

## **Housing After Prison: The Massachusetts Parole Board Model**

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### **Introduction**

In 2004, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Department of Correction received resources from the U.S. Department of Justice for prison construction, aimed at adding bed capacity to several state correctional institutions. With leadership from the state Executive Office of Public Safety, several key decisions were made to divert a significant portion of these funds to the Massachusetts Parole Board to develop and manage a reentry housing program where some of the new institutional bed capacity was transferred to the community. Simply put, the beds on the inside were brought to the outside.

With this reallocation of funds, Massachusetts joined a growing national trend of shifting focus and resources from incarceration to reentry programs that directly affect barriers to successful community reintegration. The hypothesis behind the Parole Board initiative is that chronic homelessness, the related chaos, and the perceived correlation between shelter life and a return to incarceration can be mediated by providing supportive transitional housing. Continued reliance on emergency shelters only prolongs the cycle from the street to the jail, back to the street and for many, back again to the jail. By interrupting this cycle with a transitional housing program, the Parole Board

hypothesized that the program would produce three outcomes: enhanced public safety through reduced recidivism, access to long term sustainable housing and increased employment.

Prior to opening the transitional housing program, the Parole Board strategically prepared for implementation by designing the field operations context in which the program would operate. Within the existing network of eight regional Parole offices clustered in major urban areas around the Commonwealth, the Regional Reentry Centers (RRC's) were added as a distinct service component. The RRC's provide reentry services for ex-offenders leaving jails and prisons without any form of supervision (maxing out) as well as those being discharged and completing their sentence in the community on parole. Each RRC was assigned a Substance Abuse/Mental Health Counselor (through a partnership with the Department of Public Health) and a Victim Service Coordinator. Two officers in each region were promoted to become Reentry Officers and assigned the responsibility of providing designated reentry services to ex-offenders living in the communities surrounding that office. The transitional housing program grew to become a strategic innovation integrated into the operations of the RRC.

This paper is not a “gold standard” evaluation with three years of data or random assignment to experimental and control groups (Bogue, et al 2004). It does serve as an opportunity to examine two full years of data from the initiative, seek to highlight best practices and identify areas for improvements. This report adopts a descriptive, case study style, where the focus is on a specific group with unique circumstances and may be

suitable for learning more about a complex situation. Underlying themes and patterns that emerge from the data have guided the evolution of program modules and may be of value to other public safety agencies.

### **Description of Transitional Housing Program (THP)**

In the initial cycle of service, the Parole Board assumed the role of a broker of resources and issued a request for proposals to vendors with experience housing the ex-offender population. Proposals were submitted, reviewed and contracts issued for a housing vendor in each of the eight designated regional offices. For the purposes of this program, transitional housing includes full wrap-around supportive services. The program is designed to offer a minimum of four months of housing.

#### **Housing Models**

Within the program there are two models of housing, both of which are able to assist offenders meet their release conditions designated by voting Members of the Parole Board. Specifically, THP contracts with Sober Houses and Long Term Residential Programs (LTRP's). While some offenders return to the community and rejoin their families, friends or live on their own, some are required as a part of their parole conditions set by Parole Board Members to live for a period of time in specialized housing.

The LTRP is based on an "all under one roof" model of services. Residents live in the house, receive group and individual counseling there, attend other sobriety

maintenance programming and primarily focus on regaining wellness that will support their ultimate reentry into community life. Typically, residents do not work outside the immediate environment of the house and the contact with their host community is limited. A major goal of the transitional period is to establish and pursue either further long term transitional housing opportunities (2+ years) or permanent housing. The LTRP is a highly structured environment that engages the individual in a wrap around care system geared towards serving high risk offenders with multiple prior convictions or incarcerations. They are staffed to assist individuals experiencing disabling mental health or substance abuse conditions.

The Sober House model is typically focused on assisting residents find meaningful employment and stabilize this specific aspect of their reentry. The Sober House maintains strict rules regarding curfews, sobriety, regular and unscheduled drug testing while encouraging residents to live in a community focused on both recovery and working outside the house. Service referrals may be made by house managers and the parent agency but are not offered in the house, but rather in the community as a way of assisting individuals to create provider relationships that will be sustained beyond the initial transitional period. A typical Sober House is designed to house lower-risk offenders, who are prepared to re-enter the workforce and who are relatively stable in terms of their health but may do better in a regulated, sober environment with fewer clinical needs. Like the LTRP, discharge planning includes housing searches and tenancy preservation/tenancy management skills as key strategies to preparing individuals to return to an independent life.

