

Upper Manhattan Reentry Task Force

Starting Off on the Right Foot

A Needs Assessment of Reentry in Upper Manhattan

Acknowledgements

The Harlem Community Task Force would like to acknowledge the generous contributions of those who helped bring this needs assessment and accompanying strategic plan to life.

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This assessment of reentry in Upper Manhattan was made possible by generous funding from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, in collaboration with the New York City Criminal Justice Coordinator's Office and the Center for Court Innovation.

The New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services is a multi-function criminal justice support agency with a variety of responsibilities, including collection and analysis of statewide crime data; operation of the DNA databank and criminal fingerprint files; administration of federal and state criminal justice funds; support of criminal justice-related agencies across the state; and administration of the state's Sex Offender Registry that allows anyone to research the status of an offender.

The Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator (CJC) advises the Mayor on criminal justice policy and legislation and is responsible for coordinating the activities of New York City criminal justice agencies.

Founded as a public/private partnership between the New York State Unified Court System and the Fund for the City of New York, the Center for Court Innovation is a non-profit think tank that helps courts and criminal justice agencies aid victims, reduce crime and improve public trust in justice. The Center combines action and reflection to spark problem-solving innovation both locally and nationally. A demonstration project of the Center for Court Innovation, the Harlem Community Justice Center is a community-based court that seeks to solve neighborhood problems — including youth crime, substance abuse, landlord-tenant disputes and the challenges facing parolees — in East and Central Harlem.

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Introduction

In October 2007, the Center for Court Innovation, in partnership with the New York City Mayor's Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator, convened the Upper Manhattan Reentry Task Force, based at the Harlem Community Justice Center. The Task Force seeks to achieve two broad goals: 1) Enhancing public safety; and, 2) Reducing recidivism among parolees returning to the Upper Manhattan neighborhoods of East and Central Harlem, Washington Heights and Inwood. To achieve these goals, the Task Force engaged in a comprehensive needs assessment process. This report outlines how that process was carried out and what lessons were learned. The Task Force took a stakeholder approach to this issue, investigating public safety and reentry from all possible angles. The methodology for this investigation, as described on page 6, included brainstorming sessions among Task Force members, individual interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, site visits to model reentry programs, a review of current literature, and data collection and analysis of current information on crime and reentry in Upper Manhattan.

The report describes the challenges faced by reentrants, their families, and the community. As the characteristics of Upper Manhattan communities are unique, the report offers a detailed description of several community indicators, including information on demography and population, income and poverty, employment and education, housing, crime, family and child well-being, and health. The report outlines what we learned about the discharge planning process and the options for prison programming. Key feedback gleaned from stakeholder interviews and focus groups is presented starting on page 33, including responses to three key recommendations for improving reentry in Upper Manhattan. Finally, the report closes with some suggestions for future research and a bibliography of sources accessed.

Begun in 2000, the Harlem Community Justice Center is a community-based court that seeks to address housing, juvenile delinquency, and reentry challenges in East and Central Harlem. The Justice Center has extensive experience dealing with the issue of reentry. Since 2001, the Justice Center has operated an innovative parole reentry court in partnership with the New York State Division of Parole. Additionally, since 2003, the Justice Center's Juvenile Reentry Network, in collaboration with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services and the Children's Aid Society, has provided enhanced supervision and wraparound services to juveniles returning home from state placement. Staff members from the Harlem Community Justice Center serve as support personnel for the Task Force.

This report documents our needs assessment process and what we learned through our analysis of data, interviews, meetings, and focus groups. Our goal is to provide a snapshot of reentry issues affecting Upper Manhattan neighborhoods. We reviewed numerous reports and scholarly works that offer well-reasoned suggestions. We hope to encourage local experimentation and, where possible, statewide learning and adoption of promising strategies.

Through the work of many advocates – formerly incarcerated persons, policymakers, reentry academics, business leaders and community and faith groups – there is growing support and evidence for progressive, common-sense reentry policies. Across the country, innovative approaches like reentry courts, reentry task force models, integrated workforce strategies, and greater collaboration between correction agencies and service providers are being put in place as alternatives to expensive and less effective “catch-and-release” strategies.

In New York City, the Discharge Planning Collaborative, led by the city’s Department of Correction, is working with a spectrum of non-profit and government agency leaders to enhance coordination of the jail reentry process. At the state level, work to adopt the National Institute of Corrections reentry model has begun, and model programs like the Harlem Parole Reentry Court and county reentry task forces are fostering greater collaboration and experimentation. At the federal level, the Second Chance Act recently signed by the President provides greater federal support for local efforts to enhance evidence-based services and supports for reentrants, including housing, treatment, employment, and family services.

This assessment report marks a first step for the Task Force as we seek to improve the reentry process and promote greater public safety in Upper Manhattan neighborhoods.

Methodology

The first meeting of the Upper Manhattan Reentry Task Force was convened on October 11, 2007. Task Force members include twenty-one people representing eighteen city, state and community-based organizations. Represented agencies included the New York State Division of Parole, the New York State Department of Correctional Services, the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, the New York State Office of Mental Health, the New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, the New York County District Attorney’s Office, the New York City Housing Authority and Department of Homeless Services, the New York City Department of Probation and Corrections, the New York City Police Department, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the New York State Office of Mental Health, the New York City Criminal Justice Coordinator’s Office, the John Jay College Prisoner Reentry Initiative, The Doe Fund, the Center for Employment Opportunities, The Fortune Society, Greenhope Services for Women, Inc., and Exodus Transitional Community . Subsequent meetings were convened on January 22, 2008, April 22, 2008, and September 23, 2008. Between meetings, staff at the Harlem Community Justice Center engaged in a series of investigative activities including stakeholder interviews, focus groups, site visits and literature reviews. The Task Force Coordinator during this time, John Megaw, led these activities.

Staff conducted ten stakeholder interviews from January through July of 2008. A series of key questions were developed to guide the interview process. These questions included queries about perceptions of safety, reactions to the current state of reentry policy, and ideas for change. Interview subjects included elected officials, law enforcement officers,

parole staff, formerly incarcerated persons, service providers and advocates. Interviews lasted approximately 1.5 hours and were conducted in person or via phone. A complete list of the questions is available in *Appendix A*.

A total of five focus groups were conducted. Focus group participants included persons on parole, parole officers, and community residents. Similar to the stakeholder interviews, a set of questions was used to facilitate the conversation. The Justice Center's Researcher and Planning and Operations Manager, working with the Task Force Coordinator, led the focus groups. Focus group participants were recruited from community board and precinct council meetings where staff members made presentations about this assessment process and solicited feedback about the issue. Community focus groups were assembled from sign-in sheets circulated at these meetings and took place at the Harlem Community Justice Center over a two-hour period. Parole officers and parolees were convened with the assistance of the Harlem Parole Reentry Court and similarly met for two hours at the Justice Center. A complete list of focus group questions is included in *Appendix A*.

Site visits were conducted to the Edgecombe Correctional Facility in Upper Manhattan on February 4, 2008 and to the City of Baltimore, Maryland on May 22, 2008. These visits exposed Task Force staff to reentry innovations involving multi-agency collaborations with community organizations.

The Edgecombe Correctional Facility, located in Upper Manhattan, was recently transformed from a work release facility to a "second chance" facility where parole violators with substance abuse needs can receive treatment and return to more intensive parole supervision (as opposed to being re-incarcerated). Edgecombe is offered as a graduated response to parole violations and low-level re-offending in cases where substance abuse treatment is an underlying need.

In Baltimore, Task Force staff and a representative from the Manhattan District Attorney's Office were guests of the Mayor's Criminal Justice Coordinator. The delegation toured Cherry Hill, a local community severely affected by crime and poverty. The delegation also visited a workforce development center representing a partnership between the city and county. This one-stop employment center is located in a shopping mall and provides additional supports for persons with criminal convictions seeking employment, including job developers and counselors experienced in working with the formerly incarcerated. The delegation also visited Our Daily Bread/Christopher's Place, which are programs operated by Catholic Charities in partnership with the county and state. Formerly incarcerated persons may voluntarily access social services, including employment services, onsite. The Christopher's Place residence houses men who are on parole and require transitional housing and intensive employment services. A parole officer is on site and works closely with the case managers.

The Task Force reviewed a growing body of literature on the reentry subject, including recent reports on sentencing reform in New York State, reports on New York City discharge planning innovations for jail inmates, reports on the collateral consequences

facing persons with criminal convictions, and legislative initiatives. Additionally, community-level and criminal justice data were reviewed, including data provided by the New York State Division of Parole and the New York City Criminal Justice Coordinator.

The Challenge of Reentry

For advocates, academics, criminal justice professionals and policymakers, there has been an increasing awareness of the reentry issue in the past seven to ten years, partly in response to the record numbers of persons under criminal justice supervision in the United States. A recently released report by The Pew Center's Public Safety Performance Project indicates that:

- The United States penal system held 2.3 million people in 2007, and
- 1 in 100 adults are in prison or jail in the United States.¹

Approximately 650,000 individuals return to communities from U.S prisons annually in the United States.²

Not surprisingly, this reliance on incarceration falls hardest on younger persons, males, and African-Americans. While 1 in 30 males between the age of 20-34 is behind bars, 1 in 9 African-American males is incarcerated; the ratio of persons between 20 and 29 is 1 in 53; and, women, especially African-American women, are the fastest growing prison population.³

Additionally, the cost of our criminal justice system continues to rise, creating a dilemma for governors and legislators across the country. Some feel that we should respond to crime with more prisons, where others argue that we should fund other vital services (e.g. education, youth services, tax rebates, etc). The Pew Center reports that:

- \$62 billion per year are spent by state and local governments to incarcerate adults and juveniles;⁴ and
- an additional \$27 billion will be needed in capital and operations funding to keep up with the expanding need for prisons and jails.⁵

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, expenditures on corrections by states rose 619 percent between 1982 and 2004.⁶ To meet this and other obligations, states are

¹ The Pew Charitable Trust (2008), *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008*, Executive Summary, page 3. (see: http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/report_detail.aspx?id=33428)

² Bureau of Justice Statistics *Reentry Trends in the United States* (see: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/reentry/reentry.htm#highlights>)

³ Pew Center on the States (2008) *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008*. See: <http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/One%20in%20100.pdf>

⁴ Pew Center on the States, *Corrections Spending Fact Sheet (2008)* (see: <http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/Statistics%20and%20Facts.pdf>)

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Bureau of Justice Statistics “Direct expenditure for each of the major criminal justice functions (police, corrections, judicial) has been increasing”(2008) (see: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/glance/exptyp.htm>)

borrowing heavily, pushing the costs further into the future. These large expenditures on corrections are not leading to better outcomes. According to Pew, over two-thirds of released prisoners are re-arrested within three years of release; almost half are convicted of a new crime.⁷

On the individual level, the removal and reentry process changes the self-view of a person returning home. Even if an individual wants to change, according to Rose and Clear, the pressures from family, the stigma from the community, and the expectations of parole often lead to failure – either through re-offense or technical violations.⁸ One recent client of the Harlem Parole Reentry Court, for example, wanted to seek employment on his own. He described the conditions of his parole and requirements of his treatment program as interfering with his own efforts to attend an interview. *“I am frustrated ... it is almost like they don’t really want me to find a job,”* he stated.⁹ His self-view was further compromised by his lack of appropriate clothing to look for work. *“I am not used to looking for work without a suit and tie... I don’t have money for interview clothes.”* These small indignities make it difficult for many reentrants to maintain a positive view of themselves and the motivation to live crime- and drug-free lives. While the Harlem Reentry Court is uniquely positioned to respond to these challenges with participants, not all reentrants are connected to a support system that helps them maintain a law-abiding and sober lifestyle.

