Enhancing Reentry Services for Incarcerated Veterans: A Perspective of Growth

TDCJ-Reentry and Integration Division

The 5th Annual Justice Involved Veterans Conference

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According to a report by the Pew Foundation, 1 out of 22 Texans are under some form of supervision in the state’s criminal justice system. This number includes the following offender populations:

- **One million** plus offenders are processed in local jails on an annual basis;
- **400,113** offenders on misdemeanor or felony probation;
- **153,453** offenders incarcerated in TDCJ facilities; and
- **86,438** offenders on parole.

In addition, over **70,000** offenders are admitted to and released from TDCJ facilities on an annual basis. Almost half of these offenders are released without any supervision requirements.
The Reentry and Integration Division (RID) has a voluntary reentry program focused on assisting offenders in preparing for a successful return to the community.

*TDCJ has 139 Reentry Case managers allocated to the division:*

- 126 assigned to TDCJ units where identification document ordering and Reentry Planning services are provided pre-release.

- 13 assigned community locations to provide post-release reentry services to serve as Community Reentry Specialists.

The Division also has a designated Veteran’s specialist assigned to the Austin office.
**Pre-Release Reentry Services**

*Reentry Case managers use the Texas Risk Assessment System – Reentry Screening Tool (TRAS-SRT) to assess offender risk of reoffending, with program enrollment offered to moderate and high risk offenders.*

- Case managers develop an individualized reentry plan in collaboration with the offender, community providers and family support systems. It is designed to address offender needs in nine key areas recognized as necessary for successful reentry, including:
  - Identification
  - Housing
  - Employment and Education
  - Health Care
  - Substance Abuse
  - Transportation
  - Clothing, Food, and Amenities
  - Financial Resources
  - Support Systems

- Eligibility criteria for the Reentry Program include:
  - Must have a target release date within 6 months, or sentence maximum expiration date within six months
  - No active ICE or felony detainers (excludes State Jail detainers)
  - Must plan to reside in Texas upon release from TDCJ
Community Reentry Services

Community Reentry Specialists will meet with moderate and high risk offenders who were enrolled in Reentry Planning services during incarceration.

The Community Reentry Specialists will provide case management and reentry engagement in the following areas:

- Identification
- Housing
- Employment and Education
- Health Care
- Substance Abuse
- Transportation
- Clothing, Food, and Amenities
- Financial Resources
- Support Systems
- Family Reunification
TENAS REENTRY SYSTEM

**Sentencing/Probation**
- Community Reentry
  - Key Needs Assessed
  - Priority for Services
  - Identify Key Programs
  - Document supervision and treatment plan in an integrated case management system

**Institution**
- Institution Reentry
  - Risk and needs assessment
  - Integrated case management plan review and update
  - Assignment to Programs
  - Monitor Program Participation
  - Re-assessment to evaluate current risk and needs

**Pre-Release**
- Pre-Release Reentry
  - Risk/Needs Assessment
  - Reentry Plan to address:
    - Pro-social Support Systems
    - Housing
    - Employment
    - Identification card
    - Benefits
    - Coordination with Parole on reentry plan

**Parole**
- Release & Reentry
  - Parole Officer
  - Risk/need assessments
  - Community providers
  - Family Involvement
  - Assignment to Programs
  - Monitor Programming
  - Revise Reentry Plan as Appropriate

**Continuous Reentry Planning**
Reentry: Addressing a Texas sized need

Of the 153,453 offenders incarcerated in TDCJ facilities

7%, over 10,000, Self Report as Veterans
TDCJ established a collaboration with the Veterans Integrated Service Network to link Veterans with special health care needs to services pre-release in 2007.
VISN 17
Healthcare for Reentry Veterans Program

- Warren J. Pearson, LCSW
- VA Reentry Program Specialist
The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

- **Veterans Health Administration (VHA)**
  - All Health care services
  - Medical Centers, Ambulatory Care & Community Based Outpatient Clinics

- **Veteran Benefits Association (VBA)**
  - All VA Benefits - VA Regional Offices
  - Compensation & Pension, GI Bill, Home Loans, etc.

