

Online Friday, April 20, 2007

The Newport Daily News

(401) 849-3300

Newport, Rhode Island - America's First Resort



- [Compare Online](#)
- [Plasma TVs](#)
- [Dvd Players](#)
- [Digital Camcorders](#)
- [Nokia Cell Phones](#)
- [Laptop Computers](#)

ARCHIVES

Program gives freed convicts help they need

In November 2004, a panel discussion at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center in Newport focused on how to help ex-convicts become a part of their communities after they are released from prison.

The panelists - including local law enforcement and health officials and a former prisoner - agreed that a community-based network to support ex-convicts was needed to help them in their quests to kick addictions, find jobs and care for their families - in other words, to make the transition from prison back into the community.

That forum was part of a statewide effort. Today, Newport is home to the only active prisoner re-entry program in the state.

The Newport County Re-entry Council brings together officials from the Newport County Community Mental Health Center, CODAC, Newport Hospital, the Urban League, the Housing Hotline, Newport police, a probation supervisor, a prison discharge planner, a social worker from the East Bay Community Action Program, and Turning Around Ministries - a faith-based community outreach program associated with four local churches.

Together, they are helping people like 51-year-old Virginia Cherry and 41-year-old Keith Lambert, both of whom were featured in stories in Thursday's Daily News, get back on their feet - and stay on them.

"They provided shelter for me. They provided me food, transportation, guidance," Cherry said of Turning Around Ministries. "They did everything like a big-sister setting."

When people get out of prison, they first are faced with the basic problems of housing and employment. Quite a few have substance-abuse problems and will need treatment. Some need mental-health counseling.

"We need to realize these people can't get back into society unless we allow them to," said Cheryl Newsome, coordinator for the local program. "If we don't give them another chance, all they're going to do is what they know."

And that - otherwise known as recidivism - is not good for the individual or the community.

A third of those released from the Adult Correctional Institutions in Cranston will return to prison within a year; more than half will be back behind bars within three years, according to statistics from the state. Lowering the rate of recidivism has a twofold impact: Reducing the overall cost of crime on communities, and reducing the taxpayer-borne costs of the correctional system, about \$40,000 per prisoner.

That's what makes the Newport County Re-entry Council so valuable, both for former prisoners and for the community.

We are glad to see such a program in Newport County. We hope it will receive the

support it needs from employers, landlords and other stakeholders in the community, and will serve as a model for other areas of the state.

- April 20, 2007

[Email this story](#) | [Print this story](#) | [Return to editorial index](#)

[[Home](#)] [[Local News](#)] [[Sports](#)] [[Business](#)] [[Obituaries](#)] [[Editorial](#)] [[Election](#)] [[Subscribe](#)]
[[Classifieds](#)] [[Place an Ad](#)] [[Back Issues](#)] [[Real Estate Map](#)] [[About Us](#)] [[Contact Us](#)]
[[Finance News](#)] [[World News](#)] [[Health](#)]

© 2001 - 2007. The Newport Daily News. All Rights Reserved.