

# Upper Manhattan Reentry Task Force

## Enhancing Parole Reentry and Public Safety in Upper Manhattan

### A Strategic Plan

## **Acknowledgements**

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

The Upper Manhattan Reentry Task Force is composed of the following individuals, all of whom have shown their dedication to promoting greater public safety and improved success for those returning to New York communities from prison or jail:

**Patricia Brown**, Assistant Commissioner for Forensic Behavioral Health Services, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

**Sharon Davis**, Addictions Program Specialist II, Bureau of Criminal Justice Services, New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services

**Charlene Fletcher**, Manager of Criminal Justice Programs, The Doe Fund

**Leroy Frazer, Jr.**, Executive Assistant District Attorney, Governmental Affairs and Community Relations, New York County District Attorney's Office

**Lynn Goodman**, Statewide Director of Re-Entry Services, New York State Division of Parole

**Police Officer Kevin Grogan**, New York Police Department

**Richard Levy**, First Deputy Commissioner, New York City Department of Probation

**Glenn Martin**, Vice President of Development and Public Affairs, The Fortune Society

**Sheila Mashack**, Deputy Director, Greenhope Services for Women, Inc.

**George McDonald**, President, The Doe Fund

**Julio Medina**, Executive Director, Exodus Transitional Community

**Ricardo Morales**, General Counsel, New York City Housing Authority

**Superintendent Cynthia Morton**, Former Superintendent of Edgecombe Correctional Facility  
New York State Department of Correctional Services

**George Nashak**, Deputy Commissioner, New York City Department of Homeless Services

**Chauncey Parker**, Director, New York/New Jersey HIDTA (High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area)

**Tonya Perry-Wilcox**, Forensic Coordinator, New York State Office of Mental Health

**Captain Brian Reilly**, New York Police Department

**Michele Sviridoff**, Deputy Criminal Justice Coordinator, New York City Criminal Justice Coordinator's Office

**Mindy Tarlow**, Executive Director, Center for Employment Opportunities

**Superintendent Shelda Washington**, Superintendent of Edgecombe Correctional Facility, New York State Department of Correctional Services

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Al Siegel, Deputy Director, Center for Court Innovation

Raye Barbieri, Director of Implementation, Center for Court Innovation

Chris Watler, Project Director, Harlem Community Justice Center

Nigel Jackson, Reentry Coordinator, Harlem Community Justice Center

John Megaw, Deputy Director, Harlem Community Justice Center  
Kate Krontiris, Planning and Operations Manager, Harlem Community Justice Center  
Rashida Abuwala, Research Associate, Harlem Community Justice Center  
Donald Farole Jr., Senior Research Associate, Center for Court Innovation  
Julie Weiss, Reentry Intern, Harlem Community Justice Center  
Zachary Hamilton, Research Associate, Center for Court Innovation  
Karissa Farinas, Junior Court Analyst, Harlem Community Justice Center

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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 goals: 1) To enhance public safety; and, 2) To reduce 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 examined community and criminal justice data; interviewed key stakeholders; held focus groups with parolees, community members, and parole officers; and reviewed current literature on reentry. Task Force staff also attended various community meetings, traveled to Baltimore, Maryland to explore reentry innovations, visited Edgewood Correctional Facility, and attended a statewide conference for County Reentry Task Forces. The full Task Force met quarterly and several Task Force members made themselves available for additional meetings as needed. This work culminated in a report entitled, "Starting Off on the Right Foot: A Needs Assessment of Reentry in Upper Manhattan." The report documents what we learned and provides detailed information from our examination of available data and conversations with key stakeholders. A brief summary of the report's findings is included in the section below entitled *The Reentry Challenge in Upper Manhattan*.

The Upper Manhattan Reentry Task Force is distinct from the County Reentry Task Forces implemented around the state. In upstate New York and on Long Island, the model involves a collaborative case management approach designed to strengthen discharge planning for specific persons returning from prison to the county. In Upper Manhattan, we began with a more macro focus and broad exploration of reentry. We are seeking to develop innovative approaches to reentry locally in one of the most densely-populated and high-needs areas in the state. As part of this strategic plan, however, we are proposing a case management focus similar in some respects to what is being done by County Reentry Task Force programs around the state. Another key difference is that this effort is being organized as part of an existing community court program, the Harlem Community Justice Center (the "Justice Center"). The Justice Center brings to the reentry work considerable experience, local contacts, and a problem-solving justice focus. Several principles underlie the work of the Task Force and are informed by the experiences of the Justice Center.

