

Grant Update

A Summary of Grant Activity

Governor's Crime Commission

NC Criminal Justice Analysis Center

Harriet's House: Transitional Housing for Female Ex-Offenders

The number of women incarcerated in the North Carolina correctional system has increased significantly over the past seven years. Since 1999-2000, the female population has grown from 2,559 to 3,603, a 29 percent increase. Currently there are over 1,200 women housed at the N.C. Correction Institution for Women in Raleigh alone.

While the number of women in the prison system has increased, programs to help them transition back into the community after release have not increased proportionately. Ex-offenders face many challenges when they leave prison, including finding housing, employment and re-establishing their families. Programs set up with male offenders in mind have been roughly adapted for women, but many of these programs do not address the unique needs of women — especially those with children — and do not adequately prepare them for reentry into the community.

The Problem

In spite of the increase in the number of women committed to the prison system, there have been few social service programs or agencies set up to address the needs of female offenders. There is an increasing gap between the need for housing and the facilities available. Most of the women released from prison have children and their vocational skills are limited. This combination of factors can cause many of them to end up in shelters, in transitional facilities or on the street. It is more than likely that without meaningful work and viable economic opportunities 40 percent or more of the women released will return to prison.

The Grant

Harriet's House was named after Harriet Tubman, an African-American abolitionist who helped free slaves through a network of safe houses known as the Underground Railroad. The house was established to provide transitional housing and reentry services to female ex-offenders and their children. The 24-month program provides comprehensive, progressive services including intensive, wraparound case management, parenting classes and vocational and educational training. Mental health and substance abuse counseling are arranged for clients that need these services. Assistance is provided for budgeting, credit and debt management and savings. Permanent housing assistance, including referrals and rental subsidies, is available. With the support of the grant provided by the Governor's Crime Commission, services are being expanded to include single women as well as those with children.

"I had crossed the line of which I had so long been dreaming. I was free; but there was no one to welcome me to the land of freedom. I was a stranger in a strange land . . . "

*Harriet Tubman
(c. 1822 – 1913)*



Harriet's House provides transitional housing and re-entry services to female ex-offenders. These women are currently enrolled in the program.



Left to right: Sharon Bethea, Michelle Bridges and Onia Royster of Passage Home.

Goals and Objectives

The goals of Harriet's House are to reduce the number of re-arrests among mothers and single women, help them to regain custody and care of their children, secure and maintain employment that provides a living wage, obtain safe, permanent affordable housing, assist ex-offenders' return to the community and maintain a positive, responsible lifestyle.

The program operates in four phases. Pre-release involves an intake assessment of the individual offender. Eligible incarcerated offenders are referred to Harriet's House by a prison social worker and a case manager. The referral is followed up with an initial intake evaluation and a face-to-face interview. If approved, a letter of acceptance is issued and on the day the offender is released, a case worker or probation officer will transport her from the correctional facility to Harriet's House.

The first stage of the program — supervised living — lasts approximately six months. Program participants live in supervised housing and share quarters with a roommate while they acclimate to living in the community. They participate in substance abuse or mental health sessions and attend skills training classes. During this phase, they are referred to employment. Mothers and their children also have supervised visitation.

Transitional living — the second phase of the program — lasts between six and 12 months. In this stage of the program, women are moved into a transitional living unit with their children to continue the reunification process. At the third stage — community living — families and women without children move into permanent housing. This phase usually lasts approximately six months. Services continue to be provided but are gradually decreased based on the participant's needs.

Aftercare — the final phase — continues for an additional six months. Case workers monitor the progress of each woman and provide assistance when needed. Clients must show that they can manage their finances, use good parenting skills, stay sober and drug-free and maintain employment.

Community Involvement



WOO: Women Overcoming Obstacles

Harriet's House is a project of Passage Home, a faith-based community development corporation that assists low-income homeless families in becoming economically self-sufficient and in obtaining permanent affordable housing, employment and training. The program provides extensive support to clients of Harriet's House through a network of community organizations. The Faith and Community Partnership Network is made up of 12 congregations throughout Raleigh and Wake County that assist clients with housing, food, clothing, tutoring and child care. Passage Home has apartments at four locations in Raleigh to provide housing for ex-offenders. Volunteers from the 12 churches 'adopt' an apartment and prepare it for the families by stocking the pantry, cleaning, furnishing and decorating each room. Other volunteers assist with child care, tutoring and providing additional support for the women.

