



Faith-Based Mentoring Initiative

Frequently Asked Questions

Background

Each year, over 2,000 adults are released from prison and return to District of Columbia neighborhoods. Many have substance abuse problems and lack important job and literacy skills. Many of these men and women have dysfunctional support systems and have had little or no contact with their nuclear families. Research has consistently shown that positive relationships are critical to successful reentry. In short, the absence of positive relationships and support services portend relapse into patterns of drug use and criminal behavior that will lead to reincarceration.

What is CSOSA's Re-Entry Vision?

CSOSA seeks to assist Previously Incarcerated Persons (PIPs) in the transition from incarceration to "freedom." Through the provision of effective supervision and support services, CSOSA seeks to help these individuals become law abiding, productive members of the community. CSOSA's goal is to enhance public safety through effective supervision and successful re-entry. Therefore, CSOSA has designated three clusters within the city to provide mentoring, resources, and services to offenders on supervision in partnership with faith-based institutions. Each cluster has a Cluster Coordinator and an Outreach Coordinator.

What is the Faith-Based Mentoring Initiative?

The Faith-Based Mentoring Initiative links re-entering men and women with concerned members of the faith community who offer support, guidance and assistance during the various phases of re-entry. During the transition from prison to neighborhood, PIPs can be overwhelmed by problems, both large and small. Mentors work with CSOs to assist mentees in solving these problems. Most importantly, mentors provide individual support and guidance. They facilitate the returning individual's connection to, and acceptance by, the caring community of a faith institution. In short, they help to bridge the gap between prison and community by welcoming men and women home and helping them start a new life.

Mentors and Outreach Coordinators for the FBI also provide information on community resources and assist with referrals and placements. Many returning offenders need help with housing, family reunification, pro-social skills, job and interview skills, and relapse prevention. The FBI responds to these needs.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible, an offender must satisfy all of the following conditions:

- Six months or more remaining on supervision;
- Scores in the medium to high risk level on the CSOSA Screener; and
- Maintains compliance with the drug testing schedule (negative urine testing for the past three months; limited non-compliance may be considered on a case-by-case basis).

The offender may have:

- Job retention difficulties;
- Unstable living arrangements; and/or
- Lack of family/social connection/support.

Offenders are not eligible to participate if they are sex offenders; suffer from untreated or unstable mental health conditions; or present a pattern of violent felony convictions. CSOSA provides specialized and intense services to these offenders through the Community Supervision teams.

How does an offender get a mentor?

If the offender enters CSOSA supervision from prison, CSOSA's Transitional Intervention for Parole Supervision (TIPS) and the general Community Supervision Officers (CSOs) develop an individualized pre-release plan. This plan is prepared in collaboration with Institutional Case Management staff approximately 30-120 days prior to the offender's release. The plan will include referral for mentoring services if the offender meets the program eligibility criteria. If the offender is released from prison without a stay in a Residential Re-Entry Center (halfway house) or an approved release plan, the General Supervision CSO will evaluate the offender for mentoring services early in the supervision process, when the offender's risk and needs are assessed. Probation cases also may be referred by General Supervision CSOs.

The Mentoring Liaison Coordinator (MSLC) receives and reviews all referrals. If any referrals are found to be ineligible, they are returned to the CSO and may be scheduled for review with the supervisor. The MSLC, CSO, SCSO, and Cluster Coordinator review and discuss all eligible referrals; the MSLC then recommends a specific mentor based on mentor profiles maintained by the Cluster Coordinator.

After the prospective mentee receives an orientation on the program, the mentor and mentee have their first meeting and begin the mentoring relationship.

How does a mentee meet his/her mentor(s)?

Mentors and mentees meet for the first time at a Family Support Meeting. The mentee's family members or significant other(s) are invited to this meeting. The meeting is arranged within the first few weeks of the PIP's return to the District of Columbia.

Following this initial meeting, the PIP and mentor(s) will communicate monthly, and probably more frequently. Two weeks prior to release from the halfway house, a discharge staffing will be held. The TIPS CSO, General Supervision CSO, the mentor group and the mentee will review and discuss the initial supervision plan. At that point, the PIP will set up an initial post-release meeting with his/her mentor(s).

How often, and where, will the mentee meet his/her mentor(s)?

Mentors are required to meet with mentees for at least two (2) hours per week for six months. Meetings are held in public places (faith institutions, CSOSA events and facilities). Mentor monthly reports and staffings with the CSO are required to maintain accountability and continuity. Mentors also meet monthly to share resources and experiences and develop the Cluster's resources.

How long does mentoring last?

Mentors have been asked to make at least a six-month commitment.

What kind of activities will the mentor and mentee do together?

That is largely up to the mentee and the mentor(s). The relationship may center on a specific issue such as employment or may be more general, providing the mentee with someone with whom s/he can talk. During the early meetings, the mentee and the mentor(s) will discuss how mentoring can be most helpful. The mentee may be invited to attend social or entertainment events with the mentor(s).

Mentors do not lend or give money or significant gifts. While the mentor may offer to help with a transportation need or accompany the mentee to an appointment or interview, s/he is also free to decline to do so. The mentor is available to support the mentee

What happens if the mentee and mentor do not get along?

Not every mentor/mentee relationship will result in a friendship. In fact, the mentee often may not want to hear what the mentors have to say. However, the mentors are available to support the mentee in responsible, crime-free behavior. Mentors are there to help the mentee make the right choices and point out the wrong ones. It is less important that mentees like their mentor as a friend than it is that mentees respect and learn from the mentors.

CSOSA recognizes that occasionally a matching will not work out. A conflict may emerge. In that case the CSO and faith institution coordinator will work with the mentee and mentor(s) to determine if the matter can be resolved or another match would be more beneficial.

Does the mentor meet the mentee's family?

At the initial family support meeting, the mentor will meet the important people in the mentee's life. Subsequently, the extent of interaction is largely up to the mentee and the mentor. Mentees may or may not find it helpful to use the mentor as a sounding board or intermediary in some family issues. Mentees and mentors should discuss what works best for them and keep the CSO informed.

Does having a mentor mean that the mentee must attend church?

Mentors are active members of faith institutions and believe strongly in the value of spiritual connection and ministry. By agreeing to participate in the Initiative, the mentee agrees to respect the mentors' religious beliefs and values. Mentors will probably invite the mentee to attend religious services and related activities. Mentees are free to decline such invitations.

What is the relationship of the mentor with the CSO?

The mentor(s) and the CSO will have regular contact. In addition, the mentor is aware of the conditions of the mentees' release. The mentor is obligated to report any violation of those conditions to the cognizant CSO. The mentor is also aware of confidentiality requirements and will not divulge any confidential to inappropriate persons

For More Information Contact:

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