

CCJBH Diversion Reentry Meeting Minutes

Friday, February 16, 2024

3:00 PM – 5:00 PM

In- Person and MS Teams Webinar

Workgroup Purpose:

The webinar highlighted initiatives and programs that are supporting workforce development opportunities for individuals who are justice involved with behavioral health needs.

Councilmember Advisors:

Mack Jenkins, *Chief Probation Officer, Retired, San Diego County*

Judge Stephen Manley, *Santa Clara County Superior Court*

Dr. Tony Hobson, *Behavioral Director for Colusa County*

CCJBH Staff:

Staff Members Present: Brenda Grealish, *Executive Officer, Council on Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health (CCJBH)*, Elizabeth Vice, Kamilah Holloway, Jessica Camacho Duran, Emily Mantsch, and Cameron Byrd

I. Welcome & Introductions

Ms. Grealish welcomed participants and gave an overview of the agenda and shared the purpose of the workgroup. Councilmembers introduced themselves to participants.

II. CCJBH and California State Sacramento University's (CSUS) Report on Barriers and Solutions to Hiring Individuals with Lived Experience

Jessica Camacho Duran, *Health Program Specialist II, CCJBH*

Ms. Camacho introduced the collaborative project between CCJBH and CSUS, which began in 2019 and concluded in 2023. The project aimed to develop solutions for the employment barriers faced by individuals with lived experience (LE). CSUS's involvement centered on three key components: leading stakeholder engagement through online surveys, conducting key informant interviews to identify employment barriers, and facilitating workshops to devise solutions for these identified barriers.

A 10-question online survey yielded 254 responses from a diverse group of stakeholders within the behavioral health and criminal justice systems. Additionally, CSUS conducted ten one-hour interviews via Zoom or phone to further explore the survey findings. These discussions centered on organizational practices that promote employment for individuals with LE and assessed the effectiveness of current practices.

Ms. Camacho then presented the responses, noting that while organizations are actively hiring individuals with LE, challenges persist, including background checks, security clearances, and Equity Employment Opportunity laws. Issues such as inadequate funding, compensation, and support, along with stigma and certification requirements, were highlighted. A call for a standardized definition of “Lived Experience” and “Recovery” across sectors was made, emphasizing the need for further research and best practices to support employment for those with LE.

The presentation then focused on the Solutions to LE Hiring Barriers workshop, involving stakeholders from behavioral health, criminal justice, and higher education. It highlighted solutions for addressing background checks and security clearances, emphasizing HR training on relevant laws, especially as outlined in [Assembly Bill \(AB\) 1008](#). Suggestions included toolkits for employers on conducting and completing background checks and a call for statewide policies or standards to establish peer support with experienced professionals, aiding in best hiring practices for individuals with LE. It advocated for technical assistance, training, toolkits, hiring strategies, and awareness campaigns to share success stories. Stigmas around individuals with LE was also a stated challenge for employers. To counter any attached stigma, participants suggested educating and fostering collaboration with organizational Diversion Equity and Inclusion committees that foster opportunities for individuals with LE to demonstrate their competencies and skills. Participants also communicated that having state jobs, local level jobs, and organizations create incentives to employ a certain percentage of individuals with LE will help counter stigmas.

Workshop participants discussed enhancing partnerships with re-entry organizations to improve support, including mentorship, for hiring individuals with LE. They suggested the benefit of having trainers experienced in behavioral health and trauma-informed care to guide individuals with LE in their career paths. To address Equity Employment Opportunity laws and support needs, the creation of support groups was recommended. These groups would advise on storytelling during the hiring process, application disclosures, and responding to interview questions about their background.

In the presentation's conclusion, Ms. Camacho highlighted creative solutions for fair compensation and other challenges faced by staff with LE. Advocacy for adequate state living wages, paid educational opportunities to meet degree requirements, and policy changes to facilitate licensing in behavioral health fields were discussed. Additionally, enacting policies for a minimum number of LE hires and leveraging both quantitative and qualitative data to showcase the benefits of employing individuals with LE in the behavioral health and criminal justice sectors were proposed as crucial steps.

III. Benefits of Hiring Individuals with Lived Experience

Timothy Jackson, *CEO Quality Touch Cleaning Systems*

Mr. Jackson began his presentation with gratitude for the opportunity to share his journey from incarceration to reintegration, emphasizing the rarity of such platforms for formerly incarcerated individuals. He showcased a three-minute [video](#) to provide context for his background. Mr. Jackson narrated his transformative experience with the California Prison Industry Authority (CALPIA), which altered his view of prison from a barrier to employment to a place of rehabilitation and opportunity. His engagement with CALPIA led to certifications and a renewed perspective on leadership and personal growth possibilities.

