



PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

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Program Purpose:

ComALERT (Community and Law Enforcement Resources Together) was created in 1999 by Kings County District Attorney Charles J. Hynes. The program's goal is to aid men and women returning from prison to successfully reintegrate into their Brooklyn communities. This goal is accomplished by providing an effective combination of immediate wraparound transitional services that target individuals returning from prison to Brooklyn who have histories of substance abuse and are currently under mandated community supervision. ComALERT's wraparound service model has been validated as an evidence-based design that supports the reduction of recidivism, thereby enhancing community safety for all Brooklyn residents.

History of ComALERT

Over two-thirds of all individuals being released from New York State prisons originally resided in New York City prior to their commitment. By 1999, the population of parolees under supervision in New York City had swelled to 34,703, a figure that more than doubled the number under supervision in 1985.

As approximately 3500 formerly incarcerated individuals were returning to Kings County each year, at the time the largest number for any county in New York State, this public safety crisis demanded a collaborative response from the community and law enforcement working together. District Attorney Hynes understood that without an effective reentry mechanism to assist these men and women in achieving successful reintegration into the community, parolees threatened to become a disruptive force to the community well-being, while also burdening the city and state with the direct and indirect costs of crime and re-incarceration.

ComALERT therefore began its first year of operation as a community outreach resource network, using community meetings to generate referrals for approximately 290 formerly incarcerated men and women to over 100 social services providers and community-based organizations for transitional services. D.A. Hynes soon acknowledged the need for greater direct involvement by the District Attorney's Office which would lead to more accurate assessments of clients' needs, facilitate the tracking of clients' outcomes, and allowing for a better evaluation of the program's strengths and weaknesses. This led to the agency's hiring of its first reentry staff person, a licensed social worker, to receive direct referrals and follow-up calls from clients' assigned parole officers.

In 2001, ComALERT partnered with the Doe Fund's Ready Willing and Able program, a highly regarded community agency that provided both transitional housing and employment to ComALERT clients.

Data provided by the New York State Department of Correction and Community Supervision (DOCCS) later revealed that each year nearly 8 out of 10 men and women returning from prison to reside in Kings County do so with significant histories of

substance abuse, with mandated treatment being a condition of their release on parole. Noting that substance abuse often played a direct or indirect role in criminal conduct, ComALERT began to target this population group in facilitating client referrals. This led to ComALERT's highly productive linkage with the Counseling Service for the Eastern District of New York (CSEDNY), the agency's first full-time onsite reentry service provider.

By 2012, ComALERT had developed strategic partnerships that allow the program to offer over 20 vital reentry resources and services, both onsite and via priority referrals. In large measure, due to the strategic partnering of the Kings County District Attorney's Office with responsible community, faith-based and governmental agencies, ComALERT has evolved into a comprehensive one-stop, onsite, wraparound reentry resource center. In addition to substance abuse treatment, in 2011 ComALERT provided 5,291 individualized transitional services to 985 men and women returning from prison to live in Brooklyn.

Current Program Structure

Core Staff and Services

Exemplifying the office's long-held position that reentry is an essential component of law enforcement, ComALERT has been designed as a law enforcement tool in furtherance of a permanent community reentry project.

ComALERT has steadily expanded since 2007. The program now consists of 8 full-time and 3 part-time ComALERT staff hired by the Kings County District Attorney's Office, as well as a full time substance abuse treatment clinical staff from ComALERT's onsite partner, Counseling Service for the Eastern District of New York (CSEDNY). ComALERT's full-time onsite Job Developer makes available employment placement opportunities for all ComALERT clients. Each job placement candidate must be in complete compliance with substance abuse treatment mandates and successfully complete the program's intensive series of job readiness workshops.