## **The Transitional Housing Process**

Leaving a jail or prison on parole requires an approved home plan whereby the field parole officer responsible for supervision completes an investigation and agrees that a specific plan will support successful reintegration. Thus, entrance into THP begins in the incarcerating institution. After an offender is granted parole by the Parole Board and is ready to be released into the community, the responsibility is placed on that offender to secure acceptance into a community program. The offender is assisted by staff from both the institution and the Parole Board in identifying programs, applying and getting the program acceptance letter to the field parole officer who has the authority to approve the plan. THP options are known to staff and they can be a resource for the inmate looking for a place in a program. In-reach presentations about parole reentry services and THP bring the message directly from the Parole Board staff who oversees the program to the inmate during their incarceration. Beyond providing information, the secondary goal of in-reach is to prevent homelessness among discharging offenders by identifying potentially homeless offenders and helping to arrange their housing options prior to discharge.

## **Participant Status at Time of Release**

Intake information pertaining to demographics and socioeconomic factors on the Transitional Housing Program's first 712 clients (July 2005 through July 2007) is presented in Figure 1. The majority of all participants are male (90%), white (55%) and single or never married (76%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 70, with the average age being 34.3 years. Thirty-six (36%) of clients were between the ages of 26-35, 33%

of clients were between the ages of 36-45 and 20% of clients were between the ages of 18-25. These demographics are representative of Massachusetts parolees overall and, as highlighted in Figure 1.B, typically report a history of substance abuse.

## FIGURE 1.

### Demographics of the 712 clients placed into THP between July 2005 and July 2007:

FIGURE 1.A GENDER, AGE AND RACE

<b>Gender</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	639	(90)
Female	73	(10)
<b>Age</b>		
18-25	140	(20)
26-35	254	(36)
36-45	235	(33)
46-55	71	(10)
56+	12	(1)
<i>Average</i>	<i>34.3</i>	
<b>Race</b>		
White	390	(55)
African American	124	(17)
Hispanic	173	(24)
Other	25	(4)

FIGURE 1.B PROGRAM FACTORS

<b>Parolee</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	660	(93)
No	52	(7)
<b>Institution Type</b>		
State	199	(28)
County	510	(72)
Interstate	3	(<1)
<b>Substance Abuse Issues Reported</b>		
Yes	662	(93)
No	50	(7)

### Data

The data presented here represents two years of program operation: July 2005 through July 2007. Outcome measures for the program include recidivism, employment and

housing status. The data presented is for the 615 clients who have discharged from the program in the first two years of operation.

**Recidivism:** For the purposes of this report, recidivism is presented in terms of both re-arrest and re-incarceration. Further, re-adjusted rates are presented that include technical violations of parole conditions (returned to custody specifically due to a violation of a parole condition). Criminal record reports are run 6 months after a client discharges from THP and again at 12, 24 and 36 months post-discharge from the program.

- ✚ Clients with an arrest for a new crime: 127 (21%)
- ✚ Clients with an incarceration for a new crime: 37 (6%)
- ✚ Clients returned to custody on a technical violation: 51
  - Adjusted re-arrest rate (to include technical violations): 178 (29%)
  - Adjusted re-incarceration rate (to include technical violations): 88 (14%)
- ✚ Clients' timeframe of re-arrest:
  - 6 months: 95 (75%)
  - 1 year: 31 (24%)
  - 2 years: 1 (1%)
  - 3 years: N/A
- ✚ Analysis of client governing (original) offense before and after THP:



**FIGURE 2.**



## Recidivism Trends:

### Institution

THP clients coming out of a county correctional institution are more likely to recidivate than those coming from a state correctional institution -- 25% of county offenders were re-arrested versus 13% of state offenders

### Age

Clients between the ages of 18 and 25 are more likely to recidivate than any other age category, followed closely by offenders in the 36 to 45 age cohort.

### *Recidivism by Age:*

- 🚦 18-25: 21% of clients re-arrested
- 🚦 26-35: 15% of clients re-arrested
- 🚦 36-45: 20% of clients re-arrested
- 🚦 46-55: 15% of clients re-arrested
- 🚦 56 (and up): 8% of clients re-arrested

### Type of Housing Program (Sober House vs. LTRP)

Clients who discharged from a Sober House displayed higher re-arrest and re-incarceration rates than those clients discharging from an LTRP.

### **Number of Discharged Clients by Housing Program**

- Total discharges: 615
- Total Sober House discharges: 356 (58%)
- Total LTRP discharges: 259 (42%)

### **Recidivism by Type of Housing Program**

- Sober House re-arrest rate: 116 (33%)
- Sober House re-incarceration rate: 62 (17%)
  
- LTRP re-arrest rate: 62 (24%)
- LTRP re-incarceration rate: 26 (10%)

**Recidivism Observations:** After two years of operation, THP reports recidivism figures that are well below national averages. The current national recidivism figures from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) show that 67.5% of all offenders released from prison will be re-arrested in three years, and that 51.8% will be re-incarcerated (both of these figures include parole technical violations). (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs), June 2002, retrieved January 10, 2008) Although the Massachusetts Parole Board does not yet have 3 year recidivism figures on THP clients, the current figures are encouraging and demonstrate that transitional housing positively impacts recidivism rates.

