



Transition from Jail to Community Initiative: One County's Experience

Editor's Note: In the preceding article, "Assembling the Jail Reentry Puzzle: The Transition from Jail to Community Initiative," author Jesse Jannetta, from the Urban Institute, focused on the Transition from Jail to Community (TJC) initiative, a cooperative agreement between the National Institute of Corrections and the Urban Institute and overviewed participation by Douglas County, Kansas, and Denver County, Colorado, as initial sites for the implementation of the TJC model. This article, by Shannon Murphy, offers a firsthand account of the challenges faced and lessons learned by the Douglas County Sheriff's Office as a participant in the TJC initiative.

SHANNON MURPHY

In January 2008, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office formally launched its community inmate reentry program. The path to its implementation was filled with anticipation, risk, pause—and fright. Can we really affect change on our frequent-flyer population? How do we promote change alongside other systems that have roles with our incoming and outgoing population? At a time when we were tired of tackling the same issues year after year, we faced the common issue of building onto a facility less than a decade old in order to house a growing inmate population. That is when we made an important realization—we could not continue to build ourselves out of this predicament.

Background and Statistics

Douglas County, Kansas, has a population of 112,000. Its county-seat, Lawrence, is an urban bedroom community, home to the University of Kansas, and situated equally between the State capital of Topeka and metropolitan Kansas City. Although violent crime has decreased 7 percent in Douglas County over the past four years, the overall crime index offenses increased 12 percent, most notably in property and theft-related offenses.

The earlier, linear style 55-bed capacity was fraught with space and inmate management issues—affecting safety both inside the facility and in the outside community. In September 1999, a new direct supervision facility opened, increasing bed capacity to 186.

Populations within the facility are as diverse as those in the outside community. Of the 186 beds, the facility houses a 46-bed work release unit for short-term commits and inmates on a work release program. The facility also includes a medical unit with mental health professionals; a full booking and classification department; minimum-, medium-, and maximum-inmate male units; a mixed-classification female unit; and a special management unit for the mentally ill and protective custody inmates. In 2007, the facility booked more than 5,500 arrestees.

In addition to holding a population of pre-trial (58%) and sentenced (27%) inmates, the facility houses those inmates pending transport to the Kansas Department of Corrections (9%) and inmates awaiting or admitted to State security hospitals (6%). The facility's population reflects the social issues with which all jail facilities nationwide struggle. Seventeen percent of Douglas County inmates identified themselves as homeless; 78 percent indicated that alcohol and/or drug abuse resulted in their social, economic, and/or legal problems. Forty percent of the facility's pharmaceutical expenses are for psychotropic medications. The concept of defin-

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ing a reentry program evolved from watching our inmate population climb in just a few short years.

In 2005, the Douglas County Commission charged Sheriff Ken McGovern with finding alternatives to building onto the facility. Sheriff McGovern contacted the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) Jail Center for assistance in conducting a justice system assessment of the facility and its operations, along with a review of local criminal justice system practices. We soon learned that this was more than just a jail issue. Sheriff McGovern's comment cannot be stressed enough: "A reentry effort isn't just the jail's responsibility. It is a system of partners throughout our communities." NIC also commented: "While it may be in vogue to talk [a] very hard line on all criminals, the truth of the matter is that in Douglas County nearly all of the offenders incarcerated are going to be released and will be returning back into the community."

The onsite technical assistance provided by NIC began in the spring of 2006 with a subsequent meeting that produced the following recommendations:

- Link inmates to community services upon release.
- Organize a criminal justice coordinating committee.
- Improve data management systems.
- Consider design and development of intermediate sanction options.

Upon completion of a justice system assessment, a reentry committee community planning summit was held to include all systems partners: local law enforcement agencies, community mental health and substance abuse treatment providers, residen-

tial housing intervention agencies, the University of Kansas' School of Social Welfare, and the 7th Judicial (Douglas County) District Court. A core steering committee emerged and met over an 18-month period to review how NIC's recommendations may be integrated into a local inmate reentry program within the community. The committee identified barriers that inmates face upon release and recommended how to address those needs through a local inmate reentry program.

The corrections division and core steering committee studied the reentry practices and systems through the ideals of the Transition from Jail to Community (TJC) initiative to accomplish NIC's recommendations. The steering committee developed a mission statement as a platform for change that maintained its purpose inside and outside the facility and directly affected the community we strive to protect. The thrust of the mission statement was first to keep the focus on public safety, then to acknowledge the community as a partnering support system and uphold inmate accountability.

In addition, county administration and facility staff visited several model programs, including Kent County, Michigan, and approved a new jail management system to assist with facility and program measurements. Barriers and pathways were identified as were processes and partnerships. But now what? It was soon apparent that identified responsibilities needed to shift to a revised formal program. The county commission, in conjunction with county administration, concurred and agreed to fund a position dedicated to inmate reentry into the community.

Existing Efforts as Reentry

It was evident that reentry efforts should begin by improving existing direct supervision management model and interventions. The facility expanded a number of programs that specifically addressed particular inmate risks and needs as well as its volunteer division, led by Director Mike Caron. It also hosted programs to increase the peaceful management of inmates. Well over 100 approved volunteers now move about the facility, providing much needed programming for improving education and addressing substance abuse. Volunteers also conduct a multitude of therapies, dispense health information, and provide spiritual guidance. Most recently, cognitive behavior-based groups to change continued criminal thinking errors have been added to the volunteer programs.

