



BEYOND THE NUMBERS

FY 2025–2026 Annual Report

Orange County Local Reentry Council

A Program of the Orange County Criminal Justice Resource Department

Rebuilding Relationships. Restoring Hope. Strengthening Community.



Mission and Purpose

The Orange County Local Reentry Council's (LRC) mission is:

- *to create a network of individuals and organizations assisting justice-involved people and people reentering the community after incarceration in a state or federal prison or local jail;*
- *to maximize and coordinate the use of existing reentry resources and services;*
- *to develop innovative responses to address gaps in resources and services;*
- *to conduct community education and outreach about the needs of reentering individuals and the public benefits of meeting those needs;*
- *to reduce recidivism; and*
- *to increase public/community safety.*

The LRC's purpose is to coordinate resources in the community in an effort to provide assistance for returning individuals and their families that will facilitate a successful transition from incarceration back into society or help reduce barriers that are faced by those who have been justice-involved.

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A Letter from the LRC Coordinator

There is a saying in reentry work that people rarely succeed because of one program or one service—they succeed because someone believed they were worth investing in. After years of working alongside individuals returning home from incarceration, I have found that to be true time and time again.

Throughout my career in the carceral state and reentry, I have had the privilege of sitting across from hundreds of people at some of the most uncertain moments of their lives. I've celebrated employment offers, housing placements, reunifications with family, milestones in recovery, and countless personal victories that never make headlines. I've also witnessed the realities of homelessness, untreated mental illness, addiction, poverty, and the overwhelming barriers that can make starting over feel impossible.



Tiffany Bullard
Orange County LRC Coordinator, CJRD

Those experiences shaped how I have approached case management and now my role as Coordinator of the Orange County LRC.

Although I stepped into a new leadership role this year, I did so with a deep appreciation for both the challenges and the opportunities that exist within reentry work. I knew the success of the LRC would never be measured solely by the number of participants served or referrals completed. It would be measured by the strength of our relationships, the trust we built within our community, and our willingness to create systems that would continue serving people long after the end of any one fiscal year.

This year became an opportunity to do exactly that. Early in the fiscal year, we partnered with the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction (DAC) to take an honest look at the structure of the Orange County LRC. Rather than continuing to operate as we always had, we chose to intentionally strengthen our foundation. Together, we redesigned the Executive Committee, reengaged community stakeholders, developed a transparent nomination process, elected new officers, and adopted revised policies and procedures aligned with the DAC's Standard Operating Procedures.

Those changes were about much more than governance. They were about creating an organization capable of bringing people together around a common purpose.

One of the accomplishments I am most proud of this year was watching that vision begin to take shape. Under the leadership of our new Criminal Justice Resource Department (CJRD) Director, Danielle Carman, the LRC was given the space and encouragement to expand its presence throughout Orange County. Community partners returned to the table. New voices emerged. Individuals with lived experience accepted leadership roles. Our new Executive Committee became energized, engaged, and committed to building something that would have lasting impact.

As meaningful as those organizational changes were, they reinforced something I have believed throughout my career: the most important work we do begins by listening.

Every person who comes through our doors has a story. Some stories are filled with loss. Others are marked by resilience. Many carry both.

I've learned that before we can help someone navigate housing, employment, healthcare, or recovery, we first have to understand who they are, what they have experienced, and what they hope their future

can become. Too often, people returning home are defined by the worst decision they have ever made.

Reentry work asks us to see something different. It asks us to see potential. It asks us to recognize that behind every criminal record is a person who has experienced trauma, loss, failure, perseverance, growth, and the same desire for stability and belonging that all of us share.

This year reminded me that stories have the power to change more than individual lives. They change communities.

When we hear someone's story, barriers begin to fall. Assumptions are challenged. Compassion grows. Partnerships become stronger because they are rooted in understanding rather than perception.

That is why we intentionally created opportunities throughout the year for people with lived experience to share their journeys. Whether through our Transformation Tuesday Writing Series, community presentations, Executive Committee leadership, or simple conversations across a table, those stories reminded us that successful reentry is not simply about helping someone survive after incarceration. It is about helping them rediscover purpose, rebuild relationships, and become active contributors within their communities.

This year also reinforced how interconnected the barriers to successful reentry have become. Housing continued to be our greatest challenge as rising costs and limited availability made stability increasingly difficult to achieve. Transportation, however, became one of our greatest successes. Thanks to American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) transportation funding provided through the DAC, we were able to remove barriers that had prevented participants from reaching employment, treatment, education, and housing opportunities. We also witnessed food insecurity emerge in ways we had not anticipated, reminding us that economic pressures affect not only the individuals we serve but also the community organizations working tirelessly to support them.

While these challenges remain significant, I leave this year encouraged. Encouraged by the partnerships that continue to grow. Encouraged by employers willing to offer second chances. Encouraged by volunteers who freely give their time. Encouraged by community leaders who choose collaboration over competition.

Most of all, I am encouraged by the resilience of the people we serve. Every participant who chooses recovery, accepts accountability, returns to work, reconnects with family, or simply walks through our doors asking for help demonstrates extraordinary courage. It is a privilege to walk alongside them, even for a small part of their journey.

As we look toward the future, I remain confident that the Orange County LRC is well positioned to continue growing as a trusted community resource. We have strengthened our foundation, expanded our partnerships, and created momentum that will carry this work forward. There is still much to accomplish, but I firmly believe that when a community commits itself to seeing the person before the circumstance, meaningful transformation is possible.

Thank you to every participant, volunteer, community partner, Executive Committee member, advisory member, the CJRD, the DAC, and every individual who has chosen to believe in the power of second chances.

The work of reentry belongs to all of us.

I am grateful to be part of a community that continues to prove, every day, that restoration is possible.

CJRD Leadership Transition

Every organization experiences seasons of change, and this year was one of transition for the CJRD. We are deeply grateful to our former director, Cait Fenhagen, for her years of leadership, vision, and steadfast commitment to strengthening reentry services in Orange County. The partnerships she cultivated and the foundation she helped build continue to shape our work today. As we begin a new chapter, we are equally grateful to welcome our new director, Danielle Carman, whose thoughtful leadership has encouraged collaboration, innovation, and organizational growth. Her support has created space for the Orange County LRC to reimagine its structure, elevate new voices, and strengthen its commitment to serving individuals returning home. It has been a privilege to witness one chapter conclude with gratitude while another begins with optimism and renewed purpose.

Executive Summary

Beyond the Numbers

2025–2026 Annual Report

Orange County Local Reentry Council

A Program of the Orange County Criminal Justice Resource Department

The Orange County Local Reentry Council (LRC) exists to help individuals returning from incarceration rebuild their lives through coordinated services, meaningful partnerships, and opportunities that promote long-term stability. During Fiscal Year 2025–2026, the Council continued this mission while undergoing a significant period of organizational growth and transformation. More than simply delivering services, this year focused on strengthening the systems, relationships, and community partnerships that make successful reentry possible.

Throughout the year, the LRC served **106 participants**, enrolled **86 new participants**, maintained an **active caseload of 190 individuals**, and provided **1,245 direct services** across housing, employment, transportation, behavioral health, healthcare, legal assistance, documentation, education, and basic needs. These numbers represent measurable outcomes, but they tell only part of the story. Behind every service provided was an individual working to rebuild a life, reconnect with family, recover from addiction, secure employment, or find stable housing after incarceration.

