



Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative ➔

MPRI

Creating Safer Neighborhoods & Better Citizens

2010 Progress Report

Making Strides in Public Safety



“Michigan has developed one of the most comprehensive statewide re-entry initiatives in the United States. The Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative draws on extensive research demonstrating how public safety can be enhanced when people returning from prison are appropriately supervised and engaged in risk-reduction interventions. Other states are learning from the Michigan experience.”

Michael Thompson, Director
Council of State Governments
Justice Center

The MPRI “has helped cut down on the number of repeat criminal offenses, inmates in prison and the general crime rate.”

“What more can you ask of a government program?”

“And the success couldn’t come at a better time, when the state’s budget is squeezed by declining tax revenue and can use all the savings it can muster.”

Oakland Press Executive Editor Glenn Gilbert, Sept. 9, 2009

“It used to be, you give them a few bucks and a bus pass—we don’t want that mindset anymore ... We want them to have the opportunity to become valuable members of the community.”



Lansing Police Lt. Noel Garcia
Lansing State Journal, Nov. 22, 2009

“The Detroit Police Department has been engaged with MPRI in Wayne County since its inception. Our role as first responders in the city does not stop once individuals are sentenced to incarceration—it is important that our presence is front and center when men and women return from serving their time of incarceration as well.

“Our past partnerships with the MPRI have consisted of face-to-face call-out meetings with parolees, community information forums, community service projects conducted by MPRI parolees, as well as coordinated surveillance, investigation and apprehension efforts.

“We are committed to maintaining strong community-police partnerships and trust throughout the community. Our role and partnership with MPRI in increased supervision, monitoring, and community education efforts have contributed to our Department’s overall public safety goals.”

Detroit Police Chief Ralph Godbee



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FOREWORD

The transformation of Michigan's corrections system was born out of crisis. In 2003, Michigan's prisons were bursting at the seams, in large part because they had become revolving doors for criminals. Nearly half the prisoners found themselves back in prison within three years after their release. Corrections costs were consuming an ever-growing share of the state's general fund at the expense of other vital areas, including cuts to higher education and fewer police on the streets. The return on investment was falling far short in terms of public safety. We had to find a different, better way to protect the public and preserve limited taxpayer dollars.

Today, we are proud to say that the Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative (MPRI) is that better way. It acknowledges that 95 percent of all prisoners eventually return home, and that we are safer when they become productive, law-abiding citizens. It recognizes that those returning prisoners have a far better chance of success if they have support and enhanced supervision than if we hand them a bus ticket and leave them to fend for themselves. The MPRI is an ambitious, nationally recognized commitment to public safety that gives prisoners the tools they need to succeed in a process that begins when they enter prison and continues through parole and re-integration into the community.

The MPRI is a collaborative effort that draws on the amazing talents and commitment of community groups and individuals who have dedicated themselves to making it work. The MPRI is administered through a public-private partnership including the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) and other state agencies, Public Policy Associates, Incorporated, and the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency. It has been designed and refined using the best evidence-based research, and built on the hard work, creativity, and determination of talented and committed people. Community groups, including law enforcement, play vital roles in improving public safety by helping parolees become valuable members of our community.

The ongoing challenge is great. The MPRI is a massive cultural shift. In the prisons, thousands of corrections officers have been retrained, and the programming has been evaluated and reshaped using evidence-based principles. In the community, police officers are redefining their relationships with parolees and offering support as well as supervision. Community groups, including faith-based organizations, are reaching out in new ways to help returning prisoners find jobs, secure stable housing, and cope with everyday problems. Thousands of Michigan prisoners are being paroled through the MPRI every year, and when they walk out of prison, they have a game plan for success.

We acknowledge from the outset that no strategy will eliminate crime. It is a given that some parolees will make bad choices and commit new crimes. But research suggests—and our early results show us—that we are on the right track. For the 22,000 MPRI parolees, the return-to-prison rate has improved from one in two to one in three; the rate of parolees returning to prison for new crimes is at its lowest level since 1995. We have safely reduced our prison population by 7,500, and it continues to shrink. The Michigan Parole and Commutation Board has been able to confidently grant more paroles because it has better information about prisoners' risks, and it knows that support systems are in place for prisoners when they return home.

The MPRI is a work in progress, and we are learning, evolving, and improving every day as we respond to research and experience. We have contracted with the Michigan Public Health Institute to undertake a rigorous long-term evaluation that will provide vital information and assistance. The Department of Corrections and its partners are making our state safer through this Initiative. This 2010 Progress Report will show you how far we have come, and where we are going.

Presented by the MPRI Leadership:

Michigan Department of Corrections

Public Policy Associates, Inc.

Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF INCARCERATION, CRIME

“MPRI continues to grow in our state as we strive to keep communities safe. We must continue to allocate available resources with the goal of safely returning prisoners to our communities. This is a process that holds great potential for decreasing the recidivism rate in Michigan’s Department of Corrections. Beginning the rehabilitation and re-entry process in our prison systems is a wise investment for the future of our communities.”



**State Representative
John Proos IV**
(R - St. Joseph)

First and foremost, the Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative is about making Michigan residents safe in their homes and their neighborhoods. It recognizes that 95 percent of all prisoners eventually return home—more than 10,000 every year. Their choices, along with their opportunities, have an impact on every citizen. When we help parolees succeed, we cause crimes NOT to be committed.

