

Crime Prevention Institute Keeps Post-Incarcerated Individuals Off the Streets

By Julie Solomon

The Crime Prevention Institute (CPI) is an organization committed to helping individuals released from prison or jail transition back into the outside world. By providing counseling and education to those about to be released from incarceration, CPI works to keep these people off of the streets. CPI is a purely local organization that was formed in Austin in 1993. With only three staff and two social work interns, CPI works hard to develop strong programs that fulfill their mission of the reduction of crime and restoration of domestic tranquility in communities through individual case management, educational programs and strategic partnerships directed toward the underlying causes of crime (www.cpiaustin.org). By helping with this often difficult transition, CPI helps individuals avoid homelessness by assisting them in finding and keeping employment.

The Targeted Project Re-Enterprise (TPRE) is one of CPI's two major initiatives to keep ex-offenders off the street. Pete Daniels, case manager at CPI, heads this program. Daniels regularly visits the Travis State Jail in East Austin to provide inmates with pre-release education and post-release case management. The CPI helps 120 felons annually, all of whom are 4th degree felons that have served two years or less for non-violent crimes. This means that out of the 60 offenders released from the jail each month, ten of them are helped out by CPI. However, more than 600 inmates receive pre-release education, such as learning to fill out job applications and interview preparation. The applications are used to help pick who gets to be involved with the CPI. Once the ten inmates are chosen, they have the opportunity to have a mock interview with a volunteer from the business community. In this interview they learn how to address their criminal history.

Once a selected prisoner reaches the end of his incarceration, CPI provides him with a re-entry kit with valuable information (including transitional housing opportunities) as well as a case manager. CPI spends approximately \$50 per client to get basic supplies such as documents/IDs, clothes, bus passes, etc. The next step is to start their job search, which they are encouraged to do primarily on their own, but CPI also aids them. Those involved in the program are encouraged to call and check in once a week with their case manager. They stay in the program until they get a job and then for 90 days after that. As an incentive to stay in the program, they are rewarded a \$50 bonus for holding a job for 30 days, and another \$200 at the completion of the 90 days on the job. This program is highly successful as 75% of those involved get jobs. Pete Daniels holds support groups every other Monday at Encore House in which he continues to advise and educate those released from prison on things such as managing their first paycheck, paying their bills, maintaining a steady job, etc.

Laura Elmore-Smith heads CPI's other program, Girl Scouts Beyond Bars. This program is the female equivalent to TPRE, however it involves counseling not just for

mothers, but for their daughters as well. For this program, CPI works in partnership with the Girl Scouts, YWCA, and the UT School of Social Work. Laura provides case management and education to the mothers in Gatesville Prison, while the YWCA provides therapy for the kids and mothers. Julia Cuba of the Girl Scouts Lone Star Council leads Troop 1500 for the young girls in this program in which they partake in the traditional Girl Scout activities, but also have the support they need for dealing with their mothers' incarceration.

CPI's programming is cutting down on the number of homeless ex-offenders on the streets. Homeless ex-offenders without a release plan or post-release support get dropped off at Salvation Army. Many dropped off there would end up re-arrested within seven days. CPI gives directions to transitional housing in their re-entry kits. Upon release, many ex-offenders have nowhere to go, and this helps them start out on the right foot. By instilling this program, they help these people at a 90% reduced cost than that of pursuing, prosecuting and re-incarcerating a repeat offender. This means that by running their program, they are spending only 10% of what it would cost the government if the ex-offenders living on the streets were to be re-incarcerated. CPI has a Health and Human Services Contract, meaning that the city and county fund 80% of their operations. The remainder of their funding comes from private individuals and fundraising.

In fact, CPI just held its first Wine Tasting and Cigar Sampling fundraiser on October 24th. Besides funding, CPI could use help appealing to the community for more support financially, more volunteers for interviews, as well as clothing donations appropriate for interviews (so that more funding can go to other things besides clothes). CPI is currently seeking a partnership with Travis State Jail, and is even considering moving their office into the jail. They are also involved in collaboration within the community, such as the Re-entry Roundtable in which they help prepare offenders and also victims for re-entry after incarceration. For more information, log onto their website at www.cpiaustin.org.