

Treatment Program Profile

Provider seeks broader funding base in order to expand offender services **TP**

by Gary Enos, Contributing Editor

Even with a 17-year history of providing in-custody substance use treatment services under contract with the Massachusetts correctional system, it is no time for organizations such as Worcester-based Spectrum Health Systems to feel completely comfortable about their revenue stream long-term. Spectrum's most recent expansion of its services for offenders illustrates its aim to broaden its funding options for improving clients' recovery and re-entry prospects.

Spectrum in November launched in Massachusetts an effort called Project Peer Connection, a peer mentoring initiative financed by a two-year, \$300,000 federal grant under a pro-

gram authorized under the Second Chance Act. Spectrum's state director for Massachusetts correctional services told *ADAW* that while leaders in the state generally have maintained offender treatment services as a priority in budget-cutting times, it is essential for organizations such as Spectrum to explore federal, private and other sources of revenue in order to enhance services for a difficult-to-reach population.

"In this economy, funding sources are here one day and gone the next," said Spectrum's Earl Warren. "We're having to find ways to streamline processes in order to be more cost-effective. With limited funds, we have to find ways to make it work."

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Twenty years ago, Spectrum developed the Correctional Recovery Academy™, a modified therapeutic community model specifically modified for the criminal justice population. Today, Spectrum's Correctional Treatment Division provides a range of services to more than 6,500 criminal offenders each day, including 31 in-prison therapeutic community programs, totaling nearly 4,000 beds nationwide.

Spectrum operates corrections programs in Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Massachusetts, Maine, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Washington State.

www.spectrumsys.org

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Broadening the continuum

According to Warren, Project Peer Connection is intended to fill a critical gap in re-entry services by assisting released offenders in navigating a health and human services system that often can be unresponsive to their needs.

Inmates with a demonstrated substance use problem and who have received some treatment services while in custody (and who will be locating in Worcester County upon release) become eligible for peer mentoring three months prior to their scheduled release date. The volunteer mentors represent all walks of life in the community: Some are ex-offenders who have been out of prison for several years, but Warren says a criminal history is not a prerequisite for serving as a mentor.

"We recruit from faith-based groups, recovery programs with alumni groups," he said. "We have teachers, ministers, college students."

The program matches mentors with offenders according to factors such as gender and life experiences. "Sometimes there may be a young woman who might do better with a role model than with a peer," Warren said.

Each mentor receives 12 hours

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Earl Warren

of training prior to commencing the relationship, covering areas such as role definition, boundaries and ethics. They also are instructed in principles of motivational interviewing, Warren said.

Once the mentor is matched with an offender, he/she will attend pre-release meetings with the offender; these sessions are monitored by a Spectrum program coordinator. Once the offender has been released, the mentor is available to coach the offender as he/she navigates the community service system and seeks to reintegrate. Many of these individuals also will be receiving outpatient treatment services from Spectrum at this time.

The mentors' approach "builds self-efficacy for the offender," Warren said. "They don't access the resources for them; they coach."

For many offenders, this eases a reintegration process that can prove daunting. "Many have been in the justice system for many years," Warren said. "An offender will be re-

leased and can become immediately overwhelmed."

Prior to launching the peer mentoring program, Spectrum traditionally worked on re-entry planning for offenders in the Massachusetts justice system, but never had the infrastructure in place to track how successfully the offenders were accessing the support that had been recommended to them, Warren explained. Spectrum also operates correctional treatment programs in half a dozen other states.

Mentors in the Massachusetts program are asked to participate with an offender for a targeted time period of six months, which appears to be the amount of time the typical offender needs this kind of support. If a released offender gets rearrested and ends up back in custody, the program will attempt to re-establish contact and determine whether the person is interested in resuming with a mentoring relationship at the proper time.

But Warren said that this remains a theoretical point, as so far no participant in Project Peer Connection has returned to custody for a parole violation or a new offense.

Instead, a more typical story so far resembles that of an offender who was released from his third incarceration in December. Since then he has met once a week with his mentor, and in that time he has been able to move from a shelter into permanent housing, he has

worked out his Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, and he has secured part-time employment, Warren said.

Competitive funding

As one of 50 grant recipients (out of 600 applicants) in the U.S. Department of Justice's prisoner re-entry initiative round in which it participated, Spectrum realizes it is fortunate to have identified this funding source for the peer mentoring effort. Warren believes the agency's lengthy experience working with offenders under contract with the Massachusetts corrections department gave it an advantage in the competitive process.

Spectrum already is preparing

Spectrum Health Systems

Founded: 1969

Headquarters: Worcester, Mass.

Correctional Programs: Provides offender treatment in programs in Georgia, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Washington

Staff: 1,000 employees

Clients Served: 20,000 a year

for a 2012 competitive grant process under the federal department; it will have to reapply for funding if it wants to maintain the peer mentoring effort through federal support. Yet in addition, "We are looking for other avenues," Warren said, and he believes that private grants will be-

come an increasingly important target for his organization.

Regardless of how the picture looks after the present two-year grant ends, Warren believes having a member of the community directly involved in re-entry services will prove to be essential to clients' success. "I believe it's critical to maintain a continuum of care with these folks," he said.

Charles J. Faris, Spectrum's president and CEO, told *ADAW* that "now, through this U.S. Department of Justice grant, we can offer offenders returning to the community experienced guidance to successfully overcome the obstacles that might otherwise result in relapse and reincarceration." •

July 25, 2011 Alcoholism & Drug Abuse Weekly