

AUSTIN•TRAVIS COUNTY

# REENTRY ROUNDTABLE

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2021 ANNUAL REPORT

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# A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Colleagues:

The Roundtable has been in existence since 2004, but I'm not sure that we've ever seen a year quite like this past one. While the COVID-19 pandemic has brought untold challenges to the criminal justice system, the Austin/Travis County community has also begun to elevate the importance of focusing on and investing in supporting reentering citizens like never before.

In the past year, Travis County has announced the investment in the Travis Center, a new community-based center to help divert homeless people and those with substance use disorders or untreated mental illness, from jail, as well as an initiative to reduce the women's jail population. The City of Austin introduced an investment of \$400,000 in targeted reentry services to transform outcomes for formerly incarcerated persons. We celebrate the policymakers who are finally addressing reentry with the attention that it deserves in our local policymaking environment. Thank you, Council Member Natasha Harper Madison and Travis County Judge Andy Brown, for your visionary leadership!

The Roundtable, as the only local forum dedicated to addressing reentry and reintegration of formerly incarcerated persons and individuals with criminal histories, is a critical community asset. I am proud of the Roundtable's legacy of advocating to impact institutional and public policy change to improve outcomes for those leaving jail and prison. In recent years, the Roundtable has advocated for the City of Austin Fair Chance Hiring Ordinance (2016); released the Texas Criminal Background Screening Guide for Rental Housing Providers (2018), supported the City of Austin Fair Chance Housing resolution (2020), and developed recommendations and a work plan to improve local reentry coordination in the 2020 Reentry Progress Report (2020).

The Roundtable has a critical role to play in ensuring that as reentry is more in the forefront of our community leaders' minds, that we are also not doing our work in silos, that we are engaging persons with lived experience as the experts that they are, and that we are ultimately building a movement for policy and system change to reduce recidivism and divert folks from engaging with the criminal justice system in the first place.

We invite you to join us in supporting this critical mission – there's always more room at the table.

With gratitude,

Jennifer Tucker

Chair 2020-21

# ABOUT

Our **vision** is a community that values and supports equity for formerly incarcerated persons and individuals with criminal histories.

Our **mission** is to be a robust collaborative promoting safe and healthy communities through effective reentry and reintegration of formerly incarcerated persons and individuals with criminal histories.



## Our core values are:

- **Community Voice** – we listen to and engage people with lived experience in the criminal justice system and communities impacted by the criminal justice system.
- **Inclusion** – we include multiple perspectives on how to achieve safe and healthy communities through effective reentry and reintegration.
- **Respect** – we honor the basic dignity of every person and support relationship building as a means to overcome challenges.
- **Equity** – we focus on disparities and inequities in system delivery and we are not afraid to ask hard questions to facilitate system change.
- **Preventing Incarceration** – we champion strategies that offer alternatives to jail/incarceration whenever possible.

## Our intended impacts:

- Policy and practice changes that lead to reductions in recidivism and revocations from community supervision with the aim of reducing the number of incarcerated persons in Travis County.
- Improved access to housing, job opportunities, and physical and behavioral health care for persons with criminal backgrounds in Travis County.
- Shifted public perception of people with criminal justice involvement so that every person in Travis County understands that people with criminal histories are contributing members of society.

# 2020-2021IMPACT

## Engaging Diverse Stakeholders Impacted by Reentry

This year, the Roundtable engaged with institutional partners, community-based organizations, private sector organizations and other stakeholders to the impacts of incarceration and reentry on diverse communities, including the following activities:

- **Community Conversation on Reentry.** In December 2020, the Roundtable partnered with the Austin Justice Coalition to host a virtual Community Conversation on Reentry focused on connecting reentry to other local public safety conversations, increasing awareness about collateral consequences of incarceration; and engaging in dialogue to build understanding and strengthen support of solutions to improve reentry outcomes. Approximately 80 individuals participated in the event.
- **Job Fairs Partnership.** The Roundtable was excited to be invited to participate in a series of virtual job fairs hosted by Capital Area Workforce Solutions, the TDCJ Reentry & Parole Divisions, and Austin Community College in 2021. Amanda Cassidy, the Reentry Advocacy Fellow, created a virtual booth to allow job seekers to learn about the Roundtable and connect with the Reentry Advocacy Project (RAP) upon release.
- **Partnership with Aunt Bertha.** In 2020-21 the Roundtable worked closely with Aunt Bertha, the leading referral platform for social services in the U.S. Aunt Bertha representatives participated in the Reentry Service Landscape project which resulted in updating Aunt Bertha's Gethelp.org listing to include the reentry services that were included in the reentry provider survey and in linking the Roundtable's Get Help webpage to link to Aunt Bertha's Gethelp.org platform.

