



Kenneth P. Thompson
District Attorney

DISTRICT ATTORNEY
KINGS COUNTY
350 JAY STREET
BROOKLYN, NY 11201-2908
(718) 250-2000
WWW.BROOKLYNDA.ORG

Kings County Re-Entry Task Force

Bi-Monthly Meeting of July 22, 2015 – Minutes (Amended)

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| Meeting Date: | Wednesday July 22, 2015 | |
| Meeting Time: | 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm | |
| Meeting Location: | Office of the Kings County District Attorney 350 Jay Street, 19 th Floor – Bob Kaye Room, Brooklyn, NY 11201 | |
| Attendees: | <p>Mr. Matthew Augustin, Ms. Mary Johnson, Mr. Jerome Livingston, Mr. John Ramsey Mr. Trevor Reid</p> <p>A HOUSING SOLUTION: Ronald Williams ACCES-VR: Wendy Hersh BE THE EVIDENCE: Tracey Mendelsohn BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES: Wesley Caines BROTHERHOOD OF ST. ANDREW: Bertrand Gordon BROWNSVILLE THINK TANK MATTERS: Ronald Robertson CENTER FOR APPELLATE LITIGATION: Susannah Karlin COMING HOME PROGRAM: Donna Hylton DEFY VENTURES: Damarcus Adisa, Tarell Rodgers THE DOE FUND: William Glenn FAMILIES, FATHERS & CHILDREN: Ellen Edelman FORTUNE SOCIETY: Carmen Bautista GETHSEMANE CHURCH – PROJECT CONNECT: Dave Ehlke GETHSEMANE CHURCH - FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH: Richard Green NYC AGENCY FOR CHILDREN’S SERVICES: Michael Dunbar, Angus Cuffy NYC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & MENTAL HEALTH: Leiba Frans, Julia Phillips RESOURCE TRAINING: Michelle Gonzalez RIGHT HOUSING SOLUTION: Miguel Otero UNIVERSAL CHURCH: Marva Harris Small VERA: Patricia Connelly</p> | <p><u>KCRTF - KCDA</u> Christopher Owens, Co-Chair Designate Dr. Vanda Seward, Coordinator Norma Fernandes, Case Manager Andrea Johnson, Case Manager</p> <p><u>KCRTF – DOCCS</u> Michelle A. Yon, Co-Chair Designate Petero Sabume</p> <p><u>KCRTF – DCJS</u> Margaret Chretien</p> <p><u>KCDA – ComALERT</u> Fredda Broza, Job Developer Mary Beth Melendez, Case Manager John Watkins, Community Associate, Community Relations</p> <p><u>KCDA – Bureau of Youth Diversion & Re- entry Programs</u> N. Carrie Cohen, LCSW, GRASP Tammy Eggleston, Program Administrator, Project Re-Direct Allison Ottley, LCSW, Project Re-Direct Amanda Ritchie, Intern Katarina Marczeski, Intern</p> <p><u>KCDA – Fiscal</u> Leleah Robinson, Grants Manager</p> <p><u>KCDA – HR</u> Cynthia Aker Dana Martin</p> |