1. *Collaboration* is essential to effective reentry. The most effective collaborations are interest-based, with each partner agency getting what they need to effectively contribute to the work.
2. *Better information* equals more effective decision-making at the individual, agency, and community level. At an individual level, this means pushing for assessment of risk and criminogenic needs<sup>1</sup> using tested and reliable screening tools. At the agency level, this

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of clarification, *criminogenic needs* refer to those crime-producing factors that are strongly correlated with risk, such as anti-social attitudes, anti-social peer associations, substance abuse, lack of empathy, lack of problem-solving capacities, and employment status. Notably, these are factors that are *dynamic*, in that they can be targeted for change; additionally, the greatest reduction in risk comes when four to six of these factors are targeted together, and not when programs attempt to reduce just one factor. For more information, see Latessa and Lowenkamp, *What Are Criminogenic Needs and Why Are They Important?*, [http://www.uc.edu/criminaljustice/Articles/What\\_Are\\_Criminogenic\\_Needs.pdf](http://www.uc.edu/criminaljustice/Articles/What_Are_Criminogenic_Needs.pdf)

means sharing data both on processes and outcomes, so that effective goals and practices can be determined. At the community level, this means greater transparency about the reentry process for local residents, professionals, and organizations.

3. *Accountability* matters. Community safety is enhanced by reentry approaches that foster both greater agency accountability for results and individual accountability through more effective community supervision.
4. *Using resources effectively*. Better access to treatment services, employment, and housing is critical to reentrant success. In some cases, greater investments are needed, but in many cases, better use of existing resources can support better outcomes for reentrants, leading to increased community safety.
5. *Community engagement*, when done right, encourages greater support for effective reentry efforts. Outreach to business, religious, and political leaders creates a climate of trust and can bring fresh ideas to reentry planning work.
6. *Focus on outcomes*. Reliable data and meaningful measures are essential to ensuring good outcomes. Where possible, evidence-based practices should be implemented; given that this field is still building an evidence base of those strategies that reduce recidivism, promising practices should also be utilized.

This report includes a set of strategic recommendations and an implementation plan for the next year of Task Force work. As the Task Force continues this important work, we hope to develop model approaches in Upper Manhattan that can be replicated in jurisdictions across New York State and the country.

### **The Reentry Challenge in Upper Manhattan**

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 23<sup>rd</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, 32<sup>nd</sup>, 33<sup>rd</sup>, and 34<sup>th</sup> 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 96<sup>th</sup> Street on the east side and north of 110<sup>th</sup> Street on the west side, extending to the upper most tip of Manhattan, from the East River to the Hudson River. In 2006, the most recent year for which complete data is available, there were 584,033 people living in upper Manhattan community districts, representing 36 percent of the total population of Manhattan.<sup>2</sup>

The profile of Upper Manhattan in our companion needs assessment report points to continued disparities between Upper Manhattan neighborhoods and the rest of New York City. Rapid changes have occurred in Upper Manhattan neighborhoods in recent years, spurred on in part by

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<sup>2</sup> United States, Census Bureau, *2006 American Community Survey* (United States: Census Bureau, 2007), <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/popacs.shtml>.

historic low rates of crime and violence. Young professionals and upper middle-class families seeking more affordable housing in Manhattan are relocating to Upper Manhattan neighborhoods. New businesses are opening to cater to a growing upper middle class clientele. High-rise luxury developments, shopping malls, and small upscale shops are emerging in areas once considered too poor and too dangerous by many. The benefits of these changes include greater employment opportunities and reductions in the stigma of crime and violence that limited investment and enjoyment of public spaces in places like Central Harlem and Washington Heights.