At the community level, the removal and reentry process strains neighborhood and familial ties, disrupting the normative systems in a community that might encourage pro-social behavior. Rose, Clear, and Ryder (1999) examined the impacts of “coercive mobility,” the forced removal and return of persons from their neighborhoods due to geographically-concentrated mass incarceration. While their discussions with community members included some positive impressions of incarceration – e.g. removing problem persons from the community temporarily and the productive use of prison time away from dysfunctional relationships – the authors found that high levels of “public control” lessen the effectiveness of the “parochial and private control” thereby “disrupting social networks at their foundation” and leading to more crime.¹⁰ In other words, with a greater state and federal presence in arresting, detaining, and supervising residents, communities experienced a decay in their more local, community-based structure for crime prevention. Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997) suggest that high levels of distrust and fear mitigate against what they call “collective efficacy” – the social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good.”¹¹ When there is greater violence resulting from unclear norms and disorder in social networks, community members are less willing to participate in

⁷ Ibid, Pew Center on the States, Corrections Spending

⁸ Dina Rose and Todd Clear (2002) Incarceration, Reentry, and Social Capital: Social Networks in the Balance. See http://www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/410623_SocialCapital.pdf.

⁹ Conversation with Project Director of the Justice Center on April 23 2008.

¹⁰ Dina Rose, Todd Clear, Judith A. Ryder (1999) Drugs, Incarceration and Neighborhood Life: The Impact of Reintegrating Offenders Into the Community, Executive Summary. Page 2 (see: <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/195164.pdf>).

¹¹ Robert J. Sampson, Stephen W. Raudenbush and Felton Earles (1997) Neighborhood and Violent Crime: a Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy. Science. Vol 277, August 15, 1997. page 918.

neighborhood activities. Informal social control is weakened as a result, and there is greater reliance on formal social control mechanisms – e.g. police, courts. Additionally, high rates of incarceration and poverty and low confidence in the justice system weaken a community’s capacity to meet the needs of formerly incarcerated persons. Lack of awareness among community members and informal leaders about what constitutes effective reentry can lead to increased fear and distrust in systems like parole which, when functioning well, can actually enhance community safety and promote the positive reintegration of reentrants into the community.

The literature on reentry suggests that greater collaboration among government agencies, community-based organizations, and faith-based groups is needed. The development of an interest base for collaboration in the reentry process is a leadership imperative. Community-based treatment providers, for example, must have access to parole officers to receive information on potential clients for assessment and enrollment purposes. In turn, parole officers require accurate and timely information on treatment progress and any compliance issues. To achieve this, regular contact between parole officers and treatment staff is needed. One example of this, the Harlem Parole Reentry Court, brings parole staff into the community to work closely with case managers who link parolees to services and offer enhanced compliance. Through regular hearings before a judge and team meetings among program staff, information is shared and problems are addressed in a way that supports success for the person on parole.

During the 1990’s, Congress enacted laws that increased civil penalties for persons convicted of a felony.¹² These civil barriers include laws that deny or delay access to public housing programs and laws that deny federal college assistance. This legal framework contributes to the general problem of discrimination based solely on criminal record. We can find no evidence, for example, that denying federal student aid to convicted drug offenders or public housing to a person with a felony conviction improves safety. Excluding reentrants will not solve the challenges they face and will not increase community safety. Recently, the President signed into law the Second Chance Act, signaling a new direction for reentry policy at the federal level.¹³ The Act provides funding for local governments and non-profits to invest in local reentry efforts and enhances coordination of federal reentry efforts. While the Act does not specifically address disenfranchisement or other civil penalties, it does establish a federal “interagency task force” charged with exploring barriers for the reentry population and reporting back to Congress with their findings.

¹² According to the Legal Action Center, these laws included: The Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act (P.L. 105-276), the Adoption and Safe Families Act (P.L. 105-89), the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Program Extension Act (P.L. 104-120) and the higher education laws that ban student loans to persons with a drug conviction.

¹³ Second Chance Act (H.R. 1593 now Public Law No. 110-199) (See Library of Congress/THOMAS: <http://www.thomas.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d110:HR01593:@@P>)

Model Programs: Harlem Parole Reentry Court

Harlem Community Justice Center, www.courtinnovation.org

Working in cooperation with the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services and the Division of Parole, the Reentry Court provides ongoing judicial oversight to new parolees, stabilizing them in the initial phase of their reintegration by helping them find jobs, secure housing and assume familial and personal responsibilities.

Key problem-solving components:

- **Comprehensive Pre-Release Discharge Planning**

Working closely with parole officers in correctional facilities, Reentry Court staff conducts comprehensive pre-release assessments of potential participants prior to release to determine eligibility for the program and to identify service needs. Reentry Court staff develop detailed profiles of participants, to include information about medical status, mental health, addiction and treatment, criminal involvement, living arrangements, vocational skills and family composition. Based on this information, a customized treatment and supervision plan is prepared for each participant. Service referrals and linkages are put in place prior to the parolee's release.

- **Increased Accountability and Court Monitoring**

All new participants in the Reentry Court make their "arrival report" before the Administrative Law Judge who oversees the process. The Judge welcomes the parolee to the program and personally reviews his service and supervision plan. Thereafter, parolees appear before the Judge regularly to track compliance and monitor progress. Parole officers stationed at the Justice Center, together with on-site case management staff, also meet frequently with parolees and family members both in the community and at the court house. The Reentry Court promotes compliance through the use of graduated sanctions and rewards. Sanctions for misbehavior such as missed appointments and "dirty" urine samples may include curfews, increased court appearances, increased drug treatment and, in the most serious cases, return to prison. Rewards, which provide positive reinforcement for positive behavior, include reduced court reporting and relaxation of travel restrictions.

- **Collaborative Case Management and Coordinated Services**

The Reentry Court emphasizes early identification of parolees' needs and speedy links to programs that deal with employment, drug-relapse prevention, mental health and other social service issues. To improve service delivery, Reentry Court case managers, parole officers and service providers convene regular case conferences. Case managers and parole officers also meet with family members of parolees to encourage their assistance and support. Case managers and parole officers routinely share information and collaborate around service delivery. The Justice Center has developed a broad array of on-site and community-based vocational and treatment services.

- **Aftercare**

The average length of participation at the Reentry Court is 4-6 months. Parolees who successfully fulfill the requirements "graduate" from the program and are transferred to regular parole supervision. However, Reentry Court staff continue to monitor each graduate's case and the parolee can return at any time to the Justice Center for additional assistance on a voluntary basis.

Community Profiles: Upper Manhattan Neighborhoods

Upper Manhattan encompasses some of New York City's most vibrant and culturally rich communities, engendering a strong sense of neighborhood loyalty for residents. A stronghold of Italian culture through the mid nineteenth century, East Harlem later evolved as a primary destination for Puerto Ricans seeking a new life and opportunity in what they termed "El Barrio." Unique among American communities, Harlem was the birthplace of the Harlem Renaissance and has nurtured some of America's most notable leaders. For over a generation now, Harlem has been a center for Black intellectual, spiritual, and creative endeavors.

Washington Heights and Inwood have been important communities for many new immigrants arriving from the Dominican Republic, the Caribbean, and Central America. These immigrants, like the European immigrants in the early twentieth century, are

reshaping the New York landscape. Other neighborhoods within the Upper Manhattan area include Fort George, Hudson Heights, Sugar Hill, Hamilton Heights, Manhattanville, and Morningside Heights.

In spite of this rich history, neighborhoods in Upper Manhattan are plagued by socioeconomic conditions that compound an already pressing reentry situation. Data on the area's population demographics, income and poverty indicators, employment and education statistics, housing status, crime trends, family and child well-being, and health indicates a zone in distress. For this reason, Upper Manhattan is a unique and compelling subject for examination of the challenges facing reentrants.

We have defined upper-Manhattan as those neighborhoods covered by Parole Bureaus II, III and IV, which supervise parolees residing in eight police precincts (the 23rd, 25th, 26th, 28th, 30th, 32nd, 33rd, and 34th precincts). This area encompasses the following community districts:

- Community District 9: Manhattanville
- Community District 10: Central Harlem
- Community District 11: East Harlem
- Community District 12: Washington Heights

Geographically, this represents approximately an area north of 96th Street on the east side and north of 110th Street on the west side, extending to the upper most tip of Manhattan, from the East River to the Hudson River.

Demographic and Population Information

In 2006, according to the most recent American Community Survey, there were 584,033 people living in Community Districts 9, 10, 11, and 12, with a significant majority in Washington Heights. This represents 36 percent of the total population of Manhattan. Upper Manhattan neighborhoods are comparable to the rest of New York City in terms of age. According to estimates from the 2006 American Community Survey, 26 percent of people in Upper Manhattan neighborhoods are age 19 or younger, which is equal to the percentage of young people in New York City as a whole.¹⁴

These districts are primarily neighborhoods of color. Hispanics comprised 51 percent of the population, followed by African-Americans (29 percent), Whites (15 percent) and Asians (3 percent).^{15*} Upper Manhattan neighborhoods are also home to a comparable percentage of foreign-born persons (35 percent) as New York City on the whole (37 percent). Washington Heights is the neighborhood with the highest percentage of foreign-born residents (50 percent) among Upper Manhattan neighborhoods, followed by Manhattanville (34 percent), East Harlem (23 percent), and Central Harlem (21 percent).

¹⁴ United States, Census Bureau, *2006 American Community Survey* (United States: Census Bureau, 2007), <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/popacs.shtml>.

¹⁵ Ibid

* All percentages may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

Many residents speak a language other than English, with the highest percentages in Washington Heights (78 percent) and East Harlem (54 percent).¹⁶

While all people are affected by the criminal justice system, African-Americans and persons of Hispanic descent are over-represented in the nation's prisons and jails. Nowhere is the justice color line more evident than in the communities of New York City. African-Americans from New York City make up the largest proportion of state prison inmates and they are more likely to be stopped by police in their own neighborhoods; and African-American children are over-represented in the juvenile detention system. Recent data analyzed by the New York Civil Liberties Union indicates that while African-Americans made up 25 percent of the City's population, they comprised over half of all police stops in New York City in 2007.¹⁷ Residents in Central Harlem served by the 28th Precinct had a 30 to 36 percent chance of being stopped by the police, while the citywide average was 6 percent, according to the ACLU.¹⁸ Of all state prison inmates in 2007, 51 percent were African-Americans and 26 percent were of Hispanic descent. According to 2006 New York State population estimates, African – Americans and Hispanics comprise 17 percent and 16 percent of New York State's population respectively.

Income and Poverty

Despite the economic expansion of the 1990's and early 2000's, there are persistent disparities in poverty, crime, and disorder between Upper Manhattan communities and the rest of New York City. The four community districts in Upper Manhattan are among the poorest in New York City. In 2006, between 24 and 33 percent of persons over 18 years old lived in poverty, depending on the district, compared to 16 percent citywide. Children under 18 are poorer: between 34 and 46 percent were living in poverty in 2006, compared to 28 percent of all New York City children.¹⁹ This is especially troubling, as poor children tend to remain poor as adults.