The number-one goal of the MPRI is to reduce crime. It does that by better preparing parolees before they return to the community, making smarter decisions about who is released and when, and providing enhanced supervision and services in the community. It is a comprehensive strategy that starts by identifying the weaknesses and risk factors of prisoners through effective assessments when they begin their sentences. It then sets in motion services to address those issues while they are incarcerated. It ensures that all parolees have what Warden Kenneth McKee calls “a game plan for success,” including a team of community supporters who will help them carry out the plan.

Thanks to the MPRI, the Michigan Parole and Commutation Board is far better equipped to make informed parole decisions. Before the MPRI, board members often relied on their gut instincts in making decisions, and they were especially wary of granting paroles knowing there was no support system in place. Now, the board has much more information about individual parolees, and it knows that community partners are working with returning prisoners to help them succeed.

As parole dates near, community groups and parole agents reach into the prisons to begin developing a transition plan of structure, support, and supervision. By the time parolees return home, they have a stable place to live, a job or a path toward employment, and a service and support network that helps them address barriers to their success.

Strong parole supervision is a key to successful outcomes. With the MPRI, parole agents operate as case managers, not only monitoring returning prisoners but working with police and others to keep a watchful eye and intervene early when problems arise.

Finally, a successful re-entry program enables Michigan to safely reduce the prison population and, therefore, contain prison costs. Parole supervision costs approximately \$2,130 a year, compared with more than \$34,000 to lock someone up in prison. Keeping corrections costs under control by helping returning prisoners succeed allows us to make more effective use of limited taxpayer resources.

The MPRI was built using two decades of research and incorporating evidence-based practices shown to reduce recidivism. Michigan has participated in the National Institute of Corrections' Transition from Prison to Community Initiative and is supported by the Center for Effective Public Policy and the Council of State Governments. Looking forward, the MPRI will gather additional evidence about its effectiveness, and the ongoing results will guide continual improvements throughout the system.

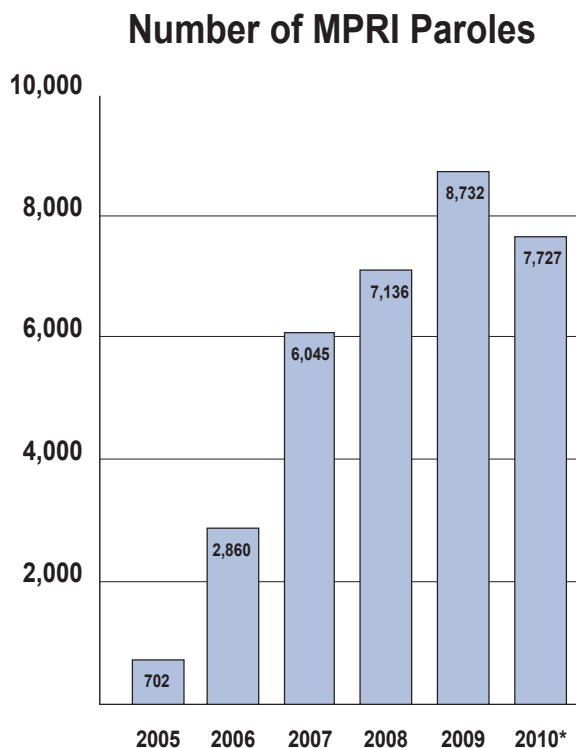
“The faith-based community has been doing prisoner re-entry ever since it started, to one degree or another. To do it in a collaborative manner with the Department of Corrections has been exciting. Now we’re working together, and there is a sharing of information so we are able to keep the individuals accountable and create an environment that is more conducive to the returnee being successful.”



