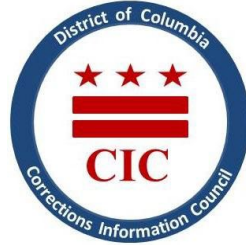


**District of Columbia
Corrections Information Council**



**Volunteers of America
Residential Reentry Center**

Report on Findings and Recommendations



September 14, 2022



District of Columbia Corrections Information Council

Charles Thornton, Board Chair
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About the District of Columbia Corrections Information Council

The District of Columbia Corrections Information Council (CIC) is an independent oversight body mandated by the United States Congress and the Council of the District of Columbia to inspect, monitor, and report on the conditions of confinement in correctional facilities where residents from the District of Columbia are incarcerated. This includes facilities operated by the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), the District of Columbia Department of Corrections (DOC), and private contractors.

The CIC reports its observations and recommendations to the District of Columbia Representative in the United States Congress, the Mayor of the District of Columbia, the Council of the District of Columbia, the District of Columbia Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice, the Director of the BOP, the Director of the DOC, and the community.

Although the CIC does not handle individual complaints or provide legal representation or advice, individuals are still encouraged to contact the CIC. Reports, concerns, and general information from incarcerated DC residents and the public are very important to the CIC, and they greatly inform our inspection schedule, recommendations, and reports. However, unless expressly permitted by the individuals or required by law, names and identifying information of residents, corrections staff not in leadership, and members of the general public will be kept anonymous and confidential.

DC Corrections Information Council

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Facility Overview

Volunteers of America Residential Reentry Center

Dates of Inspection: April 25, 2022

Location: 5000 E Monument Street
Baltimore Maryland

Security/Custody Level:
Minimum/community

Rated Capacity: 148

Current Population: 106

DC residents in population: 54

Survey respondents: 18

Length of Stay in BOP: Approximately 30% of survey respondents were in custody 15+ years.

Length of Stay at VOA: Almost 30% of survey respondents were at VOA less than one month.

Introduction

Volunteers of America (VOA) is a Residential Reentry Center (RRC) located at 5000 E. Monument Street in Baltimore, Maryland. Volunteers of America has provided reentry services for more than forty (40) years. The RRC in Baltimore re-located to its current site in 2013. The facility has 148 beds total currently all occupied by men; fifty-four who are from DC. There are approximately 42-45 staff members, which includes ten case managers and two employment specialists. VOA relies on the provision of programming from community-based organizations. In response to concerns about COVID-19, almost all programming was suspended or terminated and is now resuming.

The DC Corrections Information Council conducted an in-person site visit on Monday April 25, 2022 as a follow up to the virtual visit conducted on November 19, 2020. In addition to following up on recommendations made during the virtual visit, the DC CIC observed and gathered information about resident-staff interactions. Residents noted that the environment at the Residential Reentry Center is as restrictive as a secured facility. During interviews, residents stated they would better served in a more open and transparent atmosphere. While residents indicated they felt safe; they also stated that they felt stressed and strained because of frustrations created by interactions with staff. Residents, especially those who have served 15 years or more, also indicated a strong desire for more hands-on guidance to connect with reentry resources.

During the tour of the facility, six DC Corrections Information Council staff and representatives were escorted by seven Bureau of Prisons staff members, two Volunteers of America Residential Reentry Center staff and the Vice President of Maryland Programs of the Volunteers of America Chesapeake. During the site visit, BOP staff directed DC CIC staff to desist from handing their business cards to residents.

The focus of the site visit was the residential program and CIC did not interview persons currently on home confinement. Several of the residents who were interviewed stated they had been on home confinement and required to return to the residential setting. Throughout the interviews, residents

stated they would like VOA to operate the facility in a less restrictive manner consistent with being a residential reentry facility rather than a secure institution and that the requirements/restrictions for remaining on home confinement were too difficult. The CIC has requested data on revocation of home confinement resulting in return to the residential setting as well as data on revocation of home confinement or residential rules resulting in return to a secure institution.

This report is based upon observations by CIC staff and representatives and surveys and interviews with 18 residents. The CIC also gathered documents from the BOP and spoke with organizations that VOA listed as partners. Several organizations highlighted the difficulties residents face accessing services because of barriers created and maintained by VOA staff practices, which includes denying passes to residents to attend programs - and failing to communicate with residents and external entities in a timely and consistent fashion. Partnering organizations indicated that they often rely on residents' word of mouth to promote available services. They also indicated that residents are unable to maintain employment and complete programs in DC, because of the restrictions and prohibitions imposed by case managers. Additionally, residents reported not receiving basic items from VOA, and partnering organizations reported using significant funds to provide VOA residents with clothing, toiletries, personal protective equipment, transportation tokens, and Smart trip cards.

