2021 SECOND CHANCE ACT ADULT REENTRY EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, TREATMENT AND RECOVERY PROGRAM GRANTEE

Hope Network of West Michigan

Success Story

In 2022, the Hope Network of West Michigan began implementing its "Turn the Page" initiative to reduce recidivism among adult men housed at the Kent County Correctional Facility in Grand Rapids, Michigan who have 90 or fewer days remaining on their sentences.

Turn the Page offers comprehensive pre- and post-release support services to increase employment, secure consistent post-release engagement, and provide connections to community resources and services. These services support those preparing for release and help newly released individuals successfully reintegrate into their communities.

Turn the Page's pre-release services include four weeks of "high-touch interaction" through employment and personal responsibility classes and one-on-one meetings to create and execute participants' reentry plans. Post-release services include job placement and retention services that connect people with employment opportunities and resources.

Turn the Page employs a Peer Navigator and Workforce Development Specialist to keep participants engaged in services. These two staff members facilitate the classes at the jail during pre-release and continue to build rapport and provide services and support during post-release.

Lessons Learned

Program staff learned to be agile and adapt during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the beginning of implementation, program staff could not provide classes in the jail due to a COVID-19 outbreak. However, the Turn the Page team quickly pivoted by using a virtual platform to continue to facilitate classes and relationship building with participants.

Turn the Page program staff have also learned that:

1. It is important to have strong lines of communication with and support from all partners.

2. The framing of recruitment materials is important and can make a difference in how potential participants view the services. For example, participants were more willing to participate when materials focused on how the program could help them, versus the project's objectives.

What worked?

Key factors that contribute to the program's success are:

- Having frequent meetings with all partners to not only provide updates on the program but to address any issues and strategize ways to problem solve.

- Having virtual options—while not ideal—offers the ability to maintain programming when staff aren't allowed to host in-person meetings with participants.

What did not work?

Program staff faced obstacles securing participant referrals from the jail due to a lack of interest from a small percentage of eligible inmates, which had the potential to impact achieving outcome measures. In response, Turn the Page staff updated their informational flyer to focus on "what we can do for participants," instead of program objectives to increase interest. In addition, Turn the Page amended their eligibility parameters to provide participation opportunities to more men. As a result, in the first few months of implementation, program staff enrolled three cohorts of a total of 15 participants who completed the pre-release portion of services.

Additionally, the initiative originally planned for four weeks of classroom time and one or two one-to-one meetings to build a rapport with participants. However, program staff realized that they needed to provide a more high-touch program and met with participants more frequently to build stronger rapport.

"We meet them at the door once they are released to show support and to connect them with their loved ones. … Once they transition [back to their communities], we provide basic essential resources, such as housing information, transportation assistance, food, and clothing, as needed. This approach allows us to positively make an impact on our participants and our community."

—TURN THE PAGE STAFF
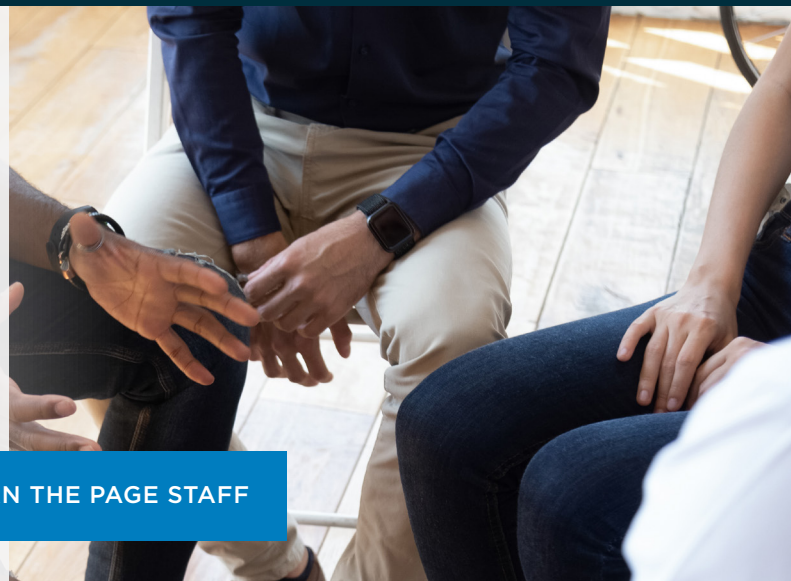
What's next?

The Hope Network team will continue to be flexible and open to change to sustain its accomplishments. They will continue to work to maintain support from jail leadership and administrators.