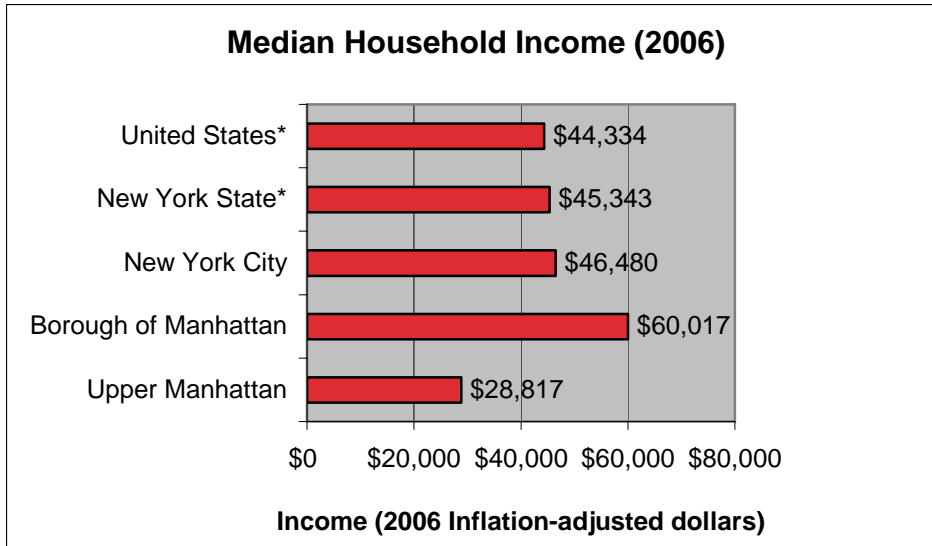
The median household income in Upper Manhattan was \$28,817 in 2006, compared to \$46,480 for the rest of New York City. Approximately 30 percent of all households in Upper Manhattan had incomes of less than \$15,000 for the same year. Of those families below the poverty line, single female-headed households comprised 35 to 40 percent of all households in Upper Manhattan, depending on the district.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "Police Told to Give Street-Stop Data." Christine Hauser. New York Times. May 31, 2008.

¹⁸ New York Civil Liberties Union Stop and Frisk Fact Sheet. <http://www.nyclu.org/node/1598>

¹⁹ Ibid.



*Income in 2004 inflation-adjusted dollars

As observers have noted, there are many hidden financial burdens that communities are left to manage when family members and neighbors go to prison:

- Where families used to rely on two incomes or support from a non-custodial parent to feed a family and pay the bills, they now must make do with only one salary.
- Businesses (most notably small businesses) lose both employees and customers.
- Houses of worship and volunteer programs must gather the resources to provide services that poor families require once they have lost the income of a household member.
- For crimes that result in death or severe disability, victims' families are permanently stripped of the earning potential of the deceased or disabled – and may also become burdened with unexpected property loss or medical costs.²⁰

These financial burdens come as additional strains on many families already struggling to survive below the poverty line.

Employment and Education

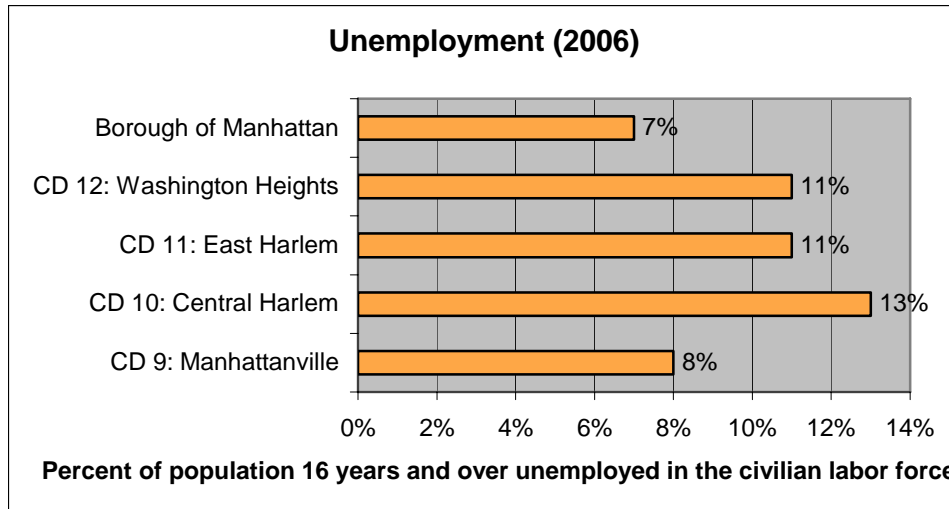
A job is critical to the success of reentrants, especially persons on parole. Upper Manhattan neighborhoods have traditionally had higher rates of unemployment than the rest of New York City. According to the Administration for Children's Services, in 2007, the unemployment rate for Upper Manhattan community districts averaged about 16 percent compared to NYC (9.7 percent).²¹ The New York State unemployment rate for

²⁰ Fields, Gary, "Communities Pay Price of High Prison Rate," The Wall Street Journal, 11 June 2008, <http://www.tucsoncitizen.com/daily/local/90658.php>.

²¹ New York City Administration for Children's Services, *NYC 2007 Community Snapshots*, (New York City: New York, 2008), http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/statistics/statistics_cd_snapshot.shtml. Note: The report notes the following: "Typical seasonally-adjusted unemployment rates distributed by the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics put New York City at approximately 5.2% unemployment

July 2007, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, was 4.9 percent.²² It should be noted that the Bureau calculates its unemployment statistics to exclude those who are considered “discouraged” or under-employed, accounting for a slightly lower unemployment rate than the Administration for Children’s Services would calculate. Nonetheless, there continue to be significant differences in employment statewide.

There are striking differences in unemployment between Upper Manhattan and the rest of the borough:²³



Education is linked to a host of positive social outcomes, including longer and healthier living, greater lifetime earnings, and greater levels of personal satisfaction. Of those persons 25 years and over in Upper Manhattan, only 25% had graduated from high school, which is only slightly less than the New York City average (27 percent). A college degree is essential for many entry-level positions and plays a critical role in terms of increased lifetime earnings. Despite this, only 16 percent of the adult population attained an associate or bachelor degree, compared to 25 percent for the rest of New York City.²⁴

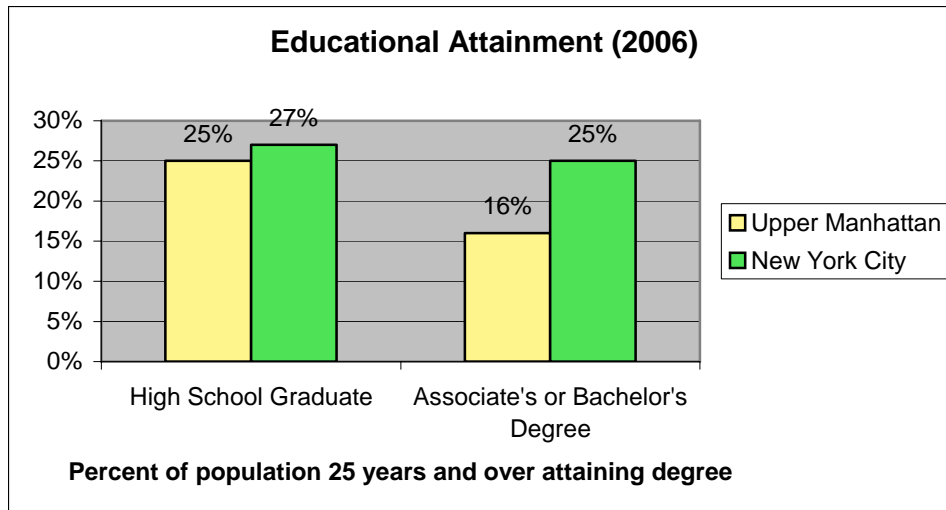
for May 2008. However, these statistics are based on a survey of those individuals who report ‘actively looking for work within the last four weeks.’ The percentage of civilian unemployment as reported by Claritas and the American Community Survey (2006) also takes into account those workers who are considered ‘discouraged’ (meaning they are unemployed and not actively looking for work) or under-employed into their overall unemployment rate. This accounts for the slightly higher percentage of civilian unemployment as reported by Claritas, for this community snapshot.

²² New York State Department of Labor, Workforce and Industry Data Statewide, Not Seasonally Adjusted, July 2007 (New York: New York State Department of Labor, 2007),

<http://www.labor.state.ny.us/workforceindustrydata/index.asp?reg=nys>

²³ United States, Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey (United States: Census Bureau, 2007), <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/popacs.shtml>.

²⁴ Ibid.



Research shows that justice system involvement aligns with lower lifetime earnings for an individual, as compared to people who do not become engaged in the system. As the Reentry Policy Council notes, there are a number of key challenges:

- Poor basic education and marketable skills among people who are incarcerated
- Insufficient opportunities for people in prison and jail to participate in vocational or educational programs.
- Work assignments or training provided during incarceration that do not always correspond to jobs available in the community.
- Inadequate job opportunities, especially for people with few skills, in the communities to which prisoners return.
- Statutory and regulatory barriers, in addition to employer concerns generally, regarding the employment of people with criminal records.
- Lack of coordination between otherwise effective workforce systems and departments of correction.²⁵

A federally-designated “Empowerment Zone,” Upper Manhattan has been recognized for some time as an area facing series challenges for employment and economic development. In an urban environment where people without criminal records have difficulty finding and securing employment, it is that much more difficult for an individual with a criminal record to do the same.

Housing

There are several ongoing major development projects in the city, two of which are located in Upper Manhattan. A formal proposal to rezone 125th Street in Harlem was approved by the New York City Council in May 2008 and a major expansion of the Columbia University campus was recently approved by the city and state. There are many

²⁵ Reentry Policy Council, Council of State Governments, http://reentrypolicy.org/issue_areas/education_employment.

other development projects underway throughout Harlem that are re-shaping the neighborhood and attracting more affluent persons.²⁶

According to research from the New York University Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy, the housing characteristics of Upper Manhattan Neighborhoods vary in important ways. The Furman Center report examined subsidized rental units in Upper Manhattan in 2005. Subsidized rental units include units located in public housing developments operated by the city's housing authority and units receiving some form of governmental subsidy to promote affordable housing. Rent regulated units refer to privately owned rental units where the rent paid is regulated by law. The report found that:

- In 2005, the median monthly rent varied between \$529 in East Harlem and \$731 in Manhattanville, compared to \$860 for the rest of New York City.
- In Upper Manhattan neighborhoods, rent-regulated rental units comprised between 35 percent of the rental market (in East Harlem) and 90 percent of the rental market (Washington Heights and Inwood).
- Rent-subsidized rental units comprised between 8 percent of the rental market (in Washington Heights and Inwood) and 55 percent of the rental market (in East Harlem).
- Most housing stock in Upper Manhattan is over 80 years old.
- The neighborhoods of Upper Manhattan have among the highest percent of housing units in fair to poor condition citywide, according to the Furman Center.²⁷

In a 2005 study of family homelessness in New York City, the Vera Institute of Justice found that almost half of all eligible homeless families come from 10 community districts in New York City, including northern Manhattan as a primary location. Census tracts in northern Manhattan also produced high rates of homeless families (50 or more families per 1,000 households) during the years studied. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the strongest indicator of high levels of homelessness was the number of people receiving public assistance in a neighborhood.²⁸

Housing is a crucial need for reentrants. Persons returning to the community on parole are faced with a lack of affordable and safe housing. If they formerly lived in public housing, they are often unable to return to their families due to exclusion policies adopted by the New York City Housing Authority. There are 58 Housing Authority buildings in Upper Manhattan, representing 32,286 units of public housing, with the highest

²⁶ New York Times, "Council Approves Rezoning of 125th Street, Over Loud Protests of Some Spectators," May 1, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/01/nyregion/01harlem.html?_r=1&scp=3&sq=rezone%20125th%20street&st=cse&oref=slogin.