This fiscal year also marked an important turning point for the organization itself. In collaboration with the DAC, the LRC undertook a comprehensive effort to strengthen its organizational foundation. A redesigned Executive Committee, formal nomination process, revised governance documents, updated policies and procedures, and newly elected leadership created a more sustainable structure positioned for long-term success. These improvements reflected a commitment to transparency, accountability, and shared leadership while ensuring the Council remains responsive to the evolving needs of Orange County.

Housing continued to emerge as the most significant challenge facing participants. Rising rental costs, limited affordable housing, criminal background barriers, and financial instability created obstacles that could rarely be resolved through a single referral. The Council responded by strengthening collaborative relationships with housing providers, including Reentry House Plus, Wonderful House, Oxford House, and countywide housing initiatives. These partnerships reinforced an important truth: housing stability depends on coordinated community support rather than isolated services.

Transportation became one of the year's greatest successes. Through **\$19,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) transportation funding** awarded by the DAC, the LRC significantly expanded transportation assistance for employment, healthcare, treatment, housing appointments, and community supervision. Reliable transportation proved to be far more than a supportive service—it became the bridge connecting participants to nearly every opportunity for success.

Community engagement remained central to the Council's work. During Reentry Month 2026, the Orange County Board of County Commissioners issued their first local **Reentry Month Proclamation**, recognizing the importance of supporting individuals returning home from incarceration. Community

education initiatives included the ***Restoring More Than a License: Rebuilding Lives After Incarceration*** panel discussion, the ***Transformation Tuesday*** writing series featuring individuals with lived experience, an immersive Reentry Simulation for community stakeholders, participation in local outreach events, and continued collaboration with the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., whose Welcome Bag Initiative helped restore dignity to individuals returning home with few personal belongings. These efforts strengthened public awareness while helping reduce stigma surrounding incarceration and second chances.

The LRC also continued expanding its presence within countywide planning efforts by participating in committees addressing affordable housing, homelessness, coordinated entry, economic mobility, and regional planning. These collaborative efforts ensured that the voices and needs of justice-involved individuals remained represented in broader community conversations while strengthening partnerships that directly benefit participants.

Throughout every chapter of this report, one theme remains consistent: **relationships are the foundation of successful reentry**. While annual reports often emphasize statistics and performance measures, the work described in these pages demonstrates that lasting change begins with trust. It begins when employers offer second chances, when landlords choose to see potential instead of a criminal record, when community organizations collaborate rather than compete, and when someone simply takes the time to listen to another person's story.

This report intentionally looks beyond traditional performance metrics to examine the people, partnerships, and shared commitment that make successful reentry possible. It highlights organizational growth, community collaboration, participant-centered case management, innovative programming, and the countless moments of compassion that often go unseen but ultimately shape lasting outcomes.

As the Orange County LRC moved into Fiscal Year 2026–2027, it does so with a stronger organizational foundation, expanding community partnerships, growing leadership, and renewed momentum. The Council remains committed to reducing barriers, strengthening systems of support, and ensuring that every individual returning home has the opportunity to rebuild a life defined not by past mistakes, but by future possibilities.

Because in the end, **the true measure of reentry is found not simply in the services we provide, but in the lives restored, the relationships rebuilt, and the community we strengthen together.**

At A Glance Overview

LRC = Orange, Date Range = 7/1/2025 - 6/30/2026

Last Data Update Time

7/8/2026 12:33:40 PM UTC

Data is updated daily at 6 AM ET.

Summary of Selected Local Reentry Council(s)

86

Clients Enrolled

190

Active Clients

106

Clients Served

1,245

Services Provided

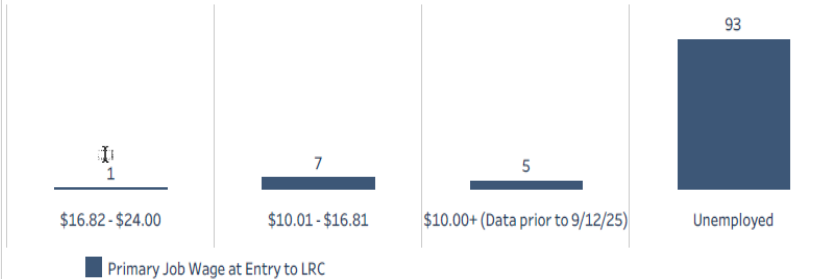
Local Reentry Council Mission and Purpose

A Local Reentry Council (LRC) is an organized network of individuals and agencies that provide programs and services to support justice-involved citizens living in local communities. The mission of an LRC is to reduce recidivism and victimization, enhance public safety, create a network of individuals and organizations assisting justice-involved individuals, maximize the use of existing resources and services, and develop innovative responses to address gaps in resources and services. Typical LRC services include assistance with housing, employment, transportation, substance abuse, obtaining personal documentation and other basic needs.

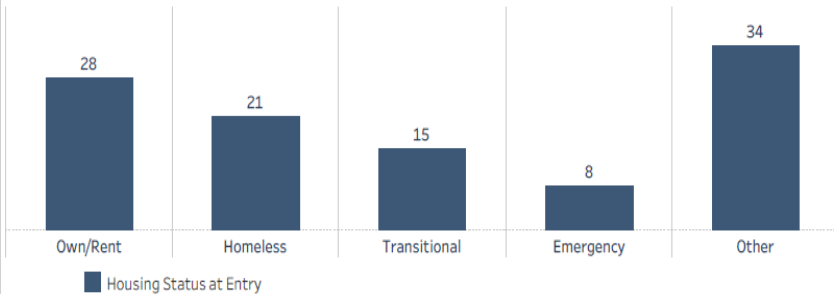
Local Reentry Council List

Orange

Employment Status



Housing Status



NC DAC LRC Reporting Dashboard | Last Updated: 7/8/2026 12:33:40 PM UTC | Updated Weekday Mornings | v2.1.2

Chapter One

A Year of Rebuilding: Strengthening the Foundation for Lasting Impact

“Strong reentry systems aren’t built overnight. They are built through relationships, shared leadership, and a community willing to invest in second chances.”

Looking Back

Every organization reaches a point where it has an opportunity to pause, reflect, and ask whether its current structure is truly serving its mission. For the Orange County LRC, Fiscal Year 2025-2026 became that opportunity.

This was more than another program year. It was a year of rebuilding.

Early in the fiscal year, Orange County CJRD leadership met with DAC representatives to examine the existing structure of the LRC. Together, we had honest conversations about what was working, where there was room for growth, and what it would take to strengthen the Council for years to come.

One thing quickly became clear: if we wanted the Orange County LRC to continue growing as a trusted community resource, we needed to intentionally rebuild its foundation.

That work began with people. Rather than simply filling committee seats, we wanted to create an Executive Committee made up of individuals who believed deeply in the mission of reentry and were willing to invest their time, experience, and leadership in helping the Council grow. We wanted voices from across Orange County—community partners, service providers, advocates, individuals with lived experience, and organizations committed to reducing barriers for people returning home from incarceration.

