

June 16, 2012

# As Escapees Stream Out, a Penal Business Thrives

By **SAM DOLNICK**

After serving more than a year behind bars in New Jersey for assaulting a former girlfriend, David Goodell was transferred in 2010 to a sprawling halfway house in Newark. One night, Mr. Goodell escaped, but no one in authority paid much notice. He headed straight for the suburbs, for another young woman who had spurned him, and he killed her, the police said.

The state sent Rafael Miranda, incarcerated on drug and weapons charges, to a similar halfway house, and he also escaped. He was finally arrested in 2010 after four months at large, when, prosecutors said, he shot a man dead on a Newark sidewalk — just three miles from his halfway house.

Valeria Parziale had 15 aliases and a history of drugs and burglary. Nine days after she slipped out of a halfway house in Trenton in 2009, Ms. Parziale, using a folding knife, nearly severed a man's ear in a liquor store. She was arrested and charged with assault but not escape. Prosecutors say they had no idea she was a fugitive.

After decades of tough criminal justice policies, states have been grappling with crowded prisons that are straining budgets. In response to those pressures, New Jersey has become a leader in a national movement to save money by diverting inmates to a new kind of privately run halfway house.

At the heart of the system is a company with deep connections to politicians of both parties, most notably Gov. [Chris Christie](#).

Many of these halfway houses are as big as prisons, with several hundred beds, and bear little resemblance to the neighborhood halfway houses of the past, where small groups of low-level offenders were sent to straighten up.

New Jersey officials have called these large facilities an innovative example of privatization and have promoted the approach all the way to the Obama White House.

Yet with little oversight, the state's halfway houses have mutated into a shadow corrections network, where drugs, gang activity and violence, including sexual assaults, often go unchecked, according to a 10-month investigation by The New York Times.

Perhaps the most unsettling sign of the chaos within is inmates' ease in getting out.

Since 2005, roughly 5,100 inmates have escaped from the state's privately run halfway houses, including at least 1,300 in the 29 months since Governor Christie took office, according to an analysis by The Times.

Some inmates left through the back, side or emergency doors of halfway houses, or through smoking areas, state records show. Others placed dummies in their beds as decoys, or fled while being returned to prison for violating halfway houses' rules. Many had permission to go on work-release programs but then did not return.

While these halfway houses often resemble traditional correctional institutions, they have much less security. There are no correction officers, and workers are not allowed to restrain inmates who try to leave or to locate those who do not come back from work release, the most common form of escape. The halfway houses' only recourse is to alert the authorities.

And so the inmates flee in a steady stream: 46 last September, 39 in October, 40 in November, 38 in December, state records show.

"The system is a mess," said Thaddeus B. Caldwell, who spent four years tracking down halfway house escapees in New Jersey as a senior corrections investigator. "No matter how many escaped, no matter how many were caught, no matter how many committed heinous acts while they were on the run, they still kept releasing more guys into the halfway houses, and it kept happening over and over again."

By contrast, the state's prisons had three escapes in 2010 and none in the first nine months of 2011, the last period for which the state gave figures.

After The Times began its investigation last year, Mr. Christie adopted measures that his aides said would more tightly regulate the system. They said that because of these reforms, only 181 inmates had escaped in the first five months of 2012 — a 35 percent decline when compared with a similar period in 2009, before he took office.

But over several months of inquiries from The Times, state officials also revised downward the escape totals during Mr. Christie's tenure.

Many inmates who escape from halfway houses are recaptured within hours or days, or turn themselves in after having second thoughts. But many remain at large for weeks, if not months, and are caught only after committing new crimes.

They have been arrested on charges of assaulting police officers, holding up a gas station and shooting strangers. They have been found selling drugs outside Newark schools and wielding a knife inside a Cape May bus station. Some have been caught as far away as Miami.

At least 85 inmates are currently at large, according to state records.

