

Highland Community Collaboration Council  
In Person  
Meeting Minutes  
November 8, 2021  
9:30am

The Highlands Community Collaboration Council had an in-person meeting on November 8, 2021.

Welcome and Introductions

Chris opened the meeting at 9:30 and members introduced themselves. He asked for additions or corrections to the agenda. There were 10 members in attendance today. A sign in sheet was completed. Review and approval of September 13, 2021 meeting minutes.

Matt motioned and Linda seconded the motion. All in favor. The minutes are approved

Guest Speakers:

Stan Rose: (Cognitive Counselor, Bland Correctional Center)

John Shoda: (Security Manager, Bland Correctional Center)

Virtual Q&A between HCCC members and incarcerated individuals at Bland CC.

Bland Questions:

1. How can we get a passport, and which countries accept felons? Matt states he recently applied for a passport. Depends on the charges and if your parole officer wishes to allow it. Drug trafficking is generally a barrier. It is up to the state department. If you are convicted of sex tourism that can also be a barrier. There are some countries that will not allow. Some also require a Visa. If going to Mexico or Canada they are part of NAFTA so that would apply.
2. How do we start the process of creating a small business for a felon upon release? Jimmy suggests start at Small Business Development Center. Most are housed at local community colleges. DARS and VA Cares can help with small scale businesses. On the larger scale, would start with the community college. Matt owns a local business and states it depends on the type of business. Nothing prevents a felon from starting a small business. Suggest contact parole officer for input. If want to form a partnership or a corporation. Matt is willing to help. Gmcswva.com for more details. There are different licensing requirements. Depends on what type of business that you are interested in opening.

3. How can we get help when released from prison for food stamps and clothes for the people who don't have anyone upon release from prison? Chris. Need a physical address then just go to the local DSS. Linda says OEI has a thrift store. A lot of the ministries have vouchers for work clothes. Chris says talk to probation officer. Expedited? Yes, if meets criteria.
4. How does the halfway house work? What are the rules and how does it help me? Referrals start prior to release. There are admission criteria. Dorcas House in Roanoke is the closest one. Depends on the locality. DOC has contracts CCOR in Lebanon. Process start with counselor in the institution. BLR can also review you for admission. The rules are contingent upon locality. There are sobriety and drug free requirements. It is a great way to get re-established. Oxford Houses are nationwide. There is one opening in Wytheville. There is also a Roads to Recovery program. They generally have a high success rate.
5. How long will it take when I get out to get my SSI and Social Security checks? Joey says go ahead and file. If you are attempting to resume the benefits, check with your counselor while still incarcerated. Initial applications can take several months.
6. Will the DMV take my substance abuse certificate that I received while I have been incarcerated? Chris says there is no DMV representative here today. Start with probation officer verifying your home. They will not take other documents except those from probation officer. Try to make sure you have social security card before release.
7. I am currently without transportation. How can I be provided with help to get to work and medical appointments? People, Inc. has a displaced worker program. They have a no interest loan for vehicle. Several programs are available. Suggest they contact People, Inc. to see what programs you would qualify for. A Medicaid cab will take you to medical appointments. Some MCO companies are allowing 4-5 trips per year that are non-medical. In certain area, VA Cares can provide bus passes.
8. Do you have a list in this area that hires felons? Chris says locally probation regularly receives email from employers who are seeking to hire felons. Matt says he can hire 8 employees right now. It seems everyone is hiring. Being a felon is not going to be a barrier to employment at this time. If you are in Smyth or Wythe County Matt will hire you right now if you can pass a drug test. Matt says the council has a list of resources on their website. There is no list of companies that hire felons. There are too many variables to make such a sweeping statement. Many employers are unwilling to make such a statement. VA Cares can assist with individuals on a 1:1 basis. You can return to work and be successful. You just have to have the drive and desire to do so.
9. What type of help do you have for people with drug problems? Cindy with Mount Rogers says you should reach out to your local CSB upon release. The programs are available 24/7 and can help and they offer same day access to many programs. Peer Specialist positions are available. They can provide case management. Don't wait until you have abused substances before seeking help. There are counseling and treatment options available. There are recovery groups throughout the region. Recommend that to attend a meeting the day you are

released. Rick with BLR says the system is designed to help. There is a high risk for relapse. Getting involved right out of the gate is highly recommended. They have a low intensity residential program. Sometimes they can help people directly upon release. There is counseling, care coordination, nursing and referral services. There is spiritual services and 12-step meetings. The 90-90 is also very effective. Can look for a meeting instead of a fix. If interested in a referral, please speak with your counselor. People, Inc. and VA Cares are statewide based. Some of the resources we are speaking about are local.