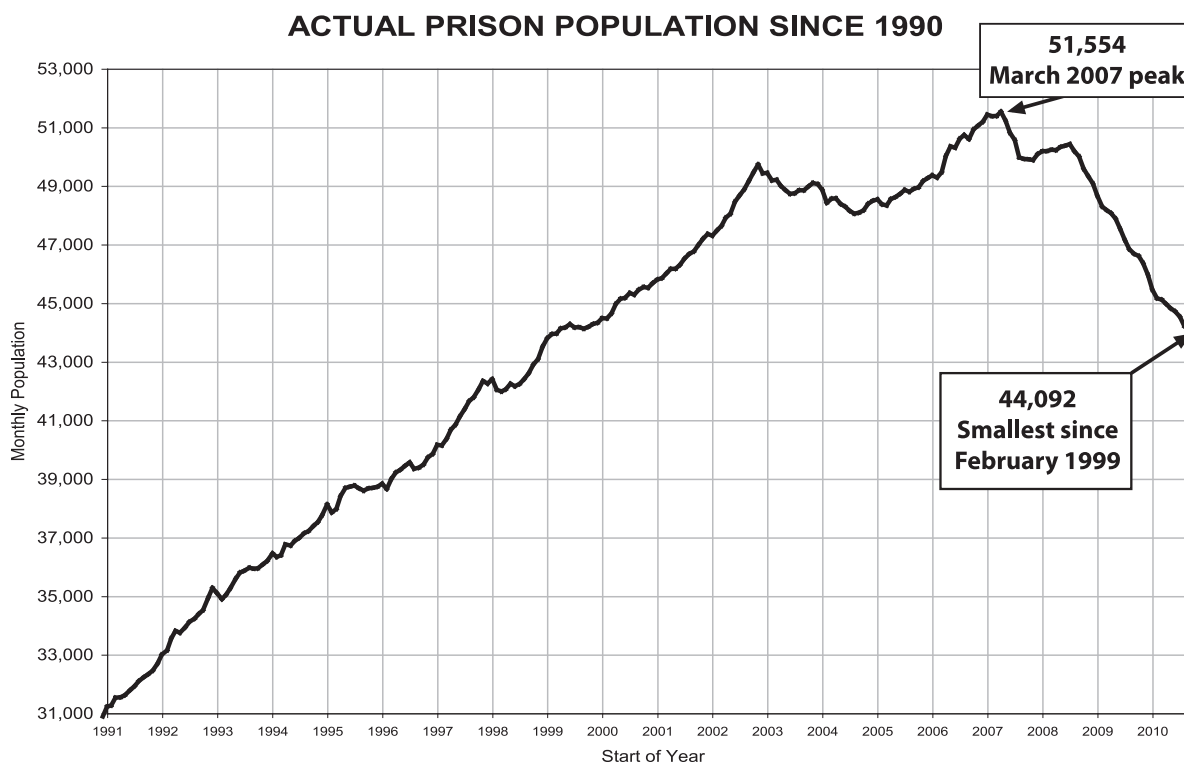
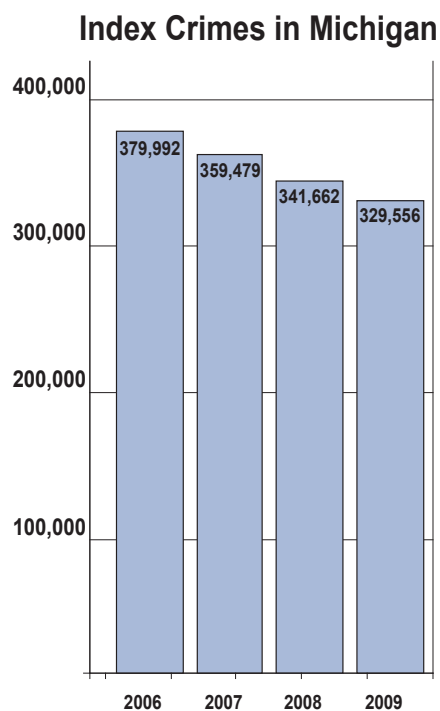
The Rev. Milton Wells
MPRI community coordinator for
Kalamazoo and St. Joseph counties

MPRI Progress by the Numbers...

More Parole, Fewer Prisoners, Less Crime



* Estimate for 2010 based on data through October.



GETTING SMART ON CRIME

Eight years ago, the Michigan Department of Corrections knew something needed to be done differently. The prison population was soaring, up nearly 10,000 in just six years. The state was running out of prison beds—yet again—and lawmakers were facing the possibility of another expensive expansion of the prison system. And the costs of Corrections continued to soar.

Michigan's high incarceration rate came, in part, because prisoners were often serving much more than their court-imposed minimum sentence. The Michigan Parole and Commutation Board had very limited information about the risks that individual prisoners posed, and little confidence that they would receive mental health services, substance abuse treatment, or any other needed services once they returned to the community. When in doubt, prisoners were denied parole.

There was another huge factor as well. A large percentage of prisoners returning home—either on parole or after serving their maximum sentences—were failing, many of them committing new crimes. In hindsight, no one should have been surprised. Inmates received minimal programming while in prison, and what they did receive was not targeted specifically on reducing the risk they posed to the community. Upon their release they were largely left to fend for themselves. But with bipartisan backing in the legislature and strong support from the governor, the Department of Corrections committed to transforming the system. That transformation is the MPRI.

It is based on the recognition that nearly all prisoners will eventually return home, and that there is no correlation between prison population and crime rates. Our neighborhoods are safer when returning prisoners find work, rejoin families, and develop a positive social structure. It is smarter and more cost effective to support their long-term success than to lock them up an extra year. Returning prisoners have a clearer path to success with community support—finding jobs, securing stable housing, staying off drugs, and staying away from bad company.

“[We can] throw them out the door...or give them some of the tools they need for success...”

Michigan State Police First Lt. Jeff Anthony regularly meets with prisoners at Pugsley Correctional Facility who are about to be paroled. He knows first-hand the barriers they face when they go home after years of incarceration.

Finding jobs, a place to live, and a support network can be a challenge. Even a task like operating a cell phone for the first time can seem daunting.

And Anthony knows that their chances of transitioning to a successful life are much greater when they get help. Initially skeptical, he's now an active supporter of the Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative and a resource for returning prisoners.



“The most important thing people need to recognize is that these are men and women who are going to get out of prison either way,” he said. “We have the opportunity to basically do what we did for many years and that’s throw them out the door with little chance for success, or we can give them some of the tools they need for success and help ensure it.”

Anthony is on the steering team and advisory committee of the Northwest MPRI and is impressed with work that community groups are doing to help returning prisoners succeed. “It’s a growing and living program that changes as new needs are identified,” he said. “I certainly know of specific cases where MPRI has just done wonders for helping individuals get back in their community.”

Anthony says citizens need to understand that they have a stake in returning prisoners’ success, both in terms of taxpayer costs and their own safety.

“The bottom line, to put it bluntly, is we are going to pay for them one way or another,” he said. “The cost of assisting them in a successful return to society is much less, not only financially but in the broader scheme.”