These men and women could be charged with felonies for escaping but typically are not. Usually, they are simply returned to prison to finish their original sentences. Some end up back at halfway houses.

The Times's investigation encompassed more than 200 interviews with current and former halfway house workers, inmates, officials and others, as well as a review of thousands of pages of government, court and corporate records.

Mr. Christie, a Republican who took office in January 2010, has for years championed the company that plays a principal role in the New Jersey system, [Community Education Centers](#).

Community Education received about \$71 million from state and county agencies in New Jersey in the 2011 fiscal year, out of total halfway house spending of roughly \$105 million, according to state and company records.

The company first obtained substantial contracts for its "re-entry centers" in New Jersey in the late 1990s, as state financing began increasing sharply. In recent years, it has cited its success in New Jersey in obtaining government contracts in Colorado, Pennsylvania and other states.

William J. Palatucci, who is the governor's close friend, [political adviser](#) and former law partner, is a senior vice president at Community Education.

Mr. Christie himself was registered as a lobbyist for the company in 2000 and 2001 when he was a private lawyer, according to disclosure reports that his law firm filed with the state. In early 2010, he hired the son-in-law of Community Education's chief executive as an assistant in the governor's office, according to state personnel records.

And as United States attorney for New Jersey and then governor, Mr. Christie has often visited the company's halfway houses and praised its work. The company has highlighted those visits in its publicity material.

"Places like this are to be celebrated," Mr. Christie said in a 2010 speech at a 1,200-bed Community Education facility in Newark, a speech [featured](#) on the company's Web site.

"A spotlight should be put on them as representing the very best of the human spirit," he said. "Because as you walk through here, as I've done many times, what you see right before your very eyes are miracles happening."

Mr. Christie would not be interviewed for this article.

In a statement, his spokesman, Michael Drewniak, said Community Education had been "associated with public contracting in New Jersey going back no less than 18 years to the administration of Gov. James Florio and every governor, Democrat or Republican, since that time."

"The suggestion of favoritism is defeated by the demonstrable fact that none has occurred," Mr. Drewniak said.

Mr. Drewniak emphasized that Mr. Christie had had a deep interest in improving drug treatment and other services for prisoners since his days as a county lawmaker in the 1990s.

Community Education said it had developed a highly successful model of “community corrections” that had improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of inmates across the country. It said the rate of escapes at its halfway houses in New Jersey was “staggeringly low,” given the many people who go through the system. And it blamed other halfway house operators for allowing escapes of inmates whom Community Education had first handled.

“To focus on walkaways from halfway houses would be to report on only part of the story and not include the positive outcomes for the majority of offenders who complete a halfway house program without walking away,” the company said in a statement.

Roughly 10,000 prison inmates and parolees a year — equivalent to about 40 percent of the state prison population — now pass through the system of halfway houses; most spend time at a Community Education halfway house.

But regulation by a patchwork of state and county agencies has been lax. The state comptroller [determined](#) last year that there were “crucial weaknesses in state oversight.”

The Christie administration began fining Community Education and other operators for escapes only in April, eight months after The Times undertook its investigation.

The Legislature has not scrutinized the system either.

Assemblyman Charles Mainor, a Democrat and police detective who is chairman of the Law and Public Safety Committee, was asked for his estimate of how many people escaped from halfway houses in 2011.

“I have heard of no more than three,” he responded.

According to state records, the number was 452.

Assemblyman Sean T. Kean, a Republican, said of the escapes, “It’s not really a problem.”

“It’s a cheaper way of doing business,” he said of the system, “so that’s why it behooves us to use that option.”

‘The Greatest Times’

Viviana Tulli stuck out her tongue in family photos. She threw water balloons at friends. Once, to make her sister laugh, she took a running jump and dived into an eight-foot bush in front of their home in Garfield, N.J., a suburb of New York.

She had worked at a pet store — few animals were ever loved more than her Chihuahuas, Mikey and Hennessy — but had not settled on a career.

