



INSTITUTE ON WOMEN
& CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Mentoring Women in Reentry

A WPA Practice Brief

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WOMEN'S PRISON ASSOCIATION

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ABOUT WPA

The Women's Prison Association is a service and advocacy organization committed to helping women with criminal justice histories realize new possibilities for themselves and their families. Our program services make it possible for women to obtain work, housing, and health care; to rebuild their families; and to participate fully in civic life. Through the Institute on Women & Criminal Justice, WPA pursues a rigorous policy, advocacy, and research agenda to bring new perspectives to public debates on women and criminal justice.

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GENERAL NOTE

This brief represents the most up-to-date information available to us at the time of publication. If you would like to provide updated or corrected information for future versions of this brief, or if you would like contact information for any of the featured programs, please send an e-mail to institute@wpaonline.org.

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WPA Practice Brief: Mentoring Women in Reentry

About This Series

Women's Prison Association's Practice Briefs are designed to present service providers, policymakers, advocates with a snapshot of a particular issue related to working with women in the criminal justice system. Practice Briefs provide an issue summary, feature effective approaches, and highlight relevant legislation, research, and further resources on the topic.

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Issue Overview: Mentoring Women in Reentry

Women who are making the transition from prison or jail to the community must achieve stability in multiple areas of their lives: criminal justice compliance, maintaining sobriety, reunifying with family members, establishing and maintaining a home, and gaining employment. Establishing and receiving support from healthy relationships with other adults can be helpful as women navigate these challenges. A mentoring relationship with another adult can serve as a place of solace and safety, while also providing practice at a non-competitive relationship in which there is a mutual desire to promote each other's well-being and success. This can be especially meaningful for women who have a history of negative relationships.

Research and programs that address the intersection of mentoring and criminal justice-involved populations have largely concentrated on children, either mentoring for the children of incarcerated parents or of juveniles in the criminal justice system. Less attention has been paid to mentoring adults involved in the criminal justice system. While it is true a woman in reentry has many tangible needs (housing, employment, family reunification, formal education) attention to intangible needs (empowerment, a sense of belonging, someone to talk to) can promote personal growth through positive reinforcement of progress, encouragement and support in the face of defeat and temptation, and a place to feel like a regular person.

People reentering the community face challenges such as the stigma of incarceration, the need to reframe their personal identities and to rebuild and form relationships. Mentors facilitate the creation of positive social capital and provide social support during the transition process.¹

This Practice Brief focuses on the benefits of establishing healthy social and civic connections through mentoring of criminal justice-involved women.

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What Is Mentoring?

Mentoring is the practice of matching up an individual who has a stable educational, professional and personal life with another individual who is in need of guidance in those areas. Mentors model acceptable behavior in a range of settings, in effect teaching the mentee how to act so that she feels comfortable and confident in places she may not have been before. The mentor/mentee relationship is mutually beneficial. Mentees receive support and guidance while mentors often express gaining a new perspective on life issues and feel they are giving something back to society.²

In the professional world, many organizations and corporations have come to understand that mentoring is an essential component of developing the professional skills of staff members. Benefits of mentoring in a professional setting include enhancing teamwork skills, exposing employees to new situations and improving employee retention.³ These lessons can also contribute to an employee's personal development.

Mentoring programs that pair "at-risk" youths with strong adult role models can be found across the country. In recent years the impact of parental incarceration on children has become a focus for research and program development.⁴ In his 2003 State of the Union address, President George W. Bush called for, and Congress subsequently authorized, an allocation of \$450 million in funding to create and expand mentoring programs for children of incarcerated parents.⁵

For a formerly incarcerated woman in reentry, a mentoring relationship can provide new tools to approach everyday activities such as navigating public transportation, asking for help in a department store, or trying to reschedule an appointment. A mentor's support can help a woman develop confidence as she navigates the myriad of challenges, small and large, that come with returning to the community after incarceration.

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Mentoring and Gender

Although there has been little research conducted on how gender impacts mentoring relationships, it is widely believed that men and women form relationships in different ways and for different reasons.