| ITEM # | ITEM | DESCRIPTION AND ACTION ITEMS |
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| 1 | Call to Order | This meeting was called to order by Mr. Christopher Owens, Co-Chair at 1:00pm. The Chair asked Ms. Amanda Ritchie, a summer intern with the King’s County District Attorney’s Office (“KCDA”), to take minutes for the meeting. |
| 2 | Opening remarks | The Chair noted the location of the meeting had been changed to 350 Jay Street, 19 th Floor, the Bob Kaye Room, Brooklyn, NY 11201, due to the Brooklyn Public Library’s Cadman Plaza branch being unavailable until the Fall. |
| 3 | Presentation of meeting minutes from May 20 th | The Chair requested the attendees to review the Minutes from the May 20, 2015 KCRTF Bi-Monthly Meeting, and to contact the co-chairs if there were any comments or concerns that required correction. |
| 4 | Introductions | <p>Those in attendance introduced themselves and the organizations they represented. The Chair also acknowledged the presence of staff members who are part of the KCDA.</p> <p>The Chair introduced co-Chair Michelle Yon, from the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS). Ms. Yon noted that the DOCCS office move to 15 Second Avenue in Brooklyn was going well and that good things were taking place at the site, including the location of the KCRTF’s “Thinking For Change” program. Ms. Yon expressed her confidence in the continued strong relationship between DOCCS and KCDA regarding re-entry. She also stated that the previously postponed open house event will be rescheduled soon.</p> <p>The Chair then proceeded to introduce Dr. Vanda Seward, Coordinator of the KCRTF.</p> |
| 5 | Coordinator’s Report | <p><i>Opening Remarks</i></p> <p>Dr. Seward asked all attendees to network with each other to ensure that all are aware of the resources available. She also noted that NYC Agency for Child Services should serve as a special presenter for a future KCRTF meeting given the scope of services that it has to offer and its direct and indirect relevance to re-entry matters.</p> <p>Dr. Seward acknowledged that the KCRTF grant from DCJS had been renewed, which pleased but did not surprise her given the quality and quantity of work performed by the Task Force.</p> <p>She noted that the new grant has some revisions, including new Cognitive Behavioral Intervention (CBI) requirements. In addition to “Ready Set Work,” the program “Thinking for Change” is now a part of the KCRTF contract. “T4C” is an evidence-based program that may be provided to KCRTF-eligible individuals and other parolees specifically selected for the CBI by their parole officers.</p> <p>The T4C sessions are taking place weekly on-site at DOCCS, thanks to assistance from DOCCS Regional Director Mary Smith and Ms. Yon. KCRTF staffer Andrea Johnson, who has been trained in T4C oversees 2.-5-hour sessions conducted by KCDA staff member John Watkins (with assistance from intern Amanda Ritchie).</p> <p>It has also been determined that parolees with anger management mandates may fulfill their requirements by completing the 12-week T4C session. (If, however, a participant engages in “acting out” behavior, they will have to complete an alternative program – one that they may have to pay for.)</p> <p>Dr. Seward also acknowledged that DCJS is attempting to create a two-day module for individuals who do not necessarily need a 12-week session, but who would benefit from exposure to this CBI.</p> |

Offender Workforce Development: Ready Set Work

The other CBI is “Ready Set Work” (“RSW”), which is being offered on-site at the KCRTF. Dr. Seward and case manager Norma Fernandez each completed the intensive, three-week training across a 90-day period. Dr. Seward stated that for each of them, the training was enlightening – helping to lead them to better understand how to manage information being given to clients so they are not overloaded and so that they are able to progress effectively through the various stages of work readiness. What was also reinforced was the importance of one-on-one time with clients, since group sessions work better with some clients than with others.

The Chair interjected that a second computer lab is planned for the KCDA re-entry office to ensure that every client would have appropriate access to necessary technology and time to get acclimated to the necessary technology.

Ms. Fernandez stated that the RSW sessions were now also linked up with ACCES-VR orientations to ensure that clients who need a full range of services receive them. The first session was held on June 22nd, and went very well. The challenging question for clients was “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

Question: “How do people get involved with the program?”

Dr. Seward stated that an individual who has had criminal justice involvement should come to the office at 210 Joralemon Street, 3rd Floor, and have an intake done. The individual will either meet the eligibility criteria for the KCRTF or for ComALERT.

Thinking For Change

Regarding T4C, Ms. Johnson was assigned to receive the formal training in Albany, which she did. She stated that the T4C implementation through the KCRTF was in Week 6 and going well. Ms. Johnson stated that applying principles of T4C to oneself prior to using it to facilitate a workshop is beneficial and recommended.

When applied to the re-entry population, the T4C model requires sensitivity to identities, awareness of words and actions, tactfulness regarding the delivery of information, and the ability to engage participants in role play – to get their “buy-in” to the experience. Ms. Johnson stated that there are currently eight (8) enrollees and all have been attending and participating. She thanked Mr. John Watkins and intern Amanda Ritchie for their assistance and contributions to the positive launch of the T4C CBI component of KCRTF’s work.

A formerly incarcerated individual who had taken a T4C course while in prison asked how this ‘on the outside’ program differed from how it is presented inside prison. His concern was whether or not individuals were simply duplicating the same thing.

Ms. Johnson responded that T4C can be applied to everyone – including everyone in the room – because it can be utilized in different ways and take into account different situations.