She was 16 when she met David Goodell, who was a decade older and claimed to be affiliated with the Bloods gang.

“Everybody had a bad feeling about him,” said Martha Galan, now 22, a close friend, who often shared secrets with Ms. Tulli on her family’s porch.

Mr. Goodell wore baggy jeans and oversize sweatshirts that swallowed his 140-pound frame. He had the temper and swagger of an insecure man trying to act tough.

He was arrested in 1997 for committing three robberies and then briefly spent time in Talbot Hall, a Community Education halfway house. In 2003, he was released on parole.

He worked as a warehouse packer and a truck driver but was arrested again in 2008, after he pinned a former girlfriend to the ground and threatened to kill her if she did not give him money.

While he was in custody on those charges, his romance with Ms. Tulli took off. He wrote her dozens of long letters addressed to “Supergirlfriend” or “Princess.” He promised her a future far from New Jersey.

“The times that are to come with you and I are gonna be the greatest times of both of our lives,” Mr. Goodell wrote.

His letters were filled with meticulous drawings shaded in pinks and blues — the two of them smiling in matching clothes, a tearful boy holding a flower for her.

Ms. Tulli told her parents he was just a pen pal, but she enjoyed the attention. She kept his letters in a folder hidden in her bedroom. She visited him and sent him photos of herself.

In September 2009, at the time of Mr. Goodell’s sentencing, Judge Nestor F. Guzman, of Superior Court in Passaic County, wrote that there was a “risk that defendant will commit another offense,” according to his case file.

Six months later, after 16 months behind bars, Mr. Goodell was paroled and transferred to a Community Education halfway house.

The company’s halfway houses, like others in the system, have varying degrees of security. Some allow inmates to leave on work release, and those facilities tend to have the most escapes. Other halfway houses are locked down, but restrictions are sometimes sidestepped.

Mr. Goodell was sent to Logan Hall, which in recent years had one of the highest totals of escapes in the halfway house system — 185 from 2009 through 2011, according to state records. There, he used a cellphone to call Ms. Tulli constantly. Inmates are not allowed to have them, but cellphones, like drugs and almost anything else, were readily obtainable in Logan, former workers and inmates said.

Finally, Ms. Tulli, who was 21, ended contact.

That set him off.

Mr. Goodell had often boasted to her that in prison he pretended to be ill to get privileges. On Aug. 29, 2010, at Logan Hall, he did so again, to seem as if he had a seizure, prosecutors said.

A low-level Community Education worker escorted him to University Hospital in Newark.

Many Community Education workers are paid little more than minimum wage and have previous job experience that amounted to operating a convenience store register. The worker, like all halfway-house employees, had no authority to restrain Mr. Goodell.

At the hospital, he slipped away.

He persuaded Ms. Tulli to meet him nearby in the middle of the night. Before she left, she poked her head in her mother's bedroom to say goodbye and wish her a happy birthday. Her mother turned 60 the next day.

At 1:11 p.m., the police received a phone call that a man covered in blood was standing in the Ridgely Park High School parking lot.

It was Mr. Goodell.

When the police arrived, Mr. Goodell jumped behind the wheel of Ms. Tulli's car and sped away. After a chase, he was cornered in a cul-de-sac.

Officers found Ms. Tulli's body in the passenger seat. She had been suffocated. Mr. Goodell, who had slashed his wrists, was charged with murder. The case is pending against Mr. Goodell, who is now 32.

In the days after the killing, Ms. Tulli's relatives took solace in announcements by the Christie administration and Community Education that they would conduct separate [inquiries](#) and consider adopting reforms.

"Use my sister as an example," her older sister, Stella Tulli, recalled thinking. "Security needs to be tightened in all aspects. There's money being funded, and there's no accountability."

And so they waited, hopefully, for the findings.