However, despite the economic expansion of the last fifteen years, the neighborhoods of Upper Manhattan continue to suffer from a variety of long standing social problems. For example:

- 40 percent of children (persons under 18 years old) lived in poverty in Upper Manhattan in 2006, compared to 29 percent for all of New York City.<sup>3</sup>
- Approximately 30 percent of all households in Central Harlem, East Harlem, and Washington Heights had incomes of less than \$15,000 in 2006.<sup>4</sup>
- Of those persons 25 years and over in Upper Manhattan, only 25 percent had graduated from high school, and only 16 percent had completed some college. While high school graduation rates compare similarly to those Manhattan-wide, college completion rates are much lower than the city average of 25 percent.<sup>5</sup>
- In 2007, the unemployment rate, including those persons who have given up seeking work, for Upper Manhattan community districts averaged about 16 percent compared to NYC (9.7 percent).<sup>6</sup>

While crime has gone down dramatically, with many of the highest crime areas in Upper Manhattan experiencing the biggest decreases, disparities in crime between Upper Manhattan communities and the rest of New York City persist.

- In 2006, there were 5897 violent felony adult arrests in Manhattan, 48 percent of which occurred in Upper Manhattan (2,802).<sup>7</sup> It should be noted again that Upper Manhattan contains only 36 percent of the borough's total population.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> United States, Bureau of Labor Statistics, [Unemployment Rates by State, Seasonally Adjusted, June 2006](http://data.bls.gov/map/servlet/map.servlet.MapToolServlet?datatype=unemployment&year=2006&period=M06&survey=la&map=state&seasonal=s) (United States: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics Information and Analysis, 2006), <http://data.bls.gov/map/servlet/map.servlet.MapToolServlet?datatype=unemployment&year=2006&period=M06&survey=la&map=state&seasonal=s>; and from: United States, Census Bureau, [2006 American Community Survey](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/popacs.shtml) (United States: Census Bureau, 2007), <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/popacs.shtml>.

<sup>6</sup> New York City Administration for Children's Services, [NYC 2007 Community Snapshots](http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/statistics/statistics_cd_snapshot.shtml), (New York City: New York, 2008), [http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/statistics/statistics\\_cd\\_snapshot.shtml](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 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."

- More than 50 percent of all juvenile felony arrests in Manhattan occurred in Upper Manhattan precincts in 2006.<sup>8</sup>
- The 28<sup>th</sup> precinct, serving Central Harlem, had the highest rate of prior felony convictions within the prosecuted arrest population – 43 percent, compared to 29 percent for all of Manhattan.<sup>9</sup>

Within Upper Manhattan, the effects of crime and poverty are not equally felt. Areas of Upper Manhattan have micro-concentrations of crime and poverty that account for much of Manhattan’s share. For example, a one-mile area of East Harlem has the highest concentration of formerly incarcerated males in New York City, 1 in 20 males, according to the Justice Mapping Center.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the Mapping Center reported that 900 people who live in the zip code that includes this area were admitted to the city’s jail system.<sup>11</sup> By comparison, on average 633 persons per zip code citywide were admitted to city jails during the same time period.<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, poverty, educational failure, and high unemployment are also evident within this reentry corridor.

Given the crime picture in Upper Manhattan, it is not surprising that a large number of persons on parole return to Upper Manhattan neighborhoods. A recent snapshot of persons on parole returning to Manhattan indicated that 4,461 were assigned to parole bureaus serving all of Manhattan. Of these, 52 percent (2,324) were assigned to Upper Manhattan parole bureaus.<sup>13</sup> 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
- typically out *longer* than parolees in the rest of Manhattan.<sup>14</sup>

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.

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<sup>7</sup> 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). Unlike other boroughs in NYC Manhattan police Precincts are not co-terminus with the Community Districts they serve. The violent felony arrest figures are divided proportionally by the population served within the Community District.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> 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 Year 2006. Data obtained through the Mayor’s Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator.

<sup>10</sup> Justice Mapping Center, <http://www.justicemapping.org/>, See article in New York Daily News (March 18, 2007) “Convict Alley in Harlem Nabe.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> New York City Department of Corrections, [http://www.nyc.gov/html/doc/html/stats/doc\\_stats.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/doc/html/stats/doc_stats.shtml).