Dr. Seward responded that those who have been incarcerated understand that how a program is handled on the inside is going to be different from on the outside due to the change in environment. She stated, “I don’t want to go too deep, but Thinking For Change is kind of hard when someone is getting ready to push up on you!” The lessons may be theoretically similar, but the examples and the way in which the participants engage in the role play will be different because the environment is different.

Ms. Yon responded as well: “When I am witnessing the role play, we are displaying and acting out real life scenarios -- interactions between prospective employers, or a co-worker, with family at home. A safe environment is set up for the participants in order for them to best perform. When I watch Amanda and Mr. Watkins, they use a very soft hand and they are very encouraging. Some participants are very willing and enthusiastic about role play, while others sit back and observe. In this particular environment, these are all young people who are in the same age range and are going through the same experiences. The common ground is a great support network. What I am witnessing now is individuals who at first did not know each other but are now pairing off and creating bonds between each other, establishing

relationships and implementing their new thinking skills within those relationships. When you are in prison, for the most part you can plan out how things can go, but, on the outside, situations can arise that require you to stop and think. Encountering issues with families -- at work -- that you could have never imagined, and now you can reflect on those instances and think of different ways you could have changed the outcome.”

Mr. Watkins responded: “What I would add is, when you bring these young men together in a structured program, they are, for the most part, complete strangers and so there is an initial period of getting acclimated with the staff and each other. Trust -- or rather teams as I call it --needs to be established. Now, in Week Six, there is cohesiveness, there is an established safe space, and a lot of that has to do with the DOCCS staff and I thank them for that. They provide the clients and ensure a safe space for all. We have carried them through various modules of the program and now they do engage very actively in role play and they know it is a requirement. But now they actually look forward to it and see it as empowering. A lot comes out during role play and it is the facilitator’s job to modulate that in terms of the structure and the lessons of that day -- at the same time also be encouraging. We are halfway through and we are excited for the other half and the graduation, or should I say commencement. The participants express that they utilize the skills they have gained from the course in their own lives.”

A question was asked as to how individuals who have been incarcerated for a long period of time will receive the support they need to adjust to everything that has changed, including technology and culture.

Mr. Owens responded: “When a young person -- or anyone for that matter -- goes off to prison and comes out, they must recognize that the world has essentially left them behind and learn how to re-adjust. The short answer is “that is why we are here.” The only way that someone will be able to adjust is if they get help from entities who are committed to making that transition possible. By bringing all of these groups together, by working with the resources that we have, and that everyone else has, we have to be the ones that make that change possible for that individual. A business owner doesn’t want to help you move from point A to point B when he needs you at point B, so we try to prepare you and help you get to point B. If you are currently dealing with a population that is struggling with that transition, they need to be in our office, working with our staff and utilizing the resources available to them from the people in this room. They also need to be going through programs such as Thinking For Change in order to be dedicated to the road toward success. Because, in the end, it’s their choice. We can only provide the resources. With reference to businesses, we cannot dictate the actions they will take to employ the formerly incarcerated. However, there are a few select businesses out there that look specifically for those who were formerly incarcerated and those are the organizations we will work with. There are not many of them but there are a few.” He made reference to a developer based in Queens who has made it part of his moral and economic imperative to hire formerly incarcerated individuals, since he believes they better understand the value of work.

Dr. Seward added that those groups and individuals who are “new” to the KCRTF “table” should and will be “brought up to speed” so they can fully understand and benefit from the services that are available through this network. She referenced the New York City Human Rights Commission’s website, which has important information:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/cchr/html/home/home.shtml>

There is also a hardcopy publication, *Turning The Game Around: NYC Can Help*, published by the New York City Human Rights Commission, which has valuable information and for which Dr. Seward served as an editor. It is being updated.

Dr. Seward stressed that services need to be age-appropriate for the population whose needs are being addressed. For example, a cohort of individuals participating in a CBI should all be within the same age range.

Referrals

With regard to referrals, Dr. Seward stressed that the KCRTF has received a large number of referrals from various agencies and organizations, and that each one is accepted and accommodated as much as possible. She also stated that there have been self-referrals, particularly from individuals who have participated in the various groups that are led by staff members such as Marybeth Melendez and volunteers such as Trevor Reid. The groups generate on-site referrals and service delivery with the consent of the Parole Officer.

Overall, the referral process between the KCRTF and DOCCS has been streamlined and is working very smoothly. KCRTF staff are on-site at DOCCS each Thursday to gather referrals, in addition to the referrals that are sent by DOCCS.

