



Bexar County Commissioners Court

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Reentry Program now has a permanent one-stop shop to serve released inmates

Bexar County officials celebrated the grand opening of the Reentry Services Center that is tucked inside an old renovated warehouse near the Adult Detention Center. The one-stop resource center provides services to inmates being released from the jail and other correctional centers to promote successful reentry into the community.

More than 50,000 men and women are released into the Bexar County community each year from federal prison, state jail and county jail. Individuals who are released without any connection to employment, housing, education, and social services are more likely to reoffend, creating a cycle of incarceration that becomes increasingly difficult to reverse with each offense.

The Reentry Program and the Center were born out of the Reentry Council, a group of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, faith-based programs and private citizens. The various committees of the Council focus on employment and education, housing and social services, substance abuse and mental health, restorative justice, and prostitution prevention and intervention, among other issues that can pose barriers to a recently released inmate's success.

"Not too long ago Bexar County was looking at an overcrowded jail and the prospect of building a new jail if we didn't get our jail population in check," said County Judge Nelson Wolff. "We discovered a large portion of the inmates had been in that jail before, so we knew something had to be done to help these people reintegrate to society so they won't reoffend and continue the cycle."

Programs like the specialty treatment courts, mental health diversion and reentry are helping keep the jail population well under capacity, Wolff added.

Individuals in the county jail are identified to participate in reentry services before release in a few ways: those who are classified as being in high need for services, individuals sentenced to more than 6 months in the jail, participants in the Mothers And Their Children or Papas And Their Children (MATCH/PATCH) programs, veterans, and those with a mental health diagnosis requiring follow-up services and case management. Reentry specialists work with jail staff to develop a transitional plan while the person is still incarcerated and then a community plan that will carry them through after release.

“By working with jail staff and beginning reentry before the inmate is released, we are able to create a warm hand off to connect individuals with employment, housing, GED, life skills and recovery resources like AA and NA,” said Mike Lozito, Director of Judicial Services. “The Reentry Services Center will build on the services clients receive before their release.”

The \$1.5 million center includes small meeting rooms for classes like anger management, or Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings. The space also includes private offices for nonprofit partner agencies to meet with clients. Participants will have access to computers to set up and check email, work on resumes, and look for jobs. And a University Health System doctor will work out of the center to handle mental health referrals and prescription management. This helps decrease the amount of traveling participants must do now to follow their community plans.

Venus Anderson entered the criminal justice system at age 16 and was in and out of jail until her last offense at age 30. Being released from jail was like going back to prison with all the negative influences surrounding her in her family’s home. The Reentry Program helped her find employment, and the former public housing tenant recently purchased her own home. Anderson will graduate from Texas A&M University - San Antonio on May 20.

“This county is a national leader in getting smart on crime,” said Commissioner Tommy Calvert. “It’s not just government, but civic organizations and businesses. There are 200 businesses that have told the county they will be a part of our reentry effort to get the formerly incarcerated jobs. When I became chair of the Reentry Council in 2015, my goal was to double that to 400. Today we are at 374 businesses and we will pass 400 soon, and we will be able to help more people become contributors to society rather than a drain on society.”

The Reentry Services Center is at 222 S. Comal Street, next door to the Drug Treatment Court and the soon-to-open Video Visitation Center.

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