

## A Case Study

# Reentry to Workforce Partnership



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This case study was  
sponsored by The Thomas  
Scattergood Behavioral  
Health Foundation

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## INTRODUCTION

Francis Lawn<sup>1</sup> was feeling very optimistic about the new program he was managing. It was June 2010, and the first participants of an innovative workforce training program operated by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS) called Roots to Re-Entry (R2R) were completing the 14-week training and preparing to graduate. The graduates, all recently released from the Philadelphia Prison System (PPS), started in the R2R program while still in prison to gain skills that would allow for employment in the landscape and horticulture industry. By connecting to employment immediately upon release, it was believed that these men would then be able to access other support services in the City and that this combination would keep them from recidivating.

R2R grew out of the PHS City Harvest program, a hands-on horticulture and landscape skills program that works with inmates in the Alternative and Special Detention (ASD) division of the PPS. R2R extends the City Harvest training to include on-the-job training during work release and places participants in jobs with local landscape contract employers. The program's pre- and post-release span and job placement component were innovative. Everyone – including the funders, the Prison, the Public Defenders and PHS – were excited about the potential results. “Green jobs initiatives like City Harvest and Roots to Re-Entry get at the heart of the PHS mission, which is to empower people and change lives through horticulture,” says PHS President Drew Becher. “When I was hired to run this program,” says Lawn, “the message I got was that *the job* was the missing piece to this puzzle. Recent research showed that employment was considered an important deterrent for going back to prison.” Lawn and his colleagues at PHS were confident that they were set for success.

Lawn was stunned when the first graduate went back to prison two weeks after his parole. What happened? What failed? Throughout the next year, other graduates followed. Although a number of the participants shared feedback about how helpful the program was to them, Lawn was still disheartened. If a job was not the silver bullet, he was determined to figure out what was.

Over the next four years the R2R program grew and changed to better serve individuals discharged from the PPS. New partners with additional programs came on board and the collective became known as the Reentry to Workforce (RTW) partnership. The RTW team learned significant lessons about what the barriers to successful reentry are and how a cross-sector partnership can work together effectively. They knew support services and coordination of those services were essential to success, but they didn't

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President, PHS

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Lawn is one of the authors of this paper.

know how to synchronize those services among the different partners. They assumed that pre- and post-release intervention would increase the impact for the participants, but they did not anticipate the extent of the complexity of the partnership. Most importantly, they realized that they must work together to identify the elements within the system that prevent coordination and develop solutions to address these deeply ingrained structures. This insight has led the RTW team to embark on a completely new approach to addressing complex social issues like reentry.

## **A SNAPSHOT: ROOTS TO REENTRY JOB TRAINING AND PLACEMENT PROGRAM**

### **PURPOSE**

To give inmates a chance to develop new skills and gain hands-on landscaping and horticulture experience, as well as life skills and job placement opportunities upon their release.

### **TARGET POPULATION**

Candidates selected for the program are non-violent offenders on work release from the Philadelphia Prison System between the ages of 18 and 45 with a basic level of literacy and a strong interest in working in the landscaping industry. These persons tend to be poor, low-skilled individuals who face limited employment prospects upon reentry.

### **PROGRAM STRUCTURE**

- ✦ 14-week job training program teaching landscaping/horticulture and job readiness skills
- ✦ Starts pre-release and continues for two years post-release
- ✦ Provides direct support services including health education, literacy, occupational therapy services, peer counseling, and case management to help access other support services as needed

### **PROGRAM PARTNERS**

Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, Federation of Neighborhood Centers, The Philadelphia Prison System, The Office of the District Attorney City of Philadelphia, Defender Association of Philadelphia, Adult Probation and Parole, Thomas Jefferson University and Hospital, KJK Associates, Moon Site Management, Inc., and Liberty Tree and Landscape Management