Drug-free clients who are referred for this service will initially receive a confidential comprehensive vocational needs assessment from a trained ComALERT Case Manager who also assists the Job Developer in facilitating these workshops. Each participant must successfully complete the workshop series that includes classes in Job Realities: the basics of getting and retaining a job; Job Applications: instructions on how to properly complete a job application; Interviewing Skills: videotaped mock interviewing sessions, including how to answer questions concerning convictions; Cover Letters and Resumes; Job Retention and Working under Supervision; The Importance of Networking; Your Civil Rights in Seeking Employment (facilitated bi-weekly by the NYC Commission on Human Rights); and Phone and Email Etiquette. Over 140 local employers have hired ComALERT clients who have received onsite workforce development services since 2009.

Onsite GED Services, including eligibility testing, tutoring, and weekday classes, are also available through a productive partnership with Medgar Evers College for the City University of New York. ComALERT's partnership with the Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing enables the program to sponsor its innovative Coming Home: Life Skills and Empowerment program. The Coming Home project matches each participant with trained community mentors while offering an array of 8 life skills workshops including public speaking, goal setting, and empowerment for change that promote self-efficacy and the desire to embrace positive lifestyles.

Other onsite services include anger management; family reunification services; HIV/AIDS counseling and testing; acquisition of birth certificates and NY State identification cards; health insurance enrollment and clothing assistance. Simultaneous access to essential wraparound transitional resources including transitional housing, college placement, transitional employment, and state-paid job training services available through the New York State Department of Education; mentor matching and cognitive skills development workshops are also available.

The essence of ComALERT's successful program design can be found in its attention to its creation and development of solid partnerships with effective, responsible community and faith-based agencies, government entities, and other law enforcement agencies. Together, we have the mutual goal of providing these services to improve the lives of our returning citizens, and thereby improve the quality of life for the entire community.



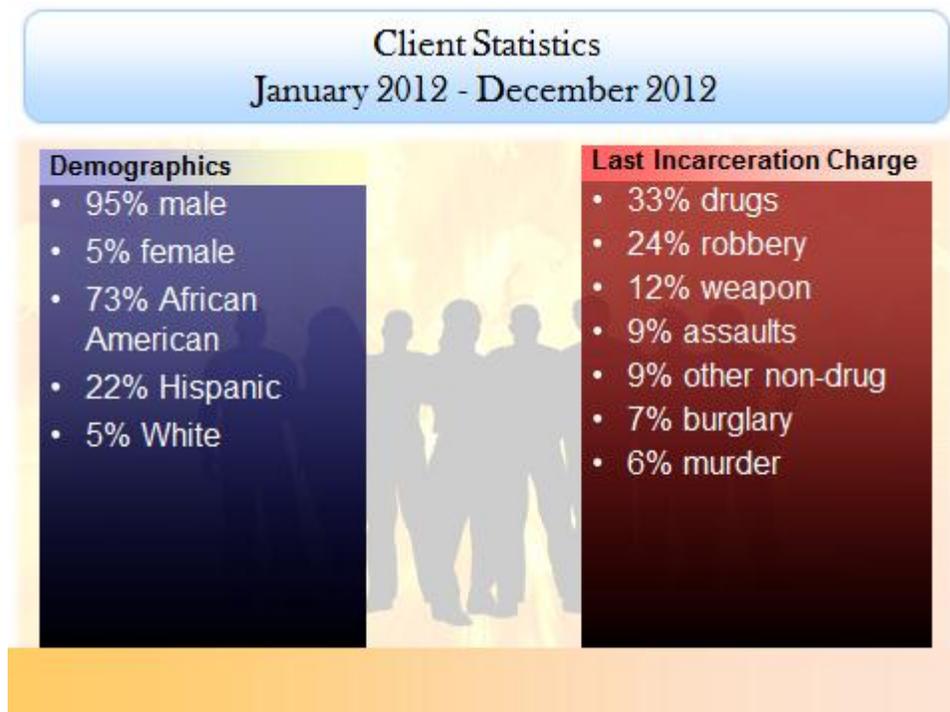
DA Hynes joins Counsel to the District Attorney Lance Ogiste, Esq. (far left), ComALERT Executive Director John Chaney (2nd from Right), and faith-based community partners in congratulating graduates of ComALERT's Coming Home: Life Skills and Empowerment program.