Building that kind of leadership takes time. It requires conversations before meetings, trust before commitments, and relationships before results. Those relationships became the cornerstone of everything we accomplished this year.

Building Structure that Supports the Mission

With the support of our new CJRD Director, Executive Committee meetings took on renewed purpose and direction. Meeting agendas became more intentional. Committee responsibilities became clearly defined. Decision-making became more collaborative. Most importantly, we established the governance necessary to support sustainable growth.

Throughout the year, Executive Committee members worked together to review and adopt revised policies and procedures aligned with the DAC’s Standard Operating Procedures. These revisions strengthened accountability, clarified roles and responsibilities, and established consistent processes that will guide the LRC well into the future.

We also conducted officer elections and formally established committee leadership, creating an organizational structure that empowers members to actively participate in shaping the Council's direction.

The result was more than improved governance. It was renewed energy. Members began contributing ideas, strengthening partnerships, volunteering for initiatives, and helping expand the LRC's visibility throughout Orange County. For the first time in several years, there was a shared sense that we were building something lasting.

Leadership that Creates Space for Growth

Looking back over the year, one accomplishment stands above the rest. I am incredibly proud of the leadership demonstrated by our new CJRD Director.

Strong leadership is not always measured by the decisions someone makes. Sometimes it is measured by the space they create for others to succeed.

This year, our Director intentionally created opportunities for the Orange County LRC to become more visible, more engaged, and more connected to the community. That support gave us the time and flexibility to strengthen relationships, participate in community initiatives, expand outreach efforts, and elevate the work of the LRC throughout Orange County.

Reentry work often happens quietly. Much of it takes place in conversations, committee meetings, coffee shops, courtrooms, correctional facilities, and community events long before a client ever walks through our doors. Having leadership that recognizes the value of those relationship-building efforts made an extraordinary difference this year.

Building Community Through Shared Leadership

The work of the LRC extends far beyond direct client services.

Throughout Fiscal Year 2025–2026, the Orange County LRC intentionally expanded its participation across multiple county and regional initiatives to ensure that the voices of justice-involved individuals were represented wherever important community decisions were being made.

Council leadership and staff actively participated in:

- Orange County Housing for All Committee
- HOME Committee
- Vibrant Communities Committee
- Chapel Hill Debt Fund Committee
- Coordinated Entry Housing Committee
- NC-513 Continuum of Care Nominations Committee, serving as Co-Chair

Participation on these committees allowed the LRC to advocate for individuals returning home while also strengthening partnerships with organizations working to address housing instability, homelessness, healthcare access, and economic mobility. These partnerships continue to open doors for collaboration that directly benefit our clients.

Preparing for the Future

This year also represented an important period of organizational growth. In addition to welcoming new leadership within the CJRD, the LRC welcomed a new Coordinator and began planning for the addition of a part-time Case Manager during Fiscal Year 2026–2027.

Expanding staffing represents more than organizational growth. It represents increased capacity to meet clients where they are, provide individualized support, and strengthen long-term case management services throughout Orange County.

As the Council continues to evolve, investments in people remain one of our greatest priorities.

Beyond the Numbers

When people look at an annual report, they naturally notice the numbers first. How many clients were served. How many referrals were made. How many meetings were held.

Those numbers matter, and they tell an important part of our story. What they do not show is everything that happened before those numbers became possible. They do not show the countless phone calls spent introducing the LRC to a new community partner.

They do not show the trust that must be earned before an employer agrees to interview someone with a criminal record. They do not show the conversations with landlords willing to consider a second chance. They do not show the planning sessions, committee meetings, volunteer recruitment, or collaborative problem-solving that happen every week behind the scenes.

Those relationships are not separate from the work. They are the work.

One lesson became increasingly clear throughout this year: showing up consistently matters.

It matters when we attend committee meetings. It matters when we volunteer alongside community partners. It matters when we follow through on commitments. It matters when we continue answering the phone after a referral has been made. Trust is built one interaction at a time.

Over the course of this year, we watched that trust grow. Community partners came to know the Orange County LRC as an organization that follows through, values collaboration, and remains committed to advocating for people returning home from incarceration. That trust has become one of our greatest resources. It cannot be measured on a dashboard, but it influences every success that follows.

Why This Matters

Fiscal Year 2025–2026 was not defined by one event, one initiative, or one statistic. It was defined by intentional growth.

We strengthened our leadership. We reengaged our community. We created a more sustainable organizational structure. We expanded our voice in countywide conversations. Most importantly, we laid the foundation for the future.

The work accomplished this year positions the Orange County LRC to continue growing as a trusted partner, an advocate for second chances, and a catalyst for meaningful change. Every policy adopted,

every new committee member welcomed, and every relationship strengthened moved us one step closer to a community where people returning home have greater opportunities to rebuild their lives.

This chapter marks the beginning of that story. The chapters that follow will demonstrate how that stronger foundation translated into tangible support, meaningful partnerships, and lives transformed throughout Orange County.

Chapter Two

Beyond the Numbers: Understanding the Realities of Reentry in Orange County

“Behind every statistic is a person trying to rebuild a life. Behind every service is a conversation, a relationship, and a community choosing not to give up on someone.”

Looking Beyond the Data

Annual reports naturally begin with numbers. They tell us how many people were served, how many referrals were made, and how many services were provided. Those numbers are important because they demonstrate accountability and help measure progress.

During Fiscal Year 2025-2026, the Orange County LRC served **106 participants**, enrolled **86 new clients**, maintained an active caseload of **190 participants**, and delivered **1,245 individual services** across housing, employment, transportation, healthcare, behavioral health, legal assistance, documentation, and basic needs. These figures reflect the tremendous amount of work completed throughout the year and the growing trust participants place in the LRC.

Yet numbers only tell us **what** happened. They rarely explain **why** those services were needed or what those interactions looked like once someone walked through our door.

This chapter explores the realities behind the data—the barriers our participants faced, the lessons we learned, and the opportunities that continue to shape our work.

Housing Remains the Greatest Barrier

If there was one issue that touched nearly every participant this year, it was housing.

Housing has always been difficult for individuals returning home from incarceration, but this year it became increasingly clear that the challenge extends far beyond simply finding an available apartment.

The cost of housing continued to rise throughout Orange County, leaving many participants competing for a limited number of affordable units. Even when housing was available, criminal background screenings, prior evictions, poor credit histories, limited income, and the absence of rental references often prevented individuals from securing stable housing.

Many participants entered our program already experiencing housing instability. Some were living unsheltered. Others were staying temporarily with family or friends, moving between hotels, or residing in transitional housing while searching for something permanent. Still others had housing but were at imminent risk of losing it due to financial hardship.

What became increasingly apparent was that housing is rarely solved through a single referral.

Housing is connected to almost every other area of a person's life. A participant cannot maintain employment without reliable transportation. They cannot qualify for housing without income. They cannot consistently work if untreated mental health concerns or substance use disorders remain unaddressed. They may struggle to complete housing applications if they lack identification or other essential documents.

Each successful housing placement represented dozens of conversations, applications, phone calls, advocacy efforts, and coordinated partnerships happening quietly behind the scenes.

For that reason, housing continues to remain one of the Orange County LRC's highest priorities.

