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COMMUNITY MEETINGS TO ASSIST INMATES IN REENTRY

McGarrell, E.F., Hipple, N., & Banks, D. (2003). *Community Meetings as a Tool in Inmate Reentry*, *Justice Research and Policy*, 5(2), 1-32.

WHY WAS THE STUDY DONE?

From 1990 to 2000, the number of former prisoners released into the community rose from about 400,000 per year to about 600,000 per year. Given the problems associated with reentry as well as the high rate of recidivism among this population, programs that effectively assist the transition of former inmates from prison to community are critical.

As part of a project in Marion County, IN (Indianapolis), recently released inmates were required to attend a meeting of criminal justice officials, neighborhood leaders, and service providers that offered a deterrence/assistance approach to successful reintegration. First meeting officials delivered the message that violence in the community would not be tolerated, and then they described the social services available to the former inmates to help their transition. This study describes the project and how the intervention was designed, and presents the results of the program evaluation.

WHAT DID THE STUDY FIND?

Roughly 40% of the 93 former inmates who attended the meeting reoffended within about a year. This rate of reoffending was similar to the rate for a comparison group of 107 recently released inmates who did not attend the meeting. It was also similar to the rate found in other research for all inmates across the country who returned to their communities in 2001. Over half of the failures in this study occurred within the first five months. Given the roughly 2,400 former inmates

released into Marion County per year, the study results indicated that just under 1,000 former inmates per year could be expected to be rearrested in Marion County within 16 months of their release from prison.

The meeting had two benefits. First, the former inmates who attended the meeting had an additional 50 days, on average, until rearrest compared to the group who did not attend the meeting. Second, those who attended the meeting were less likely to be arrested for a person offense. (Neither of these benefits was statistically significant, however.)

Methodology. The researchers gathered descriptive data on inmates returning to Marion County using FY2000 Department of Corrections release data (roughly 2,400 adult males and 300 adult females) and chose a baseline sample of 769 males. Ninety-three ex-offenders attended one of five reentry meetings, with a comparison group of 107 ex-offenders who did not attend. Both groups were similar in demographic profile and prior criminal history.

GENDER AND PROBATION RECIDIVISM

Olson, D.E., Alderden, M., & Lurigio, A.J. (2003). *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus, But What Role Does Gender Play in Probation Recidivism*. *Justice Research and Policy* 5(2), 33-54.

WHY WAS THE STUDY DONE?

Although women account for an increasing proportion of offenders at every stage of the criminal justice process, few studies and policies address female

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criminality. Since most female offenders are on probation, basic knowledge about their characteristics and their success or failure on probation is particularly important. This study addresses two issues: (1) differences between male and female probationers in demographic characteristics, gang membership, drug use, and recidivism rates, and (2) whether different factors predict rearrests and technical violations for men and women probationers.

WHAT DID THE STUDY FIND?

Male probationers were much more likely than female probationers to be employed and to have prior convictions, while women were almost twice as likely as men to be living with children. Male probationers were more likely to be rearrested than female probationers. Fewer factors predicted recidivism in female probationers than in male probationers. Younger men, unmarried men, and those with a previous history of substance abuse were more likely to recidivate, while for females these variables (age, marital status, and substance abuse history) did not predict recidivism. Women who were high school dropouts, who had one or more prior convictions, who were on probation for a felony, and who had a current substance abuse problem were more likely to recidivate. Similar results were observed in an analysis of technical violations of probation.

The impact of three probation conditions - urinalysis, payment of fines, and treatment outcomes - was also examined. Urinalysis as a condition of probation reduced recidivism for female probationers, but not males. Payment of fines decreased recidivism for men but not women. Finally, females appeared to benefit much more from treatment completion than males, but treatment failure for females was much more likely to lead to rearrest.

Methodology. The study included every adult probationer discharged from supervision in Illinois during November 2000 (2,636 males and 689 females). Probation officers provided information on a data collection form using a combination of official records and probationer self-reports. The researchers examined rearrests and technical violations of probation using multivariate logistic regression analyses, which allowed them to examine the effects of each factor holding other factors constant. Analyses were conducted for the entire sample, and for males and females separately.