## A Growth Industry

When the system was created, the large halfway houses were intended to help low-level offenders toward the end of their sentences. Inmates would be housed in dormitory-style rooms and receive drug treatment, job counseling and other services.

Many experts praise the halfway-house model, saying that if facilities are well managed, inmates are less likely to return to crime. State officials and Community Education credit the system with helping to reduce the state's recidivism rate, as well as its prison population, which fell to 25,000 in 2010 from 30,000 in 2000, federal data show.

Community Education offered a tour of one of its facilities, the 500-bed Talbot Hall, showing off orderly group counseling sessions and tidy living spaces.

In interviews of inmates who had been in the company's halfway houses, some spoke highly of its programs.

"It taught me how to have patience, how to keep moving forward and stop looking back," said Sal Hemingway, 41, who was imprisoned on murder charges in the 1990s and was in a Community Education facility last year.

The financial incentive is also clear. The state spends about \$125 to \$150 a day to house an inmate in a prison. The corrections, parole and other government agencies in New Jersey pay roughly \$60 to \$75 per inmate per day to operators of halfway houses, including Community Education, based in West Caldwell, N.J.

But as the system has [grown](#), the percentage of New Jersey inmates convicted of violent crimes but lodged in halfway houses has been rising, to 21 percent now from 12 percent in 2006, according to state statistics. Their ranks currently include dozens of people serving time for murder, and hundreds convicted of armed robbery, assault or weapons possession — some of whom escaped.

At the same time, the state acknowledges that it has never examined whether the system helps inmates. Last year, the Christie administration commissioned a three-year study. Community Education has financed its own [research](#) that it says shows the success of its programs.

Mr. Christie has also established a task force to coordinate the state's efforts intended to help inmates as they leave prisons.

Over all, New Jersey's system has about 3,500 beds in two dozen or so halfway houses. Community Education runs six large facilities, with a total of 1,900 beds for state inmates and parolees, along with others for county and federal inmates.

Community Education's leading role in the system means that the company had been responsible at one point for many of the inmates who escaped.

All inmates transferred to halfway houses by the Corrections Department are required to first spend about two months at a Community Education halfway house that serves as an assessment center. □ Parolees generally do not. □

The company says it evaluates the inmates and recommends to the state which ones are low-risk and unlikely to escape. Those inmates are then transferred to other halfway houses — run by Community Education or other operators.

Thus, though facilities run by a nonprofit organization, [the Kintock Group](#), accounted for nearly half of the escapes in recent years, according to state records, many of those inmates arrived at Kintock after first being deemed low-risk by Community Education halfway houses. From 2009 through 2011, about 16 percent of escapes were from Community Education halfway houses, according to state data. Another 43 percent were inmates who had been evaluated by Community Education halfway houses and then escaped from others.

Robert Mackey, a senior vice president at Community Education, said in an interview that the company had excellent security and strove to prevent escapes by providing therapy and other services to discourage inmates from leaving.

“If somebody was climbing over that fence right now, our recourse would be to notify the authorities,” Dr. Mackey said. “We could not physically take them off the fence to restrain them from escaping.”

He added, “The staff here are not law-enforcement officers.”

The company said a better way to measure its security was to examine how few inmates escaped, given the tens of thousands who went through its facilities in recent years. It said that by its calculation, since 2005, 0.53 percent of inmates from the Corrections Department and 3.3 percent of inmates from the Parole Board had escaped.

Dr. Mackey said the company could not be held responsible for inmates who had entered the halfway house system through its facilities and then escaped from others. “We certainly didn’t cause the escape,” he said. “The other halfway houses also have to look at, what are they doing.”

David D. Fawcner, chairman of the Kintock Group, said he was surprised to learn of the frequency of escapes from Kintock halfway houses.

“The number does take me back a little bit,” he said.

Mr. Fawcner said halfway houses served a difficult population moving into the community.

“We’re not a prison,” he said. “Our job is not to keep them in.”