Social psychologists have observed that women's friendships are often based on intimacy, empathy and self-disclosure, while men tend to maintain relationships through activities. Further, women are more likely than men to go to their friends to seek emotional support or help during times of distress.⁶

Bloom, Owen and Covington, in their study *Gender Responsive Strategies*, point to Jean Baker Miller's relational theory to describe how men and women form relationships differently. Miller argues that women's primary motivation is to build connections with others.⁷ "Females develop a sense of self and self-worth when their actions arise out of, and lead back into, connections with others. Connection, not separation, is thus the guiding principle of growth for girls and women."⁸

These differences in how men and women form and maintain relationships influence mentoring relationships as well. A problem-focused and goal-oriented mentoring program may be appealing to men, while women seek mentoring relationships in which they feel safe and can form interpersonal relationship that serve as a basis for support.⁹

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Policy & Legislation

Ready4Work

Ready4Work was a three year, \$22.5 million initiative launched in 2003 with support from the U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Justice, and the Annie E. Casey and Ford Foundations. Ready4Work was designed to provide a comprehensive set of services to support formerly incarcerated people's movement from prison to employment in the community. The basic program model included employment services, case management and mentoring. The original program collaboration ended in 2006, while services continue as the Prisoner Re-entry Initiative (described below).

In 2006, there were 17 Ready4Work sites established across the country. Of those sites, 11 focused solely on adults. All the sites have a mentoring component. [Just Out: Early Lessons from the Ready4Work Prisoner Reentry Initiative](#), a report released by Public/Private Ventures, acknowledges that building mentoring programs has been the most challenging aspect of the program and credits Ready4Work as pioneers with learning how to adapt mentoring practices to benefit adults with criminal justice involvement.¹⁰

President George W. Bush's Prisoner Reentry Initiative

Recognizing the needs and challenges often faced by people when they're released from prison and motivated by a desire to reduce recidivism rates, President George W. Bush proposed a four-year, \$300 million reentry initiative during his 2004 State of the Union address. The President's initiative called on the resources and expertise of faith-based and community organizations to provide his stated three key requirements to successful re-entry – Employment, Transitional Housing and Mentoring.

Known as the [Prisoner Reentry Initiative](#), this program continues the Ready4Work model. Congress allocated \$100 million to this program for three years in 2005. Currently, faith-based and community organizations in 30 locations are receiving funding to implement mentoring and other transitional services with almost 6,000 participants.

Second Chance Act of 2007

The Second Chance Act of 2007 (HR 1593/ S.1060) acknowledges that the number of people leaving prison is increasing and they are returning to communities where there is a dearth of support services. The Second Chance Act, signed by the President on April 9, 2008, authorizes a \$65 million reentry grant program administered through the Department of Justice for state and county reentry initiatives and a \$15 million reentry program for community and faith-based organizations to deliver additional or different types of mentoring and transitional services.

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The WPA Approach to Mentoring

Women's Prison Association uses mentoring as a means of facilitating a woman's personal growth through the WomenCare and Escort to Care Peer Mentor Programs. While all WPA programs incorporate aspects of mentoring, particularly role modeling and promoting personal development, these two programs have been created with mentoring as the primary vehicle for supporting clients.

WomenCare

The goal of [WomenCare](#) is to promote confidence and competence in women as they transition to the community after incarceration. This is achieved by connecting the woman in reentry with a resourceful person in the community who is concerned about her well-being and can model a healthy lifestyle. Unlike many programs, women participate voluntarily. This is a key to the program's success. By choosing to take advantage of the opportunity for a mentor, a woman takes a powerful step in directing her own life.

WomenCare staff work with prison and parole officials to identify potential participants for the program. Women who choose to participate enroll in an 8-week workshop provided in prison that focuses on decision-making and preparation for taking on the responsibilities of everyday life. Following release from prison, mentors participate in at least eight workshops that examine and explore strategies for helping women cope with the challenges they may face, such as with substance abuse, trauma, navigation of public assistance systems and domestic violence.

