



RE-ENTRY MINISTRY: A CALL TO ACTION

During the weekend of January 11 to January 13, the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) and its partners in the District of Columbia's faith community joined together in a Day of Re-Entry Worship to launch a ministry of support and assistance to offenders returning to the local community from prison.

January is National Mentoring Month. To emphasize the value of mentoring to returning offenders, mentor recruitment will be the first cooperative initiative of CSOSA and its partners in the faith community.

Why is Re-Entry important?

It has been reported that about 2,500 offenders will return to District of Columbia neighborhoods from prison next year. Most will have substance abuse histories. Most lack basic job and literacy skills. In many cases, they have lost touch with family and friends during incarceration, so their natural support systems are weakened. Research has shown consistently that positive relationships are critical if offenders are to avoid recidivism. Without those relationships and support services, offenders are more likely to relapse into patterns of drug use and criminal behavior. Re-Entry is about helping these individuals become productive, law-abiding members of our community.

How does mentoring help with Re-Entry efforts?

Returning offenders need the support of positive relationships. Because religious institutions are the cornerstone of the community, these institutions are a crucial source of such relationships. If an offender feels welcomed by the faith community and receives support and guidance from that community, he or she can begin to establish a positive connection to, and find value in, friends who reject drug abuse and criminal behavior.

What about other services?

The CSOSA/Faith Community Partnership is collaborating on a range of services for returning offenders, such as counseling, job training, and transitional housing. In the coming months, the partnership will begin to establish a network of faith-based services throughout the city. Our vision is to link all returning offenders with a welcoming faith community that will provide help and support.

The CSOSA/Faith Community Partnership's efforts are part of a citywide Re-Entry Strategy. The District of Columbia's public, private, non-profit, and faith organizations are joining together to provide a comprehensive network of re-entry services.

How can I help?

At Re-Entry Worship Services, congregations heard about the needs of returning offenders and the value of personal relationships in meeting those needs. These services were an important first step in establishing an active ministry to provide outreach and help to returning offenders. We hope that as a result, many volunteers will come forth to extend a hand to returning offenders by serving as a mentor.

CSOSA will hold an orientation meeting for prospective mentors. This meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, February 7, 2002, from 6:30p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Israel Baptist Church, 1251 Saratoga Avenue NE**. At this orientation, CSOSA staff will present details about the mentoring program and will announce a schedule of training sessions for those who wish to serve.

For more information on the CSOSA/Faith Community Partnership, contact Gail Francois in CSOSA's Office of Community Justice Programs: (202) 220-5320 or gail.francois@csosa.gov.