The vast majority (75%) of all THP clients who were re-arrested did so within the first 6 months of discharge from the program. This trend is reflected in the literature which indicates that more offenders are arrested and returned to prison within the first six months to a year from release than any other period of time within the first three years after release. (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, June 2004, retrieved January 2008, [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs))

Another facet of recidivism is whether or not THP has had an affect on reducing certain *types* of crimes, specifically drug and violent crimes. A decrease in drug crime represents considerable fiscal and social capital savings when a release does not require further drug treatment, often known to be lengthy and expensive. The *average* four month THP cycle costs \$7,300 and is thus substantially less expensive than incarceration. As previously demonstrated, a majority of offenders report a history substance abuse thereby indicating an operating and program priority. Treatment programs delivered in the community provide the opportunity to address real-world issues of reentry as they are based in the community where sobriety management skills can be both learned and tested. Decreases in violent crime also show similar savings since violent crime usually results in lengthy terms of incarceration. However, reducing the number of new victims is the true savings and addresses a key public safety priority of the Massachusetts Parole Board. Although THP is still a relatively new program, among THP clients who have been re-arrested there is a 9% decrease in person-related violent crime and a 3% decrease in drug crimes committed when comparing these new offenses to the client's previous offense before THP (see Figure 2 above).

In this early stage of analysis, three static client factors have been identified that appear to have a positive correlation with recidivism: age, releasing institution and program type. It appears that THP clients who are younger, released from county facilities and discharged from a Sober House are recidivating at higher rates than any other type of client. Other factors such as race, educational level and marital status were

tested yet did not provide any significant statistical correlations in regards to recidivism within THP.

**Employment:** Each program vendor works with clients individually to provide (either in-house or by referral) job training skills, vocational training and internships. The goal is to ensure that clients have steady, gainful employment upon discharge from THP.

Full and part time employment status is captured for THP clients at both admission and discharge from the program. A goal of THP is to encourage the overall percentage of clients employed:

- 📊 128 (18%) of clients were employed at intake into the THP program
- 📊 302 (49%) of clients were employed at discharge from THP

While many offenders are not employed when discharging from custody, the different housing models approach employment with differing strategies:

#### Comparison of Employment Rates by Program Type (Sober House vs LTRP)

Overall, clients discharging from sober housing were *significantly (33%)* more likely to be employed than clients discharging from an LTRP.

- 📊 77 (30%) of LTRP clients were employed at discharge
- 📊 225 (63%) of Sober House clients were employed at discharge

Recent research on the impact of offender employment has on recidivism shows mixed results. A comprehensive research review published by the Campbell Collaboration states “employment-focused interventions for former prisoners have not been adequately evaluated for their effectiveness using random assignment designs, and

that more rigorous evaluations are needed to provide direction to policymakers as to the most effective combination of employment-related services for specific types of ex-offenders” (Visher, et al 2006). While this study does not begin to refute these research finding, we believe that the THP experience suggests that employment in combination with housing has a positive correlation with reduced recidivism (see Lessons Learned section of this report).

**Housing:** Another goal of THP is to improve the transition of offenders to sustainable housing after they have completed their four-month stay at either their sober house or LTRP. Sustainable housing is considered to be an extended program commitment with their current housing program vendor, another halfway or recovery home and either an apartment, condominium or house (owned or rented by the offender, or the offender’s family or friend/s) Employment is highly dependent upon a fixed living arrangement and without housing, substance abuse and mental health treatment is compromised. The Parole Board believes that supportive, appropriate and safe housing is the foundation of the reintegration process.

Sustainable housing rates are also captured at discharge from the program. For the two years of reported data, **403 (66%)** clients found appropriate housing upon departure from their program. Below is a breakdown by type of housing:

- ✚ Apartment: 118 (29%)
- ✚ House: 66 (16%)
- ✚ Extended Program Commitment: 160 (40%)
- ✚ Halfway or Recovery House 55 (14%)
- ✚ Unknown: 4 (1%)

### Comparison of Sustainable Housing by Program Type (Sober versus LTRP)

Overall, clients discharging from an LTRP were more likely (17%) to report having obtained sustainable housing than clients discharging from a sober house.