Kintock paid Mr. Fawcner \$778,316 in 2009 when he was chief executive, according to disclosure forms.

Last year, the New Jersey comptroller, Matthew Boxer, released an [audit](#) that found that many halfway houses had loose security, and that state inspections were lenient, if done at all. One halfway-house administrator had the dates for supposedly unannounced inspections noted in advance on a calendar.

“As a state, we have done a poor job of monitoring the program and have made no real attempt to find out what taxpayers are getting for their money,” Mr. Boxer said.

Experts said it was extremely difficult to compare halfway house escape rates among states because systems varied greatly.

But Mary Shilton, executive director of the [International Community Corrections Association](#), a trade group that supports the halfway house movement, said she was startled to hear of The Times’s findings on the numbers of escapes in New Jersey.

“Given that there will always be risk, are we doing our very best to respond to escapes at the state and local level?” she asked.

Gary M. Lanigan, the state corrections commissioner, who was appointed by Mr. Christie, defended the system.

“I’ve not been shown what I think is a better model,” Mr. Lanigan said in an interview.

Asked whether he felt pressure because of Community Education’s political ties, he said, “Absolutely not.”

He said the company obtained state contracts through an impartial bidding process that was “fair and insulated.”

Mr. Lanigan was told that state records showed that roughly 5,100 inmates under the supervision of the Corrections Department and Parole Board had escaped since 2005.

“That’s not a familiar number to me,” he said.

But he called escapes “a significant concern.”

“Acceptable is zero,” he said. “An escape is an escape.”

Mr. Lanigan said he was tightening oversight. In April, the department issued \$15,000 in fines against Community Education for three escapes last year. The department also fined Kintock \$5,000, and another nonprofit agency, CURA, \$10,000.

“I’ve been out to every one of the halfway houses more than once,” Mr. Lanigan said in the interview. “I’d venture a guess you’re not going to find one of the prior commissioners that ever did that.”

After the interview, the Corrections Department emphasized that inmates who fled halfway houses should be referred to as “walkaways” to distinguish them from inmates who escape prisons.

The term “walkaway,” though, does not exist in state law. Inmates who flee halfway houses can be charged with escaping or absconding, depending on which agency is supervising them. Both are felonies with a sentence of three to five years.

This month, the department also revised downward its calculation for the number of escapes in 2010 and 2011 by 15 percent. It said it had weeded out what it referred to as “technical violations,” including inmates who were listed as having escaped but merely returned late from work-release programs.

## Politics and Prisons

Last summer, many of New Jersey’s most powerful officials assembled for a wedding that bridged the worlds of politics and prisons.

The bride was Jessica Clancy, a daughter of John J. Clancy, Community Education’s founder and chief executive. The groom was Samuel Viavattine, whom Mr. Christie hired in 2010 as an assistant in the governor’s office. He is now paid \$42,000 a year.

Mr. Christie attended the wedding, as did State Senator Richard J. Codey, a Democrat who is a former governor and Senate president. He served as Community Education's insurance broker for many years and plays golf with Mr. Clancy.

Among others at the wedding was [Joseph N. DiVincenzo Jr.](#), the Essex County chief executive, a Democrat who is close to Mr. Christie.

The three elected officials and their associated party committees have received more than \$200,000 in campaign contributions from Community Education, its executives and their family members over the last decade, according to state records.

Mr. Clancy, who got his start running a drug-treatment center in Hoboken, was one of the first entrepreneurs to realize that halfway houses could be big business.

In New Jersey, as in many other states, expenditures for prisons have been among the fastest-rising. Mr. Clancy had an alluring sales pitch: Trenton could reduce costs and improve services by turning over inmates to Community Education.

In the 1990s, Mr. Clancy worked out an unusual arrangement. Under state law, only nonprofit agencies can receive contracts for halfway houses. But regulators allowed Community Education to obtain contracts through a nonprofit called Education and Health Centers of America, state records show.

