

SPECIAL EDITION

THE PAROLE REPORT

Volume I Issue 3

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Special points of interest:

- Chairman's Message
Edgcombe Project
ROOTS
Reentry Task Forces
ComALERT
Fair Chance Initiative



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Message From the Chairman

Public safety is one of the foremost responsibilities of state government and I would like to thank the hard-working men and women of the Division of Parole for their dedication to that mission.

It is a difficult task to protect the public while giving former offenders the chance to become assets to their communities and I commend the Division's employees for their efforts.

This issue of the Parole newsletter is focused on the Division's biggest role in protecting the public: Reentry.

According to the federal government, New

York is the safest large state in the nation and the fifth safest overall. The dramatic decrease crime over the past decade has come even as the number of people in our state prisons has dropped substantially.

Those declines have led us to now focus on the thousands of prisoners who will soon complete their prison sentences and return to society. It is on reentry that we as a state must hone our efforts to continue the historic reductions in crime and save taxpayer dollars.

Here in New York, there are about 63,000 inmates now in state

prison. This year, 25,000 of those inmates will be released.

More than one-third of those will return to prison within three years. The vast majority will be sent back to prison for violating the conditions of their parole. This fact alone demonstrates the need to develop successful reentry programs.

An offender's ability to successfully transition from prison to life on the outside is linked to his or her success in securing stable housing and em-



See CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE, page 5

Technical Violator Program Begins at Edgcombe

The Division of Parole, along with the Department of Correctional Services and the Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services are partnering on a program at

Edgcombe Correctional Facility to address the drug treatment needs of technical parole violators.

The project is part of the Division's goal to cut down on the number of

parole violators returned to state prison by getting them the help they need to remain at large as law-abiding citizens.

Division of Parole statistics show the num-

See EDGECOMBE, page 5

Parole and Vera to Study Violators

As part of the statewide reentry initiative, the Division of Parole and the Division of Criminal Justice Services are partnering with the Vera Institute of Justice to study the causes of parole violations.

The Division of Parole will use the findings of the study, announced in February, to restructure its current staffing model to better allocate supervision resources to target specific triggers of parolee violations.

“This endeavor will serve as a springboard to an even more successful reentry strategy,” Chairman Alexander said. “Finding the root causes of parole violations will help us better serve those coming out of prison by helping them avoid the pitfalls that could lead to reincarceration. We very much look forward to working with the Vera Institute on this crucial project.”

The first part of the multi-

phased study will be devoted to the examination of specific violation behaviors. The second phase will focus on ensuring that the Risk and Needs assessment process that the Division plans to employ includes identification of violation triggers and their potential remedies. The final phase of the project will include a review of actions taken by the Division and a further development of required new guidelines.

The project is geared to determine who violates while on parole, how violations can be prevented and which violators could be diverted from prison to community based sanctions.

Among the factors being examined are race and ethnicity, age, parole-offense type, time on parole, program participation, employment, education, and parole conditions.

The study will look at the differences that exist between techni-

cal violators, parolees who commit new offenses, and those who successfully complete parole.

Researchers will also try to determine if the prevalence of violations and violators vary by parole region, offense and caseload.

Additionally, the study will look to pinpoint what additional data are necessary to determine which violators are the best candidates for specific types of graduated options, which violators are most likely to commit a new offense following a violation and which violators are most likely to commit a new violent crime following a violation.

Vera, based in New York, is a non-profit, independent center for criminal justice policy and practice.

The first phase of this study has already started. The implementation of policies based on its preliminary findings is expected this fall.

Former Parolee Finds Success in Sales

By his own account, William Walker led a troubled life from an early age.

From around the age of 12, Walker used and sold drugs. Soon after that he got his first introduction to the criminal justice system.

As I grew up and started going to jail, I could never stay out,” he says. “Every time I came home I would be around the same people. I would see the same characters all the time.

“That was my life, running around the streets, selling drugs, robbing people. As I got older I just realized that wasn’t the way to go about things,” he says.

Having spent about eight years of his life in jail, Walker, now 28,

has finally straightened his life out.

As a regional manager for a sales company whose clients include major telecommunications and retail energy companies, Walker is now living the life he always dreamed of. That’s thanks in part to the hard work of his parole officers.