²⁷ New York University Furman Center for Real Estate and Public Policy, State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods 2007, (New York City: New York, 2008), <http://furmancenter.nyu.edu/SOC2007.htm>

²⁸ Vera Institute of Justice, Understanding Family Homelessness in New York City: An In-Depth Study of Families' Experiences Before and After Shelter, (New York City: New York, 2005), http://www.nyc.gov/html/dhs/downloads/pdf/vera_Study.pdf

concentration in East Harlem.²⁹ Private landlords often refuse to rent rooms or apartments based on the criminal history – a violation of state law that often goes under reported and under investigated.

For reentrants who are homeless, the challenges are even greater. As of March 2008, according to the Division of Parole, 134 parolees assigned to Upper Manhattan parole bureaus were in shelters (this is roughly 6 percent of all intensive and regular parolees in Upper Manhattan).³⁰ It is the Division of Parole's policy to reduce the numbers of referral to shelters. A specialized bureau works with parolees who declare that they are homeless. Under this policy, parole staff contact a parolee's family and work with service providers to secure housing for the reentrant. Chronically homeless persons with a substance abuse problem may be eligible for scatter site housing under a new effort with the City's Department of Homeless Services and The Doe Fund. The City also has housing programs for the mentally ill that can benefit reentrants. Many reentrants who are referred to the shelter system may simply have nowhere else to go, are convicted sex offenders and legally barred from many housing options, or are not able to access specialized housing programs at the time of their release, even if they have a substance abuse history or mental illness.

In 2006, Common Ground Community and the Corporation for Supportive Housing released a study showing that increasing access to supportive housing services would help lower the rate of criminal recidivism. Some key findings from this study include the following:

- 350 individuals are released from prison every day in New York City. Because there is little planning upon discharge, many are released without housing, medical discharge plans, or support networks, or even the documents that would enable them to obtain medical care, work, or housing.
- According to the NYC Department of Homeless Services, as of March 2004, there were 37,226 homeless individuals in the New York City shelter system. On average, 30% of individuals living in the shelter system have also been recently incarcerated.
- Ex-offenders tend to go back to the community and social situations they lived in prior to incarceration. Without homes or supportive services, they often return to familiar, illegal activities. In addition, upon release, ex-offenders who go to shelters are seven times more likely to abscond from parole.
- Investing in supportive housing helps prevent recidivism by providing access to necessary services, including employment counseling/training, substance abuse treatment, mental health counseling, and access to quality health care. In addition, the annual cost of maintaining a resident in a supportive housing facility (an

²⁹ New York City Housing Authority website, <http://gis.nyc.gov/nycha/im/NychaStart.do?>

³⁰ Snap shot of intensive and regular parolees under supervision in Manhattan Parole Bureaus as of March 31, 2008.

average of \$13,000) is well below the amount of money spent per person for city jail cells (nearly \$63,000).³¹

As Upper Manhattan communities continue to experience great change in the kinds of housing available to low-income people, this issue will likely be exacerbated for those with criminal records.

Model Programs: Fortune Academy at “The Castle”

The Fortune Society, www.fortunesociety.org

In April of 2002, after six years of strategic planning and development, the Fortune Society opened the doors to the Fortune Academy, a residential housing facility located in West Harlem. Nicknamed “The Castle” for its Gothic architecture and prominent site along the riverfront, the Academy provides 62 beds in single and shared occupancy units for formerly incarcerated individuals who are homeless. Twenty-one of the beds are earmarked for emergency housing and the remaining 41 represent longer-term, “phased permanent,” housing, where residents stay up to a year or longer, depending on their individual needs. The Academy also boasts an industrial kitchen that provides residents with daily nutritious meals, a computer lab, a laundry room and a community space where residents can rest, relax and interact with each other in a drug-free environment.

Like Fortune itself, the Academy is unique in that it provides a broad array of services under one roof, with staff members on hand 24 hours a day to help residents address the multiple problems that confront them. In addition, every resident is required to participate in productive activities at our Long Island City offices – such as education, career development and counseling – to assist them in their successful transition back to the community

Since 2002, the Academy has provided housing for over 500 formerly incarcerated people who were homeless.

Crime

New York City has experienced a dramatic decrease in major crimes in the last 10 years. Between 1998 and 2007, the city saw a 41 percent decrease in violent crime, including a 57 percent decrease in reported rapes. Property crime also decreased during that time: 37 percent on the whole, with specific improvements in motor vehicle theft (70 percent decrease) and burglary (55 percent decrease). The New York City jail population also decreased 30 percent over this same time period.³²

Upper Manhattan has experienced a similar dramatic reduction in crime. In fact, the rate of crime reduction has been largest in the neighborhoods with the most crime historically. But despite these large reductions in crime, the neighborhoods in Upper Manhattan continue to experience a disproportionate amount of crime in comparison to the rest of the borough.

³¹ Common Ground Community and the Corporation for Supportive Housing, *New Beginnings: The Need for Supportive Housing for Previously Incarcerated People* (New York City: New York, 2006), <http://www.commonground.org/?p=83>.

³² New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, *Index Crimes Reported to Police By Region 1998-2007* (New York: Division of Criminal Justice Services Uniform Crime/Incident-based Reporting Systems, 2008).

- Murders: Precincts in Upper Manhattan had approximately 8 murders per 100,000 people in 2007 (using 2006 population estimates) compared to 2 murders per 100,000 in all other Manhattan precincts.
- Rape: Where Upper Manhattan precincts had approximately 26 rapes per 100,000 persons in 2007, the rest of Manhattan had 11 rapes per 100,000 persons.
- Robbery: Upper Manhattan precincts had 384 robberies per 100,000 persons in 2007, compared to 237 robberies per 100,000 persons for the rest of Manhattan.³³

There were 38,710 prosecuted arrests in Upper Manhattan police precincts (the 23rd, 25th, 26th, 28th, 30th, 32nd, 33rd, and 34th precincts) in 2006, according to the New York City Criminal Justice Agency (CJA) -- 46% of the Manhattan total.³⁴ Indeed, arrestees in Upper Manhattan have deeper and more serious criminal justice involvement than those in the rest of Manhattan:

- 49% of arrestees in Upper Manhattan had prior convictions compared to 40% in the rest of Manhattan
- 34% of arrestees in Upper Manhattan had priors at the felony level compared to 25% in the rest of Manhattan.

In fact, 60% of Manhattan arrestees with prior felony convictions were arrested in Upper Manhattan precincts. Four precincts (the 23rd, 25th, 28th, and 32nd precincts) had much higher rates of prior convictions than the rest of Upper Manhattan. In these four precincts, 55% of arrestees had prior convictions compared to 40% in other upper Manhattan precincts. In addition, in these four precincts, 40% of arrestees had prior convictions at the felony level compared to 26% in other upper Manhattan precincts. The precinct serving Central Harlem had the highest rate of prior felony convictions (43 %).³⁵

In 2006, there were 5897 violent felony adult arrests in Manhattan, 48 percent of which occurred in Upper Manhattan³⁶ - substantially higher than the percent of Manhattan residents (36%) in the area. Between 2004 and 2006, there were 118,505 prosecuted arrests in upper Manhattan precincts, compared to 256,474 citywide; prosecuted arrest activity in Upper Manhattan represented in aggregate 46 percent of all prosecuted arrest activity in Manhattan.³⁷

In talking with community stakeholders, public safety emerged as a top concern. Over the past year, several high-profile shootings have heightened community concerns that violent crime is increasing. A recent incident in Harlem involving eight young victims

³³ New York Police Department, CompStat Crime Complaints Covering the Week of 7/14/2008 Through 7/20/2008 (New York: NYPD CompStat Unit, 2008).

³⁴ New York City Criminal Justice Agency, Borough Wide and Selected Precinct Data for CJA Computed Criminal Conviction History in Cases of Prosecuted Arrests of Defendants Held for Arraignment in Manhattan Criminal Courts: Calendar Years 2004, 2005, 2006. Data obtained through the Mayor's Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Arrest data comes from Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc, Keeping Track of New York City's Children: A Citizens' Committee for Children Status Report 2008, (New York City: Consolidated Color Press, 2008).

³⁷ Ibid

has led to calls for a stronger response to gun violence.³⁸ Additionally, according to the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB), complaints of police misconduct went up 84 percent between 2000 and 2007, despite a small decrease between the years 2006 and 2007.³⁹

Trust is another important factor. In a small internal survey conducted recently of youth at the Harlem Community Justice Center, almost half of respondents indicated that most people in their neighborhood could not be trusted.⁴⁰ Youth complain frequently about their treatment by law enforcement and there is a general lack of understanding between community youth and police. The need for improved relations between the community and justice agencies is critical to creating an environment where residents and police officers feel like partners instead of enemies. For juveniles – persons under the age of 16 – there were 587 felony arrests in 2006 in Upper Manhattan, accounting for more than 50 percent of all Manhattan juvenile felony arrests. There were an additional 509 juvenile misdemeanor arrests for the same year, accounting for 57 percent of all Manhattan juvenile misdemeanor arrests.⁴¹

Upper Manhattan is home to a large number of persons returning to Manhattan neighborhoods from prison under parole supervision. A recent snapshot of parolees provided by the Division of Parole indicated that 4461 persons were under parole supervision in Manhattan as of March 2008.⁴² On average, over 2,200 formerly incarcerated persons on parole – or roughly half the total for all of Manhattan – are assigned to the bureaus serving Upper Manhattan neighborhoods each year.⁴³ Compared to parolees in the rest of Manhattan, parolees in Upper Manhattan are:

- a bit older;
- *less* likely to have a drug and alcohol history;
- *more* likely to be unemployed;
- *less* involved in support programming, especially drug and alcohol programs, and significantly *less* likely to be engaged in mental health programs;
- slightly *more* violent in terms of original conviction offense;
- *more* likely to have been returned previously on their sentence; and

³⁸ 8 Are Wounded in Shooting in Harlem. New York Times May 27, 2008 (see: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/27/nyregion/27cnd-shoot.html>)

³⁹ Civilian Complaint Review Board Status Report July 2008 (see: http://www.nyc.gov/html/ccrb/pdf/ccrbann2007_A.pdf) Note: Substantiated cases have been decreasing from a high in 2004 of 16% to 8% in 2007, below the 12% average. There has been a “dramatic” increase in the number of substantiated CCRB referrals in which no disciplinary action is taken –34% in 2007.

⁴⁰ Youth Justice Project Survey, conducted October 2007 – December 2007.

⁴¹ Arrest data comes from Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York, Inc, Keeping Track of New York City’s Children: A Citizens’ Committee for Children Status Report 2008, (New York City: Consolidated Color Press, 2008).

⁴² Snap shot of parolees under supervision for all Manhattan Parole Bureaus as of March 28, 2008.

⁴³ Data from Parole for years 2003-2007 covering the Parole Bureaus II, III, and IV. These bureaus cover all NYPD Manhattan North Precincts, including some located outside of the neighborhoods that are the subject of this report. However, we suspect that the vast majority of parolees live in Greater Harlem, Inwood and Washington Heights. This figure does not include sex offenders on parole and certain parolees with special mental health designations, both classes of cases are monitored by a city-wide parole bureau.