Selected responses from the Community Conversation post-event survey question: *"Something I will commit to doing after today's conversation is..."*

- Getting my degree.
- Learning more about the advocacy work already happening in Austin.
- Finding purpose from pain.
- Holding colleagues accountable to bring folx with lived expertise to the table to build together.
- Reducing the number of times I use "them."
- Talk to my landlord.
- Commit to continue tell my story for social impact.
- Pressing the education system to break the school to prison pipeline.
- Providing avenues for more conversations like this to happen.

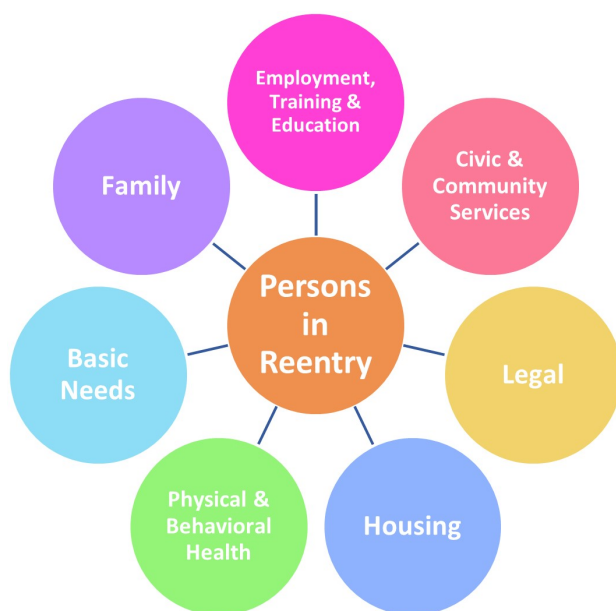


Image from Community Conversation on Reentry

## Convening Dialogue and Critical Conversations

The Roundtable is uniquely positioned as a convener to engage the community to better understand the impacts of incarceration and reentry, and to engage with system partners to improve reentry outcomes. This year, activities included:

- **Reentry Service Landscape.** A working group of the Roundtable undertook a comprehensive survey of organizations and programs that provide services to formerly incarcerated persons in Travis County to identify restrictions to accessing programs and services for the reentry population and to highlight existing connections and gaps between providers serving the reentry population. A key finding of the survey is that Austin/Travis County has a relatively small foundation of targeted reentry services provided by 14 organizations, although there is a larger ecosystem of other social services that persons in reentry can access.
- **Quarterly Shift & Share sessions at Planning Council meetings.** In FY2020-21, the Roundtable hosted three Shift & Share session in which members of the Planning Council or other guests had the opportunity to share about innovative local reentry-focused organizations, programs and initiatives, including the following: Behavioral Health & Criminal Justice Intercept 4 Reentry Working Group, Building Promise USA, Capital Area Private Defender Service, Community Coalition for Health, ECHO Racial Equity Strategy Group, Empowering Women Out of Prison, Goodwill Central Texas, Integral Care – ANEW Program, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, and the Texas Veteran’s Commission.
- **Robert Wood Johnson Community Solutions for Healthy Equity Grant Finalist.** In partnership with Community Coalition for Health (C2H), the Roundtable was selected in November as one of 27 finalists out of a pool of over 700 applicants submitting letters of intent to apply as a finalist for the Robert Wood Johnson Community Solutions for Health Equity grant program. Although the grant wasn’t ultimately funded, developing the grant proposal allowed the opportunity to develop a detailed proposal focusing on improving health outcomes for formerly incarcerated persons, and the Roundtable will continue to elevate the local need for more collective action on this issue.



This graphic represents seven key domains identified in the Reentry Service Landscape survey.

To view local organizations that offer services in each key domain, visit our [Get Help](#) page.