10. What type of help and assistance do you have for housing? VA Cares. Would need to complete an application. Hands and Feet can also assist with deposits.

11. Are there any resources to help with affordable transportation or help with payments? People, Inc. has several programs to include loans. Depends on what program the individual qualifies for. OEI has a cars program.

12. How to receive help with housing arrangements? VA Cares

13. How to receive help getting a driver's license back or reinstated by the court? Joey says upon release go to DMV and get a compliance summary. Then call Legal Aid and get them to navigate the process. Can set up a payment plan. Need to make arrangements with the court. Can also work through child support if there are arrearages. Not difficult but takes some time. DMV is very particular. Judge can give people the right to drive but DMV can say no. The courts will work with you.

14. How can I find help getting a job? Chris says talk with probation officer. Can register with VEC. Matt says the workforce connection will help you find employment and help identify barriers and acquire job skills. They can reach out to different employers and help you find a job. Depends on charges. Matt got a job two days out of prison and has been there ever since. Chris adds that there are two people on this panel today who are prior felons. They have obtained and maintained employment.

15. How to get eligible to rent or get a place while a felon? VA Cares through People, Inc. Depends on the location you will be releasing to. May have difficulty obtaining state and federal funded housing developments. There is help available with deposits. You will need to get plugged back into the community to tap into these local resources. Anyone who needs the help can get the assistance they need at obtaining housing.

16. Can you get your driver's license back if they have been suspended because of child support? Joey says need to get to the local court that ordered it. May need a lawyer to get in front of the judge. Legal Aid can help with that. Make sure probation officer is aware of what you are pursuing. You don't want to get incarcerated for arrears. Get the help and guidance beforehand. Linda with Hands and Feet say they can help with fees.

17. On post release do I report to anyone like probation or etc? If on post release, you will report to your probation officer. It is between the court and the individual and opposed to the parole board. Linda adds that there are Teen Challenge and other faith based programs available throughout the service area.

## New Business

- Refer to committee members: None.

## December 13, 2021 Council Presentations:

Please send an email to Chris with any suggestions.

## Sub-Committee Reports

*Housing Committee/ Service Integration Committee/ Grants/Finance Committee*  
(Matt, Emma, Andy, Felisha, and Linda)

*Employment Committee:* (Jimmy with DARS, Mike with VEC)  
None

*Mentoring Committee/ Substance Abuse Committee:* (Ruth, Teresa, Chris, Chuck)  
None

*Public Relations Committee:* (Manuel)  
None

*Executive Committee:* (Chris, Richard, Felisha and Chris).  
None

## Re-entry Updates

None

## Local Coalition Updates

Questions/Concerns/Comments/Announcements:

Rob made some closing statements: It is great that there are two members of the council that were previously incarcerated. It would be interesting to have some individuals who have been through the system to present to the council. Heard this is the best re-entry council. Is there any joint meetings with neighboring councils? Yes, but it has been over four years ago. How active is the re-entry staff with the probation officers? There has been some limited interaction. Maybe have re-entry team see what probation officers do. Can be more effective counselor for re-entry if I know what is involved. Linda says Tennessee has a program called Take One. They hope to duplicate it in Abingdon. It is a six-month pre to one-year post program. It reduces recidivism by 50%. Mentoring is very effective yet under-utilized in our current system. There are several promising programs that would be beneficial in our area. It is suggested that we expand this conversation and make resources available to the returning citizens that are specific to the locality they are

expecting to return to. Rob says it would be great to have an in-house resource fair at the facility to make the inmates aware of local resources. It is suggested that trauma informed care be available to those in prisons. Dr. Steve Lloyd was recorded at his recent presentation and it is available on the ASAC website. Linda will email the link to Chris to be shared with the council.

**Next meeting –December 13, 2021: second Monday**

**We meet the second Monday of each month.**

<http://www.highlandsccc.org>

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**The meeting adjourned at 11:12am.**

If there is someone you would like for us to invite to a future meeting as either a guest or member, please let one of us know.

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Respectfully submitted,

Chris Austin  
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