Hampshire Sheriff's Office

Bridge to the Future Program

The Bridge to the Future program is a 16-bed halfway house located at 272 Grove St., about 100 yards from the main HSO facility, that places an emphasis on planning for release. Increased levels of personal responsibility and conduct are expected. The ideal candidate for admission to the program will have no less than 120 days left to serve on their sentence in order to take full advantage of all that the program has to offer.

In FY '24 (July 1st, 2023 – June 30th, 2024) 22 men concluded their sentence and transitioned back into the community through our Bridge to the Future program. It is important to note that the average length of stay at the Hampshire County Jail and House of Correction for sentenced individuals is 105 days, meaning that most of the men in our care are released before becoming eligible for the program.

Bridge residents, while under staff supervision, attend outside AA/NA meetings, and may access programs at the Northampton Recovery Center (NRC), the Community Justice Support Center (CSJC) and other community-based organizations. This provides an opportunity for men nearing the end of their sentences to experience an increase in community-based programming that will aid in their recovery and reintegration. With staff supervision, participants begin working on developing a healthy and structured routine to include treatment, education, and volunteer work.

Before being considered for the Bridge program, potential residents will have identified specific goals to accomplish while at the Bridge and after release. With staff support, residents develop an action plan on how they will accomplish these goals. Prior to applying for this lower level of security, residents may have any or all of the following in place: Recovery meetings, a sponsor/mentor/recovery coach, therapy, medically-assisted treatment, supervised volunteer work, classes through the CJSC and/or a plan to complete an Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP), education and/or vocational programs and an active plan for housing (applications to halfway houses or sober homes, apartment searches or actively searching for an apartment, or having already established safe and supportive housing). In addition, residents may also be eligible to earn money through a community-based employment opportunity. Each resident works with Bridge staff to identify a plan for employment and a determination is made about when one may begin working. Each resident will identify at least one treatment day in the week to continue participating in individual meetings, group treatment, education and volunteer opportunities.

At the Bridge to the Future, residents may be eligible for Electronic Monitoring (ELMO). This is designed to maximize the reentry process by allowing the participant to practice their established routine on their own. This may include riding a bike or utilizing public transportation to get to work, attending community-based programs, attending school or vocational programs and volunteer in the community. ELMO may also include spending ones' last few months supervised at a halfway house, sober home or approved residence where they plan to reside post-release. ELMO

participants who are living in the community adhere to a weekly itinerary they create and staff approve.

What is afforded to the residents

Each resident works with staff to formulate a treatment and re-entry plan. They follow a weekly itinerary that incorporates some or all of the following: community based treatment programming, employment, education and volunteer opportunities. This allows each resident a chance to establish a routine, as well as a healthy balance of treatment, work, school and civic responsibilities. At the Bridge to the Future, residents are given the opportunity to establish and practice these routines. They begin to build confidence in themselves while realizing their individual successes. A primary goal of the program is for each resident to continue this same routine post-release, which alleviates the stress of "what do I do now?" once released from custody.

Residents are encouraged to establish as much of their routine out in the community as possible. This includes but is not limited to: self-help community meetings (AA, NA, Al-Anon, SMART recovery), individual therapy, peer support and recovery through the Northampton Recovery Center (NRC), anger management and domestic violence programming, early recovery groups, medically assisted treatment (MAT) and parenting programs.

Residents are afforded the opportunity to do their own grocery shopping on a weekly basis and they are encouraged to make their own medical, dental and vision

appointments in the community. They utilize the bus system or ride bikes to their destinations. This is an important step in familiarizing oneself with public transportation, as many of the residents will not be able to obtain a license for a number of years, if ever, post release. If a resident is eligible for a license, they are given the opportunity to pay fines due to the RMV, complete driver recertification classes, take their permit test and schedule their license exam. Lack of transportation is another big stressor for those post release and taking these steps toward a license prior to release helps alleviate this stress.