## Advocating to Support Institutional and Public Policy Change

The Roundtable serves as an intersectional network to build momentum for system change in criminal justice and reentry. This year, we focused on:

- **Reentry Center Peer Community Research.** In accordance with the action steps outlined in the 2020 Reentry Progress Report, the Roundtable conducted a comparative study of reentry centers across the country in order to identify key elements of successful centers, including reentry centers in Albuquerque/Bernalillo County, New Mexico; Philadelphia; Houston; and Washington D.C. One of the key findings of that report is that existing city and county-wide reentry coalitions play a critical role in the success of community reentry centers or reentry one-stop shops. Some of the important roles that community coalitions play include sharing cohesive information about reentry in the community; aligning siloed service providers and other partners; and helping to develop a comprehensive advocacy strategy for reentry in the community.
- **Alignment with BHCJAC Intercept 4 group.** The Roundtable formed an alignment with this working group in FY2020-21 which resulted in new conversations and coordination around reentry. In particular, this alignment opportunity allows the Roundtable to engage a broader cross-section of institutional partners and led to a planned partnership with the Intercept 4 group on the creation of a reentry service provider community of practice in FY2021-22.
- **Coordinating Role with Inaugural Reentry Fund Grantees.** With the announcement of the City of Austin's new Reentry Services grant program, the Roundtable successfully advocated for a formal role in serving as a community builder and connector for awardees of the City's Reentry Services grant fund, including providing support and guidance to the hub organization; including all hub and spoke grantees in the new reentry service provider community of practice; and convening key constituencies to provide feedback and input on the reentry services grant program in partnership with the Hub awardee and the City of Austin Equity Office.

## Partnering to Broaden Our Impact

Partnerships allow the Roundtable to maximize its impact. In 2019-20, the Roundtable partnered with the following entities on a variety of projects and initiatives:

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| • Aunt Bertha   | • Leadership Austin   |
| • Austin Community College  | • Philadelphia Reentry Coalition                                      |
| • Austin Justice Coalition  | • Reentry Advocacy Project (RAP)                                      |
| • Behavioral Health & Criminal Justice<br>Advisory Committee – Intercept 4<br>Reentry Working Group | • Shriver Center on Poverty Law                                       |
| • Central Health  | • Texas Department of Criminal Justice,<br>Reentry & Parole Divisions |
| • City of Austin Civil Rights Office  | • Travis County District Attorney's Office                            |
| • City of Austin Equity Office  | • Travis County Judge Andy Brown                                      |
| • City of Austin Housing & Planning<br>Department   | • Travis County Justice Planning                                      |
| • Community Coalition for Health  | • Travis County Sheriff's Office                                      |
| • District Attorney   | • Texas Criminal Justice Coalition                                    |
| • Downtown Austin Community Court   | • Whole Communities–Whole Health,<br>University of Texas at Austin    |
| • Integral Care   | • Workforce Solutions Capital Area                                    |

## SPOTLIGHT ON ADVOCACY FELLOW AMANDA CASSIDY & FELLOWSHIP MENTOR DARWIN HAMILTON

The Roundtable was excited to welcome Amanda Cassidy as the newest Reentry Advocacy Fellow in 2021. Amanda has experienced the criminal justice system first-hand, and she uses her experiences to serve others in overcoming obstacles in the reentry process. After her most recent incarceration, Amanda discovered a passion for advocating for people with similar lived experiences. Amanda has completed Recovery Support Peer Specialist Training, serves on the planning committee for the Virtual Big Texas Rally for Recovery, and is currently on the Board of Directors of Building Promise USA.

Amanda sees this fellowship as a great opportunity to connect with people within the advocacy world, as well as learn how to be an effective and compassionate advocate. It is her hope and dream to be a part of real and effective change within the justice system.

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*“It has been exciting opportunity to be a part of the Roundtables efforts to support the reentry community. I have been able to connect with a variety of people and organizations in my time as a Fellow. From connecting one on one to with the planning council members, participating in the Hogg Academy meetings, taking part in the Reentry Services Mapping Work Group efforts, reimagining the monthly RAP meetings to working with the Executive Committee and my mentors has provided me a chance to grow into becoming a fierce advocate for those returning to the community from the justice system.” –Amanda Cassidy*

