



Meeting Summary January 19, 2022

Members Present: Dennis Ritchie, Mary Lucas, Mane Martirosyan, Liz McQuillen, Robert Greenwell, Patti Echsner, Demond Bush, Amelia Speers, and Terrie Willis.

Guests and Staff Present: Tyler Dennison, Jessie Halladay, Wayne Sartin, Matthew Aaron, and Millie Stevens.

I. Welcome/Call to Order

Dennis Ritchie opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and reminded all attendees to stay on mute throughout the meeting unless presenting or speaking.

II. Approval of the December 1, 2021 Meeting Summary

The December 1, 2021 meeting summary was unanimously approved as submitted.

III. Opportunity Network Updates

A. New Member Introduction

Dennis introduced the Opportunity Network's newest board member, Demond Bush. Demond is a Program Recruitment Specialist with Goodwill Industries of Kentucky. Dennis spoke very highly of Demond and says that Demond is very passionate about his work with justice-involved individuals and will make a wonderful addition to the Opportunity Network.

Demond then introduced himself to the group and said he is excited to join the group and help make positive changes in the lives of justice-involved individuals. Demond spoke to the group about his history with the justice system, after spending 25 years incarcerated. After leaving prison, Demond said he worried that his criminal record would prevent him from getting a second chance within the community, which led him to Goodwill Industries. After participating in some of the programs Goodwill offered, Demond was encouraged to apply to be a Career Coach. Demond stated that he understands the challenges and rejection that second chance individuals often face, and he wants to help these individuals find their passion and succeed. Demond thanked Dennis for being a mentor to him and hopes he can be that for someone else.

B. Reentry Workbook Project Update

Dennis then turned it over to Mane Martirosyan with the Louisville Metro Department of Corrections (LMDC), to share an update on the reentry workbook project.

Mane informed the group that in 2021, 66 workbooks were disseminated inside LMDC. In addition to these workbooks, Mane said that she has identified new opportunities to distribute the workbooks inside the jail.

LMDC's Familiar Faces and Action and Community Transition (F2ACT) Program was recently expanded, which will allow Mane and her team to utilize the workbooks while helping inmates plan for their discharge from the jail. Outreach specialists inside the jail are now able to walk inmates through the book and assist with any questions or concerns they may have. Additionally, the Outreach Specialists will be able to follow up with individuals, via telephone once they are released from custody. Mane informed the group that since utilizing the workbooks in conjunction with the F2ACT Program, she and her team have been able to disseminate 34 workbooks.

Additionally, Mane stated that the workbooks will be distributed inside the jail's reentry program dorm, though this process has been delayed because of the pandemic. Mane says that she is optimistic that this will begin sometime this month. The dorm will house inmates who are close to their release date and inmates will utilize the workbooks with assistance from the program coordinators. Mane is hopeful that these new avenues will mean more responses for the Opportunity Network's research partners at Indiana University.

Tyler Dennison also informed the group that the workbook research study was recently extended for a second time. The study will now conclude at the end of June 2022. Tyler stated that the study was extended in hope that more individuals will follow up with the research team. Tyler says that this will likely be the final time that the study is extended. At this time, workbooks are only being disseminated inside LMDC, but this could change if more responses are needed. There has been interest in the workbooks from other local jails and these jails may soon be included in the research study.

C. Legislative Workgroup Update

Dennis then introduced Jessie Halladay, Chairperson of the Opportunity Network's Legislative Workgroup, to provide an update on the group's recent meeting. The workgroup previously met in late December and members discussed the upcoming legislative session in Frankfort. One bill that the workgroup is keeping a close eye on is House Bill 218, which would reduce the fees and waiting period associated with felony expungements. This bill was introduced to the House on January 5, 2022, and currently has four sponsors. This bill has the potential to help a great number of justice-involved citizens in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, which is why the Opportunity Network would like to speak out in favor of it. Jessie informed the group that letters have been drafted to the bill sponsors and if the group is in favor, the letters would be forwarded to the sponsors. The letters were included in the meeting packet for member review and there was no opposition to forwarding the letters. Tyler advised that he mail the letters out as soon as possible.

In addition to House Bill 218, Jessie stated that the workgroup is also monitoring any criminal justice-related bills that may be harmful for the justice-involved community.

IV. Group Discussion

Opportunity Network Strategic Plan

During last month's meeting, members discussed the Opportunity Network at the end of 2021 and some of its goals for 2022 and beyond. There wasn't enough time during that meeting to discuss the Network's strategic plan, so Dennis again introduced Jessie to discuss this.

Jessie opened by saying that she believes the Opportunity Network has done a wonderful job in staying focused and relevant, despite the global pandemic, which has forced the group to meet virtually for nearly two years. Prior to the pandemic, Opportunity Network staff and members sat down for a strategic planning meeting, which helped the Network craft its goals and focus. During that meeting, it was decided that the Network would focus on four primary goals:

- Promoting successful reentry
- Creating inclusive collaboration among its partners
- Advocating for statutes, regulations, and policies that reflect effective methods of successful reentry
- Operating from a strong organizational framework

Jessie commended the Network and its members for working toward these goals the last three years and stated that the organization can build on this going forward. Jessie informed the group that this is great opportunity for the Opportunity Network to expand its focus. Jessie stated that she hopes the Network can become more proactive in its approach to changing the conversation around reentry, whether it be through the Network's Legislative Workgroup, through networking, or through community events such as a resume-writing seminar or the Human Library idea, which has been discussed by members in the past.

Jessie then opened the discussion to the group and asked members to brainstorm some ideas or goals they feel the Opportunity Network should begin working toward.

Demond Bush proposed that the Network could address what reentry looks like in a post-COVID world. He worries that individuals are leaving incarceration with health concerns and lack the basic knowledge and resources needed to seek routine medical care. Demond says that the transition from incarceration back to the community is already a difficult one and is only made more challenging when you factor in the pandemic.

Mane Martirosyan says that in her opinion, a huge need is a residential placement for severely mentally ill individuals. Mane says that options are limited for these individuals, and they require assistance if they're going to successfully reintegrate back into the community.

Dennis Ritchie stated he agreed with Mane's assessment and says that housing in general is a major need when it pertains to the justice-involved community. He told the group that he would like to see more housing with programmatic requirements.

Dennis then recommended that all members come up with one or two ideas or goals they would like to see the Opportunity Network pursue and to forward those ideas to Tyler Dennison before the end of January. The ideas will then be presented to group members at the March Opportunity Network meeting, where members can the discuss the ideas and vote on which ones the Network should focus on in the future.

V. Adjourn

Dennis thanked everyone for attending the meeting and reminded everyone that the next scheduled meeting is Wednesday, March 16, 2022. Dennis reminded everyone that meetings will remain virtual until further notice. With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.