Client Eligibility, Referrals, and Graduation Requirements

To be eligible for ComALERT, each prospective participant must meet the following core requirements:

- (a) He or she must be paroled to Brooklyn and have at least nine months remaining of parole supervision;
- (b) He or she must be at least 18 years old upon enrollment into ComALERT;
- (c) He or she must not have any convictions for a sex offense or arson.

ComALERT continues to prioritize its recruitment and enrollment of men and women required to receive outpatient substance abuse treatment and counseling pursuant to community supervision mandates.



ComALERT generates the majority of its client referrals through its creation and development of a strong linkage with the parole division of the New York State Department of Correction and Community Supervision. This partnership with parole, that also extends to parole's participation in ComALERT case conferences, is key in ensuring that most incoming clients receive services rapidly, often within the first few weeks of their release.

Quick access to services may help reduce recidivism, especially for individuals with histories of substance abuse who, when removed from the controlled environment of

prison and confronted with multiple opportunities to re-engage in negative behaviors, may quickly relapse and engage in new criminal activity. Individuals released from prison returning to Brooklyn are directed to report, within 24 to 48 hours of release, to Kings County (Brooklyn) parole. There, the parolee meets with his or her assigned parole officer and reviews with the officer the conditions of his or her release. If the conditions include mandated substance abuse treatment and counseling, the officer refers the parolee to Parole's onsite Access Program Center, located within each Parole office and staffed with personnel who have expertise in substance abuse treatment and mental health issues.

The Access counselor assesses the intensity level of treatment needed by the parolee. If the Access counselor determines that there might be a good match with the moderate intensity, out-patient treatment provided by ComALERT, the parolee meets with a ComALERT-CSEDNY counselor who makes a treatment needs assessment. The eligible client is then directed to report to the ComALERT center at the Municipal Building in downtown Brooklyn for a program orientation.

Orientation sessions are held each Friday afternoon. Immediately thereafter, an onsite licensed counselor from CSEDNY, ComALERT's onsite substance abuse treatment partner, is assigned to the client and conducts a complete psychosocial assessment. The assessment is then used in designing the client's individual treatment plan that is interwoven with the client's other reentry resource needs, such as enrollment into GED or college classes, transitional employment, or medical services.

ComALERT also receives a small number of self-referrals. These individuals may have learned about ComALERT while still incarcerated, most often through informational sessions ComALERT regularly conducts at DOCCS facilities for men and women about to be released under parole supervision within a year.

Alternatively, they may have learned about ComALERT as a result of ComALERT's efforts to publicize the program in the community. Parolees who contact ComALERT are told to attend the next available orientation session. After orientation, they meet with a counselor for an assessment and, if appropriate, are enrolled in the program and assigned to a primary counselor