### **FUNDING PARTNERS**

The Prison Board of Trustees, The Thomas Scattergood Behavioral Health Foundation, The Philadelphia Foundation (including general funding and the David S. Mathers fund), Job Opportunity Investment Network, The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Boeing Company, 1830 Family Foundation, JP Morgan Chase & Company, JP Morgan Chase Foundation, United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, The Methodist Hospital Foundation, GlaxoSmithKline, Independence Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

### **UNIQUE MODEL FEATURES**

- ✦ Deep employer commitment to placing and hiring participants upon graduation
- ✦ Seamless pathway from prison to employment, including life skills training and wrap-around supportive services after reentry and up to two years post-employment
- ✦ Integration of health screens and health education into all phases of reentry to workforce (i.e., pre-release job training program, work release job training program, transition into employment, and two years post-employment)
- ✦ Integration of occupational therapy that provides critical insight and evidence-based approaches for designing interventions that are tailored to participants' learning styles
- ✦ Integration of an evidence-based contextualized workforce literacy program into a job training program, starting pre-release and continuing through work release
- ✦ Best-practice training program that includes strong personal connections, hands-on experience at both a prison-based greenhouse and a public garden/park, and employer involvement in curriculum development
- ✦ Training directly benefits the community by beautifying public gardens/parks in underserved neighborhoods. Contributed value of trainee work significantly offsets program costs
- ✦ Integrated collaboration between a diverse and non-traditional group of partners and stakeholders

## BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP WILLING TO ADAPT AND LEARN

“No one would have guessed five years ago how this initiative would morph and change,” remarks Jennie Sparandara of the Job Opportunity Investment Network (JOIN), an early investor in R2R. JOIN was very interested in supporting a program that worked with participants before and after release. “This program needed flexible, thoughtful partners who are willing to keep exploring.” That commitment to confront the outcomes, learn from the failures as well as the successes, and adapt became the hallmark of the RTW partnership.

The process and framework built by the partnership fostered coordination and collective learning. These changes have improved the RTW partnership and have had larger systems impact by influencing the processes and programming of other efforts to benefit people returning from prison. “We knew we had to surround these people with support services. We thought the job was the last piece of the puzzle,” explains Joe Pyle, President of the Thomas Scattergood Foundation, another founding funder. “Our theory was that with a job, all the services that were out there would align. We didn’t realize how difficult it would be for people who are just released to access these services and how inflexible the system was to adapting to their needs.”

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Jennie Sparandara  
Director, JOIN

### REDUCING RECIDIVISM: FACTORS OF SUCCESS

**Links to jobs:** PHS learned that just offering a job training program (through the City Harvest program) without a link to a job was not enough.

**Support to “show up” for the job:** PHS learned that the graduates had many obstacles to overcome to be able to show up consistently for the job.

**Responsive to the individual:** The Federation of Neighborhood Centers (FNC) learned to extend their learning style support to the employers when employees ran into difficulties at work.

**Coordinated case management:** Five partners agreed to streamline case management to avoid duplicating efforts.

**Compassionate and individualized engagement:** FNC learned that building caring relationships with participants prior to release, and continuing them post release, helped to establish support systems and prosocial ties that help them avoid criminal activity.

**Magnify importance of physical and mental health to job retention:** Partners learned that integrating health care services into a job training program and post-employment supportive services enhanced the importance and relevance of attaining and maintaining good health among the participants.



## FINDING A FLEXIBLE PARTNER COMMITTED TO CONTINUOUS LEARNING

After the initial failure as graduates returned to prison, PHS determined that they needed to address the issues of accessing support beyond a job. They put pressure on the service providers to adapt their process to remove the excessive hurdles, but some were not able or willing to adapt. In response, PHS sought a new partner who could be flexible in service delivery to meet the needs of the individual.