- typically out *longer* than parolees in the rest of Manhattan.⁴⁴

All of these factors highlight the fact that Upper Manhattan parolees typically have a deeper involvement in and longer history with the criminal justice system. In East Harlem, 1 in 20 males have been incarcerated along a reentry corridor from 126th Street to 119th Street, representing the highest concentration in New York City according to the Justice Mapping Center.⁴⁵ Additionally, the Justice Mapping Center reported that 900 people who live in the zip code that includes this area were admitted to the city's jail system.⁴⁶ By comparison, roughly 633 people per zip code citywide were admitted to city jails during the same time period.⁴⁷

Family and Child Well-Being

Getting by is difficult for many families in Upper Manhattan. The poor and working poor comprise a large segment of the population and they struggle to provide the basics for their children. Many hard-working and motivated families confront tough decisions daily about paying rent, putting food on the table, and providing clothing for their children.

The Citizens' Committee for Children of New York reports information about the "self-sufficiency standard" for families, which applies a wage scale (based on household size and composition) to assess self-sufficiency. For Manhattan north of 96th Street, this monthly wage was \$5,131; on average, only half of families north of 96th Street are able to meet this standard. In 2005, there were 81,407 claims for city Earned Income Tax Credit (a tax incentive that rewards work for poor families) in community districts 9, 10, 11, and 12; these four districts represented 64 percent of all claims in Manhattan. They also contributed to 74 percent of all families entering homeless shelters in Manhattan in 2007.⁴⁸

Childhood poverty is linked to a myriad of other social problems throughout life. Children born into poverty tend to stay poor as adults. In 2005, roughly 73 percent of children in Upper Manhattan were born into poor families. Additionally, 61 to 71 percent of children born in Upper Manhattan were delivered to single mothers in 2005, depending on the community district. Compared to citywide percentages, there were also more births to *teen* mothers in Upper Manhattan than the rest of the borough in the same year (an average of 11 percent of births compared to 8 percent citywide). While the Upper East Side and East Harlem are contiguous geographically, the ratio of children receiving public assistance in East Harlem as compared to the Upper East Side was approximately 30 to 1 in 2006.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Snap shot of parolees under supervision for all Manhattan Parole Bureaus as of March 28, 2008.

⁴⁵ Justice Mapping Center, <http://www.justicemapping.org/>, See article in New York Daily News (March 18, 2007) "Convict Alley in Harlem Nabe."

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ New York City Department of Corrections, http://www.nyc.gov/html/doc/html/stats/doc_stats.shtml.

⁴⁸ Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc, Keeping Track of New York City's Children: A Citizens' Committee for Children Status Report 2008, (New York City: Consolidated Color Press, 2008).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Although information about Manhattanville is not publicly available, the Administration for Children’s Services reports that there were approximately 4,500 abuse and neglect investigations in Central Harlem, East Harlem, and Washington Heights in 2007 – representing over half of all investigations in Manhattan. Whereas the Manhattan-wide child victimization rate per 1,000 children was 19.2 in 2007, the three communities above had victimization rates of 32.7, 35.2, and 14.4 respectively. Across all three neighborhoods, abuse and neglect are the motivating factor for placement (75 percent), with minimal placements for PINS cases (“Persons In Need of Supervision,” or children with behavior problems so severe that their parents or guardians have asked the court system for supervision assistance), juvenile delinquency, voluntary placement, or other unknown reasons.⁵⁰

There are 95 elementary, middle, and high schools in Upper Manhattan. Across all four community districts, the percentages of public school students performing at grade level are fairly similar. In the 2006-2007 school year, only between 34 and 40 percent of elementary and middle school students in Upper Manhattan schools were meeting state and city reading standards, compared to 50 percent citywide. In reading, only 52 to 54 percent of elementary and middle school students were meeting state and city math standards, as compared to 65 percent citywide.⁵¹

When individuals are separated from their families due to incarceration, there are significant consequences for their children. Nationally, between 1991 and mid-2007, the number of parents held in state and federal prisons increased by 79 percent and the number of children of incarcerated parents increased by 80 percent.⁵² As Washington State’s Department of Social and Health Services reports, “families impacted by incarceration of a parent face multiple challenges and often require service provision from multiple agencies and/or administrations. These challenges include:

- Abuse and/or neglect resulting in child welfare system involvement. Nationally, as many as one in three families with open child welfare cases have a parent who has been arrested on at least one occasion.
- Substance abuse. Incarcerated parents with child welfare system involvement have a substance abuse rate eight times higher than the general population of families involved with child welfare.
- Mental illness and trauma history. A quarter of incarcerated mothers are prescribed medication to address mental illness, and over half have a history of physical or sexual abuse.
- Poverty and receipt of income assistance. Children with parents who have been incarcerated are 80% more likely than those whose parents had never been incarcerated to live in a household with economic hardship.

⁵⁰ New York City Administration for Children’s Services, *NYC 2007 Community Snapshots*, (New York City: New York, 2008), http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/statistics/statistics_cd_snapshot.shtml.

⁵¹ Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York, Inc, *Keeping Track of New York City’s Children: A Citizens’ Committee for Children Status Report 2008*, (New York City: Consolidated Color Press, 2008)

⁵² US Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children*, (Washington: District of Columbia, 2008), <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf>.

- Low educational attainment. Incarcerated parents report a low level of educational attainment and low job skills.

Other reported negative affects on children include:

- An increased likelihood of criminal behavior by children;
- Depression and/or difficulty sleeping and concentrating;
- Difficulty with academic subjects and behavior at school;
- Increased delinquency and likelihood of incarceration of the child;
- Increased risk of drug use;
- Higher rates of mental illness; and
- Higher rates of exposure to illicit substances and alcohol in utero. Sixty percent of children of incarcerated parents are reported to have been exposed to alcohol or illicit substances in utero.”⁵³

According to a report from the Women in Prison Project, a program of the Correctional Association of New York, about 75 percent of female prison inmates are mothers and most were the primary caretakers for their children before the arrest, many as single parents. In 2006, an estimated 11,000 children had a mother in a New York State correctional facility (and many more had a father incarcerated as well). The report notes that “a mother’s incarceration has a pernicious effect on her family and community. The removal of a primary caretaker disrupts family structures, while relatives who may assume responsibility for minor children must grapple with added financial burdens. Separation and dislocation cause children significant mental distress. These repercussions are concentrated within a handful of low-income communities of color in New York City, where more than half of the state’s women prisoners lived before their incarceration. Social, emotional and economic harm to families and communities is a defining legacy of female imprisonment.”⁵⁴

Upon return to their communities, mothers *and* fathers face the challenges of child support arrears, family court involvement, and the foster care system as they attempt to reintegrate themselves into the lives of their children. There is an increased need for programs to assist incarcerated parents in developing parenting strategies that increase protective factors for their children. Incarcerated parents need financial assistance, help resolving conflicts, and sometimes legal assistance to function effectively as a parent.

⁵³ Washington Department of Health and Social Services, Children and Families of Incarcerated Parents: Understanding the Challenges and Addressing the Needs, (Olympia, Washington: 2008).

⁵⁴ Correctional Association of New York, Women in Prison Project, When “Free” Means Losing Your Mother: The Collision of Child Welfare and the Incarceration of Women in New York State (New York, NY: 2006), http://www.correctionalassociation.org/WIPP/publications/When_Free_Rpt_Feb_2006.pdf.

Model Programs: Children of Promise, NYC

www.childrenofpromisenc.org

Children of Promise, NYC (CPNYC) is a Brooklyn-based organization committed to embracing and empowering children of incarcerated parents to break the cycle of intergenerational involvement in the criminal justice system. CPNYC's mission is to provide children of prisoners with the guidance, support and the resources necessary to effectively develop leadership skills, form positive social relationships and enhance academic performance.

CPNYC has innovative and unique after-school programs that create a safe haven for children of prisoners' ages 6-18. The model is built on CPNYC's core values and uses social change, youth development and mentoring to fully engage young people in the process of creating change. Recruited from schools, mental health providers, faith-based organizations and social services agencies in the community, participants are offered an array of comprehensive services, which include assessments (individual service plans), mentoring (one year match with an adult), counseling (one-to-one and group therapeutic sessions), referrals to support services and academic tracking and enrichment.

Health

Not surprisingly, Upper Manhattan residents are faced with some serious health challenges. Although there are an abundance of hospitals, nursing homes, walk-in health programs, residential and non-residential mental health service providers, and substance abuse treatment programs, Upper Manhattan residents still face a myriad of problems with regular access to health care, obesity, sexually transmitted infections, asthma, and diabetes.

Washington Heights seems to be faring slightly better than Central and East Harlem on a survey of ten indicators that the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene uses to rank neighborhood healthiness. Unfortunately, Washington Heights residents are nearly one-third more likely to be without a regular doctor than those in New York City overall (32 percent versus 24 percent) and one in three adults was uninsured or went without health insurance during 2003 and 2004. For the same years, one in five Inwood and Washington Heights adults is obese and one half of adults reported not exercising at all, compared to 32 percent of Manhattan residents. Finally, although the birth rate to teenage mothers has been decreasing since 1997, it was 40 percent higher in Inwood and Washington Heights than in New York City overall in 2003-2004 (at 106 births to teenagers per 1,000 live births).⁵⁵

Central Harlem, while it ranks as average on more than half of the DOHMH indicators, faces particular challenges with respect to smoking, heart disease, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, and substance abuse. More than 1 in 4 adults in Central Harlem reported smoking in 2004, which was more than 40 percent higher than the proportion in New York City overall. In the past decade, heart disease hospitalization has increased, to more than 40 percent higher in 2003-2004 than the Manhattan rate, although deaths due to heart disease have decreased. Similarly, Central Harlem's death rate due to HIV disease has decreased in the past ten years, but it remains more than double the HIV-related death rates in Manhattan and New York City overall. The City reports that

⁵⁵ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Community Health Profiles, Second Edition (New York: NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2006).

Central Harlem also has elevated rates of other sexually transmitted infections, such as chlamydia and gonorrhea. While both the drug- and alcohol-related hospitalization rates have decreased markedly in the past decade, they were both higher than in Manhattan and New York City overall in 2003-2004. Finally, Central Harlem's drug-related death rate was more than double that of Manhattan and the city as a whole.⁵⁶

Of all Upper Manhattan communities, East Harlem fares perhaps the worst on the city's indicators of good health, ranking below average on eight out of the ten indicators. Home to city infrastructure that produces large amounts of air pollution, East Harlem had the most pediatric asthma hospitalizations in the city, with 11.4 per 1,000 children in 2005. The death rate in this community is more than 50 percent higher than both Manhattan and New York City overall in 2003-2004, due primarily to lack of routine health care, HIV, and obesity. More than 20 percent of residents visited the emergency department for routine health care in 2004, a figure that represents triple the visits from Manhattan and citywide residents for the same year. Notably, the rates for lack of insurance in East Harlem actually increased between 2002 and 2004, presenting significant barriers to health care access. This community had the second highest HIV-related death rate in the city in 2004 and almost two thirds of East Harlem adults were overweight or obese in the same year.⁵⁷

A particular health concern among a majority of reentrants to Upper Manhattan neighborhoods is substance abuse. Data from a recent snapshot of parolees provided by the Division of Parole⁵⁸ shows that, in some areas, 64 percent of releasees have some kind of drug abuse history and 31 percent have alcohol abuse histories. Of those parolees placed in one or more social service programs upon release, roughly 84 percent were attending drug or alcohol programs as of March 2008.⁵⁹ Chronic and communicable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B and C, are another particular concern among the reentrant population, as these are much more prevalent among incarcerated people than among people of comparable ages who are not incarcerated. Importantly, the incidence of serious mental illness (including schizophrenia, major depression bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder) is two to four times greater among prisoners than among those in the general population.⁶⁰ More generally, the Reentry Policy Council has cited the following as clear challenges to physical and mental health of reentrants:

- Inconsistent and ineffective screening and identification of prisoners for health and/or mental health disorders

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Snapshot of parolees under supervision for all Manhattan Parole Bureaus as of March 28, 2008.

