

## Promising Gender-Responsive, Community-Based Programs for Female Offenders in Massachusetts

In 2009-2010, Erika Kates, Ph.D. Project Director and Project Assistant, Crystal An visited a number of programs throughout the state that provided gender-responsive resources for female offenders. These programs were located in four counties – Bristol, Hampden, Middlesex, and Suffolk – and had been recommended for review by members of the Women’s Prison Coalition who were experts in the area of women offenders. The first task of the Women’s Prison Coalition was to arrive at a common definition of a gender-responsive, community-based program based on the literature, their experience, and their sense of priorities. The Coalition decided that such a program would:

1. Utilize gender-responsive and holistic treatment models
2. Create safe communities for women
3. Facilitate connections between women and their children
4. Facilitate connections between women and their children’s caregivers
5. Connect with Criminal Justice and Corrections institutions
6. Expand limited program resources with trained volunteers
7. Create an extensive resource network
8. Collect data on client characteristics and program outcomes
9. Miscellaneous (hire ex-offenders, have links with statewide networks, create a multicultural environment, and advocate for resources).

The primary project goal was to inform criminal justice and corrections personnel, policymakers, and others of 4-7 model programs offering resources in the communities in which many offenders lived. However, almost all the program identified by Coalition members met most, if not all of the criteria, and so the project report identified 17 programs, and highlighted 7.

Table 1. Program Specialties	No. of Programs
Housing/treatment/children	5
Housing/long term	2
Children/Family connections	4
Case-management/support	3
Education	1
Employment	1
Health	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>

As Table 1 shows they offered a wide range of critical resources to women. Programs usually offered several resources, e.g., substance and mental health treatment combined with housing for mothers and children.

Table 2. Gender-responsive, Community-based Criteria	No. of Programs
Relationship with CJ and Corrections	17
Utilize gender-responsive models	17
Create safe communities	16
Facilitate connections with children	10
Facilitate connections with caregivers	12
Create extensive resource network	12
Utilize volunteers	13
Collect data on clients and outcomes	16
Other	16

As Table 2 shows all the programs had developed relationships with CJ programs; 11 programs continued offering resources post-release; and five took referrals from the courts and police. Almost all collected data on outcomes, although few had resources to summarize data. All offered gender-responsive treatment/counseling approaches.  $\frac{3}{4}$  used volunteers,  $\frac{3}{4}$  worked with caregivers, and just over half worked with children.

Table 3. Program Names/locations	
1.	<b>Steppingstone</b> New Bedford
2.	<b>The Women's Center</b> New Bedford
3.	<b>YWCA</b> New Bedford
4.	<b>Program for Alcohol and Addictions</b> Step-up, New Bedford
5.	<b>Immigrants' Assistance Center</b> New Bedford
6.	<b>Square One, Turning Point, Fresh Start</b> Springfield
7.	<b>YWCA,</b> Springfield
8.	<b>After Incarceration Support Services</b> Springfield
9.	<b>Womanshelter/Companeras</b> Holyoke
10.	<b>McGrath House</b> Boston
11.	<b>Project Place</b> Boston
12.	<b>Boston Public Medical Health Center</b> Mom's Project, Boston
13.	<b>Action for Boston Community Development</b> RISE, ROSES, Boston
14.	<b>Boston University, Metropolitan College Prison Program,</b> Boston
15.	<b>Girl Scouts of Eastern MA</b> Girl Scouts Beyond Bars, Boston
16.	<b>Reentry Mentoring Program</b> Framingham
17.	<b>South Middlesex Opportunity Council</b> Women in Transition, Natick

**Gender-Responsive, Community-Based Programs make a significant contribution to gender-responsive programming:**

1. They provide key resources for women within correctional institutions and reentry initiatives, and address many of the key concerns of women offenders.
2. They often work in conjunction with each other, forming “resource clusters.”
3. Their interface between “inside” and “outside” corrections facilities increases the likelihood that women will obtain critical resources.
4. Corrections facilities’ accommodate community-based programs in different ways. Some are very porous – allowing easy access by programs staff to women offenders and for corrections staff to visit program sites; while other facilities are more wary of external staff and volunteers.
5. It is now recognized that the treatment of choice for women is now trauma-informed, holistic, and modeled on a relational-cultural approach
6. Some programs claim to have reduced recidivism rates through their efforts. Adequate resource provision for women offenders is still problematic.
7. Community-based programs are occasionally utilized as sentencing alternatives.

**Continuing Unmet Needs:**

There were many unmet needs programs cannot address with their limited funding and resources. Their priorities for women included:

- Housing
- Mental Health Resources
- Education, employment opportunities
- Dealing with CORI barriers
- Family/child visiting assistance
- Basic resources on leaving (Money, medication)
- Other: deportation, mentors, transgender offenders

**Policy Recommendations**

1. Disseminate project findings to community-based programs and correctional institutions.
2. Encourage discussion regarding their relationships and whether they could/should be strengthened.
3. Disseminate project findings and promising program models to police, probation, parole, and the judiciary to broaden their knowledge base of such programs and to encourage referrals to community-based programs.
4. Document how “program clusters” are able to maximize the benefits of local resources; identify the ‘focal’ agency and share this information with criminal justice and correction personnel.
5. Encourage correctional institutions and community-based programs to share their resource databases and to update resources for women using the gender-responsive criteria developed for this project.
6. Encourage evidence-based practice by collecting consistent data on program interventions and outcomes for women involved in these program models.
7. Continue to identify gender-responsive, community-based programs in Massachusetts.

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