

## Tennessee Bridges

The Tennessee Bridges Program was a pilot reentry program for high-risk, male offenders, which operated with funding from a three-year grant from the U.S. Departments of Justice, Agriculture, Commerce, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing & Urban Development, and Labor & Veterans Affairs. This unprecedented collaboration among federal agencies was a part of the “Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative.” The Tennessee Department of Correction (TDOC) was among 68 grants awarded states to support efforts to ensure public safety and reduce victimization by helping returning offenders become productive members of their communities. Along with Tennessee, forty-nine states and the District of Columbia and Virgin Islands received the funding.

Project Return contracted with the TDOC to provide project management and facilitation in support of Tennessee Bridges through the three phases of the program, February 18, 2003 through June 30, 2005. The program was housed at the former Middle Tennessee Correctional Complex Annex (now the Charles Bass Correctional Complex Annex).

The target population was offenders who were defined as serious and/or violent offenders with a high risk of re-incarceration (“recidivism”), confined for a minimum of 12 consecutive months, age 18-35 years old upon program entry, housed in the TDOC. The program served individuals who were released in all three of Tennessee’s Grand Divisions: Knoxville (East), Nashville (Middle), and Memphis (West). The overall goal of the program was to increase public safety by reducing the state’s offender recidivism rate and the victimization of citizens from offenders returning to the communities. Addressed housing, employment, education, life skills, and treatment-related issues.

TDOC compared the recidivism results for offenders in the Tennessee Bridges Program, 46.6%, to results for offenders in three control groups. The average recidivism rate for the three control groups was 71%. The reported national one-year recidivism rate is 55%, and the three-year failure rate in Tennessee is 67.5%. Statistics show that 95% of all incarcerated felons are eventually released from prison. This is why the TDOC remains committed to offering programs that will help educate and rehabilitate inmates. Using the knowledge gained from Tennessee Bridges, TDOC developed two new reentry programs: The Genesis and Exodus Transition Programs. Project Return continues to partner with the TDOC to provide program facilitators and Alcohol and Drug of Abuse Counselors for the programs.

## Genesis and Exodus Transition Programs

The Genesis and Exodus Transition Programs’ primary goals are to assist participants to change negative patterns of thinking, feeling and behaviors that predispose them to negative behavior such as drug abuse, criminal activities and other anti-social behaviors. Change in behavior and thinking is accomplished through rigorous education, peer confrontation and support, and group dynamics. In this program, “The Community is the agent of change and the staff, as part of that community, facilitates each participant’s work to change his own behavior.” (Hooper, et. al., 1993)

## Tennessee Department of Correction

The Exodus 40 bed female program is housed at the Tennessee Prison for Women (TPW), and the 90 bed Genesis male program is located at the Charles Bass Correctional Complex Annex (CBCX). Both are prime examples of the department's effort to focus on the rehabilitation of felony offenders. Both transition centers utilize a modified therapeutic community model that promotes awareness, responsibility and accountability.

Genesis and Exodus offer a three (3) phase approach, lasting approximately nine (9) months. The first phase is assessment and program orientation. The second phase is mainly treatment, with a focus on community service. Phase three consists of reentry preparation with the primary focus on employment, housing and relapse prevention.

In order to be eligible for the Transition Programs, an offender must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Annex placement eligible
- Board of Probation and Parole referred
- Within 12-15 months of release eligibility or expiration of sentence
- Must be able to physically perform job functions
- No Class A or B offenses within the last six months
- Convicted in Davidson or surrounding county

### **Program Attributes**

- Modified therapeutic community
- Assessment of criminogenic issues, addiction severity, employment, vocational training, and socialization & relationships
- Drug testing
- Community service
- Focus on employment retention
- Fees assessed to off-set costs

### **Program Services Offered**

- Employment readiness and placement assistance
- Relapse prevention planning
- Victim impact awareness
- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Discharge planning
- Community service
- Parole preparation
- Mentoring services

The CBCX Main compound site serves as the reception, classification, and diagnostic center for male felons committed from the Middle Tennessee area. The Annex site houses minimum custody inmates who are within five years of release, with an emphasis on community reintegration. Genesis is only offered at the Annex.

TPW is the primary correctional center for female felons in the state. Its operating capacity is 744. It is a reception and classification center for female offenders entering into the TDOC system. The prison also houses inmates in all custody levels, including pre-release participants, work release inmates, and those women sentence to death. TPW offers a weekend child visitation program which has received national recognition at both the main and annex compounds.