⁵⁹ Data from Parole for years 2003-2007 covering the Parole Bureaus II, III, and IV. These bureaus cover all NYPD Manhattan North Precincts, including some located outside of the neighborhoods that are the subject of this report. However, we suspect that the vast majority of parolees live in Greater Harlem, Inwood and Washington Heights. This figure does not include sex offenders on parole and certain parolees with special mental health designations, both classes of cases are monitored by a city-wide parole bureau.

⁶⁰ Reentry Policy Council, Council of State Governments, http://reentrypolicy.org/issue_areas/physical_mental_health.

- Narrow focus on emergency treatment needs of people who are incarcerated rather than their long-term health and public health generally
- Compartmentalized, uncoordinated treatment of co-occurring disorders, particularly substance abuse and mental illness
- Inadequate communication and cooperation between correctional health officials and community service providers
- Limited capacity of existing community-based services and general reluctance of providers to serve people with criminal records
- Delivery of services and use of medications that do not reflect the most current, evidence-based practices
- Shortages of qualified health care professionals in prison and jail, and high cost of medications⁶¹

A Central Challenge: Discharge from New York State Prisons

At all points throughout the needs assessment process, one theme was repeated consistently, from agency decision-makers to parolees returning home: *something needs to be done to improve discharge planning in New York State*. Preparing an inmate for his return to the community is one of the most important activities that Department of Correctional Services, the Division of Parole, and service providers in the community can undertake. Pre-release case planning and case management have a significant impact on the success of an inmate's re-integration.

As this is such a crucial topic, the Task Force made a special attempt to examine the discharge planning process that currently exists in New York State. What follows is a review of the process as it is conceived. This information provides a context for understanding some of the focus group feedback gathered about actual outcomes for inmates returning to the community. **It is eminently apparent that planning for discharge should start at the time of incarceration, as there is a need for adequate lead time and preparation for each individual's unique challenges and strengths.**

Initial Planning

Prior to sentencing, the Department of Probation prepares a "Pre-sentence Investigation" report (PSI) using the "COMPAS" (Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions) Risk and Assessment tool.⁶² At the front end, this information helps the sentencing judge and, if the individual is to be incarcerated, the tool helps the State Department of Correctional Services determine the inmate's "classification level" and consequently where he will serve his sentence. It is also used to guide an offender's eligibility and need for specific rehabilitative programming while incarcerated. This includes issues such as the individual's substance abuse and mental health history, arrest record, and nature of conviction. At the back-end, when the individual is to be released, this information is used during the inmate's Parole Board hearings to assist the Board in its decision-making process.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² COMPAS was developed by the Northpointe Institute for Public Management, Inc.

Upon incarceration, an initial assessment using COMPAS is part of the intake process conducted at one of the state's general reception facilities: Ulster County Correctional Facility, Downstate Correctional Facility, Elmira Correctional Facility, Albion Correctional Facility, Auburn Correctional Facility and Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. Inmates take a battery of tests, for example, to determine their mental health statuses. Inquiries are also made into what vocational and educational programming they would like to participate in while incarcerated. Inmates usually remain in a general reception facility between two and eight weeks. Once the initial investigation is complete, the inmate is transferred to one of seventy New York state prisons.⁶³

In-Prison Programming:

The Department of Correctional Services Transitional Services Units (TSU) within each facility operates a three-phase program that begins with an orientation phase in the first week of the inmate's arrival.

- *Phase I: Orientation – two to four weeks.*
The primary goal in the initial phase is to familiarize new inmates with the operation of their correctional setting. Information is provided about Comprehensive Alcohol and Substance Abuse Treatment (CASAT) and Aggression Replacement Therapy (ART), for example. Information is also provided on the process of transferring to a facility closer to the area where the inmate was residing pre-arrest.

Corrections staff at each facility also begin the process of obtaining vital documents, such as the birth certificate and social security card for any inmate who has indicated that they are in need of one. Inmates may reportedly delay this, however, for a variety of reasons: they go by an alias and do not want their true identity revealed, they have a general fear of releasing confidential information, they cannot afford the cost of obtaining vital documents (around \$30), or they prefer to wait for a time closer to their release, etc.

- *Phase II: Eight to twelve weeks.*
The goal of this phase is to teach inmates how to make the most of their time while they are in prison and includes educating inmates about available voluntary programming. There is also a component about thinking skills, based on themes included in cognitive behavior therapy programs. There is some overlap between phases II and III, and phase II incorporates the time served by the individual. Available voluntary programming varies quite a bit from facility to facility, but it can include: Correctional Industries work programs, vocational and academic educational programs, guidance and counseling, library services, ministerial, family, and volunteer services, and substance abuse treatment.⁶⁴ At Butler

⁶³ Conversation with Reentry Official, NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, July 2008.

⁶⁴ Conversation with Linda Foglia, Public Information Office, NYS Department of Correctional Services, September 18, 2008. Additionally, DOCS lists the programs available at each correctional facility on its website, available at: http://www.docs.state.ny.us/ProgramServices/program_list_facility.html#BUTLER.

Correctional Facility in Wayne County, for example, there are split functions. Inmates in the minimum security component participate on work crews outside the building in the morning and then have the opportunity to attend educational programs in the evening. On the medium security side, which supervises inmates with alcohol and substance abuse issues, participants engage in treatment and counseling in the morning and can attend classes or participate in work assignments in the evening.⁶⁵

- *Phase III: Four to five weeks.*

This phase takes place several months prior to release and focuses on setting goals related to employment and substance abuse treatment. Inmates are exposed to resources outside the prison facility by Corrections counselors or facility parole officers in the Transitional Services Unit. This includes housing resources, employment services, HIV treatment services, substance abuse treatment, etc. For inmates returning to New York City, the resource manual “Connections” is distributed to assist with the transition process. It is prepared by the New York Public Library and provides post-release information and resources in the city.

Return to Community Supervision

For those individuals who are being released to parole supervision, there is a transfer of information from the facility parole staff to the field parole staff, including information about a parolee’s physiological, social, educational, medical, and family history; about any mental health issues or psychological diagnoses; about his behavior and disciplinary history while incarcerated; about telephone logs and visits; about his criminal offenses and pattern of crime; and about his in-prison program participation, educational engagement, or work experience. According to a senior parole officer in Upper Manhattan, this information is collated by PARMIS, the Parole Access Records Management Information Services, which prepares a “grey folder” for field parole officers on each parolee on their caseload. Additionally, the Division of Parole asks that field parole officers consult a DCJS-maintained database that includes additional information collected by various agencies over the course of the person’s involvement in the criminal justice system. Often, because many field parole officers have such high caseloads, they do not have time to consult this database for every parolee, although some do utilize it on occasion, according to our source.⁶⁶

One central question was whether police departments are informed of the arrival of parolees to their precincts. From interviews with Upper Manhattan precincts, it seems that there is some variety in the transfer and capture of information about parolees returning to specific precincts. In one East Harlem precinct, a long-time sergeant receives a monthly listing (with pictures) of parolees returning to the precinct from the Division of Parole and compiles that information in a “Parolee Book” on public display in the precinct (as of fall 2008, for example, there were 597 individuals on parole in this precinct). As crimes occur in the precinct, the book is consulted – if there is a spate of

⁶⁵ Conversation with Administrative Official, Butler Correctional Facility, September 18, 2008.

⁶⁶ Conversation with Senior Parole Officer, NYS Division of Parole, September 18, 2008.

robberies and a parolee with a history of robbery charges has recently returned to the area, officers may contact the individual's parole officer and investigate the situation. Importantly, the sergeant's long tenure at the precinct is of particular value: often, he has an institutional memory of certain law-breakers that his newer colleagues do not possess.⁶⁷

In another Upper Manhattan precinct, the "intel sergeant" was identified as the informal parole liaison. This sergeant does not get any regular listing of parolees from the Division of Parole but he does, on occasion, review a Police Department database (called "LEDI") that lists the individuals who are currently on parole in the precinct. The sergeant did not know how often that database was updated and does not communicate with local parole officers unless an incident occurs with an individual on parole. The sergeant did note, however, that the two agencies "do operations together every three to four months," where they visit the households of parolees in the precinct to survey their activities.⁶⁸

At a precinct in the northern regions of the borough, a sergeant reported that the Division of Parole was "supposed" to make notification of a parolee's return to the Police Department, but that that information "only trickles down about 1 percent of the time." He laid the blame partly with the Police Department's bureaucratic means of information transfer and partly with the troubled relationship with the Division of Parole. Interestingly, he feels that the police have a better relationship with the city Department of Corrections, as it is easier for him to get information about who is returning from jail than from prison. The sergeant expressed frustration about these issues, again as they relate to his ability to investigate robbery complaints, which often involve people with prior histories of robbery. Additionally, the sergeant described some previous attempts he made to inform parole about local parolees who were in clear violation of the conditions of parole (one person he mentioned was in possession of a gun). The response was not what the sergeant would have liked, as he said that Parole declined to follow up on these incidents. If Parole does decide to violate an individual, the arresting police officer is required to attend the violation hearing. Because of communication problems, the officers often do not receive notification of the hearings until after they are held – over time, this has resulted in an assumption that police officers will not show up at the hearings, and thus it is a waste of time to violate parolees (presumably for certain categories of offense).

The sergeant had a very clear understanding of the challenges in the system and even had some suggestions for how to improve them: he would like to see borough-specific units (perhaps one for Manhattan North and one for Manhattan South) composed of three police department representatives and three parole representatives. He viewed this collaboration as a way to "see what tools the other guys are working with" (for example joint police-parole ride-alongs that allow police officers access to parolees' residences for the purpose of surveillance) and also to share information about planned operations. For example, the sergeant noted situations when his precinct was conducting surveillance on

⁶⁷ Conversation with Police Official, East Harlem Precinct, September 16, 2008.