Michigan State Police First Lt. Jeff Anthony

The MPRI takes advantage of unique resources in every community across the state. Groups and citizens are extending a helping hand in countless ways. Workforce agencies are helping returning prisoners find jobs or become employment ready. Mental health services are available for those who need them. Volunteers are stepping up as mentors.

The cost of parole is far less than the cost of incarceration. As prison costs have fallen, partly due to the MPRI, Michigan has reinvested about one third of the savings into the support and supervision that make the MPRI work. The \$56 million spent on the MPRI in fiscal year 2011 is substantial, but it is only a small fraction of the \$2 billion MDOC budget, and it is paying dividends in public safety and reducing the prison population.

“Public safety is the cornerstone of the priorities of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Michigan. Our office has been working in partnership with MPRI since it first launched in 2005.

“Through our Face-To-Face program, we meet with convicted felons returning to the community after serving prison terms to inform them of the consequences of criminal conduct and to provide awareness of services available to them through the Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative.

“We are proud of our partnership with MPRI and remain committed to our shared goals of working with a broad spectrum of law enforcement partners and community leaders to continue our priority and commitment to reducing crime, and improving the quality of life in the community.”

Barbara L. McQuade
United States Attorney,
Eastern District of Michigan



THREE STEPS TO SUCCESS

“Public safety is the overriding criterion. We parole people that we believe can be safely managed and returned to the community.”

**Barbara Sampson
Chairwoman,
Michigan Parole
and Commutation
Board**



The MPRI represents a complete restructuring of Corrections. It focuses especially on the 60 percent of returning prisoners with the greatest need—those who are at high and moderate risk of failing unless they have a support network and strong supervision. The MPRI was built in three phases to create seamless transitions.

Phase One: Getting Ready

The MPRI begins preparing prisoners for success on the day they enter prison. It starts at the reception center with a comprehensive assessment of each prisoner's risk factors, needs, and strengths. An initial Transition Accountability Plan is developed to determine the services the prisoner will need to prepare them for life after prison. The plan also establishes a set of expectations for prisoners, and their success in adhering to those plans weighs heavily in decisions by the Parole and Commutation Board.

Phase Two: Going Home

About two months before their expected release date, prisoners identified as needing more intensive preparation and support are transferred to an “in-reach” center, a prison closer to home. This is an important step to set the stage for a smooth and successful transition. Community transition teams meet with the prisoners either in person or by video conference to assess their needs. Top priority is placed on developing a plan for finding work or becoming employable, as well as setting up stable housing. Depending on their needs, prisoners are linked with services in the community such as substance abuse treatment, mental health services, or sex offender therapy. Parole agents are much more than monitors; they act as case managers for the transition team's efforts to get support systems in place. Agents also determine a graduated series of sanctions for parolees who misbehave. When the parole date arrives, the returning prisoners have a structure and a support network in place to help them succeed.

Phase Three: Staying Home

Life for parolees today is extraordinarily different than it was a decade ago. Before the MPRI, parolees were often released on Fridays and had a weekend or more to get into trouble before meeting with their parole agents for the first time. Other than dealing with the parole agent, parolees were largely on their own.

Now, they are released earlier in the week and promptly meet with their parole agents and service providers, establishing a positive structure for their return to the community. MPRI partners work in a multitude of ways

“In life, you either take from society or you give back to society. It’s one or the other.”

Judy Zehnder Keller and her family, owners of the Bavarian Inn in Frankenmuth, have decades of experience offering felons a hand up by putting them to work.

The Bavarian Inn used to employ dozens of prisoners from Camp Tuscola, a minimum security prison camp that closed in 2005 but reopened as an MPRI facility in 2006. In the past few years, she has hired three parolees or probationers, and has had success with them all. One of them, Stephen Matheson, was recently promoted to front desk supervisor at the Bavarian Lodge.

Keller says she is very direct in the interview process and looks to see whether the parolees made an effort to rehabilitate themselves while in prison.

“The basic philosophy of Bavarian Inn has always been that people deserve a second chance,” she says.

“In life, you either take from society or you give back to society. It’s one or the other,” she says. “These men are now contributing to society, they are law-abiding citizens, they are paying taxes, they are good family people.”

Judy Zehnder Keller, Bavarian Inn



AIMS OF THE MPRI

Improve Public Safety

Reduce crime by helping returning prisoners become law-abiding citizens.

Improve Parole Success

Increase parole success rate by preparing prisoners to succeed and by providing support and enhanced supervision when they come home.

Reduce Prison Population

Safely lower Michigan's prison population.

Reduce Prison Costs

Break the cycle of soaring Corrections costs by investing in safe alternatives to costly and unnecessarily long stays in prison.

EVIDENCE I

Development of the MPRI was guided by evidence of what works, and the of each element of the Initiative. If the evidence shows that it works, it sho

While it is too early to draw definitive conclusions about above, the early evidence is very positive: the changes c

PROGRESS

CHANGES SINCE THE MPRI BEGAN

Convictions of parolees DOWN, Overall crime DOWN

The rate of parolees returning to prison for new crimes or technical violations is at its lowest level since record-keeping began 23 years ago. Even though there are more parolees, the number returning to prison for new crimes fell from 2,020 in 2006 to a projected 1,836 in 2010. The FBI Uniform Crime Reports show the total number of serious crimes reported (committed by all offenders) dropped from about 380,000 in 2006 to about 330,000 in 2009. The number of reported violent crimes fell from 56,778 in 2006 to 49,547 in 2009.



