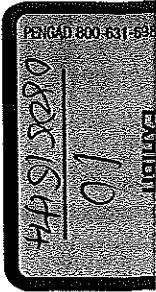


Pawlette O. Beacoats

Item #8



Question #10, in addressing the barriers of formerly incarcerated persons with a history of substance abuse I would like to say that laws concerning public assistance have recently changed however work must still be done in order to ensure the process is being continued with. I speak of the recent change in the public assistance, Medicaid, and Food stamp cases which when an individual becomes incarcerated are no longer being discontinued, merely suspended. This being a new process to our county it is important at this stage to ensure that when an individual goes to have the suspension lifted there are no unnecessary measures that will prolong this process. The unnecessary time that it could take to get this suspension lifted could make the difference in the individual being rearrested and or returning to substance abuse. What I deem as unnecessary are continuous return appointments to the Department of Health and Human Services, (DHHS), without reinstating one's benefits. If the case was open prior to incarceration the client should not have to go through the same measures for reinstating as they did upon an initial opening.

Along those same lines, in the most recent past a single person with a history of substance abuse would have to wait a forty five day period in order to receive public assistance benefits, (rental payment), in theory once approved he would be eligible to receive food stamps and Medicaid immediately.

The issue of housing is posing a problem for some males who were once incarcerated. Under DHHS guidelines if it is affordable, meaning it falls within the calculated amount for a specific size family he will only be able to access certain areas for housing, generally these areas are those with an open drug distribution, hence making it unsafe for the person with a history of substance abuse and quite possibly unstable.

Specific legislation is needed to address the issue of access for medical and outpatient services for both substance abusers as well as those individuals with a dual diagnosis. It is important that

these individuals are able to see a doctor as soon as possible for medication and also to begin treatment in outpatient which is what will need to happen before DHHS will officially approve a case. It is also needed for individuals coming from incarceration to be able to access sound, stable and safe housing which would at least provide an opportunity for one to stabilize himself in the community with strong sober community supports while he builds a recovery network. This could be either in a halfway house, transitional living home, or an apartment in a safe neighborhood. Often halfway or transitional living is usually the best housing option for an individual reentering our community from incarceration and a past history of alcohol or substance abuse.

Currently, as a credentialed alcohol and substance abuse counselor, Monroe County has provided the opportunity for us to provide CASAC assessments to our people who are incarcerated. This means that individuals who have a prior history of substance abuse are able to have the assessment while still incarcerated, and once the name of that individual hits the ARES system, (which is the system DHHS uses in order to monitor client progress in a treatment facility out in the community), it begins the clock for the forty five day waiting period. The benefit of this is that the client has a letter of appointment in his hand upon release from the correctional facility for both DHHS, and whichever treatment center he will attending, in addition landlords could theoretically be paid much sooner if that forty five day clock has begun. This is certainly a privilege that we at the correctional facility do not take for granted. This will certainly help our population in the end and tax payers as well, because the chances of those individuals with a substance abuse history falling through the cracks decreases, which means safer streets, safer children, and safer communities.

There are programs available for employment and training through social services for formerly incarcerated persons with a history of substance abuse. DHHS participants are able to receive assistance in interviewing skills, resume writing, and other kinds of vocational preparation through the job club that is right on site. Additionally, some may be referred to Rochester Works, Boces, Salvation Army or VESID, where they can receive vocational training or assistance with school.

The impact that these programs have on drug abuse, relapse, and recidivism are tremendous. In assisting people who have this type of history with vocational, educational programs it opens up doors of opportunity, providing the person with higher recovery capital. Having a career, or business affords one to be financially stable, and perhaps more responsible, with the ultimate goal of recovery maintenance.

To improve employment and training opportunities for this population we must continue to somehow fund programs that are bridging the gap between this population and education/training. These reentry programs, (YORP CATHOLIC FAMILY SVC, PROJECT REDIRECT). In addition, specific legislation should address employers asking for criminal history on applications. Employers should not have access to this information unless it was violent or less than five years old. This would give individuals with a past criminal history a chance at making a fair and honest living.

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