Walker, was discharged from Parole supervision last year, but not without his trials and tribulations, says Parole Officer Lisa Stepanian.

During Walker’s first six months on parole, his motivation to succeed as well as his inclination to fail became evident, she says. Released from prison in 2004, he immediately made efforts to continue the progress he had begun in the

facility by completing high school and continuing on for college credits.

Still, he continued using marijuana. That led him to enter a four-month program. He lost his job and stopped attending college. After successfully completing the residential treatment program, he was returned to Stepanian’s caseload. The officer had formed a relationship with Walker, who shared his battles with her. She pointedly counseled him and enforced boundaries.

He began to acknowledge the futility in maintaining his relationship with his old associates after

See PAROLEE SUCCESS, page 4

Manhattan DA's Office Begins Parole Initiative

In February, Manhattan District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau announced an agreement with the Division of Parole to work on the Fair Chance Initiative, an effort to assist recently-released inmates adjust to life outside of prison. The aim of the initiative is to ensure that recently released inmates quickly receive the social services they need. The initiative will also provide alternatives to re-incarceration for former inmates who get arrested for non-violent crimes.

The District Attorney's Office will work with the Division and social service providers to help address the major issues confronting the inmates who have recently been released, including substance abuse treatment, job training and housing.

Under the initiative, inmates released to Manhattan will be able to contact the Manhattan District Attorney's Office directly and receive referrals to the appropriate re-entry service providers. The District Attorney's Office is working closely with The Doe Fund, The Fortune Society, and others to create a data base of available services for ex-offenders.

The District Attorney's Office will work with the Division of Parole to identify parolees who have been re-arrested for non-violent misdemeanors, but may be appropriate candidates for drug or alcohol treatment, job training or other services provided by the cadre of re-entry providers. The focus will be on former inmates who are arrested for non-violent offenses prosecuted in the Criminal Court in Manhattan.

The Fair Chance Initiative will also expand the use of the Manhattan Misdemeanor Treatment Court,

furthering the objectives of the Drug Treatment Alternative to Prison program. Expanding the court to include more parolees who are re-arrested will reduce the caseload of matters awaiting trial or other disposition in Criminal Court. It will also save the costs of re-incarcerating many parolees for parole violations and ensure that substance abuse treatment is available for eligible parolees.

Most importantly, the initiative will provide an incentive for parolees with substance abuse problems to undergo the rigors of treatment. A parolee who is arrested and admitted to treatment will be required, first, to plead guilty to the new misdemeanor charges. If he fails to complete treatment successfully, he will be returned to prison for violating parole and will, in addition, face sentencing on the misdemeanor charge.

The District Attorney's Office will work with The Doe Fund, The Fortune Society and other non-profit re-entry providers to obtain funding for the Fair Chance Initiative through grants from various funding sources, including Edward Byrne grants.

"The Division of Parole welcomes the opportunity to partner with the Manhattan District Attorney's Office to create an important initiative that will boost public



Director of Reentry Services Lynn Goodman, DA Morgenthau and Metro I Regional Director Milton Brown

safety by helping offenders turn their lives around and become law-abiding, productive citizens," Chairman George B. Alexander said. "Collaborative efforts such as this will pay huge dividends for the safety and well-being of the residents of Manhattan. We applaud the District Attorney's recognition of the reentry needs of the offender population and the actions he is taking to address them."

Among those organizations joining in the District Attorney's initiative are: The Doe Fund, Family Justice, America Works, the Fortune Society, Harlem Community Justice Center, Episcopal Social Services Network, Center for Employment Opportunities, National H.I.R.E. Network, Odyssey House, Phoenix House, DAYTOP, Su-Casa, Veritas and Phase Piggyback.

Brooklyn DA Charles Hynes Succeeds with ComALERT

Earlier this year, I appeared on NY1's "Inside City Hall" with host Dominic Carter to discuss the ComALERT program run by my office. ComALERT (Community and Law Enforcement Resources Together) is a successful re-entry program which was implemented in my office in 1999 after I was inspired by the success of the "Boston Plan", which reduced the number of firearm homicides in Boston, Massachusetts.

The ComALERT program provides assistance and services for parolees returning to the Brooklyn community. It serves as a bridge between prison and the community for the returning parolees. Our office forms partnerships with community-based organizations that specialize in job training, educational services and substance abuse treatment.

