

Community Re-Entry Network Program Partners with Target Hunger to Celebrate National Second Chance Month with Day of Action

By: Nata E. Koerber, *Community Re-Entry Network Program*

Participants from the Houston Health Department (HHD) Community Re-Entry Network Program (CRNP) recently filled the verdant Goffney Community Garden for a Day of Action with Target Hunger under a cloudless Spring sky in Kashmere Gardens. The April 25 event commemorated National Second Chance Day, highlighting efforts to help people transitioning from prison or jail back into the community.

The Day of Action centered around the theme “Giving Back is a Key Step to Successful Re-Entry.” The community garden project with Target Hunger was selected in response to the partnership with Target Hunger, which provides monthly food distributions to the CRNP participants and their family members. The CRNP is based in the Kashmere Multi-Service Center, in the Kashmere Gardens neighborhood which has been designated as a ‘food desert’ in need of more healthy food options. The volunteer project was selected to give back and help improve the health of the community. The volunteer activity aligned with a number of core principles proven to reduce recidivism identified by the Council of State Government (CSG) Justice Center and CorrectionsOne.Com. These include using cognitive behavioral principles to reduce criminogenic thinking, increase pro-social behaviors, and provide structured learning opportunities to acquire new skills, behaviors, and attitudes, and earn positive reinforcement.

CRNP Participant Markeka Venters remarked “Today meant giving someone a chance to eat today, also helping me to give and understand someone else’s needs, not only my own. God not only blessed me, but through me someone else will be blessed also.”

More than a decade ago, a movement was built based on extensive research and tireless efforts of local leaders to address soaring recidivism rates and begin to change the nation’s perception of re-entry.



Today re-entry strategies have proven to be effective in reducing recidivism, promoting public safety, strengthening collaboration and building stronger communities at a lower cost to tax payers than incarceration.

“Re-entry isn’t just about staying out of prison,” said Dr. Nicole Jarrett, director of the National Re-entry Resource Center (NRCC), which provides research and support for re-entry practitioners across the country through funding from the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance. “Re-entry is also about reuniting families, eliminating barriers to employment, finding stable housing and much more.”

To build further momentum for Second Chance Month, The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center - which administers the NRRC in collaboration with the Bureau of Justice Assistance - is partnering with JustLeadershipUSA, a group dedicated to cutting the U.S. correctional population in half by 2030, to help highlight the work being done by the City of Houston HHD Community Re-Entry Network Program and other re-entry practitioners across the country. DeAnna R. Hoskins, president and CEO of JustLeadershipUSA states “#ReentryMatters to us because a #WorkingFuture for all results in healthier communities and a stronger democracy.

The HHD Community Reentry Network Program was founded in 2008, and offered support to formerly incarcerated persons throughout the City of Houston since the early 2000’s. Our mission is to work in partnership with the community to assess, plan, and implement effective strategies to reduce recidivism, increase public safety, and successfully assist and support ex-offenders in their transition in becoming productive, contributing members of the Houston community. It provides evidence-based re-entry programming including life-skills classes, counseling, linkage to services and workforce support.

Participants of the CRNP coalesced around the theme “Re-Entry Means GIVING BACK” recognizing that giving back is a key step in successful re-entry.



CRNP participant Tiffany Fountain summed it up saying “Today was truly beautiful! To be able to volunteer and give back to the community by helping at the garden from the goodness of my heart was truly motivating, as I would like to continue my efforts. Through this experience I was able to make an impact, strengthen the community, fellowship with my counselor, trainers and classmates as well as improve my health physically and mentally, take a lead, improve my gardening skills and share the experience with my family and friends.”

To learn more about Second Chance Month follow the hashtag #ReEntryMatters on Social Media.

To learn more about the Council of State Governments visit their website at <https://csgjusticecenter.org/>

To learn more about JustLeadershipUSA visit <https://justleadershipusa.org/>

