



Successful Reentry *Through Safe Housing Solutions*

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INNOVATIONS SERIES

Innovations Series

A quarterly publication spotlighting noteworthy solutions being used by state agencies to improve the justice system. Each report will focus on a unique area of the adult and youth justice systems and highlight organizations that have achieved success by implementing these strategies.



Safe and stable housing is essential for successful reentry, yet there are holes in programming despite best intentions. Two states have developed innovative models to address gaps in housing, with the goal of helping people succeed as they exit the justice system—reducing recidivism and improving public safety.

Why Housing Matters

To achieve successful reentry, an individual must have safe and stable housing. Housing serves as a springboard for individuals upon reentry. It reorients them to life in a community, allows them to build a social network, helps them find employment through a permanent address, and enables them to access treatment. Housing can also be psychologically beneficial, offering hope and a commitment to change.

Stable (or secure) housing means that you aren't living in uncertainty about your housing situation and generally have a choice over when to move. The opposite – housing instability – can mean facing different challenges, like struggling to pay rent, overcrowding in shelters, moving frequently, or spending most of your income on housing.

In contrast, housing instability creates situations that highly correlate with failure to transition back into society. Individuals experience a higher rate of treatment failure (specifically for substance abuse and mental illness), violation of supervision, and recidivism.

Despite the clear need for housing, challenges persist. As the United States experiences an ongoing housing crisis, it becomes harder to secure housing. Justice-involved individuals encounter barriers by virtue of having a criminal record, public housing restrictions, reluctance of landlords, and income limitations. Formerly incarcerated people are nearly ten times more likely to be unhoused compared to the public.

How States Have Met the Challenges

This brief explores two states, Louisiana and Tennessee, that have tackled these issues head-on at the state and community level. By exploring these initiatives in-depth, other organizations can better strategize their own innovations for the future.

LOUISIANA

Louisiana's Emergency Transitional Housing (ETH) began as a pilot program in 2019. With support from the Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DPS&C), community housing providers are given funding for temporary housing formerly incarcerated individuals and individuals under community supervision. This program is funded through the portion of Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) funds directed to DPS&C.

ETH includes two types of housing:

- Emergency housing for individuals who need overnight shelter (no more than 12 hours) not exceeding 14 days within a six-month period
- Transitional housing that cannot exceed six months or end of supervision (whichever comes first) for individuals under parole & probation supervision. Transitional housing that cannot exceed three months is also available for individuals who have fully termed out of incarceration

The ETH program seeks to improve the reentry process for individuals recently released from incarceration by providing them with safe, temporary housing until they can secure long-term housing. These individuals are under probation and parole supervision and are at immense risk of homelessness. Individuals may also be in state custody, having served their full terms, and are at immense risk of homelessness.

As of April 2024, there are:

33 total providers

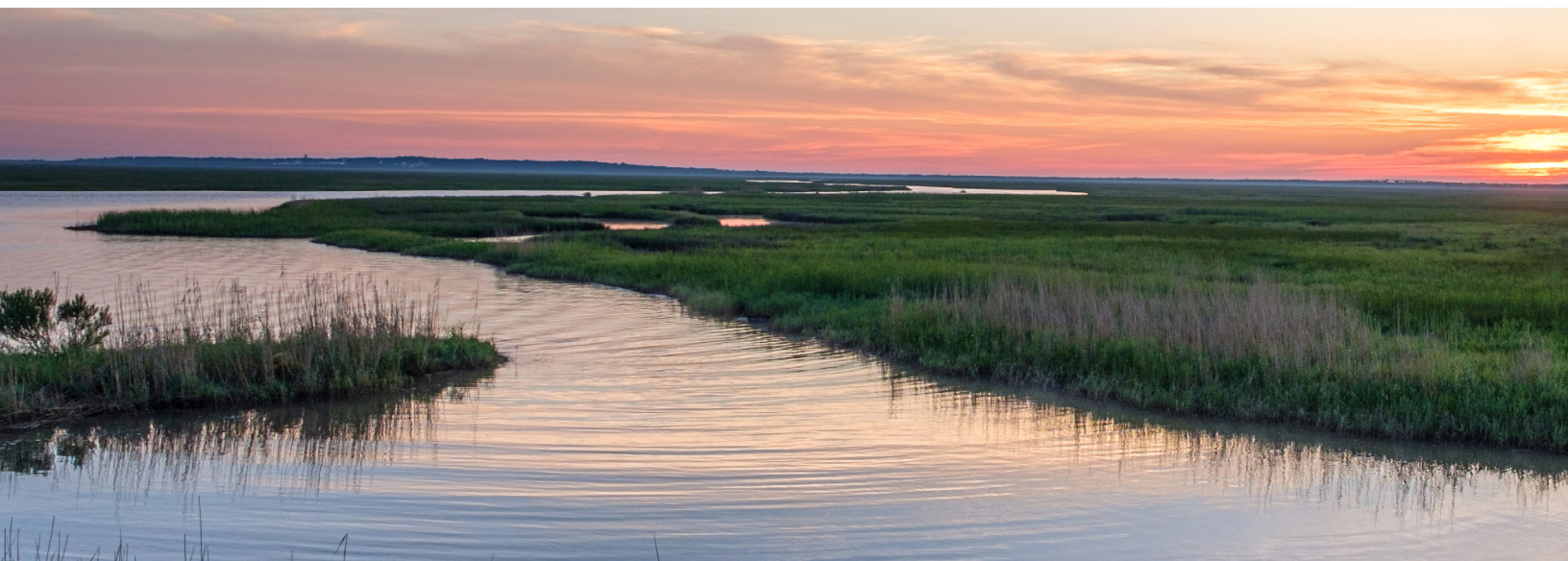
16 Parishes served

1,667 residents served to date

154 current ETH participants

Reentry Housing Efforts in Louisiana

For a better understanding of reentry housing efforts through ETH in Louisiana, it is important to showcase two organizations, One Touch Ministry and The Refinery, that are long-established community providers making important strides to support their residents.



One Touch Ministry

For more than 20 years, reentry housing specialist organization One Touch Ministry has provided local men on parole in Baton Rouge, Louisiana with the much-needed guidance to make a successful return to society after incarceration. Its director, Verna Bradley-Jackson, remembers the origin story of One Touch Ministry well. She was managing the Bellemont Hotel when a man exiting incarceration began writing to the hotel. A former guest, the man remembered hotel staff as kind and supportive. Jackson worked closely with the man to help him achieve successful reentry. Soon word spread around Baton Rouge of the Bellemont Hotel and the staffs' generosity in helping justice-involved people return to the community successfully while building a meaningful relationship with parole and probation organizations.

Eventually, One Touch Ministry was created. In its early years, many clients were reentering society after years in prison, some as long as 20-30 years. Jackson describes many of them as "institutionalized", having forgotten the daily habits of society. Cars were different. Their environments had transformed. New technologies like cell phones and laptops were everywhere. The men that One Touch Ministry guided to successful reentry had many of these large-scale obstacles to address, plus everyday routines of life outside of a correctional setting. Staff at One Touch Ministry and the clients learned from one another to ensure successful reentry, particularly when it came to the timeline of the reentry process. When rushed through the reentry process, clients had a greater risk of recidivism. As One Touch Ministry grew, it began developing programs to re-adjust clients to the societal norms they forgot during their years of incarceration and others that had changed over time.

One Touch Ministry employs a rigorous screening process for every potential client. Along with their application, each person must submit a life story outlining their entire history and the circumstances that led to their incarceration. According to Jackson, these life stories allow potential clients to recognize

gaps in their stories, putting into perspective how patterns may have led them down certain paths which they might want to avoid in the future.

Once accepted, these individuals reentering send a letter to the Department of Public Safety & Corrections (DPS&C). Upon release from custody, the DPS&C drops the individual off at One Touch Ministry where they spend six hours with Jackson for a personal evaluation. Details Jackson looks for are their triggers and how their personality meshes with other residents to determine which housing unit they belong in for their stay. After that, One Touch Ministry creates a personalized plan for each individual to understand their needs. Those who require mental health or substance abuse counseling are referred to outside services, with One Touch Ministry receiving regular updates to ensure they are making positive progress.