- ✚ 195 (75%) of LTRP clients reported having obtained sustainable housing at discharge
- ✚ 208 (58%) of Sober House clients reported having obtained sustainable housing at discharge

**Housing Observations:** Recidivism queries were run to see what type of effect (if any) housing has on recidivism. The results showed that clients who discharged from THP with reported sustainable housing plans *were more likely* to recidivate than those clients who left THP reporting no sustainable housing plans. Although these results may seem surprising, the breakdown of housing type presented above shows that almost half of the THP clients reported returning to an apartment or house. We know from internal data collection protocols that most of these clients are returning to an apartment or house of a family member, significant other or friend. While THP housing programs offered an initially stabilizing environment immediately after discharge, the point of discharge from THP can also be vulnerable.

In recent report, Bradley, et al (2001) state that “Probation and parole conditions can require an ex-prisoner to avoid specific neighborhoods and individuals, severely limiting options for habitation”. They continue: “Although many initially stay with family or relatives, these situations are often tentative, and can be volatile”. (Bradley, et al 2001)

Although 66% of THP clients reported sustainable housing upon discharge from parole, the true measure of housing success would be in relation to the offender(s) keeping this stable housing for more than a year.

### **Lessons Learned**

Stable housing is the foundation of reentry and the primary basis upon which offenders begin to build new lives. Housing programs that target services toward this group are key public safety partners.

**1. Cross-sector collaborations provide an effective staging arena for creative solution building, inspiration and best chance for impacting public safety.**

Public safety agencies can not assume that reentry programming can best be carried out within a law-enforcement *only* environment. Rather, by engaging partners from the private and non-profit sectors, recovery and therapeutic groups as well advisors from the stakeholder population and community, buy-in, commitment, and the broadest range of expertise are leveraged towards common goals.

**2. There is no one size fits all housing model that works for all ex-offenders.**

Some ex-offenders, particularly those who have completed certification, training or other job readiness programs, will do best living in a housing model that supports their quick return to the workforce. For example, those who complete training program for HVAC (heating, ventilating and air conditioning) can do

much more than eek out a meager existence -- with assistance, they can find meaningful, career-oriented employment. For offenders who have struggled with substance abuse for many years, a therapeutic environment with a recovery and wellness focus prepares these individuals for a life long journey of fighting for sobriety.

3. **Housing and employment are equally important ingredients for successful reentry.** Housing and employment sustain each other -- without an adequate job, one can not sustain housing, and with housing, life is far too chaotic to be gainfully employed. The following table (Figure 4, below) demonstrates the relationship of these factors (having housing and employment at discharge from program) in recidivism outcomes for THP clients:

**FIGURE 4.**

<b>Housing</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Outcomes Re-Arrest/ Re-Incarceration Rates</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>18% / 4%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>35% / 14%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>18% / 10%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>16% / 2%</b>

4. **Sober House versus LTRP.** Both housing models allow for a four months stay under THP but feature differing outcomes: Sober houses focus on assisting ex-offenders reenter the workforce and the numbers demonstrate that this goal is successfully met. LTRP's have better recidivism rates and more people with strategic longer term housing plans. It is a matter of matching an individual with their most urgent need.



5. **Longer term housing solutions works better for ex-offenders.** The longer THP clients stayed in the supportive housing environment, the better they did in terms of justice and employment outcome measures. While THP was designed to offer 4 months of housing and programming, the data suggests that stabilizing housing over longer periods results in better outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

Much of the information presented here does not represent new conclusions about what works best for ex-offenders returning to the community in parole agencies around the nation. Parole officers have been providing this exact kind of support for offenders as part of their work in offender reintegration for as long as offenders have been discharging. However, what is new is the growing trend in municipalities and states allocating such significant resources towards these goals and by integrating them as part of a justice agency's typical work process, budget and benchmarks. It is fairly obvious that an ex-offender will need to secure housing and employment after discharging. What this article aims to provide is a strategic approach to leveraging resources towards the best possible outcome for the individual and the community.

## References

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*According to client TA, he considers “staying clean in order to stay out of prison”, his biggest challenge as he now returns to the community.*

*Client RJ states that “not falling back into old habits and habitual behaviors” are his main challenges to staying crime-free.*

*Client ET stresses that “getting a job because of her CORI is a challenge- she is afraid all she can rely on is doing better on her interview than the next person”.*

*Client MC reports that the major strengths he acquired from his housing program were “to be better at interviews and act more professional on the job”.*

*Client RM emphasizes that “the computer knowledge he has gained from being in the job force has helped him to structure his life”.*

*Client RL states that as he leaves THP he mainly is focused on “the responsibility of getting an apartment and paying bills”.*

*Client RB reports that “although fitting back into society is his biggest concern right now, he also is worried that until he finds employment he will not be able to afford any type of housing on his own”.*

*Client RL (LTRP discharge) insisted that “he needs to go to a sober house now, 4 months in an LTRP was not enough time to gain employment and money”.*

*Client JE felt as though “5-6 months would help my adjustment to society better”.*