Partnerships That Open Doors

One partnership that experienced remarkable growth this year was our collaboration with **Reentry House Plus**. The consistent communication and shared commitment demonstrated by program leadership created an environment where participants experienced seamless transitions between housing and community-based services.

Participants were connected not only to temporary housing but also to employment services, behavioral healthcare, transportation assistance, documentation support, and long-term planning. This level of coordination significantly strengthened participants' ability to stabilize and successfully transition into the community.

Our continued partnerships with **Wonderful House**, **Oxford House**, and other Orange County housing initiatives further expanded opportunities for participants experiencing housing instability.

Each collaboration reinforced an important lesson: successful housing outcomes are built through relationships, not transactions.

Transportation Became a Turning Point

At the beginning of the fiscal year, transportation was viewed as one of many supportive services offered by the LRC. By the end of the year, we realized transportation was often the service that made every other service possible.

The DAC's award of **\$19,000 in ARPA transportation funding** transformed our ability to respond to participant needs. These funds allowed us to assist individuals traveling to:

- Employment interviews
- Work
- Housing appointments
- Medical appointments
- Behavioral health treatment
- Substance use treatment
- Educational programs
- Community supervision appointments
- Social service agencies

Transportation barriers are especially significant in Orange County, where many participants live outside public transit routes or work hours that extend beyond available bus service. Reliable

transportation often determined whether someone could accept employment, attend treatment consistently, or keep a housing appointment.

This year taught us that transportation is not simply another supportive service. It is frequently the bridge connecting participants to every other opportunity.

133 transportation services may appear to be just another statistic. In reality, those services represent interviews attended, jobs retained, counseling sessions completed, apartments viewed, probation appointments kept, and opportunities that would otherwise have been missed.

Transportation gave participants access not only to services—but to possibility.

Food Security: An Emerging Challenge

One of the most surprising challenges we encountered this year was the growing issue of food insecurity.

Historically, connecting participants with local food pantries or providing grocery gift cards offered meaningful short-term relief. This year, however, the conversation changed. The rising cost of groceries affected everyone.

Participants who had recently secured employment often found themselves struggling to keep food on the table while waiting for their first paycheck. Families working toward stability were forced to make difficult decisions between purchasing food, paying rent, buying medication, or maintaining transportation.

At the same time, our community food pantries experienced unprecedented demand. Many organizations that had previously allowed weekly or bi-weekly visits were forced to limit assistance to once each month because available resources simply could not meet community need.

This was not a reflection of diminished generosity. It was evidence of increasing demand across Orange County.

Food insecurity became another reminder that successful reentry requires addressing immediate needs while simultaneously helping individuals build long-term stability.

Employment Is More Than Finding a Job

Employment continues to be one of the strongest predictors of successful reentry. It provides income, structure, confidence, and an opportunity for individuals to redefine themselves beyond past mistakes.

Throughout the year, the Orange County LRC continued strengthening relationships with employers and workforce development partners committed to creating second-chance opportunities.

Partnerships with **Durham Technical Community College** were revitalized, reconnecting participants to Human Resources Development (HRD) classes and the **More Than Just a Job** program.

Referrals continued through **NCWorks**, local hiring events, and workforce development initiatives designed to prepare participants for sustainable employment.

The Local Reentry Council also increased outreach to employers including **Lane Construction** and **Flagger Force**, seeking additional pathways into industries offering competitive wages, advancement opportunities, and stable careers.

Employment is about much more than earning a paycheck. It restores confidence. It creates routine. It strengthens families. It allows people to begin imagining a future beyond survival.

Healthcare and Recovery

Many participants entered services carrying significant physical, behavioral, and emotional health needs. Some had gone months—or years—without routine healthcare. Others were managing chronic medical conditions while also navigating mental health challenges or substance use recovery.

The LRC continued emphasizing a whole-person approach to reentry by connecting participants with healthcare coverage, primary care providers, behavioral health treatment, medication management, and recovery support services.

Our partnership with the **Post Overdose Response Team (PORT)** became especially meaningful. When participants expressed uncertainty, fear, or concerns about maintaining sobriety, immediate collaboration with PORT often prevented individuals from navigating those challenges alone.

Rather than referring participants elsewhere and hoping they followed through, services frequently began immediately. That immediacy helped build trust while demonstrating that asking for help would be met with action—not another waiting list.

The Hidden Work of Reentry

People often see the outcome. They see someone move into housing. They see someone obtain employment. They see a participant graduate from treatment or reconnect with family.

What they rarely see is everything that happened beforehand. They don't see the phone calls. They don't see the transportation coordination. They don't see the landlord meetings. They don't see the conversations with employers willing to offer a second chance. They don't see the countless committee meetings where partnerships are built long before they are ever needed.

The success of the Orange County LRC depends on those relationships. Our work is built on showing up consistently, following through on commitments, and earning the trust of both participants and community partners. That trust cannot be measured in a spreadsheet. Yet it influences every successful outcome we celebrate.

Why This Matters

This year reminded us that successful reentry is rarely achieved through one service alone.

It happens when transportation makes employment possible. When employment makes housing attainable. When housing provides stability for recovery. When recovery restores family relationships. When community partners choose collaboration over silos. And when individuals are met with dignity instead of judgment.

The numbers reported throughout this publication represent important accomplishments, but the true impact of the Orange County LRC is found in the lives behind those numbers. Every barrier overcome represents the collective efforts of participants, staff, volunteers, employers, housing providers, healthcare professionals, community organizations, and neighbors who believe that every person deserves the opportunity to build a better future.

As we move into the next chapter, those relationships come to life through the people, partnerships, and events that made Fiscal Year 2025-2026 one of growth, resilience, and renewed hope.

Chapter Three

Community in Action: Turning Partnerships into Possibilities

“Reentry is not the responsibility of one agency. It succeeds when a community chooses to stand beside people returning home and says, ‘You belong here.’ ”

More Than a Calendar of Events

Community engagement has always been a cornerstone of the Orange County LRC, but this year our approach became more intentional.

Rather than hosting events simply because they appeared on an annual calendar, every meeting, presentation, and community partnership was designed to accomplish something larger. We wanted to educate our community, reduce stigma surrounding justice involvement, strengthen partnerships, amplify the voices of individuals with lived experience, and remind people that successful reentry benefits everyone.

Reentry is often misunderstood. For many community members, incarceration represents the end of someone's story. For those of us working in reentry every day, we know it is often where the hardest work begins.

Throughout Fiscal Year 2025–2026, the Orange County LRC worked to shift that perspective by inviting the community into the conversation.

Reentry Month 2026: A Community Coming Together

April has long been recognized as Reentry Month across North Carolina, but this year felt different. Not only did Governor Stein proclaim April to be Reentry Month but our very own Orange County Board of County Commissioners adopted the first Reentry Month proclamation for Orange County.

Instead of centering our efforts around one signature event, we intentionally created a month of opportunities for education, reflection, storytelling, and collaboration. Each event built upon the next. Each conversation introduced someone new to the work. Each partnership strengthened the network supporting people returning home.

