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Reentry Webinar Gives Encouraging Future Outlook

As you know, reentry resources for those with a sex offense are terribly limited. It was encouraging in April to participate in a webinar sponsored by the Council of State Governments' Justice Center that was titled **An Overview of Sex Offender Reentry: Building a Foundation for Professionals**.

Over 1,000 participants participated in this first of a series to address ways to assist one with a sex offense who is returning to the community. Research shows that re-arrest figures are more likely to be a non-sex crime and that supervision violations are high.

Those working with this population have found a daunting task in developing comprehensive reentry strategies which meet the countless difficult hurdles a person with a sex offense faces upon release.

The webinar presented those participating, which included criminal justice professionals, parole and probation agents, corrections professionals, reentry professionals and advocates, with statistics, information about the population being emphasized, barriers and challenges faced by this population, and a plan to assist those professionals responsible for assisting those with a sex offense as they transition into the community.

Thus it was positive to hear an emphasis will be made to change from a surveillance approach to a success oriented approach. It will be a plan to work with those with sex offenses in prison with an eye toward their release. There will be an emphasis on "in to out" strategy as is the case in Canada. Treatment that will be given in prison will continue on the same plan when the person is paroled.

Another excellent discussion was the fact that not all people with a sex offense charge need treatment. And the fact was mentioned that nine percent of those in prison have a sex offense charge, but that not all people labeled or charged as such are the same and should be treated accordingly. There is a movement stating that not all people with sex offenses are the same and should be assessed differently.

Acknowledgement was made that there will be many barriers to this approach. It will involve an emphasis for the changes with legislatures that include policy changes; case management changes and the public will have to be enlightened.

It is well known that some lawmakers have used sex offender laws as political football and threatened anyone showing a willingness to lessen sentences or make changes to registries or residence laws as being "soft on crime." It will be a major challenge to show a move toward assistance to those with sex offenses in the aspect of valid therapy in prison and then continuing it on into parole.

With 12 percent of state prison population housing people with a sex offense, 30% of whom are admitted into the system with a parole violation, it is vital for a change in procedure.

Making the power point presentation were David D'Amora, M.S., LPC, CFC, Director, National Initiatives, Council for State Governments Justice Center, and Dr. Kurt Bumby, Senior Associate, Center for Effective Public Policy and the Center for Sex Offender Management. Moderator for the webinar was Dr. Shenique S. Thomas, Policy Analyst, Reentry, Council of State Governments Justice Center.

There are branches of this organization across the nation. For information on how to obtain this report besides by Internet, contact the national office at Council of State Governments, 2760 Research Park Dr., Lexington, KY 40511. Phone is 859-244-8000. The presentation is available if you have access to their website, www.csgjusticecenter.org/reentry/webinars/an-overview-of-sex-offender-reentry.

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Letters From Across the Nation

The following are excerpts from letters we receive. We appreciate your interest, concern, and feedback. We can't include every comment. The opinions printed below are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of CURE-SORT. These are examples of what we receive.

James in Kansas

I don't hold any ill will towards anyone (with a sentence who was paroled). I committed my crimes. I thought I paid for them in prison but I guess not as this civil commitment is worse than prison.

Michael in Michigan

I was overjoyed by the cover story **More Addictive Math** by Ed G. in your Winter 2014 newsletter. Though I've only been down for a relatively short 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ years, that article is the most therapy I have received for my sex crime. Michigan offers no sex offender programming until close to release dates. And even then some are released with no programming.

I would embrace having a 12-step program to attend. It would help with the feelings that are still present even though I'm in prison. I would like to think that most sexual offenders would be thankful for any kind of therapy. My addiction was consuming my everyday life to the point where I put it ahead of my career, my family and my friends. I once thought I was dealing with my addiction fine. I thought nothing was wrong with a little masturbation. No one was going to find me in a chat room getting my fix. As long as I didn't act on it everything would be fine. But I got rid of work and pushed my family and friends away. Then even though I knew it was wrong and I shouldn't be doing it, I justified it.

When I was finally found out and I finally revealed the extent of my addiction to investigators, I felt relief. Since that day though I've still been seeking the therapy that everyone says I needed to be in prison for. So thanks for the little taste. I hope that through the hard work of your organization people will see that we are not monsters but addicted. And addictions can be treated.

