



# **Large Jail Network Bulletin**



# Work Release Program Provides Support for Community Re-Entry

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**T**he St. Louis County Work Release Center was opened on June 30, 1975, on the third floor of the county's Old Courthouse Building. The Center is one of five divisions of the St. Louis County Department of Justice Services and currently houses 142 males and twenty-two females. The facility includes five dormitories and two large, multi-purpose rooms used for programming.

Work release participants are referred from several sources:

- Offenders who are sentenced to county jail and have full-time jobs or are involved in full-time education may be sentenced directly to the work release program.
- Offenders from the Adult Correctional Institution/Annex may be referred to the center after they complete programs needed to make them eligible for work release.
- Offenders from the federal system are housed under a contract with the U.S. Bureau of Prisons.

The Work Release Center's program is innovative. Its primary objective is to help each resident establish a realistic employment or vocational goal and work toward achieving it. The program emphasizes the need for residents to learn the skills needed to achieve their goals, and it is structured to reward positive, self-sufficient behavior.

By providing programs and support that foster individual responsibility, the Work Release Center prepares residents for successful community re-entry as tax-paying, law-abiding citizens rather than as economic and social liabilities,

## Programs and Services

The Work Release Center's programs and services are geared toward equipping residents for success in the community. Residents are given the opportunity to seek jobs, continue any prior full-time employment, pursue educational or vocational training, and engage in alcohol, drug, and family counseling.

The treatment modalities used by the work release staff include behavior modification and reality therapy. The objective of these modalities is to

teach the residents to look at the way they behave, to earn rewards, and to make plans to change negative behavior.

**Employment.** Each year, the more than 600 participants in Work Release reimburse the county for the cost of their incarceration by paying room and board. The money collected for room and board is placed in the St. Louis County General Revenue Fund. Participants also pay federal, state, and Social

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Security taxes from their employment, and are encouraged to save money and fulfill their personal obligations. In 1992, the Work Release Center collected \$144,000 in rent, and residents volunteered 60,000 hours of work in the community.

For residents who lack a job when entering the center, an important aspect of the program is its requirement that residents secure their own jobs with only limited assistance from the staff. A resident who gains a job under these circumstances experiences a feeling of accomplishment in demonstrating responsible behavior.

**Educational development.** The Work Release Center supplements institutional education and training with community resources.

- General education classes- G.E.D. classes are required for all residents who do not have a high school diploma or a G.E.D. certificate. Classes are held at the Center and are taught by teachers from the local school district.
- Principles of the Alphabet Literacy System (P.A.L.S.) program - This interactive instruction program combines advanced technology with effective teaching materials. The P.A.L.S. system is designed to teach adolescent and adult functional illiterates to write, read, and touch-type. It teaches non-readers to read by teaching them to write. By the end of the program, participants should be able to spell phonetically most English words they can say. The P.A.L.S. system can awaken a resident's desire to read and write; it can also improve participants' self-esteem by giving a feeling of greater control over their lives and by training them to use computers.

**Alcohol- and drug-related services.**

Residents are randomly testing for alcohol and drug use. Violations are considered serious and may result in immediate suspension of offenders' privileges. Residents whose work release privileges have been revoked remain at the Center on housed status until they complete their suspensions.

Residents with drug use violations may also be suspended from the center and transferred to our medium security facility for at least thirty days. Return is not automatic; the sentencing judge is notified of the suspension and may revoke the offender's Work Release privilege. Referrals to in-patient treatment facilities and out-patient counseling may be required before the offender may return to the Center.

Several substance abuse treatment and counseling programs are available:

- Alcoholics Anonymous-All residents with an alcohol-related offense are required to attend weekly meetings.
- Drug/alcohol class-A four-session drug/alcohol education class is mandatory for each resident. The class provides information on chemical dependency and the physical and psychological effects of substance abuse.
- Recovery Group and Adult Children of Alcoholics-These groups assist residents in dealing with the recovery process after out-patient counseling. The ACOA group focuses on residents' family alcohol history and its effect on them as adults. Both groups are conducted in-house and facilitated by a department social worker.

- Substance abuse referrals-Individuals may also be referred to community groups such as Metroplex and Narcotics Anonymous.

**Other programs.** A variety of additional programs assist residents with specific needs:

- Psychological services-Evaluation and counseling are available at the Center, and referrals also are made to community agencies.
- Credit counseling-A monthly seminar on budgeting is presented.
- Cage your Rage-This anger management video developed by the American Correctional Association helps offenders recognize their angry feelings, learn the causes of those feelings, and deal with them in a responsible way.
- Breaking Barriers-Created by ex-offender Gordon Graham, this program deals with the realities of returning to society after doing time.
- Nutrition-This two-session class focuses on developing healthy eating habits.
- Bringing Up Father-This program helps young, disadvantaged fathers form families and care for their children. Participants are considered fathers first, providers second. Emphasis is placed on the importance of a child's social well-being.

- Parenting-This class exposes male and female residents to good parenting skills. Sessions focus on discipline, communication, and decision-making.
- Bible study-Religious study classes are offered weekly and staffed by volunteers from the religious community.

### Work Release's Success

The work release program has been highly beneficial both to participants and the community:

- It helps residents with private-sector employment to continue to be tax-paying members of society.
- Because residents reimburse the county for their room and board, the work release program helps St. Louis County recover some costs of incarceration.
- Private-sector employment is complemented and supported by educational programming, vocational counseling, alcohol/drug counseling, referrals to appropriate community agencies, and other programming designed to meet the needs of each resident.
- Finally, Work Release residents have the opportunity to obtain jobs and attend school before being released into the community.

We believe the success of the program can be attributed to the emphasis we place on individual responsibility.

**O**ver the last three years, Work Release has achieved unprecedented success in terms of residents completing the program with full-time private sector employment or full-time participation in an academic or vocational school. In 1992, 85 percent of the population completed the Work Release Program with full-time activity.

We are proud of St. Louis County's Work Release Program, not only because of its success rate, but also because residents leave with all the tools necessary to make a positive contribution to the community. The choice is entirely up to them.

For further information, contact Linda Navetta, Manager, St. Louis County Work Release Center, 7900 Forsyth, St. Louis, Missouri, 63105; (314) 889-2369. ■

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