

**Testimony for the Hearing of the CT Legislature
Appropriations Committee on February 23, 2009
Given by Family ReEntry's Executive Director, Steve Lanza**

Good evening and thank you to all the members Appropriations Committee. We appreciate the significant challenges you face and appreciate your time, attention, and hard work.

I am Steve Lanza, Executive Director of Family ReEntry. Family ReEntry operates effective research-based reentry program under contract with the DOC and a number of critical cost-effective community justice programs under contract with CSSD. We support the work of other nonprofits and stakeholders through collaborative efforts like the Bridgeport Reentry Collaborative and the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits.

I am here to urge your support for retaining funding, and in selected cases increasing funding, for DOC and CSSD community programs that reduce recidivism, increase public safety and save tax dollars.

As an example of just one such program, I would like to share with you the inspiring results of work Family ReEntry is doing with its Fresh Start Community Reentry Programs as evidence of the importance of adequately funding community programs.

Yale research has observed a significant reduction in recidivism in our Fresh Start Reentry programs. A program description, research summary, and letter from Yale are attached for your review.

The key features of the Fresh Start program include:

- Emphasis on Early Engagement Prerelease
- Ex-Offenders Mentoring and Building Social Capital
- Involvement of the Ex-Offender's Family and the Community
- Creative Employment Solutions with Entrepreneurial Business operated by Fresh Start Enterprises

One of the most powerful predictors of success is sustainable, livable-wage employment. Providing funding for the training and employment for thousands of ex-offenders returning to their communities each year will have a multiplier effect in that people have jobs, are paying taxes and child support and child support arrearages, and public safety is increased while the costs of public safety are held constant or decreased.

Effective reentry and community justice programs have great long-term potential to dramatically reduce costs of incarceration, help individuals and their families, reduce risks for children, and improve at-risk neighborhoods all at the same time.

The success of all these efforts is best illustrated by the experience of Mr. James Ghant, now a full-time employee of Family ReEntry, who has joined me here today to share his story.

***Respectfully,
Steve Lanza
Executive Director, Family ReEntry, Inc.***

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Given by Family ReEntry's Crew Chief, James Ghant**

My name is James Ghant. I joined the Fresh Start program about 3 years ago while I was still at Webster Correctional Institution. I am now a member of the Family ReEntry staff as a crew supervisor leading other men towards a successful life. As a Fresh Start member, I played an instrumental role in starting up the Fresh Start entrepreneurial business, partnering with staff and other Fresh Start members. I am very proud of the business success that Fresh Start has become.

My experience has been extremely rewarding for me, without it I would never have been as successful as I am now. Working with the staff, in a family atmosphere, has helped tremendously in pointing me in the directions I needed to head toward. I would like to highlight some of the things I think are most powerful about Fresh Start:

- 1. Becoming a mentor to the other men coming out of prison has been without a doubt extremely powerful.** I get to see the changes in the men: I see hope where there was none, I see fathers where there weren't any, I see the importance of employment, not only to make a living, but to help them believe in themselves. I have seen these men give back to the community in which they live. Their own giving back empowers them to take control of their own lives.
- 2. The dedication and true concern that the staff takes in the lives of men coming home, truly does give them a fresh start at life.** It has been my experience that guys coming home from doing time, really do better in a family atmosphere. I know that Family ReEntry really does care about the lives of all these men. It helps them to recover, to recoup because it is really tough to succeed without it when you've got a record. Family ReEntry is that bridge in these men's lives to inspire hope, change and success.
- 3. Combining this solid home base with working is a winning combination.** Plus, it is very powerful to see these men connecting with their families, becoming fathers again, brothers again, husbands again and contributors to their whole communities.
- 4. I am very proud of the success of the business we have started and are running together.** In a little over a year we have generated over \$160,000 in revenue, 34 men have gone through the program, and are earning salaries, paying taxes and child support. We are looking forward to expanding the business and our training and job development. I know there are many men who would love to have this experience.

I would be very pleased to answer any questions you might have. Thank you for your time.