The facility's inmate worker program was another existing foundation for reentry. The facility implemented the program as a tool to provide cost-effective facility services in the kitchen, laundry, landscaping, and janitorial areas while giving inmates the opportunity to work off costs, day-for-day credit on their sentences and gain valuable on-the-job training. The inmate worker program also eases inmate management issues as disciplinary issues suspend or prolong an inmate's availability to work in the program.

The core platform for expanding internal programming and management was to increase public safety within the community. In order for the inmate to successfully and safely reenter the community, the reentry program need to:

- Identify and target the risks and needs of the inmate.
- Incorporate existing programs and community services into a reentry plan.
- Integrate evidence-based correctional practices with staff and inmates.

- Set goals and tasks for transition into the community.

Identify and Target the Risks and Needs of the Inmate

We learned that when inmates receive the appropriate individual high risk and high needs tools, they are less likely to recidivate; when inmates receive the incorrect tools and interventions, they are more likely to recidivate. Immediately, we targeted those frequent flyers with high risks and effectively used our limited resources on those that needed it.

Incorporate Existing Programs and Community Services

Many facilities do not realize they already do initial reentry work. Providing medical services and nutritiously-balanced food brings inmates to a healthier level for their return to the community. A facility may have an inmate trustee program in place, many are already using safety and security measures inside that provide transferable skills to the outside. Other programs can help bring inmates to a manageable behavior pattern. The facility then needs to take the next step to link those programs with the community.

Integrate Evidence-based Correctional Practices

"Best practice" is all we hear, but are we listening? Evidence-based tools are not just about "touchy-feely" interventions to better the inmate. They are grounded upon documented successes in managing problematic behaviors and maintaining correctional security alongside rehabilitation and transitional services, providing both safety and accountability.

Through direct supervision, the staff is empowered to be a part of the inmate management, inside and out. Although the principles are applicable to any type of facility, the physical structure of a direct supervision facility places that empowerment in front of both the staff and inmates.

Set Goals and Tasks

Immediately, policies and procedures were developed to cover the core activities and guidelines developed by the steering committee to outline how transition will fit into the facility. Who to work with? How do we bring the community into the facility? What motivation can be instilled in inmates to follow through? When planning a comprehensive reentry initiative, the Urban

Institute suggests concrete tasks that jail administrators need to consider:

- Allow community health providers to come into the jail to treat chronically ill patients, set up post-release appointments, and provide a temporary supply of medications or prescriptions.
- Connect inmates with formerly incarcerated people who have turned their lives around.
- Permit workforce development agencies to offer employment services to inmates, help them obtain driver's licenses and Social Security cards, and prepare them for work.
- Encourage family visits and regular contact with inmates.
- Provide resource guides and reentry handbooks.
- Arrange for a family member or mentor to be at the jail when the inmate is released.

Corrections Undersheriff Kenney Massey participated in NIC's TJC Advisory Group, lending insight from the local facility perspective on how to integrate an established prison-based model into local communities. His input planted the previously vague, ideal notion of reentry firmly within our facility and community. From initiating the leadership and vision from the top and building ownership in partners in and outside the facility, to localizing the issue to what our particular community's needs were in the name of safety, we were in a firm position to add those concepts to the interventions and strategies that encompass the mission.

TJC project information will assist jail staff, community stakeholders, and government leaders to come together and sustain the foundation already laid for a reentry effort in Douglas County. TJC technical assistance fills knowledge gaps and systematically helps address successful reentry in communities. TJC's evaluation component organizes activities and processes, gauges whether implementation of

the model is on track, and improves the initiative's overall operations for targeting public safety.

The Future

Our ideal goal would be to never build again. But we know that building is inevitable. How we change that reality is to look farther down the road through TJC tools. Understanding what our local needs are in order to plan for building is crucial. We know space for mentally ill inmates is high on the list alongside lower-security space to provide appropriate transitional options. Other system implementations will include addressing community maintenance for the inmate through continued partnerships with existing providers.

Final Thoughts

Currently, many reentry and risk reduction initiatives occur at the end of the criminal justice system. With millions of inmates cycling in and out of local facilities, we are missing the onset of inmate movement among the systems: our local jails.

As Douglas County Commissioner Charles Jones says: "In addition to advancing an enlightened manner of dealing with jail inmates and increasing the likelihood of their healthy return to the community, the reentry initiative holds our best hope for reducing the spiraling costs associated with incarceration and recidivism."

Several excellent toolkits are now available to help direct new reentry initiatives. The Urban Institute's *The Jail Administrator's Toolkit for Reentry* was developed from two years of work by jail reentry roundtable meetings. The Council of State Governments' partnership on the *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council: Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community* is a comprehensive planning and review kit focusing on prisons and jails.

Read and absorb everything. The amount of quality, proven, and available resources grows daily. Integrate

the pieces that fit your community's mission. Remember: This is not a jail or sheriff's program—it is your community's initiative to ensure your and its safety. 

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Shannon Murphy is the inaugural Reentry Director and TJC Coordinator of the Douglas County (Kansas) Sheriff's Department. She comes to the county correctional facility with 12 years of community corrections intensive supervision experience that linked offenders to their community supervision requirements and needs. Ms. Murphy sat on the facility's community reentry development and steering committee as the District Court representative. She is a graduate of the University of Kansas with dual bachelor degrees in sociology and crime and delinquency studies, in addition to a master's degree in public administration. She may be reached at 785-830-1001 or smurphy@douglas-county.com.