<sup>13</sup> NYS Division of Parole, Characteristics of All Parolees in intensive and Regular Parole in Manhattan II, III, IV and all Manhattan Parole Bureaus. A snap-shot of parolees under supervision as of March 31, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Snap shot of parolees under supervision for all Manhattan Parole Bureaus as of March 28, 2008.

The recent global economic crisis and consolidation of financial firms in New York City will likely lead to a severe economic downturn in New York City.<sup>15</sup> Rising unemployment and lower tax receipts have already added to the strain on both the state and city budgets. Cuts in services have already begun as government enters a phase of retrenchment that is likely to last through 2009. Foundations will also suffer, as their endowments are often tied to the stock market. The troubling economic news will be especially difficult for the neighborhoods of Upper Manhattan. Additionally, agency cuts could threaten the ability of key stakeholders to participate in collaborations that support effective reentry practices.

## **Recommendations**

The complex social, cultural, and political challenges impacting reentry require locally-driven innovations that, where possible, are evidence-based and scalable. Investments in reentry must yield results at the local level, but must also provide a foundation for policy development over time across the state. The overall strategy that the Task Force will adopt to achieve practical results in the next year will involve modeling our recommendations below within a high reentry impact area in Upper Manhattan. For example, East Harlem, which was previously noted as a reentry corridor for high incarceration rates, would be an ideal area for the Task Force to test collaborative strategies that reduce criminogenic needs among the parole population and increase public safety. Successful pilot efforts would inform broader reentry efforts throughout the state. Seven key areas of focus identified by the Task Force will continue to guide our work: *law enforcement, community education, workforce development, social services, civic engagement, discharge planning, and housing*. In each of these areas, the recommendations below seek to create a foundation for greater accountability, enhanced local coordination, and more robust community involvement in the reentry process.

### **I. Pilot Program: Enhancing Coordination Between the Division of Parole and NYPD**

#### **Challenge:**

Enhanced coordination between local police precincts and parole to proactively respond to high-risk persons on parole is needed. This is especially true in precincts where reported crime is higher, more persons with multiple convictions are arrested, and high concentrations of persons on parole reside. Research shows that evidence-based interventions targeting reentrants with a high risk of committing new crimes result in better outcomes both for the reentrant and for the community. In fact, this same research shows that directing greater supervision and support to low-risk offenders can actually worsen outcomes – so that limited treatment and supervision resources should be utilized for the greatest benefit to public safety.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> NYC Comptroller Forecasts 165,000 Job Losses Over Next Two Years (October 15, 2008). NYC Office of the Comptroller (See: [http://www.comptroller.nyc.gov/press/2008\\_releases/pr08-10-142.shtm](http://www.comptroller.nyc.gov/press/2008_releases/pr08-10-142.shtm)).

<sup>16</sup> Pew Center on the States, [Putting Public Safety First: 13 Strategies for Successful Supervision and Reentry](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411800_public_safety_first.pdf), [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411800\\_public\\_safety\\_first.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411800_public_safety_first.pdf).

