



EOPS Grantee Tools

Implementing a Reentry Program According to Best Practices

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Introduction

This edition of The Executive Office of Public Safety (EOPS) Grantee Tools highlights research on reentry and principles of effective correctional programming compiled from a process evaluation of *Reentry Programming Enhancement* (RPE). The Norfolk County Sheriff's Office (NCSO) created RPE as a step-down from medium security to a minimum/pre-release reentry program for male inmates. This publication aims to share information from the process evaluation to help key individuals in the criminal justice system develop and implement reentry programs. Government agencies and non-profit organizations interested in creating or improving inmate reentry programs that incorporate evidence-based practices may use this report to assist in program development.

EOPS conducted the process evaluation early on in the implementation phase of RPE, and did not assess RPE's effectiveness or its potential impact on recidivism. However, the process evaluation did lead to a deeper understanding of best practices related to inmate reentry and correctional programs.

Reentry Programming Enhancement: Brief Program Overview

In 2004, EOPS awarded the NCSO a Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) to implement *Reentry Programming Enhancement*, which NCSO houses at the Dedham Alternative Center (DAC). The DAC is a separate housing facility on the NCSO grounds. RPE was designed to improve inmate classification, and address the gaps in programming and community service opportunities before inmates are released into the community. By addressing these needs, NCSO hopes to improve inmates' transition to the community and increase the likelihood for reentry success. The program seeks to match inmates' objective housing classification and risk/needs assessment with appropriate housing and programming.

RPE was designed to increase the chances of successful inmate reentry by employing five elements:

- Standardized Objective Assessment,
- Appropriate Classification,
- Programming,
- Community Service, and
- Research

Research on Reentry and Correctional Programming

Based on literature reviews of reentry research and correctional programming the key components of effective reentry initiatives include the following components:

Standardized Assessment. Research indicates that standardized assessment can help with the referral of inmates to appropriate programming (Serin 2005). Assessments that identify inmates' needs help administrators understand which types of programs to offer inmates and therefore promote the chances of more successful reentry to the community.

Work Release/Job Training. Several studies have looked at the benefits of work release and job training for inmates. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that job training, vocational education programs, and work release produce modest but statistically significant reductions in recidivism (Aos, Miller, and Drake 2006).¹ In a descriptive study of reentry participants in Baltimore, Visher, LaVigne and Travis (2004) of The Urban Institute cite how inmates who took part in work-release jobs, received job training, and worked as a condition of supervision are more likely to have a job post release.

Educational Programming. Research shows that educational programming has demonstrated lasting positive effects on inmates. Research finds if classes improve inmates reading and language skills, they are less likely to be rearrested after release (Piehl 2002). A report by the Reentry Policy Council recommends that correctional facilities teach basic skills and literacy to inmates who are cognitively capable of learning. The Council states that it should be a goal to enable most inmates to read at a minimum of an eighth grade level, and correctional facilities should make GED programs available to interested inmates (Reentry Policy Council 2006). The Washington State Institute for Public Policy states that inmates involved in education programs have reduced rates of recidivism (Aos, et al. 2006).²

Community Component. The Reentry Policy Council advocates that correctional staff allow for and encourage inmates to participate in community service. Community service that helps inmates build or improve productive skills is ideal (Reentry Policy Council 2006).

Continuity of Programming Pre- and Post-Release. Research points to the important link between programs offered during incarceration and follow-up programs recommended for inmates after release. According to a National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) article, initial studies of *The Delaware Key/Crest Program*³ state that the link between therapeutic programs during incarceration and follow-up programs in the community may be the most important piece of that program (Mathias 1995). In an article on correctional treatment where the principles of correctional programs are discussed, Gaes, Flanagan, Motiuk, and Stewart (1999) talk about the importance good coordination between correctional programs and aftercare programs.

Researcher Involvement. As part of their guiding principles of effective correctional programming, Gaes, et al. (1999) highlight researcher involvement with program development and implementation. Researchers can play a valuable role at translating national best practices for the specific reentry needs of a local jurisdiction.

¹An analysis of evaluation results of three in-prison vocational education programs conducted by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy indicates that vocational education programs lead to a 12.8 percent drop in recidivism rates for program participants.

