

# Who's Assisting Justice-Involved Women Being Released?

By Dr. Pamela B. Jones, C.E.O. of Communities In Cooperation, Inc. (CIC.) Many thanks to our funders, donors, and "CIC's N.J. Women's Justice Service Providers Network Movement" partners (consisting of individuals and organizations working collaboratively to meet assessed needs).



## IN THIS ISSUE

NJ Women's Justice Service Provider Network Movement Kick-off Team: Thank you, First Lady, Tammy Murphy; Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver; Senator Weinberg; Asst. DOC Commissioner Dr. Darcella Sessomes; Honorary Chair and Council President Mildred Crump; and Public Affairs Executive Jeannine LaRue.

The Honorary Chair of Sisters Transitioning And Reintegrating Together, Newark Council President Mildred Crump, organized officials while CIC staff organized, planned, and established funding and evaluation methods to assess outcomes for the November wave of women being released state-wide from Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for women – CIC's targeted service population.

## The CIC S.T.A.R.T. Program

By Pamela Jones, Director, Jessica Jensen, Coordinator, & Athanasia Moore, MSW Intern

CIC has established a highly successful model to serve justice-involved women while the complexity can bring about challenges. Communities In Cooperation's Sisters Transitioning And Reintegrating Together (S.T.A.R.T.) program operates to service and support justice-involved women being released from Edna Mahan Correction Facility for Women (EMCF) both pre and post-release. Program offerings are tailored to meet their assessed needs (using case management with a mentor/life coach approach with services ranging from applying for public assistance; connections to educational institutions & health services; job readiness and life skills; securing employment; locating housing while offering wraparound services and support groups).

### Bill S2519 Created Waves of releases commencing in November 2020.

The COVID-19 death rate of inmates in New Jersey is one of the highest in the country. Governor Phil Murphy signed a first-in-the-nation bill (S2519) that reduced prison sentences; one means to minimize the coronavirus spread in NJ. It awards credits to certain inmates during New Jersey's public health emergency declared by the Governor. Bill (S2519) provided the remission of time from their sentences. The first wave of releases took place on November 4, 2020, to include an estimated 2,000 justice-involved individuals state-wide to include prisons, jails, and half-way houses releases. Anticipated in Q1, 2021, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of discharges.

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### CIC S.T.A.R.T. Program

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Wave of New Jersey Releases

Planning assistance for women being released from the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility was provided by Adrienne Bonds, Esq. and Pamela Gaston, Honorary Advisors of START. They facilitated the many tasks required to meet the largest number of women's unique needs to be served simultaneously in the program's history. A think-tank with the Executive Director Pamela Jones (affectionately known as 'Pastor Pam'), Jessica Jensen - Program Coordinator, and Rutgers M.S.W. intern - Athanasia Moore outlined the many details for planning execution, which resulted in unprecedented successes.

Critical to the programming was creating a service provider network in advance of release – a movement to ensure women receive needed services absent delays. All providers signed MOUs authorizing connection to external services to meet assessed needs and created a seamless continuum of care; to include but not be limited to a connection to medical, mental health, addiction, housing (one of the most challenging services), food & clothing, employment, and mentoring/life coaching services for each assessed participant.

CIC is not a novice regarding Women's Reentry and has taken a leading role in this area for more than a decade. Although highly successful, CIC can only service the population as funding allows, which is sparse.

Pastor Pam states, "Despite our success, the program lacks the funding to increase capacity to serve more reentry women. We limit our services to EMCF releases".

#### Packages Shipped to Women State-Wide to Meet Their Assessed Needs



Kudos to CIC staff. They assessed more than 50 women. All received a back-pack filled with a variety of toiletry items on their day of release (meeting each releasee in the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility parking lot). Subsequently, CIC provided clothing, coats, hats, gloves, underclothes, pajamas, food cards, masks and hand sanitizer, bus tickets, books, and more. These items were packaged and delivered by mail for everyone's well-being during COVID to meet the individually evaluated needs. Our Network of Service Providers Movement participants gladly donated items to reduce the expense burden overall. The service providers were given specific sizes etc., for their donation pick-up on specified dates. This organized method made packaging and delivery a smooth process. Package tracking ensured our communication to the recipient's would be timely, clear, and useful. Intermittent needs are still being met. CIC has completed enrollment for life skills and job readiness/employment classes. Upon completion, an earned stipend is awarded for meeting other unmet needs. We are in the process of assigning each participant a mentor life-coach to help program participants work towards their potential across the many facets of life encounters. All of our participants have housing, have been effectively connected to physical, mental health, and or addiction services. Our organized service provider network movement obtaining MOU's in advance allowed rapid service connections as needed for larger than normal groups of reentry participants.



