



State of New Jersey

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Rutgers Study: Women in NJ Parole Program Less Likely to Re-Offend

FORGE Associated With Significant Reduction in Recidivism for Female Parolees

NEWARK – Female parolees enrolled in FORGE, a comprehensive, gender-based reentry initiative, have a lower recidivism rate than female parolees not enrolled in the program, according to research announced today by the Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations.

“This is a clear measure of success under Governor Corzine’s crime plan,” State Parole Board Chairman Yolette C. Ross said. “We have firsthand experience that FORGE helps women take charge of their lives, and even develop pride and responsibility. We know that FORGE helps women stop the revolving door of recidivism. Today, this scientific research is further proof that our statewide reentry efforts work.”

Heather Tubman-Carbone of the Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations’ Economic Development Research Group presented the study today at Essex County College, during a panel discussion on the value of gender-responsive reentry practices.

The study compared data on the success rates of female ex-offenders in Essex County, both before and after FORGE began in 2004 was made mandatory for all female parolees in the county in 2006. Among other findings, the study noted:

- Parole supervision, even without FORGE, is associated with a reduction in recidivism. Within four years of release from prison, female parolees not enrolled in FORGE had a lower re-arrest rate (48 percent) than those who “maxed out,” or left prison without parole supervision (66 percent).
- FORGE, and especially the combination of FORGE with Parole Accountability Conference Team (PACT) support group meetings for female parolees, are associated with an even greater reduction in recidivism. Specifically:
- Female parolees who were enrolled in FORGE but not enrolled in PACT groups had a 42 percent re-arrest rate within four years of release from prison.
- Female parolees who were enrolled in FORGE and in PACT groups had a significantly lower re-arrest rate – 28 percent – within the same time frame.

FORGE, or Female Offender Reentry Group Effort, is a coalition of state, county, municipal and non-profit agencies that provides case management and a full range of reentry services at one location, at Essex County College. FORGE reinforces the State Parole Board’s law enforcement supervision with several strengths. These include a gender-responsive approach that recognizes the specific types of trauma and other unique barriers that female ex-offenders face; a “one-stop shopping” location for assistance as varied as acquiring legal identification, housing, and medical assistance.

(more)

PACT meetings are support group sessions held one evening a month for female parolees enrolled in FORGE. The participants commiserate about the challenges and difficulties they face when returning home from prison; share their successes for mutual support and inspiration; remind each other of their responsibilities to society; and discuss helpful details about various resources available in the community. PACT meetings also allow parole officials to receive insights about reentry from those directly experiencing it – the parolees themselves.

FORGE began with the observations of a New Jersey parole officer who noted that the women on her caseload faced unique challenges – often related to domestic violence, childhood sexual abuse and other forms of trauma – and that they often did not fare as well as men in various community-based reentry programs. In 2006, FORGE became a requirement for all female parolees living in Essex County.

Heather Tubman-Carbone, author of the report, said, “Of all women on the FORGE caseload, those attending PACT meetings are less likely to recidivate. The PACT meetings seem to give them a safe place to talk about their struggles in a relationship of equals, which is different from their normal relationship with a parole officer or counselor. In this setting they are more likely to open up and acknowledge their own problems; and acknowledgement is the first step in doing something to solve them.”

A video statement by Tonya Tucker, a former parolee and one of the initial FORGE clients, is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HMU6HjiHAM>. The 3 minute statement was recorded Friday, October 23, 2009. Ms. Tucker recently graduated from Essex County College is now a student at Rutgers-Newark. She also works as a resource specialist for FORGE, and provides help and encouragement to women enrolled in the program.

Dr. Bonita Veysey, Interim Dean of the Rutgers University School of Criminal Justice, said, “We know that the pathways into crime are different for women than they are for men, and services and supports for women returning to their families and home communities after incarceration must reflect the fact that the pathways back also differ.”

Dr. Veysey added, “From a national perspective, re-entry programs that are holistic and address the many varied needs as well as support the natural strengths and resiliencies of women appear to have superior results, and FORGE is one such program. My congratulations to all the FORGE staff and participants. I am happy to know that New Jersey continues to provide leadership that improves the lives of formerly incarcerated women, their families and communities.”

With funding support from the Nicholson Foundation, the FORGE program at Essex County College has assisted nearly 1,500 women ranging in age from their early 20s to 60 since 2007. “We help parolees, those on probation and even walk-ins who need some help in turning their lives around,” said Katherine Knox, FORGE director at the college’s WISE Women’s Center. “Many of these women never have had real direction or a role model in their lives, and we’re trying to provide a little of that needed support,” she added, noting that some participants also complete their GED and then pursue associate degree programs at Essex County College.

“We are providing these women one of the pathways they need in order to re-enter the community as contributing members of society,” said Susan McDonnell, director the college’s Women’s Center. She said all FORGE participants have available to them the full resources of the college to further help them succeed.

The New Jersey State Parole Board (SPB) is New Jersey’s lead reentry agency, and works to ensure ex-prisoners return to society as law-abiding citizens. As required by law, appointed Parole Board Members and staff conduct more than 20,000 hearings per year, solicit input from victims and decide parole matters. SPB’s sworn parole officers supervise more than 15,000 offenders statewide. In addition, SPB is New Jersey’s primary law enforcement agency responsible for sex offender supervision. SPB officers are also active partners with multiple Federal, State and local law enforcement agencies and task forces. Finally, SPB’s Community Programs Unit partners with government, non-profit and private agencies to connect ex-prisoners with vocational, mental health and related services, targeted to break the cycle of recidivism and reduce risk of crime.

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