Most importantly, each event reinforced one simple truth: **Successful reentry is not something individuals accomplish alone—it takes an entire community working together.**

Restoring More Than a License: Rebuilding Lives After Incarceration

One of the highlights of Reentry Month was our community panel discussion, **Restoring More Than a License: Rebuilding Lives After Incarceration.**

At first glance, driver's license restoration may seem like a narrow legal issue. In reality, it touches nearly every aspect of successful reentry. Without a driver's license, maintaining employment becomes difficult. Healthcare appointments are missed. Housing searches become limited. Parents struggle to attend school functions. Simple errands become complicated. The inability to legally drive can quietly become one of the largest barriers to stability.

This panel brought together legal professionals, elected officials, individuals who had successfully restored their licenses, and community advocates to discuss how restoring driving privileges can transform someone's ability to rebuild their life.

The discussion extended far beyond legal procedures. It became a conversation about opportunity. About removing barriers. About recognizing that restoring a driver's license often restores something much larger—independence, dignity, and hope. And it reminded everyone in attendance that meaningful policy changes create meaningful life changes.



Community leaders, legal professionals, elected officials, and individuals with lived experience gathered to discuss how driver's license restoration creates pathways to employment, housing, healthcare, and stability.

Transformation Tuesday: The Power of Personal Stories

Perhaps the most meaningful initiative of Reentry Month was the ***Transformation Tuesday Writing Spotlight Series***.

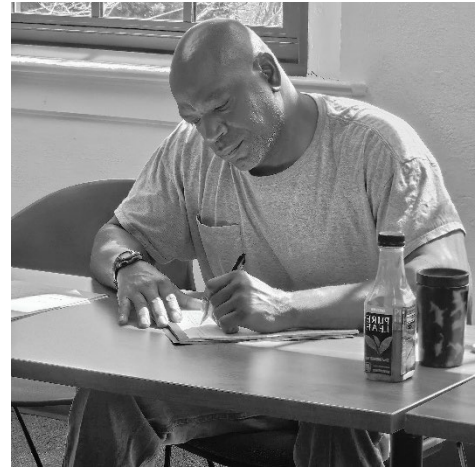
Every Tuesday throughout April, individuals with lived experience courageously shared pieces of their personal journeys.

Some reflected on accountability. Others wrote about forgiveness.

Several described rebuilding relationships with family after years of separation.

Others explored faith, resilience, recovery, and discovering purpose after incarceration.

These were not polished success stories. They were honest stories. Stories filled with setbacks, victories, fear, hope, and perseverance.



For many readers, this series became the first opportunity to hear directly from individuals who had experienced incarceration and were now actively rebuilding their lives.

It challenged stereotypes. It humanized reentry. It reminded us that every person deserves the opportunity to write a new chapter.

One of those voices belonged to **Joseph Whatley**, a current Executive Committee member whose journey reflects the very mission of the Orange County LRC. Once a participant himself, Joseph now helps shape the future of the organization by bringing the invaluable perspective

of lived experience to leadership discussions. His willingness to tell his story serves as a reminder that transformation does not end when someone leaves prison. Sometimes, it begins there.

Beyond the Numbers

Statistics tell us how many people participated. Stories tell us why the work matters.

The Transformation Tuesday series gave our community something data never can: Perspective.

Reentry Simulation: Walking in Someone Else's Shoes

One of the most powerful events of the year was the ***Orange County Reentry Simulation***.

Participants—including community partners, service providers, elected officials, and local stakeholders—were asked to navigate the challenges commonly faced by individuals returning home from incarceration.

Each participant assumed the identity of someone recently released from prison. Their task seemed simple: Find housing. Maintain employment. Attend supervision appointments. Obtain identification. Pay bills. Access healthcare. Remain compliant with court requirements. Reconnect with family.

The reality proved far more complicated. As the simulation unfolded, participants encountered transportation barriers, missed appointments, long wait times, limited financial resources, unexpected emergencies, and difficult choices that mirrored the experiences of many returning citizens.

Conversations following the simulation were both thoughtful and emotional. Participants spoke openly about feeling overwhelmed. Many admitted they had never fully appreciated how interconnected these barriers truly are. One missed bus led to a missed appointment. One missed appointment threatened employment. Lost employment jeopardized housing. Every challenge compounded the next.

The simulation accomplished exactly what it was designed to do. It transformed abstract concepts into lived experience. For many participants, it fundamentally changed how they viewed reentry.



The Reentry Simulation challenged participants to experience firsthand the complex decisions and barriers individuals face after incarceration.

Bringing Services Into the Community

The LRC also expanded outreach beyond traditional meeting spaces.

This year, the LRC participated in the **Chapel Hill Pop-Up Medical Event**, connecting community members with healthcare resources, reentry services, and information about available supports.

Events like these are important because they remove barriers before people ever enter our office.

Sometimes the first step toward asking for help is simply meeting someone at a community event.

Showing up matters. Being visible matters.

When people recognize the LRC as a trusted community resource, they are more likely to seek assistance when they need it most.



The Welcome Bag Initiative: Small Acts, Lasting Impact

One of the most heartwarming partnerships of Reentry Month continued through our collaboration with the **Chapel Hill–Carrboro Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.**

For several years, Alpha Kappa Alpha has supported the Orange County LRC through community service initiatives focused on individuals returning home from incarceration.

This year, members once again assembled welcome bags filled with hygiene items and other basic necessities. To many people, these bags may appear simple. To someone returning home with few possessions, they communicate something much more meaningful: “You matter.”

Receiving a toothbrush, soap, deodorant, or clean socks may seem ordinary. Receiving them from someone who took the time to care is extraordinary. Acts of kindness like these help restore dignity during one of the most vulnerable moments in a person's life.

Community Partners Who Show Up

One of the greatest strengths of the Orange County LRC is the willingness of community partners to continually show up. Whether presenting during quarterly meetings, serving on committees, volunteering at events, collecting donations, or responding to participant needs, these organizations continue demonstrating that successful reentry is truly a community effort.

Throughout the year, we welcomed presentations and collaborations with organizations representing housing, education, disability rights, employment, behavioral health, voting rights, workforce development, and recovery services.

Each partnership expanded the opportunities available to our participants while strengthening the broader reentry network throughout Orange County.

Community partnerships are not simply resources. They are relationships. Those relationships continue to grow stronger each year.

Why This Matters

Community engagement is often viewed as something separate from direct service. This year reminded us that it is one of the most important services we provide.

Every community presentation helped reduce stigma. Every partnership created new opportunities. Every volunteer strengthened our capacity. Every conversation expanded awareness. And every story shared reminded someone that transformation is possible.

Reentry work does not happen in isolation. It happens in correctional facilities and courtrooms. It happens in churches and classrooms. It happens in committee meetings, food pantries, housing offices, and community centers. Most importantly, it happens when people choose to believe that a person's past should not define their future.

The events of Reentry Month demonstrated what is possible when an entire community commits itself to that belief.



Chapter Four

Walking Alongside People: Case Management That Meets People Where They Are

“Reentry is not a checklist of referrals. It is a relationship built one conversation, one challenge, and one small victory at a time.”

More Than Case Management

When people hear the words *case management*, they often imagine paperwork, assessments, and referrals. While those tasks are certainly part of the work, they tell only a fraction of the story.

For the Orange County LRC, case management is built on something much simpler—and much more meaningful. It begins with listening.

