

communities'. I believe the healing environment is best described at the local unit level...

"There are several key components of a healing environment. The first is an energetic and positive environment for staff and offenders which results from attitudes and behaviors we bring to and exhibit at work. The second part includes promoting practices that ultimately result in better public safety, less recidivism, fewer victims, and a safer, more productive work environment. The third critical factor involves each of us playing a crucial role in fostering understanding and communicating the elements of a healing environment with emphasis on the unique characteristics of that environment in our units."

During 2012, the entire Extended Leadership Team, made up of wardens, superintendents, community corrections district heads, and selected department heads, received the 2-day dialogue training. To keep the number of participants in the training sessions manageable, a third of the extended leadership was trained during each of the quarterly sessions. In 2013, the same group was brought back, but this time with their deputies. Again one third were trained during each of the quarterly trainings for 2 days. All of these sessions were also attended by the executive leadership from each of the three regions and central office.

The first set of dialogue specialists was recruited late in 2012. They received quarterly training onsite at the Virginia Academy for Staff Development near Richmond and intensive coaching from Garrett and Ball between the face-to-face training sessions. In late 2013, these dialogue specialists were "graduated" to become dialogue coaches and took up the role of helping to train the next wave of over 60 new specialists. This work has continued into 2014 and plans call for the department to continue its efforts after the Morris Project concludes in 2015.

Healing Environment Initiatives

In early 2014, NIC conducted a confidential survey of all wardens, superintendents, and community corrections district chiefs. An important feature of dialogue training had been that it included the development of a proposal by each unit head—for example, the warden, superintendent, or community corrections district chief—of a local healing environment initiative (HEI). The initiatives were presented and discussed during the training and then taken back to the individual facilities or district offices to be further developed by the local leadership and staff working together. The dialogue specialists were also tasked with training other staff in dialogue and serving as resources to staff in working dialogically on their healing initiatives. The result is that the department-wide Healing Environment Initiative was "scaled down" to the local level where hundreds of staff were introduced to dialogue and how it can be used to address a local issue or concern.

The local healing environment initiatives varied from one site to the next. In the survey of the extended leadership, the respondents described a wide range of activities. About 40 percent of the

initiatives they described in the survey were various kinds of staff recognition, programs to motivate or improve morale of staff, or program improvements. In over 60 percent of the initiatives described in the survey, however, there was a predominant focus on improving communications and creating a healing environment.

In most cases the use of dialogue, either as training or in working dialogically, was a central theme. One unit head reported that efforts to use dialogue created, “a more supportive and caring work environment. [The] Healing Environment is stressed daily.” Another said they were:

“...creating an environment that promotes healthy conflict and achieves accountability...we need to engage in open, honest and passionate communication. Through productive, unfiltered dialogue we can cultivate ideas, sharpen one another, and achieve staff engagement, commitment and accountability.”

Still another said that, “The Healing Environment initiative is very positive and has grown into the general culture at our Unit. The concept of the Healing Environment is centered on positive communication, respect and professionalism.”

One healing environment initiative was called “Communication Rocks!” The unit head said, “We have been using our new dialogue skills to change the way we talk to each other. We have dialogue groups that meet to discuss any issues that arise and we try to involve as many staff as we can.”

Another said that, “We are actively teaching, monitoring, encouraging, and modeling the HE initiative at meetings and during administrative rounds. We are using dialogue as one skill to reach understanding with staff and offenders.”

A district chief said that, “The Healing Environment Initiative in our district has been embraced by the staff. They continue to be supportive of each other and the ideas presented by one another.”

Another said, “Our HE initiative is basically to recognize that this is something to embrace as it's just the right thing to do and to recognize the reward you feel when you can help someone by providing them with an environment that is supportive of them.”

According to the survey, the initiatives enjoyed strong support from the wardens, superintendents, and community corrections district chiefs. Among this group, 88 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I have seen specific benefits at our facility/office as a result of our Healing Environment Initiative.” In response to the question, “I have seen changes in attitude, positive or negative, among the leadership at our facility/office that I believe are the result of the Healing Environment Initiative,” 93 percent of wardens and superintendents and 88 percent of district chiefs agreed or strongly agreed, with all saying the changes had been positive. In response to similar questions about changes in attitude and behavior among staff, 88 percent said they had seen changes in attitudes, and 78 percent said they had seen changes in behavior. A majority of the

wardens/superintendents also said they had seen changes in inmate attitudes (57 percent agreed or strongly agreed) and even in inmate behavior at their institutions (68 percent agreed or strongly agreed). The district chiefs also said they had seen shifts in the attitudes among people under community supervision (75 agreed or strongly agreed) and in their behavior (53 percent of district chiefs agreed or strongly agreed).