James Ghant, Family ReEntry

Family ReEntry's Community Reentry Initiatives

*"Building Communities – Not Prisons"*¹

Integrated Programs that increase public safety, reduce cost, improve quality of life in our communities, and address the collateral damage and unintended consequences of high rates of incarceration on the children and families – *thus stemming the intergenerational cycle of crime, violence, and abuse. Reducing recidivism by 41%!*

1. Fresh Start Enterprise House *"Building Community"*

Fresh Start Enterprise House is an innovative demonstration project designed to create sustainable community-based opportunities for successful reentry. Success is achieved by combining entrepreneurial employment and training, providing supportive services, interagency collaboration, and *creating a community* driven to succeed. The program has adopted the core values of the very successful **Delancey Street Foundation** model. Enterprise House creates an environment with high expectations for success and standards of behavior coupled with meaningful supports from role models, mentors, and the community. Enterprise House is a peer driven, professionally supported, positive pro-social environment. Enterprise House along with the Fresh Start Community Reentry Program, and Fresh Start Enterprises Entrepreneurial Employment and Training shifts the formerly incarcerated person from *"incarceration dependence to community integration and self-sufficiency"*². The community of successful ex-offenders is viewed as a sustainable resource and social capital that will create a web of supportive, role-model, mentoring relationships that will ensure successful reentry and help stem-the-tide of youth entering the criminal justice system.

2. Fresh Start Enterprises: *"The Power of Work"*

Fresh Start Enterprises creates employment opportunities that go well beyond a paycheck. Fresh Start Enterprises uses work as a powerful medium for initiating and sustaining positive change. We create the work environment (the "work crew"), that are positive support systems where men can learn necessary work skills, gain valuable work experience, create supportive peer relationships, learn and practice social skills, build self-confidence and self-esteem, and begin to mentor each other through encouragement of positive behavior, challenging negative attitudes, and celebrating personal and business success. Men become productive citizens, responsible providers, and role models and leaders in their communities. Fresh Start Enterprises provides opportunities to continue as crew chiefs and supervisors, launch entrepreneurial businesses, or enter a new career with solid work experience and positive work attitudes. In these ways *"the power of work"* is realized in the many benefits to the ex-offenders, their families, and their communities.

3. Fresh Start: Community Reentry Program *"Coming Home for Good"*

Family ReEntry's **Fresh Start** program in Bridgeport is the implementation of some of the best thinking and latest research in the field of prisoner reentry. **Fresh Start** begins identifying and assessing inmates three to six months prior to release and provides targeted services in-prison while paving-the-way in the community for their successful transition. During the first 90 days post-release, the time of greatest risk of re-offending, the program offers intensive services that adjust over time to the needs of the clients. The program is designed to comprehensively address the unique profile of each ex-offender. **Fresh Start** will work with approximately 300 Bridgeport bound male clients this year alone with the goal of expanding to scale. About 150 are part of a comprehensive longitudinal Yale University research study. The most recent Yale University research observed a 41% reduction in the rate of recidivism for the men in **Fresh Start** after 12 months or more, in the community, compared to state data.

¹ Quote from CT DOC Commissioner Theresa Lantz

² Quote inspired by CT DOC Commissioner Theresa Lantz

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Fresh Start Community Reentry Program

Evaluation Executive Summary

February 2009

Program Description

The Fresh Start Community Reentry Initiative is a pilot program designed to facilitate the transition of men from the Connecticut correctional system to the Greater Bridgeport community by establishing continuity between pre-release and post-release support services that are comprehensive and integrated.

The goals of the program are: 1) to reduce the recidivism by supporting the ex-offenders in the areas of employment, substance use/abuse supports/treatment, mental health supports/treatment, formal supports (case management, entitlements, housing, health care), and community supports; and 2) to create a replicable community-based reentry program model that can influence changes in Connecticut's reentry policies and practices.

Demographics

As of December 31st, 2008 a total of 153 participants were enrolled in the Fresh Start program. Of the enrolled participants, 117 have been released into the community. Of the 153 participants taking the pre-release assessment 108 (70.6%) were African American and 41 (26.8%) were Hispanic or Latino. The average age was 32 years old, with a range of 19 to 62 years. On average, the men in this program indicated that they had 2 children with a range of 0 to 8. One hundred and fourteen (74.5%) of the participants were fathers. The average length of incarceration was 24.2 months with a range of 1 to 228 months.