Contact between the pair begins as a pen-pal relationship before the woman is released from incarceration. During reentry the exact nature of the relationship depends on the pair. Some continue as pen and/or phone pals while others arrange in-person meetings. Relationships often become so strong that many mentor/mentee pairs maintain contact even long after the 10-month commitment expires.

The WomenCare relationship is usually novel for both the mentor and mentee. The mentor has an opportunity to connect with a formerly-incarcerated woman, thereby fulfilling a personal desire to be of help to another while also learning about that woman's life experience, beliefs and talents. The mentee builds a mutually-respectful, non-authoritative, non-mandated relationship with another woman who cares about her and spends time with her solely because she wants to.

Over the last four years, WomenCare has coordinated more than 200 mentor/mentee matches, with 85 percent completing the 10-month commitment. In 2007, WPA conducted an outcomes assessment of a sample of WomenCare clients and found, among the sample, a recidivism rate of less than seven percent in the last 12-24 months after a mentoring relationship was active.

Escort to Care Peer Mentor Program

[Peer Mentors](#) are women with histories of criminal justice involvement who commit to a 9-month term of training and work. During this period, the Peer Mentor participates in the [Peer Training Institute](#), a key component of WPA's Reentry Services Unit, to learn about both the concrete tasks required for client escort and how to respond to a range of issues and concerns for the clients they escort. Peers escort women from prison to home, and have additional opportunities

for professional development, such as computer training or job shadowing which can help them advance toward a career track.

Peer Mentors meet women at the prison or jail gates upon release. The peer takes the client for something to eat, helps her carry her belongings, and prepares the client for each step and interaction. For example, the Peer takes care to order first so that the client, who has not been in a restaurant for some time, can follow the Peer's lead; the Peer shows the client how she uses a Metrocard to enter the subway system, and so on. These intentional, but not flagrant, demonstrations serve to take the mystery and ensuing fear out of the activities of daily living without embarrassing or drawing attention to the client. Clients appreciate and trust the Peer's assistance and are comfortable asking questions that they might hesitate to ask someone who doesn't understand the experience of incarceration. This experience is enriching for the Peer too, who is able to give back to another person, and solidify her feelings of accomplishment for what she has achieved in her own life, while providing valuable help to another.

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Mentoring Programs in Other States

Rhode Island – Women's Prison Mentoring Program

Founded in 1991, the Rhode Island Women's Prison Mentoring Program, a program of the Department of Corrections, is designed to assist women in prison with the ongoing challenge of transitioning from incarceration to life in the community. The core element of the program is the mentor/mentee match. The program recruits volunteers from the community who act as mentors to motivated women in prison. Mentors are expected to make at least a one-year commitment to the mentee, providing her with support and guidance in the transition from incarceration to the community.

A mentor is typically matched with a woman in prison several months before her release. During this pre-release period the mentor meets regularly with the mentee and, with the help of a Case Manager, assists her in implementing a discharge plan. The plan includes goals for successful independent living and concrete actions necessary to reach these goals. Following release, a mentor continues to meet weekly with the mentee to provide ongoing support and assistance in implementing her plan.

Volunteer mentors receive ongoing support and extensive training including monthly support meetings to provide them with the necessary skills and background needed to undertake this mentoring responsibility. The program also provides monthly workshops for mentors as well as for released and incarcerated mentees, which offer information about a specific topic as well as an opportunity for socialization and mutual support.

For more information contact: Judith Fox at (401) 462-3161 or judy.fox@doc.ri.gov

Maryland – Sister to Sister Program

Sister to Sister is a mentoring program that was started by the Prince George's County Department of Corrections in 2002. Through this program, women at the Prince George's County Detention Center have the option of volunteering to be placed with a mentor from the community. Once a woman asks for a mentor, her needs are assessed and she fills out a

questionnaire that goes over her interests, hobbies, things she's good at and things that are challenges to her. This information is used to make the best possible mentor/mentee match.

