Strategies for Supporting LGBTQ Youth Returning from Incarceration

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The Client: The National LGBTQ Task Force (the Task Force) is a progressive social justice organization whose mission is to “build power, take action, and create change to achieve freedom and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their families.” The Task Force is the oldest national LGBTQ advocacy group in the country, and their work focuses on strategic planning, capacity building, and technical assistance to local entities advocating and organizing for the rights of LGBTQ individuals and their families. The Task Force is currently focused on engaging more people in advocacy and building a broad-based movement, as well as developing and disseminating innovative tools to power the movement.

The Problem: Though gay and transgender youth represent just 5-7% of the nation’s overall youth population, they represent 40% of homeless youth and 13-15% of the juvenile justice system population. The factors and systems that make LGBTQ youth more likely to be incarcerated, namely family rejection and abuse and school discipline practices, have been studied and documented, yet the reentry process for LGBTQ youth has been less-examined. Through their own work, the Task Force identified several issues that can negatively impact returning LGBTQ youth, including a lack of cultural competency around HIV/AIDS; deficient education about, and support for, transitioning youth; improper emphasis on family reunification; shortages of safe and appropriate housing; and inadequate and inconsistent access to mental health care. The Task Force seeks to launch a national juvenile reentry advocacy effort, and retained The Community Justice Project (CJP) to explore strategies for how to best address the needs of LGBTQ youth returning to the community after a period of incarceration.

The Outcome: The CJP team interviewed key stakeholders including direct service providers who work with LGBTQ youth and system-involved youth, as well as policy experts in the areas of juvenile justice and LGBTQ rights. The team identified and assessed strategies to support successful reentry of LGBTQ youth and ultimately identified the creation of a corps of post-disposition advocates as a way to amplify the voices of individual LGBTQ youth, ensure their needs are met, and increase their chances of successful reentry. The team created a plan for a replicable post-disposition advocacy program and laid the groundwork for the Task Force pilot a post-disposition advocacy program in Washington, D.C.