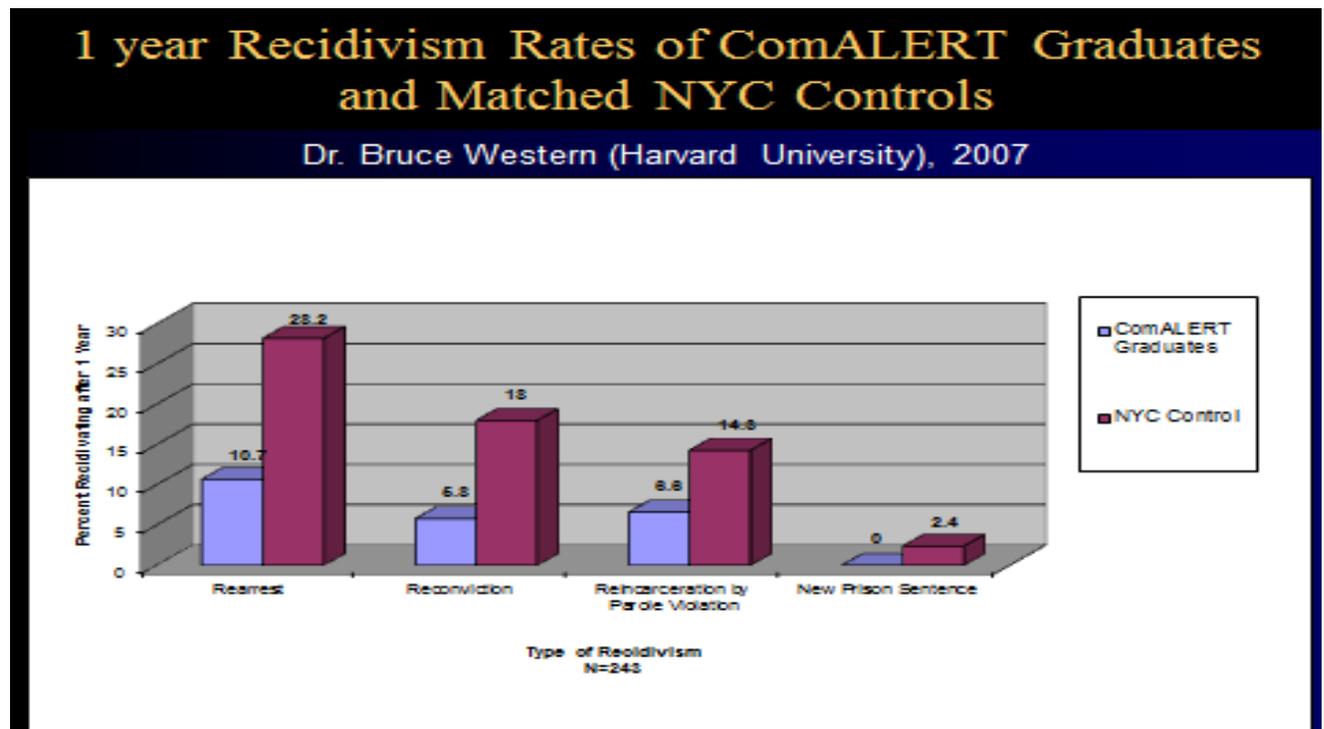
In order to graduate from ComALERT, the participant must be drug-free for three consecutive months and show proof through pay stubs that he or she has been employed in an "on the books" job for at least 30 days. The participant may also furnish proof that he or she has been satisfactorily engaged in an approved course of study for academic advancement (GED or college classes) or in a career based job training course for at least 30 days.