He credited California City Correctional Facility as the catalyst that expanded his mindset to become a businessman with the power to employ others. Mr. Jackson was one of many who was exposed to language encouraging entrepreneurial aspirations as this was not embedded in his upbringing. He mentioned the curriculum in the certification program revealed to him that he was in fact being rehabilitated as he was being provided the certifications and means to survive in the workforce upon his release despite self-limiting beliefs, environmental, sociological, and behavioral triggers.

Mr. Jackson shared his post-release job market experience, noting an interview with a cleaning company where his high qualifications from certifications paradoxically made him overqualified, affecting salary negotiations. He highlighted the significant employment barriers faced by formerly incarcerated individuals, especially exacerbated for Black job seekers. Despite these challenges, his primary goal was to prove his skills beyond the stigma of his past. Successfully employed, he received encouragement and support from his manager to pursue his dream of starting his own company to assist others with lived experience LE.

Mr. Jackson's company, Quality Touch Cleaning Systems, employs formerly incarcerated men, providing a supportive transition back into society. His unique position allows him to mentor and guide his employees, many of whom have been incarcerated for extensive periods. He views his business as a launchpad for their careers, advocating for self-investment and mindset growth. Concluding his presentation, he reflected on his role as a crucial support for those at the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), embodying hope and guidance for reintegration success.

IV. CDCR, Division of Rehabilitative Programs (DRP) – This presentation provides an overview of DRP's Center for Economic Opportunities (CEO).

Joseph Piazza, *State Supervisor of Career and Technical Education Programs, DRP*

Oscar Medina, *Supervisor of Correctional Education Programs*

Mr. Piazza expressed gratitude towards Mr. Jackson for sharing his transformative journey, highlighting the positive outcomes their programs aim to achieve. Piazza's presentation outlined the initiatives within the Office of Correctional Education, focusing on improving self-perception and interpersonal relationships among incarcerated individuals through educational and vocational training. He oversees the Career and Technical Education Program (CTE), while his colleague, Oscar Medina, supervises academic programs, emphasizing the importance of partnerships, instructor collaboration, and the application of research-based strategies to foster positive interactions between CDCR staff and residents. Mr. Medina discussed academic services provided to their students, including daily classes for high school diploma and GED preparation, supported by federal grants and enhanced by additional resources like academic coaches and peer literacy mentors.

Mr. Medina detailed the educational branches catering to over 15,000 students within the correctional system, focusing on high school diploma and General Educational Development (GED) programs where students receive daily academic instruction from trained educators employing research-backed teaching methods. Supported by federal grants, these programs are designed to enhance teacher effectiveness and student learning opportunities, featuring additional resources like academic coaches and peer literacy mentors to support students beyond regular class hours.

Mr. Medina highlighted the comprehensive nature of the educational programs, emphasizing their aim to facilitate high school or GED completion and support higher education aspirations. The programs, designed to be completed in about a year, cater to highly motivated individuals seeking associate or bachelor's degrees, with plans to expand to master's degrees. He introduced an e-learning platform for self-paced study, complemented by physical education and access to libraries, and underscored the importance of professional development for instructors to prioritize student well-being and incorporate technology skills training.

Mr. Piazza highlighted the significance of the CTE Program as a major rehabilitation initiative, preparing participants for skilled trades across various sectors with numerous annual job openings. He stressed the importance of combining CTE with cognitive behavioral interventions to significantly reduce recidivism among those far along their rehabilitative journey. Citing national studies, Mr. Piazza underscored the program's broader aim: not just skill development but fostering a sense of self-worth and potential for positive contributions in society.

Mr. Piazza concluded his presentation by describing their partnership with California Workforce Development Board within the California Department of Labor to help individuals with special needs in equipment training and other transition programs. He noted the completion of a pilot program where case managers helped begin residents' transition 12 months prior to their release allowing for a seamless case management plan. To ensure a warm handoff during the transitions, they work closely with State Building Construction, Council of California representing trade

unions in California. Close coordination with trade unions and local businesses ensures meaningful employment opportunities post-release, allowing for comprehensive tracking of employment outcomes and ongoing support for their students.

- V. Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO)** – This presentation highlights wraparound vocational support services and programs offered to individuals with a history of incarceration throughout the state of California.