That arrangement remains. The primary purpose of the nonprofit has been to pay Community Education hundreds of millions of dollars that the nonprofit has received in recent years from state and county agencies, disclosure records show. The nonprofit has only 10 employees, and gave Mr. Clancy a \$351,346 salary in its 2011 fiscal year, according to the records. Community Education itself, which is privately held, does not disclose how much it separately pays Mr. Clancy.

Early on, Mr. Clancy hired a law firm, Dughi, Hewit & Palatucci, to lobby in Trenton. Its lobbyists were Mr. Christie and Mr. Palatucci, who were close friends and rising political stars. Community Education and Mr. Christie's aides said Mr. Palatucci, not Mr. Christie, lobbied for the company, though both men were listed on disclosure forms.

Mr. Christie and Mr. Palatucci were major fund-raisers for George W. Bush's 2000 presidential campaign. After Mr. Bush won, Mr. Palatucci sent Mr. Christie's résumé to Karl Rove, the president's political strategist. Soon after, Mr. Bush picked Mr. Christie to be the United States attorney for New Jersey.

In that job, Mr. Christie had no direct role in the state corrections system. Even so, he regularly visited Community Education's facilities. He even attended the ribbon-cutting at the company's new corporate headquarters in 2007.

If Mr. Christie was gruff, Mr. Palatucci was unflappable. His dark hair was never out of place, and his suits always fit just so. He knew everyone in Republican circles.

In 2005, Mr. Clancy hired Mr. Palatucci as Community Education's senior vice president for business development, though he did not have major experience in corrections. The company said Mr. Palatucci does not lobby the Christie administration.

Shortly before Mr. Christie became governor, he formed a transition committee on prison policy that included Ralph Fretz, Community Education's director of assessment and research. Dr. Fretz pushed for more money for halfway houses, but others on the panel resisted. Nancy Wolff, director of the Center for Behavioral Health Services and Criminal Justice Research at Rutgers University, **clashed** with Dr. Fretz, who she says was trying to further Community Education's business interests during the discussions.

Dr. Wolff was not one to easily back down. She resembles a kindergarten teacher, with plain eyeglasses and hair tucked behind her ears, but she has spent much of the past two decades immersed in the prison system, interviewing inmates across the Northeast. Along the way, she has become a critic of New Jersey's halfway houses.

"This industry just infuriates me," she said in an interview. "If you want to go there and sit in peer-run groups — or hang out and smoke and play cards and have access to drugs — it's a great place."

Dr. Wolff sought cuts in the budget for halfway houses, in favor of more treatment inside prisons. When her proposal was removed from the preliminary report, she resigned.

In a statement, the company said: "Dr. Fretz did not 'skew' the final report. To the contrary, it reflected the consensus of and was approved by each of the members of the panel."

Currently, the Corrections Department has 11 percent fewer beds under contract with Community Education than it did when Mr. Christie succeeded Gov. Jon S. Corzine, a Democrat. But the company's revenue from the department has grown by 22 percent in that period, records show.

As re-entry has become a popular term across the country, Community Education has opened facilities in many states, using its New Jersey operations as a selling point.

"Building more prisons is not the answer to solving the problem of recidivism," Mr. Clancy said in a company news release. "The answer, in our view, is for departments of corrections nationwide to partner with organizations such as ours to help individuals permanently re-enter society."

With a polished public-relations arm, Community Education often publicizes testimonials from inmates who say their lives have been turned around by its halfway houses.

But problems have dogged the company's facilities. In Indiana last year, an inmate **died** after her pregnancy complications went untreated. In **Colorado**, state inspectors found evidence of fraud, and inmates described assaults, gang violence and rampant drug use.

Former executives of the company said it had financial problems after expanding too rapidly. The company defaulted on some of its debt in 2009, according to former executives and an employment lawsuit. In 2010, it borrowed at a steep interest rate of 15.25 percent, according to securities records.