Collectively, these organizations along with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies provide their respective areas of expertise.

This enables participants to make a successful transition from prison to home by providing drug treatment counseling, mental health counseling, assistance in attaining a GED, as well as access to transi-

tional housing and employment. ComALERT also provides permanent job placement assistance to those parolees who have marketable skills upon their release.

ComALERT services begin almost immediately upon release from prison, increasing the success rate for its clients as compared to the re-entry population who do not receive these services.

Based on a pre-release assessment need for treatment, a referral may be made by the parole officer to Parole's ACCESS center. At this center, a ComALERT certified alcohol and substance abuse counselor interviews the parolee about his past activities and future goals. This assessment forms the basis for future re-entry planning and treatment in ComALERT. The eligible client is then directed to report to the ComALERT Counseling Service EDNY Center in downtown Brooklyn for a program orientation and assignment to a social worker who will work with the client to help him comply with his conditional release requirements.

Most ComALERT clients have substance abuse issues, and many are actively abusing illegal drugs and alcohol. This abuse places them in direct contradiction of standard

conditional release mandates and increases the likelihood that they will engage in illegal behaviors and return to prison. Thus, substance abuse treatment and counseling form the basic framework for ComALERT's initial three-month enrollment.

In addition to drug counseling and treatment, most clients will receive a referral to and preferential placement in, the ComALERT "Ready, Willing, & Able" Program, which provides transitional employment through the Doe Fund's employment programs. In addition to receiving meals and a weekly stipend of \$200 cash for manual labor jobs for up to nine consecutive months, the program provides the group support and reinforcement needed by the clients to maintain their sobriety.

ComALERT provides weekly individual and group counseling, as well as random drug testing, to reinforce a zero-tolerance policy.

Working with the Division of Parole, ComALERT monitors its clients to ensure public safety.



PAROLEE SUCCESS (continued from page 2)

landing a job with his current employer, a position that paid both salary and commission.

Within a month into this employment, Walker was arrested for possession of marijuana stopping off at a local site to socialize with his old friends. This arrest proved to be a positive development.

Because Walker had "secured a desirable position, was making a

notable salary with opportunity to advance, and had a comfortable place to reside, the arrest gave the subject a healthy fear and cause for contemplation," Stepanian says.

Following ongoing and pointed counseling, Walker was not violated and the criminal charge was subsequently dismissed. He continued his employment, advancing to higher positions including supervisory and

management roles.

He credits his parole officer with making that happen.

P.O. Stepanian "always kept me focused. She showed nothing but patience," he says. "She kept me focused on the big picture. She was a really good support for me and always tried to help me ... She was a friend and a mentor at the same time."

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE (continued from front page)

ployment and getting treatment for drug or alcohol dependency. Only through the development of reentry strategies using community based programs and opportunities can we make sure that those challenges do not become insurmountable for the formerly incarcerated.

The Division of Parole, working with the Department of Correctional Services and the Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services, this past August began a pilot project at the Orleans Correctional Facility in western New York. As part of the program, inmates are moved to the prison, close to the communities to which they will soon return. Prior to release, participants are matched up with any nec-

essary programs, such as job training, anger management or substance abuse counseling that will help them avoid returning to their old ways. They will also have the chance to reunite with their families, a key component to reducing recidivism.

State agencies are creating partnerships with local Social Service offices, faith-based organizations and non-profit groups to assist in the cause of reentry

At the same time, the state is providing dollars to County Reentry Task Forces that coordinate and mobilize community resources to address the broad spectrum of needs of offenders transitioning to the community.

We must continue to explore new strategies to drive down the number of individuals who re-offend to achieve our goal of making New York State an even safer place to raise our families and operate our businesses.

This will not be easy, but I am confident that through these efforts we can both reduce crime and successfully transform former offenders into productive members of society.

— George B. Alexander
Chairman and CEO
NYS Division of Parole

EDGECOMBE (continued from front page)

ber of parolees returned to prison for technical violations rose from 6,938 in fiscal year 1997-1998 to 9,584 in fiscal year 2006-2007.

Under the plan, up to 100 parolees who face parole violations for substance abuse will be sent to Edgecombe, located in upper Manhattan, instead of having their parole revoked. An outside company will provide an intensive treatment program lasting between 10 and 30 days at Edgecombe.