Individuals seeking reentry are challenged with many barriers along the way, particularly financial obstacles. Among their biggest hurdles is establishing financial security, given that finding a job while on parole is challenging. One Touch Ministry guides their clients on best practices, connecting them with temporary employment agencies and other organizations willing to hire them.

Jackson is proud of One Touch Ministry's record throughout the years. "Out of thousands we helped, I can count on my two hands the number of people who returned to prison." Many past clients return to visit, showing off their new cars, projects they have worked on, or even to share their stories. One former resident, released after 38 years of incarceration, still returns as one of their biggest successes and teaches current residents that if he can do it, anyone can.

As she looks back on the fruits of her labor, those results mean everything to Jackson. "It's how I know I am doing the right thing," she reflects.



Image Source

facebook.com/refinerymission

The Refinery

The Refinery, an Opelousas, Louisiana-based program for men seeking successful transition to stable life in the community, was one of the first organizations participating in DPS&C's Emergency and Transitional Housing program in 2019. Funding short-term and transitional housing for people under supervision in the community or recently released from custody who are at immediate risk of homelessness.

Speaking on behalf of The Refinery was Steven Barnes, the organization's program director. In addition to his role as program director, Barnes is one of The Refinery's success stories. Originally from Dallas, Texas, he worked in home building and property management. Barnes explained he "crossed that line" and found himself homeless, smoking crack, and living under a bridge panhandling with no way to return to his old life. Through luck, he met someone in a treatment facility who in 2015 encouraged Barnes to move to Opelousas to attend The Refinery, then called The Opelousas Lighthouse Shelter.

Barnes is careful to make a distinction between The Refinery serving as a mission versus a shelter. "If you say that I'm living in a shelter, that doesn't do a whole lot for a person's dignity, but when you say that I live in a mission, that gives you hope." Residents come to The Refinery via different paths, including correctional facilities, rehabilitation programs, behavior health centers, or experiencing homelessness.

Housing up to 64 individuals and with a waiting list to join, The Refinery is more than just a name to Barnes. "That's what we want to do. We want to refine these men to become productive members of society."

To accomplish this, The Refinery reinforces structure, something residents often have not had for a long time, if ever. Barnes reflected, "Some of them don't know how to fill out an application. Some of them don't even have an ID or they lost their ID years ago and they have no desire to get another or never thought they would." Residents learn life skills such as morning routines, chores, budget management, life and fatherhood skills, driving themselves and fellow residents to work, and receiving mail. Barnes notes, "I'm getting them reacquainted to how to live life on life's terms."

Residents living at The Refinery typically spend six to twelve months there depending on their needs. Some want to save money to buy a car. Others are cautious to make the next step and want to wait until they feel ready. The program's popularity has led The Refinery to expanding its facilities.

TENNESSEE

The Tennessee Department of Correction (TDOC) partners with the Tennessee Housing Development Agency (THDA) to provide temporary transitional housing to at-risk individuals recently released from incarceration.

This programming fills an existing gap by expanding eligibility for reentry housing to include individuals released following sentence expiration. Previously, only those released on probation or parole were eligible for transitional housing. Improving successful reentry for additional individuals by expanding eligibility for reentry housing is embedded in the principles of Tennessee's [Reentry Success Act of 2021](#) and will contribute to the sustainability of this legislation.



Logo Source thda.org

Reentry Housing Efforts in Tennessee

To bridge their efforts with those happening in Tennessee communities, TDOC partnered with external organizations to advance the state's reentry efforts. The following profiles highlight examples of this work.





Logo Source
tn.gov/correction.html

Tennessee Department of Corrections' Reentry Services

A division of TDOC, Reentry Services helps Tennesseans leaving incarceration successfully transition back into their communities. Currently, Tennessee has approximately 30,000 people incarcerated in jail and about 20,000 incarcerated in prison. While 95 percent of these individuals will eventually be eligible for release, they face numerous barriers to successfully reentering society, as evident in Tennessee's statewide recidivism rate of 40 percent.

