



Tax Time Thursdays with the Neighborhood Improvement Association

Outreach to People Who Were Formerly Incarcerated Notes

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Outreach to People Who Were Formerly Incarcerated

Debra Simmons

About NIA:

- Is learning and growing in the area of reentry
- Founded by the mayor of Savannah over 25 years ago
- Has three asset building programs
 1. VITA program
 2. First time homebuyer classes
 3. Affordable housing development
- Established several VITA sites in various counties in Georgia, including Chatham, Bryan, Richmond, Wayne, and Camden counties
 - o Also has a year-round site
- Sites focus on reaching people with low-to-moderate income folks, people with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, rural communities, and those reentering from incarceration
- The city of Savannah is a strong partner

Reentry Outreach:

- Connects with probation officers to reach people early
- Local partners for reentry outreach:
 - o When is the Debt Paid conference
 - NIA participates in this annual event that helps people with felony convictions, people on probation, and people on parole transition back into their communities
 - o Georgia Department of Community Supervision
 - NIA attends weekly orientation sessions and shares flyers and info about tax filing
 - Also participated in their resource fair this year
 - o Dismas Charities
 - Provides residential rehabilitation services to men and women who are released from state and federal incarceration
 - NIA partners with them to reach people who are not on parole

- These organizations have been welcoming partnerships and have been successful pathways to reach larger numbers of people reentering at once

Reentry Outreach Challenges:

- Being claimed on someone else's tax returns
 - o This means that when individuals file their own returns, they are rejected
 - o Often, the individual has no idea who claimed them
 - If they cannot find out, they have to mail their return instead of filing electronically
- There aren't very many resources available for people reentering
 - o Resource fairs are helpful ways to gather job opportunities, services, etc.
- Transportation is often an issue, but there are organizations that will help with this
 - o NIA has satellite VITA sites to help serve people in close proximity to their neighborhoods

Local Reentry Outreach Tips:

- First, find out where people go after being released from incarceration
- Be sure to share information about filing back taxes and the potential benefits

Outreach & People Who Were Formerly Incarcerated: Key Takeaways

1. Find out who works with individuals at various stages of reentry. Likely your city or town itself and/or organizations working within the city will have contact with this community. Partnering with the city can provide a captive audience that is interested in the information you have to share. Also find out who in the area is willing to hire those who were previously incarcerated and share that information widely.
2. Connect and build relationships every opportunity you have, even if it doesn't seem relevant. You never know how it can support your work. Also, develop strategic partnerships with groups that can address concrete issues related to reentry, like employment.
3. Be creative to address transportation barriers. Connect with organizations that may provide transportation services. Consider the availability of public transport in your area, and whether you or your organization have the capacity to operate satellite sites within the community. Also, some individuals may have family members that can provide them rides.
4. Tax filing can be more involved for people who were incarcerated. People may need to be patient if they discover someone else claimed them on a tax return and need to mail their return instead of filing electronically. Also, remember that any earnings from work while incarcerated is not considered earned income so a Form W-2 will not be provided.

Audience Insights

- "We are working on a partnership with a law clinic that goes in the prison to assist with other matters."
- "We've got a couple of different initiatives going on, serving justice touched individuals. A lot of our work is with reemployment efforts. And two things that we're doing right now that have been really effective for us is having workforce centers partnering with parole offices. So as individuals come out, we're there to support them immediately, provide direction. We're going to parole offices taking workforce solutions services towards job search and reemployment. We've also got an initiative where we've set up a pre-release training where we're working with correctional facility with individuals who are maybe six months out from release dates."

Providing training that can be completed, partnering with a local college that will provide training prior to release dates so that by the time they come to the point where they are going to be released, they've already completed a certification program. We're focused on certified logistics technician programs so that these individuals can become employed immediately. We've got an employer on the other end of this, so that once they receive their certifications, they are immediate candidates for those types of opportunities."

- "When you're dealing with this population, you have several that come together to make their needs a whole – holistic. That holistic way of providing services to them, matches what they need. Because they need to work so they can get their taxes prepared. So, I think the whole concept of holistic health is needed for this particular group."