The extended leadership of the department also reported substantial support and a high level of participation in the healing environment initiatives by their staff. When asked, how many of their staff they felt were “completely supportive” and “actively engaged” in the healing environment initiative at their facility or office, 64 percent of wardens/superintendents and 84 percent of district chiefs said “most” or “all” were supportive and engaged. When asked how many person-hours they estimated in total were being dedicated to their healing environment initiative, 53 percent said 20 hours or less, while 28 percent said 51 to 100 hours were being used, and 18 percent said more than 100 person-hours per month were being spent on the initiatives. Among the department’s extended leadership there was strong support for the use of the initiatives and recognition that they were having a positive effect, had wide staff support, and that the burden on staff time was manageable.

The Urban Institute Evaluation of the Virginia initiative

In addition to other activities related to the project, NIC also funded the evaluation by the Urban Institute of the project in Virginia. Led by Drs. Shelli Rossman and Janeen Buck Wilson, the evaluation plan surveyed Virginia Department of Corrections staff to assess the effect of the Healing Environment Initiative on staff perceptions and attitudes. At the time of this writing, two of a planned three surveys have been completed, with the last of the three scheduled for mid-2014 and a final report on the project expected in 2015.

By the end of 2013, they had the evaluation team conduct two surveys of Virginia Department of Corrections full-time employees. The first survey was conducted during March to May 2012. All 11,135 full-time employees in the department were contacted by e-mail and invited to participate in the online survey. A total of 4,724 staff (42 percent of the total) responded. Survey 2 was conducted over a 7-week period between July and September 2013. As with the first administration, the survey invited all full-time staff (N=11,583) to participate and 4,520 (37 percent) did so. There were a total of 2,608 respondents who participated in both of the first two waves of the survey.^{xvi}

In the staff surveys, both knowledge of and support for the Healing Environment Initiative was strong and in many cases grew from the first survey to the second one.^{xvii} In the first survey, 63 percent of staff said they had heard about the initiative, while in the second survey more than a year later 97 percent said they had heard about it. Overall, 88 percent of survey 2 respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I believe in the value of the Healing Environment

initiative,” compared to 77 percent in survey 1. The pattern of strong and increasing support for the Initiative was reflected in other questions about it. In 2013, 86 percent of staff agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, “The HEI is a good strategy for this organization,” and, “The Healing Environment Initiative serves an important purpose” (compared to 74 percent and 76 percent, respectively, who agreed or strongly agreed the year before).

One subject that, not surprisingly, came up among staff at all levels when the Healing Environment Initiative was discussed was how it would affect safety within the prisons. In the surveys, anywhere between two-thirds and three-quarters of staff said their job was a dangerous one. In 2012, 65 percent agreed that, “My job is a lot more dangerous than other kinds of jobs,” 74 percent agreed that “I work in a dangerous job,” and 65 percent said “In my job, a person stands a good chance of getting hurt.” What is interesting is that these perceptions remained virtually unchanged from survey 1 to survey 2 just 14 months later. What did change was the perception that the changes taking place in the department were making their jobs less safe. In early 2012, a total of 67 percent of staff agreed that “All the changes going on around here have made my job much more dangerous.” By mid-2013, only 23 percent of staff agreed that the changes were making their job more dangerous.

In fact, it appears that the job was becoming safer during this period. The total number of institutional charges for infractions of facility rules by inmates fell from 36,348 in 2010 (a rate of 11.8 per 1,000 inmates) to 29,803 (a rate of 10.0 per 1,000) by 2012. In 2013, there were 29,676 infractions, reflecting an increase in more serious infractions (almost 400 more) while less serious ones continued to decline (about 500 less). There had been four serious assaults on staff in 2010 and six in 2011, but only three in 2012 and none in 2013. There also had been one or two escapes each year in 2008–2011, but there were none in 2012 or 2013.^{xviii}

Inmates were not the only ones who were behaving better.^{xix} The total number and rate of disciplinary action against staff declined steadily over the 2010-2013 period. There were 400 disciplinary actions taken against staff in 2010, a rate of 34 per 1,000 staff. In 2011, there were 269 and by 2013 the number had fallen to 226 (a rate of 19.5 per 1,000). The decline was consistent across all levels of disciplinary actions, with serious, medium, and low levels all down. There were even less on-the-job injuries among staff, with 1,238 reported in 2010; 1,139 in 2011; and 1,013 in 2012.^{xx} What were they doing to produce these shifts? It appears that one thing they were doing was talking a lot about creating a healing environment, and that message was cascading through the organization. When asked in the survey what activities they had participated in that discussed the Healing Environment Initiative, 62 percent of staff who took survey 2 said they had participated in dialogue circles, compared to just 8 percent only a little more than a year before, when survey 1 data was collected.