Along with substance abuse treatment, there will be a joint collaboration among the agencies to provide family reunification and cognitive behavioral treatment to

address all the issues that led to the subject being placed at Edgecombe.

“The direction the agency is taking is to first look for options other than incarceration and consider the other effects sending someone back to prison could have,” Chairman Alexander said. “We have to make sure all violations are addressed, but not necessarily through re-incarceration. As a result, we'll see fewer people violating the conditions of their parole and the success rate of our parolees will increase.”

As of April 1, DOCS and the Division will begin to accept parolees with technical warrants held in

abeyance from two Region 1 bureaus and provide substance abuse treatment, services from community providers, and begin to formulate an effective approach to steer the parolees in the right direction.

The parolees referred to Edgecombe cannot be in need of detoxification, have serious mental health issues, have a serious medical condition or any enemies in the program.

Additionally, sex offenders will be barred from participating. DOCS will also run a criminal history to determine if any of the parolees have active orders of protection lodged against them.

Comments and Suggestions

THE PAROLE REPORT is written and edited by the staff of the Office of Media Relations and Public Affairs. Anyone in the Division with story ideas or suggestions is asked to contact us at (518) 486-4631 or e-mail cweaver@parole.state.ny.us

Orleans Program Finding Success

The pilot program launched by the Division of Parole and the Department of Correctional Services in August at Orleans Correctional Facility has attained some critical successes so far in its short existence.

The 60-bed program moves inmates close to the communities to which they will return to enable family members, potential employers, social workers and others to establish contact with them before they leave prison.

The two state agencies are working with the Erie County Re-entry Task Force and other agencies to create an environment that will foster the prisoners' successful return to the community by providing personal contact between inmates and those who will help them fulfill

their obligations as citizens.

Prior to release, participants are being matched up with any necessary programs, such as job training, anger management or substance abuse counseling.

Program staffers are helping parolees apply for public benefits prior to their release to help defray the cost of such programs.

As of March 14, 82 parolees had been released to the community. Spectrum Human Services, an OASAS-funded agency, is providing provisional substance abuse diagnosis for inmate to develop a substance abuse treatment plans for the parolees

Of the inmates released, 20 percent have been linked with community mentoring programs and 5 percent utilize veterans' benefits

They have left the facility with Social security cards and birth certificates. All completed the Medicaid application process and 100 percent of the cases were domiciled.

Of the 82 released, ten entered the violation process. Each case is being reviewed so that changes in operations can be applied where appropriate.

The Division hosts presentations from family reunification organizations, health related resources and several mentors who have previously completed a period of supervision with parole.

Parole is working with the Department of Labor, Buffalo's One Stop Employment Center and the Buffalo Urban League in developing an employment strategy.

Reentry Task Forces, Parole Officers Work in Tandem

On a recent Thursday night, parolees filed into the basement of a church in downtown Troy.

Greeted by Rensselaer County Re-entry Task Force Coordinator, they grab coffee and donuts and head to a few rows of metal folding chairs.

The 20 or so recently released offenders are at the church to attend an orientation program organized by the task force, a multi-agency body that serves to stop parolees from reoffending.

The offenders hear presentations from the local Department of Motor Vehicles, job placement and training agencies, former parolees and local officials.

But first, they hear from Col. Bob Loveridge of the Rensselaer

County Sheriff's Office.

Loveridge, likely one of the last people the parolees saw before departing for state prison, welcomes the men back from prison and lets them know he hopes the next time he sees them, they'll be out in the community working and staying out of trouble.

The Rensselaer County Re-entry Task Force is one of 12 such task forces around the state created with grants from the Division of Criminal Justice Services. The task forces aim to coordinate efforts with the Division of Parole to steer parolees to the proper social service organizations, faith-based groups and drug treatment options straight out of prison.

Each of the task forces is as-

signed a parole officer who works with a specific caseload of parolees who may need extra help staying out of jail. It's a collaborative effort that brings faith-based and non-profit groups together with state and local government agencies for one task _ making sure the parolees have every chance to succeed and not regress to criminal behavior.

Bob Thayer, a 21-year veteran with the Division, is currently carrying a caseload of 35 parolees in Rensselaer County as the assigned officer to the task force.