The Case in Support of Prosecutorial Reentry Initiatives

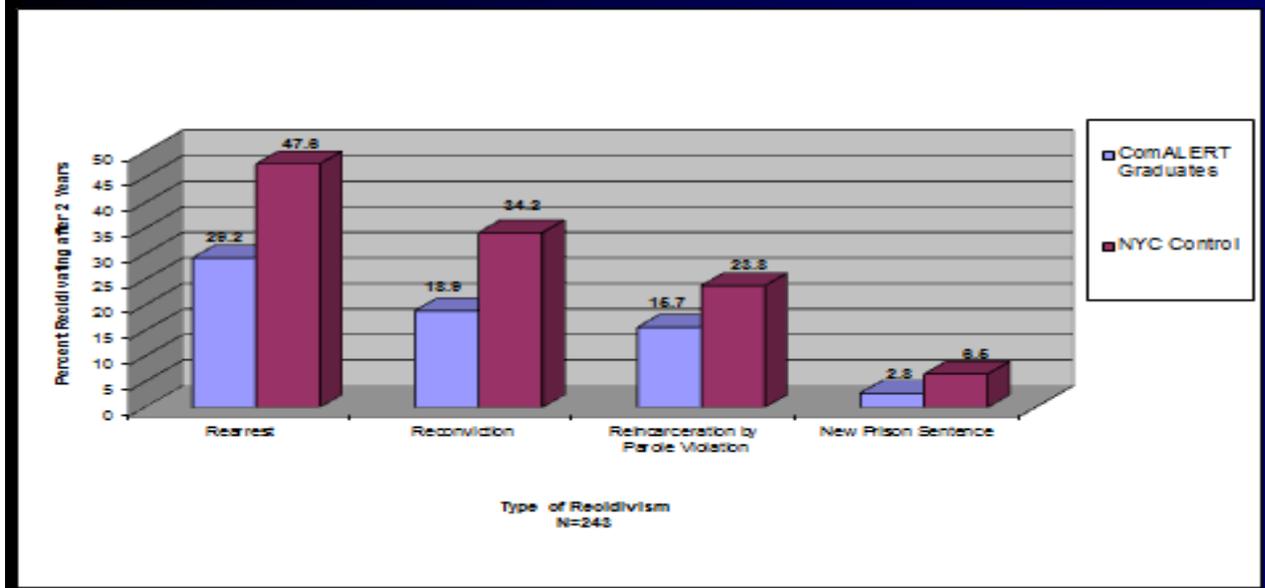
A. Reentry and Recidivism

The ComALERT reentry program has been proven as a valid program model that has been shown to significantly reduce recidivism, leading to increased public safety. Recidivism may be measured based on re-arrest, re-conviction, or re-incarceration. Re-incarceration rates can be parsed into re-incarceration based on a sentence for a new crime or based on a parole violation.

Dr. Bruce Western, Professor of Sociology at Harvard University and the director of its multidisciplinary Program in Social Policy and Inequality, analyzed the recidivism rates of ComALERT graduates from July 2004 to December 2006. These rates were then compared to those of a matched control group of New York City parolees who did not participate in ComALERT. The outcome percentages for ComALERT graduates were substantially better in all categories, as illustrated in the following graphs:



2 year Recidivism Rates of ComALERT Graduates and Matched NYC Controls



B. Prosecutorial Involvement

A district attorney's office has distinct advantages as well as responsibilities in acting as the lead agency for a reentry program that primarily targets persons on parole. New York State reports that in 2011 more than 8 out of 10 incarcerated individuals had experienced multiple arrests. As a law enforcement entity that often collaborates with other criminal justice agencies, the district attorney's office has strong ties to both the Parole division of the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision and the police. All three law enforcement agencies share the paramount duty of protecting public safety, and share a level of trust in the judgment of the other in disposing of new matters involving persons on parole.

Working with the Parole division of the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, ComALERT monitors its clients to ensure public safety. A failure to cooperate or a violation of any program condition is promptly brought to the attention of the client's parole officer. Graduated sanctions may be employed at the discretion of the parole officer, including an increase in the number of counseling sessions that the parolee must attend per week if he or she tests positive for drug use, mandates to residential treatment for repeated episodes of relapse, or re-incarceration for serious violations or new crimes.

If a ComALERT client is arrested for a new offense, ComALERT counselors will act as a liaison between the prosecutor assigned to the case and the client's parole officer. Depending on the facts of the case, it may be possible to resolve the case without the ComALERT client's parole being revoked and without re-incarceration. However, for

serious breaches of the parole, revocation and prosecution on the new crime may be warranted.

C. Employment of “Best Reentry Practices”

Unlike other service providers whose ultimate responsibilities are to the individuals they serve, the prosecutor’s office is charged with the unique responsibility of safeguarding the quality of life for each and every person who lives or does business within its jurisdiction. Upon the implementation of any project in furtherance of reentry, this heightened responsibility to the public acts as a catalyst for the district attorney’s office to ensure that the highest standards are being maintained in delivering resources and services to the reentry population. These safeguards are especially important with respect to initiatives in workforce development where clients may be represented by the agency as being sober and job ready, and in the selection of responsible, effective reentry agency partners.