Community Education's former chief financial officer, David N. T. Watson, who was hired in 2009, sued the company the next year. He asserted that Mr. Clancy lied about the financial problems when recruiting him and fired him without cause. In court papers, Mr. Watson called the company a "sinking ship."

Mr. Watson would not comment. Community Education denied the allegations. It said it had never defaulted on any of its debt.

Last year, the company saw a new opportunity: a **\$130 million contract** to house Essex County inmates and detained immigrants. It was the only bidder, proposing to use its 1,200-bed **Delaney Hall** in Newark.

Advocates for immigrants, who criticized conditions at Delaney Hall, charged that the process was **unfair**. They said the contract was written to ensure that only Community Education could qualify. Federal **immigration** authorities later acknowledged that they had been told by the county that the contract would go to Community Education.

And it did.

The official overseeing the bidding was Mr. DiVincenzo, the Essex County executive and ally of Mr. Christie.

'Could Never Keep Up'

Thaddeus B. Caldwell would jump in his car at 2 a.m. at the hint of a fresh lead. He kept his shoes polished, his suit pressed, his goatee neatly trimmed. He spoke so precisely that you could almost hear each punctuation mark.

But no matter how hard he tried, he never felt he was making headway.

"It was like an endless thing," he said. "If we apprehended 10, 10 more escaped, maybe 20 more escaped."

Mr. Caldwell, now 49, was part of a prestigious division of the Corrections Department that tracked down escaped prisoners. If the unit had been able to focus only on inmates who had fled prisons, there would have been little work.

But each month, numerous inmates escaped from halfway houses. The team of about six investigators had up to 200 cases at a time.

"You could never keep up," recalled Houston Miggins, 66, another former investigator.

The unit focused on violent fugitives, but there was no way of knowing who would snap. And many of the escaped inmates returned to crime.

"They really have no choice," Mr. Caldwell said. "They certainly can't get a legitimate job."

Mr. Caldwell grew up in Newark, and when he was working the streets, he would blend into the crowd, cajoling drug dealers and shopkeepers for information. He kept casual clothes in his trunk: Timberland boots, baggy jeans, an oversize T-shirt and a Pittsburgh Steelers cap, which he wore backward.

Raids to apprehend fugitives usually took place before dawn. Often, the convicts would try to elude capture by scampering out a window. Violence sometimes erupted.

The unit could not rely on other agencies for help. They had their own challenges.

Sheriff Armando B. Fontoura of Essex County, which is home to about 12 percent of halfway house inmates, said his office received numerous notices of escapes but lacked the staff to respond.

“It’s very, very frustrating for us,” Sheriff Fontoura said. “When you want to escape, it’s a very easy thing to do.”

Carnell Davis, who was serving a sentence for armed robbery, escaped from the Harbor, a Community Education halfway house then in Hoboken, in April 2005. Five months later, he was arrested and charged with killing a taxi driver and the man’s brother.

“I was responsible for catching him, but unfortunately, there were so many people on my caseload,” Mr. Caldwell said. “Who knew that he would be the one□

Corrections officials took no action against the Harbor or Community Education over the escape.

Mr. Caldwell said he remained surprised that after the Davis case and others like it, nothing changed.

“I used to think every time someone would get killed or there would be some outrage, there would be an instant outcry,” he said. “But then it would go away.

“There was nothing done about any particular halfway house that had an inordinate amount of escapes as opposed to any other,” he added. “It just appeared to be, that’s the way business was done.”

Mr. Caldwell retired from state corrections in 2009 and went to work for Community Education. He said he reasoned that he might help prevent escapes by improving security from the inside. But he resigned after less than a year, disillusioned with the company. He is currently an administrator at a New Jersey jail.

When the fugitive unit arrested escapees, the investigators often asked them why they had fled.