## Recommendations:

1. Explore developing a localized collaborative monitoring strategy that enhances parole supervision effectiveness in a high reentry impact area in Upper Manhattan. This strategy would serve as a framework for testing new ways for the Division of Parole, District Attorney's Office, New York City Police Department, and local service providers to collaborate. Preliminary data indicates that, as of September 2008, there were 597 parolees residing in the geographic area patrolled by the 25<sup>th</sup> Police Precinct in East Harlem.
2. As part of the localized collaborative monitoring strategy, explore approaches that enhance parole-police collaboration, including better information sharing, reliable and tested assessment tools that match resources to risk for identified persons on parole, better utilization of graduated sanctions, and better investigative coordination. This effort could focus on parolees at high risk of recidivism based on an analysis using a validated assessment instrument. (The COMPAS Reentry Assessment instrument developed by Northpointe Institute for Public Management is a possible resource<sup>17</sup>). The purpose of collaborative efforts between police and parole will be reinforcement of the idea that high risk offenders will be subject to heightened scrutiny combined with targeted resources that address issues negatively affecting their compliance and sustained law-abiding behavior.
3. The Task Force should explore the creation of a community "Reentry Scorecard" for Upper Manhattan that will track key reentry indicators of safety, support, and services for a select group of high-risk persons on parole. The Task Force will model the scorecard in one precinct initially. Scorecard indicators will include: technical violations, convictions for new crimes committed by persons on parole, the number of parolees accessing drug or mental health treatment services, and the number of parolees entering the shelter system from prison. An annual reentry scorecard report to the community, documenting successes and challenges, will result.
4. Create the position of Reentry Research Associate at the Justice Center to assist the Task Force Coordinator in managing the scorecard process by fostering relationships with research and data management staff at the Mayor's Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator, the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, and the New York City Criminal Justice Agency. The Associate would collect scorecard data, produce reports, and generate fact sheets on reentry in Upper Manhattan.
5. Explore the development of a targeted, precinct-based "welcome back meeting" for high-risk offenders, looking to the Project Ceasefire effort begun in Boston as an example.<sup>18</sup> The focus of these meetings would be high-risk persons on parole and they would take place at the Justice Center, where a team of parole officers, service providers, and law enforcement partners would help parolees understand their obligations while on parole and the services offered to support them in maintaining a law-abiding lifestyle. While Project Ceasefire sought to reduce gun crime, the

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<sup>17</sup> See: <http://www.northpointeinc.com/>

<sup>18</sup> US Department of Justice (May 2006). Project Safe Neighborhoods Strategic Interventions Offender Notification Meetings: Case Study 2 (see: [http://www.psn.gov/pubs/pdf/PSN\\_CaseStudy2.pdf](http://www.psn.gov/pubs/pdf/PSN_CaseStudy2.pdf) )

goal of these meetings would be to test if this approach could reduce technical violations and new crimes committed by persons on parole, and increase access to services. Local service providers and religious leaders would be on hand for these meetings to offer assistance; and efforts would be made to greater engage families of parolees, by assessing their needs and connecting them to needed services. The Justice Center offers a unique opportunity to test this model in New York City. As a community court, the Justice Center offers both on-site services and access to a wide array of service providers and community members who would assist in this effort, in addition to criminal justice partner agencies.

## **II. Community Outreach and Education**

### Challenge:

The public is generally unfamiliar with the reentry process, the role of relevant agencies, and the experiences of persons leaving prison. The public stigma attached to persons reentering the community often blunts efforts to develop progressive policies and local programs that enhance public safety. Promoting a broader public understanding of reentry and the potential role that the public can play in fostering effective reentry practice is critical.

### Recommendations:

1. Develop a multi-media, interactive community presentation that provides information about the reentry process and the challenges facing reentrants and their families. Schedule presentations to reach audiences that would otherwise be unaware of the reentry issue, at venues including houses of worship, schools, youth-serving agencies, business groups, cultural institutions, and agency staff meetings. Involve speakers who were formerly incarcerated in this effort and are now productive members of the community, including those who have had challenges abiding by the conditions of parole in the past.
2. Develop a speaker's bureau of formerly incarcerated persons. Provide training and development to speakers on presentation skills. Assist speakers in developing their personal narrative and life philosophy and in building their speaking engagements. These speakers would be available to speak at community events, conferences and business luncheons. A small pilot group of five to eight speakers would be recruited in the first year. These speakers would be part of a program and as such would not be in violation of Parole's policy of non-fraternization between persons on parole.
3. Explore the development of a reentry resource center in each community board. Train community board staff and volunteers on the reentry issue and provide information and materials about resources for reentrants. This work could best occur with the law enforcement or government services sub-committees of each community board.
4. Produce reentry fact sheets providing information on a range of reentry topics for the public, employers, reentrants and service providers. Distribute these to community agencies and post them online.

5. Recruit volunteers, including religious leaders and retired professionals, to provide mentoring and guidance supports to reentrants.

### III. Workforce Development

#### Challenge:

Access to a living-wage job and a defined career path is essential for a reentrant's short- and long-term success.<sup>19</sup> Employment and overall economic viability are important ways to encourage pro-social behaviors and positive relationships. Despite this fact, and the desire of many reentrants to work, there still exist many barriers to employment for persons with a criminal conviction. Key among these barriers is the stigma of a criminal conviction and the resulting discrimination faced by reentrants from employers who are unaware of the law and, more importantly, how their business can benefit from hiring pools that include qualified candidates with a criminal conviction record.

