months post-delivery while both parent and child reside in the Nursery Program unit. The program will maintain a strong reentry focus, to ensure that the female offender is prepared for a smooth transition back to the community with her child. The prison nursery program will promote healthy parent-child bonding by using an evidence-based parenting curriculum, coaching/mentorship, and wellness education that will ultimately take aim at breaking the cycle of generational crime and further victimization. With only eleven prison nursery programs across the country, the VADOC remains at the forefront of implementing innovative evidence-based practices and programs to improve offender reentry success and address the needs of the population under its purview.

During the spring and summer of 2020, renovations were made to a vacant house on the property of Virginia Correctional Center for Women. Planning is underway to use this property as a family reintegration house to allow women, as part of their reentry process, to visit with their children and practice parenting skills. Women would still have the support of VADOC staff that can help



problem-solve and provide additional family and life skills. Ability to provide this program is contingent upon available funding in the future.

Gender-Responsive: As an agency, VADOC made a commitment to working towards the goal of using a gender-responsive, trauma-informed approach to the custody and care of all individuals in our women's facilities. In October of 2019, all incarcerated women were integrated to the Central Region affording them an administration focused primarily on the specific needs of women. With the expansion of programs, women are now offered vocational training such as welding, electrical and HVAC, digital imagery, entrepreneurship, and business software applications. VADOC received input from Dr. Barbara Bloom and Dr. Stephanie Covington, internationally recognized for their development of the National Institute of Corrections research on the principles of gender responsive programming for incarcerated women. In addition, The Darden Business School at the University of Virginia offer Entrepreneur classes to women to increase their financial literacy and ability to be successful businesswomen upon release from incarceration. The women's work-release program at State Farm offers employment in community-based settings combined with classroom instruction to increase the likelihood of employment stability upon release from incarceration. The "Greener Pastures" program, located at State Farm Work Center, transitioned to an all-female work program in the fall of 2019. Women are taught valuable skills such as caring for horses, and in this process learn to care for themselves and others. They also, if chosen, gain teaching skills as trainers, and gain equestrian skills that can be transferred to self-sustaining jobs post-release. These opportunities are provided with the long-term goal of fostering financial independence and the ability for women to live with their children and families as the primary wage earner.

Women have unique pathways to crime and therefore unique program needs, such as increased need for substance abuse, mental health, and trauma services. The Women's Risk and Needs Assessment is used to identify their unique needs. VADOC is in the process of expanding the use of gender-specific curricula for women, including women's interactive journaling programs of *Trauma in Life* and *Women in Recovery*, and Dr. Stephanie Covington's program *Healing Trauma* (a six-session brief intervention for women), and *Beyond Violence* (a program for women with histories of violence and aggressive tendencies). The nationally recognized Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) screening tool is being piloted at Central Virginia Correctional Unit to help mental health practitioners understand the impact of childhood trauma on toxic stress, and emotional and physical health problems in adult incarcerated women. To ensure the VADOC is utilizing best practices, the agency has incorporated *Helping Women Recover* and *Beyond Trauma* curriculums, authored by Dr. Stephanie Covington, in the Cognitive Therapeutic Community Program at the Virginia Correctional Center for Women. The Department has also ensured that staff is trained in trauma informed care practices. A four-hour SAMHSA Gains Center Training titled, "Being Trauma Informed", has been incorporated in all Basic Skills for Counselors, Probation and Parole Staff and is being added to the Basic Skills for Correctional Officers.

Wellness Program: Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women (FCCW) has implemented a Wellness Program known to provide gender-responsive, evidence-based, and trauma sensitive



quality assurance. This program was designed to increase self-awareness and mind-body integration, while utilizing collaborative ways to help offenders develop the skills of self-compassion and self-efficacy. One of the most prominent components to the program is the Mothering From Within Program, where specialized instruction in lactation, birth support, preparation for separation and child custody planning, and community-based Doula (birth partner) services are provided.

The new Compassionate Care Program provides specialized Hospice Care Training to offenders. This specialized training allows women to offer companion care and emotional support to incarcerated women who are nearing end-of-life.

MILK (Mothers Inside Loving Kids): MILK is another parenting curriculum delivered at Fluvanna Correctional Center and the Virginia Correctional Center for Women. In the MILK program, female offenders meet regularly with staff and volunteers to discuss issues regarding their children, learn effective parenting and communication skills, and plan for special visits that are designed to be child-centered 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 participants. In 2019 the MILK participants had the opportunity to invite their children to the facility for a special visit. The event included holiday décor, age-appropriate activities, and games. MILK members topped the day off with a delightful lunch with their children.

Family Reunification Curriculum: Since 2011, Family Reunification 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 to be better prepared to support their loved one as they return to the community. Unique approaches have included multi-agency events where partner agencies share resources on topics like pre-employment services and healthcare options. This, along with families learning about supervision expectations from the probation district, better prepares returning citizens. Family reunification seminars in the community are held at churches, libraries, and the community partners' offices. 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. Seminars also include information and materials on the transition phases and adjustment to release from incarceration, along with upcoming supervision requirements. The late Dr. Joyce Byron, a renowned Family Therapist, developed the curriculum used for the seminars that engages family members in the reentry process. Overall, the agency is working to incorporate families as a vital part of reentry success.

