

ViewPoint

The Way Home offers help, savings for the State

Coastal Point Editorial October 12, 2012

Those who pay attention to prison numbers know that recidivism rates are high — the state's Department of Correction, in fact, has a recidivism rate of 21 percent. That means that more than one in five released inmates ultimately return to prison for another [crime](#), which means many of these convicted individuals are not reformed during their time incarcerated, or fall back into old habits when they are freed and out from watchful eyes.

The Sussex Correctional Institute in Georgetown has seen some success in dropping that number through its bootcamp program — where first-time offenders are put through rigorous training and classes in order to be put back on the streets with some direction in their lives. It is a comprehensive program that not only builds up self-respect and accountability in inmates, but offers [drug counseling](#) and parenting courses.

That program, and others like it, often result in well-intentioned people when they leave the prison. However, that does not always equate to constructive opportunities for people when they get back out in to the real world.

Sussex County Council members heard from representatives of The Way Home of Georgetown this week. The Way Home is an organization that assists men and women who are leaving prison and have nowhere else to turn.

"We grew out of a prison-based [Bible study](#) and are connected to many churches," said Barbara Del Maestro, the director of The Way Home. "We started in 1994 as a volunteer organization and in 1998 were a formal non-profit."

The organization is a certified non-profit, and have received some funding from the State, area churches, the Southeastern Sussex Ministerium and private donations. They attempt to place released inmates in housing, help them get driver's licenses and transportation to and from job interviews and help with clothing.

Billy Johnson, who was released after serving five years in prison and now owns a small lumber [business](#), spoke to County Council about how The Way Home helped him.

"I had a family, but I didn't know where they were," said Johnson. "I didn't have anything. I had a plan, but didn't have anyone to help me carry it out. They helped me with getting my license, clothes and transportation to my job... Now, I have a vehicle, I go to meetings and I go to church. I don't know where I'd be without them."

Indeed, recidivism rates for participants in The Way Home are at about 10 percent, less than half the rate for those former inmates who are not in the program. That is a real number, and that is a lot of [savings](#) for the State when you consider it costs about \$30,000 per year year to house one inmate in prison. The Way Home's cost is about \$5,000 per year, per recipient, according to Del Maestro.

Councilmembers Sam Wilson, Joan Deaver and Vance Phillips each gave \$1,000 to the program out of their councilmanic accounts, following the presentation, and we applaud them for that.