- **National Cemetery Administration (NCA)**
  - National and State Veterans Cemeteries
  - Headstones, Markers & Presidential Memorial Certificates
VA Authorization
Title 38 CFR 17.38

- VHA can provide
  - Outreach, assessment, and referral to services
  - Treatment for justice-involved Veterans who are not incarcerated

- Does not allow VHA to provide:
  - Hospital or outpatient care for a Veteran who is a patient or an inmate in an institution of another government agency if that agency has a duty to provide that care or service
Health Care for Reentry Veterans

Operational Nationally Since 2007

- Designed to address community Re-Entry needs of Veterans within 6 months of release from State and Federal Prisons

- VHA has 44 Reentry Specialists who cover prisons in all 50 states

*Texas has five Reentry Specialists*
21 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN)

In January 2002, VISNs 13 and 14 were integrated and renamed VISN 23.
VA/VISN Reentry Specialist

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Michelle Smith – Big Spring VAMC
Health Care for Reentry Veterans
Goals and Services

- Prevent homelessness
- Reduce the impact of medical, psychiatric, and substance abuse problems upon community re-adjustment
- Decrease the likelihood of re-incarceration for those leaving prison

HCRV services include:

- Providing information, pre-release assessment, screening, and reentry planning services (in conjunction with corrections staff)
- Assistance with various forms including the VA Application for Health Benefits and SF-180 to obtain their DD-214 and military medical records
- Post-release case-management through referral, linkage, and coordination for VA and non-VA services
HCRV
VITAL PARTNERSHIPS

Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ)

Probation/ Parole

Incarcerated Veteran Re-entry Specialist

VHA/ VBA Services

Community Service Organizations
Contact Information

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Healthcare for Reentry Veterans (HCRV) Web page
http://www1.va.gov/HOMELESS/Reentry.asp
TDCJ and VISN Partnership

- Provide demographic, diagnosis and treatment information for Veterans with special healthcare needs to the appropriate VISN representative pre-release.

- Provide access to incarcerated veterans for outreach services.

- Maintain single liaison through the designated veterans’ specialist to assist with lay ins, obtaining information, and logistics to access incarcerated veterans.

- Collaborate to obtain special housing, healthcare, domiciliary care or nursing level care for eligible veterans post release.
A Growth Perspective

As the number and complex needs of incarcerated veterans grow in the post 9/11 era TDCJ continues to expand the approach to meet these needs.

- HB 634 and Identification
- Continuity of Care and Linkage through Peers
- Compensation and Benefits Applications
- Veterans Reentry Dormitory Planning
Emerging Needs

Justice Involved Veterans are more likely than their non-veteran counterparts to:

- Have a history of alcohol dependence
- Live with mental illness
- Be at risk for suicide upon release from confinement
- Suffer from PTSD
- Struggle with finding employment
The Complicated Task of Simply Coming Home

The first contact with Law Enforcement can be from something as simple as driving.

- Drivers drive toward the center of the road to avoid improvised explosive devices on the shoulder
- No use of directional signals or obedience to traffic devices
- Right-of-way is generally given to U.S. troops
The Complicated Task of Simply Coming Home

After a deployment, a veteran generally no longer has the 24/7 companionship of a firearm

- This may cause a service member or veteran to feel defenseless
- A service member or veteran may fear losing their constitutional right to bear arms if they seek treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other behavioral health issues
- A service member or veteran could react aggressively at an attempt to seize their firearm
Substance Use, Abuse and Dependence

The NHSDA (National Household Survey on Drug Abuse), reported the following alcohol use among the nearly 30 million veterans aged 18 and older living in the United States:

- **ALCOHOL USE:** Male Veterans 56% vs. Female Veterans 41%
- **BINGE DRINKING:** Male Veterans 23% vs. Female Veterans 14%
- **HEAVY DRINKING:** Male Veterans 7% vs. Female Veterans 2%

Male veterans are more likely than female veterans to report alcohol use, binge drinking and heavy alcohol use. But the percentages are still alarming regardless of gender – both male and female veterans in the post 9/11 era have demonstrated increasing problems with alcohol.
Substance Use, Abuse and Dependence

- The Army’s substance abuse budget in 2004 = $38 million; in 2008 = $51 million.

