

OVERVIEW

Many men and women who are re-entering communities after incarceration struggle to connect to the programs that can support their success. Of particular concern is the higher risk that people leaving prison face for food insecurity and health crises, both of which can block progress toward stable employment or lead to recidivism.¹ In light of the finding by the N.C. Department of Commerce that people with criminal records face tougher job prospects in recent years, the role of income supports to provide a bridge until employment can be secured is critical.²

Across the country — in states as varied as Montana, New York, South Dakota, and Vermont — communities are developing programs that link prisoners pre-release to the income supports that can support their re-entry process and provide critical resources to meet their most basic needs.

These programs have primarily focused on the potential for pre-enrollment in SNAP and Medicaid so people leaving prison will have these benefits available immediately upon release. While there are various ways to design the program, the critical opportunity for communities is to provide people with the tools pre-release that will support their success in the community upon their release from prison.

HOW IT WORKS

Programs are designed in various ways to support access to benefits.³ At the most basic level, prisoners preparing for release within 60 to 30 days could meet with a case manager to prepare for release and to complete the necessary paperwork to begin the process of enrollment. In this model, the person leaving prison will still be required to deliver the

1 https://jobgap2013.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/ajs_job_after_jail_report_final_pdf.pdf and <https://sph.unc.edu/sph-news/former-inmates-at-high-risk-for-opioid-overdose-following-prison-release/>

2 <https://www.nccommerce.com/blog/2018/10/22/out-prison-out-work-new-normal-ex-offenders-north-carolina>

3 <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/how-snap-can-better-serve-the-formerly-incarcerated>

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WHAT YOU CAN DO

Local re-entry councils across the state are being formed to coordinate services for people re-entering communities after prison. These councils should be the first stop in raising the potential of a pre-enrollment program at your local correctional facilities. You can find more on existing councils here: <https://ncsecondchance.org/resources/local-reentry-councils/>.

If your community does not have a re-entry council, the next step could be connecting with your local food bank to explore the potential for initiating a program at your correctional facility, as well as engaging your local Department of Social Services office.

More broadly, communicating to your community that providing income supports to people leaving prison is a critical tool in supporting their rehabilitation and that saving taxpayer dollars by reducing recidivism can go a long way in building support for these efforts.

HOW IT WORKS (CONT'D)

completed application to the local DSS office upon release or to electronically file, as is possible in North Carolina, the application after their release date.

Other models embraced in other states have been facilitated by the state and include the pursuit of a federal waiver allowing case managers to pre-enroll prisoners in programs — SNAP and Medicaid — and secure the necessary supporting documentation required for the application to be filed. In this model, the person leaves prison with the EBT card and Medicaid coverage in hand.

IMPACTS IN N.C. TO DATE

A promising program in Wake County has been piloted between the Department of Public Safety and the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina. This initial pilot has informed work by the MANNA FoodBank in Asheville to establish a relationship with the Swannanoa Correctional Center for Women, which results in MANNA maintaining a relationship with women post-release, thereby ensuring transitional food security.

— *Written by Alexandra Sirota with Aisha Benton*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Legal Services Guide to Prison and Public Benefits — <http://www.ncids.org/defender%20training/2013SpringConf/PublicBenefits.pdf>

N.C. Department of Public Safety, Transition Services — <https://www.ncdps.gov/adult-corrections/prisons/transition-services>

A Guide to Release Planning for Corrections Facilities from the Urban Institute — <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/32056/411767-Release-Planning-for-Successful-Reentry.PDF>