#### Recommendations:

1. Explore the development of an employment initiative, working with Task Force member agencies the Center for Employment Opportunities and The Doe Fund, along with the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, Chamber of Commerce, the New York City Human Resource Administration, Department of Small Business Services, and elected officials to engage local business leaders in Upper Manhattan. This initiative would inform local business of the tax incentives and other benefits of hiring qualified reentrants and provide support for small businesses to complete the necessary forms to access tax credits and other benefits. The National HIRE Network serves as a particularly good resource regarding occupational license plans, as well as interpretation of negligent hiring laws.
2. As an immediate response to employment needs for reentrants, explore enhanced funding for transitional employment programs in Upper Manhattan that provide immediate earnings for persons on parole and that meet the parole condition of gaining unsubsidized employment.

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<sup>19</sup> Research from the Urban Institute on the employment and recidivism outcomes for former male prisoners in Illinois, Ohio and Texas indicates that “working before prison and earning wages early after release were significantly related to reincarceration the first year out. After controlling for all the factors listed above, respondents who worked in the 6 months before prison were nearly half as likely to be reincarcerated 12 months out as those who had not worked (16 percent compared with 28 percent). Similarly, the more wages earned two months after release, the lower a respondent’s likelihood of reincarceration. Predicted probabilities of reincarceration were 8 percent for those earning more than \$10 per hour; 12 percent for those earning \$7 to \$10 per hour; and 16 percent for those earning less than \$7 per hour—compared with 23 percent for those who were unemployed. Also notable was that respondents who participated in job training classes while in prison (about a fifth of the sample) were less likely to be reincarcerated one year out—with a difference approaching significance ( $p = 0.084$ ) of 13 percent compared with 22 percent. Neither pre- nor post-prison work was related to self-reported recidivism outcomes after release, but releasees who had held a job while in prison were significantly less likely to report having been rearrested eight months out (19 percent compared with 28 percent of those with no job in prison). See Visher, Debus, and Yahner, Employment after Prison: A Longitudinal Study of Releasees in Three States, page 8, [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411778\\_employment\\_after\\_prison.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411778_employment_after_prison.pdf).

3. Utilizing Department of Labor information and in partnership with the Upper Manhattan Workforce 1 Career Center, identify growth sectors in the New York City economy, including “green collar” jobs.<sup>20</sup> Work with the Division of Parole to get information on parolee skill sets and education levels and use this information to inform the development of an employment and education strategy.
4. Work with local credit unions, banks and workforce development agencies to explore the creation of a micro-credit program for reentrants seeking to start their own business.
5. Work with the defense bar and other legal service providers like the Legal Action Center to conduct information sessions that help parolees obtain a copy of their rap sheet and assist them in understanding which jobs may or may not be appropriate for them based on their criminal history. These sessions would help parolees not only understand how to read a rap sheet, but also become aware of the jobs that are barred by certain crimes and the circumstances under which those bars can be lifted.

#### **IV. Accessing Services**

##### Challenge:

Reentrants need increased access to local services, including aggression management therapies, drug treatment services, housing assistance and local employment services.

##### Recommendations:

1. Develop and distribute a resource compendium to parolees returning to Upper Manhattan. Make it available at parole bureaus, correctional facilities, the Harlem Reentry Court, and through local service providers.
2. Build on a recently-initiated tele-visiting program, through DOCS chaplains, where significant others can come to the Harlem State Office building and visit with incarcerated individuals at certain facilities through videoconferencing. This endeavor is intended to help individuals maintain family ties, in hopes of making the eventual return to family and the community easier.
3. Outreach to foundations that are interested in supporting localized reentry efforts. Work with these foundations to create funding programs that will support the development of promising reentry practices that reduce crime and address the critical needs of reentrants. Work with these foundations to create an investment pool targeting the highest need reentry zones in Upper Manhattan.
4. Work with religious leaders to develop reception sites where reentrants could access information and emergency services – clothing, food, toiletries – as well as mentoring services.
5. Explore the creation of the position of Reentry Ombudsperson to assist reentrants who need additional assistance accessing services. The Ombudsperson would work with reentrants, employers and service providers to resolve problems that limit access to services. The Ombudsperson would also collect and aggregate information

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas L. Friedman: The Green-Collar Solution. (October 17, 2007) New York Times. (see: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/17/opinion/17friedman.html> )

on the challenges facing reentrants attempting to access services and employment in Upper Manhattan and report this information to city and state agencies along with recommendations for improvements. This position would be housed at the Justice Center.