² An analysis of evaluation results of seven in- prison basic adult education programs conducted by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy indicates that basic adult education programs lead to a 5.1 percent drop in recidivism rates for program participants.

³ *Delaware Key/Crest Program* is a three-phase, substance abuse program for criminal offenders consisting of 12 months of residential substance abuse and behavior modification programs followed by six months of a therapeutic community work-release program and then six more months of aftercare programs.

Research on Correctional Programs

A significant body of research exists on the effectiveness of programs conducted in a correctional facility. Research on this topic can generally be grouped into two categories: characteristics about the nature of the programs (principles) and actual program content (components). The following sections describe what the research identifies as best practices.

Key Principles of Correctional Programs

A literature review of research articles identified principles of effective programs. Based on a review of research articles, Gaes, et al. identified eight key principles of correctional programs. The following is a brief summary of those principles.

- 1. Criminogenic Needs.** Programs should address such things as pro-criminal attitudes, pro-criminal associates, impulsivity, weak socialization, below average verbal intelligence, risk seeking, weak problem solving and self control skills, early onset of antisocial behavior, poor parental practices, and deficits in educational, vocational, and employment skills.
- 2. Multimodal Programs.** Ideally, programs should treat all the criminogenic deficits of an inmate. Inmates often have multiple deficits and therefore are at an increased risk of recidivism. Addressing only one or two deficits for inmates with many deficits reduces a program's effectiveness.
- 3. Responsivity.** Program administrators should consider the learning styles of inmates and match those with the teaching styles of the staff.
- 4. Risk Differentiation.** Programs should target the higher-risk inmates, who have the most criminogenic needs because they are more likely to benefit from programs than lower-risk inmates.
- 5. Skills Oriented and Cognitive-Behavioral Treatments.** Programs should teach social learning principles and skills that help individuals resist anti-social behavior.
- 6. Implementation and Continuity of Care.** There should be coordination between correctional programs and aftercare programs. Programs that started in a correctional facility will be more effective if they are continued after release.
- 7. Dosage.** Although there is limited research that specifically addresses the issue of dosage (i.e., exactly how much programming is the right amount of programming), it is generally agreed that programs should be of sufficient duration.
- 8. Researcher Involvement.** When researchers are involved in program development, implementation, and evaluation, programs have been found to be more effective. Examples of how researchers can be beneficial include designing programs that are based in best practices, enhancing the integrity of implementation, tracking progress to help make mid-course corrections, and evaluating whether the programming is working as intended.

Targeting dynamic risk factors should be the focus of programming that attempts to follow best practices. Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, and Cullen (1990) suggest that programs that focus on reducing chemical dependency and increasing rewards for non-criminal activity in home, school, and work may help reduce motivation to commit crime by

giving the inmate more to lose by choosing to be involved in criminal activity (Andrews, et al. 1990).

Key Components of Correctional Reentry Programs

The Office of Justice Programs (2006) indicates that institutionally-based correctional reentry programming should include:

- Mental health treatment,
- Substance abuse counseling,
- Basic adult education programs,
- Job training,
- Batterer intervention,
- Family counseling, and
- Mentoring.

Educational, vocational, and labor programs have been known to have modest effects on reducing recidivism, and also have a positive effect on inmate behavior (Gaes, et al. 1999). Other research has shown that if inmates improve their reading and language skills, they are less likely to be rearrested after they are released (Piehl 2002).

The following table is based on the principles outlined by Gaes, et al. (1999). Reentry program developers and corrections administrators may use this table as a tool to determine if a correctional program incorporates these guiding principles.

Achieving a “yes” for each principle in this table is an ambitious goal. Many barriers exist, such as funding, space, and staff, which prevent a reentry program from aligning with all of these principles. However, this table should represent a target and serve as a guide for the design of the components of a reentry program.

