Time Out

Feds to prisoners: Get out of jail, get counseling and care

July 1, 2003 By Rachel Maddow

The Brightest progress in services for HIVers can be found at your local correctional facility—if only because there is so much room for improvement. Often, inmates are returned to their communities with no idea where to look for the health care and counseling they need. But since the Ryan White CARE Act and an innovative federal project began freeing up funding for AIDS organizations to look after recently and soon-to-be-released prisoners with HIV three years ago, new programs are breaking out all over.

“We’re there to ask, ‘Did you go to the doctor? Have you taken your meds?’” said Jean’quel Henry, prison liaison for Family Service of Greater Baton Rouge. “Upon leaving that structured [prison] environment, it can help to have someone ask those questions.” Since last July, the Ryan White Act lets case workers put prisoners on their client lists as early as six months before they exit the prison gates. So every month, Henry visits Louisiana’s East Baton Rouge Parish Prison, hooking up HIV positive prisoners with the local services and medical care they’ll need on the outside.

Henry told *POZ*, “When people get out, there’s that fear of the unknown. A lot of times no one else knows they’re HIV positive. So we let them know that there are services and support.” In its first 10 months, her program eased 112 discharged state and parish prisoners back into society; only three have been rearrested.

Anne Lemoine is the health care manager inside the East Baton Rouge Parish Prison, where 5.8 percent of the women and 2.1 percent of the men have HIV. “We’re the public-health deathtraps,” Lemoine said. “This is where infectious diseases end up.” Her jail isn’t funded to offer discharge planning to HIV positive prisoners, so the services Henry and other outside case managers provide are crucial.

Since 1999, California, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Florida, Georgia and Massachusetts have joined a CDC discharge planning project, setting up programs similar to the one in Louisiana. John Miles, former Special Assistant for Corrections and Substance Abuse at the CDC, said these services are expanding “because community activists are saying, ‘We can’t let people fall through the cracks.”

Prisoner advocates are cheered by these efforts but aren’t ready to stop there. ACT

UP/Philadelphia’s Asia Russell asked, “What about the thousands of positive people still locked up, facing medical neglect and discrimination? That’s a real test for the AIDS community—do we care enough to confront prison medical neglect and bigotry?”

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Time-Out-2894-9073