Ken Kolodziej of KJK Associates, one of the program partners and an employer of R2R graduates, helped to facilitate the connection between PHS and the Federation of Neighborhood Centers (FNC), a network of twelve neighborhood centers in Philadelphia. In 2011, FNC received a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to design, implement and test the Career Support Network (CSN), an innovative workforce model that attacks and overcomes unemployment in targeted populations with high incidence of job loss in the first year after being newly hired. CSN accomplishes this mission by integrating mental and physical health services, chronic disease self-management, occupational counseling, and peer support into job training programs and post-employment supportive services. The CSN offers a new, much needed holistic approach that directly links mental and physical health and employment, thereby addressing a critical gap in the current workforce development system.

CSN grew out of FNC's Green Job Readiness Partnership (GJRP), whose purpose was to develop and implement a coordinated infrastructure to assess new and marginally employed Philadelphia workers and connect them to pipelines for advancement in green jobs. JOIN, a major investor of the project, saw the potential impact of integrating workforce literacy, occupational skills training, job readiness and case management into workforce development programs. Lessons learned from the GJRP led to the creation of the CSN.

PHS met with FNC to learn more about the CSN program, and they agreed they could benefit the people returning to the community from prison by working together. The CSN program turned out to be a good fit. The FNC

### CREATING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS: FACTORS OF SUCCESS

**Identifying partners with services that align:** The first set of supporting services partners that PHS brought on were not a good fit because they were unable to adapt their approaches to the needs of the participants and other partners.

**Recruiting partners to remove barriers:** Some participants who were doing well and wanted to finish the program were not able to because they could not attain work release. A new partner, the District Attorney's Office, was recruited to address this barrier.

**Involving funders as strategic partners:** Funders joined the learning process, contributing their expertise and strategic thinking, instead of getting results at the end of the program.

**Creating tools to coordinate activities:** Discussions during partner meetings were not enough; the partners needed visuals of how the participant experienced their activities during pre and post-release to truly align programs/services among the partners.

**Involving people with lived experience:** To more efficiently and effectively meet the needs of people released from prison, they needed to be members of the partnership.

**Providing structure to think strategically:** The focus stayed tactical until a process for identifying and addressing the most important issues resulted in strategic dialogue.

team became a flexible, thoughtful collaborator that shared PHS's commitment to continuous learning and process improvement.

### IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS WITH NEEDED INFLUENCE

In order to set up the participants for success post-release, PHS works with the Prison and the Defender Association to identify strong candidates for the program. This level of partner engagement in the criminal justice system from the beginning of a job training program was critical to success and had not been attempted before at PPS.

But the partnership soon realized that the timing of engaging partners needed to be adjusted. R2R was facing a frustrating roadblock when some participants could not secure work release on time, leaving them unable to complete the on-the-job phase of the program. This caused several issues. Prisoners had to drop out of the program once work release was delayed or denied; thus, the investment in training was lost. It also had a damaging effect on the inmates, whose hopes had been raised, perpetuating their distrust in “the system.” With the early participants, PHS was working with the Prison and the Defender Association of Philadelphia to identify strong candidates for the program. The District Attorney's (DA) Office became involved four weeks into the program when they applied for work release and parole. Instead, PPS and the Defender Association suggested inviting the DA to join the partnership. They agreed, and as selection began for the next group of participants, the DA became part of the process, helping to identify which candidates might not qualify for work release and parole within the needed timeframe.

Although it took a year to get the timing of the selection process steps fully aligned, this collaboration model is now used by other PPS release programs. This close collaboration among three criminal justice organizations and a nonprofit provider was a significant change in how those entities had worked in the system prior to this program. “They’ve been a fantastic partner to us,” confirms Louis Giorla, Commissioner of the Prison, about PHS. “Working so closely with the courts so they are paroled when they complete the program has created an entire sequence that is seamless, and that’s extremely important.”

### FUNDERS WILLING TO BE STRATEGIC PARTNERS

After five years, the partnership has raised over \$900,000 from more than a dozen funders<sup>2</sup>. Many of the funders first attracted by the innovative model have stayed on board because they have gained invaluable knowledge and experience. They have learned how a cross-sector partnership can make powerful systems changes that can in turn remove barriers to success for people returning from prison.

