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Media Advisory

New Returning Home Career Grant Pilot Program to Improve Life Outcomes for Justice-Involved Adults

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ALAMEDA COUNTY, CA – Rubicon Programs, as the lead agency in the Better Careers Design Group (BCDG), will launch the pilot of the Returning Home Career Grant this month to support at least fifteen justice-involved adults in Alameda County. Collaborating on this project since 2020, the BCDG is a partnership composed of five prominent organizations: Rubicon Programs, Alameda County Workforce Development Board, Growth Sector, Alameda County Probation Department, and Third Sector. With seed support from the James Irvine Foundation, the project features two primary components aimed at improving quality of life and economic outcomes for adults who are returning home from incarceration.

The first component of the project is providing direct monetary and mentorship support to those re-entering the workforce following incarceration. Participants selected for the pilot will receive a \$1500 monthly stipend for 9-18 months. This model represents a larger monthly investment over a longer period of time than other regional stipend programs aimed at providing a guaranteed basic income, representing a total investment of up to \$27,000 per participant in stipends alone. The monthly stipend is unrestricted for the participants, meaning there are no reporting or expense tracking requirements tied to receiving the funds. Participants will have the ability to spend the funds as needed for basic needs such as shelter, food, transportation, or other expenses that would otherwise be a burden to cover while working towards their career goals.

Dr. Carole “DC” Dorham-Kelly, President and CEO of Rubicon Programs, emphasizes that unrestricted grant support is a vital investment in facilitating the individual and community shifts that the project aims to create. “Incorporating best practices from established GBI programs, minimizing restrictions on how beneficiaries can use the funds is essential to maximize flexibility and true impact on quality of life,” Dorham-Kelly says. “This level of unrestricted support to a community that has long been distrusted, discounted, and kept on the fringes aims to ignite new narratives of equity, inclusion, and worthiness.”

The pilot cohort will be limited to referrals received from eligible Community Based Organizations (CBOs) providing pre-release and post-release services to justice-involved adults. Select CBO partners will nominate participants who are engaged in their programs and services, for whom this grant opportunity will alleviate barriers to employment and career mobility. In addition to financial support,

the partner CBOs will provide one-on-one mentorship and goal support. Mentors will help participants map out their career pathways, explore county resources or services, and keep track of their achievements.

The second component of the project is developing a Fair Chance Hiring Video for employers. This multi-media tool will build the capacity and awareness of local employers who are uncertain of the benefits and considerations for hiring justice-involved job applicants. The video will feature snapshots of people leaving jail or prison, navigating various circumstances, pursuing career goals, and successfully entering diverse industries. The goal of the digital piece is to encourage more employers to support, train, and hire more justice-involved adults directly.

By focusing a portion of the pilot on confronting stereotypes around justice-involved job seekers, the project will address systemic barriers to career mobility in addition to individual challenges. The video will address common assumptions about justice-involved individuals in an effort to change employers' hearts and minds, particularly about people with "serious" or "violent" convictions.

Donté Blue, Rubicon's Chief of Programs, explains the significance of the video component to the project. "This video is important because we have always felt finding the best worker from the entire pool of potential employees is a good business decision," Blue says. "But more importantly, while everyone in the community tends to agree reducing crime is a good thing, giving work that can sustain a formerly incarcerated person and their family is a proven crime prevention strategy at work."

Through an equity-based continuous improvement plan, the BCDG will collect information from career grant recipients, engaged employers, and mentorship partners to better understand their experiences and outcomes and make appropriate adjustments over the course of the pilot. The goal is to learn from and improve upon the project over the course of the 18-month pilot so that participation leads to improved economic outcomes and quality of life for justice-involved individuals. The BCDG expects that the success of the project will lead to an extension beyond the pilot period.

Rubicon Programs received seed funding of \$500,000 from the James Irvine Foundation for the pilot's first year, which coincides with the 2022 calendar year. Without additional funding, the duration of support will be limited to 9 months, rather than the 18-month design. Additional unrestricted funding is being sought by Third Sector and Rubicon Programs to support the pilot through the remaining six months, as well as to expand the project to serve up to 25 individuals. Ongoing funding to support the program beyond the initial pilot is also being prospected from public and philanthropic sources.

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Rubicon Programs transforms East Bay communities by equipping people to break the cycle of poverty. Since 1973, Rubicon Programs has provided job training and placement, financial education, behavioral health, and other supportive services to low-income people in Contra Costa County, and in Alameda County since 2005, in order to break the cycle of poverty. Today, Rubicon operates sites in Antioch, Concord, Oakland, Hayward, and Richmond. Learn more at www.rubiconprograms.org.