Returns to prison DOWN

Before the MPRI, one in two parolees returned to prison within three years. That has improved to one in three. About 2,800 fewer parolees have returned to prison than would have been expected prior to the MPRI.



Population DOWN from 51,554 to 44,000

Michigan's prison population grew by nearly 500% between 1973 and 2003, consuming a much greater share of taxpayer dollars. The number of prisoners has safely declined by almost 7,500 since March 2007 and is at its lowest level since 1999. As a result, the state has been able to close 14 correctional facilities.



Spending on prisons DOWN \$293 million annually

Part of the savings has been reinvested in community resources for supervising returning prisoners and helping them succeed. Without the changes of the past eight years, the state's \$1.9 billion Corrections budget would be more than \$627 million (33%) higher.



E MATTERS

the MPRI leadership is committed to ongoing evaluation should be continued. If not, it should be replaced.

*out the link between the MPRI and the changes shown
s are precisely the outcomes that were intended.*

“It’s a great process and it all relates back to better public safety.”

Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility is the pioneer when it comes to transforming Michigan prisons to help inmates transition successfully to the community after they serve their time.

Bellamy Creek is the home of the MPRI Learning Site, where up to 120 prisoners who are within two years of parole receive comprehensive services tailored to their individual needs. A member of the Michigan Parole Board is even part of the project. If inmates’ behavior is putting them off track for parole approval, the parole board member lets them know.

State corrections officials are using the Learning Site to determine such things as the best indicators of offender success, how well staff are acquiring the skills they need, and how to most effectively provide services.

The lessons learned will be applied to the rest of the prison system as Phase One: Getting Ready is expanded statewide.

Bellamy Creek Warden Kenneth McKee says most prisoners at the Learning Site take the opportunity to heart, and the early results are encouraging. Of about 125 prisoners who have been in the program and paroled, fewer than 12 have returned to prison in the past year-and-a-half.

“We better prepare these guys while they are in prison, but we are also making sure they are aware of what’s available in the community so that they become good members of that community, so they are not running back to the drugs and the alcohol and the gangs and the streets,” McKee says. “It’s a great process and it all relates back to better public safety.”

**Kenneth McKee, Warden
Bellamy Creek
Correctional Facility**



to help parolees get and stay on the right track. They run jobs clubs, provide leads, or help with resumes to assist returning prisoners looking for employment. Mental health services are in place to ensure that parolees get the help and medication they need. MPRI housing partners work to identify stable housing.

Phased Implementation

The Michigan Department of Corrections rolled out the MPRI in a thoughtful process that maximizes public safety. In order to address the needs of prisoners whose paroles were imminent, the MPRI was launched beginning with Phase Two: Going Home and Phase Three: Staying Home. The approach immediately drew in numerous local organizations and individuals who were enthusiastic about the MPRI. Those groups, including public agencies, faith-based organizations, and others, went to work helping parolees find work and housing, reunite with their families, address addictions, and rejoin society.

As Phase Two and Phase Three were ramping up, the MDOC was planning for Phase One: Getting Ready. It involved retraining thousands of Corrections staff and overhauling programming. The implementation of Phase One began in earnest in 2009.

“You’re so emotionally fragile, coming out and being blindsided by the world. For someone like me, who is trying, if it hadn’t been for the right people coming together at the right time, I wouldn’t be where I’m at.”

MPRI participant, Lansing State Journal, Nov. 22, 2009

MILESTONES

The transformation of Michigan's corrections system has been remarkable. In eight years, the MPRI has moved from an idea for fixing a broken system to a comprehensive strategy that is changing the nature of prisons. Even more importantly it has created a vital role for communities as partners. Community groups and individuals have stepped forward in intelligent, creative, helpful ways to maximize the opportunities that returning prisoners will succeed. New partners are coming on board every day.

Transforming Prisons

As part of Phase One: Getting Ready, the MDOC has changed the culture in its prisons, whose mission now includes helping break the cycle of incarceration. Corrections officers do much more than provide security—they help inmates lay the foundation for success when they return home.

Following an extensive planning process, the MDOC trained some 3,200 employees—parole agents, corrections officers, teachers, and others—as case managers. They work with staff and prisoners to match programming with needs and to ensure that the plan is carried out. Staff has also been trained on how to motivate prisoners, which is critical to their success.

“Custody and security is very important. That’s what we do, but we also have a role in working with offenders to prepare them to become responsible citizens,” said Chris Trudell, Operations Manager of the Offender Re-entry Services Section of the Michigan Department of Corrections. “We get safer prisons because of it, but we also enhance public safety when we get somebody prepared prior to re-entry to the community.”

In the past two years, the MDOC has assessed more than 100 programs for prisoners to determine whether there is evidence that they are effective. Some programs were added, others were scrapped. Today every core program in Michigan prisons is built on evidence-based principles.

“For me, it’s relationship building...”

Grand Rapids Police Officer Terry Dixon runs a weekly support group for MPRI participants. About 20-25 typically attend. Many are looking at police officers in a new way—as supporters.

Now, some of the parolees are working with police and the Michigan Department of Corrections to reach out to youth in Grand Rapids and help them steer clear of crime.

“For me, it’s relationship building in order to try to help the fellas to maintain a crime-free life. I point them in the right direction for resources when I can and hopefully, we can make a safer community,” Dixon says. “It’s a different way to protect and serve.”

Officer Terry Dixon
Grand Rapids Police



Stronger Supervision, Greater Accountability

MPRI parolees have far more support from the community than ever before, and they have enhanced supervision as well. Parole agents have developed closer ties with police officers, and they are working together to help parolees stay out of trouble—and to step in when problems arise.