Former graduates of Harriet's House have established an alumni group — Women Overcoming Obstacles — to share their experiences and to provide support to each other and Harriet's House clients. They offer assistance and encouragement to each other and help women going through the program as they try to balance the demands

of caring for their children, maintaining employment and providing housing for their families. By reaching out and helping each other, they find additional strength to stay straight.

Program Evaluation

The program numbers for this year are impressive. Thirty-two women (21 mothers and 11 single women) and 53 children have been served. For the two year grant period, there is a 3 percent re-arrest rate, but none of the arrests led to re-convictions. Twenty-seven clients are employed, have established budgets and maintain escrow accounts. Of the 26 women with substance abuse problems, 24 have remained clean and sober for at least six months to one year. To date, 14 women have obtained housing, while 10 have not yet transitioned into permanent housing.

Accomplishments

This year Harriet's House received the Outstanding Criminal Justice Program Award from the National Criminal Justice Association for its work in reducing recidivism and helping women to obtain and maintain permanent, safe, affordable housing. The award is presented annually to outstanding programs for providing effective services to address crime-related issues in the community. The award was presented at the National Forum on Criminal Justice and Public Safety that took place in Bellevue Washington on Aug. 9-11.

In 2004, the program received the Annie E. Casey Foundation 'Families Count: Family Strengthening Award.' It has also been recognized by the National Congress of Community Economic Development and the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Capacity Building as an example program for reentry. Harriet's House is currently being replicated to use as a national prototype for re-entry programs for female ex-offenders across the country.

Summary

Onia Royster, a case manager for Passage Home, delivers a unique perspective on Harriet's House because she was a client. In her words:

I thank God that I am a product of Harriet's House. This program offered a myriad of services but to me, in a nutshell, it offered hope. Hope in the face of the despair of having doors slammed in my face, of having opportunity feel as if it wasn't mine to have, of having society ostracize me based on mistakes of my past. Through the Harriet's House program I became empowered. I was not only given a future, I was able to take that proactive stance in determining my future. . . . I am not only a product of the Harriet's House program, Passage Home believed in me enough to hire me. . . The position allows me to share my experience, strength and hope with other women going through what I have experienced.



A Harriet's House participant has reunited with her children.

Harriet's House program has demonstrated that the cycle of offending and re-offending can be broken when women receive support in taking responsibility for their lives and those of their children. By addressing the specific challenges faced by female ex-offenders the program has shown women how to overcome the barriers they face to housing and employment and enable them to reunite with their children and become — and remain — families again.

Women who return to their communities from prison must simultaneously comply with probation or parole, achieve financial stability, access health care, locate housing and commence the process of reuniting with their children. Setting priorities and accomplishing goals can seem overwhelming to someone who is confronted with so many tasks at once.

*— Onia Royster
Case Manager
Passage Home
and Ex-offender*

HARRIET'S HOUSE – TRANSITIONAL HOUSING FOR FEMALE EX-OFFENDERS

GRANT SUMMARY

Area Served: Raleigh and Wake County

Implementing Agency: Passage Home CDC

Project Director: Lisa Crosslin, Program Director

Funding: Total: \$113,745 Federal Funds: \$63,776

Overview: Harriet's House assists female ex-offenders being released from prison in making a successful transition from prison to economic self-sufficiency. The main objective of the program is to assist women to regain custody of their children while maintaining housing and a drug-free lifestyle.

- Accomplishments:
- Thirty-two women have been enrolled in the program this year. Twenty-one mothers, 53 children and 11 single women have been served. During this two-year grant cycle, there has been a 3 percent re-arrest rate, but none of the arrests have led to re-conviction.
 - One hundred percent of the mothers enrolled in 12-week parenting classes. Six mothers did not complete the program.
 - Twelve of the 21 mothers have reunited with their families. Five are still going through the reunification process. Four women were discharged before the reunification process was completed.
 - Twenty-seven of the 32 women enrolled took part in pre-employment groups, developed a resume and practiced interviewing techniques. All of those taking part in the pre-employment activities have obtained and maintained employment.
 - While 26 women entered the program with substance abuse problems, 24 have remained clean and sober for at least six to 12 months. Two women relapsed during the year.
 - Of the 32 women enrolled in the program this year, 14 have been housed, 10 have not transitioned out of the program and eight were discharged before completing the program.
 - Each of the 27 women who obtained employment developed a budget and opened an escrow account.