Key Findings

The CIC highlights the following:

Programs and Services

- Residents are received into the program on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.
- Orientation of new residents is held every Friday.
- Residents meet with the employment specialist(s) on Mondays.
- Residents meet with their assigned case manager 5 to 10 days after arrival. The resident then meets every other week with their case manager. There are currently nine case managers and one case manager position which is vacant. Residents expressed frustration about trying to contact their case managers. Several stated they had not yet seen their case manager.
- Mental health and addiction treatment services are provided by Royal Minds via a contract with the Bureau of Prisons. While VOA runs mental health and drug treatment services in both Maryland and the District of Columbia, residents are not able to access these services as they must use the contract provider.
- There is a weekly financial literacy/responsibility class held once every week.
- VOA staff provided CIC with a monthly calendar of classes and activities. (See attachment.)
- To obtain a pass and MARC train ticket residents must provide proof of a specific appointment, which the case manager or employment specialist must verify. VOA staff keep a log of the MARC train tokens and vouchers provided to residents.
- The only PREA signage observed was on one bulletin board. CIC staff had to lift other notices on the board to find the PREA materials.
- Visitors are allowed Monday through Friday 4 pm to 8 pm and Saturdays and Sundays noon to 4 pm.
- There are five classrooms and one computer lab, which contained six computers.

- Each “ward” contains 10 beds: five on either side of a partial wall. Each person has a single bed and a locker. Only shoes are allowed under the bed.
- There is one unit reported as ADA compliant. It contains four beds, as opposed to the standard five, to accommodate wheelchairs; however, the entrance was 30 inches wide, which is not ADA compliant. No guiderails or grips were observed.
- The bathrooms smelled heavily of smoke. During interviews, residents complained about the smell of smoke and prohibitions on outdoor smoke breaks.
- There are no women currently housed at the facility. The women’s unit, which consists of two rooms with ten beds each, is currently occupied by men.
- There is an indoor basketball court; there is no outside area for recreation.
- All residents are permitted to have cell phones.
- Outside food and/or ordering delivery food is not permitted. The meal schedule and weekly menus are posted. Plated or bagged meals are available for residents who are working during mealtimes upon their return.
- There was one bulletin board marked as *information for DC*. There were visibly outdated items on the bulletin board.
- Staff, including caseworkers, did not have knowledge or copies of the PDS Reentry Navigator book, which contains resources in DC for returning citizens.
- Several interviewees reported that case managers’ voicemail boxes are full.
- Interviewees consistently voiced concerns about the unprofessional and disrespectful ways that staff communicates with residents.

Medical Services

- Residents go through their caseworker to apply for medical services through Naphcare.
- Residents were not aware of how to access medical and dental services.
- Caseworkers make the dental and medical appointments for the resident.
- There are three or four nearby hospitals which are accessed in emergencies. Which hospital will treat the resident is determined by the ambulance service that responded to the 911 call.
- Residents may self-carry medications except for Class 1 controlled substances.
- BOP data provided to CIC indicated that none of the current residents have a diagnosed mental health issue; however, during interviews several residents stated they were on mental health medications.
- Royal Minds offers Medically Assisted (Drug) Treatment.

Home Confinement

- In addition to the residential program serving 148 men, men and women are served by being monitored on home confinement.
- Of those on home confinement, some have gone “directly” to home confinement after being processed through intake and provided with equipment others reside at VOA until they are approved for home confinement based on good behavior, employment, and existing support services including appropriate housing.
- Some DC residents with no issues or reports have been assigned to Core DC for the monitoring of home confinement.

- Residents must sign two agreements, one with the BOP and one with VOA, governing conditions of their home confinement.¹
- VOA will “hold a bed” for those on “indirect” home confinement so the person has a placement if home confinement and progressive discipline “fails”.
- Approximately 25% of the residents interviewed had been stepped back to VOA after a period experience of home confinement.
- Individuals who are stepped back from home confinement can be reassigned to a secure facility. According to staff, 34 persons were returned to a secure facility within the last 12 months.²

Movement

- Residents are monitored by cell phones and ankle monitors; sometimes both.
- Sixty-six percent of survey respondents reported paying for transportation out of their own resources when traveling to DC.