Harold Clarke, reflecting on the project in Virginia, summed up his views by saying:

“...we’re in the business of creating public safety, and we know quite well how to build secure institutions. We know how to operate secure institutions...We have to do better than to simply incapacitate. And so, how do you do better than that? You do better than that by addressing the deficits, the needs of offenders and staff. And to address the deficits and needs of offenders and staff, you have to create the conditions for that to occur. And the conditions that need to be created are those, in my vision, that are readily in existence in a healing environment where the needs of staff and offenders are being addressed. So I am sold on the concept. I think it’s a human thing...We have to evolve in our industry. If we don’t evolve in our industry, it’s going to be because of our lack of initiative and because of our lack of courage to do the right thing and our desire to embrace the past.”

Next Steps

In May 2014, NIC made an award to the Urban Institute to complete its work on the Norval Morris Project in the Virginia DOC and the transfer to them the capacity to continue to do staff surveys. Under the award, Urban will:

1. Close out the three-wave Virginia DOC staff survey series and prepare a written report documenting the history and methodological details of the survey.
2. Develop a detailed report on the results of the three waves of the staff surveys.
3. Prepare for dissemination a public use data file of the three waves of the surveys which makes the data available for secondary analysis, while preserving the confidentiality of respondents.
4. Provide advice and technical assistance to the Virginia DOC research staff to help them use the public data file for their own planning, the transfer the staff survey to a suitable platform to allow them to continue to administer surveys to their staff in the future, and support to research staff in the analysis and use of quantitative data.

Also in May 2014, NIC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Virginia DOC to assist them in transitioning to next stages in their work. The agreement provided funds to support the DOC in continued training in dialogue and developing a training and support infrastructure at the unit level. The Virginia DOC also agreed to aid the Urban Institute in finishing the evaluation, including providing performance and other data for analysis by Urban. The MOU, together with the award to the Urban Institute, will leave the department with a significantly expanded capacity and allow them to continue to build on the accomplishments of the past 3 years.

ⁱ Jacobs made the remark at the first planning meeting for the Norval Morris Project on August 23, 2004 in Denver, Colorado.

ⁱⁱ See Jacobs, J. (2009), "Norval Morris as Penologist: An Exception Who Proved the Rule," in *Federal Sentencing Reporter*, 21:26-264; Morris, N., (1966), "Impediments to Penal Reform", *University of Chicago Law Review* 33:627-628.

ⁱⁱⁱ See the J-SAT website at <http://www.j-sat.com/> for more information.

^{iv} The meeting was held in Denver, Colorado on August 23, 2004. The participants were; Jeffery Beard, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, William Burrell, Temple University; Chis Innes, National Institute of Justice; Jim Jacobs, NYU Law School; Zack Del Pra, Adult Probation, Maricopa County (AZ); Joan Petersilia, University of California, Irvine; Larry Solomon, National Institute of Corrections; Reginald Wilkinson, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections.

^{xvii} Buck Wilson, J. and Rossman, S. (2013), “Measuring Support for and Influence of the Healing Environment Initiative: Wave 2 Analysis Update”, briefing for the Virginia Department of Corrections Executive Team, Richmond, Virginia, December 3, 2013.

^{xviii} These figures were supplied by W.D. Jennings, Ph.D., Administrator, Research and Management Services Unit at the Virginia Department of Corrections and are drawn for his research (personal communication on March 27, 2014) and from Virginia Department of Corrections, (2013) *State Responsible Offender Population Trends, FY2008 - FY2012*, Virginia Department of Corrections, Richmond. See, http://vadoc.virginia.gov/about/facts/research/new-statsum/offenderpopulationtrends_fy08-fy12.pdf.

^{xix} These figures were supplied by W.D. Jennings, Ph.D., Administrator, Research and Management Services Unit at the Virginia Department of Corrections and are drawn for his research in a personal communication on March 27, 2014.

^{xx} Virginia Department of Corrections, (2013) *State Responsible Offender Population Trends, FY2008 - FY2012*, p.15.