In 2007, a Freedom of Information Act request had forced the US government to disclose that more than 33% of troops who were convicted of criminal acts in Afghanistan and Iraq had committed offenses while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

As a result more active and veterans are seeking help than ever before: According to the Army, in 2009, the number of soldiers enrolled in treatment after being diagnosed with alcohol problems had increased by 56% since 2003, when the Iraq war started.
Tracking Veteran Unemployment

Unemployment rates for post-9/11 veterans are significantly higher than rates for civilians and other veterans – a situation that has persisted since the government began tracking the group in 2008. The July 2013 rate of 7.7 percent is down from a high of 15.2 percent in January 2011, the result of an improving economy and a variety of public and private efforts to combat the problem.

Credit: Riley Johnson

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics
Family Violence

“Anger is the predominant emotion of the combat experience. It is the emotion that kept him alive, kept her alive, when he was in Afghanistan or Iraq, but it is the thing — the emotion — that will get him arrested at home.” Annie Potts Jackson, Asst. District Attorney, Bell County TX.

- Discharged from Military
  - Loss of Income
  - Loss of right to carry a firearm

Often one conviction can lead to a quick sand effect, creating increasing difficulties for the veteran and family leading to increased criminal justice involvement and longer term incarcerations.
TDCJ’s Systemic Approach for Incarcerated and Reentering Veterans

To ensure the needs of incarcerated veterans are addressed, and to enhance reentry and decrease recidivism, TDCJ recognizes these basic tenants:

1. Identification upon incarceration.
2. Income and entitlements initiated pre-release for a more rapid availability post release.
3. Linkage to a Veteran peer during incarceration and Veterans’ community upon return home.
Identification During Incarceration

The Public Assistance Reporting Information System (PARIS) provides and exchange of information between the Veterans Administration and the Health and Human Services Commission.

- House Bill 634 of the 83rd Regular Session requires TDCJ to utilize the PARIS to identify incarcerated veterans.

- Full implementation is anticipated Summer 2014.

- All incarcerated persons will be initially matched at implementation. Following the initial match, new intakes to TDCJ will be matched for Veteran’s status monthly.
Identification During Incarceration

*TDCJ seeks to go beyond identification to ensure quality and need specific reentry services are delivered to the incarcerated veteran.*

The PARIS match will also include:

- Dates and branch of service
- Type of discharge
- Entitlement awards
- Entitlement actions
- Information regarding application needs related to restarting or amending any compensation, entitlements or pension to benefit the veterans’ reentry needs.
Income and Entitlements

The TDCJ in collaboration with the Texas Veterans Commission have trained all unit based Reentry Case Managers to complete Compensation and Pension applications for incarcerated veterans.

- TVC training director traveled to regional training sites across the State and provided TDCJ specific training regarding completion of compensation and pension applications.
- Pilot at 3 TDCJ units began April 23;
- Pilot will end May 14;
- Statewide video conference with feedback on May 15;
- Statewide launch May 19.
Linkage to a Veteran Peer and the Veteran Community

_TDCJ recognizes the value of Peer to Peer mentorship within the Veteran Community. To assist incarcerated veterans with reconnecting to the veteran community TDCJ has established a Continuity of Care pilot with the Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN)_

- Provide MVPN with a directory of incarcerated veterans nearing release
- Provide volunteer training to MVPN Volunteer Coordinators and facilitate access to incarcerated veterans
- MVPN meets face to face with Veteran Pre-Release
- Provides mentorship, fellowship and reentry focused guidance
- Links Veteran with a MVPN peer in the community upon return
- Community Peer continues to provide mentorship and community readiness services
Linkage to a Veteran Peer and the Veteran Community

*TDCJ participates as a member of the Texas Coordinated Council on Veterans Services (TCCVS). The latest TCCVS report recommended TDCJ implement Veterans’ dorm with relevant programming. TDCJ recognizes this need and is planning stages of a Veterans Reentry Dorm at Travis State Jail.*

The dorm will partner with the MVPN through the Department of State Health Services to establish Veteran specific programming to include (but not limited to):

- Seeking Safety
- Bringing Everyone In the Zone
- Brief Solution Focused Therapy
- Tai Chi
- Group Sessions focused on Home Readiness activities
TDCJ and the MVPN

A unique partnership.

Sean Hanna, State Coordinator

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