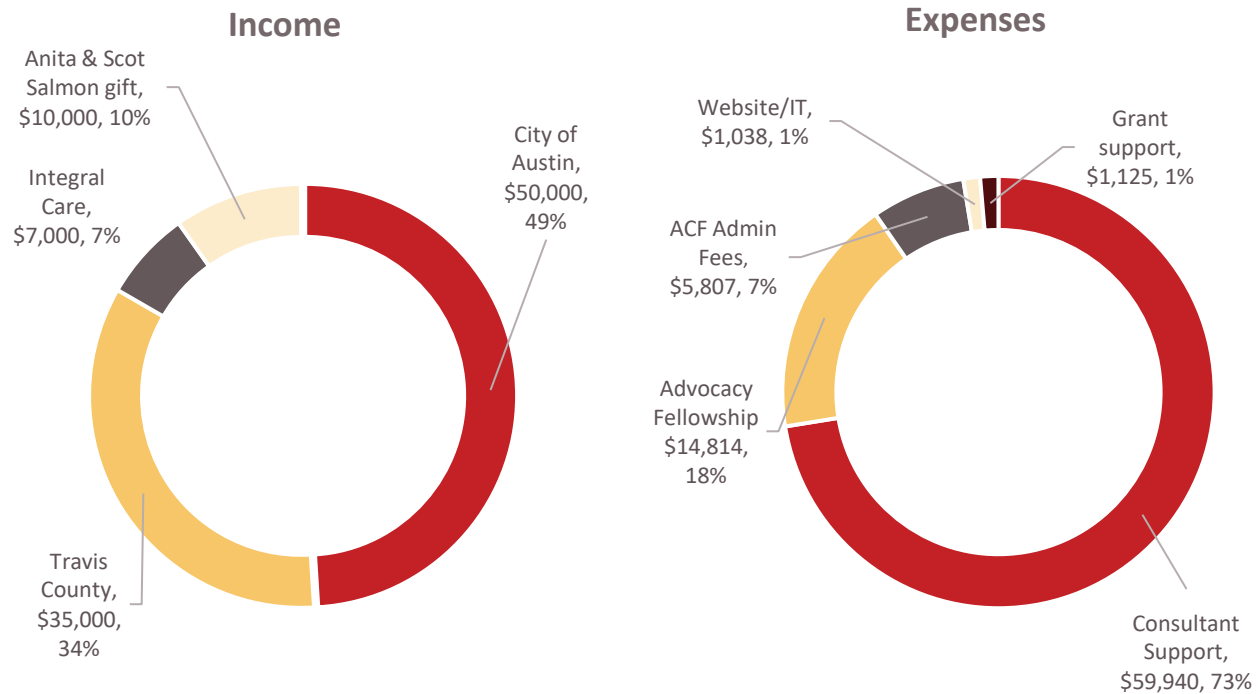
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The Roundtable was also pleased to announce that Darwin Hamilton will serve as the first formal Mentor for the Roundtable Advocacy Fellow. As a long-time member of the Planning Council and one of the founding members of RAP, Darwin is well-suited for this role. Darwin served as a part of the Executive Committee that created the Advocacy Fellowship in 2016, and is excited to feed his passion and purpose by guiding the Advocacy Fellow in the Mentor role. In his words, “Criminal Justice advocacy and policy reform was the vehicle that compelled me to use my voice and tell the stories of my lived experience, framed in ways that affect local, state policy and to have a social impact by removing the shame and stigma ascribed to formerly incarcerated people... This mentorship position would be the reward for my dedication to the cause and not the applause after all these years.”



# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW



Anita and Scot Salmon made a generous donation to the Reentry Roundtable in December 2020 with the intent to further enhance the mission of the Roundtable as we continue promoting safe and healthy communities through effective reentry and reintegration of formerly incarcerated persons and individuals with criminal histories. Anita Salmon was introduced to the Roundtable as a Leadership Austin Essential Class of 2018 classmate of Darwin Hamilton. One of the intentions of this generous gift is to encourage more engagement with and support of the Roundtable. While there are many ways for you to get more involved with the work of the RRT, we encourage you to consider one of the options listed below:

- Get to know a person with lived experience in the criminal justice system. One way to do this is by attending a Reentry Advocacy Project (RAP) meeting. Details about the upcoming meeting can be found below.
- Consider inviting a RAP representative to attend a meeting of your church or civic association, or interview them for your next organizational newsletter. To honor this important work and support equity, we recommend offering a stipend to a speaker when possible.
- Donate \$25 or the amount of your choice to help support the Reentry Advocacy Fellowship program.