Table 1: Principles of Effective Correctional Programs Checklist

| Principles of Effective Programs | How Can Your Program Meet This Principle? | Your Program (Yes/Somewhat/No) |
|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Criminogenic Needs : Intervention efforts must be linked to criminogenic characteristics. | Assess the overall criminogenic needs of your inmate population and offer programs that meet these needs. | |
| 2. Multimodal Programs : All criminogenic deficits should be treated. | Make sure that the programs offered meet all of the needs of all inmates in the program. | |
| 3. Responsivity : Program instructors should match client learning styles with staff teaching styles. | Determine learning styles for inmates in the reentry program and design program lessons that correspond with those learning styles. For example, use visual teaching tools for visual learners. | |
| 4. Risk Differentiation : Higher risk clients are more likely to benefit from programs than lower-risk clients; the highest level of programming intensity should be used for highest risk clients. | Measure the risk level of the inmates and focus appropriate programming on high risk inmates. | |
| 5. Skills Oriented and Cognitive-Behavioral Programs : Program instructors should use programs that teach clients skills that allow them to understand and resist antisocial behavior. | Programs should focus on developing skills that help inmates resist anti-social behavior. | |
| 6. Program Implementation and Continuity of Care : Clients should be treated in well supported programs. | Ensure that there is continuity between programs offered at various security levels at the correctional center and with the aftercare programs recommended to inmates. | |
| 7. Dosage : Interventions should be comprehensive and of sufficient duration. | Determine the length of programming necessary to positively affect the inmate. | |
| 8. Researcher Involvement : Researchers should be involved in both program development and evaluation. | Incorporate a researcher during the development and implementation phases of the reentry program. | |

Further Reading

For further information on inmate reentry please see the following articles and publications.

Aos, Steve, Marna Miller, and Elizabeth Drake. January 2006. "Evidence-Based Adult Corrections Programs: What Works and What Does Not" Olympia, Washington: Washington State Institute for Public Policy

Andrews, D. A., Ivan Zinger, Robert Hoge, James Bonta, Paul Gendreau, & Francis Cullen. 1990. "Does Correctional Treatment Work? A Clinically Relevant and Psychologically Informed Meta-Analysis." *Criminology*. 28, 369 (3)

Bonta, James, & Robert B. Cormier. April 1999. "Corrections Research in Canada: Impressive Progress and Promising Prospects." *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 41, 235(1)

Gaes, Gerald G., Timothy J. Flanagan, Laurence L. Motiuk, & Lynn Stewart. Fall 1999. "Adult Correctional Treatment." *Crime & Justice*. Chicago, Ill, 26, 361(65)

Joplin, Lore, Brad Bogue, Nancy Campbell, Mark Carey, Elyse Clawson, Dot Faust, Kate Florio, Billy Wasson, and William Woodward. August 2004. "Using an Integrated Model to Implement Evidence-based Practices in Corrections." Boston, MA. Crime and Justice Institute

Mathias, Robert. 1995. "Correctional Treatment Helps Offenders Stay Drug and Arrest Free." National Institute on Drug Abuse - NIDA Notes. 10, 4
http://www.nida.nih.gov/NIDA_notes/NNVol10N4/Prison.html (accessed November 9, 2006)

Piehl, Anne Morrison. 2002. "From Cell to Street: A Plan to Supervise Inmates After Release." Boston, MA: MassINC

Serin, Ralph C. 2005. "Evidenced-Based Practice: Principles for Enhancing Correctional Results in Prisons." National Institute of Corrections, Washington, DC

Visher, Christy, Nancy LaVigne, & Jeremy Travis. 2004. "Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry." Washington, DC: The Urban Institute

Office of Justice Programs. 2006. "Key Components of Effective Prisoner Reentry Programs: A Guide to matching National Service Programs with Weed and Seed and Other Citywide Initiatives on Prisoner Reentry."
http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ccdo/programs/vista_reentry_handbook.pdf
(accessed on November 6, 2006)

Reentry Policy Council. 2006. "The Report of the Reentry Policy Council: Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community."
http://www.reentrypolicy.org/reentry/THE_REPORT.aspx (accessed November 6, 2006)

Reentry Policy Council Report

The process evaluation and resulting report that informed this publication focus on *Reentry Programming Enhancement*, the program NCSO set forth to facilitate more successful reentry for inmates at the Norfolk County Correctional Center. There are other issues to take into account when developing and implementing a reentry program. The Reentry Policy Council has outlined the necessary elements and factors for any correctional center or supporting organization to consider as it begins a reentry program for its jurisdiction. The 35 relevant policy statements and the subsequent recommendations outlined in The Reentry Policy Council's report offer sound advice from start to finish when developing a reentry program. Their full report may be viewed at www.reentrypolicy.org.