SURVEYING SOON-TO-BE RELEASED PRISONERS

Visser, C.A., La Vigne, N.G., Castro, J.L. Returning Home: Preliminary Findings From a Pilot Study of Soon-To-Be-Released Prisoners in Maryland. Justice Research and Policy 5(2), 55-74.

WHY WAS THE STUDY DONE?

The Returning Home Project was launched to provide systematic knowledge about the reintegration of former prisoners into society. The project aims to answer two broad questions: what is the experience of those being released from prison and returning home, and what factors influence a released prisoner's propensity to reoffend?

Using a large sample of prisoners across neighborhoods, communities, and states, the three-year project is studying five aspects of prisoners' return home: the individual experience, the family experience, the peer group experience, the community experience, and broader policy implications at the state level. This article reports on the initial phase of the research design, a survey of soon-to-be-released prisoners in the pilot state of Maryland.

WHAT DID THE STUDY FIND?

The researchers interviewed 324 prisoners (235 male and 89 female). Among the more interesting findings were:

- *Demographic:* 83% were black; only 7% reported being married but 69% were parents; over half were drug offenders, those convicted of burglary, theft, and fraud comprised the next largest group, and 27% were imprisoned for a parole violation.
- *Education:* 33% of prisoners reported having a 10th to 11th grade education, 16% had finished high school but not attended college, and 24% had a GED (about 8% earned their GED during their current prison term).
- *Employment:* 65% said they had been employed in the six months before prison; less than a third had a job in prison; 65% felt it would be easy to find a job after prison, and 88% thought it would be easy to keep a job they found.
- *Criminal History:* 65% of respondents had been in prison before; of the 53% who had been on parole at least once, 71% said they had their parole

revoked; the average age at first arrest was 18 years; 60% reported that someone else in their family had been convicted of a crime, and 40% had another family member currently in prison.

- *Substance Use:* The majority reported some drug use (78%) and/or alcohol use (61%); nearly two thirds reported arrests associated with their drug use.
- *Family:* 77% said they felt close to their family, and 89% said they wanted family involved in their lives; 54% expected financial help from family, and 71% expected to live with family after release.
- *Housing:* 64% knew where they would live after release; 39% expected to live with mothers/stepmothers; 19% with boy/girl friend, and only 6% with fathers.

Questions about attitudes and expectations for life after prison revealed, somewhat surprisingly, that the majority thought it would be easy to deal with reintegration issues after release. However, most also wanted help in dealing with these issues. Respondents with strong family relationships had the most positive expectations. Respondents who expressed the greatest desire to change were most likely to want help getting mental health treatment, more education, job training, financial assistance, health care, and drug/alcohol treatment following release. Prisoners expressing the least readiness to change wanted virtually no help, but that was also true of prisoners with relatively high levels of self-esteem. Finally, few of the attitudes and expectations respondents expressed were related to the length or extent of their criminal careers.

Methodology. A self-administered questionnaire was delivered to 324 soon-to-be-released prisoners. This baseline questionnaire was primarily intended to document preprison characteristics, in-prison experiences, and expectations about the period immediately following release. Binary and multinomial logistic regression were used to identify sampling and selection biases. Prisoners with extensive criminal histories and more serious conviction offenses may be underrepresented in the sample.

CASE-MANAGED REENTRY EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Rossmann, S.B., Roman, C.G. (2003). *Case-Managed Reentry and Employment: Lessons from the Opportunity to Succeed Program. Justice Research and Policy* 5(2), 75–100.

WHY WAS THE STUDY DONE?

Studies have shown that prisoners released from state and federal prisons are at high risk for committing a

new crime after reentering their communities, particularly in the first year after release. Employment seems to play a crucial role in helping returning prisoners avoid future crime and incarceration, but little is known about what strategies help promote employment among these former inmates. This study reports on an evaluation of the Opportunity to Succeed Program (OPTS), a multisite prison and jail aftercare project, with a focus on the program's employment services.

WHAT DID THE STUDY FIND?

OPTS clients received a core group of employment services, including (1) assessment of their skills and career interests, (2) basic job search skills training, and (3) job referral and placement services. Case managers and probation officers actively assisted the former inmates with employment services. Each of the OPTS programs encountered certain challenges in providing services, such as few high quality jobs, limited accommodation for clients with special needs, and even clients' resistance to services. The case manager seemed to be a critical component in the success of the clients.