Every individual who walks through our doors arrives with a different story. Some are returning home after serving decades in prison. Others have been released only days earlier. Some have family waiting with open arms, while others return to communities where they know no one. Many arrive carrying years of trauma, grief, addiction, untreated medical conditions, financial hardship, or the overwhelming uncertainty that accompanies starting over.

No two reentry journeys are the same.

For that reason, our approach has never been about moving participants through a standardized list of services. Instead, we begin by asking a simple question: **“What do you need today?”** Sometimes the answer is housing. Sometimes it is transportation. Sometimes it is employment. Sometimes it is simply someone willing to sit down, listen without judgment, and help make sense of what feels impossible.

Those conversations become the starting point for everything that follows.

Meeting People Where They Are

One lesson became increasingly clear throughout this year. People rarely come to the LRC because only one thing has gone wrong. More often, they arrive facing multiple challenges that are deeply connected. A participant searching for employment may also be sleeping outside. Someone seeking housing may not have identification. A participant trying to attend treatment may have no transportation. Someone attempting to reunite with family may first need to address untreated mental health concerns or substance use.

Looking at these issues individually can feel overwhelming. Looking at them together allows us to develop a plan. Rather than asking participants to navigate dozens of systems on their own, we work alongside them to identify priorities, remove barriers, and build momentum one step at a time.

Progress rarely happens all at once. It happens through a series of small victories.

One Conversation That Changed Everything

There is one participant whose journey has stayed with me throughout this year.

Like every story included in this report, identifying details have been changed to protect confidentiality, but the experience reflects the reality of reentry for many individuals we serve.

He arrived at intake carrying little more than a backpack. He had no housing. No employment. No income. No healthcare. No connection to mental health services. No active substance use treatment. Relationships with family had deteriorated after years of addiction and instability. Most importantly, he had reached a point where he no longer knew what to do next.

As we began talking, he spoke openly about the weight he had been carrying. The uncertainty of where he would sleep. The fear of relapsing. The shame of feeling like he had exhausted every opportunity.

Then he quietly said something I have thought about many times since: **“I just don't know what to do from here.”**

Those words captured what so many participants experience when they first come through our doors. Not hopelessness. Exhaustion. When someone has spent years navigating addiction, incarceration, fractured relationships, and systemic barriers, knowing where to begin again can feel impossible.

Responding in the Moment

One of the greatest strengths of our community is the willingness of partners to respond immediately when someone needs help.

Recognizing the urgency of this participant's situation, we contacted **Chase** with the **Post Overdose Response Team (PORT)**. Within fifteen minutes, Chase arrived at our office. There was no waiting list. No complicated referral process. No instructions to call someone else. He simply showed up. Together, we completed an intake, discussed harm reduction strategies, explored treatment options, and began building a plan.

As the conversation unfolded, something remarkable happened. The participant lowered his head, covered his face with his hands, and began crying. After several quiet moments, he looked up and said, **“I never thought I'd be in such a hard place at this age in my life.”** Then, after another pause, **“I'm really thankful for all your help.”**

Those words were never about transportation assistance. Or referrals. Or paperwork.

They reflected something much deeper. For perhaps the first time in a long time, someone believed he wasn't facing this journey alone.

Small Steps Become Big Changes

The weeks that followed did not bring immediate transformation. They brought consistency. One appointment led to another. He reconnected with medical providers. Healthcare providers helped stabilize chronic medical needs. Behavioral health services addressed anxiety and depression that

had gone untreated. Substance use treatment strengthened his recovery. As his confidence began returning, he secured employment.

Shortly afterward, he contacted the LRC again. This time, he wasn't asking for emergency assistance. He simply needed work clothes and steel-toed boots so he could start his new job. Helping him purchase those items may seem like a small act. In reality, it removed one more obstacle standing between him and long-term stability. Sometimes success depends on something as simple as having the right pair of boots.

Hope Creates Momentum

As the weeks turned into months, something even more meaningful began happening. His family noticed. They saw him showing up for work. Keeping appointments. Remaining engaged in treatment. Taking responsibility. Slowly, conversations reopened. Trust began returning.

Eventually, his family welcomed him back into their home. Soon afterward, they provided him with a vehicle so he could travel to work independently.

By every measurable standard, his circumstances had improved. He had housing. Employment. Transportation. Healthcare. Recovery support.

But those accomplishments are not what I remember most. What stays with me is the way he carried himself six months later.

The first time we met, he rarely made eye contact. His shoulders remained slumped. Every conversation felt weighed down by uncertainty.

Six months later, he walked into the office differently. His posture had changed. His confidence had returned. He smiled more easily. The job mattered. The home mattered. The car mattered. But the greatest transformation was something much harder to measure. He believed in himself again.



Beyond the Numbers

This participant represents far more than one successful case. He represents what becomes possible when systems work together. When healthcare providers respond immediately. When transportation removes barriers. When employment opportunities exist. When families are willing to offer another chance. When community organizations refuse to let someone navigate reentry alone.

No single agency changed his life. A community did.

Supporting the Whole Person

Stories like this remind us that successful reentry is never about addressing one need in isolation.

Throughout Fiscal Year 2025-2026, participants sought assistance with housing, employment, transportation, food, healthcare, behavioral health, substance use treatment, legal concerns, identification documents, financial assistance, clothing, and family reunification.

Each need influenced another. Someone cannot focus on employment if they are hungry. They cannot maintain employment without transportation. They cannot secure housing without income. They cannot sustain any of those gains without hope.

This interconnected reality continues to shape how the Orange County LRC approaches case management. We do not simply connect people to services. We help connect the pieces of their lives back together.

Why This Matters

This year reinforced something that cannot be captured in a spreadsheet or annual performance measure. People rarely remember every referral they receive. They remember how someone made them feel during one of the hardest moments of their lives. They remember whether someone answered the phone. Whether someone followed through. Whether someone believed they were capable of building a different future.

At the Orange County LRC, we believe those moments matter. Because behind every successful outcome is a relationship built on trust, dignity, and hope. Those relationships remain the heart of our work and the foundation upon which lasting change is built.

Chapter Five

The Power of Partnership: Building a Community That Says “Yes” to Second Chances

“No single organization can remove every barrier a person faces after incarceration. But when organizations choose to work together, barriers begin to fall.”

Reentry Is a Community Responsibility

One of the greatest lessons reinforced throughout Fiscal Year 2025-2026 was that successful reentry is never accomplished by one agency acting alone.

The Orange County LRC serves as a convener, bringing together organizations, government agencies, nonprofit leaders, faith communities, educators, healthcare providers, employers, and individuals with lived experience around one common purpose: helping people successfully return home.

Every participant who enters our office arrives with a unique combination of strengths and challenges. Some need housing. Others need employment, healthcare, transportation, recovery support, or simply someone willing to help navigate unfamiliar systems.

No single agency possesses every answer. Fortunately, no single agency has to.

This year's accomplishments were made possible because of a community that continues to say “yes” when asked to help.

Relationships Before Referrals

Throughout this report, one theme has emerged repeatedly: Relationships matter.

Many people assume partnerships begin when a referral is made. But that’s not the case, partnerships begin months—and sometimes years—before anyone picks up the phone asking for assistance. They begin when organizations consistently attend meetings. When agencies show up for one another's events. When promises are kept. When trust is earned.