⁶⁸ Conversation with Police Official, East Harlem Precinct, September 17, 2008.

an individual in the community and the Division of Parole “runs an operation” on that same person. For the sergeant, this lack of communication puts both operations at risk—and he wishes there was a better way to collaborate with Parole.⁶⁹

Clearly, the communication issues extend beyond simple information about parolee return to a community. From an operations perspective, the Police Department does not have an official policy to guide regular communication with the Division of Parole.⁷⁰

Recent Innovations

In early 2004, New York State was awarded technical assistance from the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). This award provided the state with the opportunity to participate, along with seven other states, in the Transition from Prison to Community Initiative (TPCI). Through this initiative, NIC is facilitating the enhancement of New York’s transition process to conform to national best practices, specifically with an eye toward improved coordination of criminal justice and human service programming.⁷¹

Currently, the TPCI model is being piloted at the Orleans Correctional Facility but has not yet been fully implemented. (For example, the facility does not use the COMPAS risk and needs assessment tool, although it does use an instrument specifically for assessing the relapse risk for people with substance abuse issues – called the Texas Christian University Drug Screen II Instrument (TCU-DSII).) At this point, there is only collaborative case planning at the facility for the highest-need offenders – those who have high recidivism rates returning to Erie County. The Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) funds the substance abuse portion of this program, as eighty percent of the men in this 60-bed program have substance abuse issues. The program also includes intensive programming for housing assistance and employment and begins working with the inmates 120 days prior to their release. The facility has a Human Resources Administration Medicaid Examiner in the building, so inmates are released with an active Medicaid card. On occasion, an attorney panel visits the prison to discuss strategies for managing family court, especially with respect to custody and visitation and child support issues. Orleans also provides licensing information for post-release employment, such as barbering.⁷² While the facility has partnered with agencies such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and different faith-based groups to do in-prison programming, some challenges persist. Orleans has inmates who are both high-risk and high-need, which means that both the safety and service requirements are quite demanding. The physical environment is also a challenge – visitors must wait at the gate for up to an hour to enter, one cannot bring laptops or other presentation equipment into the facility, and the distance from major cities means that there are fuel costs to consider. At this point, the drug and alcohol treatment programs are already at capacity, so there is not a lot of incentive or motivation to recruit new participants from other facilities.

⁶⁹ Conversation with Police Official, Northern Manhattan Precinct, September 18, 2008.

⁷⁰ Conversation with Police Official, New York Police Department, September 23, 2008.

⁷¹ National Institute of Corrections website,
http://criminaljustice.state.ny.us/crimnet/ojsa/initiatives/tpci_crtf.htm.

⁷² Conversation with Administrative Official, Orleans Correctional Facility, September 18, 2008.

Among New York state prison facilities, however, Orleans is considered one of the more progressive facilities in the state following the TPCI model.⁷³

In the TPCI model, there are three basic phases: the institutional phase, the re-entry phase, and the community phase. The Orleans facility is currently only implementing the TPCI model in the last 120 days of incarceration – during the re-entry phase – and follows the individual’s service provision for nine months to one year post-release in the community. One of the hallmarks of the program is that the field parole officer of each participant in the program begins contact with the inmate prior to release during “Meet Your Parole Officer Day” events. (Parolees typically meet their parole officer after they have been released.)

A care coordinator from OASAS is placed in Orleans to collaborate with both DOCS and Parole in an effort to provide a seamless transition into substance abuse treatment and the provider network. Erie County social service providers also go into the Orleans facility “behind the walls” to help enroll inmates in Medicaid. After release, the care coordinator continues supervision of the parolee in conjunction with the parole officer for nine months to a year. The goal is to improve the parolee’s compliance with treatment and assistance with employment and housing. There is also emergency wraparound funding for individual needs, such as steel-toed boots required for a job, or emergency transportation.⁷⁴

Implementation of the TPCI model in other counties with high populations of reentrants is done by the County Reentry Task Forces (CRTFs). These local collaborations of city and state agencies seek to: (1) provide coordinated services across a wide spectrum of needs to offenders returning to the community; (2) collaborate with state criminal justice and human service agencies to develop transition plans for high-risk offenders transitioning from prison back into the community; and (3) create local capacity to develop strategies to provide services and manage risk. The role of the CRTFs is to coordinate and strengthen the community response to high-risk offenders transitioning from prison back to the community with the ultimate goal of reducing the number who return to prison for new convictions. Currently, thirteen counties have a CRTF and more are planned for the future.

Lessons Learned

The NIC model of Transition from Prison to Community is a smart model – and it is a hopeful sign that New York State has begun to implement the infrastructure needed to realize it fully. It is unclear, however, what plans are in place to fully implement the model statewide. The various system stakeholders we spoke with were either unaware of or confused about the state’s efforts to adopt the TPCI model.

⁷³ Conversation with Reentry Official, NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, September 18, 2008.

⁷⁴ Conversation with Reentry Official, NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, July 2008.

It is significant that community residents, law enforcement stakeholders, reentrants, advocates, and policy makers consistently mentioned the lack of coordination between agencies as one of the greatest challenges in regards to reentry. It appears that this is a challenge at both the state and local levels.

Summary: Stakeholder Interviews

Task Force staff conducted ten stakeholder interviews from January through July of 2008. Selected participants had direct experience dealing with the reentry issue, including prosecutors, a defense agency representative, police, service providers, persons who were formerly incarcerated (including persons who are no longer subject to criminal justice oversight and are successful members of the community), and elected officials and their staff. A series of key questions were developed to guide the interview process. These questions queried perceptions of safety, reactions to the current state of reentry – including how government agencies have responded to the issue – and reactions to preliminary ideas developed by the Task Force.

When asked to describe some of the strengths of Upper Manhattan neighborhoods respondents listed:

- *Highly visible elected officials and their staffs.*
- *An “old school” core of community activists who continue to advocate for services*
- *Hospitals that have done a good job of promoting positive community relations*
- *The use of technology by police to promote safety, including cameras*

It was not surprising to hear many concerns about public safety in general. One respondent indicated that the community was very concerned about sex offenders returning. There was also concern about specific residences in the community with high concentrations of reentrants. Respondents felt that, without effective treatment programs, supervision and employment opportunities, many reentrants would seek to “reclaim their old turfs,” leading to increased crime and violence in the community. One prosecutor’s office representative indicated concern about the increase in shootings, especially in East Harlem. One law enforcement official indicated that drug users committed most of the petty crime that sometimes lead to violent crime. Other general public safety concerns expressed included:

- *Saturation of social service programs in some neighborhoods.*
- *A large number of undocumented persons in the community and on parole*
- *Gangs*
- *Over-reliance on the police to solve crime issues*
- *Robberies and property offenses*
- *Drug dealers*

Regarding the reentry population specifically, respondents expressed concern about the range of challenges faced by reentrants, a lack of coordination of services, and a sense

that law enforcement and parole should collaborate better. Other specific concerns included:

- *Lack of housing for persons returning from prison.*
- *The need for educational and employment services and jobs for reentrants.*
- *Reentrants often have to navigate a maze of service providers and government rules to access assistance, discouraging them from pursuing benefits for which they are eligible.*
- *High caseloads for parole officers limit their effectiveness.*
- *Law enforcement is not sufficiently proactive enough, and there is a need for increased contact between police and parole. NYPD is not formally notified when a person is returning to the community.*
- *Confusion in the community about the reentry process.*
- *Need for peer group support.*
- *Parole conditions can actually contribute to failure for motivated persons. One respondent cited curfews that make it difficult for a parolee to seek employment or develop pro-social relationships.*
- *One respondent was not sure that the current system of matching parolees to the appropriate supervision and treatment plan was happening. Some parolees expressed the belief that all parolees are on the same level of supervision – and furthermore, that this system is not working. There was a lack of information about how the parole supervision system is actually structured.*
- *Discharge planning is still an ad-hoc process. Parolees often leave custody with few, if any, service referrals in place, and lack identification and Medicaid upon discharge.*

Respondents were asked to react to three preliminary recommendations of the Task Force and to offer suggestions of their own. Below are reactions to each preliminary recommendation and a list of other suggestions made by respondents:

1. Reentry Road Show: The Reentry Road Show will be a community education initiative designed to increase awareness of and support for promising reentry policies and practices. This effort will include presenters with direct experience in the reentry process – formerly incarcerated persons, leaders of social service agency and faith-based organizations, employers, Task Force members – who would be trained to make presentations to local groups, including in-school youth, justice-involved youth, community boards, faith institutions, and chambers of commerce/business groups.

Reactions:

- *Include testimonials of persons who have completed parole and are successful.*
- *The term “Road Show” is troubling and perhaps sends the wrong message, as some people associate a “Road Show” with a traveling*

circus. To avoid further stigmatization, it was suggested that the Task Force look at Fortune Society's "Get on the Bus Campaign" for ideas.

- *Bring presentation to non-traditional audiences, not the usual suspects – e.g. legislators who oppose progressive reentry reforms.*

2. Community Reentry Scorecard: The Justice Center plans to create a Community Reentry Scorecard, a set of data-driven indicators designed to help local community stakeholders and justice agencies measure the success of the local reentry process. The Scorecard will focus both on recidivism and parole violations as well as on key social service needs like housing, employment and treatment. Potential indicators might include numbers of arrests and technical violations among parolees, numbers of reentrants receiving treatment services, and numbers of reentrants with access to non-shelter housing. The scorecard can be used to educate community members on specific local challenges and hold public agencies accountable. Once designed and tested, the Scorecard can be replicated and utilized in other New York City neighborhoods and beyond.

Reactions:

- *Need to determine who is responsible for which data measure*
- *Be clear about who the audience is for this.*
- *Measure indicators beyond law enforcement – i.e. connections to social groups, involvement in religious communities, stable housing.*
- *Disaggregate technical violations from new arrests to provide a clearer picture of reasons for recidivism.*

3. Strengthening Pathways to Employment: In partnership with organizations like the Center for Employment Opportunities and the Doe Fund, the Justice Center will convene a series of roundtable discussions with local businesses to promote the hiring of persons with criminal records.

Reactions:

- *Make sure partners are reputable.*
- *Target small- to medium-sized employers.*
- *Use tax credits as a deal-closer, as most employers are not interested in tax credits as the primary reason to hire a person with a criminal history. (We heard as much in Baltimore as well.)*
- *Base outreach efforts on issues employers care about, such as finding and retaining good employees.*

Some other ideas were offered as well:

- *Focus on health issues for the parole population.*
- *Parolees could start their own Credit Union.*

- *Greater police-parole collaboration through joint outreach/investigation and information sharing.*
- *Notify police when a parolee comes home.*
- *Have town hall-style “welcome back” meetings at precincts for recently returned parolees.*
- *Assist older successful reentrants to develop “fictive kinship” relationships with newer parolees and wayward community youth. This takes advantage of the willingness of some older formerly incarcerated persons to give back both to new parolees and community youth.*
- *Provide space for informal support groups to convene in a non-contrived manner where reentrants can discuss openly their failures and aspirations without controversy.*
- *Provide greater assistance for reentrants to access college and basic education supports.*

Summary: Focus Groups

The Task Force also conducted five focus groups with key constituents: community members, parole officers and parolees. The focus groups provided important perspectives on general public safety prison discharge planning and post-release support. A focus group protocol was developed by Task Force staff and included a series of questions and prods. The following is a summary of the main issues discussed at the various groups.

Community Member Feedback

Community members expressed concern about public safety, in general, even though there was agreement that crime had gone down in the past two years. Participants felt that the government responses to crime are not adequate and that more direct community member involvement is needed. Several focus group participants regularly attend community board and/or precinct council meetings. They use these forums to report concerns to the police and remain educated about trends.

Several community members expressed concern about illegal activity on the streets related to gun violence and gang conflicts – *“I live in the East River Projects... one side is the Crips and one is the Bloods so you can’t say it’s not your problem, you have to be involved.”* Concern was expressed as well about the illegal drug trade they witness of dealers who *“sell it like candy.”*

Conversely, there was considerable empathy for the struggles parolees must face as they attempt to re-integrate back into the community. One woman indicated: *“they need to recognize where they are now – there are big changes in Harlem – it’s hard to find affordable housing and it’s hard to find a good paying job especially with only a high school diploma or even less education. And even if you have the tools when you come out, the environment and old habits can lead you astray.”*

Participants also discussed specific services parolees need in order to succeed: *“Mothers need daycare for their kids or they can’t look for a job,” “there needs to be more*

training programs in prison,” “they need to make the perception of jail a bad thing again instead of a rite-of-passage,” and parolees “need to be willing to change otherwise change isn’t going to happen.”