Furthermore, Dr. Seward stated that the number of referrals and clients required to fulfill the mandates of the DCJS grant were both met and exceeded for FY2015.

Public Education Committee

Dr. Seward stated that the Public Education Committee has been active.

In June, the Re-Entry Consortium held a gathering focused on children of incarcerated parents and relevant services. The success of the consortium was due in part to the work of Ms. Ellen Edelman of the organization Families, Fathers & Children. Ms. Edelman allowed to KCRTF staff members to interview a child-client and videotape the interview. Unfortunately, the audio did not work properly at the time. A Sesame Street video regarding children and incarceration was shown and copies were distributed. In general, attendees gained a broader perspective on the issue, which will be beneficial to many organizations and individuals.

Ms. Hersh from ACCES-VR and the Re-Entry Consortium stated that an additional highlight of the Consortium gathering was a presentation by a warden from a federal women’s prison, who discussed many different programs within the facility. This warden’s focus is on families and keeping families connected during incarceration.

The next Consortium session is scheduled for September and will focus on re-entry transitions. Expected guests include Think Outside The Cell and Mr. Ronald Day (Fortune Society).

BEGIN AGAIN: Mr. Max Rose (Office of Public Engagement) discussed this KCDA initiative designed to clear outstanding warrants. The first session handled more than 1,000 people and cleared 700 warrants. The next one will be Saturday, September 12th at St. Paul’s Community Baptist Church, East New York, Brooklyn. Flyers are available for distribution.

Question: Is there a way to help individuals determine if they have outstanding warrants?

Mr. Rose responded that people with warrants are sent letters by the Office of Court Administration, but less than 5% show up in Court. For BEGIN AGAIN, there is a “partnership” between the Courts, the District Attorney’s office and Legal Aid. A person comes to the event and first speaks with a Legal Aid attorney who does the full check before the person goes into the waiting room with the judge. If the person has no warrants, they are told to go home. If they do have a warrant, the information is shared with the individual and they are advised as to what to do next. No one was arrested at the last event.

Dr. Seward stated that “rap sheet clean-up” is a service that is provided by various agencies, including not-for-profit organizations.

The Chair announced that Making The Change took place on June 23rd. The next session will be in the Fall and there is the hope to expand it to locations in addition to Red Hook (where it currently takes place).

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| 6 | Fiscal Report | Tabled by the Chair. |
| 7 | Reports/concerts | N/A |
| 8 | Guest presentations | <p>MS. LESLIE ROBINSON, <i>RECHARGE BEYOND THE BARS RE-ENTRY GAME</i> http://www.rechargegame.com/</p> <p>Ms. Robinson discussed the history of Beyond The Bars and how it assists individuals confronting transition challenge by prompting them to share from a deeper personal place in a game format. There is no “winner” or “loser” other than the participant’s actual “winning” themselves back through self-reflection and healing, and through sharing and bonding with others. There are 360 questions that help end the isolation that formerly incarcerated individuals feel as they transition.</p> <p>Intern Amanda Ritchie referenced her experience using BTB during the T4C sessions. She felt that the game built trust and was a positive experience for the participants. Dr. Seward attested to the positive nature of the game’s outcomes – laughter, bonding and healing – as rewards for playing. Mr. Watkins had also used BTB and was impressed.</p> <p>MS. TRACY MENDELSON, <i>BE THE EVIDENCE</i> http://www.betheevidence.org/</p> <p>Be The Evidence is a research-based set of projects and initiatives supporting advances in human rights and social justice on a global scale and pursuing improved health and well-being for all individuals, families, and communities.</p> <p>Ms. Mendelsohn linked her personal story of recovery from addiction to the broader need for re-entry support and the role for Be The Evidence in providing that philosophical and ethical foundation.</p> <p>On October 31st, BTE will be hosting a conference on solitary confinement at Fordham University.</p> |
| 9 | New Business | <p>Ms. Donna Hylton announced that a dramatic production of material performed by women who were incarcerated will be taking place on October 29th. This ensemble is inspired by the work of Eve Ensler, author of The Vagina Monologues.</p> <p>Mr. Dunbar announced that the Brooklyn Borough office of the NYC Agency for Children’s Services (ACS) will be holding its Annual School Fair on August 29th.</p> |
| 10 | Adjournment | The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 pm. |