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Commissioner, PPS

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<sup>2</sup> See list of funders on page 2 of this paper.

As it turned out, one of the most engaging innovations was the commitment of the partners to continuous learning. Funders were invited to attend the quarterly strategy meetings. Many responded enthusiastically, asking probing questions and sharing insights. Partners were grateful for the real-time feedback, incorporating these perspectives into their improvement plans. “When PHS and the Prison started this program, we were aiming to make an important difference for a small group of men leaving prison,” explains PHS’s Bob Grossmann, Director, Vacant Land Program at PHS. “The funders thought we could sustain something more expansive and so the program grew.”

Joe Pyle, President of The Thomas Scattergood Foundation, shares his important learning: “We thought that being connected to a job would mean that everything else would fall into place. But when people are discharged from prison, their lives are highly disorganized (it’s not that they are disorganized people, but the events create a situation that is highly disorganized). If we don’t have a system that is coordinated and so creates the structure they need to be successful, we won’t see the change we are trying to enable.”

#### INCLUDING THE VOICE OF PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Early in the process, RTW included graduates from the program in the planning meetings. Their perspective provided important feedback that shaped the improvements the partnership made over the years. “One of the aspects of this initiative that has most impressed me has been the level of involvement of people with the lived experience of making the transition from prison back into the community,” states Ana Lisa Yoder, Director of Grantmaking and Special Projects at The Philadelphia Foundation. “At each meeting they are well represented and their voices are heard and respected.” At a meeting where the partners were strategizing how to recruit for the upcoming training, the past participants helped the group understand the level of influence peers’ opinions have. They shifted the focus of the recruitment efforts so that potential participants could speak informally to graduates rather than just give a short talk within the formal presentation.

“Most of our experiences when we try to work with others are that people automatically assume that we are a problem,” shares Lionel Wiley, who was released from PPS in March 2014. “Being around the table and having people want to hear what we have to say is very different. And I’m constantly amazed at how much I learn at each meeting with so many perspectives being shared.”

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Lionel Wiley

Person with Lived Experience

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## CREATING A STRUCTURE TO SUPPORT ALIGNMENT BETWEEN PARTNERS

As the RTW partnership grew, partners continued to discuss how to create more benefits for the participants. They were surprised to discover that the new partnership revealed how much they needed to improve their own processes that were impeding the group effort.

The partners in the program were very engaged, attending monthly Advisory Council meetings to get updates and coordinate activities. But even with this investment of time and their good intentions, tight coordination proved to be elusive and partners became frustrated with gaps in information needed to complete their part of the program. Participants expressed frustration at overlaps between program elements and unclear expectations.

To help resolve these issues, Diane Cornman-Levy<sup>3</sup>, the Executive Director of FNC, recommended bringing in Strategy Arts, a consulting firm with experience working with cross-sector partnerships. “We have great partners at the table who are committed to working together, but don’t know how to work across sectors,” expressed Cornman-Levy. Strategy Arts worked with the team over the next year to build a structure to align the partner activities. They used principles of the Collective Impact model<sup>4</sup> including developing a common agenda, a shared measurement system, and a method for aligning activities. “The partnership with FNC and Strategy Arts changed everything for us,” says Grossmann. “Their work enabled all the partners to sit down and discuss the issues and utilize our experiences.”

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Bob Grossman

Director, Vacant Land Program, PHS

Strategy Arts led the group through an alignment exercise where the partners created a workflow map from the participants’ perspective. After interviewing each partner and creating a preliminary map, a group review allowed partnership members to immediately identify how to enhance the program. Focusing on the participant experience enabled specific conversations about how to better set up the participant for success in gaining and keeping employment. Moreover, it created a safe place for difficult conversations about partner expectations by having an objective visual of what the participant is experiencing. The workflow map is an evolving tool, with the partners continuing to refer to and update it over time.