Program residents are supported in finding affordable, safe and sober housing upon their release. They are given the opportunity to utilize a computer at the Bridge house to search for single rooms or efficiency apartments, as well as residential treatment programs or sober homes. Residents are escorted to program interviews, as well as appointments for available apartments. Establishing housing prior to release is an extremely important piece in their overall re-entry plan and residents are strongly encouraged to begin their search at least 4-6 months prior to their anticipated release.

Also, through the use of the Bridge house computer, residents are given the opportunity to find their own employment. The work release coordinator is on hand to provide residents with CORI-friendly employment opportunities pre-established within the community. However, residents are strongly encouraged to first seek out employment on their own. They are tasked with building a resume and cover letter, searching available jobs, applying for those jobs, following up with emails and phone

calls, and explaining their current situation eloquently (incarcerated in a treatment program) and excel in an interview. Although this can be challenging and time consuming, it allows each resident to take control of their own employment from start to finish and feel a sense of accomplishment once they've been hired. They gain confidence in succeeding at something while being completely open and honest about their criminal record and often poor work history. In addition, they practice self-advocacy, a skill that will serve them well as they begin relying less on others and more on themselves.

At the Bridge to the Future program, residents are given the privilege of having a cell phone. Although the phone available to each resident is basic in nature, it allows residents to communicate with their support network (family, friends, self-help community members, sponsors, mentors, employers, their therapist, Bridge staff, etc.). Residents continually provide feedback indicating this is an extremely important tool in reconnecting with their children and other loved ones. In addition, having this form of communication available places a responsibility on each resident to make their own appointments, stay connected with their support network, and get in touch with their employer or with staff at the Bridge when necessary. Having an established phone number prior to release significantly increases the chances that a resident will stay in contact with staff post-release and continue to utilize them as part of their overall support network.

Our partners

Treatment

Northampton Recovery Center (NRC)

Department of Children & Families (DCF)

Center for Human Development (CHD)

Behavioral Health Network (BHN)

Community Justice Support Center (CJSC)

Veterans Administration/Soldier-On

ServiceNet

Clinical and Support Options (CSO)

On-Call

Healthy Living

Partakers Re-Entry Program

Tapestry

Nurturing Father's Program

ROCA Young Men's Program

Health Care Resource Center (HCRC)

Education

UMass-Amherst

Amherst College

Smith Vocational Adult Education (ACES)

Holyoke Community College (HCC)

Greenfield Community College (GCC)

Volunteer Work

Salvation Army

Edwards Church/MANNA Soup Kitchen

Angel Tree

First Congregational Church Food Pantry & Thrift Store

Northampton Recovery Center

Northampton Senior Center Lunch Café

What are the benefits

The Bridge to the Future program offers many benefits to its residents and the community in general. The first major benefit is that the program allows participants the community access necessary to establish vital connections. Residents attend recovery meetings and work with sponsors, mentors, and recovery coaches. It is extremely important to begin building a strong support network that they can rely on post release so that residents feel like they are a part of the community. Attending self-help meetings and establishing connections within the recovery rooms prior to

release reduces anxiety, builds confidence and a sense of belonging for the resident and greatly increases the chances that they'll continue attending these meetings post release.

Employment allows each participant the opportunity to utilize existing skills and learn new ones. For some, this is the first time they've established a consistent routine of getting up early, preparing for work, working 8 hours/day, getting to bed early and doing it all over again the next day. Employment also allows residents to earn money to pay off existing debt, restitution, license fees, child support arrears and to save for housing, program fees and/or a vehicle. The ability to save money gives a program resident an advantage when looking for housing, which is often limited in availability, affordability and not always CORI-friendly.

Participants may elect to go to college or take a class within a specific vocation. For most, this is a new and exciting experience. It builds confidence in their academic ability, and participation allows them to feel like part of their community and it allows them to add on to their support network and participate in a pro-social activity.

Residents at the Bridge house report better quality time spent with their families and children. The quiet setting of the program allows residents the opportunity to watch a football game with their dad, play basketball or tag outside with their children, cook a meal for their significant other or enjoy a conversation with a friend at the picnic tables. The home-like setting alleviates the stress of bringing

children or older parents into an institution-type atmosphere where it may otherwise be uncomfortable or inappropriate to visit with their loved one.