Some claimed the reason was dangerous conditions inside. Others shrugged. But Mr. Caldwell and his colleagues still puzzle over a basic question: Why would inmates escape from a halfway house only months before they would be freed□

Corrections officials maintain that the reason is often problems at home — a girlfriend takes up with someone else; a mother falls ill.

Mr. Caldwell and his colleagues say the large number of escapes from halfway houses is an indictment of the system. They argue that either the facilities are accepting the wrong kinds of inmates, or the services are not meaningful.

“They were touting these as such great programs,” Mr. Caldwell said. “If that’s the case, and inmates were getting such great benefits, why would they want to leave?”

### On the Run, but No Charges

Valeria Parziale was one of 19 inmates to escape from New Jersey halfway houses in one week in October 2009. She fled the Albert M. “Bo” Robinson Assessment and Treatment Center, a Community Education facility in Trenton that is intended to be more secure than other halfway houses, but had two escapes that day.

Nine days later, in a Newark liquor store, Ms. Parziale, now 33, attacked a man with a folding knife, cutting off part of his ear and slashing his face, prosecutors said. She was arrested and charged with aggravated assault and possession of a weapon.

But not escape.

Prosecutors in Essex County, where she was arrested, and Mercer County, where she had escaped, say that they were not aware that she was a fugitive, and that they learned of her status only after The Times alerted them to it more than two years later.

The establishment of the system of halfway houses amounted to a major change in corrections in New Jersey. But state and county agencies — prosecutors, the police, corrections officials — have done little to coordinate oversight.

Two months after Ms. Parziale escaped, Rafael Miranda fled the halfway house run by the Kintock group in Newark.

Four months later, Mr. [Miranda](#) pulled out a gun during an argument at the Stadium Sports Bar and Grill in Newark. He attacked a bouncer and then fatally shot another man, officials said.

Other examples abound, according to prosecutors:

- Leland Washington held up a gas station with a knife and tried to force an attendant into the bathroom.
- Aryam Mojica assaulted a police officer who pulled over his car.
- Hiram Rivera Jr. was caught with a cache of weapons and drugs.
- Marcus Jones pleaded guilty to a role in a shooting.

The failure to control the system extends to what happens after fugitives like these are captured: They typically are not charged. They are simply returned to prison to finish out their original sentences.

Approximately 1,000 inmates have fled halfway houses in Essex County since 2009. Yet the county prosecutor's office said it had pursued such charges in only about 100 cases in that time. And the office would provide information on only three.

"If they're gone for a relatively short period of time and turn themselves back in and face administrative consequences for that, that would tend to be cases we don't prosecute," said Carolyn A. Murray, the acting Essex prosecutor.

Among the escapes in Essex were those from Logan Hall, the Community Education halfway house in Newark that housed Mr. Goodell, who is charged in the killing of Ms. Tulli.

In fact, in the month when Ms. Tulli was killed, August 2010, 10 other inmates fled Logan Hall. Those 10 had been imprisoned on robbery, drug and weapons charges. After they escaped, they stayed out for an average of about 40 days. None of the 10 were charged for leaving, according to county records.

Five other inmates fled Logan Hall the next month, just after the Christie administration and Community Education, prompted by the Tulli case, promised inquiries into security at halfway houses.

Ms. Tulli's family had believed that the inquiries meant that the administration would reform the system. But nearly two years later, the family is still waiting for the findings.

Community Education said it had done an informal investigation and found no wrongdoing by the company. "It would be grossly irresponsible" to say the halfway house was in any way at fault, the company said.

"People have to be held accountable for their own behavior," said Dr. Mackey, the company's senior executive.

David W. Thomas, executive director of the State Parole Board, said it had conducted an inquiry, but he would offer no details.

Asked for a copy, Mr. Thomas said, "There is no actual document."

• • •

*To contact the reporter: sam.dolnick@nytimes.com.*

• • •

*Jo Craven McGinty, Sheelagh McNeill and Jack Styczynski contributed reporting.*