From the Editor's Desk

By Wayne Bowers

Our thanks to those of you who made a donation in our recent fundraising campaign. It is greatly appreciated and we will put ALL that we received into service to assist those in need and to promote our mission. . . . **The 33rd annual research and treatment** conference for the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) will be held Oct. 29 to Nov. 1 in San Diego, CA. Theme of the conference, chaired by Michael F. Caldwell, Psy.D., is a positive one for those of us working hard in the advocacy world to promote the need for change as it will be **Transforming Research Into Practice**. President of ATSA this year is someone we are honored to know, Dr. Elizabeth J. Letourneau, Bloomberg School of Public Health, Director of Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and Associate Professor at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD. It has been my privilege to present at three previous ATSA conferences in San Diego, Albuquerque, NM, and Phoenix, AZ. To register for this conference on line, go to www.atsa.com and to mail, ATSA, 4900 SW Griffith Dr., Suite 274, Beaverton, OR 97005. **Much of the emphasis** regarding sexual abuse revolves around cases affecting children. Our emphasis can get focused just on those. Yet, there are many other issues involving sex offense charges that we hear about a lot. Child pornography has been a major topic in countless communications we receive. A coalition called Alliance for the Reform of Sex Laws has formed to strategize child pornography laws and held its first conference call in July. That call focused on determining a strategy for changing those laws. **Some other areas** that are getting more attention on sexual assaults are military protocol, college and university reporting and prison assaults under a program called Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) which was passed by Congress in 2003 and now is gaining more stature in facilities. The Clery Act became law in 1990 requiring colleges and universities participating in federal financial aid programs to report on assaults and crimes of various categories on campus, including sex offenses, but there has not been a strong emphasis in use across the nation. Legislation just introduced in Congress called The Campus Safety and Accountability Act will put more teeth in a school's reporting and follow-up.

PLEASE NOTE: Check the date on your mailing label to determine if your membership is due to expire. Also, please let us know if your address changes – especially inmates -- because your mail will not be forwarded. Be sure to include your prison I.D. number to guarantee proper mailing.

RSOL Holds Sixth National Conference in Dallas

**By Rebecca Walkup
Director, Oklahoma RSOL**

The sixth national Reform Sex Offender Laws (RSOL) conference in Dallas in July was the best yet. Kudos to the Texas Voices conference team and the National Administrative team for their hard work in making the event happen. Texas Voices is that state's RSOL chapter.

The venue, a private two story conference center on the campus of Skillman Church of Christ boasted a rotunda auditorium for general sessions, a gymnasium and kitchen for meals, and multiple fully equipped conference rooms for breakout sessions. The conference speakers were both educational and entertaining, and there were great opportunities for networking with advocates from across the country. 130 RSOL members attended from as far away as California, Florida, and Vermont.

Lenore Skenazy of New York City had everyone rolling with laughter during her keynote address about the unreasonable fears our society has fostered around the safety of children. Known as "America's Worst Mom," the columnist-turned-reality show host got that title after letting her 9-year old son take the subway, alone, in New York. In response to the media blowback, she founded the bookblog and movement, "Free-Range Kids." Her feisty belief that our kids are safer and smarter than our culture gives them credit for has landed her on talk shows from Dr. Phil to The View. Her publicist joined her later to give us insider tips on reaching out to both print and broadcast media outlets and how to approach reporters with our stories.

Story and communicating message out was a unifying theme of the conference with several workshop focused on media, public, and interpersonal communications. Participants at Phil Horner's workshop Storytelling for Change were fascinated as he demonstrated the use of narrative techniques and honesty, brevity, and vulnerability to change public opinion through our own personal stories of the registry. Audience members brought tears to our eyes with their own stories. Horner, former physician who served time in New Hampshire for an offense, writes a blog for Citizens for Criminal Justice Reform entitled *Notes From the Land of Oz*.

Another prominent theme was the importance of standing up and speaking out without fear. There is a trend in the movement away from anonymity on both a personal level and the organizational level. In a panel presentation on developing strong advocacy organizations, Janice Belucci, civil rights attorney and director of California's chapter, urged us all to "stand up, and speak out ... when we're ready" recognizing that while it takes some longer to be comfortable being public for the cause than others, everyone in this movement can and should take a stand for our freedoms.

Our own Wayne Bowers closed the conference with "A Commitment to a Long Hard Haul" about what it takes to grow and sustain an advocacy organization for the long term. He stressed the need for patience, diligence, ability to overcome internal differences, and a driving passion to show that there is a better way.

This year every workshop was recorded, and the volunteer staff at National RSOL are working now to prepare the videos for the website. There were approximately 20 workshops, and the videos have to be edited to assure the privacy of conference-goers. It may take a bit of time, but they will eventually be posted at www.rsolconference.org, so keep checking the site. In the meantime, you can watch many of the videos from the last three conferences. They are all well worth your time.

The dates and location for next year's conference haven't been determined. I encourage you to attend as it will be another great event.