Education

More than half of the 153 clients (99, 64.7%) did not complete 12th grade. The mean level of education completed by the men was the 11th grade. Of the 99 clients who did not complete the 12th grade, 41 (41.4%) reported having a GED and the remaining 58 (58.6%) clients had not attained a GED by the time of pre-release assessment.

Employment

At intake, 105 (68.6%) clients reported being employed prior to incarceration. As of December 31, 2008 and based on information available for 67 of the 117 released

clients, 45 (67.2%) of the 67 clients with data available obtained employment, 19 (28.35%) were unemployed, and 3 (4.5%) reported having a disability which impeded them from acquiring or retaining employment.

Relapse prevention services

At intake, 68 (44.4%) clients reported using alcohol or drugs at least one to five times per week prior to incarceration. At the end of December 2008, based on 3,773 service logs, case managers reported addressing substance use and mental health issues with 49 (32.0%) of the clients.

Financial Data

At intake, 101 (66.0%) clients reported significant debt, and at least 34 (22.2%) reported outstanding child support payments.

Recidivism Risk

Age at first incarceration, multiple arrests and/or incarcerations, history of violent offenses, and history of probation or parole violations are key recidivism risk factors (Hare, 1991; Webster, Eaves, Douglas, & Wintrup, 1995).

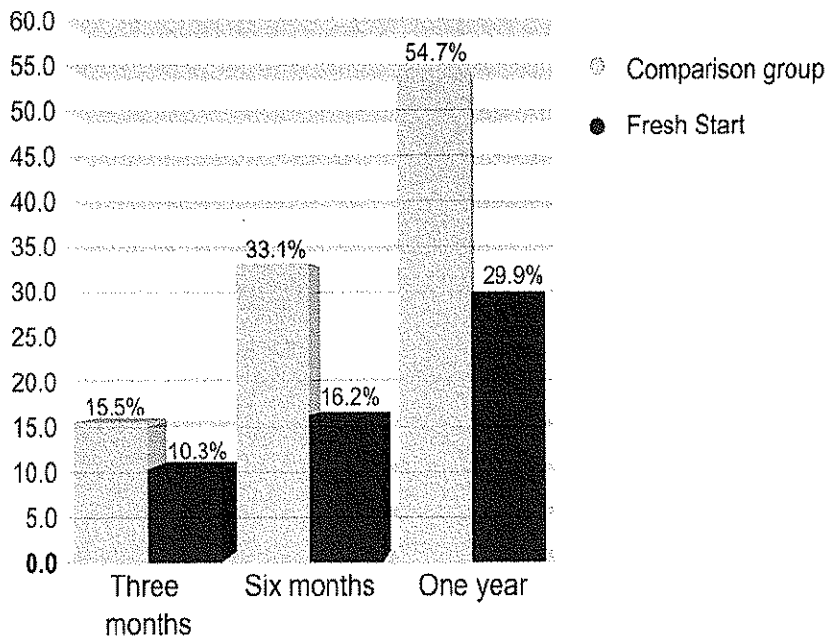
Of the 153 clients enrolled in the Fresh Start Initiative, nine (5.9%) clients did not endorse any risk factors. Sixteen (10.5%) clients endorsed at least one of the four risk factors, 47 (30.7%) clients endorsed at least two risk factors, 50 (32.7%) clients endorsed three of the four risk factors, and 31 (20.3%) clients endorsed all four risk factors.

Of the 60 clients released to the community who completed a release assessment, five (8.3%) did not endorse any of the four recidivism factors, six (10%) men endorsed at least one of the factors, 17 (28.3%) endorsed at least two risk factors, 17 (28.3%) endorsed three of the four risk factors, and 15 (25%) endorsed all four risk factors.

Among the 25 clients released to the community for three months or more who completed a three-month post-release assessment, one (4%) did not endorse any of the four recidivism factors, two (8%) men endorsed at least one of the factors, nine (36%) endorsed at least two risk factors, eight (32%) men endorsed three of the four risk factors, and five (20%) endorsed all four risk factors.