D. Impact Upon Public Education

When the district attorney’s office highlights key facts concerning the reentry effort, the public tends to listen. Many communities have routinely shown reluctance in lending support to men and women returning to the community in need of housing, education, mentoring, and employment services. The credibility and high profile status of the district attorney’s office can play a crucial role in encouraging community support that fosters successful re-integration. Additionally, the prosecutor’s office that develops an effective reentry project is eminently qualified to explain how reentry works as a cost-effective tool that saves the community taxpayer dollars. In the case of ComALERT, the Kings County District Attorney’s Office has determined that the program has thus far saved its residents well over \$10 million in prosecution and re-incarceration costs. It currently costs the agency less than \$2,300 to provide services for an enrolled ComALERT participant as opposed to \$60,076 to incarcerate the same individual for a year in a New York State prison. Additionally, the district attorney’s office’s development and implementation of reentry initiatives and public education efforts can be used as solid reminders to the public that seeking punishment for offenders is only one of the many goals for the agency in pursuing its ultimate long term objective: ensuring the safety of each and every resident.

Finally, the current state of the national economy and its impact upon areas already decimated by crime puts greater emphasis upon the need to provide those returning from prison with immediate access to practical, career-based vocational training or educational advancement, leading to a job. The district attorney’s office can add an exceptionally strong voice in furtherance of this effort. Employers have shown a willingness to hire individuals with a criminal record who have graduated from a district attorney sponsored reentry program like ComALERT.



District Attorney Hynes with ComALERT job readiness program participants and Brooklyn Law School students.

Strategies for Creating a Reentry Project in Your Jurisdiction

For Law Enforcement agencies considering creating a reentry program based upon the ComALERT model, here are some planning and implementation steps that might be considered:

- Not all communities have the same socioeconomic profile or needs. Be sure, therefore, to take the time to assess the reentry needs for your community. Arrange meetings with community organizations, houses of worship, other law enforcement reentry stakeholders, and local elected officials. Learn who is coming back to the jurisdiction and in what numbers. Be sure to include the input of formerly incarcerated individuals in your discussions to provide depth and insight into the reentry experience, including highlighting any individual or systemic barriers that might impede efficient delivery of specific reentry resources;
- Assess the reentry service infrastructure that is already in place in your jurisdiction. Get the assistance of local social service professionals to report on the efficiency of current service delivery methods being used by local reentry providers. This will also help to identify agencies that may be suitable as collaborative partners, and keep your agency from duplicating what may not be needed;
- Let the development of your reentry program be data driven. Use statistical information supplied by local social service and criminal justice agencies to identify the type of reentry client or resource you wish to target

in your community. Whether the primary reentry need is drug treatment, housing, employment, education, or another resource, you will want supporting data to justify your choice, especially if it will be used to seek funding. You will also wish to use data once the program is under way to analyze whether the program is realizing positive performance outcomes;

- If your office ideally has or is given space to house a reentry project where you assume responsibility for delivering a specific reentry resource, be sure to start small. As a law enforcement agency, your office's credibility will be on the line, meaning you will want to maximize the quality of service delivery for whatever transitional resource that is being offered by your agency. In any event, your office's chief goal in the early stages should be to seek assistance in designing a highly efficient collaborative reentry service referral and performance monitoring network;
- Utilize your existing connections with local, state, and federal agencies. Begin to establish relationships with your local correctional institutions, parole offices, the courts, and police to introduce dialogue on how a collaboration that generates referrals of eligible reentry candidates could be a mutually beneficial endeavor that could enhance information sharing, save taxpayer money, and make the community a safer place in which to live and work;
- Add reentry to your offices' agenda in planning any community forums, town meetings, and public education events. Be sure to have available statistics showing the success of other reentry efforts, such as ComALERT's, in reducing recidivism and the cost effectiveness of these efforts. As your program begins to generate successful graduates, include these individuals in information forums to humanize reentry projects, showing that these programs actually turn formerly incarcerated individuals into community assets.

For further information about ComALERT you are invited to contact Lance Ogiste, Esq., Counsel to the District Attorney at Ogistel@brooklynda.org, or John R. Chaney, JD, Executive Director for the ComALERT reentry program of the Kings County District Attorney's Office at ChaneyJ@brooklynda.org.

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