

## Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative

*By Tamela Aikens, Community Coordinator, Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative*

Michigan, like many states throughout the country, is facing an exorbitant prisoner population crisis. But there is a light at the end of the tunnel, thanks to the Governor's Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative (MPRI). According to the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC), prisoners in the MPRI are 21 percent less likely to return to prison. Partly in response to this success, Michigan plans to roll out the program to the whole state in 2008.



Officer Myra Gracey prepares clothes for the reentry closet.

With a budget of \$2 billion and an inmate population of 51,000, Michigan's prison system is larger today than at any time in its history. Every year in Michigan nearly 10,000 prisoners are paroled from correctional facilities throughout the state. The MPRI focuses on parolees as a means of preventing additional crime in the communities and repeated cycles of incarceration.

Initiated in 2005, MPRI is working to create safer neighborhoods and better citizens through state and local collaborations. It is striving for a seamless, individualized plan of services and supervision that begins when offenders enter prison and continues through their transition, reintegration, and aftercare in the community. MPRI brings together key state and local stakeholders—including state agencies, community leaders, policymakers, faith-based institutions, social and clinical service providers, and MDOC—to influence the success of each prisoner who returns to the community.

MPRI's vision is to provide every prisoner released to the community with the tools needed to succeed. To that end, partners from a variety of public and private sectors are working together to achieve two goals:

Promote public safety by reducing the threat of harm to persons and their property by released offenders in the communities to which those offenders return.

Increase the success rates of former prisoners by fostering effective risk management and treatment programming, accountability, and community and victim participation.



Community partners help out at the Greyhound Station.

## **Getting Ready, Going Home, and Staying Home**

Three phases make up the MPRI.

**Phase I: Getting Ready.** This is the institutional phase and represents the details of events and responsibilities that occur from the time the offender enters prison until the parole decision is made. During this phase, prison staff uses an assessment and classification tool called the Correction Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions to measure each prisoner's risks, needs, strengths, and weaknesses. This assessment is then used in combination with prisoner input to create a Transition Accountability Plan (TAP). This plan specifies programs, treatments, and interventions that will enable the prisoner to succeed in returning home and reintegrating into the community. The point of these interventions is to manage, if not reduce, the risks and address the needs.

**Phase II: Going Home.** The TAP is updated as needed during phase II and is reworked into a collaborative, prisoner-centered plan involving each prisoner, prison staff, parole agents, and human services providers in the community. During this phase, both the community and the prisoner are mutually preparing for the offender's release by discussing and verifying the offender's needs, such as housing, employment, substance abuse prevention and intervention, and clothing. The TAP describes actions that will prepare the offender for release, defines the terms and conditions of that release, and specifies the supervision and services the offender will receive in the community. During this phase, each prisoner meets with his or her transition team, comprising service specialists from the community, the parole officer, and the institution case managers who discuss and confirm the TAP and provide appointment dates and service-provider contact information.

**Phase III: Staying Home.** While under community parole supervision, the former prisoner, his or her parole officer, and the human service providers connected with the aftercare plan work together to ensure that the parolee successfully completes the parole term. The parolee and the community-based service providers also prepare for the end of parole, when these providers will take over the case (i.e., without the involvement of the MDOC) by providing a continuum of care that includes mentoring, development of positive social networks, and constructive community involvement.

## **Wayne County MPRI Site and Northwest Detroit Weed and Seed**

Nowhere in the state is the success of this program more evident or sure to have more bearing than within Michigan's Weed and Seed communities. In Wayne County, the partnership between the state's reentry program and the Weed and Seed communities has resulted in not only increased communication across law enforcement agencies, but increased participation from community and service providers.

Annually, nearly 35 percent of all Michigan prisoners return to the state's largest county—Wayne. Of this total, 85 percent return to the city of Detroit. The reality of 3,000 to 3,500 former prisoners returning to a community every year requires not only engaging stakeholders to address the needs of former prisoners effectively, but also a critical reframing of how each partner is interconnected and equally relevant to ensuring the safety of the community.

Since early 2006, the Wayne County MPRI site and the Northwest Detroit Weed and Seed site have collaborated to transport former prisoners returning to Detroit via Greyhound Bus. Community partners; a community relations officer, when possible; and MPRI staff and providers meet the parolee at the Greyhound terminal. Then, some ex-offenders are taken to community housing by van, while others receive enough bus fare to get home and to their parole officer the next morning. Sometimes offenders get rides directly to the parole office. The reentry team distributes everything from water to bus route maps to toiletry kits.

In addition, Officer Myra Gracey of the Northwestern Police District manages the Weed and Seed Men's Clothing Closet as part of the site's reentry project. This MPRI and Weed and Seed partnership started with a year-long (and still ongoing) city-wide men's clothing drive. To date, the effort has netted thousands of clothing donations, which are distributed to the several MPRI community aftercare service locations. The majority of the clothing donations have been received from churches, community organizations, and local enforcement officers.

At the core of this collaboration is the belief that—with the appropriate support—former prisoners can transform their lives as they strive to achieve self-sufficiency, rebuild family and community ties, and—most important—become assets to the communities they left behind. To that end, northwest Detroit's Weed and Seed community is a hub of innovative reentry partnerships and initiatives. In addition to this partnership, northwest Detroit also is the site of another program: Operation TIDE (tactical intelligence-driven initiative), the multijurisdictional law enforcement and community development initiative. The Detroit Chief of Police and the

U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan jointly lead Operation TIDE in close cooperation with state and federal law enforcement partners. This effort is an initiative of Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN)—led by U.S. Attorney Stephen Murphy—that includes the Detroit Police Department, the Michigan State Police, the Wayne County Sheriff, MDOC, and virtually every federal law enforcement agency that conducts operations in Michigan.

The primary objective of PSN is to work with Weed and Seed sites to reduce violent crime, especially gun violence, by sharing intelligence among various agencies and jurisdictions. Since Operation TIDE's inception, Wayne County MPRI has been essential as a partner in the dual-purpose parolee call-in meetings held in the police district. Each meeting serves two purposes:

To inform parolees of the community's commitment to reducing crime and gun violence and that their involvement with guns may result in federal prosecution.

To link parolees with the necessary community supports, including job training, job placement assistance, transportation assistance, and temporary housing options.

MPRI contractors are on hand to schedule appointments and provide referral assistance. The next phase of MPRI's involvement with PSN will include incorporating this meeting into the prerelease process for each offender returning to this Weed and Seed community.

In late 2006, MDOC committed \$500,000 to an initiative called Ready4Work to further establish this Weed and Seed community's resilience and its ability to serve as a hub of reintegration resources anchored by job training, job opportunities, law enforcement support, community involvement, and family services and resources. This funding was enhanced by an additional \$500,000 grant from the Michigan State Housing and Development Authority.

Through the MPRI Ready4Work Initiative, offenders returning to Detroit's northwest neighborhoods will be offered employment on construction and housing rehabilitation projects, where they will receive on-the-job training in a supportive environment aimed at preparing them to work outside of the program. Prior to release, offenders will have participated in the MDOC building trades and training program and will leave prison with certification enabling them to join the Ready4work program.

Although it is still too early to measure its success, this innovative and synergistic place-based approach to crime prevention and community stabilization is well poised and perfectly suited to achieve its reentry and community development goals. At the same time, MPRI is a national model for communities that want to achieve reduced crime and improved quality-of-life outcomes.

**For more information, contact:**

**[Tamela Aikens](#)**

Community Coordinator,

Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative—Wayne County