Women who volunteer to become mentors fill out a similar questionnaire about their interests and undergo a thorough background check. During a four-hour mentoring training, the new mentor learns about the issues and barriers that women with criminal justice involvement face as well as information about trauma and victimization. To prepare for making visits to the correctional facility the mentor receives two-hours of security training.

Before the mentee is released, the mentor visits her in person at the detention center for a minimum of one hour per week. During this time the mentor and mentee build a relationship and start to set goals for the mentee's future. After the mentee is released it is up to each mentor/mentee pair to decide if they want to continue the relationship and, if so, how. There is no time commitment requested from the mentor after the mentee's release; however, mentors are asked to make a six-month commitment prior to release.

The Sister to Sister Program makes an average of 18 to 20 mentor/mentee matches each year and some mentors are matched to more than one mentee at a time. Mentors are recruited from the county website, ads in the Prince George's community newsletter, through faith-based networks and by word of mouth. The mentor/mentee relationships are often positive for both parties involved. Women who volunteer to become mentors as a way to make an impact on someone else's life are often surprised at the impact of a mentee on their life as well.

For more information visit:

<http://www.co.pg.md.us/government/PublicSafety/Corrections/sisters.asp> or contact Tanya Law at (301) 952 - 7339

Washington, DC – Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency

The Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) is an independent federal agency created in 2000 to provide parole and probation services in Washington, D.C. In 2002, CSOSA partnered with faith-based entities to expand the range of support services available to D.C. residents returning from incarceration. CSOSA/ Faith Community Partnership programs are based on the belief that spirituality and the moral authority of religious organizations motivates some returnees in more constructive ways than conventional programs are able to do.

CSOSA/ Faith Community Partnership programs use a group mentoring model. This strategy allows the program to address the multiple needs of participants and create a strong support network, something especially important for those who lack strong family ties.

For more information visit: <http://www.csosa.gov/>

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Addressing the Challenges of Implementing Mentoring Programs

Creating and implementing a strong, positive mentoring program for women returning to the community requires patience and the willingness to embrace and learn from challenges. The

Ready4Work program and WPA's WomenCare have been successful at identifying and addressing many of the challenges that are likely relevant to other mentoring programs.

Recruiting volunteer mentors is one of the first challenges mentoring programs face. One solution is to use a group mentoring model where one mentor meets with a group of four to five mentees on a regular weekly or biweekly basis. Once a sufficient number of mentors are recruited, moving to one-on-one mentor/mentee matches is possible.

Ready4Work sites have been successful at recruiting many African-American males to serve as mentors, which is important given that the majority of mentees are male and/or people of color. All of the sites have turned to congregations as the primary source for recruiting mentors and have found greater success when the pastor is supportive of the efforts and encourages congregants to participate.

Even with a large pool of mentors, it can be challenging to make a good match for the mentor and mentee. A bad match may lead to either the mentor or mentee abandoning his obligation. WPA's WomenCare works to recruit mentors with a wide range of backgrounds to enhance the possibility of finding people who are well suited to each other. Matches are based upon anticipated compatibility by utilizing a matching tool to gauge interests and attitudes.

Addressing barriers to participation by mentees is another challenge organizations must face when developing a mentoring program. Common barriers include time conflicts or constraints, and lack of transportation and/or childcare. In response, Ready4Work sites have made efforts to schedule mentoring meetings at convenient times and locations, and by offering stipends to cover transportation.

Ready4Work sites also identified a psychological barrier to participation that arise with use of the word 'mentor.' For some, it implied a hierarchical relationship with the mentee playing a childlike role. The Washington D.C. Ready4Work program changed 'mentors' into 'life coaches', a term more acceptable to both parties. The WomenCare program at WPA sometimes uses the word 'protégé' to describe the mentee.¹¹

As with many relationships, setting boundaries between the mentor and mentee can often pose a challenge. Situations may arise where the mentee requests assistance that is beyond the scope of the mentor/mentee relationship. Mentors should be briefed about the agency's rules, and training should explain both ways in which boundaries can be tested and possible responses.

