2008 Innovations Awards Program
APPLICATION

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ID # (assigned by CSG): 08-E-17NJ

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: New Jersey

Assign Program Category (applicant): Public Safety/Corrections (Use list at end of application)

1. Program Name – Successful Transition and Reentry Series (S.T.A.R.S.)
2. Administering Agency – New Jersey Department of Corrections, Office of Transitional Services
3. Contact Person (Name and Title) – Darcella Sessomes, Director, Office of Transitional Services, New Jersey Department of Corrections
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9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

The Successful Transition and Reentry Series (STARS) is a reentry program that prepares Inmates to successfully transition back into society. Developed by the Office of Transitional Services (OTS) in 2006, STARS identifies issues that the inmate will face upon release and provides solutions so that they may meet those needs.

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 1, 2008 to be considered.

The initial pilot of the S.T.A.R.S. Program began in December of 2006, with the following institutions: Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women, Garden State Youth Correctional Facility, Northern State Prison, and Southern State Correctional Facility. Since then, the S.T.A.R.S. Program has expanded throughout the department. To date, approximately 650 inmates pending release have successfully completed the STARS program.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

The purpose of the STARS program is to break the vicious cycle of re-incarceration and reduce recidivism rates in New Jersey by focusing on the factors that can help prevent recidivism, such
as education, treatment, housing, gainful employment and healthcare. DOC believes that STARS can help to reestablish those who have gone astray and in turn create safer communities.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

Throughout the 48 hour, 13-week program, group facilitators discuss with inmates how to build positive family relationships, prepare for the workforce, as well as develop effective communication and problem solving skills. Participants meet twice weekly for two hour sessions, and receive valuable information on transportation, housing, educational options, and community resource information. The curriculum breakdown is as follows:

**Introduction**
- Identify potential barriers (i.e. chemical abuse, lack of money, housing),
- Create a list of items the offender will need assistance with obtaining (i.e. social security card)
- Learn the five step goal setting process

**Chapter 1: Identification**
- The acceptable forms of identification and how to obtain those documents.
- How to obtain a social security card and benefits if eligible.
- The Motor Vehicle Commission’s Six Point system for obtaining a driver’s license (or Identification card) and the process for license reinstatement.

**Chapter 2: Housing**
- The various types of housing available.
- What landlords look for in tenants.
- Things to know before signing a lease
- Rights and responsibilities as a tenant.
- The cost of renting an apartment or buying a home.
- Where to call for emergency assistance.

**Chapter 3: New Thinking**
- How thinking affects behavior.
- How to develop a thinking plan.
- What are thinking errors?
- What are antisocial thinking patterns?
- Challenges versus barriers.
- Effective steps for decision making.
- Conflict resolution techniques.

**Chapter 4: Employment**
- How to set employment goals.
- Job seeking methods.
- How to fill out employment applications.
- How to create a resume.
- Interviewing skills.
- Tips on how to maintain a job.
Chapter 5: Mock Interview
  • How to answer the interview questions.

Chapter 6: Money Management
  • How to make a budget.
  • How to find “lost” money.
  • About banking, savings and checking accounts, ATM’s.
  • How to establish and maintain good credit as well as repair poor credit.
  • Personal money management style.

Chapter 7: Education
  • How to obtain educational records and credentials.
  • How to become marketable in the world of work.
  • The benefits of apprenticeship, college and technical schools.
  • How to obtain financial aid.

Chapter 8: Health and Life Skills
  • The importance of exercise, diet and basic health.
  • Information on depression and stress reducers.
  • How to avoid substance abuse.
  • How to make responsible health decisions.

Chapter 9: Relationships
  • Effective communication skills.
  • Rules for handling conflict.
  • How to live a responsible life.
  • 12 steps for raising yourself esteem.
  • How to maintain healthy relationships.
  • Tips for incarcerated parents.

Chapter 10: Transportation
  • Options regarding public transportation services.
  • Basic information regarding purchasing a car.
  • New Jersey Motor vehicle requirements regarding title, registration, and vehicle inspection.
  • Basic information about car insurance requirements in New Jersey.

Chapter 11: Restorative Justice
  • The definition of restorative justice.
  • Basic concepts of restorative justice.
  • The benefits of restorative justice to victims of crime.
  • The important values and concepts of restorative programs.
  • The importance of victim impact programming.
Chapter 12: Going Home

- What he/she should do to prepare for your release?
- How to be a good listener.
- General conditions of parole supervision.
- Behaviors that lead to problems on parole.
- Ways to succeed on parole.
- Ten steps to success on parole supervision.

Chapter 13: What Have You Learned?

- Exercises and scenarios that allow for practice of the skills learned throughout the program.