To address the overlap and gaps among the eight different program elements, Strategy Arts developed program profiles that each program partner completed with objectives, program requirements and a detailed description of the program content. In an intensive working session the partners reviewed each profile, deepening their understanding of the

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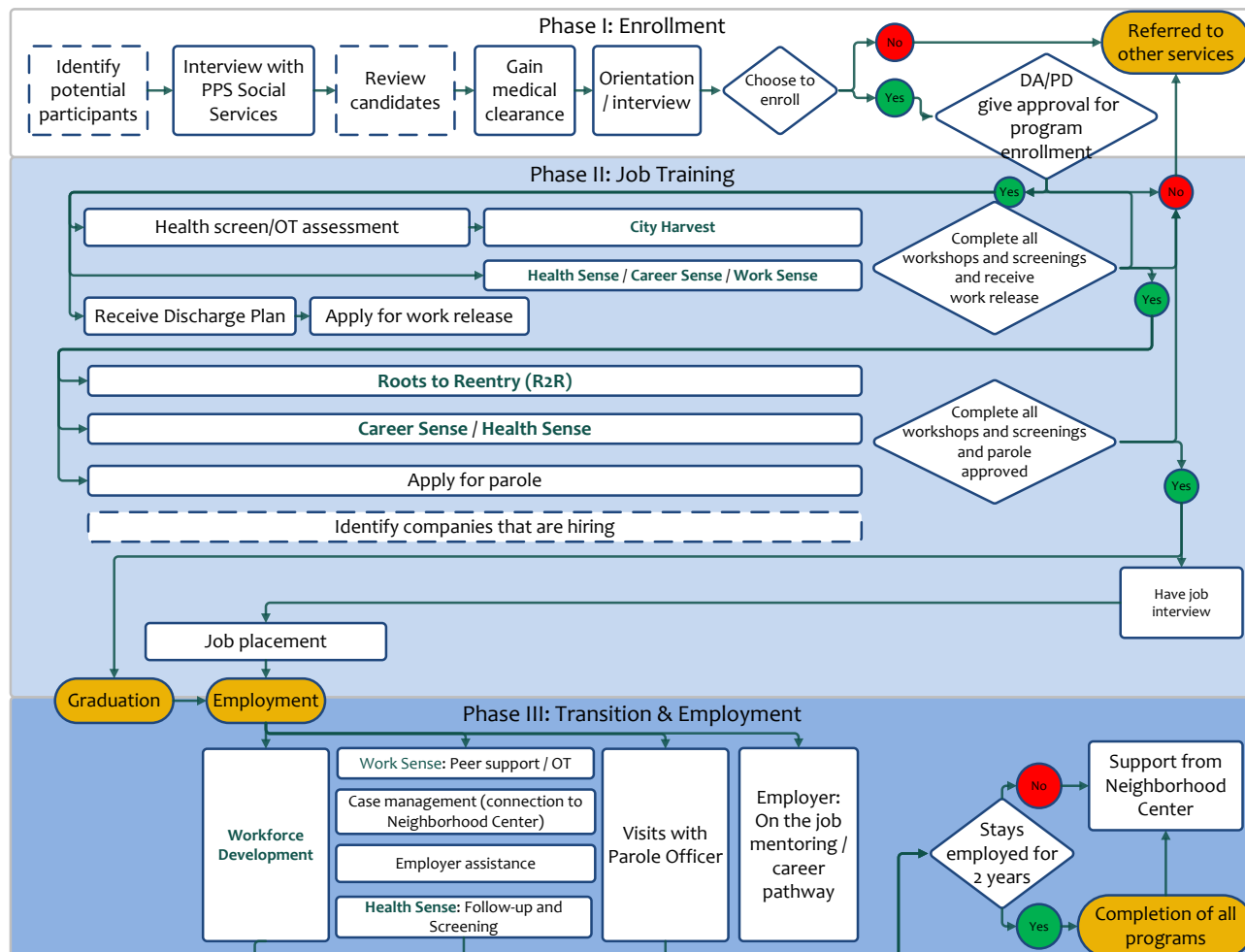
<sup>3</sup> Diane Cornman-Levy is one of the authors of this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Kania, John and Kramer, Mark. 2011. Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Winter 2011: 36-41.



complementary services provided by other programs and asking probing questions about existing and potential coordination points. These profiles are also living documents that exist on a shared document platform that all partners can access.