Law Enforcement

Police, prosecutors, and judges all play important roles in the MPRI. Many serve on local MPRI steering teams or advisory committees, and they are finding innovative ways to make the MPRI more effective. In Grand Rapids and Lansing, the MPRI joined with police and the MDOC to sponsor events designed to keep youth out of the criminal justice system. Both departments have assigned officers to the MPRI. In Grand Rapids, Officer Terry Dixon runs a support group for parolees, and he reports they have been overwhelmingly successful in staying out of trouble.

Round-the-Clock Monitoring

In many communities, police officers and parole agents team up for Operation Nighthawk, checking up on parolees any time of day or night. They perform breathalyzer tests, check tethers, and look for drugs or alcohol. “For the most part it keeps them from re-offending, and that’s keeping the public safer,” Jackson Police Officer Chad Dermeyer told the Jackson Citizen Patriot.

“Without MPRI, I don’t know where I’d be. I feel very blessed.”

**MPRI participant,
Kalamazoo Gazette,
May 21, 2010**

Helping Parolees Succeed

The MPRI identifies the biggest hurdles returning prisoners face. Many of these services are delivered starting with entry into prison, and then continue in the community. Every region of the state tailors its approach to its unique needs and resources.

Programming addresses the following areas:

- Employment
- Safe, affordable, accessible housing
- Substance abuse treatment
- Transportation
- Sex offender treatment
- Family support and domestic violence prevention
- Victim support
- Health care
- Life skills
- Mentoring

Community Collaboration

The MPRI is built with the understanding that community members are important stakeholders in successful re-entry and have a vital role. Research shows that successful strategies draw on the support of family and human services agencies, and include a post-release structure of supervision and accountability.

The MPRI has benefited from unprecedented collaboration and cooperation among its partners. Community transition teams work together and with returning prisoners to develop and carry out plans for successful re-integration into the community that include support and supervision. Service agencies, employers, and educational institutions are collaborating to help parolees find jobs or develop skills that will lead to employment. The police are working more closely with Corrections than ever before.

New partnerships have been created among five state departments: Corrections; Education; Human Services; Energy, Labor, and Economic Growth; and Community Health, as well as agencies such as the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) and the Governor's Office of Faith and Community Based Initiatives.

Community groups have stepped forward with remarkable enthusiasm, working with each other to address issues such as employment, housing, and transportation. MPRI steering teams and community coordinators are reaching out to their communities through public awareness and education campaigns.

Employment

There is no question that returning prisoners will have a much better chance of success if they are able to find and maintain jobs, which is especially difficult in hard economic times. Barriers to employment include inadequate education and job skills, poor work habits, a history of substance abuse, and the stigma of their incarceration as felons.

Jobs specialists are important members of in-reach teams that plan and provide services. Before parolees are released,

*“I want to leave
a positive legacy
to help kids get
out of trouble. I’d
like to enlighten
kids that prison
ain’t all it seems
to be.”*

**MPRI participant,
Muskegon
Chronicle,
Oct. 24, 2009**

there is a plan in place for finding employment or for developing the education and skills they need to become employable.

The Inner-City Neighborhood Project is a collaborative effort of AmeriCorps, the MDOC, the Michigan Community Services Commission, local MPRI's and the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency. The project

“Maybe those that are being mentored will somewhere along the line be able to help someone else.”

Marilyn and Paul Vance of Baldwin are helping a paroled sex offender readjust to the community and turn his life around.

The Vances have been mentoring the man since March. He attends their church, and they see him about three times a week, even though he lives 20 miles away.

They take him grocery shopping, invite him over to dinner, and help him get involved in positive social activities, such as bowling. They stayed with him in the hospital after he broke his arm in a biking accident. They're also trying to help him find a job.

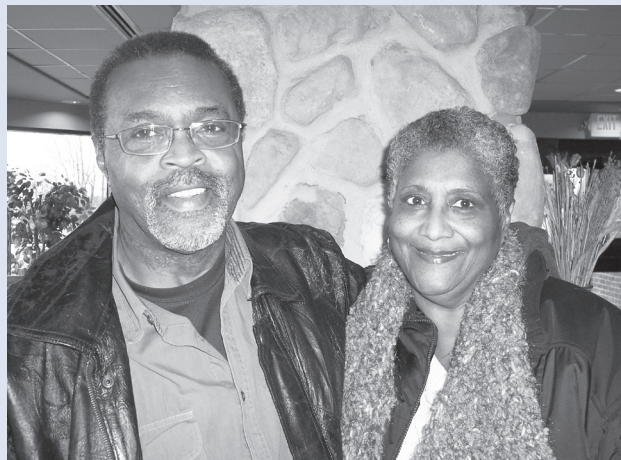
“I worked with him on studying to get his driver's license, and he did pass the written test. We will be taking him for his driving test,” Marilyn said.

The Vances and their minister are working with the man to help him address his addiction and learn appropriate social behavior.

Marilyn says she feels it's important to help those who have lost their way get back on track.

“We want to help them become productive citizens and hopefully contribute to the community,” she said. “Maybe those that are being mentored will somewhere along the line be able to help someone else.”