In order to distinguish mentor meetings from being seen as another reporting requirement, Ready4Work participants set the topics for discussion during mentoring meetings. Program sites believe that if the participants find the meetings valuable, then they will continue to participate and possibly build a longstanding relationship that will make a positive difference in their lives.¹²

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Further Resources:

Court Services & Offender Supervision Agency for the District of Columbia's Faith Community Partnership website: <http://www.csosa.gov/>

Federal Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated: www.fcnetwork.org

Girl Scouts of America's [Girl Scouts Beyond Bars](http://www.girlscouts.org) Program: www.girlscouts.org

National Mentoring Partnership: www.mentoring.org

White House Faith Based & Community Initiatives ~ Prisoner Reentry Initiative:
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/pri.html>

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¹ Rose, Dina and Todd Clear. *Incarceration, Reentry and Social Capital: Social Networks in the Balance*. Paper prepared for the "From Prison to Home" Conference. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. January 2002.

² Carlton, Adrienne. *Who Mentored You?!*, Journal of Family and Consumer Science, January 2007. Vol. 99, Issue 1.

³ Rhodes, Jean. *Benefits of Mentoring*. Research Corner – Mentoring.org:

http://www.mentoring.org/access_research/benefits/

⁴ Evaluations of the effectiveness of mentoring programs for children with incarcerated parents reveal mixed effects. While many programs are evaluated by the number of matches they make, there is evidence that the duration of the relationship is important and that short-lived matches may actually be detrimental to the children.

Rhodes, Jean. *Mentoring Children of Prisoners*. Research Corner – Mentoring.org:

http://www.mentoring.org/access_research/prisoners/

⁵ According to the Federal Resource Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents, programs that mentor children of incarcerated parents should build awareness among the mentors of the "impact of parental incarceration on child development, family dynamics and the parent-child relationship. Engaging a child in a mentoring program creates an opportunity to engage the incarcerated parent as well. Including parents helps to improve or repair the bond between parent and child and open up a dialogue around needs and expectations. Girl Scouts Beyond Bars (GSBB) has taken an innovative approach to mentoring that provides supports to young girls with incarcerated mothers while strengthening the bond between mother and daughter. Started in 1992 as a partnership between the Girl Scouts and the National Institute of Justice, GSBB hosts mother/daughter troop meetings at correctional facilities. Incarcerated mothers are given the opportunity to lead troop meetings where they develop and demonstrate leadership, parenting, and conflict resolution skills. This program expands the role that mothers and daughters are able to play in each other's lives. A young girl can see her mother as not just a prisoner but also as a person who provides guidance and support and has skills and knowledge to share. These Girl Scouts participate in a support group of girls with incarcerated mothers and spend time with their incarcerated mothers with troop leaders guiding them and serving as positive role models. Facilities that host GSBB report fewer problems and infractions from the incarcerated mothers who participate in program. Currently, 28 states have GSBB programs serving more than 800 girls and their mothers each year. For more information, go to: [Girl Scouts Beyond Bars](http://www.girlscouts.org/beyond-bars).

⁶ Rhodes, Jean. *Spanning the Gender Gap in Mentoring*. Research Corner – Mentoring.org:

http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/research_corner/spanning_the_gender_gap_in_mentoring.php?pid=all

⁷ Bloom, Barbara. Barbara Owen and Stephanie Covington. *Gender-Responsive Strategies: Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders*. National Institute of Corrections, July 2003.

⁸ Direct quote – *Gender-Responsive Strategies* pg. 54.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jucovy, Linda. *Just Out: Early Lessons from the Ready4Work Prisoner Reentry Initiative*. Public/ Private Ventures, February 2006.

¹¹ Organizations that work with this population are increasingly recognizing the impact of language. The Women's Prison Association refrains from referring to women with criminal justice involvement as ex-cons, felons or ex-offenders. These words focus on the women's past mistakes and not her present self or future opportunities. More constructive phrases such as formerly incarcerated women/person or women/person with criminal justice involvement emphasize the fact that she is first and foremost a person.

¹² Information in sections was taken from WPA staff interviews with Brenda Pearson and Robin Ransome and from Linda Jucovy's *Just Out*.