## WORKFLOW MAP OVERVIEW PAGE



The alignment processes and tools provided the structure that partners needed to fully understand how their activities could best be aligned to benefit participants.

## STRUCTURED PROCESS TO CONTINUALLY EVALUATE THE PARTNERSHIP'S ACTIVITIES

When Strategy Arts began working with the partnership, the Advisory Council meetings were primarily tactical in nature. Everyone was open to changing and improving the program, but there was no clearly delineated process to support the intensive analysis that needed to happen in order to identify strategies with the most promise for improving program outcomes. Quarterly strategy meetings were established, and monthly meetings remained focused on operational coordination. Shared measures were established and

a dashboard developed to allow the partners to have an in-depth learning conversation based on a shared understanding of the program's outcomes. Careful design and skilled facilitation of the strategy meetings built a culture of trust and a space for collective learning. This approach allowed the group to identify strategies with the most promise for positive impact, and a place to evaluate the level of success of those changes.

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## WHAT DO PEOPLE RETURNING FROM PRISON NEED TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

Using the workflow diagram and the other alignment tools, the partners were able to make improvements in coordinating, integrating and monitoring services so that the services were responsive to each individual's strengths, personality, learning style, learning capacity, motivation, and behavioral health needs. This also allowed the partners to ensure that participants were able to access appropriate services.

### SERVICES THAT ARE RESPONSIVE TO THE INDIVIDUAL

An Occupational Therapist (OT) from Thomas Jefferson University conducted learning style assessments at the beginning of each R2R program so that participants, job trainers, and employers could understand how participants best learned. This approach is based on the Responsivity Principle of accounting for an individual's abilities and learning styles when designing treatment interventions.<sup>5</sup> Job trainers then tailored their training to better match the participant's learning style. The OT also provided coaching to employers in how to provide instructions, taking the learning style of the participant into account. The CSN team integrated contextualized literacy and academics into the beginning of the program so all program leaders could take into account each participant's learning abilities, learning capacity, and motivation.

Byron Cotter, Director of the Alternative Sentencing Unit with the Defender Association of Philadelphia, emphasizes how the knowledge gained from the partnership enabled the public defenders to provide personalized service and really get to know the clients. "It's exciting to work so closely with the clients," Cotter remarks. "The participants would often feel tentative in the beginning, but they began to grow and mature as the program evolved." Many participants would even keep in contact with the defenders after parole.

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<sup>5</sup> Duran, Le'Ann; Plotkin, Martha; Potter, Phoebe and Rosen, Henry. *Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies: Reducing Recidivism and Promoting Job Readiness*. NY: The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2013.

## A UNIFIED APPROACH TO CASE MANAGEMENT

Having a wide range of support services meant multiple organizations performing case management for their specific area. The workflow analysis revealed that participants were completing four different action plans that were only partially supported with an ongoing case manager. The partners developed a unified action plan that all stakeholders would use. They appointed one person as the lead case manager and began having bi-weekly case management meetings with the health and support services providers.

Significant systems change occurred when the case management team began to coordinate with the parole officers. For example, participants often had parole requirements that conflicted with work responsibilities or other needs. CSN realized they needed to provide the parole officers training and education about the program. Now case managers and parole officers exchange information on each case at the beginning of parole. Consequently, the case management team and parole officers reinforce each other's activities, including coordinating schedules that allow people returning from prison to work while addressing other needs such as counseling, health care appointments, legal issues, and family needs.