6. Work with local treatment providers to develop greater access to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and other validated behavior change programs in Upper Manhattan that reduce aggression and promote effective problem-solving and conflict management.

## V. Civic Engagement

### Challenge:

Persons returning from prison often lack a rich social network of relationships that support desistance from crime, sobriety, gainful employment and access to services. This state of diminished social capital limits reentrants' ability to address their needs. Civic engagement and education through community service is a powerful way to encourage the development of productive social capital for reentrants.

### Recommendations:

1. Explore the use of national service programming to encourage civic participation. The AmeriCorps program could be enhanced to offer young persons on parole (ages 17 to 25, those who are more likely to recidivate) an opportunity to perform a year of paid services, earn a reward for future educational pursuits, and transition to full time employment. Efforts to encourage the enrollment of persons on parole or with a prior criminal conviction in existing AmeriCorps programs should be explored (with certain exceptions as determined by each program and in accordance with state law and Corporation for National and Community Service policy). The majority of persons with a criminal conviction served time for a nonviolent crime. National service work would benefit the community as well as the person.
2. The recently established NYC Justice Corps is an innovative effort targeting vulnerable older youth, 18-24 years old, who are involved in the criminal justice system. If this initiative is effective, New York City should consider scaling up this effort quickly in the face of the economic crisis to provide a pathway to employment for vulnerable older youth and to strengthen the social capital of poor neighborhoods.<sup>21</sup>
3. Develop volunteer opportunities in partnership with faith-based groups for reentrants that allow them to utilize their talents to address issues of importance to the community. Such projects might include youth dialogue events, providing assistance to other persons reentering the community, organizing education efforts and fairs around health issues like HIV/AIDS and substance abuse, and projects that address conditions of disorder in the community.

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<sup>21</sup> John Jay College of the City University of New York: New York City Justice Corps (see: <http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/centersinstitutes/pri/current.asp> )

## VI. Discharge Planning

### Challenge:

New York State has made some strides in implementing the National Institute of Corrections Transition from Prison to Community model. However, in many cases, we heard from parole officers and parolees that the discharge planning process fails to meet the needs of reentrants. Effective discharge planning promotes public safety by encouraging successful reentry.

### Recommendations:

1. The state should move more quickly towards full implementation of the Transition from Prison to Community model. More comprehensive information about this effort should be made available on the DCJS website and should include updates from the frontlines about the success and challenge of implementation, the name and contact of a state-level representative who can answer questions from the field, and a description and contact person for each County Reentry Task Force.
2. New York State could benefit from the use of validated risk assessment instruments that assess risk and criminogenic need. The Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) is one tool currently in use by probation agencies across New York State. COMPAS informs the Pre-Sentence Investigation Report (PSI) and provides guidance on classification and programming in prison. The Division of Parole recently validated COMPAS as a risk and assessment tool. The Division will begin using COMPAS at the Orleans Correctional Facility, but it is not widely used by the Department of Correctional Services. As a result, there is no formal coordinated risk and assessment planning process among the Division of Parole, the Department of Correctional Services, the Office of Mental Health and Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. We recommend that one tested and reliable risk assessment instrument be used to assess risk and needs during classification, periodically during the course of the individual's incarceration, and in preparation for discharge. An assessment tool should be deployed as well throughout the discharge planning and community supervision process to track changes in risk levels. Use of such an assessment tool should enhance, not supplement, the informed judgments of professional staffs.
3. A release plan that both links individuals with medical services and substance abuse treatment services for follow-up care and supplies an adequate amount of medication upon release is critical to reentry success. The Department of Corrections should make the process of lining up insurance coverage, including Medicaid, an essential component of the discharge arrangements. In April 2008, a new law went into effect for those already enrolled in Medicaid in which the coverage is suspended instead of being terminated when they are incarcerated. When the inmate is released from prison, coverage is then resumed. For persons incarcerated prior to April 2008, however, and for those who were not enrolled at the time of their incarceration, accessing Medicaid remains a challenge. Efforts to initiate the application process during the discharge planning phase should be enhanced either through training of corrections and parole staffs to help clients

