

## **CSS Reentry Initiative**

### **Coming Home: A Series of Roundtable Discussions**

There are more than 63,000 inmates in New York State prisons. Once released, these individuals return in high concentration to a handful of communities, particularly in the South Bronx, Central Brooklyn, and Harlem neighborhoods. Many soon find that they are unable to secure employment and, as a result, are at-risk of engaging in activities that will result in further imprisonment.

High rates of recidivism undermine these communities. It costs the state too much money – more than \$25,000 a year for each inmate – to essentially create a revolving door for the correctional system. This cycle costs families and neighborhoods too much financially and emotionally. The time is now to move legislation, create policies, and develop resources that allow the formerly incarcerated to be reintegrated into the workforce.

To determine what policies and resources are necessary to facilitate the successful reentry of individuals back to their home communities, the Community Service Society (CSS) launched the New York City Reentry Roundtable in December 2005 to foster collaboration between advocates and families members, and to develop a consensus reentry agenda.

The Reentry Roundtable — which represents more than 50 organizations — provides a unique venue for information gathering as well as an opportunity to build alliances. Meetings are held monthly, often featuring informed guest speakers on subjects concerning reentry problems.

### **Roundtables Held to Date**

- December 10, 2005 – Featured speaker, Peter Wagner, Prison Policy Initiative. Topic: Census count of prisoners and the political and economic effects on their communities.
- February 16, 2006 – “Addressing the Issues Faced by Prisoners as They Reenter the Community,” roundtable discussion. Joseph Hayden from “Unlock the Block” discussed voter registration efforts among the formerly incarcerated.
- April 19, 2006 – Featured speakers, Dr. Divine Pryor, Executive Director, Center for New Leadership, and Glenn Martin, Co-director, National H.I.R.E. Network, discussed community public safety concerns.

- June 13, 2006 – “The Reentry Experience in the Garden State,” presented by The Honorable Peter C. Harvey, Former Attorney General of New Jersey, who discussed how New Jersey is dealing with the problems of reentry.
- August 23, 2006 – Working Session: Planning for a Re-entry Advocacy Day in Albany.
- September 19, 2006 – Featured speaker, The Honorable Juanita Bing Newton, Administrative Judge for the NYC Courts, discussed how courts and judges deal with those defendants, especially people of color.
- October 18, 2006 – “Restoration of Rights,” presented by Rima Veseley-Flad, I.C.A.R.E., spoke about faith-based efforts to aid the formerly incarcerated.
- November 15, 2006 – “Addressing the Issues Faced by Prisoners as They Reenter the Community,” roundtable discussion. Guest speaker Felipe Luciano, poet and journalist, spoke about how the media view and report on the formerly incarcerated.
- December 21, 2006 – Holiday Networking Luncheon.
- January 17, 2007 – Advocacy Training Day. Guest speaker Lorraine Paterson-Greene from the Coalition of Women Prisoners, discussed problems of formerly incarcerated women in adjusting to reentry.
- February 21, 2007 – “Financial Management and the Formerly Incarcerated,” presented by Awilda Velez, M.S., Founder, Cultural Renaissance for Economic Revitalization.
- March 21, 2007 – Featured speakers, Vivian Nixon, Soros Justice Fellow and Founder of the Project Re-Enter Grace, and Glenn Martin, Co-director, National H.I.R.E. Network, discussed faith-based programs to help the formerly incarcerated.
- April 18, 2007 – Planning for Advocacy Day.
- May 16, 2007 – Setting agenda scheduling, briefing for Advocacy Day.

### **May 22, 2007 – Advocacy Day**

More than 100 advocates of prisoner reentry traveled to Albany to discuss Reentry Roundtable legislative proposals affecting the formerly incarcerated as they reenter their communities. They held more than 20 meetings with legislators and staff on key committees overseeing correctional issues.

Next scheduled Roundtable: June 20, 2007. Debriefing session on Advocacy Day and planning for next steps.