At one year, OPTS clients had significantly higher levels of full-time employment than members of a control group. Interaction with case managers was associated with increases in full time employment. In turn, increases in full time employment were associated with desistance from criminal activity. To replicate the positive outcomes found in this study, programs and policies may want to consider offering additional services such as (1) preemployment preparation (including more systematic, focused assessment and prerelease preparation), (2) postemployment follow-up, and (3) community outreach to service providers, employers, and the public at large.

Methodology. Evaluation of the OPTS program included process and impact components. Data for the process analysis were obtained through in-person and telephone interviews with program staff and practitioners, small-group discussions with OPTS clients, observation of program activities, and secondary analysis of program documents. The impact evaluation was designed as a randomized study to compare outcomes related to drug use, recidivism, and employment one year after release from prison or jail of released offenders enrolled in an OPTS program and offenders placed under routine probation or parole supervision. Baseline surveys were conducted with 343 participants (175 in OPTS and 168 in the control group). A follow-up survey was conducted at one year with 288 of these participants.

COMMUNITY-BASED REENTRY MODEL

Taxman, F.S., Young, D., Byrne, J.M. Transforming Offender Reentry Into Public Safety: Lessons from OJP's Reentry Partnership Initiative. Justice Research and Policy 5(2), 101–128.

WHY WAS THE STUDY DONE?

This study describes the Reentry Partnership Initiative, one of three early efforts by the Office of Justice Programs to explore community-based models for offender reintegration. The partnership approach recognizes that criminal justice agencies—police, the courts, institutional and community corrections—must work with formal community service agencies (employment, housing, other services) as well as informal social control agencies (families, peer networks, faith and civic organizations) to bring about successful integration.

The study uses a process evaluation methodology to examine the efforts of eight RPI sites to design and implement the reentry model, and considers implications for future programmatic developmental efforts.

WHAT DID THE STUDY FIND?

Eight sites developed reentry partnership programs that reflected local ideas about the proper approach to incarceration, release, and reintegration. The process had three intertwined phases:

- *Phase I*, the institutional phase, during which the offender is placed in prison and ideally in appropriate treatment or vocational programs.
- *Phase II*, structured reentry, begins in prison and carries into the first months in the community, with intensive preparation for release, and establishment of the reintegration plan and stable connections in the community, and
- *Phase III*, community reintegration, which begins in the second month after release. Focus shifts to sustaining gains already made, refining and maintaining the reentry plan, and achieving independence for the former inmate from the case management process. Emphasis is on stabilization and assisting offenders obtain jobs, housing, treatment, and services for successful reentry into the community.

The study evaluated the eight sites on how they performed in each phase.

- In *Phase I*, only one site started the reentry assessment process at the outset of inmates' prison terms. Most started six months prerelease due to correctional constraints. Many sites did not have any discharge planning efforts in place, though some built upon existing system models to begin planning.
- In *Phase II*, the critical transition period between prison and community reentry, sites struggled to bridge the gap between partnering agencies and the offenders. Additional struggles occurred for sites where offenders were not on conditional release. Sites realized they had to build offender motivation and readiness for change earlier, during the last several months of incarceration, and many established a team approach that involved institutional and community personnel. Many of the sites used an exit orientation process to increase the offender's awareness of the issues regarding community reintegration and expectations regarding behavior after release.
- In *Phase III*, some of the sites recognized that plans must be responsive to the way offenders evolve toward reintegration, but very few had crafted a plan to help offenders construct roles as family members, employees, and citizens. Sites differed in their approach to reintegration. In general, sites recognized the need for key staff to work within and across the correctional system and community to build the reentry process. Several sites had an individual who could be considered a boundary spanner—someone responsible for helping offenders move through traditional system boundaries

Methodology. Researchers constructed a fidelity assessment tool to measure where the sites had effectively designed and/or implemented reentry model components, and to provide site feedback. Researchers visited sites 15 to 18 months after project commencement, reviewed program materials, and conducted numerous interviews with agency representatives and others. The process assessed sites on 40 program factors grouped into five domains: institutional, prerelease, postrelease, ongoing reintegration, and administrative factors. Researchers assigned scores in each of the 40 areas, which afforded a comprehensive, comparative view of each site.