complete the application, or through the co-location of local human services staffs in facilities to process applications, similar to the presence of human services staffs in hospitals in New York City.

## VII. Housing

### Challenge:

Housing is a critical need for reentrants, but many barriers exist that prevent reentrants from accessing housing. Approximately 15 percent of all parolees in Manhattan returned to an address in the shelter system in New York City.<sup>22</sup> Current federal and local housing laws and policies bar persons with a criminal record from public housing or Section 8 subsidies. Specifically, according to the Legal Action Center, under 24 C.F.R. § 960.203, NYCHA may exclude any individual and their family if that person “might negatively affect the health, safety, or welfare of other tenants, Authority staff, or an Authority development.”<sup>23</sup> Persons convicted of a felony can be excluded for a period of up to six years after completion of their sentence, including probation and parole; violations and misdemeanors can be excluded for up to three years.<sup>24</sup> NYCHA has discretion and may evaluate each case on a case-by-case basis and admit persons who have proven that they are “rehabilitated.”<sup>25</sup>

### Recommendations:

1. The Task Force should explore with the New York City Housing Authority strategies that would modify admission policies to provide a case-by-case review of persons on parole seeking to return to their family in NYCHA housing. For example, this approach has been modeled in East New York, Brooklyn through a collaboration involving Family Justice, the Kings County District Attorney’s Office and NYCHA. Through provision of services and enhanced supervision, the person on parole and his family are able to remain in public housing.<sup>26</sup> The Harlem Parole Reentry Court could be utilized to test this approach locally in East and Central Harlem. The Task Force could work closely with NYCHA to determine what type of wraparound services would be necessary to promote desistance from criminal activity for persons being considered for re-admission.
2. NYCHA should explore the possibility of raising the age – from 16 to 21 – at which a non-violent adult criminal conviction can be considered in barring a person from public housing and Section 8 subsidy.

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<sup>22</sup> Snapshot of Parolees as of March 28, 2008: Characteristics of Intensive and Regular Parolees in Manhattan II, III, and IV and all Manhattan Bureaus.

<sup>23</sup> Legal Action Center. How to Get Section 8 or Public Housing Even with a Criminal Record: A Guide for New York City Housing Authority Applicants and their Advocates pp. 4 (See: [http://lac.org/doc\\_library/lac/publications/How\\_to\\_Get\\_Section\\_8\\_or\\_Public\\_Housing.pdf](http://lac.org/doc_library/lac/publications/How_to_Get_Section_8_or_Public_Housing.pdf) )

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. pp. 4-5.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. pp. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Family Justice La Bodega de la Familia Program (see: [http://www.familyjustice.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=187%3Aabout-family-bodega&catid=51%3Ageneral&Itemid=58](http://www.familyjustice.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=187%3Aabout-family-bodega&catid=51%3Ageneral&Itemid=58) )

3. The state and city should explore strategies utilizing state and federal programs (e.g. Community Development Block Grant funding, NYS Homeless Housing and Assistance Program, and tax credits) to encourage developers and non-profits to increase supportive housing options for persons returning from prison to Upper Manhattan, especially those that are homeless, mentally ill and/or substance abusing. Fortune Academy, a project of the Fortune Society, is one model that could be replicated.<sup>27</sup> Scatter-site supportive housing with a mobile staff providing support to reentrants should also be considered.

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<sup>27</sup> See: [http://www.fortunesociety.org/02\\_services/academy.html](http://www.fortunesociety.org/02_services/academy.html)

Harlem Community Justice Center

170 East 121<sup>st</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10035

[www.courtinnovation.org](http://www.courtinnovation.org)

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