

The Triangle TRIBUNE

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Roundtable discussion pool resources for ex-felons

By Cynthia Dean
THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

RALEIGH - Ex-felons who live in the Triangle have a place to go to find support and services after they are released from prison.

Dennis Gaddy is the executive director of the Community Success Initiative that helps ex-offenders transition back into mainstream society. Gaddy hosts monthly Ex-offender Resource Roundtable meetings, which he calls "a resource center without walls."

Gaddy said ex-offenders are often overlooked and forgotten, and they need help in getting acclimated back into the community. Former inmates and the people who work to assist them meet every fourth Wednesday of the month at the Building Together Ministries building at 1116 N. Blount Street from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The meetings are open to the public.

The roundtable discussions allow community organizations that offer transition and re-entry services to pool their resources together.

"The purpose is to bring together alliances who are currently involved in work pertinent to men and women," Gaddy said. "Organizations, clients and providers are welcome to come to the meetings to leverage the resources of the alliances that are already in place."

About 25 different groups

attend the meetings, including leaders from the department of corrections, people who work with transitional homes and employers who offer jobs to ex-offenders.

The roundtable discussions also increase awareness of the obstacles that ex-offenders face upon release, such as finding housing and employment. Former inmates also have an opportunity to share their success stories at the meetings and let community members know what they can do to help.

Gaddy said most people understand the cost of incarceration (about \$30,000 a year). On the other hand, they tend to overlook the price someone has to pay when victimized.

"It's a price that is overlooked because it is not in a dollar amount," he said.

Sheldon Howard helped coordinate the roundtable events along with Gaddy. They know both sides of life.

"When we were incarcerated together, we saw a lot of people who did not have the resources or the know-how to make it on the outside," Howard said. "Going back out into the world, laws have changed, circumstances have changed. It's hard to find a place to live, and it's hard to find a job."

Howard said one ex-offender, who attended one of the roundtable discussions, was able to find a free clinic so he could get a check-up. While

he was incarcerated, the state took care of his cancer treatments, but that stopped after he was released.

"We're sort of a support group," Howard said. "We try to be supportive for the ex-felons. We try to advocate for them. These are good people. The ones that get out of prison, who are trustworthy and hardworking, many of them measure up quite well."

Eventually, Gaddy said he would like to develop a Web site that lists all of the partnering groups of the roundtable. Donations for the roundtable program can be sent to P.O. Box 61114, Raleigh, NC, 27661.

For more information about the roundtable, contact Gaddy at 682-8473, ext. 14 or e-mail dgaddy1@bellsouth.net.