Outcome Data

Using cumulative counts, the following incarceration rates were observed for the men enrolled in the Fresh Start program: of the 117 released clients, 12 (10.3%) were re-arrested within a three-month exposure to the community, 12 (10.3%) were re-incarcerated; 19 (16.2%) were re-arrested within a six-month exposure to the community and 19 (16.2%) were re-incarcerated; and 35 (29.9%) clients were re-arrested within a twelve-month exposure to the community and 35 (29.9%) were re-incarcerated. At all three benchmarks (3 months, 6 months, and one year) a comparison group of inmates similar to the Fresh Start study cohort who were released from a DOC facility in 2004 shows higher rates of re-incarceration: 15.5%, 33.1%, and 54.7% respectively.



The 2007 Program Investigation and Review Committee Report contends that reconviction for and/or resentencing of a new crime defines recidivism. Based on this definition, the state of Connecticut reports an overall recidivism rate of 39%. In contrast, at the end of December 31st, 2008, 13 (11.1%) of 117 released Fresh Start participants had recidivated by being reconvicted of a new crime.

Entrepreneurship Training and Employment Pilot Initiative

During the fall of 2007, Fresh Start developed a pilot entrepreneurial training and employment component through the creation of Fresh Start Enterprises. This model is based in part on the concepts and practices cited in *Venturing beyond the Gates: Facilitating Successful Reentry with Entrepreneurship*, published by the Prisoner Reentry Institute of John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Throughout 2008 this venture trained and employed 34 participants. Expansion to scale is contingent on adequate funding for training costs.

Residential Services

In July 2008, Fresh Start started operating an eight bed housing facility. By December 31st, 2008, 13 men had received housing services; 11 (84.6%) experienced employment during their residence at this residential facility; 5 (38.5%) were remanded; and 6 (46.2%) transitioned into independent living.

February 20, 2009

Re: Letter of Support for Effective Community Programs such as Family ReEntry's Fresh Start Programs

In our capacity as evaluators for the Bridgeport Fresh Start Initiative we have worked closely with Family ReEntry in their efforts to address the needs of incarcerated men returning to the Bridgeport community. Family ReEntry has advanced the efforts to support the successful transition of men to the greater Bridgeport community. The collaboration between our work and Family ReEntry's efforts has been important in speaking to the value of State, community, and academic partnerships.

Yale University expects to continue its efforts in conducting both outcome and process evaluation research on Family ReEntry's Fresh Start Reentry Programs. The evaluation research will continue to be completed in collaboration with Family ReEntry and the CT DOC. It is our view that this partnership will help to further improve the effectiveness and efficiency of reentry for the region and the state.

Under the direction of Principal Investigator, Derrick Gordon, Ph.D. Yale University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry the evaluation efforts have been helpful in tracking Fresh Start's reentry activities across three highly successful and integrated programs: **Fresh Start's Community Reentry Program** – a nonresidential reentry program that has yielded significant reductions in recidivism when compared to DOC rates; **Fresh Start's Enterprise House** – an eight bed congregate supportive housing model based on the core principles of the nationally renowned Delancey Street Foundation Model; and **Fresh Start Enterprises** – an entrepreneurial training, employment, and business development program for formerly incarcerated men. The work of these integrated programs has grown out of national reentry data and recommendations. Collaboration in the development and implementation of these initiatives with the CT DOC has been a critical element of the success of these programs.

It is clear that Family ReEntry's program which has a comprehensive and holistic approach shows tremendous promise as a model for reentry. Data collected as of December 31st, 2008 suggests a 29.9% one-year post-release recidivism rate. This demonstrates progress when compared to the State of Connecticut's research study on 4,000 inmates where the one-year reconviction rate was 40% and the three-year recidivism rate was 70% (Legislative Program Review & Investigations Committee, 2001). We also observed a 54.7% one-year post-release rate of a similar group of CT inmates released in 2004. Building on this success, Family ReEntry has also expressed their intent to continue to develop effective and cost-efficient reentry services

that have the potential to help thousands of ex-offenders. In our opinion, Family ReEntry is an excellent organization dedicated to high quality programs and, in working with the CT DOC and other stakeholders, is poised to increase public safety and reduce costs. The integrated and comprehensive nature of Family ReEntry's efforts is fundamental to its success, especially the integration of reentry services with the *Fresh Start Enterprises*, a program that provides entrepreneurial training, employment, and business development to program participants.

Sincerely,

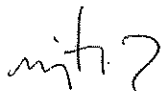


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