On-site Visitation and Video Visitation: Each intensive reentry 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 to visit their loved ones. Regular contact between offenders and their families is helpful in maintaining strong family connections. VADOC has also installed video visitation technology allowing offenders to both talk and see family members for a small fee without requiring travel to the prison site. VADOC partners with a non-profit organization, AFOI (Assisting Families of Offenders), to facilitate access to video visitation in the community.

Family Information Seminars: These Seminars are held at the intensive reentry program sites or at probation & parole districts to help family members understand reentry programming and issues that their incarcerated family member will encounter upon their return to the community. Often, offenders may not accurately share the details of their specialized reentry programs with family members. Many family members have requested more information regarding services their incarcerated family member has received while in the intensive reentry program. The forum is a safe space to ask questions and learn more about the VADOC. The Family Information Seminars are unique in that they provide that opportunity for family members to meet directly with institutional and community staff working in reentry services.

Each year the agency continues to work to help families and build stronger communities. In the fall of 2019, district offices held special back to school seminars in collaboration with various local state agencies and community partners providing backpack and school supply giveaways for the children of returning citizens. These events ensured that children started school with items needed to foster a positive learning experience. Districts have also held special events to serve families of those involved in the criminal justice system by hosting donation drives of food, toys and coats at the holidays and sponsoring summer camp enrollment for children. One VADOC Probation and Parole District hosted a “Welcome Home” Family Reunification seminar in partnership with the local Reentry Council and VACARES. Over 120 returning citizens and families were invited, and more than twenty community partners committed to providing their services and support to returning citizens and their families as they reintegrate back into society. These seminars are consistent with our mission and promote lasting public safety and reduce generational patterns of crime.

Special Parenting Events: All correctional facilities are encouraged to be innovative and resourceful, creating special parenting events throughout the year. Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women held a Women’s Empowerment Seminar hosted by a life coach and noted author. Greenville Correctional Center collaborated with a community partner to host a special program for 30 parole granted offenders actively participating in VADOC intensive reentry programs. The event was designed to raise awareness and discuss the impact of trauma that domestic violence has on a child’s life. Ultimately, the parolees who participated in the seminar left empowered with tools to understand various forms of domestic violence, how to get support, how abuse affects children, and most importantly how positive parenting can help break generational cycles of domestic violence.



Anger Management: The Department continues to offer an evidence based anger management curriculum. *Aggression Alternative Skills* is a cognitive based program offering an additional thirteen skills provided at the end of the *Thinking for a Change* curriculum that focus on appropriate ways to deal with aggression. The VADOC also offers *Anger Management* by SAMHSA for offenders who score high on the negative social cognition scales as well as mental health and/or substance abuse on the risk and needs assessment. These programs assist offenders with skill development to strengthen family relationships and parenting.

Cognitive Behavioral Interventions for Substance Abuse (CBI-SA): *CBI-SA* is a research-based program that provides a structured approach for treating justice-involved clients with substance use disorders. This curriculum developed by the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute, relies on a cognitive behavioral approach to teach participants strategies for avoiding substance abuse. Emphasis placed on skill building activities to assist with cognitive, social, emotional, and coping skill development. The CBT approach is most effective with substance use clients involved in Corrections. The curriculum includes pretreatment (optional), motivational enhancement, cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, social skills, problem solving and relapse prevention. Specific modules offer skills that will enhance the family reintegration process. Such topics include finding support, communicating your needs, having a conversation and understanding the feelings of others. The VADOC has expanded substance use disorder services to offer medication assisted treatment (MAT) at pilot locations which assist those returning to their communities manage their recovery. Currently, the VADOC has regional recovery support navigators to coach offenders enrolled in MAT two months prior to release from incarceration through the first year of probation. Navigators also connect individuals to community MAT providers to maintain their naltrexone (Vivitrol) injections and treatment needs.

Making It On Supervision: Seminars are offered throughout the state by Senior Reentry Probation Officers to ensure that returning citizens are prepared with the knowledge needed to be successful on probation and parole. These seminars review the conditions of probation and parole. In addition, the returning citizen is able to gather detailed information on their personal case regarding sentencing orders, fines, special conditions, etc. This collaboration prior to release is contributing to a decrease in anxiety for both the returning citizen and their family regarding the transition process.

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 increasing the offender's awareness of areas needing improvement, improving the offender's coping strategies and skills, and assisting the offender in developing appropriate skills to handling daily stressors and situations. Emphasis is placed on reentry into the household and how family relationships may be affected.



Reentry Resource and Employment Fairs: The purpose of a Reentry Resource and Employment Fair is to introduce returning 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 service 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 to practice through role-playing typical situations that the offender will encounter after release.

