

## **Full Circle Advisory Group Proposal**

Revised 10/13/22

Minnesota Corrections Association (MCA) Legislative Committee sponsored a workshop at the 2021 Fall Institute consisting of members of Dan Cain's Lifers Group discussing their experiences with the release process, community integration and supervision. The panel was well received with great attendance, questions and interest in their openness and honesty in sharing their experiences, insights and suggestions. During post-conference discussion within the Legislative Committee, the idea of creating a group of individuals who have been incarcerated and/or on probation who are interested in sharing their experiences, insights and suggestions to advise prison/supervision reform, programming suggestions, legislative education/input, etc. A sub-group of the Legislative Committee started meeting to discuss formation of such a group.

The group started by asking and answering questions and creating a Mission Statement.

### **Mission Statement:**

The Full Circle Advisory Group exists to promote positive change through engaging and empowering people who have been through the criminal justice system. By hearing the voices of those who have successfully come through the justice system, we can create effective change in correctional programming, policies, and legislation with the goals of creating culture change within the system, and impacting successful reintegration for a safer Minnesota.

### **Why do we think this would be a good idea?**

We believe those who have entered and left the criminal justice system successfully making positive changes in their lifestyles and behaviors, are under-realized and underutilized resources to the system at large. These people hold lived, first-hand experience of how the system worked or impeded their success in navigating the world and transforming their lives. They hold insights into a variety of system gaps such as institution programming, release planning, family pre-release conferences, circles of support and employment connections that impact security, programming, education, pre-release, post-release, community supervision, etc. Learning and hearing from people who have successfully gained from the system can provide valuable input and perspective to the work in Corrections.

We believe that a shared history of on-going policies / procedures / philosophies that change based on differences in politics and administrations' views and beliefs can inform current policy makers on what has been tried and worked or did not work to avoid repeating mistakes.

### **Is this a group/committee that is appropriate for MCA?**

Minnesota Corrections Association (MCA) encompasses all areas of the criminal justice system throughout the state and has credibility for striving to provide effective, efficient services based on evidence-based practices. The individual dynamics and needs of the people we work with make

our communities safer, therefore; we believe this is a good addition to the work of MCA. The diversity of experiences, perspectives and thoughts are valued additions to discussions in the criminal justice system.

**Would this group be a stand-alone committee, with chair/co-chairs members of the MCA Board or a sub-committee within the Legislative or other committee?**

We heard from the men on the Lifers Group panel and studies support that a positive working relationship between professionals and the people they work with is an important indicator of successful outcomes in a person's effective transformation process. We believe developing an opportunity for a constructive working relationship will strengthen the corrections community as a whole.

Since this is something we have never tried before and most of the members being referred to the group have little to no experience with organized committee involvement, we as the Legislative Committee, decided it would be best to start this out as an Advisory Sub-committee to the Legislative Committee. An Advisory Sub-committee can support members, giving them a voice and assist in navigating the formal organization process for policy and legislative change.

**Would people who have never been incarcerated or on probation be welcome on the committee as allies?**

MCA Legislative Committee members will coordinate to serve as moderators, coaches, support mentors and give guidance to the group until leaders within the group emerge and the group becomes structured and functioning with their goals and purpose clarified and operational. The Legislative Committee plans to connect with other organizations, including the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance Coalition /MACCAC and MCA Community Supports Committee, etc. to collaborate with them as well.

**Purpose / Goals of the committee?**

- A structured place to share what was helpful in their transformations for change.
- A place to share what wasn't helpful with their incarceration / supervision and impeded their motivation for change.
- A place to share lived experience and insights on what would help things work better.
- Develop organic programming ideas/suggestions for pre-release, release and community support.
- Receive organization, coaching & support for small groups to speak within prisons, jails, prevention programs, legislative committees, and participate in policy development discussions.
- React to proposed policy & law changes.
- Be more intentional regarding re-entry policies and programming as they relate to community supervision.

**Would people presently on supervision be required to have Supervising Agent approval to apply for committee membership?**

Yes, anyone on active supervision would be approved by their Supervising Agent (see below). Additionally, any potential member referral would go through the Supervising Agent before discussions with the member.

**How would we assure that committee members are joining for the purpose of serving the goals and intent of the committee and not just to gain access for grinding axes they have with the corrections system?**

Participants will need to be recommended to the group by someone known to the corrections system who has worked with them that will verify the referred person (e.g., Agent, Corrections Officer, Case Manager, Corrections Program Therapist, Law Enforcement Officer, Reentry Program Supervisor, etc.).

We are looking for people who are actively working to be successful in a healthy, prosocial lifestyle who want to be engaged in their community and are working toward a system that fosters healthy transformation.

We plan to start with a group of 10 - 12 people. We decided to start with members who have been incarcerated within a prison system. Once the group has their structure established and leaders start emerging, they will develop a means by which to expand the group. We envision expanding to add a prison based group.

We understand people's journeys take many different twists and turns that lead to invaluable learning experiences. These are guidelines for acceptance & will not prohibit exceptional candidates recommended by corrections allies to participate.