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## WHAT WE STILL NEED TO LEARN

Approximately 40,000 individuals are released into Philadelphia from federal and state prisons and local jails each year, according to a 2011 Economy League report.<sup>6</sup> In 2010 nearly 6% of the city's budget was spent on jails.

JOIN's Jennie Sparandara reflects that the partners' willingness to engage in discussion of how to make the RTW program work was incredible, but she cautions that there is more work to do. "We've learned a lot, but we need to continue to build our understanding of how people being discharged from prison connect to work. As a community, we can do a lot better."

"Despite the fact that we've been successful, we have a ways to go," says Commissioner Louis Giorla. "Selection and support are working, but the jobs piece is a tougher nut to crack than we realized." Giorla believes building public acceptance is an important next step.

Scattergood's Joe Pyle reflects on the partnership's learning: "We realized our theory that support services would fall naturally in line was wrong. This requires a massive level of coordination." Pyle is impressed by the coordination that the partnership has created over the past four years.

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*"Now they are poised to take this learning to the next level to make wider change in the reentry system."*

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Joe Pyle  
President, Scattergood Foundation

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<sup>6</sup> Economy League of Greater Philadelphia. *Economic Benefits of Employing Formerly Incarcerated Individuals in Philadelphia: Executive Summary*. Philadelphia, PA, 2011.

“Now they are poised to take this learning to the next level to make wider change in the reentry system.”

FNC is taking the lead on creating this expanded effort, building on the knowledge gained by the RTW partnership (which will continue to run the R2R and CSN programs). They are teaming up with Strategy Arts and PHS to implement a full Collective Impact initiative to transform the reentry system in Philadelphia. The Collective Impact approach will bring a broader set of organizations and individuals from different sectors together to define common goals for this transformation. It then provides a framework for aligning their efforts and learning together using common measures of success.

The effort began in April 2014 with the convening of a larger group of stakeholders doing work in reentry in Philadelphia to create a transformative vision and theory of change, two elements of a Collective Impact Common Agenda. Currently, a smaller group of stakeholders is beginning an intensive effort to define and map the full reentry system. Shortly, a wider group of stakeholders will be engaged to set priorities for the changes needed to improve, and ultimately transform, this system. “As providers we often ask our participants to adapt and change, but we aren’t willing to admit where we need to change,” remarks Diane Cornman-Levy, Executive Director of FNC. “The Collective Impact initiative is changing that. With each meeting we are all learning how we need to improve our processes, both individually and collectively.”

The success of the RTW partnership can be largely attributed to cross-sector learning. Perspectives from government, businesses, service providers, and persons with lived experience are critical to be able to see the full issue from all sides. As we embark on the next phase of our journey, we plan to continue to document and share what we learn.

We need to continue to learn how to create intensive coordination to improve our system to truly support people coming out of the prison system. How do we each need to change to realize our vision of building a just, compassionate and humane reentry system, where people with the lived experience of being incarcerated and other stakeholders work together in order to unlock the potential of every person returning from prison through embarking on a journey of discovering and living their passions and dreams? Through a holistic and collaborative process, people who have been incarcerated will achieve stable, meaningful, and productive lives for themselves, their families, and their communities. This will make Philadelphia a safer, healthier, and stronger community for all of us.

If you are interested in joining the Collective Impact initiative or learning more, please contact any of the authors.

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Diane Cornman-Levy  
Executive Director, FNC

#### FOCUS AREAS MOVING FORWARD

- ✦ Determine how to increase the number of employers willing to hire formerly incarcerated individuals
- ✦ Identify meaningful measures of success and develop a process for sharing those with the expanding network
- ✦ Develop a strategy for sustained funding of both the programming and the infrastructure required for an effective partnership
- ✦ Develop and implement a communications plan to support stakeholder collaboration and collective learning
- ✦ Build public will to support the partnership’s efforts