Melanie Robledo, Housing Program Manager, CEO

Melanie Robledo's presentation highlighted the transformative impact of the Center for Economic Opportunities (CEO) programs on her life, addressing challenges like mental health, addiction, and trauma. Introduced to CEO during her incarceration, she now serves as the Housing Project Manager for the largest reentry employer in the U.S., operating in 31 cities across 12 states. Her talk detailed the programs designed for those recently released from incarceration, stressing the importance of building trust and confidence as they reintegrate into the workforce and society.

CEO's program model is structured in stages, offering participants stipends as they progress. Initially, there's a 2 to 3-day onboarding process for program connection, I-9 compliance, and workforce entry. Following this, a 2 to 6-month transitional work period allows participants to gain hands-on experience through various projects, including work with Caltrans and private contracts. Concurrently, CEO offers career readiness development, including one-on-one job coaching and employer connections to match participants' skills and interests, aiming to build confidence and strategically position them for sustainable career paths and economic advancement.

Ms. Robledo discussed the Emerging Leading Program, a 12-week initiative focusing on inclusive hiring, personal and professional growth, and leadership. It's part of the transitional phase offering shadowing opportunities for skill enhancement. A significant focus is on assisting participants in securing housing, supported by a network of services and one-on-one housing specialist consultations for planning, placement, and budgeting. CEO commits to a year of post-release support, aiming for participants' career stability. The presentation concluded with plans to expand partnerships across California to reach more individuals.

Councilmember Discussion

- Q:** Councilmember Jenkins expressed his pleasure in seeing the growth of CEO, recalling his role in establishing the first California office in San Diego, following New York. He inquired about the involvement of parole agents in DRP services, suggesting this as a potential area for expansion, a topic previously discussed with the CDCR Secretary, Jeff Macomber.
- A:** Mr. Piazza acknowledged the appointment of Amy Casias as the new director of DRP, highlighting her dedication to enhancing reentry services and integrating them as a key group within DRP. He anticipates organizational changes to better reflect the program's future direction, focusing on improving communication and collaboration. Plans include involving Community College counselors, allowing them access to case plans to assist local Justice Community Colleges and nonprofits like CEO in their efforts.
- Q:** Councilmember Jenkins reflected on hearing Mr. Jackson speak at a graduation from CALPIA and asked when Mr. Jackson decided to change his life and what influenced this decision.
- A:** Mr. Jackson thanked Mr. Jenkins and shared that a pivotal moment came while in county jail, during a prayer for grace and mercy. Reflecting on his past and recognizing the need to address his cognitive responses to childhood traumas and self-defense mechanisms, he was inspired by the interconnectedness of all people, regardless of background, to treat others better and pursue positive actions, shaping his actions and mindset throughout his sentence.
- Q:** Councilmember Manley noted he often encounters individuals with a "self-limited" mindset in his courtroom, echoing Mr. Jackson's term. He asked Mr. Piazza about the support provided to mentally ill individuals in prison.
- A:** Mr. Piazza clarified the customized nature of mental health care, emphasizing the wide range of needs among the mentally ill. He described daily treatment programs managed by medical professionals to tailor medication and therapy protocols. Before entering DRP programs, individuals need a level of independent functioning. The programs allow flexibility in participation, ensuring individuals can engage in academic pursuits while receiving therapy and experiencing CTE training, fostering progress and community integration.
- Q:** Councilmember Manley inquired on the participation rate of mentally ill individuals in DRP programs.
- A:** Mr. Piazza, lacking precise data, estimated that fewer than 20% of individuals with mental illness are unable to engage in DRP programs due to their intensive care needs.

Q: Mr. Jackson inquired about how to connect friends recently released from incarceration in San Diego with Ms. Robledo's resources.

A: Ms. Robledo indicated she divides her time between the Riverside and LA offices and suggested contacting Aaron Willing for direct connections to her services.

VI. Announcements

The next [Full Council Meeting](#) will be on March 22, 2024, from 2:00- 4:30 PM, and it will focus on housing. The [Juvenile Justice Workgroup](#) will be on April 19, 2024, from 12:45-2:45 PM, and focus on The RAND Corporation giving their final presentation on the CCJBH SB 823 juvenile justice compendium and toolkit contract. The [Diversion/Reentry Workgroup](#) will be on April 19, 2024, from 3:00-5:00 PM, and will focus on behavioral health peers.

VII. Adjourn