REENTRY MENTOR TRAINING

1. GOALS
2. CHALLENGES
3. METHODS
4. RESOURCES

Maryland Street Reentry Committee
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Schedule

• Morning meeting: Setting goals.
• Morning meeting: Challenges we face.
• Lunch: What residents confront when they are released
• Afternoon meeting: How to be a good mentor for returning citizens.
• Afternoon meeting: Resources we can utilize.
• Definitions: ex-con, ex-offender, returning citizen, returnee, mentee, mentoree, brother and sister.
The straight and narrow

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Matthew 7:13-14
We all need help

• Life can be like a minefield.
• Break into groups of three persons.
• Introduce your self and talk about the following:
• Discuss a time in your own life when a big change was very de-stabilizing and you felt disoriented.
• Did you have help? Briefly describe it.
Footprints in the sand

• We all need God to carry us through tough times.
• We all need friends to show God’s love when we feel lost and alone.
• We all have need for fellowship.
• Prisoners are not unique in this regard.
• We all need to share God’s love.
• We are equal brothers and sisters in His sight.
Listen, Listen, Love, Love

• Mentoring is a relationship between equals.
• Mentors help released prisoners become full members of our faith community.
• Our efforts to help returnees should aim at creating new competence in them.
• It should not create dependence upon us.
• We want them to become independent and self-sufficient members of society.
A mentor is:

- A disciple, serving our Lord.
- A good listener.
- A good friend.
- A wise coach.
- A skilled guide.
- A caring person.
- A constructive example.
- A helper.
A mentor is NOT:

- A savior (Jesus is all we need).
- A probation officer.
- A substitute mommy or daddy.
- Mr. Fix it.
- A cool friend who goes with the flow.
- A source of ready cash.
- An enabler (for bad habits).
- A correctional officer.
Discussion

• How can we help our brothers and sisters stay on the straight and narrow?
• Without acting like law enforcement officers ourselves?
• How do we help them become responsible, competent and faithful members of the community?
We are witnesses

“You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” (Thessalonians 2:10-12)
We are servants

• We should claim no credit when God does miraculous work.
• We are followers of the Risen Lord.
• Our goal is to mentor returnees so they can become full members of the Christian community.
• Not depending on us
• But relying on the Lord.
We need God’s help

“They then turned to His disciples and said privately, ‘Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it.’” (Luke 10: 23-24).
Challenges

• Recidivism rates are very high.
• Most inmates who are released from prison end up behind bars again.
• We want to avoid this outcome with the returnees we help.
• The underlying problems are enormous.
• Our ministry is working to address these challenges. We are a work-in-progress and some of the advice in this training guide will be changed as we learn from experience.
Discussion

What are the specific issues that make it difficult for released inmates to avoid running afoul of the law in the future?
What problems did you identify?

- Mentoring is designed to help inmates avoid the counter-productive behaviors that can occur when they are released back into the environment where they previously got into trouble.
What are some categories?

• Family problems,
• Neighborhood problems,
• Problems with old friends and gangs
• Crime
• Addiction
• Joblessness
• Homelessness
• Exclusion (especially for sex offenders)
• Stigma
• Others?
Focus on reality

• This is no time for sentimentality.
• Address the reality of the situation.
• Level with those you are mentoring.
• Encourage them to avoid situations where they may be tempted.
• Warn them about the risk of addiction and encourage them to stay in a 12-step program. Insist they continue addiction treatment.
Build positive ties

• Have them join a faith congregation
• Help them join an Emmaus, Cursillo, or Tres Dias community.
• Get them involved in healthy community activities and programs.
• If possible, help them reconnect to family members who can play a positive role in their rehabilitation. Note that mediation services are available.
Focus on the positive

• Mentors should help the released inmate develop positive, realistic goals.
• Mentors should reinforce any steps (including small ones) towards accomplishing goals.
• Confidence-building is essential.
• Mentors should stay in regular (weekly) contact.
• A mentor should pray every day for the mentoree he/she is helping, and for his/her family and close friends.
Be prepared for the negative.

• Break into groups of three. (With new partners you haven’t worked with before).
• Discuss:
  • What can go wrong?
  • Imagine potential problems and worst case situations.
• What would you do about it?
Be prepared for a crisis

- PRAY for guidance and strength.
- Do not try to deal with it by yourself. Even the Lone Ranger had a Tonto.
- Get help from the Reentry committee. A crisis requires a collaborative response.
- Show respect at all times. Everyone has problems, but recently released prisoners may feel especially vulnerable.
- Your support is crucial in a crisis.
Lunch

- Grace
- Food and fellowship
- Listening to those who have walked this lonely valley, those who have survived release from prison and reentry into the “real world.”
- Questions and answers
The 23rd Psalm

• Darkness/shadow combined with pastures and still waters.

• A returnee from prison may experience many conflicting emotions due to the radical change in life style.