This year reaffirmed something I have always believed: Showing up matters.

It is just as important for the Orange County LRC to show up for our community partners as it is for our participants to show up for services. When our partners see us consistently engaged, advocating, collaborating, and following through, trust develops. That trust makes difficult conversations easier. It opens doors for our participants. It encourages creative problem-solving. Most importantly, it creates a network of professionals who understand they are working toward the same goal. Our participants benefit from relationships they may never even realize exist.

Housing Partnerships That Create Stability

Housing continued to be one of the greatest challenges facing participants this year.

As affordable housing options became increasingly scarce, partnerships became even more valuable. Throughout the year, our collaboration with **Reentry House Plus** continued to grow into one of the strongest examples of coordinated reentry support.

What makes this partnership successful is not simply the availability of transitional housing. It is the communication. The willingness to collaborate. The shared understanding that successful reentry requires more than a place to sleep.

The Program Director consistently worked alongside the LRC to ensure RHP residents remained connected to employment opportunities, healthcare, transportation, behavioral health services, and long-term planning. Rather than working independently, we worked as one team.

We also remained grateful for our continued partnerships with **Wonderful House, Creative Directions, Oxford House**, and housing advocates throughout Orange County. Each organization contributes something unique to our community's housing continuum.

Together, they create opportunities that would not exist otherwise.



Employment Begins with Opportunity

Finding employment after incarceration remains one of the greatest challenges participants face. While many employers express support for second chances, translating that support into hiring opportunities often requires ongoing relationship-building.

This year, the Orange County LRC intentionally focused on strengthening workforce partnerships rather than simply increasing referrals. Our partnership with **Durham Technical Community College** was revitalized, reconnecting participants with Human Resources Development (HRD) classes and the **More Than Just a Job** Program.

These programs provide far more than classroom instruction. They help participants rebuild confidence, develop workplace skills, and prepare for sustainable careers.

Referrals through **NCWorks** continued throughout the year, connecting participants with employment specialists, job fairs, résumé assistance, and career exploration opportunities.

The LRC also expanded outreach to employers including **Lane Construction** and **Flagger Force**, organizations recognized for providing meaningful employment opportunities within industries offering competitive wages and opportunities for advancement.

These conversations remain ongoing. Building second-chance employment opportunities is not accomplished through one meeting or one hiring event. It is built through trust, persistence, and employers willing to recognize potential instead of focusing solely on someone's past.

Education Creates New Possibilities

Education remains one of the most powerful investments someone can make during reentry. Whether pursuing a GED, workforce certification, financial literacy, or career development, education provides individuals with tools that extend well beyond employment.

Throughout the year, participants were connected to educational opportunities through Durham Tech, workforce partners, and community organizations committed to lifelong learning.

Many participants entered services believing their opportunities had ended because of their criminal record. Education reminds people that growth is still possible. It reinforces that their future can be different from their past.

Meeting Immediate Needs with Dignity

One aspect of reentry work that often receives little attention is the importance of meeting immediate needs. Before someone can focus on long-term goals, they must first address today's challenges.



Throughout Fiscal Year 2025–2026, LRC participants received assistance with:

- Work clothing
- Steel-toed boots
- Hygiene supplies
- Grocery and gas gift cards
- Phones and minutes
- Baby supplies
- Transportation assistance
- Identification documents
- Rental assistance
- Emergency housing support



These resources may appear modest on paper, but they often determine whether someone can begin working, attend an interview, care for their family, or simply maintain their dignity while navigating difficult circumstances. Meeting immediate needs creates the stability necessary to pursue long-term success.

Volunteers and Interns Strengthen Our Mission

The Orange County LRC also benefited from the generosity of community members who freely shared their time and talents. This year, five dedicated volunteers and interns contributed approximately **45 hours** supporting the LRC through:



- Community presentations
- Transportation assistance
- Financial literacy education
- Client fundraising efforts
- Outreach events
- Reentry Month activities

Volunteer hours cannot be measured solely by time. Every hour represented another conversation, another participant supported, another relationship strengthened, and another opportunity created. Their willingness to invest in this work demonstrates that successful reentry truly belongs to the entire community.



Community Leadership Beyond Our Walls

The LRC's partnerships also extended into broader community leadership.

Participation on county and regional committees—including Housing for All, HOME Committee, Vibrant Communities, Coordinated Entry Housing Committee, Chapel Hill Debt Fund Committee, and the NC-513 Continuum of Care Nominations Committee—allowed the voices of justice-involved individuals to remain present in conversations shaping housing policy, homelessness response, and community planning.

These meetings influence the systems our participants navigate every day. Advocacy at these tables helps create stronger pathways long before someone ever walks through our office door.

Beyond the Numbers

One of the greatest misconceptions about partnership is that it simply means organizations exchanging referrals. True partnership looks different. It looks like a PORT navigator arriving within minutes because someone is in crisis. It looks like a housing provider answering the phone after hours. It looks like an employer willing to interview someone others overlooked.

It looks like volunteers collecting welcome bags because they believe everyone deserves to come home with dignity. It looks like community organizations choosing collaboration over competition. Those moments are often where transformation begins.

Why This Matters

As I reflect on this year, I am reminded that the Orange County LRC is not defined by the walls of our office. It is defined by the people who continue choosing to work together. Every community partner. Every volunteer. Every committee member. Every employer. Every housing provider. Every person with lived experience willing to share their story.



Each has contributed to building a stronger network of support for individuals returning home from incarceration. Together, we have created something far greater than a collection of services. We have built a community that believes second chances are not simply possible—they are worth investing in. That belief continues to guide our work, strengthen our partnerships, and shape the future of reentry in Orange County.

Chapter Six

Looking Forward: Building on a Strong Foundation

“Every year teaches us something. This year taught us that when we invest in relationships, strengthen our systems, and keep people at the center of our work, meaningful change follows.”

Moving Forward with Purpose

As we embark on Fiscal Year 2026-2027, there is a genuine sense of optimism surrounding the Orange County LRC. Not because the work has become easier. Not because the challenges facing individuals returning home have diminished. But because last fiscal year demonstrated what is possible when a community commits itself to building something stronger together.

We leave last fiscal year with stronger leadership, deeper community partnerships, renewed organizational energy, and a clearer vision for the future than ever before. That foundation will continue guiding our work in Fiscal Year 2026-2027.

Continuing to Strengthen Leadership

One of the most important accomplishments this year was strengthening the organizational structure of the Orange County LRC. The redesigned Executive Committee, newly elected officers, revised policies and procedures, and increased stakeholder engagement have positioned the Council for long-term success.

This year, our focus will shift from building the structure to empowering that structure. Executive Committee members will continue taking active leadership roles in planning initiatives, identifying community needs, strengthening partnerships, and helping shape the strategic direction of the LRC.

This shared leadership model ensures that the work of the Council reflects the voices and expertise of the community it serves.

Expanding Capacity

One of the most exciting developments for Fiscal Year 2026-2027 is the anticipated addition of a **part-time Case Manager**.

Over the past year, participant needs have continued to grow in both number and complexity. Adding another member to the team represents much more than increased staffing. It means:

- More individualized support.
- Faster response to participant needs.
- Greater follow-up.
- Stronger community outreach.
- Increased capacity to develop partnerships.

