
Reintegrating the Previously Incarcerated

Nearly every family that has a son or daughter involved in Safe Haven-Ministations, Full Service Community Schools, Quantum and Argus also has a family member who is incarcerated. Over two million American citizens currently are in American prisons, the highest rate of any nation in the industrialized world, and over four million are on probation. The cost to American taxpayers is enormous.

Each year approximately 650,000 men and women come home from prison. But most are unable to find housing, restricted in their travel, and unable to find decent employment while unpaid fines and child support continues to accelerate. As a result, many revert to old behaviors and the solace of drugs and alcohol. Nearly two thirds are re-arrested within three years.

In response, the Foundation has assembled existing best practices in the re-entry field. With these best practices, the Foundation is identifying existing organizations in the field and providing technical assistance and training to “upgrade” and enhance their operations, by integrating in more of the best practices. The Foundation also is exploring the launching of new organizations that can implement best practices from the very beginning.

For example, the Eisenhower Foundation is providing technical assistance on best practices to the Gemeinschaft Program in Virginia. Gemeinschaft is a six month residential re-entry program. Residents must first complete a six month orientation program while in prison. When they leave prison, Gemeinschaft becomes a vehicle to help them stabilize their life, acquire life skills, save money and find a job.

Gemeinschaft has won many awards for its excellent record of helping men exiting prison make a successful transition into the working world. Best practice refinements now are being made. They include transitioning from a strategy based on professional staff to a peer-driven model in which the residents have full participation in the life and welfare of the organization.

Recently, Gemeinschaft has:

- Opened a business training school, the Gemeinschaft Auto Detailing Business;
- Replaced through natural attrition several professional staff with men who had first been residents of the program;
- Instituted the practice of “each one, teach one” and “learning by doing” in which all residents are responsible for teaching and holding accountable all those who come behind them, and in which every resident has an important role to play that contributes to the health of the whole while also teaching valuable skills;
- Developed relationships with academic institutions so that the men can get their GEDs and, eventually, pursue college degrees;
- Acquired, with the help of the Eisenhower Foundation, two additional properties in which men that complete the six month program can move into a longer term program in which they finish vocational training, advance their educations, pay off loans and fines, and establish adequate savings.

Gemeinschaft also is working with the Eisenhower Foundation to diversify its funding base and earn more income from business training schools.