Road to Success: The goal of the Road to Success is to provide reentry 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 reentry programming during a four-month cycle. While work centers and field units typically house offenders with 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 targets the specific needs of this population. VADOC uses materials developed by The Change Companies that promote cognitive restructuring, problem solving skills, and job skills preparation. A Senior Reentry Probation Officer and an Offender Workforce Development Specialist each provide informational sessions on how to succeed on probation, how to create an effective resume, and how to apply for employment.

Thinking for a Change: The *Thinking for a Change* program is designed to teach offenders social skills, problem-solving strategies, and appropriate cognitive restructuring techniques, which subsequently may impact 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* (T4C) curriculum is widely used in correctional settings across the country and is supported by the National Institute for Corrections as an evidence-based program.

Veterans Programming: This programming enables participants to become aware of Veteran benefits, ways to access programs, skills to enhancing self-esteem, and steps to improve relationships with family and others and identify 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 such as medical and mental health, disability, and housing. VADOC has forged close ties with the Virginia Department of Veteran Services (DVS) as well as other Veteran support groups like American Legion and the



Veterans of Foreign Wars. These groups meet quarterly in a Veterans Stakeholders Meeting with staff to address common issues and concerns. Through partnerships, DVS staff and representative from other veteran agencies provide onsite services to all VADOC institutions meeting with incarcerated veterans and assisting them in benefit applications. VADOC has a Veteran Programs Manager to oversee VADOC veteran concerns. In addition, a Veteran Advocate Position was filled in 2020 to enhance services for Veterans specifically surrounding Veteran Benefits.

Healthy Relationships: The goals of this curriculum are to teach offenders to stop violence towards intimate partners and prevent the occurrence of future violence. 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 offenders examine the beliefs they hold about violence so that this new 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).

Ready to Work: To prepare returning citizens for the transition back to their communities and to assist them in securing employment, this group is offered to all offenders prior to release. The group offers skill-building sessions focused on interviewing, professional dress, work ethics, employment legalities, and additional workforce development areas. In this group, all participants are afforded an opportunity to develop a resume and cover letter, and participate in mock interview sessions. In addition, the Federal Bonding Program is explained to the participants and they are released from incarceration with a personal Federal Bonding Eligibility Letter. This group emphasizes the importance of workforce development and the financial responsibilities of caring for a family. Participants are eager to attend this group since it provides them with skills to financially support a family and contribute to their children's needs.

Drive to Work: The VADOC partners with a non-profit organization to deliver the Drive to Work program to assist offenders in restoring their driving privileges. These seminars address driver's license restoration and offer a review of their personalized driving compliance summary. The Drive to Work program has expanded to include the driver improvement course online. This program offers participants a second chance to restore a much-needed privilege. Driving is often critical for work and caring for a family. This driver improvement course affords returning citizens a new opportunity, which assists them with employment, family reintegration and community involvement.

Documents: To ensure parents released from incarceration are prepared, the VADOC works with each returning citizen to assist them in securing their birth certificate and social security card. Through a MOU with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), the VADOC is able to provide DMV IDs for offenders prior to release. In 2020, Real IDs were also made available, along with Veteran indication on the ID cards. The DMV also ensures offenders are provided DMV Compliance Summaries to assist them in securing their driver's license.



COVID19 Pandemic Response

In response to the COVID19 pandemic, the VADOC has modified programs and activities to ensure reentry services are provided in accordance with CDC guidelines. Modification to services have included:

- Parenting resources distributed statewide addressing topics such as virtual learning, stress management, talking to kids about COVID19, sanitation for young people.
- One free telephone call weekly for each returning citizen to enhance family communication.
- Offenders who are incarcerated fathers enrolled in the Building Family Bridges Parenting Program were able to record messages for their children in preparation for the upcoming reunification.
- The VADOC provides every offender at the time of release a Reentry Resource Packet. This packet has also been uploaded to the VADOC public website. The packet contains resources and information including DMV ID requirements, interviewing guidance, and tips to staying safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Interactive evidence based journals are given to offenders within reentry, including *What Got Me Here* and *Money Smart* from The Change Companies.
- Reentry videos addressing financial management and the Virginia Bonding Program are shown.
- The VADOC and DMV continue to partner, providing DMV ID cards prior to release for those who are currently in the DMV system. In addition, DMV has held special visits to probation and parole districts to assist individuals on supervision secure DMV ID cards.
- Offenders with opioid dependency and alcohol dependency continue to be offered medication assisted treatment.
- The Virginia Bonding Program video was made available through the offender Jpay System so offenders can watch the training video on their personal devices. The video is available through the VADOC website for probationers/parolees.
- The VADOC developed a Wellness Channel offering a rich assortment of videos replacing group trainings that include reentry planning, former offender success stories, healthy relationships and fighting germs. The information is available on DVD and shown through the facility's close circuit TVs or housing unit televisions.