Marilyn and Paul Vance



is a public safety and national service initiative aimed at reducing crime and improving employment outcomes for prisoners returning to Detroit, Benton Harbor, Saginaw, and Grand Rapids. The project connects 100 returning prisoners a year to sustainable “green” jobs in the construction industry and engages participants in community service in their neighborhoods. Additionally, the project builds on existing state and local public safety initiatives such as the MPRI and engages local law enforcement in efforts to ensure that participants remain crime free.

Across the state, MPRI community coordinators and partners are working creatively to expand opportunities. They are reaching out to businesses and encouraging them to hire parolees. In some cases, they offer temporary subsidized employment to allow employers to try out an employee at less cost. In Northwest Michigan, the MPRI subsidizes on-the-job training for employers willing to take on an MPRI participant. Jobs clubs have been established to help MPRI participants learn to search for jobs, write resumes, and prepare for interviews. Employers who hire parolees are also eligible for federal Work Opportunity Tax Credits. Employers who have hired parolees with successful results are encouraging others to do the same.

Housing

Parolees have a much better chance of staying on the right path if they find safe, stable, affordable housing than if they wind up in a shelter, on the streets, or on a buddy’s couch. Housing remains one of the biggest challenges, but the MPRI is working in partnership with the Michigan State Housing Development Authority and other public and private agencies. Housing specialists are part of the transition teams working with returning prisoners, and they assist in finding satisfactory housing options. In 2010, MSHDA changed its policies to open up new housing opportunities for parolees.

“I believe MPRI can and does have an effect on recidivism.”



Kalamazoo County Prosecutor Jeff Fink understands that his community is safer when returning prisoners make the choice and the commitment to become productive, law-abiding citizens. He'd much rather see the community help them succeed than prosecute them for new crimes and send them back to prison.

That's why he's fully invested in the Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative. He serves on the MPRI Steering Team, which reviews programs and needs. Out in the community, he works with employers and workforce programs to enhance opportunities for parolees to find jobs.

“We understand that the majority of felony offenders will return to our community. All of us have a vested interest in working to help them succeed,” Fink says. “I believe MPRI can and does have an effect on recidivism.”

Jeff Fink, Kalamazoo County Prosecutor

Meeting Challenges

MPRI participants with special needs can get assistance through the MPRI. Those include youths, the medically fragile, those with mental health issues, and sex offenders. Before the MPRI, says Michigan Parole and Commutation Board Chairwoman Barbara Sampson, parole board members were reluctant to grant parole to the mentally

ill because they knew services were not in place to help them succeed. Now, she said, the transition accountability plans are designed to ensure a smooth transition to the community. Similarly, she said, effective new treatment programs are in place for sex offenders.

Going Statewide

The MPRI was launched in stages geographically. It began with the establishment of eight pilot sites in 2005. An additional seven sites were added in 2006. During 2007, the 15 sites were expanded to include neighboring counties, and three more regions were added. MPRI has been operating statewide in 18 regions since then. Community coordinators are spreading the word about the MPRI, recruiting employers as well as adding new partners to expand and improve services that help parolees succeed when they return home.

In the past two years, the MPRI has become integrated into the prisons with the implementation of Phase One: Getting Ready. Every prisoner entering the system now undergoes a risk and needs assessment, with the results used to identify the appropriate services needed during incarceration to prepare them for successful return to the community after parole. As a result of a complete review of programs, all core programs are becoming evidence-based. And the MDOC is preparing to launch an entirely redesigned approach to assaultive offender programming.

As the MPRI matures, it remains committed to constant improvement. For that reason, a Learning Site was created to fully test all aspects of the Initiative. Based at the Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility in Ionia, the Learning Site provides comprehensive, evidence-based services, focusing on prisoners who will be returning to Kent County. Those parolees receive a full range of MPRI services in the community after they are paroled. A robust evaluation of the Learning Site by the Michigan Public Health Institute will be used to better assess the effectiveness of the MPRI and make improvements across the state.

THE BOTTOM LINE: A SAFER MICHIGAN

Since 2003, Michigan has transformed its corrections system. It is investing in more than punishment and security—it is investing in the success of returning prisoners, giving them the tools they need to become productive, honest members of their communities. The transformation has been remarkable. Every prisoner is assessed when he or she enters prison, followed by support and supervision that continues during their incarceration and after their release and reintegration into the community.

“Our goal used to be to run safe and secure prisons and supervise felons in the community. Now we think about it much broader, in terms of offenders successfully transitioning to a life that doesn’t include crime,” said Patricia L. Caruso, who was the Department of Corrections Director when the MPRI was created. “That’s a whole different way of thinking about things.”

The Initiative is still growing and improving in a variety of ways. New partners are joining the MPRI to help returning prisoners find jobs and places to live, or to cope with other issues. Members of faith-based organizations and other groups are signing on as mentors. And law enforcement organizations are finding new and creative ways to both assist and supervise returning prisoners, recognizing that parolees’ success means safer communities.

The Parole and Commutation Board has been able to safely and thoughtfully increase the number of paroles in the past few years. That is because members have much better evidence-based information about the risks of individual parole candidates, and because they know there are support, structure, and supervision in place to help returning prisoners succeed.

It is important to recognize what MPRI is and what it is not. It is not a magic potion that will eliminate crime. It is also not an early release program—every parolee has served at least the minimum court-imposed sentence. MPRI is a comprehensive strategy that pulls together the state, the community, police, mentors, therapists, and others to give each returning prisoner a game plan for success.

“The more successful they can be, the safer we all are and the less it costs us as a community and as a state in the long run.”