• The change may be daunting for the one being thrust onto the cold streets of our society.
How to be a good mentor

• We cannot wait until someone is released.
• The Reentry committee will work with the chaplain and volunteer coordinator in prisons to target those about to be released.
• We should talk with those who are scheduled for release while they are still in prison, seizing opportunities like share-and-prayer and monthly reunions.
• They should be urged to do life planning workshops (if we are allowed to provide them).
• Advise returnees about family mediation.
Discussion: life planning

• What subjects do you think should be part of a life plan process prior to release?
• What can volunteers in prison do to help facilitate the transition to freedom?
Initial activities

- As a pilot program, we first focused on Maryland Correctional Institution at Hagerstown, where a Kairos program is established.
- When additional prisons gain Kairos programs the Reentry program can be expanded.
- Men will mentor male inmates and females will mentor female inmates.
- Mentors should try to meet mentorees on the day of release from prison.
Mentor activities

- A one-year commitment to work with an inmate about to be released from prison.
- Contact should be weekly.
- Contact should be face-to-face as often as possible and by phone when necessary.
- Two mentors should be assigned to work with each returnee entering the aftercare program. They should coordinate their actions and stay in touch. They should also stay in touch with the Reentry committee.
Checklist for assistance:

- Housing
- Christian community involvement.
- Sources of spiritual support
- Health care and mental health care
- Suitable job prospects
- Successful money management
- Educational opportunities
- Family needs (including mediation)
- Positive recreational activities
- Others?
Get help for family members

• Encourage men about to be released to encourage their female family members to do a Kairos Outside weekend.
• Urge KO volunteers to become mentors for women mentorees leaving prison and to advise male mentors with male mentorees.
Help returnees make choices

• Setting realistic goals is an individual chore.
• The mentor may assist and guide the discussion with the returnee, but…
• the person who is in charge of the process needs to be the one who is being released from prison.
• Mentors can suggest, but they cannot dictate.
• Making choices is the mark of a free person.
Encouragement

• Encourage participation in an on-going share and prayer group.
• Encourage a relationship with a local pastor and other caring members of a church.
• Encourage the local church to help the recently released person. We need to help churches become welcoming communities.
• If other Christians start providing the sort of help that mentors offer, rejoice. Don’t be envious if others begin doing the work you’ve started. (After all, it’s God’s work).
Money matters

• Money is likely to be scarce.
• Family members may help; maybe not.
• We need to help those who are released find work and sources of income.
• We should NOT become the source of income for them.
• Our job is to build their self confidence, not bind them in dependence to us.
**Do’s and Don’ts**

- Do help with job advice.
- Do steer them to places where they can find interim financial help.
- Do help them find job prospects.
- Do NOT give them money.
- In an emergency, the Reentry Committee should be asked to consider interim financial help. Individual volunteers should not provide financial support.
Financial support

• The Reentry Committee may decide not to provide monetary support.
• It is not our mission and it may hinder the progress toward self-sufficiency.
• Mentors should never give encouragement that money might be forthcoming from us.
• Other avenues for financial help should be explored.
• On the rare occasions when the Reentry Committee decides to help with money, it should go to pay overdue bills directly, not to the mentoree.
Financial advice

• One area where we can be particularly helpful is in providing basic financial advice.

• Many inmates have never learned about budgets, checking accounts, debt management, timely payment of bills, etc.

• We should develop a protocol for advising on money matters, based on material in the best self-help financial books.
Security matters

• In prison Kairos volunteers never ask why a resident is incarcerated. It is not relevant to the help we give in prison.
• This information is relevant after release so we can avoid any potential endangerment to the local community.
• It is also necessary for mentors to know about past offenses for the protection of themselves and the mentor’s family.
• It is important to work with pastors to ensure that their churches will welcome ex-offenders and set proper boundaries.
Boundaries

- The following are from the Harbor on the Hill program in Ohio:
- Follow state guidelines at all times.
- Avoid meeting alone with a returnee. Two mentors should work together.
- Give no money, no gifts, no deliveries.
- Limit physical contact to a handshake between a returnee and someone of the other sex.
- Do not let the returnee meet with a person under 18 years of age.
Boundaries for returnees

• *From the Ohio Harbor on the Hill program:*
• Faithfully continue to participate in drug, alcohol and anger management programs.
• Do not take a lead role or tell his/her story to a large group in the first year home.
• Support our rules and encourage our volunteers to support the rules.
• Limit physical contact with the opposite sex to a handshake.
Probation/parole conditions

- Violations of parole are extremely serious and endanger the transition to freedom.
- Mentors are not parole or probation officers.
- But mentors should encourage persons in reentry to carefully comply with all conditions of parole.
- Encourage the released person to keep all appointments with probation/parole officers.
- Emphasize the importance of the CONTRACT that we will insist that mentorees agree to and sign.
Resources

We are not trying to start new social programs for the ex-offenders we serve. We will help him engage and participate in organizations that already exist for these purposes. Government and not-for-profit groups need to be tapped. For example, Jubilee Jobs has an ongoing program in DC that includes job assistance for ex-offenders. Celebrate Recovery and Healing Communities have programs for individuals and congregations. We will work with others doing reentry, including Justice Fellowship.
Other resources

A work in progress to identify organizations in several categories:

• Employment assistance
• Job training
• Social services
• Housing
• Medical and mental health care
• Addiction treatment
• Anger management programs
• Sex offender programs

• MD locator:  
  http://www.mdcsl.org/advantagecallback.asp?template=map_search
Jesus looked at him and loved him

- As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
- "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother."
- "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."
- Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."
- At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. (Mark 10:17-22)
Impediments

Wealth is not the only false god that people find hard to give up. Bad habits of every sort can get priority in our lives. Tragically.

We should expect men and women released into a free society to be tempted. Mightily.

We should recognize their right to make wrong choices. “He went away sad....”

We should remember that Christ loves him.
The real resource

• Jesus is the source of strength.
• He calls us to follow Him.
• All who evangelize will face setbacks.
• He does not call us to be successful.
• He calls us to be faithful.

May God bless you for your willingness to serve.