Chapter 14: Personal and Community Resources

- Offender should use to plan for release and as a reference after release
- Includes addresses, phone numbers, and web sites

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

The STARS program is innovative in numerous ways. Primarily, it is a comprehensive program that addresses the most critical areas of life that an inmate will need to address in order to be a productive member of society. Additionally, with the aid of group facilitators, inmates are encouraged to participate in sessions so that they fully grasp the concepts of in the STARS curriculum. Facilitators use speakers, mock interviews and other props to prepare inmates for what to expect on the streets. Performance is measured by homework assignments that must be completed out of class, as well as quizzes at the end of each Chapter. At the end of the three month class, successful students participate in a graduation ceremony and receive certificates and awards for outstanding performance.

Finally, the STARS curriculum was developed in-house by NJDOC, which provides NJDOC with valuable cost savings as well as the flexibility to modify the curriculum so that it is always current and consistent with changing state laws.

14. What were the program’s start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

Year-to date start up costs for FY 2008 total approximately $163,000. This amount includes an aggregate salary of $112,500 for 13 social workers who started on the payroll in the December time period. An additional 3 social workers were recently hired which will result in all 16 budgeted social worker positions being filled. When fully staffed the annual salaries will be approximately $792,000. Approximately $4,500 has been spent on office supplies and $46,000 on educational materials. In addition to the $163,000 expended, a funding request for 12 computers is currently in process at a cost of $30,000. Additional wiring needs to be done at 4 to 5 of the institutions, but cost is not known at this time. Printers may also need to be purchased. The current budget for equipment purchases is $88,000.
15. **What are the program’s annual operational costs?**

The program has annual operating costs of $1 million, which includes salaries of group facilitators, curriculum and book costs, as well as equipment. The annual operational costs also include the salary for a STARS Coordinator, who is responsible for implementing the STARS program in NJDOC institutions.

16. **How is the program funded?**

The program is funded as a Direct State Services appropriation in Governor Corzine’s FY06-07 budget.

17. **Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.**

The program was included in NJDOC’s FY06-07 budget, which was included in the Governor’s approved FY06-07 Budget. (New Jersey State Budget, FY06-07).

18. **What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?**

STARS facilitators receive new computers which are used to gather statistical program information. Additionally, the computers are used to track program metrics so that program participation and success rates can be reported. Besides that, group facilitators rely on the STARS Curriculum and their creativity to administer the program. Inmates enrolled in the program do not utilize equipment, technology or software to participate in the program.

19. **To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator’s name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.**

Yes, STARS originated in the State of New Jersey by the Department of Corrections. The staff at the Department of Corrections’ Office of Transitional Services, developed the program in its entirety. Darcella Sessomes, Director, Office of Transitional Services, is the current director of the unit. Address – Whittlesey Road; P.O. Box 863; Trenton, NJ 08625-0863; Telephone Number – (609) 292-3257; E-mail Address – Darcella.Sessomes@doc.state.nj.us

20. **Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?**

Some states, such as Florida, offer a reentry program for youthful offenders. And while other states, such as Rhode Island are attempting to develop strategies to combat the issue of prisoner reentry, New Jersey Department of Corrections is unaware of any other state that offers a comprehensive reentry preparatory curriculum available to all inmates prior to release. That, in addition to the curriculum makes the STARS program unique.

21. **Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?**

Yes, the program is fully implemented in all 14 state correctional facilities.
22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program’s effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

The program is effective in identifying problems/issues and addressing them with actual visual props. For example, with the job preparation section, the program requires inmates to fill out actual job applications; drafting actual budgets; writing simulated checks; and picking out appropriate attire for interviews. Because of the relative newness of the program, the affect of the STARS program on recidivism rate is still being measured, with results being available 2010. However, based on post-graduation surveys conducted by the inmates, over 95% of inmates said that they liked the program and approximately 94% of all inmates felt as though they were better equipped to reenter the community after have taken the STARS program. Additionally, participants in the STARS program netted a post-curriculum test average of 83%, indicating that the inmate population is retaining the material taught in STARS.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

STARS has grown from 4 offering institutions and 88 graduating inmates, to all 14 institutions and approximately 650 graduating inmates thus far. The initial pilot of the S.T.A.R.S. Program began in December of 2006, with the following institutions: Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women, Garden State Youth Correctional Facility, Northern State Prison, and Southern State Correctional Facility. As noted, the STARS Program is now operational statewide.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

The biggest obstacle to success of this program is to engage inmates prior to release so that they are interested in the program. The program is not mandatory, but is offered to all inmates 6-12 months prior to release. New Jersey has seen successful enrollment rates due to the nature of the curriculum, stellar group facilitators, but most importantly, self-advertisement done by inmates who have previously taken the STARS program. Additionally, there must be a commitment to prisoner reentry across state government, not just the Department of Corrections. Finally, because each state has its own challenges and barriers to reentry, the STARS curriculum must be adapted to address the specific challenges that inmates in each state faces upon reentering into their community.