Criteria for the initial group members will be:

**1. "Initial membership limited to those who have served a minimum of 5 years in prison in one stretch."**

*Persons who are in their initial term of incarceration or "short timers" are less likely to have reached the level of "prison maturity" needed for the responsibilities of this sub-committee. Those serving longer incarceration terms have gained the respect of staff and peers. They should also be discipline free for at least the 12 months immediately prior to release. This can and should be revisited as the group evolves.*

**2. "Minimum of 5 years out of prison."**

*There are two reasons for this. First is the likelihood someone overcame the emotional, psychological and systemic barriers associated with Reentry. Ideally, they should be without violations; we acknowledge there is a wide range of technical violations and will make allowances to allow some minor or very old circumstances.*

*The second reason is their length of time in the community will hopefully mute some of the reluctance of some people to take them seriously.*

*We are open to people who are presently on supervision as well as those who have completed their supervision because if they've completed SR/ISR it reinforces their credibility/potency.*

**3. Members should be gainfully employed and in stabilized housing.**

*Being able to be self-sufficient, and having stable housing is a foundation to being able to be successful. A potential member's employment which has shown progression in responsibility would be a plus for membership.*

**4. In the 10-12 initial members there should be diversity and representation to the extent possible.**

Ideally the representatives of this sub-committee will be from various racial and ethnic groups and have some record of leadership. This representation should be for the betterment of the group and not for individual recognition.

**5. Some evidence of current, or past, involvement in some type of support and/or advocacy activity, i.e. Lifer Group, POP, Second Chance Coalition, One Step at a Time, etc.**

Involvement in support or advocacy activities shows personal accountability and leadership. This lends to a social conscience.

**7. Recommended by the person's supervising agent or someone else who's recognized as a correctional ally.**

*While some of these criteria are more subjective than others, hopefully the recommendation will come from someone who can gauge those qualities.*

**8. Committed to active participation.**

*This sub-committee is a transitory project which will likely evolve over time to include other subsets of those who are receiving, or have received corrections services. If the criteria is showing to be restrictive or limiting, it can be expanded after the group has established relevance and credibility. Both corrections professionals and ex-cons can be overly skeptical so it's important the group establishes itself as a meaningful part of the process.*

Appropriate candidates must:

- Be committed to wanting to be part of improving the corrections system, including consistent attendance to sub-committee meetings.
- Demonstrating healthy lifestyle change.
- Demonstrated positive behavior and takes responsibility for past unhealthy behaviors.
- Involved in or completed self-improvement programming.
- No active violations / restructures.
- Gainfully employed (in the community).
- Be willing to do "homework" for group discussion preparation.
- Demonstrated understanding that an openness to individuals change processes takes many forms, including a variety of individual issues, needs and solutions are not a "one size fits all."
- Respectful of opinions, differences and needs of others.
- Good listening and collaboration skills.
- Respect confidentiality of group members and hold an appropriate standard of practice among group members within the committee.

**Who will coordinate / facilitate / organize the group(s)?**

Dan Cain & Paul Mickelson have agreed to start as co-facilitators of the Full Circle Advisory Group. As part of setting up a workable structure for the group they will work on establishing a line of succession and turn the group over to new leadership once the group operation is solid.

**How will it be determined what professionals will be involved with the group(s)? MCA legislative committee members only, open to all MCA members? A vetting / application process?**

At this time, we are looking at MCA Legislative Committee members to start with in order to establish core mission and guidance for members. As the structure becomes established the group will develop a means by which to collaborate with corrections professionals.

**Would members of the Full Circle Advisory Group be required to be MCA members? Discounted membership?**

Yes, MCA bylaws require any committee member to have active membership in the organization. Being a member of an organization shows a level of commitment and ownership in the process. Most of the members of this group will not be employed by a corrections organization but we believe that people who are incarcerated or on supervision are in essence members of the corrections system, especially if they are interested in working toward a better corrections system.

Based on these members' unique set of circumstances, likely having recently been released from incarceration and financially limited, MCA Legislative Committee is recommending free membership for initial members through the first year of the sub-committee. Providing this initial discount takes into account equity and could help build their commitment to MCA. Additionally, sponsoring memberships could be considered to assist financially.

**How will the groups be structured? In the institutions? In the community?  
How many do we want to start with?**

We plan to start with a small group of people (approx. 10-12 members) on supervised release or have successfully completed supervised release to establish a structure. Starting the group with people who have successfully integrated into the community and have the support of their Supervising Agents.

Eventually we envision a variety of small groups throughout the state and in each institution. In addition to advising the Legislative Committee, we visualize the group having sub-groups trained in public speaking and testifying to the legislature.

Current MCA Legislative Committee members Dan Cain and Paul Mickelson have been determined to be advisory leaders to this sub-committee, which will meet monthly. Meetings will be open quarterly to Legislative Committee Members to attend, and as needed when issues arise. Additionally, Legislative Committee members will screen applicants with Dan and Paul

conducting the interviews with potential candidates in determining who best fits sub-committee criteria.

**How and who will we start contacting for referrals to the group & structure the application / interview process?**

Initial contact for referrals to the sub-committee will come from Legislative Committee members, corrections allies (i.e., Lifer Group, POP, Second Chance Coalition, One Step at a Time, etc.), and corrections professionals. Legislative Committee members will share the application with professionals and allies for potential candidates. Once applications are received, Legislative Committee members will screen potential members appropriate/eligible for an interview to become sub-committee members.

**Determine next steps for MCA Board approval.**

MCA bylaws do not require a formal Board approval through voting for creation of a sub-committee. However, in the interest of transparency and support, we will be bringing the proposal to the MCA Board and open membership meeting at the Fall Institute on Friday, October 28th for feedback.