Parole Officer Feedback

Two parole officer focus groups were conducted. One included the Senior Parole Officer who supervises the parole staff at the Harlem Community Justice Center, at the Palladia Parole Transition Program (PTP) and at Project Greenhope, a residence for female parolees and their children. The other group consisted of field parole officers and a senior parole officer responsible for supervising parolees exclusively in Upper Manhattan.

The parole officers reported that they meet new parolees on the day they are released based on a computerized list generated each day. The information about each parolee comes from the facility parole staff.

The officers identified housing, employment, mental health issues, and drug treatment as the main challenges facing parolees. Mental health was identified as the most difficult challenge for parole staff to address since there are few programs that deal with parolees with dual diagnoses, such as mental illness coupled with drug and alcohol problems.

Consistent housing was also a frequent problem – according to one of the parole officers we spoke with, “parolees often rent rooms in Upper Manhattan but fail to inform the landlord that they are on parole and then face eviction when the parole officer makes the initial home visit or they move back into public housing and put their families at risk based on the federal rules which forbid parolees from public housing.” In addition, since parolees are not allowed to be referred to the shelter system unless they have a prior history of homelessness, they cannot be referred to shelters. The Division is making efforts to reduce the number of parolees who are referred to the shelter system (for those that do have a history of homelessness), as there are often drug and alcohol "triggers" at the shelters. Additionally, new admissions require lengthy assessments, which can take days to complete. These time issues can interfere with referrals to other support programs, such as drug treatment and employment programs.

The lack of anti-aggression programs was also defined as a major problem. The officers reported a growing number of parolees who have special conditions to attend anti-aggression programs, but few exist that can accommodate parolees.

The parole officers identified high caseloads as the single biggest problem. The officers reported they often have 70 to 80 parolees on their caseload. They identified responsibilities such as conducting “community preps,” (pre-release home evaluations that include a visit to the residence to ensure that it is suitable and there are no other parolees living there, that the parolee is welcome, that the residence is safe, etc.), within a week of a parolee’s release from prison as well as taking weekly reports, curfew checks and urine testing as time consuming activities. Much of their time is spent trying to prioritize the most troublesome cases. The officers added that parolees are often released without adequate identification, such as their social security cards, and without benefits

(such as Medicaid) having been secured. This compounds the work of parole officers who have high cases loads, limiting their ability to provide needed support for their clients. The officers agreed that in order to effectively provide adequate supervision, the caseloads should not exceed forty parolees.

Parolee feedback

The parolees agreed that the lack of discharge planning was one of the main factors affecting failed reentry. Each parolee who participated in the focus group reported that he had not met with a DOCS employee or a facility parole officer to talk about his needs prior to release. Most recently, these men had all been released from Queensborough Correctional Facility, but some had previously been released from upstate facilities and reported discharge planning had not been organized upstate either. Specifically, parolees cited financial challenges, housing issues and admission to programs such as drug treatment programs, anger management programs, mental health services, etc. as difficult. Many also considered support from family and parole officers (burdened by inflated caseloads) as inadequate.

Many of the parolees described common structural and systemic challenges. One participant, for example, noted that when he was released from an upstate prison with \$40, the money was virtually spent just in transportation costs returning home to New York City. Financial challenges are also compounded by long processing times for public assistance and Medicaid. Although services like emergency food stamps are critical, food stamps alone cannot help a parolee meet subsistence needs for his/her family. Wages for available employment are also too low. These financial issues make it more difficult to fight the temptation to return to previous illegal occupations.

Virtually all of the parolees agreed that the amount of individual attention given to them by their parole officer was limited. They acknowledged their needs were often not being met because the officer's caseloads are so full, the parole officers *"don't really have the time to see what's needed and get us started on the right foot."*

When asked what would make supervision more helpful, or work better, for someone coming out of prison for the first time, the parolees recommended the following:

- Parole should be looking at individual needs, not just taking a "kitchen sink" approach.
- HRA and Medicaid eligibility should be arranged before they get out so that a parolee can look for work right away. That way, the person doesn't have to interrupt program participation to go to HRA. Additionally, parolees need the Medicaid card before they get out for admission to programs and for medications.
- Information on programs should be available so that parolees know how to get to service providers; there should be a booklet of services and what is needed to get into programs.
- Parolees should be able to network; in fact, they already network and help each other informally. There should be a forum for this to happen more formally so that persons on parole do not incur a violation for such activity.

Conclusion

This needs assessment has allowed us to outline some clear areas for improvement with respect to public safety and successful parole reentry:

1. Upper Manhattan communities continue to be challenged by serious social and economic issues: these neighborhoods tend to be poorer than other city neighborhoods and bear a higher burden of crime.
2. Residents in Upper Manhattan feel that there is a strong and committed core network of leaders and social service providers that can be mobilized to address these issues. At the same time, these residents have serious concerns about public safety, especially with respect to sex offenders, high concentrations of reentrants, drug sale, and a recent spate of violent crime.
3. With respect specifically to reentry, residents see a jumble of social services, strong in and of themselves, but suffering from a lack of coordination. Community members perceive a similar lack of organization among city and state agencies responsible for discharge planning and community supervision.
4. With some specific recommendations for improvement, interviewees generally expressed favorable attitudes toward Task Force recommendations regarding community education, data management and improved law enforcement communication, and strengthened pathways to employment.
5. The NIC model of Transition from Prison to Community is a good model. It is unclear the extent to which it is being or will be fully implemented in New York State. Efforts should be made to actively pursue integration of city and state agencies around successful discharge planning.

There is still research to be done, however, and a simultaneous need for action. The Upper Manhattan Reentry Task Force, as a result of its investigation, has suggested a set of targeted actions in an accompanying Strategic Plan document. As previously mentioned, these ideas focus on greater collaboration and information sharing among local law enforcement stakeholders, on strengthening pathways to employment, and on lessening the stigma associated with an incarceration. A full discussion of each is included in this companion document.

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Appendix A

Stakeholder Interview and Focus Group Question Script

The following is a sample script for use by the interviewer(s).

Introduction

“Thank you for taking the time to meet with me.

With support from the New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services, a Task Force has been established to develop and implement a strategic plan to promote enhanced supervision and coordination of services persons on parole returning to the Upper Manhattan neighborhoods of East Harlem, Central Harlem, Washington Heights and Inwood. The Task Force includes representatives from state and local justice agencies, municipal human service and housing agencies, as well as community-based and faith-based organizations.

The overall goal of the Upper Manhattan Reentry Task Force is to enhance public safety and to reduce recidivism and reentry failure among parolees returning from state imprisonment to Upper Manhattan neighborhoods. The Task Force is engaged in a two-phased process. The first phase is a community needs assessment, in which the Task Force will gather data on the quality and comprehensiveness of the community’s current parole reentry system. In particular, the Task Force will focus on the provision of housing, employment, mental health, substance abuse and family support services to both parolees and their families. A needs assessment report will document the Task Force’s findings, including an analysis of the parolee population, the most common obstacles and service needs, as well as a compilation of existing resources, policies and procedures with regard to reintegration of offenders.

In the second phase, the Task Force will develop a strategic plan for improving the capacity of Upper Manhattan Neighborhoods to assist and support offender reentry by expanding on strong networks already in place, encouraging family and community involvement, and by improving coordination and collaboration across offender-serving organizations and government agencies. The Task Force will identify a local reentry strategy with three measurable goals that, once achieved, will bridge the gaps between current and best practices.

Finally, the Task Force will engage the community in building a strengthened reentry system through public education, providing opportunities for community participation in reentry planning and programming.”

Summary of procedure

“The interview/ discussion group will last approximately one hour. I hope you don’t mind if I take notes, but I want to be sure I remember the key points you make. If any

quotes are attributable to you by name in the materials produced for the project we will seek your permission to use them.”

I. COMMUNITY STRENGTHS

Main Question:

1. What are the main strengths of Upper Manhattan neighborhoods?

[Strengths are factors that make a community function more effectively and help it deal with change or challenges.]

Additional Prods:

- What do you think are the best things about living or working in Upper Manhattan neighborhoods?
- Please identify some important community resources (e.g. schools, parks, community-based organizations, political leadership, geographic locations, and other positives) that contribute to your community’s well being.

II. PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES

Main Questions:

- 1. What are some of the more pressing public safety concerns in Upper Manhattan neighborhoods?***
- 2. What types of crime pose the greatest concern to you personally?***
- 3. Aside from the public safety concerns you have just mentioned, what are the primary concerns or problems currently facing Upper Manhattan neighborhoods?***

Additional Prods:

- Are “quality of life” offenses a concern to you? Which in particular?
- Are there other types of illegal activities or conditions that concern you?
- Are there specific laws you would like to see enacted or changed to enhance public safety in Upper Manhattan?
- Who or what would you say is causing the problem you’ve mentioned?
- What members of your community would you say are the most adversely affected by this problem?
- What kinds of solutions might help address this problem?

III. SATISFACTION WITH PUBLIC SAFETY RESPONSES FROM GOVERNMENT

Main Questions:

- 1. In what ways have the government agencies responsible for public safety met or exceeded your expectations in responding to public safety needs in Upper Manhattan?*
- 2. In what ways have the government agencies responsible for public safety experienced difficulty responding to public safety needs in Upper Manhattan neighborhoods?
[Persons who work in the justice system should respond to these questions by considering how well their agency has met its mission in serving local communities]*

Additional Prods:

- What (if any) are your current frustrations with the criminal justice system?
- How can courts, police, prosecutors and corrections be more responsive to local public safety needs?
- Do you have examples of a public safety response from government that went well and one that did not?
- What would you like to see more of from government in regards to meeting the public safety needs of local neighborhoods?

III. OTHER PUBLIC SAFETY CONCERNS RELATED TO PAROLEES

Main Questions:

- 1. What types of problems/challenges do you think parolees face returning to Upper Manhattan neighborhoods?*
- 2. What types of programs or services do you believe persons on parole need to be successful community members?*

These questions (and the focus group protocol around this issue) will likely vary for each subcommittee. What kinds of key questions would you as a subcommittee like to have answered?

IV. PAROLE REENTRY BEST PRACTICES

Main Questions:

- 1. Do you support greater continuity of jail-based mental health and substance abuse treatment services and community-based treatment service providers to provide continuous treatment services for persons on parole?*
- 2. Would you support a comprehensive one-stop center where parolees would report regularly, receive services and contribute to the community through community service under the supervision of the courts, the Division of Parole, and the police?*
- 3. Would you support neighborhood-based courts where parolees would be regularly supervised by a collaborative team, including parole officers, treatment providers, and court-based clinical services?*
- 4. Would you support increased funding for employment training programs aimed at assisting parolees in securing and maintaining employment?*
- 5. The Rockefeller drug laws, a controversial issue, instituted long-term prison sentences for non-violent drug felonies. Would you support repealing these laws as a necessary foundational change, and replacing them with community supervision and services?*

VI. OTHER INFORMATION

Main Questions:

- 1. Are there other persons you recommend we speak with as part of this process?*
- 2. Do you have reports, data, or publications that you recommend we review as part of our assessment?*

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