



**Testimony before the House Committee on Human Services & Housing**

May 13, 2013

Douglas Cooper, Deputy Director Mercy Corps Northwest

Madame Chair, and members of the committee: thank you for taking our testimony this afternoon. My name is Doug Cooper. I am the deputy director of Mercy Corps NW and we are the lead agency for the Reentry Transition Center in Portland.

The Reentry Transition Center, or RTC, is a community-based reentry program which supports anyone released from county jail, state or federal prison within the last 2 years. It is a pilot program which started in late 2009 with a United Way grant, and then received addition funding through a Justice Assistance Grant which was administered by the Criminal Justice Commission.

The RTC's primary mission is to help participants to successfully rebuild productive, secure lives and to reintegrate with the community after leaving incarceration.

We do this by helping our participants identify the biggest 3 or 4 challenges they are facing in their reentry, creating an action plan with them, and then coordinating the services of over 20 partner agencies in the community to help meet those challenges. Our navigators—both of whom have been incarcerated—support them along this path, help them troubleshoot solve problems when needed.

As an agency, we see tremendous benefits to successful reintegration. Our participants successes are not just individual or private successes- they clearly provide benefits for the community and taxpayers: less crime means fewer victims and less use of police and court resources. Individuals are employed and paying payroll taxes rather than using safety net resources. Young children have parents at home and neighborhood have more stable families.

When they fail, it not only hurts them and their families, it also hurts our communities – both from a standpoint of public safety, productive use of taxpayer dollars and quality of life. It is in everyone's best interest that our participant's succeed in their transition.

We approach this reenter work with a couple of core principles:

One, we approach our participants as individuals: everyone has a different set or combination of challenges. They also have different skills, experiences, strengths and varied capacities for change. Of course we see patterns over time: employment, housing,

reconnection with family and community, mental and physical health issues are most often part of the mix. But despite patterns, we must see each person as an individual.

Second, we must see their challenge holistically- many facets of their lives need to be addressed, and any big, unaddressed gaps put their efforts at risk. – along with the investment of everyone that has provided programs and services for them during their incarceration.

Lastly, no one can do this alone. As an agency, we must rely on the expertise of our partner agencies, work in cooperation with county and federal PO's and the public safety system, along with many other resources in the community. Our job is to help connect these potential points of support to help our participants use them wisely and to their benefit. Half of our operating budget is passed through directly for participant needs, and to our partner agencies for services provided to our participants.

To give a sense of scale, the RTC welcomes about 1000 people through its doors each year, often with days of their release. We have a computer lab, a clothes closet, emergency food and shelter, and access to secure mail boxes, fax, phones. Volunteers from the community have donated over 4000 hours of service to our participants and the center through tutoring and other support activities.

Our approach has been successful. In March, the Criminal Justice Commission finalized its evaluation of the RTC and our colleague transition centers in Eugene and Klamath Falls. It found that our participants had 31% reduction in re-arrests compared to the control group. It also found that we saved taxpayers \$14 for every \$1 invested in the program. We believe that investing in this type of community-based support programs is fiscally responsible, effective and worthwhile public policy.



## Short Summary : Reentry Transition Center

Reporting Period: January 2010 - December 2012

Location: 1818 NE Martin Luther King Blvd  
Portland OR 97201  
971-255-0547

### Original Grant Goals:

Target population: Med & High Risk offenders within 2 years of release date

Engagement: # of participants	#	% of goal
Current ( as of 9/30/12)	2037	254%
Projected (6/30/13):	2500	315%
Target (Jan 2010- Dec.2011)	800	100%

18 additional months of operations w. no-cost extension

Jurisdiction	#	
State/DCJ	748	37%
Federal	456	22%
County Jail	706	35%
Unknown	127	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2037</b>	<b>participants</b>

### Gender

Female	386	19%
Male	1619	80%
unreported	18	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Service Level

Level 1 (Information & referral, no substantial resources invsted)	928
Level 2 (Limited resources invested for help w. immediate needs. No expectation of engagement)	471
Level 3 (Substantial resources invested, action plan created)	637
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2036</b>

### Budget:

Average Cost/ participant ( Levels 1,2 & 3):	\$ 632
Average Cost/ participant (Levels 2 & 3 only):	\$ 1,146
Operating budget (occupancy and staffing)/mo	\$ 13,500
<b>Current</b> Direct services & paid referrals (reduced)	\$ 5,700
Historical Services & Paid Referrals:	Apx. \$14,000/ mo
	(42% of entire RTC budget 1/2010- 12/2011)

### Community Engagement:

21 Community-based partner organizations with referral MOU's	
Community volunteer hours donated:	4003 hrs
Participant volunteer hours donated:	1208 hrs
# of Referrals to Partner Agencies:	1017

### Results:

OR Criminal Justice Commission Evaluation: March 2013  
31 % reduction in arrests for Level 2 and 3 participants.  
\$14.31 in direct savings to public safety for every \$1 invested.

Preliminary analysis by Mult Co. Evaluation Services 6/2012  
10 % Felony Conviction rate at one year 30% reduction  
Comparable cohort: State one year = 14%, Mult Co = 13%

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