# PLANNING COUNCIL MEMBERS

**Donald J. Tracy** | Chair  
*Austin Community College*



**Dr. Charles A. Moody, Jr.** | Vice  
Chair

*The Rock ATX*



**Jennifer Tucker** | Past Chair  
*Goodwill Industries of Central  
Texas*



**Joe A. Ramirez** | RAP  
Representative  
*Texas Veterans Commission*



**Carolyn Brown, LMSW**  
*Travis County Correctional  
Facility*



**David Clauss, LMSW**  
*American YouthWorks*



**Helen Gaebler, JD**  
*UT School of Law*



**Mia Greer, RN, BSN, CLIA**  
*Community Coalition for Health*



**Darwin Hamilton**  
*Community Representative*

**Carl F. Hunter II, M.Div**  
*Building Promise USA*



**Marissa Latta**  
*Texas RioGrande Legal Aid*



**Katy Jo Muncie**  
*Capital Area Private Defender  
Service*



**Rodolfo (Rudy) Pérez, Jr.**  
*Travis County Adult Probation*



**Hank Perret**  
*Community Representative*



**Kimberly Pierce**  
*Travis County Justice Planning*

**Melissa Shearer, LBSW, JD**  
*Travis Co. Mental Health Public  
Defender*



**Louella Tate, Ph.D.**  
*Community Representative*

**Peter Valdez, LMSW**  
*City of Austin Community Court*



**Alex Villarreal**  
*Integral Care*



# THE IMPACT OF DIRECTLY IMPACTED VOICES

## The Genesis of the City of Austin Reentry Services Grant Program

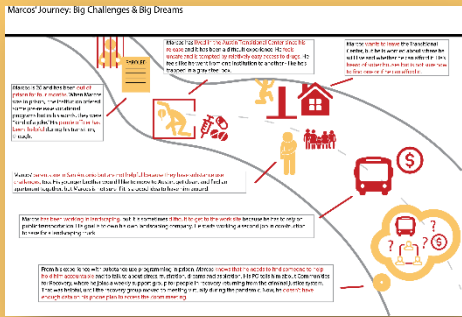
In the summer of 2020, Reentry Advocacy Project participants in coordination with the Roundtable led a participatory process to identify the needs of justice-involved individuals by elevating the voices of those directly impacted, including launching a survey and conducting five focus groups with formerly incarcerated persons and their families.

In 2021, we saw how the voices of those directly impacted by the criminal justice system can impact local policy, with the launch of the City of Austin's first-ever dedicated reentry services funding through the Reentry Services Grant Program in 2021. The City cited the findings from the Reentry Advocacy Project 2020 focus groups and Roundtable's 2020 Progress Report recommendations as justification for the creation of this funding opportunity.

The City of Austin Equity Office, the department sponsoring the funding process, announced the launch of the Re-Entry Services Grant fund in June 2021, with an initial investment of \$400,000. The Reentry Services Grant Program Request for Grant Applications launched in June 2021, soliciting organizations with an understanding and critical analysis of the system-wide inequities which prevent people from successfully re-entering and who could answer the question of "Who is most directly harmed?" in their responses.

The city funding was divided between a "Hub" award of \$200,000, and several "Spoke" awards of up to \$50,000. The Hub award was for an organization to serve as a one-stop-shop for the reentry community. Building Promise USA was selected as the Hub recipient by the City in September 2021. The Spoke awards aimed to fund components of a suite of reentry services, such as housing, mental and physical healthcare, transportation, financial assistance, job training, and more.

The Roundtable is eager to work with all of the organizations awarded funding through the Reentry Services Grant Program to ensure cohesive information sharing about reentry in the community, to build a reentry service provider community of practice, and to develop a comprehensive advocacy strategy for reentry in the community.



**Marcos' Journey: Big Challenges & Big Dreams**

The infographic depicts a winding path through various life stages and challenges. It starts with a person in a car, then moves through a house, a person with a speech bubble, a person with a dollar sign, a person with a question mark, and finally a person with a graduation cap. The path is marked with icons representing different challenges and dreams. Text boxes along the path provide context for each stage.

**Challenges:**

- Financial:** Marcos' family has a history of financial struggles. He has a history of being in debt and has a history of being in jail for financial reasons.
- Education:** Marcos has a history of being in school, but he has a history of being in jail for educational reasons.
- Health:** Marcos has a history of being in jail for health reasons. He has a history of being in jail for health reasons.
- Relationships:** Marcos has a history of being in jail for relationship reasons. He has a history of being in jail for relationship reasons.
- Employment:** Marcos has a history of being in jail for employment reasons. He has a history of being in jail for employment reasons.

**Dreams:**

- Financial:** Marcos dreams of being able to support his family and himself. He dreams of being able to support his family and himself.
- Education:** Marcos dreams of being able to finish his education. He dreams of being able to finish his education.
- Health:** Marcos dreams of being able to live a healthy life. He dreams of being able to live a healthy life.
- Relationships:** Marcos dreams of being able to have a good relationship with his family and himself. He dreams of being able to have a good relationship with his family and himself.
- Employment:** Marcos dreams of being able to find a good job. He dreams of being able to find a good job.

Understanding the journeys of persons in reentry both during and after incarceration is critical to providing the appropriate resources and services to support their success and prevent a return to incarceration.

**[Click here to read the 2020 Reentry Progress Report.](#)**