"It's really a team concept," Thayer says. "Everybody is working together to figure out what we

See TASK FORCES, page 7

ROOTS (continued from page 8)



ROOTS members Andre Morris, Joyce Clark Love, Charles LaCourt and David Howard

LaCourt notes that the “points to success” jibe with several conditions parolees agree to abide by when released. First on the list is seeking, attaining and maintaining employment.

“We tell them, ‘it’s not only a

condition of parole, but something you need to be legit. It’s not necessarily the job you have. It’s about the process,’” he said. “We talk about how there is no same in any kind of work. You don’t measure your self-worth by the job. You

measure your self-worth in your plan to advance.”

The other points include: staying alcohol and drug free; establishing financial, social, civic and personal resources; reconstructing family, marital, parental and personal relations; attaining and maintaining safe and adequate housing; and maintaining constructive parole supervision.

“A lot of guys see parole officers as the police, but we tell them they need to view parole as a resource,” he said. “You can work with parole to find employment, get referrals. That’s what they are there for.”

Last month, Morris, speaking to a group of recently released parolees in a church basement in Troy, sparked the interest of recent parolee by telling them they can view parole as a game with their parole officer serving as referee.

“It’s like a big game,” Morris tells them. “To win at the game, you have to play by the rules. Those conditions you signed when you left prison, those are the rules. Your P.O., he’s your coach.”

TASK FORCES (continued from page 6)

need to do for each individual.

“It has been very successful getting the people into the programs they need coming right out of prison,” he says. “All of the resources a parole officer need are at one table.”

Most of the parolees he’s given do not have housing. Many have substance abuse or mental health issues. It is Thayer’s job to get his cases stabilized in the community so they can later be transferred to another parole officer. Thayer, who

previously worked in the county as a child protective case worker, says he has a longstanding familiarity with many of the parolees’ families.

In a similar vein, the Division of Parole plans to assign special Reentry Parole Officers to each bureau in the coming months. The officers will not carry caseloads, but will instead provide assistance to other officers with hard cases, parolees with mental health issues or developmental disabilities. They will look for housing for the un-

domiciled and special services for sex offenders, domestic violence perpetrators or those without employment training.

Patricia Fitzmaurice, Director of Upstate Reentry Services, says the officers will be tasked with developing relationships with local treatment providers and local government agencies to help the parolees get services.

“It will be their job to make the connections happen,” she says.

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The New York State Division of Parole's mission is to promote public safety by preparing inmates for release and supervising parolees to ensure their successful reentry back to communities across the State.

The Division consists of about 2,200 employees working in its Central Office in Albany, 50 field offices and 61 Department of Corrections facilities statewide.

The Division is responsible for the community supervision and reentry of offenders released from state correctional facilities by the Board of Parole, by conditional release or those sentenced to Parole supervision.

The Board of Parole consists of up to 19 members appointed by the governor and confirmed by the State Senate. Commissioners serve six-year terms.

The Parole Report is published quarterly by the Division of Parole's Media Relations Staff.

Former Offenders Work to Help Parolees

In March, 1996, Charles LaCourt was sent to the Special Housing Unit at Rikers Island after getting into an altercation with other inmate.

It was at that moment he decided he was going to straighten out his life and end the cycle of his criminal behavior.

Sober now for 12 years, LaCourt and other former offenders lead an Albany-based group called ROOTS (Re-Entry Opportunities and Orientation Towards Success). The organization works to provide service links and connections to ex-offenders.

The group, founded in 1997, holds monthly seminars for recently

released parolees to offer guidance to help them avoid the pitfalls that led to their incarceration.

The 55-year-old LaCourt, who did three stints in state prison for robbery and drug crimes, says that with ex-offenders, the messenger can be just as important as the message.

"The things that are really crucial to change are the thinking and the value systems," he said. "These individuals are entrenched in street culture and can be very difficult to change. We really connect with them because we have been through it ourselves. We talk the language and know the terms. That gives us a lot of credibility."

The group's seminars, which attract mostly drug offenders, often feature guest speakers from social service agencies, job and employment programs, housing providers and even local politicians. Representatives from the Division of Parole have also attended.

As part of their program, ROOTS volunteers point parolees to six key areas they need to focus on to be successful.

"We really looked at what we felt was crucial for us to be successful and built our program around that," said LaCourt, a native of East Harlem.

See ROOTS, page 7