To help affected individuals overcome barriers to reentry, Reentry Services helps in several key areas of life, including acquiring necessary IDs, job training, housing, transportation, and other vital resources. Reentry Services also guides those who cannot find housing or need alternative supervision. Research has shown that housing and employment are two of the most important factors that help reduce recidivism.

Michelle Singleton, the Director of Housing for TDOC, has been instrumental in raising the bar for the State's housing program. Since taking on the role in 2018, she changed much of how the housing services were run. TDOC aided these community organizations by providing guidance on how to create effective housing. In the six years since beginning this initiative, they have seen a 250 percent rise in the number of beds, providers, and sites.

As of 2024, TDOC's database of transitional housing included:

253 locations

4,058 beds

120 providers

This rise has made a significant difference to individuals on parole compared to years past. Previously, shortages delayed the release of many people because there was nowhere to place them. This growing availability allows impacted individuals to get placed sooner. In any given month, the program will have about 1,000 participants throughout the state. Many of these individuals receive financial assistance from their families for housing costs, while indigent offenders use Recovery Housing Program grants.

As the housing program grows, Singleton aims to create more opportunities for those in need. Rural housing is a key challenge, particularly for women and people convicted of sex offenses. While capacity has increased by 70 percent in the last year alone, the program continues to strive for more.

The program also encourages individuals to transition or 'graduate' to step-down housing. These programs offer minimal oversight while still providing the necessary reports for those in need.



Logo Source

lhmm.org

Lighthouse Mission Ministries

For nearly 40 years, the Lighthouse Mission Ministries has been a key source of support for transitional housing in Memphis, Tennessee. Founded in 1986, Lighthouse Mission Ministries, also referred to as the Lighthouse, opened to help people who are unhoused, dealing with addiction, and/or returning from incarceration. Despite limited funding and capacity, only housing up to 15 people at the start, the Lighthouse Mission Ministries rapidly grew. By 1993, their need for additional space led them to purchase a former school neighboring the property.

In the years since, Lighthouse has expanded its reach to include:

6 locations

84 beds per location (at most)

100+ employees

In 2001, Chief Operating Officer Kenny Lane joined Lighthouse. During his tenure, the ministry expanded to and refocused its efforts toward individuals on probation and parole. With this new goal, Lighthouse Mission Ministries began working more collaboratively with TDOC. Through this joint effort, Lighthouse broadened its reach to more rural parts of Tennessee that had previously been underserved in support. “This is where we have had some of our greatest successes,” Lane said.

For most of its existence, Lighthouse has run six-month programs to help their residents. Recently, the organization expanded its services to offer one-year programs as well.

“We will take anyone who needs our help who has not committed a violent crime,” said Lane. While Lighthouse Mission Ministries does not typically take people with Class A felonies, they will consider doing so on a case-by-case basis.

Staff try to keep the program the same for all residents, though some individuals might have different expectations depending on their needs. While the organization has had success, Lighthouse still experiences common barriers, particularly as some residents remain uneasy in facing challenges and accepting help. In certain cases, individuals make multiple attempts to succeed. They continue to return because the program works for those who aim for success. These individuals are able to return to their communities thanks to efforts that allow them to open saving accounts, have a percentage of checks saved, apply for a driver’s license, pay outstanding court costs, and address other barriers for success.

Lane has seen many people complete their stay at Lighthouse Mission Ministries. Some of these people come from experiences with homelessness or incarceration and end up in management work, military careers, and/or thriving families. During this transitional period, residents of Lighthouse receive the full support of the ministry staff. “We encourage residents to see everyone as here to help,” said Lane.

Conclusion

Research has consistently shown the vital role that housing plays in improving reentry results. As states address creating successful reentry options and reducing recidivism, they must make housing a primary consideration. Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, Tennessee Department of Correction, and community partners have shown that these considerations create major strides towards alleviating these issues and ensuring people transitioning from incarceration have the best chance to thrive.