

## Promising Practices

### Supporting Rural Reentry: Benevolence Farm, a Promising Reentry Initiative

Formerly incarcerated individuals are [10 times](#) more likely to experience homelessness in comparison to the general population. Finding housing, especially after a longer sentence or in a rural community, compounds these challenges. One innovative program, [Benevolence Farm](#), in Graham, North Carolina, provides transitional housing and employment for people returning home from prison and/or jail.

Benevolence Farm is one of the only housing programs that accepts women and gender-expansive people, including non-binary and trans individuals, regardless of their criminal conviction, sentence length and/or diagnosis of a behavioral health condition. Individuals are eligible to live at Benevolence Farm upon release from any correctional facility across the state—once accepted into the program a staff member brings them to the farm, which sits on 13 acres in a rural part of the state. Program participants grow and sell produce, flowers and herbs and create body care products from the items grown, which are sold [online](#) and at local markets. In 2016, the first resident arrived; since then, over 50 individuals have called the farm home.

#### About Benevolence Farm



Residents are paid for working on the farm between eight to 24 hours a week, with the remaining time focused on reacclimating to life outside prison/jail, healing and attending needed appointments. After six months of living on the farm, program participants are encouraged to seek offsite employment. Importantly, farm staff ensure residents have guaranteed transportation to work as well as to parole meetings, interviews and/or attending doctor's appointments. In terms of self-healing and responding to trauma,

Benevolence Farm staff have connections in the community but ultimately encourage residents to choose their own path to healing, whether that be through cognitive behavioral therapy, a counselor or spirituality. Program staff stress the importance and power of person-centered trauma-informed reentry pathways.

Residents can live on the farm for up to two years, with staff helping program participants obtain identification, permanent housing, supportive services and anything else they may need. Additionally, residents receive employment and job readiness programming—learning small business skills, sustainable farming and more.

#### Program Success and Expansion

The Rural Justice Collaborative has named Benevolence Farm one of its [25 most innovative rural justice programs](#), and the program continues to grow to meet the need for transitional housing in the state. A second house opened in downtown Burlington—which allows residents to obtain community-based employment, and there are plans underway to build [seven tiny homes](#) by 2025 on the farm grounds to allow residents to live independently but within the context of a supportive community. In 2023, the program launched the Housing First Fund, which helps pay security deposits for permanent housing for formerly incarcerated individuals—



this fund has successfully connected 20 families to housing. Assistance with security deposits is especially important, particularly because many [landlords and property managers](#) double the deposit amount if the renter is formerly incarcerated.

One of the primary successes of Benevolence Farm is its person-centered and holistic approach. For example, depending on their conviction, some formerly incarcerated individuals cannot receive SNAP benefits, so the program encourages residents to eat produce and eggs from the farm itself and provides gift cards to residents allowing them to purchase food at local grocery stores. Although the program releases an [impact report](#) every year, Benevolence Farm is [redefining the metrics of success](#) for reentry programs—to include reunifying with family members, securing permanent housing and other key markers.

Benevolence Farm serves as an innovative model because it addresses the barriers preventing successful reentry, one person at a time, specifically helping those in rural areas of the state.

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Practice from your  
jurisdiction you  
want to share?

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