- Additional time dedicated to case planning and resource navigation.

As demand for services continues to increase, expanding our team will allow the LRC to continue providing the relationship-centered approach that has become the hallmark of our work.

Expanding Housing Opportunities

Housing will remain our greatest priority. Although remarkable progress has been made through partnerships with Reentry House Plus, Wonderful House, Creative Directions, Oxford House, and local housing providers, the demand for affordable housing continues to outpace available resources.

During the coming year, the Orange County LRC will continue advocating through:

- Housing for All
- HOME Committee
- Coordinated Entry
- County housing initiatives
- Community partnerships

We also hope to strengthen relationships with landlords willing to provide second-chance housing opportunities.

Creating housing opportunities requires more than financial assistance. It requires education, trust, advocacy, and community collaboration. That work will continue.

Strengthening Employment Partnerships

Employment remains one of the strongest indicators of successful reentry.

During this new fiscal year, we intend to continue expanding partnerships with employers who recognize the value of hiring individuals with lived experience. Building upon relationships established last year with Durham Technical Community College, NCWorks, Lane Construction, Flagger Force, and workforce development partners, we will continue exploring opportunities that lead participants toward meaningful careers rather than temporary employment.

Our goal is not simply to help participants obtain jobs. It is to help them build careers capable of supporting themselves and their families.

Transportation Remains a Priority

This year fundamentally changed how we think about transportation. What once appeared to be one supportive service among many became one of the most significant predictors of participant success. Reliable transportation opens doors to employment, housing, healthcare, education, recovery services, and family connections.

As we move into the next fiscal year, sustaining transportation resources remains one of our highest priorities. We will continue seeking opportunities to leverage funding and partnerships that reduce transportation barriers throughout Orange County, particularly for participants living outside existing public transit routes.

Investing in Community Partnerships

The Orange County LRC has never viewed community partnerships as optional. They are essential.

The coming year presents exciting opportunities to deepen existing relationships while welcoming new organizations into the reentry network. Partnership development will remain focused on:

- Affordable housing
- Employment
- Education
- Healthcare
- Behavioral health
- Recovery support
- Financial literacy
- Family reunification
- Legal assistance
- Community engagement

As our network continues to grow, so does our collective ability to respond creatively and effectively to participant needs.

Elevating Lived Experience

One of the most meaningful developments this year has been the continued inclusion of individuals with lived experience in leadership. The Orange County LRC believes that the people closest to the challenges of reentry often have the greatest insight into improving systems.

Individuals like Executive Committee member Joseph Whatley demonstrate what is possible when lived experience is welcomed into leadership rather than viewed solely through the lens of past involvement with the justice system.

In this new year, we hope to create even more opportunities for returning citizens to participate in planning, leadership, presentations, mentoring, and community education. Nothing builds credibility more effectively than someone who has walked the journey themselves.



Continuing to Change the Conversation

Perhaps one of the LRC's greatest responsibilities extends beyond providing direct services.

It involves changing how our community thinks about reentry. Every presentation. Every committee meeting. Every Reentry Month event. Every Transformation Tuesday story. Every employer conversation. Every volunteer opportunity. Each one helps replace misconceptions with understanding. People returning home are not defined solely by their convictions.

They are parents. Veterans. Neighbors. Employees. Students. Volunteers. Faith leaders. Community members.

When communities begin seeing potential instead of labels, opportunities begin to expand.

Changing that conversation remains central to our mission.

A Personal Reflection

As I reflect on this last year, I find myself returning to one simple truth. This work is about people.

It is about the father trying to reconnect with his children. The mother searching for safe housing. The participant celebrating 90 days of sobriety. The employer willing to offer someone a second chance. The community partner who answers the phone after hours. The volunteer who quietly gives their time expecting nothing in return. The Executive Committee member who believes enough in this mission to help shape its future.

The work can be difficult. There are days when housing cannot be found. When resources are limited. When barriers seem impossible to overcome.

But there are also days when someone receives the keys to a new home. Days when a participant proudly shares their first paycheck. Days when families begin speaking again after years of separation. Days when someone walks into the office carrying themselves differently because they have started believing in themselves again. Those moments remind us why this work matters.

Beyond the Numbers

At the beginning of this report, we introduced the theme **Beyond the Numbers**.

As we conclude, that theme feels even more meaningful.

Yes, this year included:

- **190 active participants**
- **106 individuals served**
- **86 new enrollments**
- **1,245 documented services**
- Hundreds of referrals
- Countless appointments
- New partnerships
- New leadership
- New opportunities

Those accomplishments deserve recognition.

But they are not the story. The story is found in the conversations. The relationships. The trust. The courage it takes to ask for help. The willingness of a community to answer that request with compassion rather than judgment.

Closing Reflection

The Orange County LRC was founded on the belief that successful reentry strengthens not only individuals but entire communities.

Last year reaffirmed that belief. Together, we rebuilt an Executive Committee grounded in purpose. We strengthened partnerships that continue opening doors. We expanded opportunities for employment, housing, transportation, education, healthcare, and recovery. We amplified the voices of individuals with lived experience. We invited our community into conversations that challenged assumptions and inspired action. Most importantly, we stood beside people during some of the most difficult moments of their lives and reminded them that their future is not defined by their past.

The work ahead remains significant. Housing will continue to challenge us. Employment barriers will remain. Transportation needs will persist.

Yet we move forward with confidence because we know we are not doing this work alone. Together—with community partners, volunteers, employers, housing providers, advocates, faith communities, county leadership, and individuals who have experienced reentry firsthand—we are building something stronger than a program. We are building a community where second chances are not just encouraged. They are expected.

And that is a future worth continuing to build.

Executive Committee Roster

Elected Officers

Chair, Kathleen Ferguson, Commissioner, Hillsborough Board of Commissioners

Vice Chair, Celisa Lehew, Chief of Police, Chapel Hill Police Department

Secretary, Danielle Carman, Director, Criminal Justice Resource Department

Members

Community Supervision/Probation and Parole

Toni V. Lewis, Chief Probation Parole Officer, DAC

Orange Correctional Center

Amanda Cobb, Warden, Orange Correctional Center

Employment/Former Justice Involved

Joseph Whatley, Employment Specialist, Caramore

Housing

Danielle DeCaprio, Homeless Program Manager, Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness

Education/Workforce Development

Candace Rashada, Director, Human Resources Development, Durham Tech

IFC/CEF

Crystell Ferguson, Community Service Navigation Manager, IFC

Community Power-Building Organization

Julia Sendor, Lead Organizer, Justice United

Recovery/Reentry Community

Paula Harrington, Special Projects Coordinator, Oxford House, Inc.

Subcommittee Chairs

Basic Needs Committee Co-chairs, Toni Lewis and Paula Harrington

Housing Committee Co-chairs, Danielle DeCaprio and Julia Sendor

Acknowledgments

The Orange County LRC extends sincere appreciation to every participant, community partner, volunteer, Executive Committee member, CJRD staff member, Orange County leadership, the DAC, and the many organizations whose collaboration made this year possible.

Your willingness to believe in second chances continues to create opportunities that change lives.

Together, we are rebuilding relationships, restoring hope, and strengthening our community—one person, one partnership, and one opportunity at a time.