Finding a job and stable housing are the two biggest challenges for many returning prisoners. Especially in a tight economy where employers have plenty of job applicants to choose from.

In northwest Michigan, the MPRI has used multiple approaches to help. One effective strategy has been providing temporary subsidized employment, where a crew of MPRI participants works with nonprofit agencies, including Grow Benzie, an agency whose projects include community gardening.

“It puts some income in their pockets, so it helps them get stable that way, and it helps them prove their work habits, prove their reliability, that kind of thing,” said Elaine Wood, CEO of the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments, which is the Michigan Works! Agency for the area. “It also can give them a good reference that’s local and that’s recent.”

The Northwest MPRI also engages in on-the-job training, picking up half of the initial training cost at a private-sector employer. It helps returning prisoners get into other training programs, such as welding, to develop marketable skills that are needed by employers in their areas.

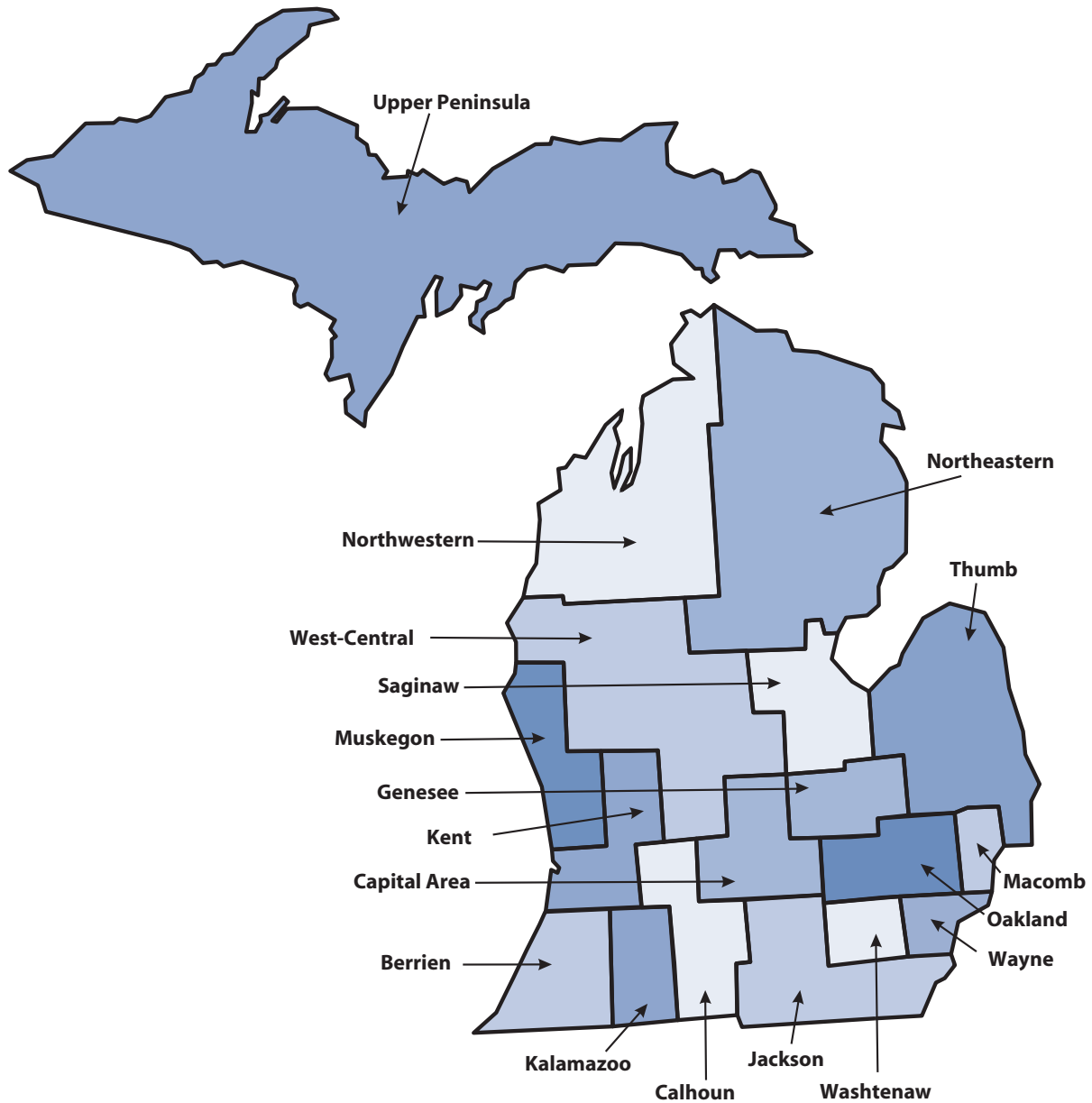
“It’s really in the best interest of the community to help parolees,” Wood said. “The more successful they can be, the safer we all are and the less it costs us as a community and as a state in the long run.

“Their success means a lot to not just them, but to the entire community. It is better for their families, for their children. It affects so many people besides the individual parolee himself.”

**Elaine Wood, CEO
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The Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative is a statewide collaborative effort administered through a public and private partnership. Public sector partners include the Michigan Departments of Corrections, Community Health, Human Services, and Education, as well as the Michigan Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth. Other partners are the Michigan State Housing Development Authority and the Governor's Office of Community and Faith-Based Initiatives. Private sector partners include Public Policy Associates Inc. and the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency.

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