Recommendations

Based on the inspection of the CDF, the CIC makes the following recommendations:

Program and Services

- Develop and maintain strong, collaborative relationships with DC agencies and organizations and ensure that DC residents are directly connected to services.
- Increase the interactions between residents and their case managers, including a requirement for case managers to meet with residents within three days of arrival.
- Provide more current and accurate information about reentry services in the District of Columbia.
- Provide additional meaningful programming and services.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: VOA currently partners with nine organizations from the District of Columbia. VOA regularly corresponds with these organizations to ascertain the most up-to-date program information. In addition, VOA employment specialists routinely send offenders to available employment programs in DC. Any information provided to VOA for DC residents is posted on an information board dedicated to DC inmates. VOA encourages the CIC or its partner

¹ Bureau of Prisons document form BP- A0460.073 “Conditions of Home Detention” contains seventeen (17) conditions of home confinement. These conditions govern the behavior of the individual who must comply under threat of revocation of home confinement and possible return to incarceration. In addition to signing the BOP document, persons under home confinement with VOA sign a four-page document “Home Confinement Program Agreement & Itinerary Guidelines”. By signing this agreement, participants agree to additional stipulations which require participating in 32 hours of programming per week and seeking approval before working over-time. Participants must complete an itinerary of activities for the coming week no later than noon on Wednesdays. The itinerary cannot be altered once it has been submitted to and approved by VOA staff.

² DC CIC did not receive data on the total number served in 12 months nor the number of the 34 who are DC residents.

organizations to provide the Director of VOA and/or the Vice President of Maryland Programs with any additional DC resources for DC offenders to assist with ensuring a successful transition back to the District.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: VOA complies with the Bureau of Prisons contract requirements as outlined in the 2017 Statement of Work (SOW). During the first three days of the offender's arrival at the RRC, they participate in program orientation and meet with various staff to include case managers. Case management staff are available daily to address immediate concerns or issues. In addition, VOA case managers meet with the offenders within ten days in order to develop an individualized program plan (IPP) which addresses the goals the offender should address while at the RRC. The Bureau of Prisons monitors compliance of this requirement through routine and unscheduled inspections.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: VOA provides information about reentry services in the District of Columbia. DC resources are located on bulletin boards accessible to all offenders. Additionally, VOA encourages the CIC or its partner organizations to provide the Director of VOA and/or the Vice President of Maryland Programs with any additional DC resources for DC offenders to assist with ensuring a successful transition back to the District of Columbia. The Bureau of Prisons monitors compliance of this requirement through routine and unscheduled inspections.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: VOA complies with the Bureau of Prisons contract requirements as outlined in the 2017 Statement of Work (SOW). VOA provides programs and services either through their own resources or via partnerships with various organizations including but not limited to job readiness classes (resume writing, interviewing), parenting (communication), financial freedom (budgeting, balancing a checkbook, banking), behavioral (anger management, and drug and alcohol addiction classes) and various other classes. However, offenders are responsible for signing up and actively participating in programs to assist with their reentry process. The Bureau of Prisons monitors compliance of this requirement through routine and unscheduled inspections.

Medical issues

- Better inform residents about the method of accessing medical services while at VOA perhaps by assigning that responsibility to a VOA staff member at the check-in central hub.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: VOA complies with the Bureau of Prisons contract requirements as outlined in the 2017 Statement of Work (SOW). Offenders are informed about the procedures to obtain medical treatment when they arrive at the facility. The offenders have various methods to reach employees to discuss medical needs and issues. The staff at VOA provide offenders with the case manager's email addresses, and work cellphone numbers to call or text, and the offenders see their case managers at least biweekly. In addition, the RRC is staffed 24 hours a day with staff available to submit a request for medical attention. The Bureau of Prisons monitors compliance of this requirement through routine and unscheduled inspections.

Home Confinement:

- Provide clear eligibility information regarding the process of transitioning to home confinement, especially all requirements about suitable housing.

- Provide support, including mentoring and self-development opportunities to encourage those on home confinement to succeed.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: VOA notifies offenders of the requirements for home confinement when they first enter the facility. The offender's IPP and progress reports include efforts at locating suitable housing, employment, identification, health care and other reentry needs. VOA maintains documentation of the assistance provided to each resident in the resident's file. Offenders are encouraged to seek suitable housing as soon as they arrive and submit housing plans to case managers, as soon as possible. If a residence is deemed unsuitable, the offender is given detailed reasons why the plan is unsuitable. The requirements for suitable housing are discussed during bi-weekly meetings and discussions are documented in the offender's case notes. If an offender cannot obtain suitable housing, the case managers will assist the offenders in acquiring suitable housing in preparation for home confinement or release. The Bureau of Prisons monitors compliance of this requirement through routine and unscheduled inspections.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: Offenders on home confinement are eligible for the same programming and services as in-house offenders. Offenders on home confinement are encouraged to reach out to their case managers and request any assistance or guidance they may require. In addition, the offender can relay their concerns during their bi-weekly progress reviews with the case managers. The staff at VOA have an "open door" policy with all offenders and schedule them for all services and programming when requested. The case manager and facility director have the authority to review requested community-based programs for approval. Programming should be consistent with the offenders identified needs. The Bureau of Prisons monitors compliance of this requirement through routine and unscheduled inspections.