Many of the residents and their significant others and / or family members feel comfortable enough to engage with staff in family meetings. These family meetings are informal and take place outside of the regular visiting hours. This is an opportunity for the family to have a voice in the re-entry planning of their loved one, as well as obtain education around the individuals' high risk areas and support in establishing healthy boundaries for themselves. Several of these same family members remain in contact with staff, whether the graduated resident continues to or not.

Most valuable collaborations

Our education collaborations are invaluable for the Bridge house residents. Growing up, so many of our participants had poor experiences in school. Many suffered from learning disabilities and low self-esteem, believing they weren't "smart enough" to advance their education. Collaborations with Smith Vocational Adult Education, Holyoke Community College, Greenfield Community College, Amherst College and UMass-Amherst have allowed many of our residents the opportunity to participate in higher education. By engaging our residents in academic and/or vocational programs, they have an opportunity to learn, become part of a larger community, build relationships, gain confidence in themselves and strive to excel in something positive and pro-social.

Collaborations with our self-help community are also extremely important. Most of the residents at the Bridge house arrive cautiously optimistic about their future. However, they bring with them a long history of broken relationships, mistrust of the system, the staff and themselves, as well as, shame and guilt about the things they've done that landed them in jail. Being accepted by individual sponsors and mentors, self-help group members, those regular participants of the Northampton Recovery Center and recovery coaches prove to Bridge participants that people are still willing to help and offer support.

What works best and why

At the Bridge house, staff are on-hand to support residents in determining what they need as individuals to succeed and the means to implement their plans. When a resident first enters the program, they meet with staff and are highly encouraged to begin thinking about what they would like to accomplish during their time at the Bridge. All goals are taken into consideration and supported as much as possible. For the most part, each resident drives their own treatment and re-entry plan. Allowing each resident the autonomy to establish their own schedule, with suggestions, support and feedback from staff, increases the chances that they'll continue to maintain the same routine post release.

Bridge staff are available days, nights and weekends. Residents learn they can count on staff to answer questions in a timely manner, work with them in a non-punitive, nonjudgmental setting and view them as valued members of a community.

Residents elicit feedback and advice from staff, feel comfortable venting frustrations or admitting wrongdoings, readily accept any consequences for minor infractions, feel a part of a bigger community, take ownership and pride in the program, hold each other accountable and look out for one another.

Communication is key. Each resident is given a journal upon entering the program and is expected to make daily entries. Staff review the journals each day and provide feedback, positive support, suggestions, answer questions, and provide any necessary updates related to each individual. Residents often admit "the first thing I do when I get home (back to the Bridge house) is look to see what's written in my journal." Another communication tool is the phone. Texting and phone calls occur throughout the day between residents and staff. These can include simple questions or reminders or can involve in-depth conversations or problem-solving issues during a lunch break. Residents feel safe, supported, and confident in reaching out in the future when they establish initial successes in communication and build a rapport with the staff.

The weekly house dinner and meeting takes place on Wednesday evenings. All residents are expected to attend. This is an informal way of gathering the community together over a hot meal prepared by one or more of the residents. It's a great opportunity to discuss current events, check in with each other, and laugh and joke around. It's also a time to make any announcements and address any house related issues. Former Bridge residents often attend these meals. It provides an opportunity for the former resident to check in with staff in person and stay connected to a pro-

social community. It also benefits the current program residents to see former residents return and hear how they're doing in the community.

The real work begins post release. Many of our residents have abandonment issues from childhood, have significantly damaged relationships with loved ones and have a limited pro-social support network. Maintaining contact with our residents post release and continuing to offer support is a critical part of the re-entry process. Staff reach out to and hear from Bridge graduates and their families through text, phone call or one-on-one visits at the house every day. Communication can be as simple as a text to say hello or extend a congratulations on a sobriety date, to fielding a phone call from a resident who is seeking advice and support, to meeting with someone post release at the Bridge House for an in-person check-in. Staff work hard to foster a safe and supportive environment at the Bridge House where participants feel comfortable remaining in contact post release, celebrating their successes and reaching out in times of distress.