Movement:

- Provide transportation passes with enough time to account for roundtrip travel on public transportation from Baltimore to DC, as well as the time required to conduct business.
- Provide safe and appropriate means of transportation, perhaps by van shuttles to and from Baltimore and DC for residents to attend appointments and family reunification events in the District of Columbia. Staff of the National Association for the Advancement of Returning Citizens (NAARC) stated that they spoke to VOA staff on several occasions about their willingness and ability to provide this service.
- Coordinate with the DC Mayor's Office on Returning Citizens' Affairs (MORCA) regarding transportation within DC for VOA residents to access reentry services.
- Allow for outside smoke breaks to decrease inside smoking, especially in bathrooms.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: When approving passes and determining the time an offender will be permitted to be out of the facility, VOA complies with the 2017 SOW and best practices associated with community-based programs. The offender's suggested pass location, travel methods, and schedules of public transportation are reviewed and considered. The timeframes the offenders are allotted allow for them to safely travel to DC to complete their programming or other tasks and return to the facility, provided there is no deviation from the schedule. If there is a circumstance in which the amount of time is insufficient, the offender is directed to call VOA and explain the circumstances of the delay. At that time, a determination will be made if an extension should be granted. Offenders are not penalized for late arrivals for legitimate reasons. The Bureau of Prisons monitors compliance of this requirement through routine and unscheduled inspections.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: VOA currently provides mass transit tickets and tokens for offenders to travel from Baltimore to DC. In addition, VOA currently partners with DC organizations that offer shuttles to and from programming sites in DC. The offender can choose their method of transportation to DC for passes; if the offender decides to utilize the personal vehicle, the offender is permitted to do so. VOA welcomes community partners from DC such as NAARC. However, these types of services must be in collaboration with VOA and cannot interfere with the accountability of the residents.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: VOA is willing to work with any offender reentry program in DC that expresses interest. VOA's willingness to work with DC reentry organizations is evident through their current partnerships with nine DC organizations. VOA will continue their efforts to develop new partnerships. However, MORCA is encouraged to contact the Director of VOA and/or the Vice President of Maryland Programs with any additional DC resources for DC offenders to assist with ensuring a successful transition back to the District of Columbia.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: VOA is a smoke free facility. Offenders who smoke on the premises are in violation of the smoke free policy and are subject to disciplinary sanctions. Offenders are made aware of the no smoking policy prior to arrival and again upon arrival to the facility. The offenders sign a notice acknowledging they are aware of the rules and regulations and agree to abide by the rules and regulations of the facility. Efforts to address unauthorized smoking in the facility include regular walk throughs of all areas of the facility and inspection of every offender during entrance to the facility.

Staff interactions

- Delegate staff who are consistently accessible via phone in order to grant necessary extensions on travel passes related to public transportation delays during roundtrip travel from Baltimore to DC.
 - Improve staff-resident relationships by addressing and responding to residents in a respectful manner.
 - Ensure that case managers are responsive and provide needed services, including obtaining necessary documents. (See chart below that describes how helpful residents perceive their case managers.)
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- The bus route in front of VOA connects to the MARC train station.
 - Residents stated it was hard to reach their case managers to inform them of late returns to the halfway house created by transportation delays.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: VOA provides the supervision and support to all offenders 24 hours a day. All inmate requests for travel extensions due to public transportation issues are addressed when practicable. Offenders experiencing travel delays due to circumstances beyond their control are not penalized for late arrival. A request for a pass into the community requires an extensive review by staff and may not be able to be processed expeditiously without specific details at a moment's notice. However, VOA makes every effort to address reasonable requests in a timely manner.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: VOA employees adhere to the Bureau of Prisons Employee Standards of Conduct and interact and correspond with the offenders in a professional and respectful manner. Staff interactions with offenders is closely monitored to ensure professionalism

of all staff. Allegations of unprofessional conduct should be referred to the Bureau of Prisons for further investigation. The Bureau of Prisons points of contract are posted on bulletin boards for offenders within the facility. It is also the responsibility of the offenders and an expectation of VOA staff and the BOP that offenders adhere to the rules and regulations of the facility and maintain a level of respect for VOA staff. The Bureau of Prisons monitors compliance of this requirement through routine and unscheduled inspections.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: VOA and the Bureau of Prisons expects case managers to be responsive and provide needed services to include obtaining identification. The Bureau of Prisons monitors compliance of this requirement through routine and unscheduled inspections.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: Offenders are provided with clear and concise instructions on how to get to the MARC train via MTA bus.

Response by the Bureau of Prisons: VOA is a 24-hour facility with staff always available to address transportation concerns. Offenders are advised prior to their scheduled pass on the procedures they need to follow should their transportation be delayed, or if there are any other circumstances which impact their transportation to and from the facility. The Bureau of Prisons monitors compliance of this requirement through routine and unscheduled inspections.

